

EGYPT PRESIDENTIAL POLLS

Rivals claim run-off places

BBC ONLINE

Egypt yesterday looked set for a run-off presidential vote pitting Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohammed Mursi against Mubarak-era minister Ahmed Shafiq, according to tallies by the Islamist group.

The Muslim Brotherhood's candidate for Egyptian president, Mohammed Mursi, is likely to face former Prime Minister Ahmed Shafiq in a run-off vote, according to partial election results.

More than 11,000 out of 13,000 polling stations have declared results, in the first election since strongman Hosni Mubarak was overthrown last year.

Early counts put Mursi on about 26% and Shafiq at roughly 24%. Partial results are subject to recounts and final results are due on 29 May.

Campaigners for Islamist candidate Mursi, standing for the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, told reporters they were confident that he had won the most votes.

No candidate appeared close to reaching the 50% threshold necessary for an outright victory.

Partial counts suggested Shafiq would be Mursi's rival in a run-off.



An artist draws a graffiti of ousted president Hosni Mubarak and military ruler Hussein Tantawi symbolising the influence of the past regime in Egypt. *Inset, Mohammed Mursi, top, and Ahmed Shafiq.*



for many years under Mubarak.

Former Arab League chief Amr Moussa was in fifth place, according to most counts.

About 50 million people were eligible to vote in the polls, in which 13 candidates are vying for the presidency.

It was the country's first freely contested presidential election in its history, and observers said it had been conducted peacefully.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton congratulated Egypt on its "historic" election and said Washington looked "forward to working with Egypt's democratically elected government," according to a statement released by her spokeswoman.

Egypt's election commission estimated that about 50% of eligible voters had participated, reported official news agency Mena.

The military body that assumed presidential power in February 2011 - the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (Scaf) - has promised a fair vote and civilian rule.

Analysts say he drew his support from people fearful of an Islamist takeover, and those exhausted by the upheavals of the past 16 months.

Mursi represents a popular strand of political Islam that was excluded from the political process

until a new constitution is approved it is unclear what powers the president will have, prompting fears of friction with a military which seems determined to retain its powerful position.

Fresh Iran nuke talks in June

BBC ONLINE

A fresh round of talks on Iran's nuclear programme will be held in Moscow in June, officials announced yesterday after a second day of talks in Baghdad.

The EU's foreign policy chief said significant differences remained, but some common ground had been found.

Six world powers made Iran an offer if it stopped processing medium-enriched uranium, which can be used to make nuclear weapons, EU officials said.

But Tehran insists that uranium enrichment is its non-negotiable right.

Speaking at a news conference after the talks on Thursday evening, the EU's Catherine Ashton described the two days of talks in the Iraqi capital as "intense".

A new meeting would be held in Moscow on 18-19 June, she said.

Musharraf killed my mother

Says Benazir Bhutto's son

AFP, Washington

The son of slain Pakistan leader Benazir Bhutto said Thursday that ex-military ruler Pervez Musharraf "murdered my mother," as he vowed to play a bigger political role in his homeland "in any way I can."

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, son of current President Asif Ali Zardari, said Musharraf sabotaged his mother's security when she returned to her homeland in 2007, and said he is confident of his own security in Pakistan.

"I'm confident that the Pakistani government will provide me with the adequate security, unlike the government at the time that sabotaged my mother's security in Pakistan," he told CNN in an interview.

The 23-year-old, who returned to Pakistan last year after studying at Oxford, said her assassination was due to a combination of Islamic extremists, and Musharraf's regime.

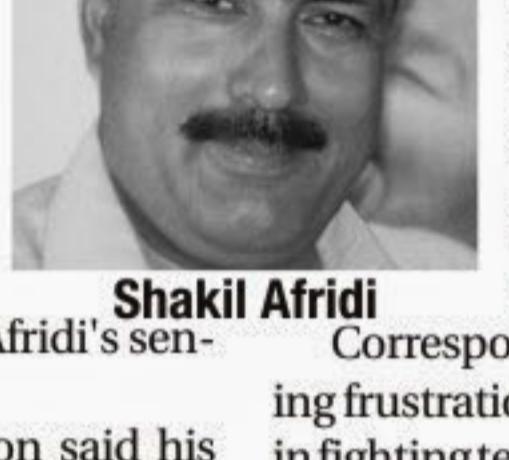
"Al-Qaeda issued the instructions to do it, the Taliban... carried out the actual attack, while Pervez Musharraf purposely sabotaged my mother's security when he knew there was going to be attacks, so she would be eliminated."

"He murdered my mother. I hold him responsible for the murder of my mother," he added. "He'd threatened her himself in the past. He said: 'Your security is directly linked to our relationship and our cooperation.'

Bhutto was assassinated on December 27, 2007, while leaving an election rally in Rawalpindi, the headquarters of Pakistan's army, shortly after her return to the country.

US cuts Pak aid over 'Laden doctor' jailing

BBC ONLINE



Shakil Afridi

A US Senate panel has cut \$33m (£21m) in aid to Pakistan in response to the jailing of a Pakistani doctor who helped the CIA find Osama Bin Laden.

The Senate Appropriations Committee has said it will cut US aid by \$1m for each year of Shakil Afridi's sentence.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said his term was "unjust and unwarranted". She added that she would continue to pursue the issue with the authorities in Pakistan.

Shakil Afridi was tried for treason under a tribal justice system for running a fake vaccination programme to gather information for US intelligence.

Bin Laden was killed by US forces in Abbottabad, Pakistan, in May 2011.

The move from the Senate panel follows earlier cuts to the White House's budget request for Pakistan. The cuts would be part of a bill that would send \$1bn in aid to Pakistan in

the next financial year.

"We need Pakistan, Pakistan needs us, but we don't need Pakistan double-dealing and not seeing the justice in bringing Osama Bin Laden to an end," said Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, calling Pakistan "a schizophrenically".

Correspondents say the cuts reflect mounting frustration in Congress over Pakistan's role in fighting terrorism on its soil.

Shortly after the raid on Bin Laden's house, Afridi was arrested for conspiring against the state of Pakistan. Pakistan has insisted that any country would have done the same if it found one of its citizens working for a foreign spy agency.

Meanwhile, Pakistan on Thursday strongly condemned US drone strikes in its tribal belt along the border with Afghanistan.

Pakistan has a clear policy that the US drone attacks are a violation of international law and unacceptable," foreign office spokesman Moazzam Khan said.

Bin Laden liked Che Guevara!

REUTERS, Islamabad

Osama bin Laden's three wives were fiercely loyal to him and gave little away when they were interrogated after the al-Qaeda chief was killed in a US raid over a year ago, a Pakistani intelligence agent who questioned them said.

Slowly puffing on a cigarette in a rundown Islamabad villa as he described months of questioning the women, the agent said he struggled to glean any worthwhile information.

Yemeni-born Amal Al-Sadeh, the youngest of the three, was headstrong and showed fury when asked questions, while the others, Saudi citizens, expressed displeasure by mostly keeping silent behind their veils, the agent said.

All appeared to strongly support bin Laden, despite the militant's long and bloody record of orchestrating violence across the world.

But at times Amal was somewhat flexible.

"Amal once told me that she and bin Laden liked Che Guevara. She seemed like a rebel so I questioned her about Latin American leftists. I found her very interesting," said the agent.

It was not possible to independently confirm his account.

Ernesto "Che" Guevara was an Argentine Marxist who was a major figure in the Cuban revolution. He was executed in Bolivia in 1967.

"The other wives didn't say much. They were boring," said the agent.

Hollande defends early Afghan exit plan

REUTERS, Kabul

French President Francois Hollande made an unannounced trip to Afghanistan yesterday to visit some of the French troops he wants to pull out later this year, defending his plan for their early exit after meeting his Afghan counterpart Hamid Karzai.

Hollande was strongly criticised at a Nato summit last weekend for accelerating France's withdrawal of its roughly 3,400 troops in Afghanistan to the end of this year, two years ahead of the timetable agreed by the alliance.

"The mission of fighting terrorism and chasing out the Taliban is close to being accomplished, and this is something we can be very proud of," Hollande told journalists at an outdoor press conference in Karzai's garden palace.

"We will stay in Afghanistan but with a different role, our cooperation will focus on civilian fronts," he said.

The drawdown, a promise to voters during Hollande's election campaign following successive attacks by rogue Afghan soldiers on French mentors,

breaks with the Nato timetable for a withdrawal of most foreign combat troops by the end of 2014.

It raised concern that other alliance nations may follow France's example and accelerate their withdrawal plans, handing security prematurely to fledgling Afghan forces.

At last weekend's meeting of Nato allies in Chicago, German Chancellor Angela Merkel criticised the early withdrawal, saying she wanted a unified pullout under the alliance's existing strategy of "in together, out together".

Some 2,000 French troops are due to leave this year but some will remain to provide support and training, and to look after equipment. France has 14 helicopters, 900 vehicles and 1,400 containers that need to be taken out via road and plane.

Visiting French forces at their base in volatile Kapisa province, Hollande thanked them for what they had done for France and Afghanistan, and promised the pullout would be "orderly" and done in "close coordination with France's allies".



Opposition deputies block the podium to protest against the draft plan for a law in the chamber of the Ukrainian parliament in Kiev yesterday. Ukraine was in uproar yesterday over a move by the ruling party, which would upgrade the use of the Russian language in official life, and set it on an equal footing with Ukrainian in some regions.

9/11 trial: Lawyers seek Obama, Bush testimony

BBC ONLINE

Lawyers for three men accused of plotting the 9/11 attacks want US President Barack Obama and predecessor George W Bush to give evidence.

The lawyers say the men cannot receive a fair trial after being regularly called "terrorists" and "murderers".

Ramzi Binalshibh, Mustafa Ahmad Al-Hawsawi, and Ali Abd Al-Aziz Ali will face a military trial at Guantanamo Bay and a possible death penalty.

The presidents are not expected to agree to give evidence.

The 11 September attacks killed 2,976 people in New York, Washington and Shanksville, Pennsylvania in 2001.

In a motion to dismiss the charges, the defence teams say the language used by the current and former presidents has exerted what is known in military law as "unlawful influence" on the case.

The lawyers have also requested testimony from Vice President Joe Biden, Attorney General Eric Holder, South Carolina Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, who has been involved with detainee policy, as well as a number of Pentagon officials.

The motion was filed on 11 May but posted on a Pentagon website only on Wednesday after security clearance, is one of several pending pre-trial motions. Prosecutors have not responded to the motion.

NEWS IN brief

Blair to appear before hacking inquiry

BBC ONLINE

Former Prime Minister Tony Blair is to appear before the Leveson Inquiry into media standards on Monday.



Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt will give evidence on Thursday, the inquiry witness list shows.

He will be asked about his office's links with News Corp during its bid to take over satellite broadcaster BSkyB.

Prime Minister David Cameron told ITV's This Morning he did not "regret" asking Hunt to rule on the abortive deal and said he had acted "impartially".

On Thursday, it was revealed that Hunt had sent a memo to the prime minister indicating support for News Corp's bid weeks before taking charge.

Mladic judges reject long trial delay

BBC ONLINE

Judges conducting the war crimes trial of Bosnian Serb ex-commander Ratko Mladic on Thursday rejected a six-month delay requested by the defence.

The case came to an abrupt halt last week when it emerged prosecutors had not disclosed evidence to the defence.

The trial judges accepted there was an impact on defence preparations but ruled that the effect was "sometimes very small or even non-existent".

They said while a delay was justified, the case should resume on 25 June.

Ratko Mladic, 70, denies 11 charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, allegations that date back to the 1992-95 Bosnian conflict.

Sri Lanka bars Fonseka from politics

BBC ONLINE

Sri Lanka's ex-army chief Sarath Fonseka is barred from political office for seven years, despite being freed from jail on Monday, his lawyer said on Thursday.

Fonseka stood against President Mahinda Rajapaksa in a presidential election two years ago, lost and was imprisoned shortly afterwards.

Fonseka's lawyer, Nalin Laduwaheti, says that the terms of his release prevent him from running for office.

They are trying to secure a full pardon for the chief. The President has remitted Fonseka's two-and-a-half year jail sentence for corruption, but has not pardoned him or annulled the sentence already served.

HUMAN RIGHTS China hits back at US report

Reuters, Beijing

China hit back on Friday at the US State Department's annual survey of human rights, saying that only the Chinese people could pass judgement on what the Foreign Ministry said were the country's obvious achievements in the area.

Asked about criticism of China in the report, Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei condemned it for being pre-judged.

Since the launch of landmark economic reforms more than three decades ago, Hong said: "China's human rights endeavours have made achievements that are plain for all the world to see. The Chinese people themselves have the most right to speak about China's human rights situation".

"In human rights, there is no such thing as the best; there is only doing even better," he added.

Human rights have long been a source of friction between China and the United States, especially since 1989 when the United States and other Western countries imposed sanctions on China after a crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators.

China rejects criticism of its rights' record, saying providing food, clothing, housing and economic growth are more relevant for developing countries like it, pointing to its success at lifting millions out of poverty.

Socrates gets retrial in Greece

AFP, Athens

Lawyers in Greece were preparing yesterday for enacting the trial of Socrates, the ancient philosopher sentenced to die for provoking the powerful, in a spectacle they say is ever-relevant in times of revolution and crisis.

Socrates spoke himself at his trial in the fourth century BC, but now in his absence a panel of 10 US and European judges will hear pleas by top lawyers at the event at the Alexander S. Onassis foundation in Athens.

Organisers say judges and the audience will then vote on whether he is guilty on the ancient charges of impiety and corrupting the young.

Socrates' influential inquisitive method, preserved by ancient authors such as the philosopher Plato, treated sensitive notions of politics and morality that earned him powerful enemies.

"We are talking about democracy versus oligarchy, free speech in a time of national crisis; the wisdom of voters versus the non-wisdom of voters," said Loretta Preska, a New York district chief judge pres