

A bus with 56 passengers on board swerved off a mountain road and plunged into a deep ravine in the Himalayan region of northern India, killing at least 44 people, an official said Wednesday.



A supporter of the 'No' vote, holds a Turkish flag during a protest regarding Sunday's referendum outcome, on the Aegean Sea city of Izmir, Turkey, Tuesday, April 18, 2017. EMRE TAZEGUL/AP

Party: Turkey detains leftist activists after 'No' protests

Istanbul police Wednesday detained several leftist activists involved in demonstrations against the 'Yes' victory in the referendum on expanding President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's powers, a party and reports said.

There have been daily street protests in anti-Erdogan neighborhoods in Istanbul after last Sunday's referendum, which the opposition claims was marred by blatant violations, AFP reported.

The Freedom and Solidarity Party (ODP), a left-wing movement not represented in Parliament, said police had detained its Istanbul chairman Mesut Gecegel early Wednesday on accusations of "agitating the public" by claiming the 'Yes' vote was illegitimate.

Gecegel had himself written on Twitter that he was being detained for protesting against the 'Yes' victory.

The leftist BirGun daily and opposition T24 website said at least five activists had been detained so far while arrest warrants had been issued for a total of 38 people.

Those detained were reportedly being questioned at police headquarters in central Istanbul.

There was no immediate confirmation of the detentions by the police.

Warning against street protests

Speaking in Ankara earlier on Wednesday, Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said the issue of the election result was closed and warned against street protests.

"Turkey is a state of law... and there can be no talk of anarchy, activities in the street," he said.

"I call on people not to give in to provocations or get caught up in incitement," he added.

The 'Yes' camp won Sunday's poll with just 51.41 percent of the vote.

But the main opposition Republican People's Party has formally requested that the Supreme Election Board (YSK) cancel the result due to alleged violations.

The opposition is particularly incensed by a last-minute move by the YSK to accept ballot documents in envelopes without an official stamp.

Pollsters: Governor loses Jakarta runoff

Jakarta's Christian governor on Wednesday lost heavily to a Muslim former government minister in an election runoff, private polls indicated.

Anies Baswedan and his supporters cheered as news came through that surveys showed him winning by over 10 percentage points against Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, who was fighting for his job while standing trial for blasphemy, AFP reported.

Official results are not expected until early May but the private pollsters, who count a sample of votes, are usually accurate.

Baswedan, a former education minister, thanked Jakarta's voters for supporting him and hinted that he would move to heal the divisions in the capital after the bitter poll, if his victory was confirmed.

"We celebrate diversity... We are all ready to work together again," the 47-year-old said.

Purnama, the city's first non-Muslim governor for half a century and its first ethnic Chinese leader, congratulated Baswedan and his running mate, adding: "We are all the

same, we want a good Jakarta, because it is our home."

The governor — known by his nickname Ahok — lost a once-unassailable lead after a controversy erupted last year over charges that he had insulted Islam, a grave charge in Indonesia.

He is facing blasphemy charges for having recited a verse from the Holy Qur'an to accuse his oppo-

to insult Muslims.

He won in the election's first round in February but Baswedan was seen as the favorite in the runoff because the votes from a third, Muslim candidate who was knocked out were expected to go to him.

Opinion polls in the run-up to the vote indicated that the race was neck and neck but in the event Baswedan strongly defeated Purnama, the pollsters indicated.

They showed him with about 57 percent to Purnama on 43 percent.

More than 7.2 million people were registered to vote in the polls, which are also important as politicians view them as a potential stepping stone to the presidency in 2019.

Purnama's long-running blasphemy trial began in December. Prosecutors are due to recommend a sentence

on Thursday, and a verdict is expected within weeks.

Many voters still supported Purnama due to his performance as governor since 2014.

He had won praise for cleaning up once-filthy rivers and creating more green spaces, although his acerbic style had upset some.



AFP

nents of using the holy book to turn voters against him in November 2016.

The move drew hundreds of thousands of Muslims onto the streets of Jakarta in major protests, and led to Purnama being put on trial for blasphemy.

Purnama has denied an intention

Le Pen hardens tone as campaign clock ticks down

Far-right presidential frontrunner Marine Le Pen said Wednesday that French people felt "dispossessed" in their own country as she stressed the threats of immigration and terrorism in the final days of campaigning.

The 48-year-old former lawyer has spent years trying to broaden support for her National Front party, but she has signaled a return to the core concerns of many of her supporters in recent speeches, AFP reported.

Speaking on BFM television on Wednesday, Le Pen emphasized how she would pull France out of the European Union, slash immigration, make it harder to get French nationality and crack down on suspected terrorists.



AFP

"French people have the feeling of being dispossessed of their identity, of their social security system and their sovereignty," Le Pen told the channel.

Polls show a four-way race developing ahead of the first round of the election on Sunday between Le Pen, 39-year-old centrist Emmanuel Macron, conservative Francois Fillon and far-left firebrand Jean-Luc Melancon. Two of them are expected to advance to a run-off vote on May 7.

After a string of terrorist assaults in France since 2015, security concerns moved to the center of the campaign Tuesday following the arrests of two French men suspected of preparing an attack to disrupt the election. Le Pen has proposed expelling any foreigner convicted of a crime or suspected of being radicalized. Convicted extremists with dual nationality would also be stripped of their French passports.

"The measures that I want to put in place would mean that many of these people would not have been on our territory or living freely," she told BFM, repeating a claim from a speech on Sunday night.

French voters have so far been more concerned about unemployment and their spending power than terrorism or security, polls show, though analysts warn this would change quickly in the event of violence.

The two arrested suspects, who were found in Marseille with a cache of weapons and explosives, were being questioned in the southern city on Wednesday where Le Pen is set to appear later at a rally.

Left-leaning Le Monde newspaper warned that Le Pen's claim that she would have prevented attacks that have claimed hundreds of lives was "absurd".

"You don't seek votes on the backs of dead people. It's a sort of moral red line," the newspaper said.

Some analysts have also depicted the French election as a sort of referendum on the European Union, with Le Pen proposing to pull France out of the 28-member club and scrap the euro common currency.

On Tuesday night, she insisted that the TF1 television channel remove the blue-and-yellow European flag from behind her before an interview.

But Melancon, her Eurosceptic far-left opponent, sought to soften his position on Tuesday night, stating that he did not seek to end the European Union or the euro despite criticizing the "ultra-liberal" trading bloc for years.

"Don't believe what they tell you. 'He wants to leave Europe, the euro'... let's be serious," he told supporters on Tuesday night.

The Communist-backed candidate has pledged to renegotiate some of the founding treaties of the bloc, however, which would cast serious doubt on the viability of the postwar project of integrating the continent.

Polls show that a majority of French people still support the EU and the euro.

Georgia race, seen as early Trump test, goes to runoff

A Democrat came close to outright victory in the closely watched US congressional primary in Georgia, heading to a runoff in a race that Democrats tout as an early test of resistance to President Donald Trump.

Jon Ossoff, 30, came in first in a crowded field of candidates in a traditionally conservative 6th district, but narrowly fell short of passing the all-important 50 percent threshold, AFP reported on Wednesday.

With 100 percent of precincts reporting, Ossoff finished far ahead with 48.1 percent support. The nearest Republican — former state secretary of state Karen Handel — came in at just 19.8 percent.

Winning the June 20 runoff will be a steeper challenge for Ossoff, however, as Handel will almost certainly benefit from her party coalescing around a single candidate in a conservative-leaning district. But Ossoff, a documentary filmmaker and former congressional aide, told energized supporters before all the returns were in that he and Democrats "shattered expectations" with their performance.

As two candidates advance to a head-to-head vote Democrats still hope that Ossoff can capitalize on Trump's lackluster popularity and make the race a test of the president's first 100 days.

A shock upset in the national spotlight, the argument goes, would deeply embarrass the president and could jumpstart efforts to retake control of the House of Representatives in next year's midterm elections.

Aleppo bomb blast kills six

A bomb killed six people and wounded 32 in Syria's Aleppo on Wednesday, state television reported.

The blast hit the southwestern neighborhood of Salah ed-Din, which was once on the frontline between terrorists and government forces before the Syrian Army retook full control of the city in December, Reuters reported.

According to AFP, state television did not specify whether the explosion was the result of an attack or unexploded ordnance left over from the four and a half years of fighting.

Once Syria's commercial hub, Aleppo was devastated by the fighting, particularly along



the complex evacuation deal was being carried out a few kilometers (miles) away in Rashidin, a southwestern suburb of the city.

Evacuations resume

The evacuation of four besieged Syrian towns resumed Wednesday, with tight security in place for those leaving government-held areas after a weekend bombing against evacuees killed 126 people including nearly 70 children, AFP reported.

A large convoy of buses carrying evacuees from the government-held towns of Foua and Kefraya reached the edge of the transit point held by the

frontline that separated the terrorist-held east from the government-held west. The explosion came as a