

Panama opposition charges election fraud

PANAMA CITY, Panama -- Panamanians voted for a new president Sunday in an election studded with charges of fraud and U.S. interference and seen as a referendum on the de facto rule of Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega.

The election pitted Carlos Duque, hand-picked by Noriega, against Guillermo Endara, the candidate of an opposition coalition.

Polls closed at 5 p.m. (6 p.m. EDT.) Voters had lined up at some polling stations at 5 a.m., two hours before the scheduled opening time. At one booth, more than 100 of 348 registered voters were in line by 8 a.m. The government promised official results within 24 hours.

"You don't stand in line for hours unless you hope you're going to have an honest election," said Rep. Lawrence Coughlin, R-Pa., after inspecting polling places in Colon, 50 miles north of Panama City.

Coughlin was among an uninvited group of 13 U.S. observers sent by President Bush. They, like other international observers, including former President Jimmy Carter, said they saw no signs of fraud at the booths.

"Everything went according to the law," said Rafael Martinez, an electoral official in the northern town of Margarita where many members of the Panamanian Defense Forces voted.

The opposition, which claimed a hefty lead in polls, kept up its drumbeat of fraud charges. Even before the polls closed, it was calling for a protest march Monday.

Opposition leaders accused the government of making arrangements for its supporters to vote "early and often" and said they feared the election would be stolen as votes were tallied at the Election Tribunal.

They pointed out that the 15,000

members of Noriega's Defense Forces were allowed to jump to the front of voting queues and they could vote at any booth, making multiple voting possible.

'We will look for a dignified exit for the general.'
—Endara

The government contends the opposition has joined forces with the United States in an effort to abrogate the 1977 Panama Canal treaties, which call for the United States to give the canal to Panama on Dec. 31, 1999.

As proof, Duque pointed to damaging U.S. economic sanctions, U.S. drug charges against Noriega, and reports that the United States provided the opposition with \$10 million in campaign assistance.

The opposition denies the government charges, and says Noriega must be eased out as commander of the Panamanian Defense Forces if democracy is to progress in Panama.

"We will look for a dignified exit for the general," Endara told a crowd of chanting supporters after he voted Sunday.

Duque and acting president Manuel Solis Palma received a mixture of boos and cheers when they voted.

Endara, 52, and Duque, 59, are both businessmen. A new president takes office Sept. 1.

Opposition vice-presidential candidate Ricardo Arias Calderon issued a statement saying he had "not the slightest doubt that there will be

fraud." He was one of the leaders calling for a protest march Monday.

Arias Calderon repeated accusations that the electoral register included 100,000 duplicate names and that out of a sampling of 3,000 recent deaths, the names of 27 percent of the dead were still on the register.

Several voters told reporters they had checked to make sure dead or absent relatives were stricken from the voting list.

"That's two less votes they can steal," said Lilia Shaw after making sure officials crossed off the names of her brother and father, both out of the country.

Her husband Roberto shrugged and said, "It won't make any difference."

Former President Carter visited 20 booths and said, "The only problem I have seen is with the number of people voting," referring to the long lines.

Violence in Beirut leaves 17 dead

BEIRUT, Lebanon -- Syrian and Christian gunners blasted residential districts of Beirut on Sunday in savage artillery duels that killed at least 17 people as the Arab League tried to revive a collapsed truce.

A police spokesman said 80 people were wounded in a seven-hour bombardment that left the streets blanketed with debris.

The spokesman, who cannot be named under standing regulations, said about 15,000 shells and rockets were unleashed on the divided capital and surrounding areas.

Fires burned out of control in both Moslem and Christian sectors. Hundreds of charred cars smoldered in parking lots and severed power cables dangled from twisted poles or shell-pocked apartment buildings.

Blazing pine trees lit up the night sky as Christian artillery positions began the exchange by firing 155mm howitzers at Syrian and Druse positions across Beirut and neighboring hills.

The Syrians responded with rocket fire at Christian east Beirut, the city's port, the Christian harbors of Jounieh and Byblos, and a cluster of deserted summer resorts in Lebanon's central mountains.

The 17 deaths and 80 woundings increased the overall toll to 295 killed and 1,091 wounded since the latest round of fighting in Lebanon's 14-year-old civil war broke out March 8.

The fighting pits army commander Gen. Michel Aoun's 20,000 mainly Christian soldiers against an alliance of Syrian troops and 7,000 militiamen of Druse warlord Walid Jumblatt's Progressive Socialist Party.

The Christians resumed shelling Saturday night after nine days of unanswered Syrian attacks on the Christian sector's coast. Those attacks were in defiance of an April 28 cease-fire called by the Arab League.

Aoun told the U.S., British and French ambassadors on Saturday

night that he would respond to the Syrian fire, a spokesman for his headquarters said, and an hour later the Christian firing began.

When the shelling slackened at dawn, tens of thousands of dazed residents emerged from underground bunkers to assess damage, buy food and water, and hurry back to the shelters.

Among those inspecting the damage was acting Prime Minister Salim Hoss, who heads a mostly Moslem Cabinet competing with Aoun's Christian Cabinet.

"No words are enough to describe this horror," Hoss told reporters as he toured the battered two-story prime ministry. "I repeat my plea for a total cessation of hostilities out of mercy for the innocent population."

The Arab League announced from Damascus that an envoy and the commander of the observer force would be sent to Beirut this week to hasten talks on the crisis and try to implement a stable cease-fire.



John Bruce/Daily Nebraskan

Contacts become disposable

ROCHESTER, N.Y. -- Soft contact lenses, those floppy pieces of plastic that help people see without wearing eyeglasses, have reached a popular American culture benchmark. They've become disposable.

That could mean a lot of changes involving the way people view the little lenses that make things clearer for 23 million Americans.

Hundreds of thousands of people are already wearing disposable lenses, even though up to now they've been available only on a limited basis. Eye doctors are flocking to lectures about them, and consumers are wondering what's going on.

"They've really captured the interest of the American public," says Dr. Scott MacRae, an ophthalmologist from Portland, Ore., who is also a consultant to the Food and Drug Administration for ophthalmic devices.

He speaks from experience. He wears a disposable lens in his right eye.

"I don't think we've ever seen anything, in my experience, that gained this kind of acceptance,"

says Hal Johnson, president of professional products at Bausch & Lomb, the nation's leading seller of contact lenses. "We're in high gear. And I mean high gear."

It hasn't been too long ago that basketball games were stopped while players scoured the floor for a missing contact lens. Most people still coddle and clean their lenses, treating them like tiny treasures.

They even buy insurance policies to protect them from loss or damage.

Now, along come some lenses that can be worn for a week or two and tossed in the trash. If they hurt your eye, just take them out and put in a new pair. No more expensive cleaning solutions. No more tender-loving care.

Is "wear 'em and toss 'em" the wave of the future?

Probably not, say officials at Bausch & Lomb and other eye care experts.

The main reason is that most of the lenses available can only be worn by patients who are nearsighted. Another negative factor is the cost - between \$300 and \$500 per year.

Companion: Cultist ordered his death

MEXICO CITY -- The leader of a drug-smuggling cult that killed 15 people ordered his own killing when police closed in on him, his arrested companion said Sunday.

Adolfo de Jesus Constanzo was shot to death Saturday in a gunbattle with Mexico City police.

Sara Aldrete, 24, a former honors student at Texas Southmost College in Brownsville, told reporters Constanzo ordered Alvaro de Leon Valdez to kill him and his top assistant, Martin Quintana Rodriguez, after police appeared outside the Mexico City apartment building where they were staying.

Aldrete, described as the "witch" of the cult, de Leon Valdez and three others arrested after the shootout were presented to reporters on Sunday at the Mexico City Attorney General's office. They stood behind a 3-by-6-foot table bearing confiscated cult items and black clothing.

"He went crazy, crazy" when police came, said the bearded de Leon Valdez, who has collar-length blond hair and was wearing a dirty white shirt.

"He grabbed a bundle of money and threw it and began shooting out the window," he said. "He said everything, everything was lost."

De Leon Valdez said Constanzo hit him in the face when he resisted killing Constanzo.

"He ordered him to kill him because it was the end and he wanted to die with Martin," Aldrete said. She referred to Constanzo, 26, as El Padrino, or the godfather.

She said she did not know about the killings of the 15 people whose bodies were found on the Santa Elena Ranch until she saw stories on television. The ranch is outside Matamoros, along the U.S. border.

De Leon Valdez, 22, said he had taken part in the killing of Mark Kil-

roy, a former Texas college student, and of some of the others on the ranch. But he and Aldrete indicated Constanzo did most of the killings.

Aldrete said she regretted the deaths carried out by the cult.

"If I had known it was like this, I wouldn't have been in it," she said. Constanzo and Aldrete, missing since the first 12 bodies were uncovered on the ranch April 11, were among 11 people indicted in the United States on a four-count drug indictment.

They are being held in Mexico on charges of homicide, criminal association, wounding a police agent in the arrest, and damage to property, Assistant Attorney General Abraham Polo Uscanga said.

The bodies of Constanzo and Quintana were found slumped together inside a tiny closet in the Mexico City apartment. Their shirts were smeared with blood.

Palestinians, Israelis continue fighting Sunday

JERUSALEM -- Soldiers wounded 10 Palestinians on Sunday during clashes in the occupied territories, despite widespread curfews aimed at preventing a repeat of the heavy violence a day earlier.

Also Sunday, authorities found the body of an Israeli paratrooper in a shallow grave near the Gaza Strip, not far from where he was last seen seven weeks ago. Police claimed he was killed by Palestinian guerrillas.

A search also was going on for another Israeli soldier missing and believed kidnapped.

Sunday's violence followed perhaps the bloodiest day of the 17-

month-old Palestinian uprising against Israeli rule.

Arab reports said three Palestinians were killed and 135 wounded by Israeli forces on Saturday, most during clashes in the Gaza Strip. The Israeli army said its records showed 77 wounded and two dead.

The army imposed curfews in 20 towns or refugee camps in Gaza and the West Bank to keep 450,000 Palestinians indoors on Sunday and prevent a recurrence of the bloodshed.

But clashes between troops and Palestinians broke out in the Gaza Strip, and Arab hospital officials said seven people were wounded during unrest in Rafah, Gaza City and two

refugee camps. Three more Palestinians were shot and wounded by soldiers in the occupied West Bank, they said.

In Tel Aviv, Brig. Gen. Ephraim Lapid defended the army's actions during Saturday's violence, claiming they were provoked by Arab stone throwers. Palestinians claimed the violence was spurred by the presence of soldiers outside a mosque in the Nusseirat refugee camp in the Gaza Strip.

Saturday's clashes broke out when soldiers opened fire to quell protests on Eid al-Fitr, a major Moslem holiday and the end of the holy month of Ramadan.

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