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## Focus

SOUTH AFRICA'S ANC  
SOUL-SEARCHES AFTER  
VOTE HEMORRHAGE

By Susan Njanji

The ruling African National Congress' historic losses in South Africa's local elections were called into question the leadership of President Jacob Zuma as head of the continent's most industrialized nation. The ANC last week suffered what analysts called a "savagely indictment", garnering less than 54 percent of ballots cast - an eight-point drop from the last local poll in 2011 and its worst showing since the fall of white-minority rule in 1994.

Of the country's six most populous cities, the ANC won an outright majority in only one: Durban, Zuma's traditional stronghold. But it suffered embarrassingly in the capital Pretoria where it came second to the main opposition Democratic Alliance, which also scored big in Nelson Mandela Bay, a southern municipality named after the country's iconic late leader. The election was largely seen as a referendum on Zuma's rule, but it also highlighted the declining popularity of the party that led South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle.

And as Mandela's party reels from weak leadership and political divisions, some in the ANC admit that all is not well. "There is something wrong on a national level that we are not paying attention to," the party's Secretary General Gwede Mantashe said at the weekend.

## 'Big Trouble'

Analysts say the party leadership has been stubborn in refusing to rein in its controversial president. Zuma, who has three more years to serve out his term, has been dogged by scandal throughout his presidency. Last month, South Africa's highest court ruled he pay back \$500,000 of public funds spent upgrading his private Nkandla residence with facilities including a chicken coop and a swimming pool. The ANC has staunchly defended him.

But after the poor showing at the polls, the party would be "much more open to a change of leadership than they would have been one week ago," said Richard Calland, a political analyst at the University of Cape Town. "Urgent steps must be taken (to) tackle the elephant in the room. It is clear that President Jacob Zuma has become a huge liability," wrote columnist Onkgopotse Tabane in the Business Day newspaper on Monday.

Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa - an anti-apartheid heavyweight - is the presumed frontrunner to replace Zuma should he be forced out before the end of his term. "Where we have shown areas of weakness, we are going to get better and improve - that's who we are," the unionist-turned-businessman said last week as the poor results poured in. Critics say urban and middle class voters have begun to tire of the continuous controversy surrounding 74-year-old Zuma, and warn of a serious backlash if the ANC fails to act fast. "The ANC is in big trouble," analyst Koffi Kouakou told AFP. "The only way to perhaps attempt to save the ANC is by having President Zuma resign and having the team that surrounds him cleaned up. If not, the ANC is in real big trouble in the long term."

But Zuma, who has thus far survived every curveball thrown his direction, may not be on his way out just yet. "I don't think he is likely to go without a fight," said Calland. "It's more likely he will survive until the end of next year," Calland said - when the ANC may vote to recall him at its next national elective congress.

In the meantime at least two rival ANC camps will start wrangling to succeed Zuma - one in support of Ramaphosa, and the other backing Zuma's ex-wife and outgoing chairwoman of the African Union Commission, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma. Meanwhile, "political uncertainty will drive continued policy confusion in the mining, energy, power, private security, and agriculture sectors, while frustrating cost-cutting measures," said EXX Africa. A downgrade of South Africa's debt by at least one credit ratings agency to junk status "is almost inevitable this year," the intelligence company warned. —AFP

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## ATATURK REVIVAL A SYMBOL OF FRAGILE UNITY

By Asli Kandemir and Daren Butler

After years of being gradually eclipsed as President Tayyip Erdogan forges a "new Turkey" with Islam firmly at its heart, the secular republic's founder Mustafa Kemal Ataturk has, for now at least, made a comeback in the wake of a failed coup. At a rally of more than a million people in Istanbul on Sunday, Erdogan drew a parallel between the spirit of the young officer who founded modern Turkey in 1923 and the civilians who took to the streets on July 15 to try to stop rogue soldiers in tanks and helicopters from seizing power.

"The belief that helped war veteran Mustafa Kemal start and win the war of independence was running through all Turkey's cities on July 15," Erdogan told the Istanbul rally, portraits of himself and Ataturk blowing in the breeze on either side of the huge stage. From a leader bent on raising a "pious generation", it seemed a major gesture of conciliation, an attempt to bridge a deep divide in Turkish society reaching back to 1923, when Ataturk forged the secular republic from the ruins of an Ottoman theocracy and banished Islam from public life.

Since the failed coup, Ataturk's portrait has been hung from the headquarters of the ruling AK Party, founded by Erdogan and rooted in political Islam, and its leaders have repeatedly invoked him - a revered figure for the country's secularists - as a symbol of unity. Kemal Kilicdaroglu, leader of the main opposition CHP, the party of Ataturk, told Sunday's rally a "door of compromise" had been opened in the nation of almost 80 million and that a new Turkey had been ushered in in the wake of the coup.

But for all the euphoria, sustaining such a spirit of cooperation would mean overcoming deep division over the direction of a nation with a secular constitution but overwhelmingly Muslim population. "This is a limited consensus. It's a very basic agreement that democracy is better than a military junta and that we all want justice. Nobody expects anyone to forget where they stood on July 14," said a senior government official.

Engin Altay, a senior CHP lawmaker, said the AK Party appeared to be invoking Ataturk to try to quell an atmosphere of "pessimism and panic" after the coup attempt and said it was

an open question whether the spirit of unity would last. "It depends on whether, after emerging from this trauma, the AK Party can adopt a compromise policy without becoming drunk on, or poisoned by, power. If it fails to do so and says 'we got power from the people and will do whatever we say', they will again slam the state against the wall," he told Reuters.

## 'Marriage of Convenience'

Erdogan has cautiously pushed a conservative Islamist agenda since the AKP came to power in 2002. Opponents see in his promotion of religious education, tighter laws on alcohol, and strictures on daily life an attempt to undermine the country's secular foundations. Ataturk's presence has gradually been felt less, having for decades loomed large, his piercing blue eyes staring from posters, his statue in pride of place in schools, public buildings and town squares. The CHP was in uproar in 2013 over the removal of his silhouette and the Turkish Republic abbreviation from state medals and some public buildings.

But the coup bid, which Erdogan says was staged by the followers of US-based Turkish cleric Fethullah Gulen, has provided a common enemy. Secularists loathe Gulen's religious movement, whose members have assumed prominent positions in the state bureaucracy, and are pleased to see it under attack. More than 60,000 people in the military, judiciary, civil service and education have been detained, suspended or placed under investigation over alleged links to Gulen since the coup.

The government may be forced as a result to work more with its secularist opponents, commonly known as Kemalists, as it replaces purged officials, particularly in the military, which for decades saw itself as the guardian of the secular order. "This requires the government to recalibrate its relations with Kemalism ... which it has demonized throughout its 14-year rule," said Gonul Tol, director of the Washington-based Middle East Institute's Center for Turkish Studies. "The military will have to accept working under an Islamist government while the government will have to respect the Kemalist core of the military," she said. "But I don't think this marriage of convenience will last. Once the government has enough loyal personnel ... the Kemalists will be discarded."

## Historic Opportunity

A return to the founding principles of the modern republic could help ease divisions in a country that has become increasingly polarised in recent years. But in Erdogan's references to Ataturk, some see political opportunism rather than a sincere attempt to bridge an ideological rift. "The switch is the result of strategic necessity rather than personal choice," said Deniz Ulke Aribogon, international relations professor at Istanbul University. "This brutal coup attempt created an opportunity for Erdogan to become the president of the whole country ... We have to wait and see what comes next," she said.

Erdogan's core supporters see him as the champion of the pious Anatolian masses, a strongman restoring religion to the center of public life after decades of rule by what they see as Western-facing Kemalist elites. He has been careful in his choice of words, referring to Ataturk simply as Mustafa Kemal, his name as a military officer when he led the Turkish National Movement to victory in the war of independence after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. Ataturk, "Father of the Turks", was bestowed on him a decade later, after he introduced reforms replacing Arabic with Latin script and promoting Western dress and women's rights. Some in conservative religious circles have already questioned the references to him, criticizing what they say legitimizes a secularist ideology they battled for decades. "All they've done is feed the idea that the ideology of Ataturk is the only foundation for legitimacy in politics and that other movements are illegitimate," wrote columnist Hakan Albayrak in the conservative Karar newspaper, criticizing those who hung Ataturk's image on the AKP building.

Parts of the crowd boomed as Kilicdaroglu spoke at Sunday's rally, dismissing his call that politics should now be kept out of the mosques, as well as the courthouses and barracks. His presence on the stage alongside Erdogan would have been unthinkable three weeks ago. It could yet cost the CHP some supporters, who remain suspicious of Erdogan's motivation. "I don't find this situation sincere at all. They can't even say the word Ataturk. For now, it suits them. If it suited them, tomorrow they would start insulting him," said Burcu Ural, a cafe owner in Istanbul's bohemian Beyoglu district. —Reuters

## HOLY COWS, HINDU CRUSADERS CLOUD MODI REFORM

By Rupam Jain and Tom Lasseter

Two miles down the road from the white marble walls of the fabled Taj Mahal, a heavyset man crouches in the dirt of a cow shed and explains how the future of India belongs to him. Digvijay Nath Tiwari is commander of a vigilante group that claims 5,000 members in the northern city of Agra, and which cultivates informants, swarms shop owners, ambushes trucks at night and metes out extra-judicial violence, all for one cause: Protecting the holy cow, an animal held sacred by Hindu beliefs.

Across the country, hardline Hindu groups have made headlines after being captured on video insulting and beating men they accuse of involvement in cow slaughter. "Retaliation is important at times," said Tiwari, as he sat with 17 men squeezed around a straw mat on the shed floor. His cell phone contained photographs of stick-wielding men rushing to the aid of fallen cattle. Local police say they cannot stop Tiwari's actions, laying the blame partly on lax laws. The "gau rakshaks", or cow protectors, are inflaming tensions among India's religions and castes. They risk undermining Prime Minister Narendra Modi's efforts to focus on economic advancement, even as the right-wing Hindu nationalist forces that got him elected promote their own agenda. The implications reach far beyond the winding alleyways of Agra. Social and religious stability are key to future assumptions of prosperity in India, currently the world's fastest expanding major economy.

"India will remain one of the strongest growth stories in the region," a Goldman Sachs strategist said in April, echoing the sentiment of many foreign investors. Yet such outlooks built on macro-analysis risk missing a ground

truth: If the rightwing groups empowered by Modi's rise do not stop antagonizing minorities, then the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) plans for nurturing that growth will not easily come to pass.

## Changing Focus

Cow slaughter is illegal in most of India, an overwhelmingly Hindu nation. However, it had long been tolerated under the Congress party, which ruled the country for most of its independent history and prides itself on protecting Muslims and lower castes who ply the meat and leather trade. Now the Hindu nationalist BJP is in power, and that is changing as vigilante groups gain prominence. And Modi, while saying he's concerned, has been either unwilling or unable to halt their more extreme actions.

The prime minister was trained and nurtured by hardline Hindu organizations that were instrumental in his rise from the son of a train station tea seller to leader of the world's biggest democracy. Once at the helm, however, he has focused on more pragmatic and inclusive economic issues: Spurring growth and creating enough jobs for a rapidly expanding workforce. These initiatives could be derailed by a narrower, Hindu nationalist agenda aimed at protecting symbols made sacrosanct by religious texts and countering a perceived threat of foreign influences.

In a speech on Saturday night in New Delhi, Modi lashed out at the cow protectors. "I feel so angry at times. Some people who are engaged in anti-social activities for the whole night wear the mask of 'gau rakshaks' in the day," he said. A senior aide to Modi, who is approaching the halfway mark of his five-year tenure, said at the end of July that while the leader is aware of the social and economic implications, "we cannot

do much to stop cow protection forces ... cow protection is integral to our core support base."

## Dalits Feel Under Siege

The violence of cow vigilante groups this year, some of it caught in disturbing videos on the Internet, has unsettled minority groups. One clip from the western state of Gujarat shows four men, shirtless, tied to a bumper being whipped with rods. The victims were Dalits, or Indians at the bottom of the caste hierarchy who traditionally take away cow carcasses which can then be used for leather. In another, from the northern state of Haryana, two people are made to sit on the road and eat a concoction including cow dung. They were reportedly Muslims, and the footage was taken during Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting.

While the BJP does not bank on the support of many Muslims, it does want to secure the votes of the Dalits, a caste formerly known as untouchables. Together, the two groups account for about 30 percent of India's population, a major consideration with important state elections due next year and a national ballot set for 2019. Chandra Bhan Prasad, a prominent Dalit writer and adviser to the Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, compared the violence to that of Ku Klux Klan racism in the United States. "It's like India's version of KKK - the past was great so long as these blacks were under our thumb, society was beautiful. So, how to control these Dalits?"

## 'Cow Not Just an Animal'

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the nation's umbrella rightwing Hindu organization which helped create the BJP, does not appear willing to tackle cow protection forces, blaming outlaws for causing the trouble. "The

cow is not just an animal. We have an emotional and religious attachment to it and we want to make it the center of our economic activity," said a senior RSS leader in New Delhi, who asked not to be named so he could speak more frankly. "Vigilantes are instructed to follow the rules and they are a disciplined force. We admire their work."

Champat Raj, a leader of the Hindu activist Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), or World Hindu Council, a group formed by RSS leadership which oversees cow groups, was more direct. "I am a cow patriot and want to free cows from the slavery of Muslim butchers," he said. "It's better we shed our blood to save the blood of cows." In Agra, some 220 km, south of New Delhi, there has already been bloodshed, and the threat of more to come.

One prominent Dalit businessmen in the city, H K Pippal, said recently at his shoe factory that he had a plan should the cow protection gang try to interfere with his operations and the cow leather it uses. "I am very powerful, my workers could kill them." Tiwari, the cow group leader, blames the butchers for much of the problem. "It's not just that the butchers get beaten," he said. "They attack us and threaten to kill us. It is a serious clash." Tiwari acknowledged having four criminal cases pending against him, but said he was innocent in all of them.

In February this year, the vice president of the VHP in Agra, who was also a senior member of Tiwari's group, was surrounded by a group of five Muslims while walking from a temple to his furniture shop, according to a police report. The men had previously been targeted by the cow protectors for allegedly dealing in beef, according to Tiwari. One of them boasted: "You think that you are a big leader, we'll teach you a lesson today," said the police report. —Reuters