

ERDOGAN URGES 'SLAP' FOR GERMAN RULING PARTIES

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday called on Turkish-origin Germans to give a "slap" to both parties in Chancellor Angela Merkel's ruling coalition in September polls, pressing on with what Berlin has condemned as unprecedented meddling. Erdogan has caused consternation in Berlin by urging ethnic Turks in Germany to vote neither for Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU), its coalition partner the Social Democratic Party (SPD) nor the Greens in the September 24 legislative polls.

Defiantly returning to the controversy for the

third consecutive day, Erdogan called on ethnic Turks living in Germany not to vote for parties who are "enemies of Turkey." "Be with those who are friendly to Turkey. Don't worry if it's a small party, give them your vote. They will then grow and get bigger." "In my opinion, those who attack Turkey in this way need to be dealt a slap in this election," Erdogan told ruling party activists in a televised speech in Istanbul.

He did not specify which parties the Turkish community in Germany should consider voting for. Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel, a senior member

of the SPD, had bitterly denounced Erdogan's calls as an "unprecedented act of interference" in Germany's sovereignty. This prompted the Turkish president the day earlier to tell Berlin's top diplomat to "know your limits" and question his political experience.

And Erdogan yesterday brushed off the criticism that he was meddling in the elections. "What are they saying now? They are saying 'he's interfering in our democracy'. But all we are saying is that our citizens should give the enemies of Turkey a lesson at the ballot box. That's all." The latest spat between

Ankara and Berlin risks propelling a months-long crisis in ties between two NATO allies with deep historic links to a new level.

Berlin has lambasted Ankara over the magnitude of the crackdown that followed last year's failed coup, which has seen several German citizens arrested, including journalists. Ankara meanwhile has accused Berlin of failing to extradite suspected Kurdish militants and coup plotters who have taken refuge in Germany. Analysts estimate that about 1.2 million people of Turkish origin will have the right to vote in the September elections. — AFP

CHRISTIAN TEEN IMPRISONED IN PAKISTAN OVER BLASPHEMY

LAHORE: A Christian teenager in Pakistan has been arrested and imprisoned for allegedly burning pages of the Holy Quran, officials said yesterday. The incident occurred in the central province of Punjab, with a local police official saying police had caught 18-year-old Asif Masih "red-handed." "On the night of August 12, police received a complaint that a Christian boy has been found burning pages of the holy Quran outside a shrine," Asghar Ali told AFP.

The incident was confirmed by another local police official, Pervaiz Iqbal, who is investigating the case. "When the police took the suspect into custody and brought him to a police check-post, a crowd of around 200 men gathered outside...demanding the culprit be handed over to them," Iqbal said. "We then secretly moved the culprit to the police station in Wazirabad where he was interrogated and confessed to his crime."

Massih was charged under section 295-B of Pakistan's penal code, added Iqbal, referring to a part of the country's constitution that makes the death sentence mandatory for anyone who damages or desecrates the Quran. He will stand trial and faces the possibility of being put to death. Blasphemy is a sensitive charge in the conservative Muslim country, where even unproven allegations can trigger mob lynchings and violence.

A Pakistani man was sentenced to death for committing blasphemy on Facebook in June. In May, a 10-year old boy was killed and five others were wounded when a mob attacked a police station in an attempt to lynch a Hindu man charged with blasphemy for allegedly posting an incendiary image on social media. At least 65 people have been murdered by vigilantes over blasphemy allegations since 1990. — AFP

FINLAND MARKS A MINUTE OF SILENCE FOR STABBING VICTIMS

HELSINKI: Finland observed a minute of silence yesterday for the victims of a stabbing attack that left two people dead in what is being investigated as the country's first-ever terror attack. Another eight people were wounded in the stabbing spree, which took place on Friday in the southwestern port city of Turku. At the market square where the attack happened, several hundred people gathered to hold a minute of silence at 10:00 am (0700 GMT).

Among the crowd were emergency workers, city officials and police who formed a ring around a makeshift memorial of candles and flowers, where Archbishop Kari Makinen, who heads Finland's Evangelical Lutheran Church, was also present. "Peace and Love - No Violence Finland" read one note next to a bouquet of flowers.

The bells of Turku Cathedral, the country's largest church, rang out for 15 minutes before falling silent as the crowd bowed its head to remember the victims. Also there was Hassan Zubier, a visiting British paramedic who was injured in the attack after coming to the aid of a woman who later died. He arrived directly from

hospital, attending the ceremony in a wheelchair. "I wanted to show my respect to the victims," he told Swedish daily Aftonbladet before returning to hospital for further treatment. Similar ceremonies were held across the country.

Women targeted

Finnish police said Saturday that an 18-year-old Moroccan asylum seeker deliberately targeted women in the attack. His motive was not yet known. All of the victims were women, including the dead, except for two men who tried to fend off the attacker. An Italian, a Swede and a Briton were among the injured. The suspect was shot and wounded by police minutes after he began his rampage on Friday afternoon.

The National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) said Sunday it was hoping to interrogate him later in the day. In hospital with a gunshot wound to the thigh, he has so far refused to speak to investigators. Police arrested four Moroccans linked to the suspect in a raid late Friday, but police said Sunday their involvement in the attack had "not yet been fully established." — AFP



TURKU: Hassan Zubier, injured in a mass stabbing as he attempted to help a stabbing victim, is pictured at the Turku Market Square. — AFP



NORCO: Buzz Riebschlager (R) who is a supporter of President Trump with his horse in the town of Norco. — AFP

IN CALIFORNIA HORSE COUNTRY, TRUMP VOTERS STILL STANDING BY THEIR MAN

'I LIKE HIS AGGRESSIVENESS, PEOPLE DON'T WALK ON HIM'

NORCO: In Norco, a California desert town an hour inland from Los Angeles, the joke is that there are as many horses as there are residents. And on a recent visit, it seemed there were almost as many Donald Trump supporters as there were horses. This community where riding trails are used as sidewalks, and rodeo events and gunslinging are favorite pastimes, is one of the most Republican in the deeply Democratic state.

And almost all Norco residents are standing by their candidate, even as he faces a storm of bipartisan criticism over his response to a violent white supremacist rally. "Look at all the jobs he's bringing, he's working on tax reform," said Skip Fischer, a 62-year-old contractor as he left the Saddle Sore Saloon, a Wild West-themed restaurant and bar. "I like his aggressiveness, people don't walk on him, that's what America needed." "I think he's gonna be the one that changes the world," said a young housewife who would not give her name.

Seven months after the wealthy businessman was sworn into office, Trump has seen his popularity plunge to 36 percent, according to a recent Washington Post-ABC News poll. And yet 61 percent of Trump supporters said they could not see the president doing anything that would make them disapprove of him, according to a Monmouth University poll.

Everyone interviewed by AFP in Norco applauded his reaction to the recent deadly violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, where several hundred neo-Nazis, white supremacists and other far-right extremists had gathered for a rally.

They clashed with counter-demonstrators and a young woman was killed by a neo-Nazi sympathizer who rammed his car into a crowd.

'They're all racists'

Trump has come under fire from Republicans and Democrats alike after he drew an equivalency between the far-right demonstrators and the counter-protesters, saying there were "very fine people on both sides." "I think his reaction was absolutely correct," Fischer said. "President Obama would come up and without any facts he'd say these guys were wrong, the police was wrong. President Trump waits until he has the facts."

Lana James, 70, who was running errands with her granddaughter, said the reaction to Trump's comments has been too extreme. "He certainly did mean to condemn the supremacists and he did," she said. "When you have two groups that are so radical, either to the left or to the right, there are hateful people and extreme on both sides." Mark Birdwell agreed with James' assessment.

"I think they're all wrong, everybody needs to take a big breath and relax," said the 48-year-old who works in industrial refrigeration. "I don't agree with Black Lives Matter, I don't agree with the KKK... they're all racists." For him and all the Norco residents who spoke with AFP, public statues of Confederate leaders who fought to preserve slavery during the US Civil War from 1861 to 1865 — should remain standing. "I had members of my family fighting on both sides during the Civil War, taking down symbols of the country is wrong, it's part of history," Birdwell said.

He's not alone—nearly two out of three Americans feel Confederate statues should remain in place.

Immigration 'problem'

Many in Norco are quick to echo Trump's own words on the topic, after he rhetorically questioned whether statues of early American presidents would have to come down too, since several were slave owners. "You had your presidents that had slaves, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, what are you gonna do? Get rid of their statues just because some people got their feelings hurt that this was in the past?" Fischer said.

Some African Americans say "we're still affected by slavery. Well, no, you're not. You're free now, you can do whatever you want," he added. Beyond Charlottesville, the fervent Trump supporter also approves of the president's war rhetoric aimed at the authoritarian regime of North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un. "Sometimes you have to be more aggressive instead of passive like Obama was, otherwise people take advantage of you," Fischer said.

Fellow Trump fan Buzz Riebschlager said he'd like to see more achievements in tax reform and in repealing Obamacare, the health care reforms that Republican lawmakers have been pledging to tear up for years. But on immigration, he's on the same page as the president. "If you don't live here, you shouldn't get a job. I'm not being racist," he said. "This is America, it's 2017, everybody's welcome here. The problem is when they come here and start doing bad things." — AFP

LEBANON ARMY ADVANCES AGAINST IS IN BORDER FIGHT

BEIRUT: Lebanese soldiers renewed fire on Islamic State group positions on the country's eastern border with Syria yesterday after capturing a third of the territory held by jihadists in the area. Lebanon's army began its operation in the Jurud Ras Baalbek and Jurud Al-Qaa region early on Saturday, and in the first day captured around 30 square kilometers of territory, a military spokesman said. "That is around a third of the area controlled by the terrorists," Brigadier General Nazih Jreij said late Saturday.

Jreij said 20 IS fighters had been killed in the clashes, and 10 Lebanese soldiers wounded. Lebanon's battle against IS comes as the jihadist group faces assaults in both neighboring Syria and Iraq, where the government early yesterday announced an offensive on the group's bastion of Tal Afar. The attack also comes after IS claimed several international attacks, including twin car ramming incidents in Spain that killed 14 people.

Lebanese soldiers raised the Spanish flag on a hilltop captured from IS on Saturday in a tribute to the victims of those attacks, the army said. Lebanon's military estimated around 600 IS fighters were present in the Jurud Ras Baalbek and Jurud Al-Qaa areas, controlling around 120 square kilometers of territory before Saturday's advances. Yesterday, Lebanon's National News Agency reported soldiers were firing heavy artillery and rockets at IS positions in Jurud Ras Baalbek.

Hezbollah campaign

The army's assault comes after Lebanon's powerful Shiite militant group Hezbollah

waged its own campaign against jihadists operating in another border area south of the current battle. The group's six-day offensive against IS and Al-Qaeda's former affiliate in the Jurud Aarsal area ended with a ceasefire. The agreement saw around 8,000 refugees and jihadists transported to a jihadist-held area of northwestern Syria in return for the release of five captured Hezbollah fighters.

Hezbollah said Saturday it had launched a simultaneous operation against IS from the Syrian side of the border, where the group's fighters are battling alongside President Bashar Al-Assad's army against rebels.



Syrian pro-government forces hold a position in the western Qalamoun yesterday during an offensive against Islamic State (IS) group fighters. — AFP

Lebanon's army denied any coordination with Hezbollah or the Syrian army. Hezbollah's War Media outlet said its fighters and the Syrian army had on Saturday "managed to liberate 87 square kilometers of the total area controlled by the Daesh (IS) organization... in western Qalamoun region" of Syria.

Security along Lebanon's eastern border with Syria has long been a concern, and in 2014 jihadists invaded the town of Aarsal and kidnapped 30 Lebanese soldiers and police. Four were executed by their captors while a fifth died of his wounds. Sixteen were released in a prisoner swap in December 2015, but another nine soldiers are believed

to remain in IS hands. It is not clear if they are alive or not.

Three more Lebanese soldiers were killed yesterday when a mine exploded under their vehicle in the east of the country along the border with Syria, the army said in a statement. The soldiers were en route to participate in an operation that began Saturday to oust Islamic State group militants from an area further north on the border, an army source told AFP. "An army vehicle was hit by a landmine on the Al-Najsa road roundabout in Jurud Aarsal at noon today, killing three soldiers and injuring one soldier seriously," the army said in a statement. — AFP

CONDOLENCES

The Owners, Management and Staff of



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extend our heartfelt condolences to **Mr Chirjeev Singh Bedi (CJ)** on the sad demise of his father, **Mr Harkanwel Singh Bedi** who passed away on **19th August 2017.**

May his soul rest in Peace