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AFP

Thousands protest over Afghan vote rigging row

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KABUL - Afghan lawmakers and thousands of their supporters took to the streets of Kabul on Tuesday to protest at the latest twist in a row over fraud in elections last year, officials said.

Afghanistan is currently gripped by what experts say is a constitutional crisis over the results of the fraud-tainted parliamentary elections in September last year and how many lawmakers should be disqualified as a result.

President Hamid Karzai last week ordered the Independent Election Commission (IEC) to resolve the long-standing dispute and it is expected to announce within days its decision on how many members of parliament will be kicked out.

"There are about 3,000 people, members of parliament and their supporters demonstrating around the parliament building," Hashmat Stanikzai, a Kabul police spokesman, told reporters.

The protesters were opposed to any change in the results as they stand.

Stanikzai said hundreds of police including anti-riot units had been deployed and that officers were "in full control of the situation."

An AFP reporter and photographer at the scene said that the protest later finished peacefully.

Last month, a special tribunal ruled in favour of disqualifying 62 lawmakers, a quarter of the 249-seat lower house of parliament known as the Wolesi Jirga.

But diplomats and analysts believe the IEC will recommend that a smaller number of lawmakers be disqualified.

The issue is highly sensitive in Afghanistan and has prompted a string of previous angry protests by both winning and losing politicians.