

Report: Observers get visas for polls

by UPI

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan - Pakistan has issued more than 500 visas to foreigners to observe the Feb. 18 parliamentary elections, the state-owned news agency reported Wednesday. "About 500 foreign observers from different countries including (the United States) and EU requested visas, for the forthcoming general elections and their requests have been processed and issued visas," Pakistani Foreign Office spokesman Muhammad Sadiq was reported as saying by the Associated Press of Pakistan. The elections were to be held in early January but were put off until Feb. 18 by Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf's government because of the turmoil resulting from the Dec. 27 assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. Despite numerous assurances from Musharraf that the elections would be fair and free, opposition parties expressed concerns the polls would be rigged. Sadiq said the European Union had raised its observer visa request to 110 from the previous 70. Musharraf recently completed a tour of EU countries. Sadiq said the U.S. group Democracy International would be sending 35 observers. He said all applications from foreign observers were accepted for grant of visas. He said about 500 foreign journalists also have issued visas to cover the elections. He said all observers would be free to visit any polling station.

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