



# Turkey faces election runoff

## Erdogan leads the first round of voting, seen with momentum ahead of the second round

REUTERS, Ankara

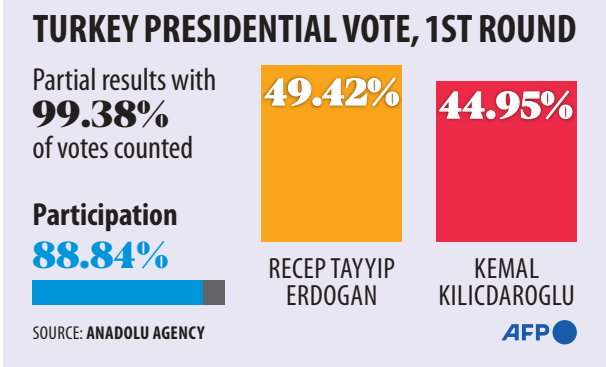
Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday emerged from his toughest election test unbowed and in a strong position to extend two decades of his Islamic-rooted rule by another five years in a historic May 28 runoff.

Turkish assets weakened on the news, which showed Erdogan just below the 50 percent threshold needed to avoid sending the Nato-member country to a second round of a presidential election viewed as passing judgment on his autocratic rule.

Erdogan's People's Alliance, comprising his Islamist-rooted AK Party and its nationalist partners, also appeared set to win a majority in the new parliament with 321 of the 600 seats, further boosting his chances in the presidential runoff.

"The winner has undoubtedly been our country," Erdogan said in a speech to cheering supporters at the AKP headquarters in the capital Ankara overnight.

With 99 percent of ballot boxes counted in the presidential vote, Erdogan led with 49.4 percent and his main opposition rival Kemal Kilicdaroglu had 44.96 percent, High Election Board chairman Ahmet Yener told



reporters. Turnout was 88.8 percent.

Further boosting Erdogan's hopes, nationalist candidate Sinan Ogan, who placed third in Sunday's election, yesterday told Reuters in an interview that he would only endorse Kilicdaroglu in the runoff if the latter ruled out any concessions to a pro-Kurdish party, parliament's third largest.

That party backs Kilicdaroglu but is accused of ties to Kurdish militants, which it denies.

The 2.8 million voters who backed Ogan in the first round will be crucial for Kilicdaroglu if he is to defeat Erdogan.

Opinion polls had shown Erdogan trailing Kilicdaroglu, but the outcome suggested that the president and his AK Party were able to rally conservative voters despite a cost-of-living crisis and soaring inflation.

Kilicdaroglu, head of a six-party alliance, vowed to prevail in the runoff and accused Erdogan's party of interfering with the counting and reporting of results. He called on his supporters to be patient.

The prospect of five more years of Erdogan's rule will upset civil rights activists campaigning for reforms to undo the damage they say he has done to Turkey's democracy.

The election has been closely watched in Europe, Washington, Moscow, and across the region, where Erdogan has asserted Turkish power while strengthening ties to Russia and putting strain on Ankara's traditional alliance with the United States.

The opposition had expected to benefit from voter anger at economic woes after an unorthodox policy of low interest rates triggered a lira crisis and soaring inflation. A slow government response to earthquakes that killed 50,000 people in February had also been expected to influence voters.

## POLLS TO 5 CITIES

# JP doubtful of EC's control over police

## CEC says they'll try to keep cops neutral

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Expressing doubts whether the upcoming five city polls will be free and fair, Jatiya Party yesterday demanded the Election Commission have control over the police during the elections.

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal assured the main opposition in parliament of trying to ensure the neutrality of the police.

The CEC was speaking to reporters after a meeting with a JP delegation at his office.

Awal said it will not be possible for the EC alone to hold a free and fair elections without the goodwill of the government and cooperation from the political parties and rival candidates.

He added that the JP delegation, led by party Secretary General Mujibul Haque Chunnu, discussed the situation in the electoral areas.

"They have urged us to have control over the police.... In the elections to local bodies, candidates sometimes try to make sure that police act in their favour. We have told them that we will try to keep

SEE PAGE 6 COL 5



Cars wait in a long queue outside a CNG filling station in the capital's Nikunja area around 9:00am yesterday. Many other filling stations in the city saw long queues of vehicles mainly due to frequent load-shedding, which slowed refill services.

## BARISHAL AL POLITICS

# Conflict intensifies as city polls near

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE with SUSHANTA GHOSH

The rift between Awami League's mayoral candidate Abul Khair Abdullah and his nephew Serniabat Sadiq Abdullah, the incumbent mayor of Barishal, has turned into a violent face-off ahead of the city polls slated for June 12.

Khair Abdullah, comparatively an unknown face in Barishal, is gaining strength after getting the party ticket while his nephew Sadiq Abdullah, who virtually controls the city, is desperate to retain his position, leading to confrontation.

An attack on Khair's followers on Sunday night and the arrest of Sadiq's men yesterday in this connection further exacerbated the situation.

The arrestees include Roiz Ahmed Manna, convener of Barishal city unit Chhatra League, his brother and 12 other BCL men.

Their arrests came hours after Khair Abdullah appealed the authorities to put the attackers behind bars while visiting his injured followers at Barishal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital.

Barishal city AL president AKM Jahangir Alam, who is loyal to Sadiq Abdullah, protested the arrest

immediately, saying Manna was not within two kilometres of the area where the incident took place.

During a press conference in the city, Jahangir alleged that they were facing various threats in recent days.

Sadiq is the general secretary of the unit, which is yet to join the mass contact with the AL candidate.

The unit leaders say they are waiting for a joint meeting and a directive from Sadiq's father Abul Hasnat Abdullah, a veteran

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politician who is the president of Barishal district AL, lawmaker from Barishal-1 and a member of AL central working committee, about their action plan over the city polls.

However, none could say when the joint meeting would be held.

Jahangir said they will conduct electioneering when the formal campaign starts and follow the decision of the joint meeting. He kept mum when asked about a

specific date of the meeting.

On the other hand, AL men loyal to Khair Abdullah, consider his eldest brother Abul Hasnat and nephew Sadiq as "an enemy in one's own home" and on Saturday, they announced Sadiq Abdullah would be "resisted" in Barishal.

They don't care whether or not the father and son support Khair or not, sources said.

Khair Abdullah has already formed two electioneering committees excluding followers of incumbent mayor. Abul Hasnat, however, was made the chief of one of the committees.

After the AL picked Khair as the mayoral candidate, Sadiq and his father started losing their grip on everything including local politics, insiders said.

Speedboat terminal of Barishal is now controlled by Shekhor Chandra Das, while Rupatali bus stand by Sultan Mahmud. Aftab Ahmed is now controlling the central bus terminal at Nathullahab, according to sources.

All three are known as anti-Sadiq and they are now being seen besides Khair Abdullah.

Apart from this, many local AL leaders and activists already shifted their stance in favour of

SEE PAGE 6 COL 5



MONKEY BUSINESS ... With summer fruits well into ripeness, a monkey reaps the benefits by feasting on jackfruits that have just fallen from a tree in Sylhet city's Shahi Eidgah area. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR



FAROOQUE 1948-2023

## The passing of a freedom fighter, movie legend

AFAQIB HASIB

Freedom Fighter, actor and Member of Parliament Akbar Hossain Pathan (Farooque) passed away at the Mount Elizabeth Hospital in Singapore yesterday morning.

He was 74.

His son Sharot confirmed the news of the death and requested everyone to pray for the departed soul of his beloved father.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

## US man breaks record for living underwater

THE STRAITS TIMES ONLINE



A university professor from the United States broke the world record for the longest time living underwater over the weekend, and he is set to continue with his subaquatic lifestyle for the next few weeks.

Saturday was Dr Joseph Dituri's 74th day residing in the Jules Undersea Lodge, a hotel for scuba divers located in a 9m deep lagoon in Key Largo, Florida.

"The record is a small bump and we love it, and I really appreciate it and I'm honoured to have it, but we still have more science to do; the science doesn't stop here," said Dr Dituri.

The previous record was set by two professors from Tennessee in 2014. Dr Bruce Cantrell and Dr Jessica Fain also stayed in the same hotel for 73 days, two hours and 34 minutes.

Despite his record-breaking feat, Dr Dituri, who is also known as "Dr Deep Sea", is not celebrating yet.

The University of South Florida educator and retired US naval officer is set to continue living underwater at ambient pressure until June 9 when he reaches 100 days, as part of an underwater mission called Project Neptune 100.

## Cyclone Mocha ravages around 12,000 houses

## Shahporir Dwip faces drinking water crisis

STAR REPORT

Around 12,000 homes have been damaged by Cyclone Mocha in Saint Martin's Island and Cox's Bazar, Enamur Rahman, state minister for disaster management and relief, said yesterday.

Of these, some 2,000 were completely damaged and the rest partially damaged.

"Some people were injured by falling trees and were given treatment at local hospitals," he told journalists at the secretariat.

"We were able to bring all people from risky areas to the shelter centers. That's why there are no reported deaths."

The authorities concerned have been instructed to distribute tin sheets and cash assistance for rehabilitation of those affected by the storm, Enamur said.

"A list of the cyclone victims is being prepared. They will be given assistance according to their needs."

Meanwhile, around 100 people are living out in the open in Shahporir Dwip, after Cyclone Mocha decimated their houses.

"The tin roof of my house was blown away by the storm. As I don't have the financial means to repair it right now,

SEE PAGE 6 COL 5