

Mubarak sweeps first contested Egyptian election

By Nadia Abou El-Magd
Associated Press Writer

CAIRO, Egypt-- President Hosni Mubarak swept Egypt's first contested race for his job, according to preliminary results Thursday, an expected victory in an election praised as progress toward democratic reform despite allegations of fraud.

The election commission, criticized as controlled by Mubarak's government, insisted Wednesday's ballot was a success, though there were widespread reports of irregularities, and voter turnout was perhaps as low as 30 percent. The commission also dismissed calls by the runner-up for a repeat of the vote.

In office for 24 years, Mubarak had been expected to win Wednesday's election by a wide margin. But his government has insisted the important thing was the process, saying the election heralds more reforms in this key U.S. ally, which has seen only autocratic rule for 50 years.

Opponents dismissed the ballot, skeptical that Mubarak will give up his long unquestioned power. Until now, the president has been re-elected in "yes-no" referendums in which he was the only candidate.

Washington, eager for Mubarak to conduct reforms but wary of pressing too hard, showed its approval.

U.S. State Department

spokesman Sean McCormack noted some "issues" in the balloting, monitors allowed in only at the last minute and campaign ads present at some polling sites. Still, he called it a "positive first step."

"What we hope is that the Egyptian government and the Egyptian people can build upon... the positive actions in this election as they look toward parliamentary elections in the fall, and look to addressing some of those issues that I mentioned that were less positive," he said.

Mubarak took 78-80 percent of the vote, according to a preliminary count, an election commission official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to announce results. Final results were expected Friday or Saturday.

His top opponent, Ayman Nour of the opposition Al-Ghad party, took 12 percent, a strong showing for a relative unknown and one that could make him a more formidable political power.

The state newspaper reported similar results in its Friday edition, saying Mubarak had won with 80 percent and that Nour came in second, though it did not give his percentage.

Nour wrote to the elections commission with a list of alleged voting irregularities and demanded a repeat of the vote, citing the "grave violations that

... influenced the integrity of the election process," his deputy, Nagui el-Ghatrifi, told reporters. Commission spokesman Osama Attawiya said the commission "examined the request," met with Nour and in the end rejected his appeal.

Attawiya said the commission concluded that the alleged violations presented by Nour "are not correct." Many reform-minded judges have accused the commission of being under the ruling party's domination.

"There have been no violations and there are no doubts in the election process," Attawiya told a press conference. "There is always the first step or the first experiment followed by progress in the next step. In Egypt, thank God, we are making some progress."

Nour was not immediately available for comment. His top deputy, Wael Nawara, said the candidate was disappointed that the commission dismissed reports of irregularities.

The 40-year-old lawmaker came in second despite forgery charges against him that he says the government concocted to wreck his candidacy and widespread dismissal of him by government media.

Throughout the campaign, the media took pains to portray Noaman Gomaa, leader of al-Wafd party, as the more serious contender to the 77-year-old Mubarak. Gomaa, 71, won

between five and seven percent of the vote, according to the commission official.

A representative of Gomaa's campaign, Cherif Abaza, said it is still early to "say for sure if elections were fair or if there was rigging."

Ordinary voters, opposition parties and some monitoring groups reported widespread pressure and incentives for people to back Mubarak. For example, ruling party officials were present in some stations as people voted, pro-Mubarak posters were rife at polling stations, and tribal leaders in some areas reported being told by police to make sure their followers backed the president.

Voter turnout was low. No final figure was announced yet, but the commission official put it at around 30 percent of the country's 32 million registered voters.

If that figure is confirmed, it would indicate that most Egyptians did not have sufficient faith in the electoral process to take part.



President Hosni Mubarak

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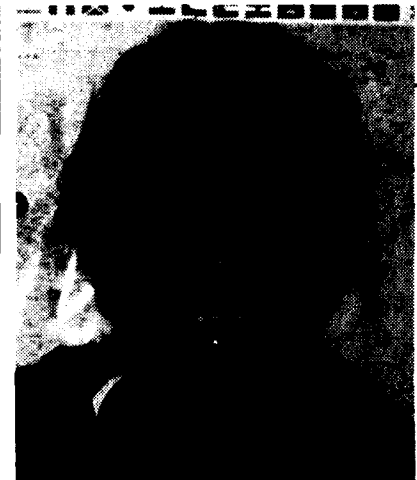
-Sean McCormack



Egypt's newly elected President Hosni Mubarak shakes hands with President George W. Bush after winning the election.

Photos courtesy of AP

World View



Osman Abdalla

By Osman Abdalla
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Dear World View readers, before I continue on with my international awareness corner, I would like to take a moment and review our discussions last year. We started by talking about the diversity of the different cultures in the world, hovered over the different political systems, and talked about the shrinking resources and how in today's real life, there is a huge lack of prioritization. Instead of looking at the population growth and the decrease in the earth's carrying capacity, people fight each other over oil.

In one of last year's "windows" (that is what I call this column), I spoke about the need for leaders with great morals and wisdoms, not the kind of leaders who pull us back by their revitalization thoughts. If progress is what matters, then liberalism is the only way toward progress. Life is a collection of experiences.

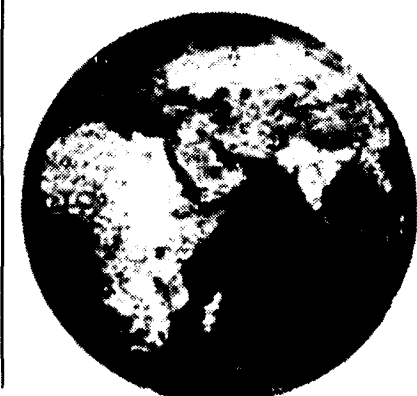
Accordingly, the more different one's experiences, the more successful one can be. This leaves us with one argument against conservatism. There is no need to repeat the same ideology if it is not working.

None of today's leaders seem to understand Gandhi's Sarvodaya (non-violent), who seemed to appreciate Socrates' skepticism. If divine guidance is the only way, then why don't we have any intact societies anywhere in the world? In the areas where massive religious followers reside, one finds all kind of vices.

In the absence of an international entity to rule the world, would one prefer the ruler to be the stronger or an anarchist? Is it true that all forms of government do not suit all forms of nations? What exactly are all these international organizations doing? What is the future of the European Union with respect to the United Nations endeavors inside Europe?

We also talked about the environmental and economical interconnection among the nations in the world. This interconnection is the only factor that makes a person who lives anywhere in the world directly affected by an international event. Why are gas prices increasing in the United States nowadays? Besides the hurricane, is the death of King Fahad playing a role in the increase in prices in the States?

For the rest of this year, I will be talking a lot about this interconnection and its effects everyone in the world, regardless of nationality, religion, and language.



N. Korea talks continue

By Alexa Olesen
Associated Press Writer

BEIJING--China said Thursday that six-nation talks on dismantling North Korea's nuclear program will resume next week, even as Pyongyang raised a possible obstacle to progress by renewing calls for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Korean Peninsula.

China appealed to all sides to be "flexible and practical" in seeking a resolution to the long-running dispute.

The latest round of discussions involving the two Koreas, the United States, China, Japan and Russia recessed on Aug. 7 after a failure to agree on a statement of principles despite 13 days of negotiations. The talks resume Tuesday and will be open-ended, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang said at a regular press briefing.

North Korean Premier Pak Pong Ju said Pyongyang would seek a "negotiated peaceful settlement" to the issue, according to the North's official Korean Central News Agency.

Pak was also quoted as saying the North would "exert tireless efforts to realize the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," which was a "dying wish" of Kim Il Sung, the North Korean leader who died in 1994.

U.S. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said Thursday there was progress at the last session and "we are ready to stay as long as it takes to get this done."

"We are still working on a statement of principles to which all parties can agree," he said.

A Japanese official expressed optimism the six parties could reach a settlement.

"We hope there will be an agreement on North Korea's nuclear dismantling," said Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiroyuki Hosoda. He also said Tokyo would try to engage the North in bilateral talks regarding Japanese citizens who were kidnapped and taken to North Korea in the 1970s and 1980s.

A senior Russian diplomat also was upbeat about the talks.

Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Alexeyev said most aspects of the statement of principles had been agreed upon. "This means that the positions of the parties have never been closer," he said, according to the Interfax news agency.

Alexeyev added, however, that the United States and North Korea remain divided on the key issue of the scale and scope of dismantling of Pyongyang's nuclear program.

He also said Russia opposed U.S. and Japanese proposals to turn over the North Korean nuclear arms issue to the U.N. Security Council as well as any changes in the current negotiation format should the six-nation talks fail again.

All six parties have declared the Korean peninsula should be free of nuclear weapons but differences over whether North Korea should be allowed a civilian nuclear program brought the talks to a halt in early August.

Washington says Pyongyang shouldn't be allowed any nuclear program, peaceful or otherwise, because of its record of broken promises.

Alexeyev insisted North Korea has the right to receive foreign aid in the development of its nuclear program if it drops its atomic

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