

# Islamists win 65pc votes in Egypt

Israel expresses concern

AFP, Cairo

Islamist parties won 65 percent of votes for party list seats in the first round of parliamentary elections, according to official figures obtained by AFP yesterday.

The moderate Muslim Brotherhood won 36.62 percent of the vote, followed by the hardline Salafist Al-Nur party with 24.36 and the moderate Al-Wasat with 4.27, according to a chart provided by elections committee secretary general Yusri Abdel Karim.

Abdel Karim said that the committee would not provide percentages until the end of voting on January 10, but according to an official chart he provided the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party list won 3.56 million out of 9.73 million valid ballots.

The Al-Nur party won 2.37 million, and the Wasat party 415,590 votes. The liberal coalition the Egyptian Bloc received 13.35 percent, with 1.29 million votes.

Meanwhile, Egyptian Christian community headed to mass fearful of the Islamists landslide victory in the country's election will mean for their community.

"All Copts are very worried. We didn't expect this," said Girgi Szaki, a 42-year-old engineer with two children. "We wanted some liberals to be elected. In the other stages, maybe there'll be a change."

Meanwhile, Israeli officials yesterday expressed concern over the future of ties with Cairo.

"We are worried, I hope that democracy will prevail in Egypt and that the country won't become an extremist Islamist state because that would put the whole region in danger," Israeli Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz told Israel public radio.

US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta suggested on Friday that the Jewish state needed to do more to "mend fences" with former allies like Turkey and called on Israel to "get to the damn table" when it came to peace talks with the Palestinians.

# Assange's extradition hearing today

AFP, London

WikiLeaks chief Julian Assange seeks today (Monday) to have his appeal against extradition to Sweden heard by Britain's top court, playing his final card in a lengthy legal battle.

Almost a year after his arrest over claims of rape and sexual assault, the 40-year-old Australian will ask two judges at London's High Court to decide whether his appeal can proceed to the Supreme Court.

For the appeal to be heard in Britain's highest court, the judges must rule the case raises a question of general public importance.

If the ruling goes against Assange, the British leg of his legal battle will end and he faces extradition to Sweden within 10 days.

# Cain suspends US presidential campaign

AFP, Atlanta

Republican White House hopeful Herman Cain has effectively ended his US presidential bid, citing the painful toll of "false and unproved" allegations of sexual harassment and adultery.

Appearing defiant but clearly upset, the former pizza executive announced Saturday that he was "suspending" his campaign because of "the continued hurt caused on me and my family" by claims of impropriety.

"America has learned something about this process of running for president. It's a dirty game. It's a dirty, dirty game," Cain said at a rally in Atlanta.

The dramatic announcement curtailed a roller-coaster run for the White House that, after a meteoric rise that had put Cain at the front of a field of experienced politicians seeking the Republican nomination, had begun to falter.

# Obama battles charges he's not Israel's friend

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama this week stepped up a counter-attack against Republican opponents levelling angry, politically fraught charges that he has shortchanged staunch US ally Israel's security.

With an eye on the November 2012 elections, Republicans energized by Obama's low popularity have slammed his Middle East policy, hoping to pump up Christian conservatives and erode Democrats' usually strong support from Jewish voters.

And most of the Republican presidential candidates will gather in Washington Wednesday for a forum run by the Republican Jewish Coalition, where they are sure to court party activists with attacks on Obama's approach to Israel.

Obama fired a preemptive shot this week during a campaign fundraiser in New York City, professing, "No ally is more important than the state of Israel" and trumpeting his commitment to help safeguard the Jewish state.

"I try not to pat myself too much on the back, but this administration has done more in terms of the security of the state of Israel than any previous administration," the president told donors.

White House allies also point to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu -- who has had a rocky relationship with the US president -- calling Obama's threat to block UN recognition of a Palestinian state "a badge of honor."

And they underscored how Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak declared last month in a CNN interview: "I don't think that anyone can raise any question mark about the devotion of this president to the security of Israel."

# Political Islam set to dominate the Middle East

AGENCIES

Welcome to the age of "political Islam", this may prove to be one of the most lasting legacies of the Arab spring. It is not only in Egypt that an unprecedented Islamist political moment is playing out. In the recent Tunisian elections the moderate Islamist Ennahda party was the biggest winner, while Morocco has elected its first Islamist prime minister, Abdelillah Benkirane.

In Yemen and Libya, too, it seems likely that political Islam will define the shape of the new landscape.

Islamists led by the Muslim Brotherhood and radical Salafists appear to have taken a majority of seats in the first round of Egypt's first parliamentary vote since the ousting of Mubarak.

Egypt's election commission announced few results, but said turnout was 62%, the



PHOTO: AFP

Egyptian protesters protesting in Cairo recently while waiting for the delayed publication of results for the opening phase of its first post-revolution election.

highest in the country's modern history, and the Islamists have claimed 65% of that.

Leaked preliminary counts indicated that the Muslim Brotherhood's polit-

ical arm took the largest share of votes. Following closely behind was the ultra-conservative Islamist Nour party and a liberal coalition, according to unofficial counts.

## THE ISLAMIST WAVE

➔ **EGYPT:** The Muslim Brotherhood is in line to win 40% of votes. It is religiously conservative, but rejects violence while insisting on the need for a transition to civilian rule. It hopes to form a unity government with more liberal parties.

➔ **MOROCCO:** The Justice and Development party elected last month models itself on Turkey's moderate Islamist government, describing its politics as a "progressive approach to Islam" focusing on social justice and economic issues.

➔ **TUNISIA:** The Ennahda party says its model is Turkey's AKP, which was itself influenced by the writings in exile of Ennahda founder Rachid Ghanouchi. Opposed to sharia law and rejects comparisons with Saudi Arabia and Iran or with the Taliban.

➔ **TURKEY:** Turkey's AKP, or Justice and Development party, led by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is a model for Islamist movements. It insists it is non-confessional and democratic, but critics say it harbours an Islamist agenda.

➔ **YEMEN:** Al-Islah, the main Islamist opposition party, has been locked in conflict with forces loyal to President Ali Abdullah Saleh. It makes up 40% of the Joint Meeting party, a coalition of opposition groups. Critics fear it would herald a fundamentalist Yemen.

➔ **LIBYA:** The new National Gathering for Freedom, Justice and Development named with a nod towards Turkey's Justice and Development party was formed in November. Likely to garner broad support.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian police detain Shia Muslims at a rally in the centre of the city to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussain the grandson of Islam's Prophet Muhammad in Srinagar yesterday. Police detained hundreds of protesters and fired teargas to disperse the procession.

# Iran shoots down US drone

REUTERS, Tehran

Iran's military said yesterday it had shot down a US reconnaissance drone aircraft in eastern Iran, a military source told state television.

"Iran's military has downed an intruding RQ-170 American drone in eastern Iran," Iran's Arabic-language Al Alam state television network quoted the unnamed source as saying.

Iran shot down the drone at a time when it is trying to contain foreign reaction to the storming of the British embassy in Tehran on Tuesday, shortly after London announced that it would impose sanctions on Iran's central bank in connection with Iran's controversial nuclear enrichment programme.

The attack dragged Iran's relations with Europe to a long-time low.

# Syria ignores Arab deadline, faces new sanctions

AFP, Damascus

Syria faced new sanctions after flouting yesterday an Arab League deadline to accept observers to monitor the unrest sweeping the country, which the UN says has killed at least 4,000 people.

The latest standoff between Syria and the Arab League comes as the death toll from violence across the country on Saturday and Sunday rose to at least 44, and after the UN Human Rights Council accused Damascus of "gross violations" of human rights.

A senior Qatari official said Damascus had asked for "new clarifications and further amendments to be made to the protocol which was proposed" to cover the deployment of the observer mission.

But the Arab ministers had "refused." The Qatari official said, however, that if Syrian officials "still want to sign, they can come tomorrow to Cairo."

The Arab League ministerial committee late on Saturday gave Damascus until Sunday to allow an observer mission into the country and thereby avoid further sanctions.

The meeting in Doha listed 19 Syrian officials it said would be banned from travel to Arab countries and whose assets would be

frozen by those states.

The panel also called for an embargo on the sale of Arab arms to Syria and cut by half the number of Arab flights into and out of Syria with effect from December 15.

The national carrier Syrian Air will be affected by the flight reductions, while among the 19 officials banned from travel to Arab countries are the defence and interior ministers and other top intelligence officials.

The Arab panel also tasked a committee with drawing up a list of Syrian businessmen involved in financing the repression, ahead of slapping them with sanctions.

An analyst in Damascus said chances were slim that the government would allow in observers under the conditions set by the Arab League. Syria says the conditions undermine its sovereignty.

The Arab League had on November 27 approved an initial wave of sweeping sanctions against Assad's government over the crackdown -- the first time that the bloc has enforced such punitive measures against a member state.

Those measures included an immediate freeze on transactions with Damascus and its central bank and of Syrian regime assets in Arab countries.

# 6 Yemenis killed in clash

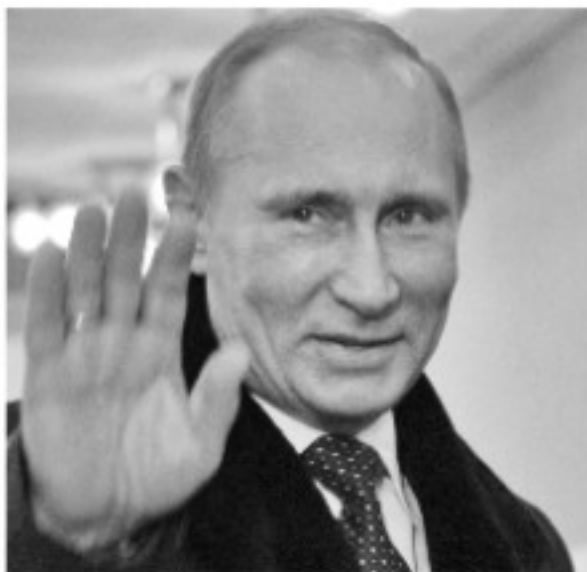
AFP, Sanaa

Six Yemenis were killed yesterday in shelling by government forces of the country's second city of Ta'ez and in shootings, as sustained violence threatened to derail a fragile power-transfer deal.

State media said a ceasefire was reached in the afternoon after a call by Vice President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi for an end to the fighting and a pullout of troops and militiamen.

Three members of a Ta'ez family were killed in shelling blamed on government forces, while two anti-regime gunmen were shot dead during clashes with troops loyal to President Ali Abdullah Saleh, witnesses said.

The five bodies were taken to a field hospital in the Al-Rawda neighbourhood of central Ta'ez, which is under the control of anti-Saleh protesters.



# Russia votes amid fraud claims

AFP, Moscow

Russia voted yesterday in legislative elections set to see erosion in the majority of Vladimir Putin's ruling party and marred by claims the authorities have engaged in foul play to ensure its dominance.

The United Russia party of Putin was expected again to win the majority in the State Duma parliament but with fewer seats, as opponents said the authorities had downed websites and harassed monitors to limit dissent.

The elections are seen as a crucial test of Putin's popularity in Russia as he prepares to stand in March 2012 presidential elections to return to the Kremlin after his four-year stint as prime minister.

Independent monitor group Golos (Voice), which claimed rampant violations in the campaign, said its "Map of Violations" website documenting reports of campaign fraud was the target of a distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack.

"Our email is not working, and we only have Skype to communicate with our regional network," spokeswoman Olga Novosad told AFP.

Meanwhile, the website of popular radio station Moscow Echo, which is owned by state gas monopoly Gazprom but often tackles sensitive issues, was the subject of a similar hacker attack.

# NEWS IN brief

## Seven killed in Kazakhstan clash

AFP, Astana

Five militants and two members of an elite police force were killed in operations in southern Kazakhstan, prosecutors said yesterday, amid concerns about rising Islamist unrest in the Central Asian state.

The clash took place during a special operation against suspected militants in a village just outside Kazakhstan's largest city and former capital of Almaty, where prosecutors said they had been planning attacks.

He said that the group had been behind the murder of two police officers on November 8 and were planning new "violent acts" in Almaty. There were no civilian casualties in the clash.

## Blast near UK embassy in Bahrain

AFP, Dubai

A small explosion took place in a bus parked near the British embassy in the Bahraini capital yesterday, the interior ministry said in the Gulf state swept by unrest earlier this year.

Sunni-ruled Bahrain was rocked by Shiite-led pro-democracy protests between mid-February and mid-March. It accuses Shia-dominated Iran of backing unrest in the kingdom, a charge denied by Tehran and the opposition.

The British embassy in Tehran was ransacked last Tuesday by a pro-regime mob after London slapped new sanctions on Iran over its controversial nuclear programme.

## Manila to re-open peace talks

AFP, Manila

The Philippines will resume formal peace negotiations with Muslim rebels this week after a series of deadly clashes led to a near collapse of the talks, a senior government adviser said yesterday.

The talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) were due to begin today in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur, although Manila remained cautious about what they could achieve, presidential adviser to the peace process Teresita Deles told AFP.

The Muslim rebellion has claimed an estimated 150,000 lives since it began in the 1970s.

## White more likely to be pardoned

AFP, Washington

An independent investigation has found that white criminals seeking US presidential pardons over the past decade have been nearly four times as likely to succeed as minorities, The Washington Post reported late Saturday.

From 2001 to 2008, Bush administration pardoned 189 people -- all but 13 of whom were white, the report said. Seven pardons went to blacks, four to Hispanics, one to an Asian and one to a Native American.

The newspaper said the review was conducted by ProPublica, an independent, nonprofit newsroom that produces investigative journalism.