

Moqtada Al-Sadr wins Iraq vote, former PM Al-Maliki close behind

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BAGHDAD: Shiite Muslim cleric Moqtada Al-Sadr's party was the biggest winner in an Iraqi election on Monday, increasing the number of seats he holds in parliament, according to initial results, officials and a spokesperson for the Sadrism Movement.

Former prime minister Nouri Al-Maliki looked set to have the next largest win among Shiite parties, initial results showed.

Iraq's Shiite groups have dominated governments and government formation since the US-led invasion of 2003 that toppled Sunni dictator Saddam Hussein and catapulted the Shiite majority and the Kurds to power.

Sunday's election was held several months early, in response to mass protests in 2019 that toppled a government and showed widespread anger against political leaders whom many Iraqis say have enriched themselves at the expense of the country.

But a record low turnout suggested that a vote billed as an chance to wrest control from the ruling elite would do little to dislodge sectarian religious parties in power since 2003.

A count based on initial results from several provinces plus the capital Baghdad, verified by local government officials, suggested Sadr had won more than 70 seats, which if confirmed could give him considerable influence in forming a government.

Statement by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), on the Iraqi elections pic.twitter.com/KwwLFI3tX7

– UNAMI (@UNIraq) [October 11, 2021](#)

However, Sadr's group is just one of several that will have to enter negotiations to form a coalition capable of dominating parliament and forming an administration, a period of jockeying for position that may take weeks or longer.

Sadr broadcast a live speech on state TV claiming victory and promising a nationalist government free of foreign interference.

"We welcome all embassies that do not interfere in Iraq's internal affairs," he said, adding that celebrations would take place in the streets "without weapons."

Sadr has increased his power over the Iraqi state since coming first in the 2018 election where his coalition won 54 seats.

The unpredictable populist cleric has been a dominant figure and often kingmaker in Iraqi politics since the US invasion.

He opposes all foreign interference in Iraq, whether by the United States, against which he fought an insurgency after 2003, or by neighboring Iran, which he has criticized for its close involvement in Iraqi politics.

Sadr, however, is regularly in Iran, according to officials close to him, and has called for the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq, where Washington maintains a force of around 2,500 in a continuing fight against Islamic State.

The initial results also showed that pro-reform candidates who emerged from the 2019 protests had gained several seats in the 329-member parliament. Iran-backed parties with links to militia groups accused of killing some of the nearly 600 people who died in the protests took a blow, winning less

seats than in the last election in 2018, according to the initial results and local officials.

Kurdish parties won 61 seats, the results showed, including 32 for the Kurdistan Democratic Party which dominates the government of the autonomous Kurdish region of Iraq, and 15 for its rival the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan party.

Sunni parliament speaker Mohammed Al-Halbousi's Taqaddum coalition won 38 seats, Iraq's state news agency reported, making it the second largest in parliament. Maliki's State Of Law coalition came third overall with 37.

New law, same big parties

Elections in Iraq since 2003 have been followed by protracted negotiations that can last months and serve to distribute government posts among the dominant parties.

The result on Monday is not expected to dramatically alter the balance of power in Iraq or in the wider region.

Sunday's vote was held under a new law billed by Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi as a way to loosen the grip of established political parties and pave the way for independent, pro-reform candidates. Voting districts were made smaller, and the practice of awarding seats to lists of candidates sponsored by parties was abandoned.

But many Iraqis did not believe the system could be fundamentally changed and chose not to vote.

The official turnout figure of just 41 percent suggested the vote had failed to capture the imagination of the public, especially younger Iraqis who demonstrated in huge crowds two years ago.

"I did not vote. It's not worth it," Hussein Sabah, 20, told Reuters in Iraq's southern port Basra. "There is nothing that would benefit me or others. I see youth that have degrees with no jobs. Before the elections, (politicians) all came to them. After the elections, who knows?"

Kadhimi's predecessor Adel Abdul Mahdi resigned after security forces and gunmen killed hundreds of protesters in 2019 in a crackdown on demonstrations. The new prime minister called the vote months early to show that the government was responding to demands for more accountability.

In practice, powerful parties proved best able to mobilize supporters and candidates effectively, even under the new rules.

Iraq has held five parliamentary elections since the fall of Saddam. Rampant sectarian violence unleashed during the US occupation has abated, and Islamic State fighters who seized a third of the country in 2014 were defeated in 2017.

But many Iraqis say their lives have yet to improve. Infrastructure lies in disrepair and health care, education and electricity are inadequate.



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Record low turnout in Iraq parliamentary election
Voters disillusioned by corruption boycott Iraq parliamentary elections

[Arab coalition hits Houthi targets in Abdiya](#)

Mon, 2021-10-11 16:16

RIYADH: The Arab coalition said on Monday it had launched 338 specific attacks on Houthi targets to protect civilians in Abdiya, Yemen, since the militias' siege of the district.

The coalition said in a statement that it had carried out 33 operations targeting Houthi in Abdiya over the past 24 hours, adding that the Houthi militia is depriving 8,000 students of education in southern Marib.

It also said the operations has included the destruction of eight military vehicles, and had casued 156 Houthi casualties.

The statement also affirmed the coalition's commitment to supporting the Yemeni army and protecting Yemeni citizens from the Houthi oppression.

The coalition later issued another statement saying it also supports the Yemeni National Army and the tribesmen in lifting the siege on civilians in Abdiya, state TV reported.

"The humanitarian situation in Abdiya is tragic and we are looking at all humanitarian and operational options," the coalition added.

It also said that the international community and humanitarian organizations must also bear the responsibility of lifting the siege.



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Arab coalition: Air operations halt Houthis' incursion into Abdiya Arab coalition destroys Houthi drone launched toward Saudi Arabia's southern region

3 Egyptian health ministry employees arrested over dumped COVID-19 vaccines

Mon, 2021-10-11 15:50

CAIRO: Three Egyptian health ministry employees have been arrested after hundreds of thousands of dollars-worth of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccines were found dumped in a water drain.

The Egyptian Public Prosecution ordered the detention of a pharmacist, storekeeper, and driver following the discovery of the discarded drugs by a canal in Minya, Upper Egypt, south of the capital Cairo.

Authorities were alerted on Thursday by residents in Ibshaq village who found large quantities of bags containing COVID-19 vaccines still wrapped in their packages and officials launched an investigation when Egyptian Minister of Health Hala Zayed reported that a health department employee in Minya's Bani Mazar Center had uncovered packages which it later turned out had been intended for use by the governorate's health directorate.

Further inquiries revealed that 18,400 packages, worth 5.24 million Egyptian pounds (\$333,000), had gone missing from store inventories. Investigators reported that 13,400 doses of the dumped vaccine were no longer suitable for use.

The three arrested employees have reportedly denied charges of embezzlement and loss of public money, claiming the vaccines had been stolen from them, but the Egyptian Public Prosecution said the Ministry of Health had not received any notification of the theft.

All three have been held for questioning for a further 15 days to allow time for investigators to examine mobile phone conversations and vehicle tracking data from the car allegedly used to transport the vaccines to the dumping site.



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Egyptian Health Ministry to receive 50k AstraZeneca vaccine doses in February
Egypt vaccines ready for clinical trials

[Greece to boost guards on Turkey border](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-10-11 00:10

ATHENS: Greece's police minister on Sunday said 250 additional guards would be deployed on the country's land border with Turkey, where thousands of asylum-seekers tried to enter last year.

"We are ready ... and we are further increasing (security) forces by hiring 250 new border guards to support Greek police," Citizens' Protection Minister Takis Theodorikakos said during a visit to the border area of Kastanies, according to a ministry statement.

In February 2020, tens of thousands of migrants surged toward Greece after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said he would let migrants seeking to reach the EU pass through.

Days of clashes with asylum seekers on the border ensued, with Greek police accusing their Turkish counterparts of firing tear gas against them.

In the aftermath of the incident, Greece invested in a new anti-migration arsenal including cameras, radar and a 40-km steel fence, to cover part of the 200-km border region crossed by the river Evros.

The Greek civil aviation authority on Saturday also said a tethered balloon known as an aerostat, equipped with a long-range thermal camera, had been deployed at Alexandroupolis airport in August to assist border surveillance.

A Zeppelin operated by EU border agency Frontex is also active in the area, state agency ANA said Sunday.

Greece has said it will examine claims of illegal pushbacks of migrants trying to enter from Turkey, made in a major investigation published Wednesday by media from several European countries.

Athens has consistently denied any wrongdoing, including claims of migrants saying they were beaten, stripped and robbed before being forced back across the land border with Turkey.



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[Turkish fires endanger world pine honey supplies](#)

Author:

Sun, 2021-10-10 23:59

COKEK, Turkey: Beekeepers Mustafa Alti and his son Fehmi were kept busy tending to their hives before wildfires tore through a bucolic region of Turkey that makes most of the world's prized pine honey.

Now the Altis and generations of other honey farmers in Turkey's Aegean province of Mugla are scrambling to find additional work and wondering how many decades it might take to get their old lives back on track.

“Our means of existence is from beekeeping, but when the forests burned, our source of income fell,” said Fehmi, 47, next to his mountainside beehives in the fire-ravaged village of Cokek. “I do side jobs, I do some tree felling, that way we manage to make do.”

Nearly 200,000 hectares of forests – more than five times the annual average – were scorched by fires across Turkey this year, turning luscious green coasts popular with tourists into ash.

The summer disaster and an accompanying series of deadly floods made the climate – already weighing heavily on the minds of younger voters – a major issue two years before the next scheduled election.

Signaling a political shift, Turkey’s parliament this week ended a five-year wait and ratified the Paris Agreement on cutting the greenhouse emissions that are blamed for global warming and abnormal weather events.

But the damage has already been done in Mugla, where 80 percent of Turkey’s pine honey is produced.

Turkey as a whole makes 92 percent of the world’s pine honey, meaning supplies of the thick, dark amber may be running low worldwide very soon.

Turkey’s pine honey harvests were already suffering from drought when the wildfires hit, destroying the delicate balance between bees, trees, and the little insects at the heart of the production process.

The honey is made by bees after they collect the sugary secretions of the tiny Basra beetle (*Marchalina hellenica*), which lives on the sap of pine trees.

Fehmi hopes the beetles will adapt to younger trees after the fires. But he also accepts that “it will take at least five or 10 years to get our previous income back.”

His father Mustafa agrees, urging President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s government to expand forested areas and plant young trees.

“There’s no fixing a burnt house. Can you fix the dead? No. But new trees might come, a new generation,” Mustafa said.

For now, though, the beekeepers are counting their losses and figuring out what comes next.

The president of the Mugla Beekeepers’ Association, Veli Turk, expects his region’s honey production to plunge by up to 95 percent this year. “There is pretty much no Marmaris honey left,” he said.

“This honey won’t come for another 60 years,” he predicted. “It’s not just Turkey. This honey would go everywhere in the world. It was a blessing. This is really a huge loss.”

Beekeeper Yasar Karayigit, 45, is thinking of switching to a different type

of honey to keep his passion – and sole source of income – alive.

“I love beekeeping, but to continue, I’ll have to pursue alternatives,” Karayigit said, mentioning royal jelly (or “bee milk”) and sunflower honey, which involves additional costs.

“But if we love the bees, we have to do this,” the father-of-three said.

Ismail Atici, head of the Milas district Chamber of Agriculture in Mugla, said the price of pine honey has doubled from last year, threatening to make the popular breakfast food unaffordable for many Turks.

He expects price rises to continue and supplies to become ever more scarce.

“We will get to a point where even if you have money, you won’t be able to find those medicinal plants and medicinal honey,” Atici said.

“It’s going to be very hard to find 100-percent pine honey,” beekeeper Karayigit agreed. “We have had so much loss.”



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Life is sweet for beekeepers in Greece, but for how long?Honey sales at Saudi Arabia’s Baha festival exceed 1 ton in 10 days