MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin's ally has been hit by serious opposition in a major regional election, officials said yesterday, following a poll overshadowed by pension protests and mass arrests.

The Russian authorities have declared a victory for Mayor Sergei Sobyanin, who is Putin's ally, in the Moscow mayoral election. However, opposition politicians and monitors say the vote was marred by widespread fraud.


**Poll overshadowed by pension protests and mass arrests**

The vote in a Moscow contest called by Yaroslav for 30 days after an announcement plans to end a rule on pension reform on election day. The ruling party suffered further mass protests. In the far east of the country, in Khabarovsk and in Vladivostok and Ulan Ude, protesters are calling for a general strike due to a pension reform on election day. The ruling party police arrested 1,018 protesters, according to an independent monitor.

Putin sought to put on a brave face, saying the election results illustrated a desire of the Russian people to keep the country on the right path in the face of domestic and international challenges.

The day before, a group of protesters holding signs reading “No to pension reform” gathered outside the Kremlin ahead of the election, waving Russian national flags and chanting slogans against the pension reform.

**Merkel ‘outraged’ by Nazi chants in Koethen protest**

German Chancellor Angela Merkel faced criticism on Wednesday over videos circulating on social media showing open Nazi chants at a far-right protest in the central German town of Koethen.

The footage, which was posted on Facebook, showed a rally organized by the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, with protesters chanting songs and waving flags.

Merkel’s spokesman, Steffen Seibert, said the government was “outraged” by the videos and called for a “firm reaction” by authorities.

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Moscow: With billions of dollars of investments, the city of Moscow has been transformed under Mayor Sergei Sobyanin, who announced his intention to run for a second term in September.

But his re-election on Sunday was overshadowed by pension reform protests and mass arrests.

**Tunisian students protest hostage situation**

Tunisian students have been protesting against the hostage situation that has gripped the country for several days after a group of Islamist militants took over the foothills of the mountainous area.

The students, who have been occupying the area since last week, are demanding the release of all students who have been detained by the police.

**Kosovo: Two-time Chilean president seeks a second term in office**

Michelle Bachelet, who served as Chilean president from 2006 to 2010, is running for a second term in the upcoming presidential election.

Bachelet, 66, is seeking to become the first woman to be elected president in Chile, a country with a deep history of political violence.

She is facing challenges from several candidates, including the current president, Sebastián Piñera, who has been accused of human rights abuses during his previous term.

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