



Supporters of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) celebrate Sunday in Istanbul, the victory of their party in elections. The outcome is a strong vote of confidence for Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government.

Ruling party wins Turkey election

PM vows to preserve secularism

AP, Ankara

Turkey's prime minister pledged to work toward national unity and fight terrorism after the Islamic-rooted ruling party won parliamentary elections by a wide margin.

Although the ruling party's success has been touted as proof that Islam and democracy can coexist, the new government is likely to face persistent tension over the role of Islam in society.

State-run Anatolia news agency was projecting that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party would win 340 of the 550 seats, as votes in all but six of more than 158,000 ballot boxes across the country were counted.

Erdogan, a devout Muslim, pledged to safeguard the country's secular traditions and do whatever the government deems necessary to fight separatist Kurdish rebels.

"We will never make concessions over the values of people, the basic principles of our republic. This is our promise. We will embrace Turkey as a whole without discriminating," he said at a rally in

the capital, Ankara.

European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso congratulated Erdogan's victory.

"This comes at an important moment for the people of Turkey as the country moves forward with political and economic reforms," Barroso said in a statement.

The EU chief said that Erdogan "has given his personal commitment to the sustained movement towards the EU."

The 27-nation bloc, while divided over whether Turkey should one day join the club, continues to spur Ankara to continue reforms to keep on track its membership bid.

Ruling party supporters clapped, danced and waved flags depicting the party symbol, a light bulb, outside the party's office in Istanbul. In Ankara, hundreds whooped as they watched election results on a big TV screen set up outside party headquarters.

"We are very happy," university student Reyhan Aksay said. "God willing, great days await us."

The election was called early to defuse a showdown with the mili-

Bombings, shootings kill 23 in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

At least 23 people were killed yesterday in Iraq, including 12 in two car bomb attacks in Baghdad, security officials and medics said.

The two blasts occurred within minutes of each other, both of them involving explosives-laden cars in central Baghdad's Karrada neighbourhood, one on a road and the other targeting a passing police patrol.

At least 12 people, including three policemen, were killed and another 38 including women were wounded in the attacks, security officials and a medic at the capital's Ibn Nafis hospital said.

Later, a third car bomb rocked an area near Baghdad's so-called Green Zone, a US-controlled part of the war-torn capital, killing one person and wounding another three.

Iraqi security officials said the bomb exploded just 400 metres (yards) from the heavily fortified zone, which houses the US and British embassies, and the Iraqi parliament.

"The car exploded outside a restaurant on the road leading to the zone. At least one person is killed and three wounded," a security official said, adding several shops were damaged.

US, Iran to hold direct talks on Iraq today

AFP, Baghdad

Arch foes the United States and Iran are to hold fresh talks in Baghdad today on the security situation in Iraq, marking only their second one-on-one encounter in 27 years.

The meeting, to be attended also by an Iraqi delegation, has been confirmed by officials in all three camps.

As with a first round of talks on May 28 -- their first since Washington broke off relations with Tehran in 1980 -- the US will be represented by its Ambassador to Baghdad, Ryan Crocker, while Tehran's envoy, Hassan Kazemi Qomi will head the Iranian delegation.

"After my meeting with the Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, tomorrow's meeting was confirmed," Qomi was quoted as saying on the website of Iran's state-run television.

"An Iraqi delegation will be in our meeting with the American delegation, during which ways to seek stability and security in Iraq will be discussed," he added.

Spokesman for the US mission in Baghdad Philip Reeker confirmed the meeting, which was first announced late Sunday by Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari.

Washington broke off relations with Tehran in 1980 after Islamic revolutionaries seized the US embassy in Tehran and held its diplomats hostage for 444 days.

A first ice-breaking meeting between the two sides on May 28 did not achieve any major breakthrough and was strictly limited to the security situation in Iraq.

Both sides stuck to their familiar positions, with Tehran calling for US troops to be pulled out and Washington accusing Iran of stoking the insurgency that is bedeviling Iraq.

Reeker said the meeting on Tuesday would also be strictly "about Iraq."

The two countries remain at loggerheads over a range of issues including Iran's nuclear programme, which the United States claims is aimed at producing nuclear weapons, an accusation fiercely denied by Tehran.

US forces have frequently accused Iran of arming and training Iraqi militias, allegations that are also denied by Tehran.

Relations have been chilled further by the detention in Iraq by US forces of at least five Iranian officials who Tehran insists are diplomats, but Washington says are members of Iran's elite Revolutionary Guard.

Strains have also come from the detention by Tehran of three US-Iranians accused of espionage and harming national security by being linked to alleged US efforts to topple Iran's clerical authorities.

Militants vow 'gift of death' for Pakistani troops

AFP, Miranshah

Pro-Taliban militants yesterday warned Pakistani soldiers to quit fighting or face more suicide attacks, as peace talks faltered in the conflict-torn area bordering Afghanistan.

The Islamist hardliners threatened that explosives would bring soldiers the "gift of death" in a pamphlet entitled "Till Islam Lives in Islamabad", distributed in the town of Miranshah in the North Waziristan tribal district.

The chilling warning came as Washington reiterated its threat that it reserved the right to launch unilateral strikes against targets in Pakistan's tribal belt, where it says al-Qaeda and the Taliban have set up "safe havens."

Fighting along the Afghan frontier has intensified amid a nationwide wave of Islamist bloodshed that has killed more than 200 people, mostly security forces, after the July 10-11 raid on the radical Red Mosque in Islamabad.

In the latest attacks Monday, seven Pakistani soldiers were wounded in two separate rocket

and bomb attacks, a security official told AFP.

The pamphlet, issued by a group calling itself the Mujahed-e-Islam (Islamic holy warriors), accused Pakistani troops of doing the bidding of the United States and leading impure lives.

It warned that its suicide attackers "love death more than you love your 5,000-rupee salary, nude pictures of Indian actresses and liquor."

"We know that you have become America's slave and are serving infidel (non-believer President Pervez) Musharraf and have become a traitor to your religion for food, clothes and shelter."

Nineteen rebels were killed in weekend clashes in North Waziristan.

Two soldiers were wounded Monday when rockets hit a checkpoint in Razmak town, and a remote controlled improvised explosive device wounded five more as they rushed to help their colleagues, a security official told AFP.



PHOTO: AFP
Indian students from Pooja Vidhyalaya make a formation spelling out KALAM during a special programme to bid farewell to outgoing Indian President APJ Abdul Kalam on the eve of his retirement in Ahmedabad yesterday. Pratibha Patil, (72), a politician nominated by the ruling Congress Party, will become India's first woman president and officially takes over on July 25.

Benazir admits contact with Pak president

AFP, London

Former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto said yesterday she was in contact with President Pervez Musharraf but it was "unlikely" they would reach a power-sharing deal.

Benazir Bhutto also claimed the United States and Britain had offered implicit support for her return to the country which she led twice before fleeing into exile in the face of corruption charges in the late 1990s.

Musharraf is facing opposition calls to quit amid mounting civil unrest highlighted by the military's storming of Islamabad's Red Mosque earlier this month to oust armed Islamists.

Asked on BBC radio if she had struck a deal with the military leader, Benazir said: "Not yet, no. There have been contacts and our contacts were over the holding of fair elections and a return to a political

system in Pakistan.

"But ... over the months, nothing moved forward and we kept stumbling, for example we stumbled over electoral lists where 30 percent of the voters were disenfranchised and I felt that that didn't amount to a fair election."

"So we haven't yet reached any agreement although we've had a lot of discussion on the point."

The leader of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) said she was now sceptical about striking a deal before Pakistan's elections.

"It's now three months left to the election so unless the regime acts rapidly it seems unlikely that there's going to be any agreement," she added.

Musharraf, the army chief who seized power in a bloodless coup in 1999, is constitutionally obliged to step aside as head of the military by the end of the year.

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Tigers still get arms from Cambodia

5 killed in Lanka fighting

AFP, Phnom Penh/ Colombo

Tamil Tiger rebels are still getting weapons smuggled from Cambodia, which are fuelling spiralling unrest in Sri Lanka, a security journal reported.

"Cambodia is one of the most significant single sources of weapons for the insurgent group," Jane's Intelligence Review said in a report published online last week, without naming any sources.

Interior ministry spokesman Khieu Sopheap acknowledged Monday that some weapons might still be getting to the Tigers, but said any smuggling would be small-scale.

"There could be some bad people involved... We would like information to lead us to the offenders," he told AFP.

"We are victims of weapons, so we don't want people in other countries to suffer the same crisis," he said.

Meanwhile, at least five Tamil

Thai king's adviser targeted in violent attack

THE NATION/ ANN, Bangkok

Thai Privy Council President Prem Tinsulanonda, an adviser to Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej, was barricaded inside his house late Sunday night (July 22) as anti-coup demonstrators threw a barrage of rocks, chairs and debris into the compound.

In the first major outbreak of violence since the anti-coup movement started in September, protesters from the Democratic Alliance Against Dictatorship (DADD) clashed with police outside Prem's home.

Several thousand people kept up the barrage of missiles for about three hours as Prem was reportedly taking shelter inside. Television footage showed a number of people were injured, but police late last night released no figures, but some reports said an officer had his leg broken.

As the violence began to wane at about midnight, chairman of the Council for the final bastion of the LTTE in the island with a victory parade last week.



PHOTO: AFP
Anti-coup protesters fight with police during a scuffle near the house of Prem Tinsulanond, the King's top adviser, in Bangkok Sunday. Thai police used tear gas and a baton charge to disperse thousands of pro-democracy protesters who were trying to reach Prem Tinsulanond house.