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Five dead due to vehicle explosion in Afghanistan

Electoral commission vehicle strikes land mine, unclear whether attack was deliberate

BY STEPHEN GRAHAM
 THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KABUL, Afghanistan — A doctor helping organize Afghan elections died Monday along with four other civilians when an explosion tore through their vehicle, police said. He was the first election worker to die in violence since the landmark vote.

Meanwhile, interim leader Hamid Karzai consolidated his ballot lead, commanding 61.3 percent with one-

fifth of the votes counted from the Oct. 9 presidential ballot. Election officials have said the tallies are unlikely to change much once 20 percent of the votes were counted.

Karzai's closest challenger, former Education Minister Yunus Qanooni, charged Monday that only cheating had given the U.S.-backed incumbent the advantage. Qanooni was trailing Karzai with only 18.8 percent of the vote.

The explosion destroyed a vehicle of the joint U.N.-Afghan electoral commission in Paktika, a troubled province on the Pakistani border, election spokesman Sultan Baheen said.

Election officials said it was unclear whether the vehicle was deliberately targeted or had struck a mine left over from Afghanistan's many years of war.

But the local police chief said the car hit a land mine laid on a main road by "the enemies of Afghanistan," shorthand for Taliban militants, who threatened to disrupt the elections.

The police official, Mohammed EXPLOSION, page 6

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Saudi Arabia learns from past mistakes, invests funds wisely

Saudi government spending cautiously, building foreign currency reserves in response to oil boom

BY DONNA ABU-NASR
 THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia — During the oil boom of the 1970s, Persian Gulf countries spent lavishly to transform their desert backwaters into shimmering modern cities, living high with the help of a huge foreign work force filling jobs citizens suddenly could afford to avoid.

Today, oil prices are at 20-year highs, but the world's largest oil producer, Saudi Arabia, is using part of the extra billions pouring in to make the kingdom run without all the imported help.

The government wants to ease unemployment and the boredom that some people say leads youths into Islamic extremism, but it will have to change attitudes that evolved out of the first spending spree.

"In our society, men want to sit in comfortable, air-conditioned offices and order people around," said Suhaib al-Hussaini, 23, a computer engineering student. "They don't want to go to the field and work with their own hands."

Oil-producing countries, many of which had drawn up this year's budgets based on expectations that oil prices would dip to \$19 a barrel, are instead selling their oil for \$55 a barrel and surpluses are piling into the billions.

During the 1970s and early '80s, producers across the Middle East spent their oil bonanza to make life easier for their people.

In Saudi Arabia, the government built roads, hospitals, schools and airports and provided free or heavily subsidized health care and education.

The spending spree began to wane in the mid-1980s, when oil prices fell and Arab birth rates soared.

With today's windfall, governments are spending much more cautiously, building up their foreign currency reserves and carefully weighing development projects for need. In several countries, there are calls to spend the extra cash on education, health and infrastructure or on civil servant pay raises.

Some people worry the money will be squandered.

"Even if we had all the world's oil riches, we won't see any of it because of the extent of corruption in our country," said Aidarous Nasr, an opposition lawmaker in Yemen, one of the region's poorest nations and a producer of about 400,000 barrels of oil a day.

For Saudi Arabia, which pumps 9.5 million barrels a day, foreign currency holdings grew by \$17 billion from January through the end of August. And that was before oil prices surged above \$50 a barrel.

Still, the government's only apparent extra spending has been a two-month bonus for security forces, which are involved in a major crackdown on Islamic militants, and a boost in funds for vocational training centers.

Crown Prince Abdullah has said most of the surplus will go to paying off the government's debt, which totals \$176 billion. But he also pledged to spend billions on infrastructure, education, housing and health projects, as well as on loans to low-income Saudis to boost their employment prospects.

"It's pretty clear they're not going on a spending binge," said Brad Bourland, chief economist at the Saudi American Bank. "The character of

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"Best Meal for a Deal," 2nd Place, "Best Omelette," 2nd Place, "Best Breakfast," 2nd Place, "Best Vegetarian Fare" 2nd Place, Register-Guard Reader Poll, 1987. "Best Breakfast," In Town Magazine, 1995. "Best Breakfast," In Town Magazine, 1996. "Best Breakfast," Oregon Daily Emerald, 1996. "Best Dinner Under \$8," Eugene Weekly, 1996. "One of the Best Things About Eugene," 1998. "Best Dinner Under \$8," Eugene Weekly, 1998. "Best Dinner Under \$8," Eugene Weekly, 1999. "Best Dinner Under \$12," 2nd Place, Eugene Weekly, 1999. "Best Dinner Under \$12," 1st Place, "Best Lunch Under \$8," 1st Place, "Best Breakfast," 2nd Place, "Best Soup," 3rd Place Eugene Weekly, 2000. "Best Breakfast," Best of Teen, Register-Guard, 2001. "Best Breakfast," 2nd Place, "Best Cheap Eats," 2nd Place, "Best Soup," 2nd Place, Eugene Weekly, 2001. "Best Cheap Eats," 2nd Place, Eugene Weekly, 2002. "Best Cheap Eats," 2nd Place, Eugene Weekly, 2003.

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Britain's education reforms: Fewer tests, more opportunity

Proposed overhaul of education system could be implemented gradually over 10 years if approved

BY MICHAEL MCDONOUGH
 THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LONDON — The biggest proposed overhaul of Britain's education system in 60 years was unveiled Monday, including a plan to replace the wave of standardized tests for high-school students with a single diploma system.

The goals include improving basic skills such as reading, writing and mathematics and giving students more opportunity to follow vocational training.

Currently, British students aged 14-19 take a large number of standardized tests known as GCSEs and A-levels, which are crucial to the allocation of college and university placement. Students usually only study three to five subjects, specializing far earlier than their European and American counterparts, whose diplomas often cover a much wider range of disciplines at less depth.

For example, British students in the arts often stop studying math at age 16, while those preparing for A-levels in science often drop English, languages or humanities.

The average British student now takes as many as 40 all-purpose, supervised exams between ages 16 and 18.

British schools also offer few alternatives to pupils wishing to study more practical disciplines that lead to a specific vocational jobs.

The existing education system is often blamed for the fact that Britain has one of the highest dropout rates for post-16 education in the industrialized world.

Under the plan unveiled Monday by former chief inspector of schools Mike Tomlinson, the system of standardized tests would be replaced with a new four-tier diploma. It would include fewer but harder exams, and pupils would take them when they were

ready, not necessarily when they reached the specified age.

After taking a common core of English and math subjects, students would decide at age 14 whether to pursue a vocational or academic curriculum, or to combine elements of both.

A "teacher-led" assessment would replace some standardized tests as the main way of evaluating the abilities of students.

Overall goals include reducing the amount of time students spend preparing for standardized tests, rather than engaging in genuine learning, reducing the number of teenage dropouts and providing a bigger academic challenge for the brightest students.

"The status quo is simply not an option," Tomlinson said. "Change is not readily embraced, but we are convinced it is needed if we are to enable all our young people to achieve as highly as possible."

He said the reforms could be introduced gradually over 10 years, if the

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