

Iran's Reformers Seek Rebound In Election

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Reform-minded Iranians who have faced years of crackdowns looked Friday to claw back a bit of ground in a presidential election that gave them an unexpected hero and a chance to upend a vote that once appeared solidly in the hands of Tehran's ruling clerics.

While Iran's presidential elections offer a window into the political pecking orders and security grip inside the country — particularly since the chaos from a disputed outcome in 2009 — they lack the drama of truly high stakes as the country's ruling clerics and their military guardians remain the ultimate powers.

Election officials began the ballot count after voters waited on line for hours in wilting heat at some polling stations in downtown Tehran and other cities, while others cast ballots across the vast country from desert outposts to Gulf seaports and nomad pastures. Voting was extended by five hours to meet demand, but also as possible political stagecraft to showcase the participation.

The apparent strong turnout suggested liberals and others abandoned a planned boycott as the election was transformed into a show-down across the Islamic Republic's political divide.

On one side were hard-liners looking to cement their control behind candidates such as nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili, who says he is "100 percent" against detente with Iran's foes, or Tehran's mayor, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf.

Hezbollah Says It Will Keep Fighting In Syria

BEIRUT (AP) — Hezbollah's leader vowed Friday that his militants would keep fighting in Syria "wherever needed" after the U.S. agreed to arm the rebels in the civil war, setting up a proxy fight between Iran and the West that threatens to engulf more of the Middle East.

President Barack Obama has deepened U.S. involvement in the conflict, authorizing lethal aid to the rebels for the first time after Washington said it had conclusive evidence the Syrian regime had used chemical weapons. Syria accused Obama of lying about the evidence, saying he was resorting to fabrications to justify his decision to arm the rebels.

The opposition forces, which have suffered key battlefield losses in recent weeks and were facing heavy fighting Friday in Syria's largest city of Aleppo, appealed for the weapons to be sent to them as soon as possible to swing the momentum to their side.

The 2-year-old conflict, which the U.N. estimates has killed more than 90,000 people and displaced millions, is increasingly being fought along sectarian lines, pitting Sunni against Shiite Muslims, and is threatening the stability of Syria's neighbors.

Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, chief of the Shiite Hezbollah group in Lebanon, appeared unwavering in his support for the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

House Passes \$638 Billion Defense Package

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House overwhelmingly passed a sweeping, \$638 billion defense bill on Friday that imposes new punishments on members of the armed services found guilty of rape or sexual assault as outrage over the crisis in the military has galvanized Congress.

Ignoring a White House veto threat, the Republican-controlled House voted 315-108 for the legislation, which would block President Barack Obama from closing the U.S. detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and limit his efforts to reduce nuclear weapons.

The House bill containing the provisions on sex-related crimes that the Obama administration supports as well as the detention policies that it vigorously opposes must be reconciled with a Senate version before heading to the president's desk. The Senate measure, expected to be considered this fall, costs \$13 billion less than the House bill — a budgetary difference that also will have to be resolved.

The defense policy bill authorizes money for aircraft, weapons, ships, personnel and the war in Afghanistan in the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1 while blocking the Pentagon from closing domestic bases.

Shocking statistics that as many as 26,000 military members may have been sexually assaulted last year and high-profile incidences at the service academies and in the ranks pushed lawmakers to tackle the growing problem of sexual assault. A single case of a commander overturning a conviction — a decision that even Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel couldn't change — drove Congress to act swiftly.

USDA: Modified Wheat Appears To Be Isolated

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Agriculture Department says it has no indications that genetically modified wheat found in Oregon last month has spread beyond the field in which it was found.

No genetically engineered wheat has been approved for U.S. farming, and the department is investigating how the engineered wheat got in the field.

USDA spokesman Matt Paul said in a statement Friday that the department "has neither found nor been informed of anything that would indicate that this incident amounts to more than a single isolated incident in a single field on a single farm."

Agriculture Department officials have said the wheat is the same strain as a genetically modified wheat that was designed to be herbicide-resistant and was legally tested by seed giant Monsanto a decade ago but never approved.

Japan, Korea and Taiwan have suspended imports of western white wheat from the Pacific Northwest as the USDA investigates.

Paul said that investigators have interviewed the farmer who harvested the wheat from his field, interviewed the supplier who sold the producer wheat seed, obtained samples of the seed and obtained samples of other wheat grown by the farmer. All of the samples have tested negative so far, Paul said, and there is no indication that the engineered wheat entered commerce.

USDA said the investigation is continuing and inspectors are conducting interviews with approximately 200 area growers. The department also has given trading partners a copy of the test developed by Monsanto so they can identify the engineered strain.

Britain Tells Airlines NSA Leaker Not Allowed

LONDON (AP) — The British government has warned airlines around the world not to allow Edward Snowden, who leaked information on top-secret U.S. government surveillance programs, to fly to the United Kingdom.

A travel alert, dated Monday on a Home Office letterhead, said carriers should deny Snowden boarding because "the individual is highly likely to be refused entry to the U.K."

The Associated Press saw a photograph of the document taken Friday at a Thai airport. A British diplomat confirmed that the document was genuine and was sent out to airlines around the world. Airlines in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore also confirmed the alert had been issued.

In London, Home Office officials refused Friday to discuss the travel alert.

The diplomat said such alerts are issued to carriers that fly into the U.K., and if any airline brings Snowden into the country, it will be liable to be fined 2,000 British pounds (\$3,100). He said Snowden would likely have been deemed by the Home Office to be detrimental to the "public good."

Colorado

Crews Hold Flames In Check

BY DAN ELLIOTT
Associated Press

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — Authorities lifted evacuations in a wide swath of terrain outside Colorado Springs on Friday as they said a surprise rain shower helped them expand containment of a wildfire that has destroyed 400 homes.

Just one day after clearing out the Flying Horse neighborhood in northern Colorado Springs, officials allowed people back into at least 1,000 houses. They also reopened an eastern swath of the nearby Black Forest area in El Paso County.

Incident Commander Rich Harvey said the Black Forest Fire — the most destructive in Colorado history — is now 30 percent contained. It was only 5 percent contained Thursday.

The fire, in which two people died while apparently trying to escape their home, began Tuesday during record-setting heat and tinder-dry conditions. Officials warned it still could flare up again if the weather shifts.

Crews say they were better prepared to take on the flames because of lessons learned fighting last year's Waldo Canyon Fire, a similarly devastating blaze that devoured hundreds of homes and killed two people only a few miles away.

When the Black Forest, a thickly wooded rural region north of Colorado Springs, began to burn, authorities swiftly evacuated tens of thousands of people from an area larger than the Denver metropolitan area.

They immediately began hand-counting destroyed houses to get information out to nervous homeowners. And they rushed federal troops and aircraft into action, cutting the red tape that had grounded those resources a year ago as smoke clouds billowed over Colorado.

Within an hour, El Paso County had its emergency operations center up and running and summoned aircraft from nearby Peterson Air Force base. Rep. Doug Lamborn called the federal center in Idaho that coordinates western firefighting to speed up the process of clearing the planes. Gov. John Hickenlooper mobilized the Colorado National Guard, and troops began to help secure the rapidly growing evacuation zone.

"We've done it all before and so there was no question," said Nicola Sapp, El Paso County budget officer. "Everybody jumped right in."

The cause of the blaze is under investigation.

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MICHAEL CIAGLO/COLORADO SPRINGS GAZETTE/MCT
Neighbors Jasen Dill, left, and Judy Pohlod embrace on the corner of Hodgen Road and Highway 83 as they celebrate the rain and the fact that both of their homes survived the Black Forest fire in Colorado Springs, Colo., Friday.

authorities evacuated people miles away, sending deputies door-to-door to ensure everyone left. They remembered the speed at which last year's fire spread.

"That's one thing I'll never forget — how fast that Waldo Canyon Fire moved," said El Paso County Sheriff Terry Maketa, who was bowled over by how rapidly help arrived this week.

The latest blaze raced through the rural reaches of the metro area, doubling in size overnight and charring at least 400 homes. The bodies of two people were found inside their garage Thursday, their car doors open as if they had been about to flee.

Some Waldo Canyon evacuees endured days without knowing whether their houses survived. So Maketa sent deputies in at night to survey neighborhoods. It was a

painstaking, risky process as ashes smoldered around them while they strained to determine the addresses of charred properties. About 24 hours later, the department began releasing the addresses of houses that were lost.

It might take two weeks to get a perfect count, but the sheriff decided to err on the side of rapidly releasing information.

"I'd rather disappoint one person, but get it right to another thousand," Maketa said.

On Friday, firefighters were aided by some rainfall in the burn area.

Hickenlooper toured the zone and said he was happily drenched.

"I'm soaking wet and I'm a little chilly, but I've never been so happy to say this," he said.

The fire zone remained at 25 square miles, thanks to lighter

winds and firefighters' efforts to stamp out flare-ups. Sheriff's deputies patrolling for looters directed crews to dozens of hot spots.

Harvey is the federal official who also oversaw the battle against the Waldo Canyon Fire. He said it was just coincidence that Colorado Springs saw two such destructive blazes in 12 months.

"This could happen anywhere," he said.

Still, the coincidence is a reminder of the challenges of tamping down wildfires across the West, especially with growing populations, rising temperatures and a historic drought.

Developers describe Black Forest as the latest contiguous stretch of ponderosa pine in the United States — a thick, wide carpet of vegetation rolling down from the Rampart Range that thins out to the high grasslands of Colorado's eastern plains. Once home to rural towns and summer cabins, it is now dotted with million-dollar homes and gated communities as a result of the state's population boom over the past two decades.

Waldo Canyon was one of the last subdivisions in Colorado Springs, bumping up directly against the pine-clad wilderness of the Rocky Mountains.

Other fires burned in Colorado, California and New Mexico. A southern New Mexico fire reached the historic mining town of Kingston, but an official said crews protected buildings there.

In Canon City, 50 miles southwest of Black Forest, the 5-square-mile Royal Gorge Fire was 40 percent contained and evacuation orders were lifted. A 350-acre fire sparked by lightning in Rocky Mountain National Park was 30 percent contained.

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