

Britain votes in knife-edge polls

Britain voted yesterday in the closest general election for decades, with polls suggesting David Cameron's opposition Conservatives will win most seats but not enough to form a government alone.

Beleaguered Prime Minister Gordon Brown faced a long election night wait to learn his fate, after polling booths close at 10:00 pm (2100 GMT) in the knife-edge ballot.

The Liberal Democrats, Britain's traditional third party, could emerge as kingmakers in a power-sharing deal after making a spectacular surge during a gruelling month-long campaign.

Election day was marked by a protest outside the polling station where Cameron voted, and a plane crash, which injured a high-profile anti-Europe candidate.

Cameron, battling to end the Conservatives' 13 years in opposition, was the first of the main party leaders to vote after urging supporters to "give this country the hope, the optimism and the change we need".


Several eve-of-election polls showed the Conservatives had a clear lead over Brown's ruling Labour Party and Nick Clegg's Liberal Democrats.

But they suggested that under Britain's first past-the-post system, Cameron's Tories would fall short of an overall majority in the House of Commons, setting up the first hung parliament since 1974.

A poll by ICM for the Guardian newspaper predicted Conservative support had increased slightly to around 36 percent,



In power since 1997
Gordon Brown, 59
Prime minister seeking second term



Last held power 1990-1997
David Cameron, 43
Front runner in latest polls



Traditional third party
Nick Clegg, 43
Third force

Key facts:

- 650 parliament seats
- 45 million registered voters
- Other Races: 164 council polls in England. 15,785 candidates fighting for 4,333 seats

AFP

with Labour unchanged on 28 percent, while the Lib Dems had fallen back to 26 percent. That would roughly equate to 283 seats

for the Tories, 253 for Labour and 81 for the Lib Dems. Such an outcome would spark a scramble for power, with Cameron seeking a partner to govern, or forcing through a minority government, possibly with the support of a handful of lawmakers from Northern Ireland.

More than 44 million voters were called to the polls, with observers predicting turnout could be as high as 70 percent after an unusual campaign transformed by the first televised leaders' debates in a British election.

A smiling Cameron and his wife Samantha voted in the picturesque village of Spelsbury in his Witney constituency in Oxfordshire, north of London.

Earlier, two pranksters climbed on to the roof of the polling station and unfurled a banner drawing attention to Cameron's education at the elite fee-paying Eton College, which has produced 18 British prime ministers.

"Britons know your place. Vote Eton -- vote Tory," read the banner, held by two young men, one dressed in a blazer and a straw boater hat, who were later persuaded to climb down by police and taken away for questioning.

Brown, who has been fighting for his political life in a frantic week of campaigning, was accompanied by his wife Sarah as he voted in steady drizzle in Fife in Scotland.

Clegg, whose party's surprisingly strong showing has made the election so close, cast his ballot in Sheffield, northern England.

Nigel Farage, a high-profile candidate for the eurosceptic UK Independence Party (UKIP), suffered minor head injuries and needed heart tests after the light aircraft he was travelling in crashed at an airfield in Northamptonshire.

His campaign manager said the pilot desperately tried to call for help in the seconds before impact.

"Apparently the plane nose-dived. We had a banner attached to the back of the plane which basically got wrapped around the tail," said Chris Adams. "It's all a bit of a shock, especially on polling day."

Brown, who took over from Tony Blair as prime minister in 2007, ended his campaigning in his native Scotland and issued a last-ditch plea to wavering voters to back Labour as the best party to safeguard the country's fragile recovery from a deep recession.

"At this moment of risk to our economy, at this moment of decision for our country, I ask you to come home to Labour," he urged a crowd in Dumfries.

Clegg, a potential kingmaker in the event of a hung parliament, pleaded with voters to back him and seize a "once in a generation opportunity to do things differently".

The Lib Dems transformed the election into a three-horse race after his assured performance in the TV debates introduced him to a wider public.

For a while, a surge of support propelled the party out of their traditional third position into second position ahead of Labour in many polls, but their poll rating faded towards the end of the race.

UK Election by numbers

BBC ONLINE

Millions of people across the UK selected their candidates in the general election. Polling stations up and down the country opened at 0700 BST and people were able to cast their ballots until 2200 BST.

THE FIGURES	
Polling stations open	7am-10pm
The number of registered voters	44m
The number of UK citizens registered as overseas voters	12,874
First declaration expected	2300 BST
The number of constituencies	650
The number of polling stations	40,000
The number of female MPs	126
The percentage swing in the national vote needed by the Conservative Party to win	6.9%
The maximum life in years of a UK parliament	5 years
The average number of voters in each constituency.	68,500

The first declarations are expected at 2300 BST. As well as picking MPs for Westminster, voters will elect councillors in 164 local authorities across England.

Voting in the general election will take place in 649 constituencies, with nearly 4,150 candidates standing for election across the country.

Polling in one constituency - Thirsk and Malton - has been delayed until 27 May because of the death of one of the candidates during the campaign.

The vast majority of constituencies will conduct their counts overnight, with about 20 not due to begin the process until after 0900 GMT on Friday.

Among the council elections taking place, voters will choose representatives in 32 London boroughs, 36 metropolitan authorities and 20 unitary authorities.

Greek bank workers strike over deaths

AP, Athens

Greek bank workers walked off the job in a 24-hour strike Thursday to protest the deaths of three colleagues trapped in a bank torched by protesters during massive demonstrations against the government's new harsh austerity measures.

Wednesday's deaths the first such fatalities in protests in nearly 20 years in Greece have shocked the public in a country where violence during demonstrations is frequent but rarely results in casualties.

"I have difficulty in finding the words to express my distress and outrage,"

President Karolos Papoulias said late Wednesday. "Our country came to the brink of the abyss. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that we don't step over the edge."

The deaths came as an estimated 100,000 people marched through Athens during a nationwide strike against additional austerity measures imposed to unlock a euro110 billion (\$142 billion) rescue loan package for debt-ridden Greece from the International Monetary Fund and the other 15 countries that use the euro.

Deputies were debating the measures Thursday and were to vote on passing the draft bill on Thursday night. Prime

Minister George Papandreou's Socialists hold a comfortable majority of 160 deputies in the 300-seat Parliament, and the bill is expected to pass easily.

Greece urgently needs the first installment of loans from the rescue package if it is to avoid defaulting on May 19, when it has euro8.5 billion in bonds maturing. The measures slash salaries and pensions and hike taxes, outraging many Greeks.

Wednesday's demonstration the first since the new measures were announced Sunday quickly turned violent, with hundreds of protesters breaking away from the march and trying to storm Parliament, shouting "thieves, traitors."

Give NPT teeth: Israel

AFP, Jerusalem

An Israeli official says the UN atomic watchdog should focus more on giving teeth to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty than on trying to get Israel to join.

The official says even treaty signatories like Iraq have tried in the past to gain nuclear weapons.

The official says Iran, also a treaty member, is "now doing the same." Iran denies it is building bombs.

The official's remarks on Thursday came in response to a report that the U.N. nuclear watchdog solicited proposals from member states on how to get Israel to sign the treaty.

38 dead after tornado hits China

AFP, Beijing

At least 38 people were killed after a tornado, hail storms, gale-force winds and torrential rains hit southern China, damaging thousands of homes and destroying crops.

The storms hit the giant southwestern municipality of Chongqing as well as neighbouring Guizhou and Hunan provinces overnight, leaving more than 190 people injured and at least six missing, state press and officials said yesterday.


State television showed collapsed homes, uprooted and downed trees, landslides and partially flooded roads in Chongqing, where 29 died and more than 70,000 people were displaced, according to the civil affairs ministry.

The death and injury tolls from the storms rose throughout Thursday, as officials worked to tally the total number of dead and injured, as well as the number of homes damaged.

"Tornados never happened here in the past -- this is the first time," Liu Fang, a local township official in Liangqing county, one of the hardest-hit areas in Chongqing, told AFP by phone.

"So far, six have died and 38 are injured in our township. The electricity has been cut, and some houses were damaged due to the strong wind."

The injured were being brought to local hospitals while tents were being set up for those whose homes were destroyed, Li said.



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টেলিফোন : ৯১৩৭২৮২, ৯১৩৭২৮৩

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VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

ICDDR,B invites applications from suitable candidates for the following positions with the Virology Laboratory under the Laboratory Sciences Division. The appointment will be made on a fixed-term basis for 2 years, which may be renewable depending on performance and availability of funds.

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Position - Manager - Monitoring & Evaluation (Qualitative)
Duty Station - Dhaka
Salary - Annual - Tk.813,620/- inclusive of house rent and conveyance allowances with other admissible benefits.

Position - Senior Monitoring & Evaluation Manager
Duty Station - Dhaka
Salary - Annual - Tk.1,099,950/- inclusive of house rent and conveyance allowances with other admissible benefits.

For detailed job profile and requirements, please visit our website: www.icddr.org. Interested candidates who fulfill the requirements should submit an online application by 13 May 2010

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Only short-listed candidates shall be invited for the interview.



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