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USD	01	GBP	01	INR	1000	PKR	1000	EUR	01	IRR	1000	AED	01
AFN	78.59	AFN	108.90	AFN	1065	AFN	500	AFN	93.90	AFN	0.37	AFN	21.22

Armenia PM Pashinyan's Civil Contract claims victory in snap poll

Nikol Pashinyan, the acting prime minister of Armenia, has claimed victory in a snap parliamentary election he had called in an effort to defuse a political crisis following a disastrous war with Azerbaijan.

With 75 percent of results declared, Pashinyan's Civil Contract party had 55.61 percent of the vote on Monday. The electoral alliance of his top rival, former President Robert Kocharyan, had 20 percent of the vote, according to the Central Election Commission (CEC).

Voter turnout was about 50 percent, with some 2.6 million people eligible to vote.

"The people of Armenia have given our Civil Contract party a mandate to lead the country and personally me to lead the country as prime minister," Pashinyan said early on Monday.

"We already know that we won a convincing victory in the elections and we will have a convincing majority in parliament," he added.

Kocharyan's bloc, however, questioned the credibility of the preliminary results and said it would not recognise Pashinyan's quick claim to victory, which came when just 30 percent of precincts had been counted.

"Hundreds of signals from polling stations testifying to organised and planned falsifications serve as a serious reason for lack of trust," the bloc said in a statement, adding it would not "recognise" the results until the "violations" were studied.

Earlier on Sunday evening, the general prosecutor's office said it had received 319 reports of violations. It said it had opened six criminal probes, all of which concerned bribes during campaigning.

The election is being monitored by experts from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which recently assessed the voting as largely fair and free. They will deliver an overall verdict on Monday.

Opinion polls prior to the election had put the two parties neck and neck. And while a record four electoral blocs and 21 parties ran for election, only a handful are expected to win seats in parliament.

Six-day war

Pashinyan had called the snap poll to try to end a political crisis that erupted after ethnic Armenian forces lost a six-week war against Azerbaijan last year and ceded territory in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region. More than 6,500 people were killed in the war, according to the latest official figures from Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Pashinyan has since been under pressure, with regular street protests demanding he step down over the terms of the peace agreement that ended the conflict. Under the deal, which was brokered by Russia, Azerbaijan regained control of territory it had lost during a war in the early 1990s. Pashinyan himself described the agreement as a disaster, but said he had been compelled to sign it in order to prevent greater human and territorial losses.

From Moscow's perspective, Pashinyan is a guarantor that the agreement will remain in place. This includes the stationing of some 2,000 Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Arsen Kharatyan, a former adviser to Pashinyan, told Al Jazeera the results gave the acting prime minister a chance to form a government "so that the internal political turmoil stops".

"Now, how are you going to handle the situation that Armenia is in? In the larger picture, the security architecture of the region has not changed much since the war. Russia is still going to be a major player in all of this. So, whoever comes in to power is going to have to deal with Moscow quite directly," Kharatyan said, adding that Sunday's vote also showed none of the parties who campaigned on a "pro-Western agenda got enough votes".

Armenia, which hosts a Russian military base, is a close ally of Moscow, although Pashinyan, who came to power on the back of street protests and on an anti-corruption agenda in 2018, has had cooler relations with the Kremlin.

Turkey, which supported Azerbaijan in last year's conflict, will also be watching the election closely.

Conflicting opinions

On the streets of Yerevan on Sunday, Armenians voiced conflicting opinions about Pashinyan.

Voter Anahit Sargsyan said the prime minister, who spearheaded peaceful protests against corrupt elites in 2018, deserved another chance.

She said she feared the return of the old guard whom she accused of plundering the country.

"I voted against a return to the old ways," said the 63-year-old former teacher.

Another voter, Vardan Hovhannisyan, said he had cast his ballot for Kocharyan, who calls Russian leader Vladimir Putin his friend. "I voted for secure borders, solidarity in society, the return of our war prisoners, the wellbeing of the wounded and a strong army," said the 41-year-old musician. Kocharyan, who hails from Karabakh, has accused Armenia's leadership of inaction during last year's war and pledged to start negotiations on Nagorno-Karabakh's borders if he came to power.

Kocharyan was president of Armenia from 1998 to 2008 and was accused of acting unlawfully when he introduced a state of emergency in March 2008 after a disputed election.

At least 10 people were killed in the clashes that followed between police and protesters.

aljazeera

Prominent UAE activist Alaa al-Siddiq dies in London car crash

Alaa al-Siddiq, a prominent dissident Emirati rights activist and critic, has died in a car crash in London.

Alaa was the executive director of the United Kingdom-based ALQST, a non-profit organisation that advocates for greater freedoms and human rights in the UAE and the wider Gulf region.

"With deep sadness, ALQST mourns the sudden death of its loved and respected Executive Director Alaa Al-Siddiq on Saturday 19 June 2021," the group said in a tweet. "May she rest in power."

Her father, Mohammad al-Siddiq, is also a prominent activist who has been held in detention by Emirati authorities since 2013.

"Today, the able Emirati researcher and honest sister, professor Alaa al-Siddiq, left this world, while her father, Mohammad al-Siddiq languishes in the notorious prisons of the [United Arab] Emirates," wrote Saudi activist Abdullah al-Awda.

According to Doha News, Alaa and her husband sought asylum in Qatar in 2012, where they had been living with their relatives.

The activist's presence in Qatar, and Doha's stance towards political activists at a time when the UAE was cracking down on voices of dissent, led to a rift between the two neighbours.

In 2018, Qatar's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani said a dispute had taken place between Qatar and the UAE in 2015 concerning a political dissident's wife.

Abu Dhabi had sent an envoy to Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani to ask that the woman in question be handed over to Emirati authorities, a request that was turned down by the Qatari ruler.

Though kept secret, Abdullah al-Ahbbah, the editor in chief of Qatar's al-Arab newspaper, later said it was Alaa who the Emiratis sought to repatriate.

Iran, world powers adjourn talks on reviving nuclear deal, resumption date unclear

Negotiators for Iran and six world powers on Sunday adjourned talks on reviving their 2015 nuclear deal and return to respective capitals for consultations as remaining differences still need to be overcome, officials said.

"We are now closer than ever to an agreement but the distance that exists between us and an agreement remains and bridging it is not an easy job," Iran's top negotiator Abbas Araqchi told state TV from Vienna. "We will return to Tehran tonight."

After more than a week of negotiations in their latest round, parties to the pact wrapped up with Russia's envoy saying no date for a resumption in negotiations had been set for now, although he suggested they could return in about 10 days.

Negotiations have been going on in Vienna since April to work out the nature and sequencing of steps Iran and the United States must take on nuclear activities and sanctions to return to full compliance with the nuclear pact.

Ebrahim Raisi, a hardliner and fierce critic of the West, won Iran's presidential election on Friday and will take office in early August, replacing pragmatist Hassan Rouhani, under whose aegis the 2015 deal was struck.

But Raisi's rise is unlikely to disrupt Iran's effort under Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, who has final say on all major policy, to restore the nuclear pact and be rid of tough US oil and financial sanctions.

"We have made progress this week, in this sixth round. We are closer to a deal but we are not still there. We are closer than we were one week ago but we are not still there," Enrique Mora, the European Union political director who has coordinated the discussions, told reporters in Vienna.

The United States under then-President Donald Trump left the deal in 2018, branding its terms too weak to remove the risk of Iran developing nuclear weapons potential, and reimposed sanctions on the Islamic republic.

Iran has since breached the deal's strict limits on uranium enrichment, a possible path to a nuclear bomb. It has said its moves would be reversed if the United States rescinded all sanctions.

US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said disagreements over how to save the deal persisted, repeating that the ultimate decision on the issue lay with Khamenei.

"There is still a fair distance to travel on some of the key issues, including on sanctions and on the nuclear commitments that Iran has to make," Sullivan told broadcaster ABC News. He added that the question of which sanctions on Iran should be lifted was still being discussed.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said he had edited the text of a possible deal being discussed in Austria, saying it was getting "cleaner and cleaner."

He said there was a good possibility a deal could be reached before mid-August when the current Iranian administration leaves office.

alarabiya

Brexit 'madness' will wreck UK steel industry: Tories warn

The UK government is dealing a blow to the country's struggling steel industry in the name of Brexit and free trade, said Tory MPs in "red wall" seats, backed by the Labour party and steel industry leaders, on Saturday.

They criticized a government body which has officially recommended that protections inherited from the European Union to safeguard UK producers be ended imminently by the government.

The recent recommendation was made by the Trade Remedies Authority (TRA) - an arm's-length body that operates in the Department for International Trade.

Ending the protections would mean that more cheap foreign imports will be allowed into the United Kingdom.

On Monday, Labour is set to stage a Commons debate and vote on the issue to try to kill off the plans, hoping to win Tory backing from backbenchers who have expressed their anger over the harm the proposal would do to their steel-producing areas.

Referring to the recommendation, Gareth Stace, director general of UK Steel, which represents the industry, said the fact that the EU had just renewed its protections on Friday meant the UK steel industry would be even more damaged if ministers acted on official advice.

"The TRA's decision to terminate steel safeguards for half of the product categories exposes the UK's steel sector to uncontrolled surges in imports and is a hammer blow."

"The UK government is squandering the opportunity to make Brexit work for domestic industry and is letting an arm's length body harm the British steel sector, not support it. We want to work with the government to level up Britain, instead they are leveling down our steel sector."

A major British steel company with 25,000 jobs depending on its operations risk immediate collapse.

Meanwhile, the shadow business secretary, Ed Miliband, described the proposal as "madness," urging ministers to refuse to act on it.

"The significance of this decision for our steel industry cannot be overstated. UK Steel has described the government's proposal as 'madness', and ministers must listen. If the government slashes import protection, it risks opening the floodgates to cheap steel imports, undercutting British steel.

The disagreement is indicative of growing tensions over the government's pursuit of free trade arrangements to replace access to the EU single market following Brexit.

Also, UK farmers last week said ministers had betrayed them following the revelations of details of a free trade deal reached with Australia, which they fear will lead to them being undermined by cheaper, lower-quality meat imports.

Palestine denounces UN for whitewashing Israeli crimes against Palestinian children

The Palestinian Foreign Ministry has criticized the United Nations for leaving Israel off the annual blacklist of parties responsible for grave violations against children, saying ignoring the regime's crimes would guarantee impunity for the child-killing entity.

It said the UN action puts its reports at risk of "invalidity" and "dishonesty", as well as skepticism about the principles on which the UN is based.

In a recent report, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called on the Israeli authorities to reduce army operations against children and guarantee punishment in all cases where children are killed, but he decided not to blacklist the regime for violating children's rights in occupied Palestine.

While blaming the Israeli military for most of the major child abuses in 2020 in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem al-Quds, and the Gaza Strip, Guterres merely called on the Israeli regime to investigate cases in which it used weapons. It also called for an end to the administrative detention of children and for prevention of any ill-treatment during detention or attempts to recruit children.

In the report, however, the UN secretary general blacklisted Ansarullah movement, which is defending Yemen against six years of Saudi-led military aggression on the impoverished country, while refusing to include Saudi Arabia for the war that has killed hundreds of thousands of Yemeni civilians.

He also blacklisted the Syrian army for allegedly violating children's rights.

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