

Duterte nemesis and drug-war critic bids for Philippine president

Robredo becomes leading opposition candidate in a crowded election field

MANILA: Philippines Vice President Leni Robredo, an arch-rival of President Rodrigo Duterte and staunch critic of his deadly drug war, said yesterday she will run for the top job, becoming the leading opposition candidate in a crowded election field. Robredo has been under pressure from supporters and opposition groups to join the 2022 presidential race, but she has been well behind the front runners in opinion polls. Analysts say the even-tempered former congresswoman could struggle. "I will fight, we will fight," Robredo, 56, said, declaring herself a presidential candidate.

"We will defeat the archaic and rotten style of politics." President and vice president are elected separately in the Philippines. Robredo quit Duterte's cabinet less than six months after he was sworn in, after a presidential aide told her she had been barred from its meetings. Her decision comes after her nemesis Ferdinand Marcos Jr, son and namesake of the country's former dictator, said Tuesday he would run for the top job. Robredo narrowly defeated Marcos Jr for the nation's second-highest office in 2016, dealing a blow to the political aspirations of the powerful clan as they sought to rehabilitate their image.

Marcos Jr-an ally of Duterte and a defender of the narcotics crackdown that has killed thousands of people-fought a nearly five-year legal battle challenging the vote, but lost in February

when the Supreme Court rejected the protest. Marcos Jr was in second place behind Duterte's daughter, Sara, in a recent Pulse Asia Research poll of voter preferences for president, though she has denied plans to run. Robredo was a distant sixth, trailing boxing great Manny Pacquiao and celebrity mayor Francisco Domagoso, who have confirmed they will seek the presidency; and Senator Grace Poe, who has not. Most of the top candidates have supported the drug war, which is being investigated by the International Criminal Court as a possible crime against humanity.

'All my strength'

Robredo, originally a lawyer for the disadvantaged, rose to fame as the wife of Jesse Robredo, a respected cabinet member in former president Benigno Aquino's administration. When her husband died in a plane crash in 2012, public clamor encouraged her to enter politics. Robredo, who has three daughters, served a single term in the House of Representatives before her successful bid for the vice presidency. "My promise is to give all my strength, not only until the election but until the very end to fight for the Philippines that we dream of," Robredo said yesterday, before registering as an independent candidate. University of the Philippines political science professor Jean Franco told AFP: "It is going to be an uphill climb

separate street shootings within 90 minutes. The killings drew wide condemnation from politicians and on social media both within Kashmir and outside. A statement attributed to the militant group issued Wednesday accused the slain men of collaborating with Indian security forces. The veracity of the statement, issued only in English, could not be independently verified. On Saturday two civilians were shot dead in a similar fashion in Srinagar, sending alarm bells ringing in the security establishment. Police chief Dilbag Singh said the assailants would be caught soon.

"Killing innocent civilians including teachers is a move to attack and damage the age-old tradition of communal harmony and brotherhood in Kashmir," Singh told reporters at the school. Officials say 25 people including workers with pro-India political parties have been killed by suspected rebels this year so far. —AFP

"The airport is not in operation at the moment," an AENA spokeswoman told AFP, saying "some cleaning work needs to be done" on the runways before it would reopen. But the closure "may not last very long" she added. On Wednesday evening, local airline Binter had said it was cancelling all flights in and out of La Palma, one of Spain's Canary Islands archipelago in the Atlantic, just off the northwestern coast of Africa. "This suspension will last until conditions improve and we can fly safely," Binter tweeted, with rival airline CanaryFly also suspending flights. —AFP



PASAY, Philippines: Philippine Vice President Leni Robredo gestures to a crowd of people supporting her candidacy to join the 2022 presidential race outside the Cultural Center of the Philippines in Pasay, Metro Manila yesterday. —AFP

but her running sends a strong statement in itself that there is a genuine opposition to Duterte and the return of another Marcos to the presidency."

Election season kicked off this month, the candidates flocking to the offices of the elections commission to file their nominations. The

process launched a typically noisy and deadly seven months of campaigning for more than 18,000 positions, with the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic downturn caused by lockdowns expected to dampen the atmosphere. —AFP

Two teachers shot dead in Indian Kashmir

SRINAGAR: Suspected anti-India militants shot dead two teachers in Indian-administered Kashmir yesterday, police said, taking to seven the number of people killed in the region in less than a week. The gunmen barged into a government-run school in the Eidgah area of the main city of Srinagar, killing the pair, including the principal, on the spot. No students were present at the time. The incident came two days after militants from a relatively new rebel group The Resistance Front (TRF) killed three civilians, including a prominent pharmacist, in three

Volcanic ash cloud closes airport in La Palma

LA PALMA: Clouds of thick ash from the erupting volcano on La Palma yesterday forced the island's airport to close for the second time since the September 19 eruption, Spain's airport authority said.

S Korea court backs transgender soldier who killed herself

SEOUL: A South Korean court yesterday ruled it was unfair for the military to forcibly discharge a soldier over her gender-reassignment surgery, months after she took her own life over the decision. South Korea remains deeply conservative about matters of sexual identity and is less tolerant of LGBT rights than some other parts of Asia, with many gay and transgender Koreans living largely under the radar. Byun Hee-soo, formerly a staff sergeant and in her 20s, enlisted voluntarily in 2017. She went on to have gender-reassignment surgery in 2019 in Thailand.

The defense ministry classified the removal of her male genitals as a mental or physical handicap, and a panel ruled in January last year that she would be compulsorily discharged. Her case was the first of its kind in South Korea, and she filed an administrative suit against the decision in August last year.

But she was found dead at her home about seven months later. The Daejeon District Court ruled in her favour, saying the

military should have officially accepted her as a woman post-surgery. "Immediately after her reassignment surgery, the court had accepted" her request to be legally recognized as a woman, the court said according to South Korea's Yonhap News Agency. Had she been officially recognized as female, the court added, it would have been impossible for military authorities to conclude that she had "a mental or physical handicap" and discharge her.

Seoul's defense ministry told AFP that "we respect the court's decision", but it has yet to decide whether to appeal. South Korea has a conscript army to defend itself against the nuclear-armed North, with all able-bodied male citizens obliged to serve for nearly two years. But Byun was a volunteer non-commissioned officer and said at her press conference last year that serving in the military had always been her childhood dream. Her death has triggered an outpouring of grief and calls for South Korean MPs to pass an anti-discrimination bill.

International rights groups have expressed concern about the way the country treats gay soldiers, who are banned from engaging in same-sex acts and can face up to two years in prison if caught—even though such actions are legal in civilian life. —AFP