

Indonesia's Widodo set for re-election

Unofficial results put the incumbent in a comfortable lead over his rival, ex-General Prabowo Subianto

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
JAKARTA

Indonesia's Joko Widodo was on track to be re-elected leader of the world's third-biggest democracy as unofficial results put him in a comfortable lead over firebrand ex-General Prabowo Subianto after voting closed on Wednesday across the 17,000-island archipelago.

While official results are not due until next month, a series of so-called "quick counts" by pollsters showed Mr. Widodo as much as 11 percentage points ahead.

The vote ended at 1.00 p.m. local time, but some of the more than 8,000,000 polling stations across the volcano-dotted nation remained open late due to delays and long queues.

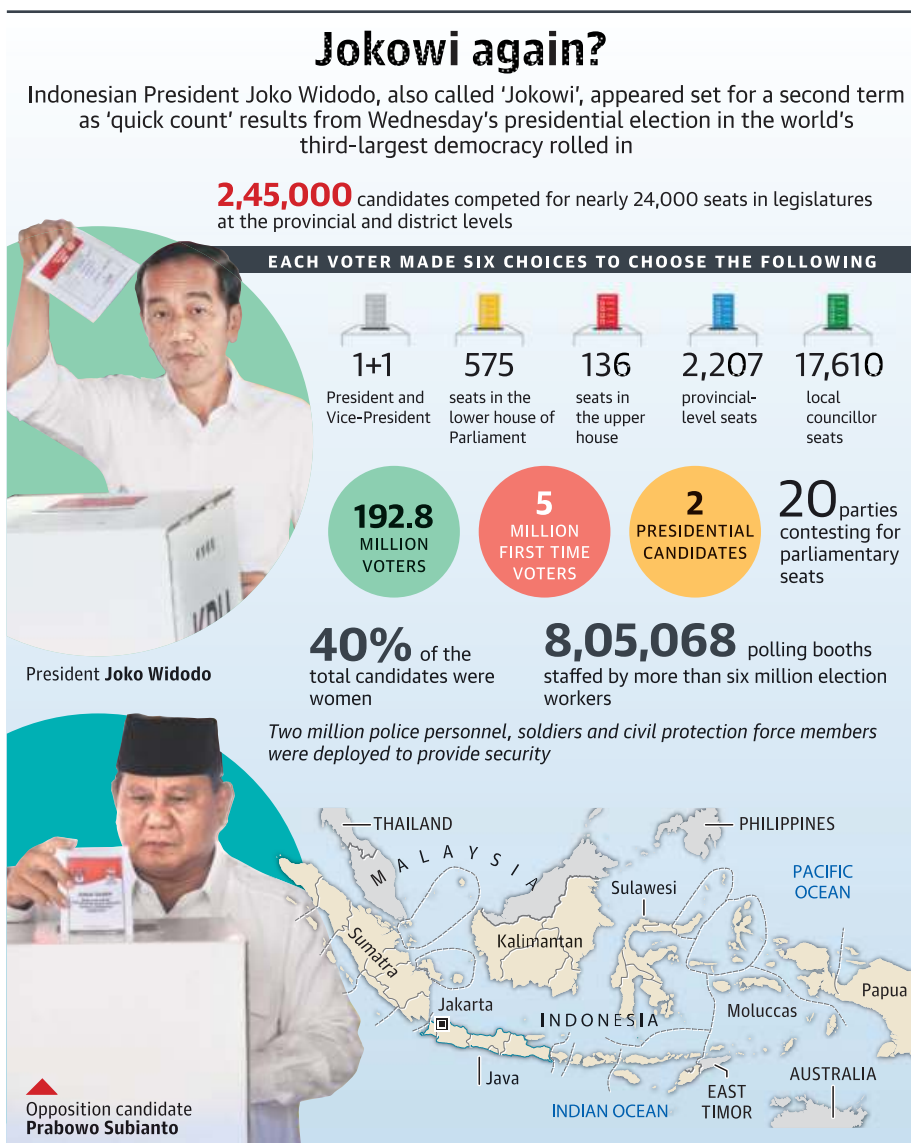
The quick counts have been reliable indicators in past elections, but Mr. Widodo held off declaring victory — while his rival insisted he had won. "We've all seen exit poll and quick count numbers, but we still need to wait for the official results," Mr. Widodo told cheering supporters in Jakarta.

Mr. Subianto — who warned of street protests and legal challenges if he lost — insisted that he was Indonesia's next leader, without citing specific evidence.

"We will not use illegal tactics because we have won," Mr. Subianto said. "For those who defended (my rivals), I'm still going to defend you. I'm the President of all Indonesians."

Mr. Subianto, who has long had his eye on the country's top job, lost to Mr. Widodo in 2014 and then mounted an unsuccessful legal challenge to the election.

This year's campaign was punctuated by bitter mudslinging and a slew of fake news online — much of it di-



rected at the presidential contenders.

"I hope after this that there will be a call for reconciliation because... we've been living in a very polarised atmosphere," political analyst Gun Gun Heryanto told Kompas TV.

Papua to Sumatra

From the jungles of Borneo to the slums of Jakarta, Wednesday saw millions of Indonesians cast their ballots in

one of the world's biggest exercises in democracy.

Horses, elephants, motorbikes, boats and planes were pressed into service to get ballot boxes out across the vast country that is home to hundreds of ethnic groups and languages.

The call to prayer had rang out as voting began at first light in restive Papua province in the east of the 4,800 km-long Muslim majority nation.

Leading in pre-vote polls, Mr. Widodo, 57, pointed to his ambitious drive to build much-needed roads, airports and other infrastructure across Southeast Asia's largest economy.

But Mr. Widodo — a political outsider with an everyman personality when he swept to victory in 2014 — has seen his rights record criticised owing to an uptick in discriminatory attacks on religious and other minori-

ties. His choice of conservative cleric Ma'ruf Amin as his running mate also raised fears about the future of Indonesia's reputation for moderate Islam.

'Indonesia first'

The soft-spoken Mr. Widodo stood in stark contrast to fiery nationalist rival Mr. Subianto, a strongman who courted Islamic hardliners and promised a boost to military and defence spending.

Echoing U.S. President Donald Trump, Mr. Subianto, 67, vowed to put "Indonesia first" by reviewing billions of dollars in Chinese investment.

His presidential ambitions, however, have been dogged by a chequered past and strong ties to the Suharto dictatorship, which collapsed two decades ago and opened the door for what is now a flourishing democracy.

Mr. Subianto, who moved to soften his strongman image with an Instagram account featuring his cat Bobby, ordered the abduction of democracy activists as the authoritarian regime collapsed in 1998, and was accused of committing atrocities in East Timor.

A record 2,45,000 candidates ran for public office, from the presidency and parliamentary seats to local positions — the first time all were held on the same day.

Voters punched holes in ballots — to make clear their candidate choice — and then dipped a finger in Muslim-approved halal ink, to prevent double-voting in a graft-riddled country where ballot-buying is rife.

About two million military and civil protection force members were deployed to ensure the vote went smoothly.

Trump vetoes Bill to end U.S. support for Yemen war

The resolution is an attempt to weaken my power: President

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump on Tuesday vetoed a resolution from Congress directing him to end U.S. support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen, the second such move of his presidency.

The resolution was a harsh bipartisan rebuke to Mr. Trump that took the historic step of curtailing a President's war-making powers — a step he condemned in a statement announcing his veto. "This resolution is an unnecessary, dangerous attempt to weaken my constitutional authorities, endangering the lives of American citizens and brave service

members, both today and in the future," Mr. Trump said.

The veto was the second of his presidency, after he overrode a congressional resolution that aimed to reverse the border emergency he declared in order to secure more funding for his wall between the United States and Mexico in March.

Green light

Vetoing the measure is an "effective green light for the war strategy that has created the world's worst humanitarian crisis to continue," said International Rescue Committee president and CEO David Miliband.

"Yemen is at a breaking

point with 10 million people on the brink of famine. There are as many as 100 civilian casualties per week, and Yemenis are more likely to be killed at home than in any other structure."

Mr. Trump argued that U.S. support for the bloody war between the Saudi-backed Yemeni government and Iran-aligned Houthi rebels was necessary for a variety of reasons, "first and foremost" to "protect the safety of the more than 80,000 Americans who reside in certain coalition countries."

These countries "have been subject to Houthi attacks from Yemen," he said.

Position on Masood Azhar remains unchanged, says China

Official says issue should be resolved through consensus

ATUL ANEJA
BEIJING

China on Wednesday said it was not facing any deadline to take a call on designating Masood Azhar, head of the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) terror group, as an international terrorist.

In response to a question on listing Azhar, Lu Kang, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, said: "On the issue of the listing of Masood Azhar, China's position remains unchanged. We are also having communication with relevant parties and the matter is moving towards the direction of settlement" in the UN 1267 committee.

China has been sticking to its position that the issue of listing Azhar is the preroga-



China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang. •AFP

nating Azhar following the February 14 Pulwama attack in which more than 40 CRPF personnel were killed. The JeM had taken responsibility for the attack.

Rules of procedures

India had expressed disappointment over China's move.

Asked whether China had been given an April 23 deadline by the U.S., France and Britain to lift its hold on listing Azhar, Mr. Lu said: "I don't know from where you get such information, but the Security Council and its subsidiary bodies like the 1267 committee, they have clear rules of procedures and you have to seek clarification from those sources."

tive of the 1267 committee and has rejected a parallel initiative by the U.S., France and Britain seeking a vote on banning Azhar in the Security Council plenary.

Last month, China placed a "technical hold" on desig-

ELSEWHERE



Myanmar pardons 9,500, but not jailed journalists

YANGON
Myanmar started releasing more than 9,500 prisoners on Wednesday as part of its annual amnesty marking the country's traditional new year, but Reuters journalists Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, in picture, will not be included, said an NGO working for political prisoners. President Win Myint announced on Wednesday that the pardons were granted on humanitarian grounds. •AFP

EU unveils tariffs over U.S. subsidies to Boeing

BRUSSELS
The EU on Wednesday unveiled a wide-ranging list of U.S.-made goods, from beeswax to car parts, subject to tariffs in retaliation for subsidies to Boeing as a trade war risked re-erupting. Europe's \$12 billion claim against Boeing comes on the trail of a similar demand by the U.S. for \$11 billion in compensation for EU subsidies towards Airbus. •AFP

Taliban derides gov't's plan to send 250 officials

KABUL
An upcoming conference between Afghan representatives and the Taliban appeared to be in trouble on Wednesday even before it begins, with the militants deriding Kabul's plan to send 250 delegates — several of whom have already dropped out. •AFP

Opposition candidate declared Istanbul Mayor

İmamoğlu had a narrow victory

REUTERS
ISTANBUL

Turkey's main Opposition candidate was declared Istanbul's Mayor on Wednesday after election recounts were finally completed, despite an appeal still pending by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's AK Party to re-run the vote in the country's largest city.

Initial results from the March 31 local elections gave a narrow victory to the main Opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) in Turkey's commercial hub, ending 25 years of control by the AK Party (AKP) and its Islamist predecessors.

New CHP Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu was handed a paper, mounted in a gold frame, which formally granted his mandate as city Mayor in a ceremony at an Istanbul court which was surrounded by a throng of supporters. The loss is especially hard for Mr. Erdoğan, who launched his political career in Istanbul as Mayor in the 1990s.

On Tuesday, after 16 days of appeals and recounts, the AKP asked the High Election Board to annul and re-run the election over what it said were irregularities. Its allies made a similar request on Wednesday.

Bashir moved from residence to Khartoum's Kobar prison

Military government announces steps to tackle corruption

REUTERS
KHARTOUM

Deposed ex-Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir has been moved to Khartoum's grim high-security Kobar prison from the presidential residence, family sources said on Wednesday, and transitional military rulers announced steps to crack down on corruption.

Demand for civilian rule
Sudan's military ousted Mr. Bashir after weeks of mass protests that climaxed in a sit-in outside the Defence Ministry compound. Protests are continuing



Sudan's ex-President Omar al-Bashir. •AFP

and their leaders say the unrest will not cease until the ruling Transitional Military Council (TMC) hands power

to a civilian-led authority ahead of elections. In initial moves to tackle graft, the TMC ordered the central bank to review financial transfers since April 1 and to seize "suspect" funds, state news agency SUNA said on Wednesday.

Mr. Bashir, 75, had been detained under heavy guard in the presidential residence inside the compound that also houses the Defence Ministry, before being transferred to Kobar prison late on Tuesday, the family sources said. He was being held in solitary confinement at Kobar, a prison source said.

France launches global contest to replace Notre-Dame spire

Not having a new spire at all is an option, says PM

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS

France on Wednesday announced it would invite architects from around the world to submit designs for replacing the spire of Notre-Dame Cathedral after a devastating blaze, as the government braced for a mammoth restoration challenge.

Prime Minister Edouard Philippe said the contest would decide whether the monument should have a new spire at all and if so,

whether it should be identical to the fallen 19th-century model or be a wholly new design.

The world looked on in horror on Monday as flames engulfed the 850-year-old gothic masterpiece seen as encapsulating the soul of Paris and the spire came crashing down.

Explaining that having no new spire at all was an option, Mr. Philippe noted that Notre-Dame had been without a steeple for part of its history. "The international contest will settle the question of whether we should build a new spire, whether we should rebuild the spire



A damaged section of the Notre-Dame Cathedral. •REUTERS

that was designed and built by (Eugene) Viollet-Le-Duc, in identical fashion, or whether we should... endow Notre-Dame cathedral with a new spire adapted to the

techniques and the challenges of our era."

Mr. Philippe described the task of rebuilding it as "a huge challenge and historic responsibility", a day after

President Emmanuel Macron said the entire restoration should be completed in just five years.

The bells of French cathedrals were to ring out at 1650 GMT on Wednesday to mark the exact moment when the fire started on Monday. Mr. Macron had vowed to rebuild the iconic monument, the real star of Victor Hugo's *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, by 2024 when France hosts the summer Olympics. "We can do it," he said on Tuesday, calling France "a nation of builders."

No sooner had firefighters extinguished the flames than pledges of donations to

wards restoring France's best-loved monument, which attracted 12 million visitors in 2018, began to pour in.

Within 24 hours, the pledges had reached more than €800 million (\$900 million), with French business magnates and corporations jostling to outshine each other with displays of generosity.

In a sign of the monument's resilience, the copper rooster that topped its spire was found on Tuesday in the rubble of the roof, "battered but apparently restorable" according to a spokesperson for the Culture Ministry.

Hearing in trial of Saudi women adjourned

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
RIYADH

A Saudi court on Wednesday postponed a hearing in the trial of 11 women activists which has drawn international censure, officials said, just days after campaigners reported a new crackdown on their supporters.

"We learn that the #WomensRightsDefenders trial did not take place today, for reasons that are not known," ALQST, a London-based human rights group focussed on Saudi Arabia, said on Twitter.