

Editorial

Challenging Reality

By Mohammad Nouri

Political discord between Turkey's secularists and Islamists almost came to an end after Turkey's parliamentary and presidential elections.

However, a decision by Turkey's Constitutional Court to question the qualification of Justice and Development Party--AK Party--revived the differences between Turkey's two main political parties to a higher degree.

Now Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and President Abdullah Gul, two senior leaders of AKP, are facing the new challenge of preserving the heritage of their religious democracy.

They have experienced all the democratic means aimed at ascertaining their right to rule the country. They managed to gain absolute majority in two elec-



tions which were like referendums for determining Turkey's political future.

However, in a fight provoked by secular judges no democratic means to end the disputes is foreseeable. Laics have taken the new crisis to a field that only two options exist; compromise or confrontation.

>>Confrontation

Some political observers believe that the ongoing dispute in Turkey is actually a confrontation between two government sectors.

They believe that a move by Turkey's Constitutional Court to dissolve the AKP is confrontation between the elected and appointed sections of the government.

The Constitutional Court representing Turkey's traditional political current considers its hope in continued support for seculars as lost.

Although it seems that Turkey's prosecutor has indicted Turkey's AK Party for violating secularist principles, such efforts are originally aimed at weakening the government of Prime Minister Erdogan. AKP which is currently the target of attacks by secularists is the backbone of the prime minister's Erdogan's political power.

AKP during six years since of establishment not only put an end to the memory of defeats its predecessors Welfare and Fazilat parties, but it managed to provide a new model for combining of religion and democracy.

Hence, all those who have pursued the amazing path of Turkey's Islamists gaining power at the crossroads of Asia and Europe, consider a special role for AKP in gaining historical victories in a short period of time.

AK Party managed to overcome old political parties due to three advantages of dynamic ideology, wise leaders and devoted and well-known political forces.

It took AKP a total of five years to win the presidential race since its victory in municipality elections in 2002. AKP has now turned into an exemplary political party in Turkey.

>>Laic Objectives

On the whole, it becomes quite evident that laics in the scenario of dissolving AK Party is aiming to get rid of political camp of Islamists.

Some political observers have said that the motif of laics is to bring Erdogan's political reform project, especially his lifting the ban on Islamic dress code in public places to a halt.

Moreover, a recent indictment of Turkey's prosecutor shows that they pursue other objectives. They might want to take their political rivalry to the streets from the parliament.

The words such as vigilance and restraint that have been emphasized in messages of Erdogan and Gul are linked with the move by Turkey's prosecutor.

Such hegemony by laics for Erdogan and Gul who have spent several years of their lives under the secular governments was not unprecedented.

However, from the perspective of an outsider, especially after representatives of AK Party gained large number of votes in two free elections voted to dissolve this party will be quite unprecedented.

Turkey Considering New Laws

Turkey's ruling party is considering proposing new legislation that would stop the country's Constitutional Court from closing it down, Foreign Minister Ali Babacan said in an interview published Tuesday.

Speaking to the Financial Times, Babacan insisted that the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) fully supported "separation of the state and religion", but added that Turkish laws were out of step with European standards.

Turkey's top judicial body decided earlier this month it would hear a case to ban the AKP on charges of seeking to undermine the country's secular regime.

"We could make the court's job easier by defining the legal framework better," Babacan told the business daily, adding that the AKP was "about to decide" on whether it would introduce a "medium-sized package" of new laws that would change the requirements for shutting down political parties.

The country's laws were not in line with Council of Europe standards that only allowed the closure of parties that used or advocated violence, Babacan said, but stressed "the independence and the credibility of the courts".

Putin to Visit Libya

Libyan leader invites Russian President as Russia's investment in Libya's energy sectors will be on agenda.

According to Middle East Online, Russian President Vladimir Putin will travel to Libya on Wednesday for a two-day trip, one of his last before stepping down on May 7, the Kremlin said Monday.

"On April 16-17, 2008, Russian President Vladimir Putin will visit Libya at the invitation of Moamer Gathafi," the Kremlin press service said in a statement.

Russian investment in Libya's gas and nuclear energy sectors are likely to be on the agenda as Moscow seeks to boost ties with the North African state that is emerging from 20 years of diplomatic and economic isolation.

The visit comes as Russia is trying to coordinate policy with other gas producing states, notably Algeria, and is promoting plans for an organization of gas producers similar to the OPEC oil producers' group.



Israel Rolls Into Gaza Again



An Israeli tank rolls into Gaza in the latest round of incursion which wounded five Palestinians.

Israeli forces entered the southern Gaza Strip early on Tuesday and carried out searches accompanied by exchanges of fire and explosions, wounding at least five people, medics said.

About 20 armored vehicles accompanied by bulldozers and two helicopter gunships moved 1.5 kilometers inside Gaza near the Kissufim crossing point with Israel, AFP reported.

They searched a school and other buildings in Al-Qarara and Wadi Al-Salqa. Israeli troops and Palestinians exchanged fire and a number of blasts were heard in the area.

"Five people were wounded by gunfire and missiles fired by the Israeli occupation. One of them is in a serious condition," Dr Muawiya Hassanein, the head of Gaza emergency services said. He added that three were wounded when an Israeli tank shell

struck a house east of Al-Qarara village.

The army said in a statement that during the operation "forces identified several gunmen approaching the soldiers. The force fired at them and identified hitting one of them."

In an earlier operation Israeli aircraft raided the Maghazi refugee camp in the centre of the Gaza Strip overnight, targeting militants of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP). No one was wounded in the strike.

An Israeli military spokeswoman confirmed that the army had carried out an operation in the area.

Earlier on Monday, a member of the DFLP's military wing was killed and three other Palestinians were wounded in an Israeli air raid on the northern Gaza Strip, Palestinian medics said.

At least 388 people have been killed since Israel and the Palestinians re-launched formal peace talks at a US conference in November, according to an AFP count.

Since the outbreak of the latest Palestinian uprising or Intifada in 2000, at least 6,351 people have been killed, the vast majority of them Palestinians.

In recent months, Israel has tightened restrictions on Gaza, putting it on the threshold of a humanitarian crisis.

This comes as Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak has ordered the renewal of fuel deliveries to Gaza which was suspended last week.

The Israeli radio reported that diesel fuel for the Gaza power station and cooking gas are included in the decision, but petrol for motor vehicles will not be delivered, DPA said.