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ERDOGAN TAKES EARLY LEAD IN TURKEY'S KNIFE-EDGE VOTE

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan took an early lead on Sunday in a landmark election that could extend his two-decade grip on power or put the mostly Muslim nation on a more secular course.

The Anadolu state news agency showed the 69-year-old picking up more than 51% of the vote and his secular rival Kemal Kilicdaroglu trailing with nearly 43%.

But Anadolu's figures were based on around 60% of the ballots and Mr. Kilicdaroglu claimed that his party's own vote count showed him winning. "We are leading," Mr. Kilicdaroglu tweeted after Anadolu's results started coming out.

Most of Anadolu's early votes appeared to be coming from heavily pro-government districts and Mr. Erdogan's lead was shrinking as the number of counted ballots grew.

"We are seeing a positive picture, according to our data," Opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) spokesperson Faik Oztrak told reporters. A separate count reported by the pro-opposition Anka news site showed the two leaders locked in a dead heat and falling just short of the 50% threshold needed to avoid a May 28 run-off.

Most pre-election polls showed 74-year-old Opposition leader Mr. Kilicdaroglu enjoying a slight advantage over Mr. Erdogan.

Huge turnout

Turnout was expected to be huge in what has effectively become a referendum on Turkey's longest-serving leader and his Islamic-rooted party.

Mr. Erdogan has steered the nation of 85 million through one of its most transformative and divisive eras in the post-Ottoman state's 100-year history.

Turkey has grown into a military and geopolitical heavyweight that plays roles in conflicts from Syria to Ukraine.

The NATO member's footprint in both Europe and the Middle East makes the election's outcome as critical for Washington and Brussels as it is for Damascus and Moscow.

Mr. Erdogan is lionised across swathes of conservative Turkey that



Pivotal turn: Supporters of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan waiting eagerly for the results, in Ankara on Sunday. AFP

The incumbent President has steered the nation through one of its most transformative eras in the post-Ottoman state's 100-year history; he is lionised across swathes of conservative Turkey

witnessed a development boom during his rule.

More religious voters are also grateful for his decision to lift secular-era restrictions on headscarves and introduce more Islamic schools.

The emergence of Mr. Kilicdaroglu gives foreign allies and Turkish voters a clear alternative.

THE NUTRITIONAL VALUE OF MILLETS



In abundance: A farmer swats away preying birds around a millet farm at Moinabad in Telangana on the outskirts of Hyderabad on April 22. NAGARA GOPAL

Why are millets popular sources of nutrition? What are the different parts of a millet kernel? How are nutrients in millets affected by processing and polishing? Can millets thrive in harsh, resource-poor conditions?

EXPLAINER

The story so far:

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has declared 2023 to be the 'International Year of Millets', giving these crops a shot in the arm even as countries worldwide are looking to them for their ability to grow in environmental conditions that the climate crisis is rendering more common. Millets are becoming more popular in India as well because of their low input requirements and high nutritional density, both of which are valuable for a country whose food security is expected to face significant challenges in the coming decades. However, the consumption of millets face one threat that has already overtaken India's major food crops — grain-processing.

What are millets?

Millets are fundamentally grasses. They are cultivated worldwide, but especially in the tropical parts of Africa and Asia, as cereal crops. Some of the more common varieties include pearl millet (*Cenchrus americanus*), barnyard millet (*Echinochloa utilis*), finger millet (*Eleusine coracana*), and foxtail millet (*Setaria italica*).

There is both palaeontological and textual evidence to indicate that millets were being cultivated in the Indian subcontinent five millennia ago. According to the Agricultural and Processed Foods Development Authority, India is the world's largest producer of millets. In 2021-2022, the country accounted for 40.51% of the world's pearl millet production and 8.09% of sorghum. Within the country, pearl millet made up 60% of all the millet production, sorghum 27%, and ragi 11%.

Sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*), adlay millet (*Coix lacryma-jobi*), and teff

(*Eragrostis tef*), among others, are grasses that differ in some respects from millets but are grouped together with them.

Why are they sought after?

Millets have two broad features that render them attractive — their nutritional value being comparable to that of major extant food crops (and better on some counts) and their ability to reliably withstand harsh, resource-poor conditions.

They are drought-tolerant, adapted to growing in warm weather, and require low moisture (axiomatically, they are particularly efficient consumers of water) and loamy soil. They don't grow well in water-logged or extremely dry soil which might occur after heavy rainfall or particularly bad droughts, respectively. Nonetheless, millets have the upper hand over crops like rice and maize with more drought-like conditions expected in many parts of the world, including the newly realised prospect of 'flash droughts'. That being said, millets don't abhor better growing conditions, and respond positively to higher moisture and nutrient content in the soil.

According to the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, millets also "thrive on marginal land in upland and hilly regions"; marginal land is land whose rent is higher than the value of crops that can be cultivated there.

Are millets nutritious?

The nutritional content of millets include carbohydrates, proteins, fibre, amino acids, and various minerals. Different millet varieties have different nutrient profiles. For example, pearl millet — one of the oldest cultivated varieties — has been found to have higher protein content than rice, maize, and sorghum, while being comparable to that of barley. According to various studies, foxtail millet is rich in the amino acid lysine; finger millet has more crude fibre than wheat and rice; proso millet has a significant amount of the amino acids leucine, isoleucine, and methionine; and overall, millets have been found to be important sources of micronutrients and phytochemicals.

Where are the nutrients stored?

According to a paper published in 2021 in the journal *Agriculture & Food Security*, each millet kernel consists of three major parts, called pericarp, endosperm, and germ. The pericarp has an outer covering called the husk. The husk and the pericarp together protect the kernel from inhospitable conditions, disease, and physical damage.

The endosperm is the largest part of the kernel and its 'storage' centre. It has a protein covering called the aleurone. According to an FAO article about sorghum, the endosperm is "relatively poor in mineral matter, ash and oil content" but "a major contributor to the kernel's protein (80%), starch (94%) and B-complex vitamins (50-75%)". Similarly, pearl millet has a relatively larger germ, which is "rich in oil (32%), protein (19%) and ash (10.4%)," plus "over 72% of the total mineral matter".

This is why, according to various experts, millets deserve to be included in people's diets. But whether they're actually included depends on the availability of "delicious products to satisfy the taste, providing knowledge on nutritional and health facts on millets, and improving accessibility," as per a 2021

study.

How does processing affect the nutrients?

Processing and preparing millets for consumption can affect nutrients in three ways — enhance them, suppress/remove them, and ignore them. In this context, 'whole grain' refers to the endosperm, germ, and bran (pericarp + aleurone) whereas 'refined grain' refers only to the endosperm.

The husk is removed from the grains because it is composed of cellulosic matter that the human body cannot digest. But at least one study has found that when this is done to pearl millets, their phytic acid and polyphenol contents drop. (On the other hand, a paper published in 2021 found that millet husk could be briquetted and used as household fuel, and potentially alleviate energy poverty in north Nigeria.)

The second common step is to decorticate the grain, that is, remove any other outer covering and expose the seed. While studies have found that mechanical and hand-worked decortication did not have significant effects on the grain, they both removed crude and dietary fibre. But decortication also makes the grain more edible and visually attractive, which are favourable factors when marketing them to urban centres.

The typical next steps are milling, to grind the grains into flour, and sieving to remove large 'impurities', including bran. One 2012 study of finger millet found that whole-flour had a high content of "total polyphenols and flavonoids" while sieving made the flour more digestible and its nutrients more accessible to the body. However, it also reduced nutrient content due to the loss of bran.

On the other hand, according to the February 2022 study, germination and fermentation — in which the grains are soaked in water for an extended duration — "showed a positive improvement in the overall nutritional characteristics of millets".

What is the effect of polishing?

A frequent last step is polishing.

The longer the grains were milled, the more protein, fat, and fibre contents the process removed. A different 2012 study found that barnyard millet could be polished with a rice polisher for up to three minutes without significant nutrient loss. Polishing is the process whereby brown rice, for example, is changed to white rice by rubbing off the bran and the germ.

A 2012 study in the *Journal of Cereal Science* assessed the effects of polishing in the nutritive value of two major Asian rice varieties — indica and japonica. Using a combination of precision abrasive polishing, plasma mass spectrometry, and fluorescence microscopy, they found that polishing removed 8-10% of grain weight and also removed 60-80% of iron, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, and manganese in both varieties. The loss of bran also compromised the grains' fibre content. Yet rice polishing is considered desirable because, as per a 2009 study, most consumers favour the resulting taste and texture and prefer the shorter cooking time, and retailers want longer shelf-life, which can be achieved by removing the bran.

THIS STRATEGIC-ECONOMIC BLOC WILL ONLY TIGHTEN THE LEASH

In November 2019, India walked out from the trade pact called the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) involving China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and the 10-state Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) grouping. Fast forward to 2023, and now India along with many of the same countries, but with China replaced by the United States, is getting into the U.S.-driven Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF). The obvious questions are: what has changed? And how are the two economic partnership frameworks different?

The devil and deep sea

The one clear difference is of China versus the U.S. Developing a strategic partnership with the U.S. is India's top foreign policy priority. Its relationship with China has, meanwhile, further deteriorated. But a strategic partnership with the U.S. need not come at the cost of economic dependency on it. With China, the big economic fear was any trade deal's impact on India's manufacturing sector; of cheap Chinese goods flooding Indian markets. But the economic issues with the U.S. have been no less problematic, e.g. about agriculture, intellectual property, labour and environment standards, and the digital economy. Strategic partnership should not mean accepting a completely U.S. self-interest-driven economic framework that does not suit India's current economic interests.

Traditionally, trade deals used to be mostly about tariffs. Increasingly though, issues related to intellectual property, services, investment, domestic regulation, digital, and labour and environmental standards, are becoming more important. The U.S.'s IPEF proposal completely removes the tariff element of typical trade deals, and is entirely about all these other areas. In any case, traditional trade deals in the U.S. face likely roadblocks in the legislature. The U.S. has also found a tariffs-free trade deal, presented as a new kind of win-win economic partnership, as a good way to get around the resistance of many countries, including India, to free trade agreements, as they used to be called.

However, the IPEF's 'new age' language itself is the biggest trap. It knits vaguely-worded webs that are not obvious in their actual economic impact, other than to U.S. strategists who created the proposals. Early assessment by many experts shows that the IPEF would result in a complete stranglehold over the economic systems of the participating countries, in a manner that is to the complete advantage of the U.S. The IPEF is really about developing a strategic-economic bloc — an integrated economic system centred on the U.S., and, as importantly, excluding China. The systemic integration caused by the IPEF's actual long-term impact will leave little leeway for domestic policies to help a country's own industrialisation (for example through tight supply chain integration that many elements of the IPEF contribute to).

A trade deal googly

Developing country trade negotiators are used to the traditional language of free trade agreements. Having honed their skills looking for problems in them, they find it quite difficult to understand and respond to the sophistry that the IPEF's innocent-sounding text is filled with. This is especially so given that the IPEF is proposed to be concluded by November 2023, and when real engagements only began late last year. Traditional free trade agreements are much more focused but still take years to conclude. The supposed innocence of the relatively high-level language of the IPEF is being used as an excuse to rush it through. However, this is precisely the kind of language that will unsuspectingly trap countries in economy-wide permanent commitments, with domestic policy making space considerably compromised, but whose real implications will only become obvious by and by.

The IPEF has four pillars: trade, supply chains, clean economy, and fair economy. Fearful of a possible trap, India has joined the other three pillars but not trade. But there is great pressure on it to join trade too, and India could relent.

Joining the trade pillar is the worst, but the other pillars too contribute to developing hard new economic architectures and structures that are not tariff-based.

In the long run, that could have an even stronger effect on economic and trade flows than tariffs. In the digital arena it is said that 'code is law, and architecture is policy'. In an increasingly digitalising world, hard-wiring supply chains and giving up policy spaces in key areas such as digital, labour and environment, and export constraints, would take the form of a gilded techno-legal cage of irreversible economic dependency. Does a strategic partnership with the U.S. need to come at such a price?

The IPEF can already be seen to have deep implications in agriculture, in terms of genetically modified seeds and food, surrendering policy space for regulating Big Tech, and compromising a comparative advantage in manufacturing because of unfair labour and environment standards. It will also seriously affect India's ability to create a vibrant domestic ecosystem in emerging areas such as a digital economy and green products.

STATISTICAL SUCCOUR

Policymakers cannot afford to drop their guard on inflation

The reading for retail inflation braked sharply last month to an 18-month low of 4.7%, aided in no small measure by the fact that price gains had hit an eight-year high of 7.8% in April 2022. While at the headline level inflation cooled by 96 basis points from March's 5.66%, the month-on-month price gains based on the provisional Consumer Price Index (CPI) in April showed a quickening to 0.51%, from the 0.23% pace in March. Inflation also slowed in April on the back of a year-on-year softening in food price gains with the Consumer Food Price Index easing almost lockstep with the broader index — the reading slid 95 basis points from the previous month's 4.79%, to 3.84%. Oils and fats were a vital contributor, with a deflation in prices widening to 12.3% last month, from 7.86% in March. Also, inflation in cereals, which has the highest weight of almost 10% in the CPI, slowed by 160 basis points to 13.7%, from 15.3% in the preceding month.

However, a closer look shows price gains accelerated sequentially in nine of the 12 subgroups of the food and beverages category that contributes almost 46% weight in the CPI basket. While vegetable prices remained in deflationary territory when compared with a year earlier, they registered 1.7%

month-on-month inflation. And prices of fruits surged almost 4% from March's levels, even as year-on-year the price gains were half that pace at 2.1%. Of concern is that prices of pulses and products as well as sugar and confectionery showed accelerations in both year-on-year and month-on-month inflation rates. With the domestic output of pulses weaker in the current crop year, the Centre has already moved to tighten its monitoring of tur and urad dal stocks held by traders, so as to head off any attempts to hoard and push up prices. It is also reportedly mulling more export curbs on sugar amid a production shortfall. To be sure, besides the Centre's supply side measures, last year's base effect is bound to ensure that headline retail inflation is unlikely to go back above the Reserve Bank of India's upper tolerance threshold of 6%, at least during the current quarter. Still, there is no room for complacency. As Jayanth Varma, a member on the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee, flagged last month, there still loom two major risks to the inflation outlook — oil prices and uncertainty on the monsoon. The heightening prospect of an El Niño forebodes the possibility of erratic or even significantly deficient rainfall impacting foodgrains production, and policymakers can ill afford to drop their guard on inflation.



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