

Nepalese vote in first local elections in 20 years

By Binaj Gurubacharya
The Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal — Nepalese voted for representatives in municipal and village councils for the first time in two decades, a sign that the country's fractious democracy may be stabilizing.

Crucial local positions have been occupied by government-appointed bureaucrats because elections could not be held amid a 10-year-old communist insurgency and years of delay in drafting a new constitution.

"The mayor is more important than the prime minister for us and the ward chairman is greater than a minister. All of us are gathered here for democracy," said Sagar Lal Shrestha, a retired businessman.

The first phase of voting in half of the Himalayan nation was mostly peaceful, although an army ordnance disposal team safely detonated two explosive devices near the capital of Kathmandu that were planted across from a candidate's house.

A small communist party known for past violence threatened to disrupt the polls, saying the country needs more political reform before it can be ready for such elections.

Two years ago, lawmakers passed a new constitution to replace the old system of monarchy, and to lay out the rules for provincial and parliamentary polls. The constitution was considered a major victory following eight years of political bickering over its terms. But not everyone was happy, and its passage sparked months of protests by ethnic groups in the south that felt shortchanged by how the document divided the country's districts.

Nearly 50,000 candidates are vying for 13,556 positions.

Japan's cabinet approves bill to allow Emperor Akihito to abdicate

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The shrinking royal family will lose another member with the coming marriage of Princess Mako, one of Akihito's daughters. When she marries a commoner, she will become one herself.

Chief government spokesman Yoshihide Suga told reporters he expected smooth passage of the abdication bill, which would only apply to Akihito. Media reports have said officials are considering his abdication at the end of 2018, when Akihito turns 85 and marks 30 years on the throne. Suga refused to

comment on timing and other details of the legislation.

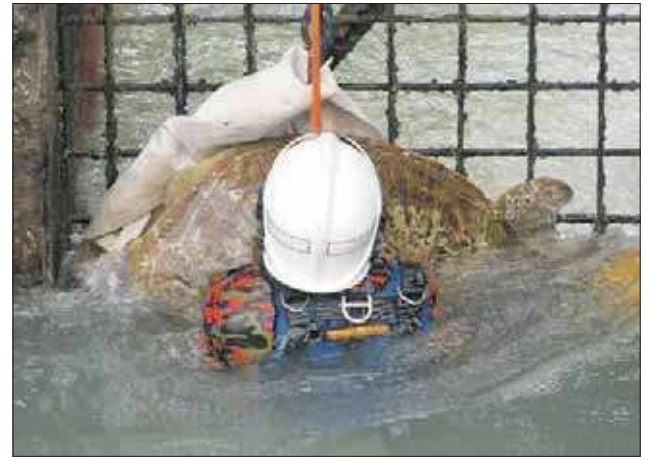
The legislation for Akihito's case was needed because the Imperial House Law does not provide for abdication. The last emperor to abdicate was Kokaku in 1817.



DELAYED DEMOCRACY. A Nepalese election commission officer empties a ballot box prior to counting the votes of local elections in Kathmandu, Nepal. Millions of Nepalese voted for representatives in municipal and village councils for the first time in two decades, a sign the country's fractious democracy may be stabilizing. (AP Photo/Niranjan Shrestha)

"We are here after 20 years and it is very important day for all of us," said Milan Manandhar, a homemaker. "These are the people who are going to be resolving our problems so we have to make sure we elect the right people."

The second phase of local polls in remaining parts of the country are scheduled for later this month.



TORTOISE IN TROUBLE. Malaysian firefighters rescued a 132-pound turtle that was found firmly stuck to a floodgate at a power station. Two firefighters waded into the water and battled strong currents to free the turtle, which was hauled to safety and released back to the ocean. (Malaysia Fire Department via AP)

Malaysia firefighters rescue turtle trapped in power station

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — Malaysian firefighters rescued a 132-pound turtle found firmly stuck to a floodgate at a power station near the Malacca Strait.

District fire chief Razif Mohamad Haris said firefighters heeded an emergency call and found the turtle, believed to be a hawksbill, trapped in the barrier gate used to filter foreign objects from entering the power station in northwestern Negeri Sembilan state.

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Please visit:

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