**How Erdogan is standing tall**

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The Western media which leads the world in dissemination of news has gone quiet after their projections of President Erdogan's defeat in the Turkish elections of May 14 did not come true.

Their forecasts of the opposition's victory after Erdogan's twenty-year rule had gained credence on account of opinion polls in the run-up to the election. As proven time and again, opinion surveys are no substitute for elections.

It now looks that, no matter how tough the contest, the Turkish president is likely to emerge victorious in the second round of election scheduled for May 28.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan came to prominence when he was elected as mayor of Istanbul in 1994 as candidate of the Welfare Party. His success in managing the megapolis proved to be only the beginning of a journey that would eventually take him to the Turkish national assembly and election as the country's premier in 2003.

Erdogan established the AK Party in 2001 which triumphed in the 2002 election and got reelected in 2007 and 2011. He was credited with transforming the country through major infrastructure projects and by overseeing rapid expansion of the industrial sector.

Not content with the hybrid presidential system that included a prime minister, Erdogan went for turning the system into a fully presidential one and getting elected as president in 2014. If reelected now, he will preside over centenary celebrations of the Turkish Republic this year. A breathtaking odyssey that makes Erdogan the greatest leader of Turkey since Kemal Ataturk.

Erdogan, a staunch nationalist, took advantage of his country's pivotal geostrategic position and its membership of Nato to play an assertive role in regional affairs. He is also acknowledged as an influential voice in the Islamic world with a strong stance against Islamophobia. Considering all these aspects, it was no surprise that in its coverage of the election, the Western media began building up the prospect of an electoral defeat for Erdogan.

In the event, the election became a close contest, but the secular opposition failed to dislodge Erdogan who is seeking another five-year term.

As a result, the polls dominated television screens across many countries on the globe. Erdogan managed to get 49.5 per cent of the vote but fell short of the 50 per cent required to be elected in the first round thus leading to a second poll on May 28. That will be a direct contest between Erdogan and his principal opponent Kemal Kilicdaroglu who obtained 44.8 per cent votes in the first round.

All eyes are now on the third candidate, Sinan Ogan, who polled 5.2 per cent of the votes. It is surmised that without him in the race, Erdogan would have crossed the 50 per cent threshold to win in the first round. Ogan, a secular nationalist, has declared that he is considering whether to lend his support to one of the two remaining contenders. Some analysts are of the view that Ogan mostly took votes away from Erdogan. A majority of those may rally around the president to facilitate his reelection.

In a commentary last week, BBC's Paul Kirby wrote: from humble beginnings, Receb Tayyip Erdogan has grown into a political giant, leading Turkey for 20 years and reshaping his country more than any leader since Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the revered father of the modern republic.

It was under Erdogan that Turkey saw steady economic growth, reduction in poverty and expansion in the middle class. He has championed Islamic causes at home and abroad winning solidarity from Muslim leaders like Mahatir Mohammad and Imran Khan. It was under his rule that Hagia Sophia was converted back into a mosque in 2020.

An armed coup attempt in 2016 nearly overthrew Erdogan but with timely intervention by his supporters and popular support, the plot was defeated and the president was able to strengthen his hold on power. While a member of the western alliance of Nato, Erdogan has promoted links with Russia and China. Turkey has ordered a Russian anti-missile system and chose Russia to build Turkey's first nuclear reactor. At the same time Erdogan has offered to mediate to end the conflict in Ukraine.

The opposition parties have rallied behind the candidature of Kemal Kilicdaroglu, 74th leader of the Republican People's Party which has its origins in the secular Kemalist tradition. His campaign has been helped by public sentiments on hyperinflation and possibly over the handling of earthquakes resulting in over 50,000 deaths in southern Turkey.

The opposition's hopes of bringing the Erdogan era to an end remain unfulfilled. The ruling AK Party and its allies won 323 out of 600 seats in the national assembly while the opposition alliance secured 211 seats. This may have dampened the spirits of Kilicdaroglu's supporters even if he sounds undeterred. Erdogan is already the longest ruler of the Turkish Republic and his hopes have been boosted by the results of the first round of presidential polls on May 14.

An analysis in the Turkish daily Sabah, known as a supporter of Erdogan, predicted that the followers of Ogan who secured 5.2 per cent votes in the first round, will likely be distributed in equal proportion between Erdogan and Kilicdaroglu. Sabah adds that it would not be a surprise if the president wins in the second round with higher numbers.

Turkey's neighbours and the wider world are all intently watching the unfolding election scene that will culminate with the second round of presidential polls on May 28. Observers ask if despite human-affected and natural disasters – including two economic crises, a pandemic and devastating earthquakes – Erdogan will prevail to lead his nation for another five-year term.

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