

Tension Escalates in Sudan As Elections End

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Photo: AP

A Sudanese election official prepares for closing of ballot boxes at the end of the last day of multiparty elections, at a polling station in Khartoum, 15 Apr 2010

Political tension is rising in Sudan as election workers get set to count the votes from the country's landmark elections.

Polling stations closed Thursday after five days of voting, in which millions of Sudanese cast ballots in races for president, parliament, state and local offices.

These were Sudan's first multi-party polls since 1986, and a key part of the 2005 peace deal that ended the country's north-south civil war.

The voting was mostly peaceful but was marred by logistical problems and charges from opposition groups that the government and ruling National Congress Party were planning to rig the results.

Tension rose again Thursday when an adviser to President Omar al-Bashir, Nafie Ali Nafie, said opposition groups are planning to reject the outcome and to organize riots aimed at toppling the government.

Reuters news agency reports that an opposition party dismissed Nafie's statement as "completely false."

Earlier Thursday, the NCP accused the army of semi-autonomous southern Sudan of killing eight people, including the party's top representative in the town of Raja.

However, other officials say those killings stemmed from a non-political dispute.

Several parties either partially or fully boycotted this week's vote, including southern Sudan's main party, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement. Both the SPLM and the opposition Umma Party withdrew from the presidential race, making it almost certain President Bashir will win re-election.

Races for many other seats remained competitive. However, election observers reported widespread problems with the voting, including missing names on voter lists, confusing ballots, polling stations opening late, and in some places, a shortage of voting materials.

Sudan's election commission said late Thursday that it was canceling elections in 17 national constituencies and 16 regional ones. State-run television said those areas would see new elections in 60 days.

President Bashir has ruled Sudan since a 1989 coup. He is wanted by the International Criminal Court for alleged war crimes against civilians in Sudan's Darfur region.

Southern Sudan is due to hold a separate referendum early next year on whether to become an independent country.