

Turkmen Parliament's Upper Chamber Elected First Time after Constitutional Reform



Ashgabat, Turkmenistan - Citizens in Turkmenistan have voted in members of the parliament's upper chamber, the People's Council, for the first time since constitutional amendments in September 2020 made parliament bicameral.

State media outlets in the tightly controlled and extremely isolated former Soviet republic said that 112 registered candidates vied for the 48 seats available in the newly established parliamentary chamber, stressing that the elections were "fair" and monitored by "independent" domestic observers.

Voters on March 28 had only two hours to cast ballots, between the hours of 10 a.m. and noon, at six polling stations across the country — one in the capital Ashgabat and five in other regions.

Turkmen authorities declared within hours of the vote that turnout in the country of 5.8 million people was 98.7 percent of eligible voters.

Foreign observers were not allowed to monitor the polling stations and no opposition candidates were on the ballot in the Central Asian former Soviet republic, which is considered one of the most repressive countries in the world.

Basketball Africa League to make debut in May 16

The NBA's new Basketball Africa League will make its debut on May 16 in Kigali, Rwanda after it was postponed last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The inaugural season was set to tip on March 13, 2020 at the Dakar Arena in Senegal. Originally scheduled to take place in different countries throughout Africa, the tournament will now solely take place at Kigali Arena in Rwanda.

Twelve teams from 12 African countries will play 26 games beginning May 16 and concluding on May 30. The 12 countries with teams participating include Angola, Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, Tunisia, Algeria, Cameroon, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique and Rwanda.

Mozambican Army takes control of town in armed attack

Mozambican forces killed a large number of rebels in operations to retake the city of Palma, which fell into the hands of jihadist groups after a bloody attack on March 24, the military said Sunday.

"It is not over yet (...) but a large number of terrorists have been killed," the commander of operations in Palma, Chongo Vidigal, told reporters.

Armed groups attacked the strategic port city 11 days ago in a well-prepared raid launched just a few kilometers from a multi-billion dollar gas mega-project run by French group Total.

In the devastated city of 75,000 people, the officer added that he could smell "the smell of the terrorists' corpses."

Images broadcast on local television showed bodies lying in the streets, houses in ruins and vehicles blown up. And also some civilians gathering food.

Sudan Rebel Group sign Agreement on Separation of Religion and State

Juba, South Sudan - The Sudanese government and a major rebel group from its southern Nuba Mountains on Sunday signed a document which paves the way for a final peace agreement by guaranteeing freedom of worship to all while separating religion and the state.

The signing is viewed as a crucial step in efforts by the power-sharing government headed by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan to reach accords with rebel groups across the country and end decades of conflicts that left millions displaced and hundreds of thousands dead.

Last year Sudan signed a peace agreement with many groups, including from the Western region of Darfur.

But a key faction of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement - North (SPLM-N) led by Abdelaziz al-Hilu, did not join in last year's agreement because it stuck to its demand that Sudan dispenses with sharia law and becomes a secular, democratic state.

The so-called 'Declaration of Principles' signed on Sunday in South Sudan's capital Juba between Sudan and the rebel faction means talks on a final accord can now begin.

The declaration stated that both sides agreed to "the establishment of a civil, democratic federal state in Sudan, wherein, the freedom of religion, the freedom of belief and religious practices and worship shall be guaranteed to all Sudanese people by separating the identities of culture, religion, ethnicity and religion from the state." "No religion shall be imposed on anyone and the state shall not adopt official religion," it said, without specifying that Sudan would become a secular state, a controversial issue in the country's transition.

After Sunday's signing, only one rebel group — a faction of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) — remains a major security challenge to the government in Khartoum.

CORONAVIRUS CASES – WORLDWIDE

<i>Data as of April 7, 2021; 15:20</i>	CASES	RECOVERED	DEATHS
	132.768.361	75.408.946	2.880.566

Nguyen Xuan Phuc elected president of Vietnam

Vietnam's National Assembly on Monday elected Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc as the country's head of state.

With 97.5 percent of votes in favor, the National Assembly of the Asian country adopted the resolution to elect Nguyen Xuan Phuc as the new Vietnamese leader.

The resolution approved by the legislative body takes effect from the moment it is approved by the National Assembly.

Bashkim Fino loses battle with coronavirus

The member of the parliament and former Albanian Prime Minister Bashkim Fino has died at the age of 59. Fino had contracted COVID-19 and for several days his condition was deteriorating dramatically.

Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama expressed his condolences for the untimely death of Bashkim Fino.

"Unbelievable, but unfortunately very true, my friend, our good friend Bashkim Fino, is no longer alive. I have no words", said Rama. Continuing, the Albanian Prime Minister noted that "today is a day of mourning for our large family; *"Our electoral activities will be stopped, in honor of the memory of our dear brother."*

Soviet version of "Lord of the Rings" reappears on YouTube after 30 years

In 1991, a television adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* titled *Khraniteli* was broadcast on Soviet television. By all accounts, it is the only adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* made in the Soviet Union, and was also thought to be lost forever. However, the Soviet telefilm has resurfaced on YouTube.

The low-budget production, broadcast 10 years before the release of the first installment of Peter Jackson's film trilogy, looks ripped from another era: the costumes and sets are rudimentary, the special effects are basic, and many of the scenes look more like a theatrical production than a feature film.

The production's music, by Andrei Romanov of the rock band *Akvarium*, gives the production a distinctly Soviet feel; no one is going to confuse this Lord of the Rings with Jackson's films.

After its 1991 broadcast on Leningrad Television, the adaptation was thought to have been lost, but it is now on YouTube, as *The Guardian* points out. Leningrad Television's successor, 5TV, posted the film on YouTube last week, where in just a few days it has garnered more than 800,000 views.

The Guardian also noted that this was not the first time Leningrad Television had adapted Tolkien: they also released an adaptation of *The Hobbit* in 1985.