

Iran Hails 'High Turnout' in Turkish Elections

TEHRAN -- Iran has congratulated Turkey over presidential and parliamentary elections, saying the high voter turnout demonstrates that "democracy has prevailed" in the neighboring Muslim country.

"The high voter turnout in Turkey's presidential and parliamentary elections on Sunday and the successful holding of the votes are a sign of victory for democracy in the neighboring and Muslim country," Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said.

Kayhan International

Sanctions Hinder Medication for Iran's Chemical Victims

TEHRAN -- An Iranian deputy foreign minister says the Islamic Republic is the biggest victim of chemical weapons in contemporary history, stressing that Western sanctions have deprived the country's victims of such weapons of access to essential drugs and medical items.

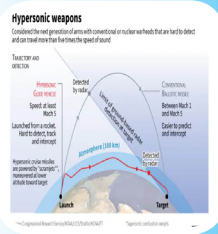
"The Islamic Republic of Iran, as the biggest victim of chemical weapons in contemporary history, regards any sanctions against independent members of this organization by some member states to be against international law and the Chemical Weapons Convention," Reza Najafi told Review Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention in The Hague.

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Iran, Russia Stand United Against Threats, Arrogant Domination



Ukraine Claims Downing Volley of Hypersonic Missiles



Iran Rank 3rd in ISSF World Cup



UAE Invites Syria's President to COP28



Decoding Surprises in Turkey's Elections

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) -- Turkey's biggest election of its post-Ottoman era confounded pollsters and threw up surprises that underscored the difficulty of gauging the mood of the sharply polarized country.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan came within a fraction of a percentage point of defeating secular challenger Kemal Kilicdaroglu in the first round.

Neither one's ability to break the 50-percent threshold sets up a historic May 28 runoff -- Turkey's first -- that Erdogan enters as the strong favorite.

Kilicdaroglu's performance was the opposition's best of Erdogan's two-decade rule.

But the 74-year-old former civil servant had to assume the role of consoler-in-chief instead of president-elect on Monday. "Don't despair," he told his despondent supporters. "It's the economy, stupid," strategist James Carville famously told future U.S. President Bill Clinton when trying to come up with a battle plan for his 1992 election campaign.

Turkey's case proved that mantra had caveats.

Erdogan entered the election battling Turkey's worst economic crisis since the 1990s.

The official annual inflation rate touched 85 percent last year. The unofficial one calculated by economists -- and trusted by most Turks -- approached 200 percent.

Erdogan fought it by refusing to drop his unconventional theories and instead handed out incentives and pay rises to various segments of the population.

Analysts estimate the cost of his pledges at billions of dollars.

"The last-minute spending promises -- like the 45-percent wage hike for 700,000 public servants -- have helped," said Verisk Maplecroft analyst Hamish Kinnear.

"Erdogan's promise to rebuild areas devastated by the earthquake also appears to have cut through to voters."

over the top.

But Erdogan used it against him by telling voters that the opposition was taking orders from the PKK Kurdish militia.

"Erdogan's strategy of linking the opposition to the PKK and the terrorist movement paid off," Bayram Balci of the CERISCIENCES Po institute said.

Istanbul housewife Leyla Gurler said the opposition's courtship of the pro-Kurdish HDP party concerned her.

"If the opposition had won, it would have been because of the HDP and the PKK," said the 57-year-old. "They stood together with the PKK. They made a mistake there."

Erdogan's chances on May 28 are helped by the unexpected rise of little-known ultra-nationalist Sinan Ogan. The 55-year-old picked up 5.1 percent of the vote as an independent.

He was once a member of an ultra-nationalist party that forms part of Erdogan's parliamentary alliance and represents voters who have more in common with Turkey's leader than the leftist Kilicdaroglu.

Analyst Umut Ozkirimli said nationalism has been a "constant" component of Turkish politics since the 1990s.

Various nationalist and far-right groups picked up 22 percent of the vote in Sunday's legislative ballot.

"The fact that Sinan Ogan won above five percent of the vote underlines that unadulterated ultranationalism is well and alive in Turkey," political risk consultant Anthony Skinner said.

"It would be a surprise if Ogan decides to place his support behind the moderate Kilicdaroglu for the second round of the presidential election. Erdogan is in pole position on May 28."

Turkey's pollsters emerged as one of the day's biggest losers.

Nakba Day: Pro-Palestine Rallies Sweep World



Pictures show protesters marching through the streets of New York, London and Ramallah as well as a ceremony held at the UN for the first time to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Nakba Day.

RAMALLAH (Dispatches) -- Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip have marked the 75th anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba day, or the day of "catastrophe," with large-scale rallies and demonstrations.

The Nakba Day is observed annually on May 15 by Palestinians to remember the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes after the establishment of Israel in 1948.

In Gaza, people took to the streets, marching through the main thoroughfares, hoisting Palestinian flags, and displaying banners emphasizing the right of return.

The demonstration culminated at the headquarters of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process in the western part of the city.

Imad al-Agha, an official from Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah Movement, addressed the gathering, affirming the Palestinians' commitment to their right to return to "historic Palestine" and their determina-

tion to achieve it.

"Our people await the awakening of global conscience to resolve their legal question, which has become the oldest and largest issue known to the world and the United Nations," he stated.

Hamas said in a statement that the Nakba day came "in the wake of a recent round of conflict where our Palestinian people, united with their resistance in Gaza, proved that they are capable of defending their national rights."

The commemoration of the Nakba day in Gaza follows a ceasefire agreement brokered by Egypt between the occupying regime of Israel and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) movement in Gaza, bringing an end to a five-day deadly confrontation.

In the West Bank city of Ramallah, a large-scale demonstration took place in front of the tomb of the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat before proceeding to the city center.

Participants observed a moment of silence for 75 seconds, sym-

bolizing the 75th anniversary of Nakba.

Palestinian Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh, who participated in the rally with other officials, said "the Nakba is a crime that extends over 75 years, and our people are still paying with their blood and living flesh the bill of aggression."

In New York, the United Nations headquarters held its first-ever commemoration of the Nakba anniversary, with the participation of Palestinian President Abbas, delivering a speech during the online event.

Abbas asked for the suspension of Israel's membership from the United Nations as it had failed to implement even one of the hundreds of resolutions adopted by different UN bodies since 1948 asking it to protect Palestinians rights and end its occupation.

"We demand today officially, in accordance with international law and international resolutions, to make sure that Israel respects these resolutions or suspend Israel's membership of the UN."

The event was organized as per a resolution passed by the UN General Assembly in November last year.

Anywhere between 700,000 and 800,000 Palestinians were forced to leave their lands, homes, villages, and towns in historic Palestine by the Zionist forces during the months leading up to the creation of Israel on May 14, 1948. More than 500 Palestinian villages and towns were destroyed during those months by Zionist forces.

Considered as large-scale 'ethnic cleansing' of Palestinians, Nakba also created one of world's largest refugee populations, which is currently living all across the world but mostly in the occupied Palestinian territories of Gaza, West Bank, and East Al-Quds and in neighboring Arab countries such as Lebanon, Jordan and Syria.

Abbas asserted that since colonial powers such as the U.S. and Britain were "directly responsible" politically and morally for Nakba, they have a historical responsibility to bring the suffering of Palestinians to an end.

Historic Palestine was a colonial mandate of Britain before it abruptly announced its termination in May 1948. Both the U.S. and Britain backed the Zionist forces during the long years of mandate administration and failed to intervene during the Zionist forces' ethnic cleansing of Palestinians.

Abbas also asked the occupying regime of Israel to end its occupation and apologize and pay compensation to Palestinians for the destruction it caused during Nakba.

Speaking during the event, the UN Under-Secretary General for Political Affairs and Peacebuilding Rosemary DiCarlo repeated the UN position on the issue which states that Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories is illegal under international law and must end.

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Raging Wildfires Spread in Canada

TORONTO (Reuters) -- Tinder-dry weather and shifting winds in Alberta on Tuesday elevated the risk of spreading wildfires in the Canadian oil-producing province where thousands have already been forced from their homes.

Some 90 wildfires are active in Alberta, with 23 out of control, according to the provincial government. At one point the fires pushed more than 30,000 people out of their homes while oil and gas producers shut in

at least 319,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day, or 3.7% of national production.

A cold front bringing gusty northwest wind, but little rain, was likely on Tuesday, Environment Canada meteorologist Sara Hoffman said.

The change in wind direction can pose a problem for firefighters as the path of the fires changes suddenly, said Christie Tucker, spokesperson for the Alberta Wildfire agency.

The Canadian military and

firefighters from across Canada and the United States are helping fight the blazes.

Benchmark Canadian heavy crude prices have risen to their highest levels in months on concerns about the wildfires.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau visited Alberta on Monday as raging wildfires prompted mass evacuations and reduced energy production in Canada's main oil-producing province, where meteorologists expect virtually no rain for 10 days or

so.

In the provincial capital Edmonton, Trudeau received an update on firefighting efforts by Canadian soldiers sent to help provincial firefighting and recovery efforts since Thursday. More troops are expected to join in the coming days, according to the Alberta government.

The first 11 days of May have set seasonal heat records in several parts of Alberta, including Edmonton, according

to Environment and Climate Change Canada.

Lieutenant Colonel Ben Schmidt, one of the army officials who briefed Trudeau, told him about the regions most at risk and how a lack of rain in the forecast was "a huge challenge."

Trudeau was due to leave for Seoul on Tuesday to meet South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, before moving on to Japan for a G7 summit starting Friday.