

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION IN AFGHANISTAN

Glitches remain; casualties soar

AGENCIES

Problems plagued hundreds of polling centres yesterday as Afghans unable to vote in Saturday's parliamentary election were given another chance to cast their ballot.

As voters once again braved the threat of militant attacks in more than 20 provinces, an AFP tally of casualty figures from across the war-torn country showed the number of civilians and security forces killed or wounded in polling-related violence on Saturday was nearly 300.

That is more than four times the latest figures released by the interior ministry.

At some of the 253 polling centres opened for voting yesterday, election workers still struggled to use biometric verification devices and voter rolls were "either incomplete or non-existent", Electoral Complaints Commission spokesman Ali Reza Rohani told reporters.

Another 148 polling sites that were supposed to open remained closed for security reasons, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) told AFP.

Afghans are scheduled for presidential vote April.

Initial IEC figures show around three million Afghans risked their lives to vote on Saturday -- many waiting hours for polling centres to open -- despite scores of militant attacks.

Taliban, who opposes democracy, on Saturday claimed it carried out more than 400 attacks on the "fake election".

There were no reports of poll-related violence on Sunday, but officials said a roadside bomb killed 11 members of a family driving in the eastern province of Nangarhar.



TRAGEDY IN TAIWAN

This CNA handout picture taken yesterday shows a derailed train in Yilan, eastern Taiwan. At least 22 people died and 171 people were injured after the train derailed and flipped over in northeastern Yilan county. Inset, Rescuers tend to injured passengers after the accident. A probe has been launched to determine the cause of the accident.

PHOTO: AFP

Trump accuses Saudis of 'lies'

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump has accused Saudi Arabia of lying about the killing of Jamal Khashoggi, his strongest comments to date on the affair as pressure builds on the administration to strike a tougher line.

In an interview with the Washington Post published late Saturday, Trump stepped back from his stance that Saudi Arabia's latest explanation for the death of the journalist inside their Istanbul consulate was credible, but said he remained confident in the leadership of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

"Obviously there's been deception and there's been lies," he said of the shifting accounts offered by Riyadh.

Saudi officials originally said Khashoggi, who entered the diplomatic mission on October 2, had left unharmed, before announcing Friday he was killed inside the building in what they described as an altercation.

"Their stories are all over the place," added Trump.

Saudi Arabia faced a growing chorus of incredulity yesterday, with world powers demanding answers. British and French officials denounced the latest Saudi explanation as insufficient. Canada's foreign minister, Chrystia Freeland, said the Saudi version lacked "consistency and credibility."

Later Britain, France and Germany in a joint statement said Saudi Arabia must clarify how Khashoggi died inside its Istanbul consulate, and its account must "be backed by facts to be considered credible".

However, Trump warned Saturday against halting a Saudi arms deal, saying it would hurt American jobs.

"We have \$450 billion, \$110 billion of which is

KHASHOGGI'S MURDER

Western world urges 'credible' explanation as pressure mounts on Riyadh



countries like China or Russia.

Several senior members of Trump's Republican Party said they believed Prince Mohammed, the kingdom's de facto ruler, was linked to the killing, and one called for a "collective" Western response if a link is proved.

But Trump stopped far short of calling for the prince to be replaced, emphasizing as he has before how important the US-Saudi relationship is to Washington's regional strategic goals.

Meanwhile, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday vowed to reveal the "naked truth" over the killing, saying that he would make a new statement on the case next week.

"We are looking for justice here and this will be revealed in all its naked truth, not through some ordinary steps but in all its naked truth," Erdogan told a rally in Istanbul.

The crisis has forced Saudi King Salman to intervene. He ordered the dismissal of five officials, including Saud al-Qahtani, a royal court adviser seen as the right-hand man to Prince Mohammed, and deputy intelligence chief Ahmed Asiri, Saudi state media reported on Saturday.

Eighteen Saudi nationals had been arrested, the Saudi public prosecutor said in a statement.

The king also ordered a restructuring of the intelligence service, to be led by Prince Mohammed, suggesting the prince still retained wide-ranging authority.

Yameen loses bid to annul Maldives election result

AFP, Colombo

The Maldives' top court yesterday ended weeks of uncertainty by rejecting President Abdulla Yameen's controversial bid to annul last month's election results, upholding his landslide defeat to an opposition candidate.

The five-judge Supreme Court bench unanimously ruled that Yameen had failed to prove his claim that the election was rigged and a fresh poll was necessary in the Indian Ocean archipelago.

Under international pressure, Yameen initially conceded defeat after Ibrahim Mohamed Solih emerged the winner in the September 23 poll.

But the strongman ruler then filed an appeal this month, throwing the island nation into turmoil and attracting warnings from the United States and regional superpower India to respect the outcome.

Opposition activists celebrated outside the Supreme Court in the capital Male after the decision was read out, effectively drawing a line under Yameen's five years of iron-fisted rule.

Yameen claimed magic ink had been used to rig the election and that votes marked for him disappeared inside ballot boxes, an allegation which the top court found ungrounded.

The Supreme Court bench last week refused to accept the testimony of three unnamed witnesses that Yameen's lawyers said would prove the election was fixed.

The next day Yameen went on national television to concede defeat a second time, making no reference to his controversial legal bid.

US, Europe and India have issued strong warnings in the past if Yameen try to undermine polls result.

In February, Yameen jailed the chief justice and another Supreme Court judge after accusing them of trying to topple him. Yameen had initially suspended the court, parliament and the constitution and declared a state of emergency when legislators were about to impeach him.

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NEWS IN brief

Communal violence kills 55 in Nigeria

REUTERS, Kaduna

Communal violence in the northern Nigerian state of Kaduna over the last few days has killed 55 people, the local police commissioner said yesterday. Ahmad Abdur-Rahman, in a telephone interview, said the clashes between two communities in the Kasuwan Magani area of southern Kaduna had led to 22 arrests. He did not give details on the cause of the conflict but tension and clashes along ethnic lines have plagued that part of the state in the last few years.

Aussie PM rules out early election

AFP, Sydney

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison yesterday pledged his embattled government would serve out a full term despite the conservative coalition looking set to lose its majority after a voter backlash in a crucial Sydney by-election. The Liberal-National coalition, which has a one-seat parliamentary majority, appeared headed for minority government status after a huge swing in a traditionally safe seat.

Blast kills six civilians in Indian Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Indian police said "leftover explosives" were responsible for a blast in Kashmir that killed at least six civilians Sunday as they protested against government forces shooting dead three alleged militants. Protesters had surged the site of a shootout in southern Soolgun town, chanting slogans against Indian rule and hurling rocks at troops.



MIGRANT CARAVAN

Honduran migrants take part in a caravan heading to the US on the road linking Ciudad Hidalgo and Tapachula, Chiapas state, Mexico, yesterday. Earlier many migrants, who were blocked at Guatemala-Mexico international border bridge, crossed river to reach Mexico (Inset).

PHOTO: AFP



'Contributions by others ignored'

Modi takes jibe on Gandhis at Red Fort as he marks 75th anniversary of Netaji's Azad Hind government

NDTV ONLINE

In a veiled attack on the Nehru-Gandhi family, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday said that to keep "one family" above the rest, efforts were made to forget the contributions leaders such as Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Bhim Rao Ambedkar and Subhash Chandra Bose made in the Independence struggle.

"But now our government is changing all that," he said while addressing an event at the historic Red Fort to mark the 75th anniversary of the proclamation of the 'Azad Hind Sarkar' by Bose.

Donning the famous Azad Hind Fauj cap, the prime minister hoisted the national flag at the Red Fort and unveiled a plaque to mark the anniversary. The plaque will be placed at barack number three at the Red Fort where members of the Azad Hind Fauj faced trial. A museum will be also set



up in the barrack.

It was on October 21, 1943, that Netaji had proclaimed abroad the setting up of independent India's first government, a key milestone in India's eventual freedom on August 15, 1947.

PM Modi lamented that post Independence India's policies were based on the British system as "things were seen through British glasses".

"Policies, including those related to education had to suffer because of this," he said.

PM Modi said had India benefited from the guidance of Patel and Bose, things would have been much better. He said his government is changing that now.

"In an effort to highlight the role of one family, efforts were made to deliberately ignore and forget contributions made by others in the independence struggle, and later in creating a new India," he said. These leaders included Sardar Patel, Bhim Rao Ambedkar and Subhash Chandra Bose, the prime minister added.

He said while Bose focused on the East and Northeast India, the two regions did not get due recognition.

Now, he said, his government is working to make the Northeast the "engine of growth".

Hailing Bose's spirit of nationalism, Modi said as a 16-year old, he was aggrieved at the plight of India under the British rule. "His ideology was nationalism, he lived by nationalism," the PM said.

'Half million' rally in London for new Brexit referendum

AFP, London

EU flag waving Britons rejecting a future outside Europe packed the heart of London on Saturday for an anti-Brexit protest organisers said drew more than half a million people.

The police gave no figures for how many showed up for the massive march and rally across Britain and even other parts of the EU.

They chanted and whistled while marching in support for causes ranging from women's rights to Britain's beloved but underfunded NHS healthcare system.

Some wore blue French berets decorated with the golden stars of the EU flag. Others stuck up signs lampooning Prime Minister Theresa May's negotiating efforts.

"I think people were misled in various ways," small business owner Peter Hancock said.

"We want to stay European," added his wheelchair-bound wife Julie.

An online petition demanding a binding vote on any deal agreed before the March deadline had been signed almost 950,000 times by the time the march kicked off under sunny skies.

May has made it abundantly clear that she has no intention of allowing a Brexit do-over.



Israel halts demolition of Bedouin village

Reopens all Gaza crossings

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has frozen plans to demolish a strategically located Bedouin village in the occupied West Bank that have drawn international concern, his office said yesterday.

"The intention is to give a chance to the negotiations and the offers we received from different bodies, including in recent days," a statement from Netanyahu's office said about Khan al-Ahmar.

But speaking later ahead of a meeting with US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, Netanyahu appeared to play down the latest move and insisted that the village would still be cleared eventually.

Israeli authorities say the small village, located east of Jerusalem along a road leading to the Dead Sea, was built illegally. The decision to evict the villagers followed years of legal battles and after negotiated attempts to agree on an alternative site for relocation failed.

The fate of Khan al-Ahmar has drawn international concern, with European countries calling on Israel not to move ahead with plans to demolish it. On Wednesday, the International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor warned that Israel's planned "evacuation by force" of the village could constitute a war crime.

Meanwhile, Israel ordered the country's goods and people border crossings with Gaza to be opened yesterday, just four days after shuttering them following a Palestinian rocket attack that sparked retaliatory strikes.