

# Ex-rebel alliance claims lead in Libya vote

## Official says parliamentary race is still too close to call

The Associated Press

TRIPOLI, Libya — An alliance led by a former Libyan rebel prime minister said Sunday the party's unofficial preliminary results showed it was in the lead in the country's first parliamentary elections since the ouster of dictator Moammar Gadhafi.

Faisal Kerkshi, secretary general of the Alliance of National Forces led by Mahmoud Jibril, said he was basing his results on reports by party representatives at ballot counting centers across the vast desert nation. He gave no details, and the head of the election commission refused to confirm Kerkshi's announcement.

"We are all waiting, and we have nothing to suggest that one party is ahead of others," election commission chief Nouri al-Abar told reporters. He also refused to set a date for announcing the full official results.

Libyans voted Saturday for the 200-seat legislature. Eighty seats are set aside for party lists and the remaining 120 are for individual independent candidates.

Officials from two other parties, including the Muslim Brotherhood's Justice and Construction Party, said Jibril's alliance was the biggest winner in the race for the 80 party seats. They also said they were basing their statements on party representatives at polling centers. Their claims could not be verified.

In the U.S., President Obama congratulated Libyans on the vote, calling it "another milestone on their extraordinary transition to democracy."

The vote comes after a bitter civil war that ended Gadhafi's four-decade rule, and was the first time Libyans have voted for a parliament since 1964, five years before Gadhafi's military coup that toppled the monarchy. Gadhafi was killed by rebel forces in Sirte in late October.

Some in eastern Libya, a center of the rebellion against Gadhafi, boycotted the elections in protest of what they say is an unfair number of seats in parliament allotted to their region. There were attacks on polling centers in the east that in some cases halted voting.

Al-Abar, the election commission chief, said preliminary figures showed 1.7 million of nearly 2.9 million eligible voters, or about 60%, cast ballots Saturday.

The vote was characterized by scenes of joy and a sense of triumph by Libyans emerging from the repressive one-man rule under Gadhafi.

They stayed out celebrating on the streets well after polls closed at 8 p.m. Fireworks lit the Tripoli sky, motorists honked their horns, and stores stayed open well past midnight.

There were also shouts of "Libya is free" by ex-rebel fighters deployed throughout Tripoli in anticipation of any violence. They flashed fingers stained by purple ink to show they voted.



By Portia Walker for USA TODAY

**Mystery solver:** Mervat Mhani is working to locate thousands of people who disappeared during Moammar Gadhafi's 42-year rule.

## Thousands missing from Gadhafi era

### Relatives seek to recover bodies

By Portia Walker  
Special for USA TODAY

TRIPOLI, Libya — Mervat Mhani sits at her office inside a sand-colored concrete building on the outskirts of Tripoli, surrounded by photos of thousands of people who remain missing in Libya.

As a worker for the Ministry of Martyrs and Missing People, she has for months been helping families try to account for their missing loved ones.

"They know that their sons are probably dead and will never come back, but they still continue the search because they want to bury their sons," she says.

Almost nine months after Libya's civil war, the fates of thousands of people who disappeared under Moammar Gadhafi's 42 years of power and during the recent civil

uprising remain an agonizing mystery for many Libyans.

Mhani says that it is impossible to provide an exact figure for the people who disappeared here, but she estimates that about 10,000 people are missing. Some were arrested during Gadhafi's rule and secretly killed in prisons. Others were snatched from the streets or shot down for attending anti-Gadhafi demonstrations in the early days of the rebellion against his rule last year.

Others vanished after going out for groceries, Mhani says.

Aladin Ali Al Righeg is one of those still searching. On Feb. 12, 1989, Gadhafi's security forces raided his family home and took his brother, Adel, 25. For years, his family took food and clothes to the Abu Salim prison in Tripoli where Adel was being held.

The prison guards would always accept the boxes of food and clothes. Sometimes, he says, they would tell him that his brother needed something, like a razor. But in 2004 the

prison guards came to his house and told him that his brother was dead.

Friends with contacts inside the prison later told him that Adel had been killed in a June 29, 1996, massacre at the prison. Human Rights Watch and other agencies say that there are reports that more than 1,200 prisoners were killed in a single day in a riot sparked by the appalling conditions. A mass grave with about that many corpses was found last fall outside Tripoli.

The Al Righeg family pleaded to have Adel's body returned to them so that they could give him a proper burial, but they were refused. Like other families, they were offered compensation in exchange for agreeing not to sue the government, but they refused.

Al Righeg says he wants those responsible for his brother's death brought to justice.

"My brother is like a fire in my heart that will not go down until we find his killer," he said. Many believe some of the

missing were killed on the orders of Abdullah al-Senussi, Gadhafi's head of intelligence. Al-Senussi fled Libya, and the interim Libyan government has requested his extradition from neighboring Mauritania.

Meanwhile, mass graves continue to be uncovered throughout the country.

The Ministry of Martyrs and Missing People is going through the slow process of taking DNA samples from the bodies and looking for possible matches to DNA samples from the families of the missing.

Mhani says the thousands of people who remain unaccounted for, a number Human Rights Watch puts at between 8,000 and 20,000, are almost certainly dead, but Libyans need to know what happened to the missing, and so recovering their bodies is important.

"The families want their samples to be tested as soon as possible," Mhani says, admitting that Libya does not have the forensic facilities to move fast. "It's going to take years."



By Mahmud Turkia, AFP/Getty Images

**No clear winner:** An election worker collects ballot boxes to prepare for the final counting Sunday in Tripoli.

# Opponent to Chávez: 'Your time is over, brother'

## Centrist governor Capriles pushes bid for presidency

By Girish Gupta  
Special for USA TODAY

MARIARA, Venezuela — Amid air horns, incessant screaming and blasting music, Carmen Carillo, 48, stands crying, holding her young daughter and staring at the passing motorcade.

"He's done so many good things," she said, looking toward President Hugo Chávez as his car passes by. "I suffered with problems with my sight, and thanks to Chávez and God I had an operation and now I can see."

Tens of thousands of people formed a sea of red that flooded into the small town of Mariara to see Chávez and hear his bid for re-election. But what has been a routine victory for the socialist Chavistas for 13 years is in doubt because of a broken economy and a viable opponent in centrist state governor Henrique Capriles Radonski.

This nation of 29 million people is suffering from high unemployment, food shortages and rising crime despite having the largest oil reserves in the world. Capriles blames Chávez, whose rewarding of friends and punishing political enemies has hobbled the oil industry and foreign investment.

Capriles, who is calling for a return to free-market economics backed by strong welfare policies, lashed out at Chávez at a campaign stop Saturday. "I'm telling you clearly, Chávez,



By Ariana Cubillos, AP

**Wants the job:** Presidential candidate Henrique Capriles Radonski in June.

whatever you do, your time is over, brother," he said. "Venezuela is waking up."

But Chávez's many supporters have not abandoned him. At the opening of his campaign for a six-year term, thousands of people walked, caught buses or hitched rides for the 10-mile route to the central city of Maracay, where they watched their "Comandante" speak. "The Bolivarian hurricane has begun," Chávez bellowed, referring to Latin-American independence hero Simón Bolívar, whose memory has been the plank of Chávez's socialist revolution.

Capriles opened his campaign in the depths of the jungle at Santa Elena, on the border with Brazil.

"Over there is Brazil," Capriles said. "Its government understood how to work. Brazil has taken off. Now it's Venezuela's turn."

Chávez, 57, gained the presidency in 1999 after an earlier failed coup landed him in prison. While in power, he has gained support from impoverished ru-



By Juan Barreto, AFP/Getty Images

**Confident of victory:** Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez salutes before a military parade in Caracas on Thursday. He has mocked Capriles as a "loser."

ral areas where he has built government housing and health clinics. He has also packed state industries with cronies, repressed the media and used a majority in the congress to pass laws strengthening his power.

Abroad, he has attempted to destabilize other regimes in South America, clashing with the United States and other regional democracies while backing dictators such as Fidel Castro in Cuba, where he has been flying for advice and treatments for cancer.

At home, one of the biggest voter gripes is insecurity. One weekend in

June saw 68 homicides in the capital of Caracas, making the city one of the murder capitals of the world. Many top Colombian drug lords are suspected of living in Venezuela.

"We need a change of government," said José Granadas, 51, in Caracas, adding that he regrets having voted for Chávez. "Sadly, the country's gone backwards."

According to pollster Luis Vicente León, about 30% of the electorate for the Oct. 7 election are undecided. This is a change from the past, he says, when most people polled were either very

much for or very much against Chávez. "I haven't got time for politics. I doubt anything will change," said Freddy Kasove, 43, in a Caracas shopping mall.

Chávez even acknowledged the "undecided" and "confused" section of the electorate in his campaign speech, saying he would win them over.

While some independent polling firms put the race within a 4-point margin, Chávez's campaign chief Jorge Rodríguez says recent polls by the Caracas-based firm Datanálisis place Chávez 17 points ahead of Capriles.

"Every day the gap favors Chávez," Rodríguez said.

Even in the event of a Chávez loss, Capriles will have to deal with a congress packed with Chávez loyalists including National Assembly President Diosdado Cabello, a military comrade of Chávez's who took part in the failed 1992 military coup.

Another issue will be Venezuelan oil, the price of which has fallen about 20% in the past two and a half months because of a worldwide economic slump. This OPEC nation depends on oil for 90% of its exports.

Chávez said this past weekend that he is confident of victory, mocking Capriles as a "loser." He says the only way he can be denied victory is if outside conspirators, such as Europe and the United States, try to steal his win with lies that he is a dictator.

"They say I am trampling on things, that I am violating laws. It is absurd ... but what is behind it all is not absurd: a conspiracy to try to deny the will of the people," Chávez said at a military promotion ceremony.

## Syria brandishes military force

In a show of force, Syria began large-scale military exercises Sunday to simulate defending the country against outside "aggression."

Damascus' staunch ally Iran warned of a "catastrophe" in the region if no political solution to the 16-month-old Syrian conflict is found. Iran has stood by President Bashar Assad's regime.

Assad said Sunday that he will not step down "in the face of national challenges." He spoke in a TV interview with German public broadcaster ARD, which released his comments ahead of the broadcast. Assad accused the United States of fueling the revolt against him by partnering with "terrorists ... with weapons, money or public and political support at the United Nations."

## DEA agents kill suspected drug pilot

The pilot of a suspected drug flight killed in an anti-narcotics operation in Honduras last week was shot dead by two U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agents after he refused to surrender, an agency spokeswoman said Sunday.

Honduran police had said the twin-engine plane from Colombia loaded with cocaine crashed while being chased by government aircraft.

DEA spokeswoman Dawn Dearden said Sunday that when police arrived at the crash scene, the injured pilot was arrested and the second was shot by the DEA agents after he ignored orders to surrender and made a threatening gesture.

## Russia to investigate flood deaths

Russian President Vladimir Putin moved to address anger over the deaths of at least 171 people in severe flooding in the Black Sea region that turned streets into swirling rivers and inundated

thousands of homes as many were sleeping.

Putin flew to the region and ordered Russia's investigative agency to establish whether enough had been done to warn people about the floods.

Torrential rains dropped up to a foot of water in less than 24 hours, which the state meteorological service said was five times the monthly average.

The Associated Press

## U.S. death toll

As of Sunday, 1,903 U.S. servicemembers and three Defense Department civilians had been reported killed in the Afghanistan War.

The latest death identified: **Army Reserve Capt. Bruce A. MacFarlane**, 46, of Oviedo, Fla., died Friday in Kandahar; 831st Transportation Battalion.

Source: Defense Department



By Alvaro Barrientos, AP

## Thunder on cobblestones

**Fueled by adrenaline:** Revelers round a corner alongside a fighting bull during the second day of the Running of the Bulls at the annual San Fermin festival in Pamplona, northern Spain on Sunday.