

Preliminary French election results show Sarkozy, Royal in run-off

PARIS: Nicolas Sarkozy and Segolene Royal finished first and second in yesterday's first round of the French presidential election, according to first estimates by TF1 television, based on figures provided by TNS-Sofres.

Sarkozy, the candidate of the centre-right Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), and the Socialist Party's Royal will square off on May 6 to determine who will head France for the next five years.

Based on 15% of the votes cast, Sarkozy was credited with about 30% of the vote and Royal picked up 25.2%.

Centrist Francois Bayrou came in third, with an estimated 18.3%, with right-wing extremist Jean-Marie Le Pen finishing a distant fourth at 11.5%.

Royal's result was impressive after a disastrous start to her campaign. She was credited with about 9% more of the vote than 2002 Socialist candidate Lionel Jospin received.

At a voting station off the Place de la Republique in Paris, 30-year-old Gaelle G said she had voted for Royal because she was afraid of Sarkozy.

"I didn't like all the statements he made to attract the extremist right-wing voters and I did not want to see Sarkozy and Le Pen in the second round," she said.

She said she usually voted for the Green Party in the first round, but this year she wanted to cast a vote utile (useful vote) against Sarkozy and Le Pen.

Many voters remembered the first round of the 2002 presidential election, when Le Pen caused a political earthquake by outpolling Jospin to make it to the run-off.

In 2002, left-wing candidates other than Jospin garnered an impressive 26.71% of the vote, while the Socialist received only 16.18%.

This year, three Trotskyist candidates, the Green Party standard-bearer and anti-globalisation activist Jose Bove picked up about 11% of the vote.

The memory of 2002 also contributed to a voter participation rate that was near an all-time high for a first-round election in postwar France. About 84.5% of the country's 44.5 million registered voters cast their ballots yesterday.

Five years ago, only 71.6% of registered voters went to the polls in the first round.

The election result was a deep disappointment for Le Pen, who had believed he could repeat his 2002 breakthrough this year.

But Sarkozy targeted his electorate, apparently with success, by promising to establish a ministry of immigration and national identity and vowing to combat illegal immigration.

The May 6 run-off promises to be close, with some polls showing a dead heat between Sarkozy and Royal. - Sapa-dpa

Published on the web by Cape Times on April 22, 2007.

© Cape Times 2007. All rights reserved.