



Women queue to vote on June 26 in Hargeisa, capital of the self-proclaimed state of Somaliland that closed its borders for the presidential election amid fears that Islamists from neighbouring Somalia could try to disrupt the polls. ALI MUSA/GETTY IMAGES

Somaliland vote relatively peaceful

By JUNE KELLUM
Epoch Times Staff

Despite at least five deaths, the second presidential elections in the self-declared Republic of Somaliland went off "without major incident and generally met international standards," according to the International Republican Institute (IRI), a non-profit organization chaired by U.S. Senator John McCain.

The Somaliland Press reported that one member of the National Electoral Commission was killed near the town of Lasa Anod. In the contested region of Hargeisa, four others died when Puntland militia attacked a polling station claimed by both Puntland, a state of Somalia, and Somaliland.

The election was a long time in coming, having been delayed since 2008 when it was originally scheduled to be held, according to an IRI press statement.

Nonetheless, the IRI declared the vote to be relatively well-organized with only "sporadic irregularities." For example, in some areas voters younger than 16—the legal voting age—were allowed to cast ballots. There were election observers from the three political parties at most voting stations.

More than 1 million of Somaliland's 3.5 million people were registered to vote.

The IRI cautions that the elections should not be judged until the process is finished and all the votes counted. In the last round of elections, back in 2003, the president won by a very slim margin of 80 votes.

Final results are expected by the end of the week.

Somaliland is a little-known former British colony located on the Horn of Africa. It declared its autonomy from Somalia in 1991 and is seen as a haven of relative peace compared to surrounding lawless Somalia.

Somaliland has its own currency—the Somaliland shilling—as well as its own judicial system and police force. However, it is not yet officially recognized by any other states, something voters hope will change after the elections, according to the Somaliland Press.

Russia snubs democracy bid in Kyrgyzstan

RUSSIA CONTINUED FROM P1

Sixty-nine percent of the country's 3 million eligible voters turned out to vote, 90 percent of whom voted in favour of the new constitution, according to Kyrgyzstan's Central Electoral Commission.

ETHNIC VIOLENCE

The referendum came just a week after ethnic clashes in southern Kyrgyzstan calmed.

Violence first erupted in early June in the city of Osh. Official numbers say 251 people died and 400,000 were displaced, but Kyrgyz authorities say the real death toll could be 10 times higher.

Tens of thousands of Uzbek refugees are gradually returning to their homes after having fled to neighbouring Uzbekistan.

Before the referendum, Human Rights Watch had raised concerns that the referendum would escalate violence, but Sunday's vote was peaceful.

Authorities have extended a 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew in Osh, Uzgen, and other neighbouring areas until August 10.

The United Nation has appealed for CA\$73.5 million in funds to rebuild destroyed homes, business centres, government buildings, and other constructions before winter arrives.



Chinese villagers leave their flooded homes in Fuzhou, east China's Jiangxi Province, on June 23. STR/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Breached dike causes chaos in China

Officials say 'no deaths'

By HONG NING
Epoch Times Staff

Record torrential rains resulted in two massive breaches in the Changkai dike in Fuzhou City in China's southeast province of Jiangxi last week, forcing tens of thousands of people to flee their homes.

While authorities claim that no one has died, local residents told The Epoch Times that the floods collapsed a number of houses, and that scores of people had drowned.

"The river was about 20 to 30 kilometres from my place at its widest point. It was filled with dead pigs and chickens. Many people also died in it, in spite of being able to swim. Even the people from the villages could see the breach from afar," a local resident of Luohu Township said.

"More than 400 metres [of the Changkai dike] have collapsed—that's quite a length. So many people have died. It was really terrifying."

The Fu River flooded its banks when the dike broke on June 21. A second breach occurred on the morning of June 23. The floods have forced 100,000 local residents to flee their homes.

"The government is afraid to report that the flood collapsed four-story buildings and drowned so many people," the resident

added.

The massive breaches in the dike have caused flooding across five towns and 40 villages, creating many isolated islands. The breaches have not been repaired as rain continues unabated and water levels remain high.

Ms. Tu, a resident of Changkai Township, recounted running away from the flood. She said that although her legs were shaking, she was afraid to hesitate for even a second as the flood waters were literally at her heels.

Ms. Tu related that in the early evening on June 21, she and her husband were observing the river from the third floor of their home when suddenly they saw water surging over the dike. The breach occurred immediately afterward, and within a matter of seconds, the gap in the dike increased to about nine metres.

Deputy Secretary of Fuzhou City, Wu Fusheng, said at a press conference on June 25 that "no deaths" had occurred in the dike-related flooding.

When The Epoch Times phoned the headquarters of the Fuzhou Flood Control Department to enquire about the deaths, a male employee said "No one has died. Where did you hear that? Since you've heard it, don't ask again."

A manager of the Fuzhou City Bureau of Water Resource Management told Century Weekly that "within the past 10 years or so,

[they] have pleaded with the government for funds to fix the dike. To meet standards, the dike's height and width need to be increased, which could cost up to 300 or 400 million yuan [C\$45.66 million to C\$60.88 million]. The water management department is aware of the dike's flaws."

Victims living in villages far away from the river blame local authorities for not issuing flood warnings.

"Two hours before the flood, my father called to tell me that the Changkai dike was going to collapse, and that the family was moving their possessions to the second floor," said a local resident of Luozhen Township in Fuzhou City.

"I asked my father where he heard that, and whether the government had given any advance notice. My father replied that the government had not issued any warning and that a teacher had told him. I told my father not to worry, and just follow the directions of the government.

"Fortunately, my father did not take my advice. The flood happened two hours later, and many people could not leave in time. If one waited for the government's directions at the time, it would have been as good as waiting for one's death."

Some villagers claimed that the dike had never been officially patrolled, and only intermittently did village cadres ride by on motorcycles, taking a quick glance before moving on.

Euro bank emergency loans expire

By MARCO 't HOEN
Epoch Times Staff

Almost C\$569.843 billion in one-year emergency loans provided by the European Central Bank (ECB) to help the commercial banks at the peak of the financial crisis last year, will expire on Thursday. The ECB has offered to extend extra borrowing opportunities in order to keep a nervous market satisfied.

The loans were given with a low 1 percent interest rate. Although some banks pleaded for an extension of 12 months, the ECB is said to be concerned that providing cheap loans for a longer period would distort markets and could restrict room to maneuver with respect to monetary policy.

Financial institutions have been reluctant lately to lend to some banks in countries like Spain and Greece, whose economies have suffered the most in the crisis.

To prevent creating too big a problem in terms of the ability to pay back loans, the ECB will ensure liquidity is still available. Ewald Nowotny, member of the ECB Governing Council, said on Tuesday that "pending of the 12-month tender is accompanied by a number of actions to ensure that there will be no liquidity squeeze," according to Reuters.

Starting Wednesday, the ECB will offer unlimited three-month funds.

The market still worries that some smaller, weaker banks will have a hard time shifting from 12-month loans to shorter-term money. In response, the exchange rate between the euro and the Swiss franc (CHF)—used as a benchmark currency since the franc usually fluctuates in step with the euro—hit an all-time low. On June 29 the exchange rate was 1 euro to 1.33 CHF, compared to 1.53 CHF one year ago.

Internet censorship brings down Facebook, Twitter in Middle East

FACEBOOK CONTINUED FROM P1

Her comments came after 30 bloggers and activists were detained in Egypt. "One member of this group, Bassem Samir, who is thankfully no longer in prison, is with us today," she said.

"So while it is clear that the spread of these technologies is transforming our world, it is still unclear how that transformation will affect the human rights and the human welfare of the world's population."

Taiwan, China sign free trade agreement

Critics fear loss of Taiwan sovereignty

By ARNAUD CAMU
Epoch Times Staff

A free trade accord between Taiwan and China was finally signed on June 29 in Chongqing, China, after months of negotiations. Proponents of the deal see an improved economic climate, while critics fear the loss of Taiwan's sovereignty.

The Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) plans for 539 Taiwanese products, valued at US\$13.8 billion, to obtain free entry into China, while 267 Chinese products, worth US\$2.9 billion, should see their tariff rates brought down to zero upon entry into Taiwan. The deal will also open up the two countries' service sectors.

"We have completed the signing of the ECFA with mainland China today. This is very meaningful for Taiwan as the pact starts a whole new era for Taiwan," said Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou, lauding the deal as an "innovation."

ECFA is seen as a key element in

Taiwan's economic development at a time when the island-state seeks to brand itself as a global innovation centre—a springboard economy that will allow Taiwanese and foreign businesses to settle in Taiwan and have free entry into the Chinese market.

The Ma administration is betting on the opportunities offered by the huge and growing Chinese market. It also hopes the deal will make possible other free trade agreements. China has blocked Taiwan from signing free trade agreements with other countries, and the administration hopes this deal will be the first step toward China removing such obstacles.

However, criticism of ECFA abounds. A Taiwan News editorial noted that while the agreement states that it is "based on the principles of the World Trade Organization (WTO)," it does not make explicit the legal basis of the agreement—which should be Article 24 of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (the ancestor of WTO).

It also forbids China and Taiwan to use WTO "trade remedies," thus preventing Taiwan from ensuring trade exceptions on the basis of national security or cultural protection

against its giant neighbour.

In response to the signing of the agreement, a small political party, the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU), promptly announced a referendum proposal on ECFA.

"Letting people directly approve the content of the ECFA would be more effective than relying on the Legislative Yuan's (Taiwan's legislative assembly) approval and supervision," said TSU Secretary-General Lin Chih-jia.

Lin Yu-chang, spokesman for the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), the main opposition party, declared that his party "will give its full assistance and backing to the Taiwan Solidarity Union's new referendum initiative."

Taiwan News reports that a similar referendum initiative was rejected early in June by the Referendum Review Committee of the executive branch of the government because of a "conflict between the reasoning and the question itself."

Should the initiative fail again, Lin told a press conference that the DPP may initiate another one itself—especially if Taiwan does not sign any free trade deals with other countries within a year.

Spokesman Tsai Chi-chang said the DPP would announce its

post-ECFA plans after further internal discussions.

Over 100,000 people expressed their disapproval of ECFA at a June 26 rally. Many fear that cheap goods from the mainland will enter Taiwan, increasing unemployment levels and further weakening Taiwan's ability to preserve its distinct political status.

"The ECFA is a sham of the Chinese communist regime. Under the disguise of benefiting Taiwan, the regime will steal Taiwan's capital, talent, and technology," said 87-year-old Lee Teng-hui, a former president of Taiwan, at the rally.

"It can't be more obvious that the regime aims at taking over Taiwan," Lee said.

At a forum organized on June 12 by Taiwan Advocates, a pro-independence think tank that he founded in 2001, Lee expressed his fear that ECFA would lead to a "wave of local industries exodus" if, in a free flow of money, goods, technology, people, and services, the ECFA effectively creates a one-China market similar to the European Union.

With the tariffs reduced, Lee fears that Taiwanese corporations will close down factories on the island and move to China where the market is larger, production costs



Former President of Taiwan Lee Teng-hui (4R) and Tsai Ing-wen (5R), chair of opposition Democratic Progressive Party, hold a banner during a protest in Taipei on June 26 against a trade agreement that they fear will strengthen China's clout over the island and erode its de facto independence. PATRICK LIN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

are smaller, and the opportunity to make money is potentially greater.

At the June 26 protest, DPP chair Tsai Ing-wen said the ECFA would weaken the domestic market and benefit "only conglomerates and a small minority of people" as the potential outflow of Taiwanese assets and inflow of cheap Chinese products could damage domestic market-oriented and community industries.

Lee urged the Taiwanese people

to voice their disapproval of the behaviour of the governing party Kuomintang (KMT)—the party he once led—at the next municipal elections in December. In December 2009, the KMT lost some of its municipal seats, a loss that was largely attributed to disapproval of its cozy relationships with mainland China.

The Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement will enter into force on Jan. 1, 2011.