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## **IRAQ PLANS MANUAL ELECTION RECOUNT ONLY FOR SUSPECT BALLOTS**

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Ahmed Aboulenein

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - Iraq will conduct a manual recount of votes from a May election only for ballots mentioned in official reports on fraud or in formal complaints, a move likely to speed up the ratification of final results and the formation of a new government.

The parliamentary election has been marred by historically low turnout and fraud allegations.

The outgoing parliament this month passed a law mandating a nationwide manual recount of votes, but the panel of judges now in charge of the recount said it would only be conducted for problematic ballots.

Interpreting a ruling from the Supreme Federal Court, a panel of judges who are now in charge of the elections commission said on Sunday they would only manually recount problematic ballots out of respect for the will of voters and their rights ... and to preserve their vote which came without any violation.

The law passed by parliament had also suspended the Independent High Election Commissions nine-member board of commissioners and replaced them with judges.

Ballot boxes from areas where there were fraud allegations will be moved to the capital Baghdad, where the recount will be held in the presence of United Nations representatives at a time and place to be determined later, the panel said in a statement.

The historically slow and complex process of forming an Iraqi government after an election has been further complicated this time round because of the fraud allegations and subsequent recount. Now that only specific ballots will be recounted, a new government could be formed faster.

The full recount was voted for by an outgoing parliament in which a majority of lawmakers, including the speaker, failed to retain their seats in the May poll. The vote came after a government report said there were serious electoral violations, but the report only recommended a partial recount.

Parliament met on Sunday to discuss another law that would allow it to remain in session until final results are ratified, even though its term constitutionally ends next week on June 30.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, whos electoral list came third in the poll, and the winner, cleric

Moqtada al-Sadr, entered into a political alliance on Saturday night, less than two weeks after Sadr announced a similar alliance with second-placed Iran ally Hadi al-Amiris bloc, thus bringing the top three blocs together.

Sadrs bloc has been boycotting parliaments sessions. He and Amiri were against a full recount. Both Sadr and Abadi oppose the idea of the current parliament extending its mandate.

Reporting by Ahmed Aboulenein; editing by Raya Jalabi and Keith Weir/David Evans

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-election/iraq-plans-manual-election-recount-only-for-suspect-ballots-idUSKBN1JK0NL>

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