

Beat: News

Afghanistan delays presidential poll results amid fraud claims

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USPA News - Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission (IEC), which is facing mounting claims of widespread fraud, announced Wednesday that it is postponing the release of preliminary election results until Monday, nearly a week later than had been expected. The results were supposed to be released on Wednesday but have been delayed to allow further investigations to take place at a number of polling sites.

IEC Chairman Ahmad Yousaf Nuristani, however, emphasized that the reason for the delay is to guarantee transparency and to reinstate the confidence of presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah in the vote-counting process, and not to place further strain on the country. Nuristani said the postponement of the preliminary results is to permit the audit of votes cast at 1,930 polling stations in 30 provinces. Nonetheless, he assured citizens, the recount of these votes does not validate the alleged illegitimacy of the ballots. He also praised efforts by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and Afghan Vice President Yunus Qanuni for persuading Abdullah to recommence cooperation with the commission. The June 14 presidential runoff has incited a wave of controversy in its wake. Afghanistan's chief electoral officer, Zia-ul-Haq Amarkhil, came under fire after he was stopped by senior police officers when he tried to shift unused ballot material out of the IEC's headquarters. Amarkhil claims the materials were to be taken to polling centers that had run out of ballot paper. But the allegations later intensified after Abdullah's campaign released an audio tape in which Amarkhil tells people to vote for Ashraf Ghani, who lost the first round of the election. The tapes also appear to reveal Amarkhil urging a colleague to "bring the sheep stuffed and not empty" in an apparent reference to ballot box-stuffing. Zia-ul-Haq Amarkhil, who was the head of the Secretariat of the Independent Election Commission (IEC), quit his position on June 23, saying he had made the decision without being pressured by anyone else. He explained that he made the decision "for the sake of national unity" and urged all sides to respect the outcome of the election. Abdullah won the first round of the presidential vote in early April, obtaining almost 890,000 votes more than rival Ashraf Ghani but below the more than 50 percent required to have avoided a run-off. The preliminary results of the second round will now be released on Monday, though the final results are not expected before July 22.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

UPA United Press Agency LTD
483 Green Lanes
UK, London N13NV 4BS
contact (at) unitedpressagency.com
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