

Poll: Clinton at peak of unpopularity

AFP, Washington
Hillary Clinton has never been so disliked by Americans. That's according to a Washington Post-ABC News poll published Wednesday, a little more than two months before she faces voters at the ballot box.

Despite being ahead of her Republican rival Donald Trump in surveys on who should take the White House, this latest poll found that just 41 percent of Americans have a favorable view of Clinton, while 56 percent have an unfavorable one.

Those ratings are Clinton's worst in the quarter century she has spent in public positions, though still ahead of Trump's 35-63 split.

Clinton and Trump are the most unpopular presidential candidates in modern US politics. The last recipient of that dubious distinction was George HW Bush, who had 53 percent unfavorable ratings during a 1992 Washington Post-ABC News poll.

In a worrying trend for Clinton, support even dropped among groups that have historically supported her. She fell from 54 to 45 percent support among women, and from 71 to 55 percent among Hispanics.

With just 68 days to go before the elections, Clinton is five points ahead overall compared to Trump, with 42 percent support against 37 percent, according to a Real Clear Politics poll average.

Meanwhile, French far-right leader Marine Le Pen has told CNN Clinton would "destabilise the world" if she wins the White House.

"Hillary Clinton is war. Hillary Clinton is devastation," Le Pen told CNN late Wednesday.



Syrians fleeing from the town of Souran, in northern Hama, drive past burning vehicles yesterday, after fighters from the Jund al-Aqsa Islamist Brigade took control of the town from Syrian government forces. A coalition of rebels and jihadists quickly advanced this week in the province of Hama, in central Syria, which is largely controlled by the regime forces, and has captured a number of towns, according reports.

Turkey sacks 820 more military men

AP, Istanbul
Turkey's state-run Anadolu news agency says more than 800 further personnel have been discharged from the military in the latest crackdown following July's abortive coup.

It reported Thursday that the Ministry of National Defense has dishonorably discharged 820 personnel from the Army and Navy. Of those, 648 were already under arrest.

The government has launched a massive crackdown against the movement led by US-based Islamic cleric Fethullah Gulen. Ankara alleges Gulen and his followers were responsible for the violent coup attempt that left more than 270 people dead. Gulen denies any involvement.

Some 35,000 people have been detained for questioning, with more than 17,000 of them being formally arrested to face trial. Tens of thousands more people have been suspended or dismissed from their jobs, including thousands from the military.

Meanwhile, Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim yesterday insisted his country would not relax its contested anti-terror laws, a key condition laid down by the European Union for giving Turks visa-free access to the bloc.

Yildirim pointed to the series of terror attacks that have rocked Turkey in the past year in telling visiting EU Parliament chief Martin Schulz the government would maintain its hardline stance.

The EU in March reached a deal with Turkey to halt the mass flow of migrants across the Mediterranean in return for a set of incentives, including billions of euros in aid for refugees on Turkish soil and visa-free travel for Turkish citizens.

Diplomatic rift opens in LatAm

Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia recall envoys; Rousseff launches appeal

REUTERS, Brasilia
The dismissal of Brazil's president upset relations with leftist Latin American governments on Wednesday as Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia recalled their ambassadors to protest what they called a "coup" and Brasilia responded in kind.

The Brazilian Senate voted 61-20 to convict the country's first female president, Dilma Rousseff, of illegally using money from state banks to bankroll public spending. The vote ended 13 years of progressive Workers Party rule and brought to power her conservative former vice president, Michel Temer.

Dilma Rousseff yesterday filed a Supreme Court challenge asking for the overturning of the Senate vote.

Leftist leaders in Caracas, Quito, La Paz and San Salvador have been consistent allies of Rousseff and her predecessor, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, including Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, who said the United States was behind the impeachment

push.

"This coup d'etat isn't just against Dilma. It is against Latin America and the Caribbean. It is against us," Maduro said in a televised speech. "This is an attack against the popular, progressive, leftist movement."



Earlier Caracas in a statement said it "has decided to definitively withdraw its ambassador in the Federal Republic of Brazil, and to freeze political and diplomatic relations with the government that emerged from this parliamentary coup".

Brazilian Foreign Minister Jose

Serra defended the constitutionality of Rousseff's impeachment and questioned the legitimacy of Maduro's government.

A political crisis in Venezuela has already heightened tensions with the Temer government, which took over on an interim basis when Rousseff was suspended in May to face trial.

Earlier this month, diplomats from Brazil and Uruguay traded barbs over the latter's accusation that Brasilia was trying to "buy" its vote to block Venezuela from taking the rotating presidency of the region's Mercosur trade bloc. Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay have refused to allow Venezuela to take the Mercosur presidency, arguing that it has not complied with the minimum requirements to belong to the common market.

Adding its voice to the criticisms, the leftist government of El Salvador said in a statement that Rousseff's removal "represented a serious threat for Latin America's democracy, peace, justice, development and integration."

Russia accused of using cluster bombs in Syria

AFP, Geneva
Evidence is growing that Russia is behind a significant increase in the use of cluster bombs in Syria, campaigners said yesterday.

A coalition of NGOs led by Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in an annual study that more than 400 people were killed or maimed by the banned munitions in the world last year.

They linked the increased use of cluster bombs in Syria to Russian forces who are carrying out air strikes in support of President Bashar al-Assad's regime.

"Since Russia began its joint operation with Syrian forces at the end last September, we have seen an increase in the number of cluster munition attacks on opposition-held areas," Mary Wrenham, HRW's arms advocacy director and editor of the report, told a press conference.

Russia has repeatedly denied using cluster bombs, which spray bomblets indiscriminately. HRW admitted it was difficult to determine whether it was specifically Russian or Syrian forces which had used the bombs.

A total of 248 people were killed or injured by the munitions in Syria last year, almost all civilians, the Cluster Munition Monitor report said.

The bombs also killed or maimed 104 people in Yemen in 2015. Saudi Arabia has denied using cluster munitions against civilian targets.

The study provides an overview of how countries are implementing a landmark 2008 convention which bans all use, production, transfer and stockpiling of the weapons.

Syria and Russia are not among the 100 signatories of the convention, but HRW says they remain bound by international law, which bans the indiscriminate attacks that are the hallmark of cluster bombings.

On the ground, Syrian opposition fighters have seized several areas in a rapid advance against government forces in central Hama province, prompting a wave of regime air strikes, a monitor yesterday.

At least 25 civilians, including children, were killed in the strikes early yesterday as fighting raged in parts of Hama.

Hama province is of vital strategic importance to President Bashar al-Assad, separating opposition forces in Idlib from Damascus to the south and the regime's coastal heartlands to the west.

Fossil find points to life on Earth 3.7b yrs ago

AFP, Sydney
Life on Earth is even older than we thought, Australian scientists said yesterday as they unveiled fossils dating back a staggering 3.7 billion years.

The tiny structures -- called stromatolites -- were found in ancient rock along the edge of Greenland's ice cap, and were 220 million years older than the previous record holders.

They show that life emerged fairly shortly -- in geological terms -- after Earth was formed some 4.5 billion years ago, said lead researcher Allen Nutman of the University of Wollongong.

And, he added, they offer hope that very basic life may at one point have existed on Mars.

"This discovery represents a new benchmark for the oldest preserved evidence of life on Earth," Professor Martin Julian Van Kranendonk, a geol-

ogy expert at the University of New South Wales and study co-author, said in a statement.

The one-to-four centimetre (0.4-1.6 inch) high Isua stromatolites were exposed after the melting of a snow patch in the Isua Greenstone Belt of Greenland.

Stromatolites are formed when microorganisms, such as certain kinds of bacteria, trap bits of sediment together in layers.

These rocks themselves were never alive, but their existence suggest that the very simple single-cell organisms that made them were present on Earth hundreds of millions of years earlier than previously thought, said the team.

The earliest evidence of life on Earth ahead of the Greenland discovery came from near-3.5 billion-year-old stromatolites found in western Australia in 2006.

The new findings were published in the journal Nature.

SpaceX rocket explodes on Florida launch pad

AFP, Miami
An unmanned SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket exploded yesterday on the launch pad at Cape Canaveral in Florida during a test, destroying it and its payload, but there were no injuries, the private space firm said.

A dense plume of black smoke filled the air following the blast. The US space agency Nasa said the incident took place shortly after 9:00 am (1300 GMT).

"SpaceX can confirm that in preparation for today's static fire, there was an anomaly on the pad resulting in the loss of the vehicle and its payload," the company said. "Per standard procedure, the pad was clear and there were no injuries."

Brevard County Emergency Management said there was no threat to the public from the incident.

SpaceX, which is based in California, is headed by internet entrepreneur Elon Musk, who wants to revolutionise the launch industry by making rocket components reusable.

The company had successfully launched a Falcon 9 last month, sending a Japanese communications satellite into orbit and then landing the rocket on a floating drone ship.



PHOTO: AFP
OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND?
This picture taken on September 2, 2015 shows the lifeless body of migrant child Aylan Kurdi off the shores in Bodrum, southern Turkey. A year ago, the tragic death of the three-year-old Syrian boy shocked Europe as an unprecedented crisis saw hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees arrive on the continent. He was one of some 3,700 people who died trying to reach Europe in 2015. But experts say Europe's migrant crisis is at the very least numerically worse than it was last year. More people are arriving and more are dying. But the twist is that, compared with last year, a lot of it is out of sight. According to data from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), arrivals are up 17 percent on last year. Deaths among those trying to get to Europe, mainly due to drowning, are up more than 15 percent.

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