

Belgian PM Michel's Party Slips Seven Months before National Vote

BRUSSELS - The liberal party of Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel lost ground in local elections, throwing into doubt whether he will be able to continue his center-right coalition after a national vote next year. Belgium will hold federal and regional elections on May 26, the same day as elections held across the European Union for seats in the European Parliament.

In Sunday's regional elections, Michel's Mouvement Reformateur (MR) slipped by around 4 percentage points in all but one of the provinces in Wallonia, the French-speaking southern region of Belgium, and lost a number of mayoral posts in the capital Brussels.



Michel told broadcaster RTBF that his party had done better than forecast by opinion polls.

"We are relatively stable," he said. In the Dutch-speaking north of the country, Flanders, the three parties ruling at national level had mixed results. Bart De Wever, the leader of the separatist N-VA, was on course to stay on as mayor of Belgium's second city, Antwerp. (Reuters)

German Prosecutors Raid Opel over Diesel Allegations

FRANKFURT AM MAIN - German police said Monday they had raided French-owned carmaker Opel, amid reports the manufacturer was the latest suspected of having manipulated diesel cars' exhaust emissions to cheat regulatory tests.

"We confirm that there are police measures and they are ongoing," a spokesman for police in Hesse state told AFP.

Citing charges from the federal KBA transport authority, tabloid-style Bild daily reported that the raid was related to some 95,000 diesel vehicles built between 2012 and 2017 that may have been fitted with "illegally manipulated" software. Since car giant Volkswagen admit-



ted in 2015 to fitting 11 million cars worldwide with software to make cars appear less polluting in the lab than in real on-road driving, the "dieselgate" scandal has left few corners of Germany's mighty car industry untouched.

But it has taken longer for Opel -- bought last year by Peugeot maker PSA from US-based General Motors -- to fall under suspicion than bigger names such as BMW and Mercedes-Benz parent Daimler. (AFP)

(1) RSF Calls...

The war imposed by the Taliban and Islamic State and abuses by warlords and corrupt politicians now permanently threaten journalists, the media and press freedom in Afghanistan.

"The increase in targeted attacks on the media and the deterioration in the security situation for women journalists in the run-up to the elections threaten the Afghan people's sovereignty and democratic choice," said Reza Moini, the head of RSF's Afghanistan-Iran desk.

"There can be no democratic elections without the freedom to inform. This is why RSF calls on the Afghan government to renew its commitment and involvement in protecting journalists. The continuation of the government's efforts with regard to security and training is essential."

Amid pre-election tension and security threats, RSF visited Afghanistan from 14 to 27 September to organize four trainings for a total of 70 journalists (including 32 women) who came from 13 different provinces and represented 53 independent Afghan media. (Pajhwok)

(2) Ministries...

They said on election day, three security belts would be created at each polling centre to ensure voter safety.

"Security forces will be stationed in the belts to maintain security. In the first belt near polling centres, mostly police and intelligence forces will be deployed," said the Interior Ministry spokesman.

Najib Danish added at a distance of 3,000 to 5,000 meters, Afghan National Army soldiers would be stationed. In the third security belt, police, National Directorate of Security and ANA will jointly mobilise patrols.

"The Defence Ministry is committed to maintaining security on Saturday (election day) and we assure all our people to go to polling centers without any fear," ministry spokesman Ghafoor Ahmad Jawed said.

The Interior Ministry's counter-narcotics department, meanwhile, said they had seized 49 AK-47 rifles that were being transferred to Kabul by armed groups to disrupt elections.

"It is mostly believed armed anti-government groups wanted to disrupt election security with the weapons we have seized," Deputy Interior Minister Abdul Khalil Bakhtiar said.

Earlier, the MoI said it would deploy over 50,000 security forces to 5,100 polling centres across the country to maintain election security. (Pajhwok)

(3) Ghani Insists...

construction of a main mosque in the city, construction of two roads, extension of electricity to districts, higher education facilities, education scholarships and others.

Speaking on the occasion, President Ghani thanked the people of Parwan province for their cooperation with the Afghan security and defense forces. Ghani said Afghanistan's trade with central Asian countries had increased and it had signified the importance of Parwan. Insisting on standard packaging of agricultural products for exports and their increased production in Parwan, the president said now Afghanistan was connected with India, central Asia and Europe through the air and ground, thus necessitating improved packaging and processing.

Later, President Ghani met security and defense officials and heard reports from them about the security situation and

preparations for the Oct 20 Wolesi Jirga elections.

The provincial security officials briefed the president about their achievements, challenges and said the security forces were in high morale and they had always frustrated enemy's designs. (Pajhwok)

(4) Media Obligations...

directors/heads of news of major radio stations, television channels, print and online media outlets

Ariana News, Killid Radio, Pajhwok Afghan News, Radio Television of Afghanistan (RTA), Salam Watandar Radio, Shamshad TV, Tolo News and 8am Daily News) representatives were among the participants.

The Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC) spokesperson, chairman of the Independent Election Commission (IEC) Media Committee, Afghan Independent Journalists Association (AIJA) and Centre for Protection of Afghan Women Journalists (CPAWJ) directors were also in attendance.

An ECES/PROSES electoral expert gave a keynote presentation on electoral integrity and the importance of media as a champion to promote more credible and transparent elections.

The European Center for Electoral Support (ECES) is a non-profit private foundation headquartered in Brussels, with a global remit. It promotes sustainable democratic development through the provision of advisory services, operational support and management of large projects.

ECES has been operating in Afghanistan since last July the fully EU-funded project PROSES (Project in Support of Enhanced Sustainability and Electoral Integrity).

This 18-month technical assistance project is supporting the 2018 parliamentary elections through a series of ongoing training and capacity-building activities focused on democracy and election stakeholders, including civil society organisations and the media. (Pajhwok)

(5) UN Chief Condemns...

a violation of international humanitarian law.

At least 22 people were killed and more than 35 wounded on Saturday in a bomb attack on an election campaign rally in northern Takhar province.

Elsewhere in the country, two individuals including a child were killed in a separate attack on a candidate's office in western Herat province.

The UN chief urged all parties to ensure a peaceful and orderly electoral process by creating a safe environment for candidates to campaign and for citizens to exercise their right to assemble and vote. António Guterres also extended his deepest sympathies to the families of those killed and wished a speedy recovery to the injured. (Pajhwok)

(6) Iran, Japan Agree...

of Iran is scheduled to present a training programme for Afghan customs staff to co-operate with Japan," the report said. (Pajhwok)

(7) USAID Launches...

obstacles preventing women from joining the civil service, among them, the lack of professional conduct and persistent harassment.

The e-Learning video will target these obstacles and seek to overcome them through training and awareness.

The e-Learning video is based on a standard WIG training curriculum that the project delivered to more than 200 cur-

rent civil service employees to build a culture of professionalism and anti-harassment. USAID produced the video in close collaboration with the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

More than 35 government representatives, who are committed to rolling out the video in their respective ministries and independent agencies, attended the launch event.

The Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, H.E. Spozhmai Wardak said, "[The Professionalism in the Workplace training] has been very effective. We decided to convert it into a video so that it can reach all of our employees. We cannot be effective and influential only through punishment. We can be more effective through awareness raising. I hope this video is used in all GIROA organizations."

Promote is comprised of four activities that are implemented specifically for women. The activities include leadership development, government employment, economic participation, and civil society advocacy. To date, Promote has supported over 50,000 Afghan women in more than 30 provinces nationwide. (Pajhwok)

(8) Women's Participation...

provide public awareness regarding elections to the people.

"There is no alternative except holding elections to rescue Afghanistan from the crisis," said Sayad.

UNAMA said that 16 percent of candidates are women, a marginal increase on previous elections, and that women make up approximately 32 percent of total registered voters, according to current statistics from the Independent Election Commission (IEC).

According to UNAMA's statement, they welcomed the crucial role that civil society plays in ensuring women's voices are heard during the election. "The mission is mindful of the great personal risk that numerous female candidates and women's rights activists routinely face in promoting women's full inclusion as candidates, voters, election staff and observers," read the statement.

Some commendable measures have been put in place to facilitate women's participation, such as the presence of at least one dedicated female polling station per polling centre, female polling staff and female security personnel.

The mission emphasizes that women's full participation - as candidates, electoral workers, observers and voters - is the civil and political right of all women. Enhancing women's participation in all stages of the electoral process is vital for strengthening democracy in Afghanistan. Elections provide a key opportunity for ensuring women's concerns are addressed and women's meaningful participation in the political, economic and social future of the country is maximized.

The UN Mission also said that it is the responsibility of Afghan authorities, political parties, candidates and civil society organizations to take all necessary measures to improve and encourage the participation of women in the elections. Afghans will go to the polls on Saturday in the long-awaited parliamentary elections. (Tolo news)

(9) HPC Says Talks...

the establishment of security and the end of the war and it should be discussed nationally," said Salim.

The withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan has been a key demand by the Taliban for many years; but the High

Peace Council said Taliban uses the issue as a "topic for propaganda" while there are much more important issues that should be addressed first.

"Because they have been backed a lot under this issue (calling for forces withdrawal) they want to use it as a propaganda subject, while there are other issues that should come first," Salim added.

Meanwhile, this high-level peace council member said that the US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad's efforts are promising regarding talks with the Taliban.

Khalilzad's meeting with Taliban officials in Qatar last week has increased hope among High Peace Council members that talks could start with the Taliban.

Taliban also said in a statement that during Khalilzad's visit, they discussed the withdrawal of foreign troops.

HPC's remarks on the Taliban's call for the withdrawal of troops comes after Khalilzad shared information with Afghan leaders of his meeting with Taliban representatives in Qatar.

"After his trip to a few regional countries, Khalilzad returned to Kabul and met with the government leadership and delivered his trip's report. We hope that efforts continue for reaching peace," said Omid Maisam, deputy spokesman for the CEO.

On Sunday in a statement Taliban insisted on continuing the talks.

"Americans, in order to preserve their interests in the region, and also due to threats from the region against their country, will never leave their bases (in Afghanistan)," said Nasrullah Stanikzai university lecturer.

Information leaked to the media indicates that Khalilzad and Taliban officials met on Wednesday in Qatar and talked about announcing a ceasefire and freeing a number of Taliban prisoners or at least exchanging them with government prisoners, but that they have not yet reached an agreement in this regard.

Taliban representatives and Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Alice Wells have met in Doha in the past. (Tolo news)

(10) NPC Introduces...

companies could enter the system with support of NPC as there would be digital categorization for private companies.

At today's meeting, he said, over 200 private sector companies would provide their views regarding the use of the digital system.

Syed Ajmal Shahna, acting head of monitoring and development of the project, said the new system would help address some issues which existed earlier.

He added out of the total 368 contracts, 275 contracts had serious problems in their implementation due to which some government programs could not implemented.

He cited vortruption, lack of transparency, delay in transfer of information, insecurity, lack of professional human resources as main challenges in implementation of the halted projects. (Pajhwok)

(11) Police Retake...

according to Rahimi.

The overnight clash left ALP commander Mohammad Aslam and two other ALP men and two Taliban insurgents dead.

However, the Taliban claimed capturing three check-posts and killing four ALP men and wounding as many in the nighttime attack. (Pajhwok)

(12) 30 Polling...

did not say where these high risk polling stations exist, but said most of them are in districts.

He said the list of all polling stations had been shared with security organs in order to ensure their security on the Election Day.

Zabihullah Majeedi, a Wolesi Jirga candidate in Kunduz, told Pajhwok that bad security situation had created problems for the upcoming polls.

"The voter registration process could not be launched in many polling stations. The government should ensure security of at least the polling stations where people have taken their voter cards, so they are able to participate in the democratic process," he said.

He expressed concern that candidates would be seriously affected by closure of polling stations.

Majeedi asked security officials to take serious security measures for safety of voters during the Election Day.

Haji Akbar Kheyabani, a resident of Kunduz City, said it was difficult to hold elections outside Kunduz City and in district centers.

"Security is not good even on the outskirts of Kunduz city, Taliban have also warned people against participating in the polls," he said.

Some other residents of Kunduz expressed similar views and asked the government to ensure foolproof security on the Election Day.

Kunduz police chief, Col. Abdul Baqir Nuristani, said they had launched operations in areas under high security threat.

"We have launched operations to improve security and people would be able to participate in polls, we are also busy deploying new security posts," he said. He said no one would be allowed to disrupt the election process.

The Wolesi Jirga elections are scheduled for October 20. (Pajhwok)

(13) Ghazni Gets...

According to a statement released by the Ministry of Interior (MoI) the latest changes have been brought based on the recommendations of the ministry and approval of the Presidential Palace.

The recent reshuffle includes appointment of Brigadier General Abdul Muqem Abdul Rahimzai as the Chief of Staff of the office of Senior Deputy Interior for Security while Brigadier General Gulam Dawood Tarakhel has been appointed as the new Security Chief of Ghazni province.

In the meantime, Colonel Haseeb Ur Rehman has been appointed as the Deputy Chief of the Personnel Directorate (Pezhantoon) of the ministry, Colonel Mohammad Wali Amini has been appointed as the Chief of the Police Rights General Directorate, while Colonel Gulam Sediq has been appointed as deputy chief of the Police Rights General Directorate. (KP)

(14) 7 Daesh...

the strikes in the mountainous provinces. Afghan security forces, backed by the United States (US)-led NATO coalition troops, have increased ground and air offensives against militants in the past few months as the country is preparing for parliamentary elections scheduled to be held on Oct 20.

During the upcoming elections, more than 54,000 Afghan soldiers and police personnel would be deployed to provide security for 5,100 polling centres nationwide. (Agencies)