

Faith Dominates in Devout Nasiriya

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By IWPR-trained reporters in Nasiriya (ICR No. 283, 9-Feb-09)

Nasiriya is like a ghost city at the moment. Everyone has decamped to Karbala to mark Arbayin, one of the holiest events for Shia mourning the killing of Imam Hussein.

Even the politicians who won the recent elections are at Imam Hussein's shrine in Karbala. The people left behind in Nasiriya, the capital of Dhi Qar province, are not talking of politics but of religion.

They debate whether various officials and civil servants, such as schoolteachers, ought to have left their posts to go on the pilgrimage to Karbala.

Religious parties got the bulk of the vote here. Iraqi prime minister Nuri al-Maliki's alliance came top, followed by a group allied to the cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.

Many people who voted for Maliki's alliance expected him to take a direct role in governing them. They are shocked to find that they will not be led by him but by his party colleagues and appointees – most of whom are new faces.

Now these voters wonder whether they may have been better off voting for some of the more secular parties instead of Maliki's list.

Everything is in limbo at the moment. The task of naming a new governor could take up to a year because so many people want the job. Until then, there is no one to approve new laws or measures.

Dhi Qar's voter turnout was estimated at 50 per cent, down from 67 per cent in the 2005 provincial elections.

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