

EGYPT PRESIDENTIAL POLLS Islamist claims victory

AP, Cairo

Islamist candidate Mohammed Morsi declared victory yesterday in Egypt's first free presidential election since Hosni Mubarak's ouster 16 months ago.

Egypt's official news agency is quoting a senior member of the ruling military council as saying the generals will hand over power to the newly elected president at the end of the month.

In a yesterday report, it quoted Maj Gen. Mohammed al-Asar as saying the transfer of power will take place in a "grand ceremony." He gave no exact date.

The winner of the presidential runoff held this weekend will be officially announced on Thursday.

Though official results have not yet been announced, the Brotherhood released a tally that showed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood took nearly 52 percent of the vote to defeat Mubarak's last Prime Minister Ahmed Shafiq with about 48 percent in a very close race.

The count was based on results announced by election officials at individual polling centers, where each campaign has representatives who compile and release the numbers before the formal announcement.

If Morsi's victory is confirmed in the official result, it would be the first victory of an Islamist as head of state in the stunning wave of pro-democracy uprisings that swept the Middle East the past year. But the military's last minute power grab sharpens the possibility of confrontation and



Mohammed Morsi

more of the turmoil that has beset Egypt since Mubarak's overthrow.

By midday, several hundred flag-waving supporters had gathered at Cairo's Tahrir Square, the birthplace of the uprising, to celebrate.

In a victory speech at his headquarters in the middle of the night, Morsi, 60, clearly sought to assuage the fears of many Egyptians that the Brotherhood will try to impose stricter provisions of Islamic law. He said he seeks "stability, love and brotherhood for the Egyptian civil, national, democratic, constitutional and modern state" and made no mention of Islamic law.

"Thank God, who successfully led us to this blessed revolution. Thank God, who guided the people of Egypt to this correct path, the road of freedom, democracy," the bearded, US-educated engineer declared.

He vowed he would be a "servant" to all Egyptians, "men, women, mothers, sisters... all political factions, the Muslims, the Christians," and added: "We are not about taking revenge or settling scores. We are all brothers of this nation, we own it together, and we are equal in rights and duties."

Just a few days before the presidential runoff on Saturday and Sunday, the military granted itself broad new powers to arrest civilians and a court packed with judges appointed by Mubarak dissolved the parliament freely elected after the uprising, which was dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian activists carry pitcher and plants on their heads in a protest to stop Indian government plan to construct dams on the river Ganges which would interrupt its flow, during a rally in New Delhi yesterday.

NUCLEAR TALKS Iran, world powers fail to break impasse

AFP, Moscow

Iran and world powers yesterday failed to move any closer to a breakthrough in the standoff over the Iranian nuclear programme at talks in Moscow seen as a last chance to solve the crisis diplomatically.

During several hours of tense talks at a hotel in the Russian capital, the West probed for signs that Iran could show willingness to scale down the intensity of its sensitive uranium enrichment activities.

But the Islamic republic appeared to have stuck rigidly to its refusal to give major concessions on its right to uranium enrichment.

"The main stumbling block is the fact the positions of the sides are rather complicated and hard to reconcile," the Interfax news agency quoted Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov saying.

Troops pound Homs 50 killed in Syria

AFP, Beirut

Syrian forces pounded Homs yesterday as they pressed their campaign against rebel strongholds in the city, while 50 people were killed across the strife-torn country, a watchdog said.

Yesterday's casualties come a day after 67 people were killed nationwide, including 15 in Homs province, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

"Shelling and shooting renewed in Homs city, with explosions heard in the Khaldiyyeh neighbourhood," the Britain-based monitoring group said.

"Regime forces trying to enter Khaldiyyeh and other neighbourhoods are facing fierce resistance from rebel fighters," it added.

Four rebels, including a dissident sergeant, were killed in Homs province by regime forces in the town of Qusayr near the Lebanon-Syria border, and a civilian died in shelling in the town of Rastan, the Observatory said.

And in Deir Ezzor, six people, including two rebel commanders, were killed in an explosion in Mohassan town.

Clashes and shelling continued through the night in several areas of Damascus province, including the towns of Douma and Qoudsaya, which have been pounded by regime forces for the past five days.

Six people -- including two children -- were killed in Douma, the Observatory said.

The Local Coordination Committees (LCC), grouping opposition activists on the ground, said Qoudsaya was shelled heavily, and that snipers were firing at anything that moved.

Greek election victor to hold coalition talks

World powers feel relieved

AGENCIES

Europe looked on with wary relief yesterday as Greek conservative leader Antonis Samaras received a mandate to launch coalition talks after coming first in national elections that follow weeks of uncertainty over the debt-crippled country's future in the continent's joint currency.

The campaign was watched closely by global leaders and markets, while central banks stood ready to intervene in case of financial turmoil - as Sunday's election was seen as a vote on whether Greece should stay among the 17 nations that use the euro, reports AP.

Meanwhile, World powers breathed a sigh of relief yesterday after pro-bailout parties won Greece's election but warned there was no time to lose to form a government committed to austerity measures.

The European Union meanwhile pledged support to the next Greek government, while saying the conservative New Democracy party and its likely coalition partner, the socialist Pasok party, should urgently form a



Antonis Samaras

new administration, reports AFP. A Greek exit would have potentially catastrophic consequences for other ailing European nations; the fallout would hit the United States and the entire global economy.

Leaders of the European Union appeared relieved that a pro-austerity government had a good chance now of being formed.

"Continued fiscal and structural reforms are Greece's best guarantee to overcome the current economic and social challenges," European Council President Herman Van Rompuy and European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso said in a joint statement.

Asian stock markets climbed early yesterday on the news of the conservative New Democracy party's strong finish, as did those in Greece with Athens stocks gaining 5.4 percent in early midday trading.

Sunday's vote "will probably ease fears of an imminent Greek euro exit," said Martin Koehring, of the Economist Intelligence Unit, adding "But the key question is how quickly can a government be formed?"

Hollande's party wins majority in parliament

BBC ONLINE

French President Francois Hollande's Socialist Party has won enough seats in parliamentary elections to form an absolute majority.

With final results still to be declared, the Socialists look set to win between 313 and 315 of the 577 seats in the National Assembly.

But former President Nicolas Sarkozy's UMP has seen its share fall from 304 to an estimated 214 seats.

It gives the president strong backing for his tax-and-spend programme.

These results mean the Socialists will not have to rely on the support of the Greens or far left to push through their plans to hire more public workers and refocus EU fiscal efforts away from their emphasis on austerity.

"This score exemplifies strong confidence in the president," said Finance Minister Pierre Moscovici.

Sunday's vote was the second round of a two-part parliamentary election. Turnout was record low, at 55.9%.

In one of the most closely watched constituencies of La Rochelle, Hollande's ex-partner, the former Socialist presidential contender Segolene Royal, was beaten by a dissident Socialist candidate.

INDIA'S PRESIDENTIAL POLL Kalam opts out of race

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

A P J Abdul Kalam yesterday announced he would not contest the presidential elections, rebuffing Trinamool Congress and BJP which wanted him to be the Opposition's candidate against UPA nominee Pranab Mukherjee.

Kalam, the former President whose name was propped up by Trinamool leader and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, said he had taken the decision of not entering the fray after considering "the totality of this matter and the present political situation".

In a statement here, he made it clear that he had "never aspired to serve another term or shown interest in contesting the elections" but Mamata and "other political parties" wanted him to be the candidate for the presidential poll to be held on July 19.

"I have considered the totality of this matter and the present political situation and decided not to contest the presidential election 2012," Kalam said.

The former president, who had earlier insisted that he could consider entering the fray only if there was certain about his victory, took the decision to stay away apparently as he was sure that numbers were not in his favour despite Trinamool, BJP and some other parties backing him.

Trinamool Congress said it would take a decision now that Kalam has opted out of the presidential race.

BJP, which was trying to persuade Kalam to be the common nominee of the Opposition, also refused to react, saying any decision on whether or not to have a candidate against Mukherjee would be taken by NDA which is likely to meet today.

Congress welcomed Kalam's decision and asked Mamata to again consider supporting Mukherjee.

A day after it failed to firm a decision on putting up a candidate against Mukherjee owing to differences within, BJP-led NDA yesterday sought to project a united face, saying whatever decision is taken will be a collective one.



NEWS IN brief

Saudi king names Salman as crown prince

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi King Abdullah named his half-brother Prince Salman as heir to the throne yesterday following the death of crown prince Nayef, state television Al-Ekhabriyah reported.

The monarch appointed Salman "crown prince and deputy prime minister" while also keeping him on as defence minister, it said, adding that Prince Ahmed bin Abdul Aziz would take over from Nayef as interior minister.

Salman, 76, became defence minister in October following the death of Sultan, the then crown prince and long-serving defence and aviation minister,

Australian FM in Libya over ICC team detention

AFP, Tripoli

Australian Foreign Minister Bob Carr arrived in Libya yesterday to press for the release of an International Criminal Court team who are being held after meeting the son of dead dictator Moamer Gaddafi.

Shortly after his arrival, Carr met interim Prime Minister Abdel Rahim al-Kib and was also due to meet other senior government officials, Kib's office said.

Carr is expected to push for the release of the ICC delegation including Australian Melinda Taylor and colleagues from Lebanon, Russia and Spain, who were detained on June 7 as they helped Seif al-Islam

Kuwait's ruler suspends parliament as row escalates

REUTERS, Kuwait

Kuwait's ruler suspended parliament for one month yesterday as a row escalated between the cabinet and lawmakers, threatening to draw in senior ministers and stalling economic planning in the major oil producer.

The emir, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, can take the emergency step under the Gulf state's constitution to allow time for talks and avert a deeper crisis that could lead to the dissolution of the elected assembly.

His suspension decree, published on state news agency KUNA, comes ahead of a planned questioning session in parliament of Interior Minister Sheikh Ahmad al-Hamoud al-Sabah, a royal family member,



PHOTO: AFP

Residents ride on tricycle along a flooded street near the port in Manila yesterday after heavy rains overnight brought about by western monsoon and enhanced by the exiting typhoon Guchol inundated many streets.

Act fast to quell unrest

FROM PAGE 1

immediately to quell the ongoing labour unrest for a pay hike in Ashulia on the outskirts of the capital.

There is no trade union in the garment sector so it is very difficult to find someone who can represent the agitating garment workers in discussions to resolve the issues, the PM observed at the weekly cabinet meeting.

All the RMG units have been closed following violent clashes between workers and law-enforcers.

"We need to find out whether there is any international conspiracy behind the labour unrest," Hasina told her cabinet colleagues, adding that the unrest leading to the shutdown of RMGs would have an adverse impact on the country's economy.

She also directed the officials concerned to supply ready-made garment workers with rice at a low price.

Fair price cards will be issued to garment workers, allowing them to buy 20 kilograms of rice at Tk 24 per kg in a month from government-appointed dealers, food ministry officials said.

Talking to reporters after the meeting, Food and Disaster Management Minister Abdur Razzaque said the fair price cards would first be distributed among nearly five lakh workers of garment factories in Ashulia.

Later, the cards will be distributed among garment workers in other areas, said Razzaque.

However, a similar move proved to be futile two years back, apparently for factory owners' indifference to it.

The government and garment owners in 2009 agreed to introduce food rationing for workers. Estimating that around 25 lakh RMG workers would come under the programme,

the government then put aside five lakh tonnes of rice to ensure rations on a regular basis.

Only a few owners complied with the deal and that too for a couple of months, food ministry officials said.

As per the agreement, owners of garment factories were supposed to distribute rice initially among 6.5 lakh workers at Tk 16 per kg. After the inauguration of the programme on August 27 that year, owners withdrew only 200 tonnes of rice which was distributed among 5,000 workers [20 kilogram each per month] for only two months.

Again in 2010, the government introduced fair price cards for low income people, but this time RMG workers were not included in the programme. So far, 70 lakh cards have been distributed among low income groups in Dhaka and some other districts.

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