

Sarkozy says will bow out if French don't pick him
Reuters
March 09, 2012

PARIS, March 9 — French President Nicolas Sarkozy said yesterday he would fight with everything he has to win a second term but will bow out of politics if he loses an April-May election.

Riot police using teargas were sent in to clear a crowd of 200 mostly young protestors in a town ahead of a campaign rally he was due to hold in the central French town of Saint-Just-Saint-Rambert just a few weeks from election day.

Sarkozy, who is badly lagging Socialist challenger Francois Hollande in opinion polls six weeks before the first round of voting, said Hollande's lack of ministerial or international experience was a problem at a time of economic turmoil.

"I worry when I look at the Socialist candidate's programme ... and I worry about this dearth of experience in such a troubled period. But if the French people do not put their faith in me, do you really think I would carry on in politics? The answer is no," Sarkozy told RMC radio.

Hollande widened his lead slightly this week, advancing 2 points to 30 per cent support for the April 22 first round, while Sarkozy gained only 1 point to 28 per cent.

The survey, by pollster CSA, saw Hollande beating Sarkozy by 56 per cent to 44 per cent in a May 6 runoff.

"I will fight with all my strength to win your confidence, to protect and lead you and build a strong France, but if that is not your choice I will bow out, that's the way it is, and I will have had a great life in politics," he said.

His wife, former model-turned singer Carla Bruni, said Sarkozy had devoted himself entirely to his job and would continue to do so if he won a second term, but if he lost he would have little choice but to change direction.

"What do you expect him to do after being president of the Republic? Do you want him to go back to being a minister or a mayor?" she told French talk show "C a Vous", adding that she worried about his health and his long working hours.

Sarkozy said on a three-hour televised debate on Tuesday that he was not discouraged by his weak poll scores and that one of his characteristics is that he never gives up.

But French media are reporting that his campaign team is starting to worry that Sarkozy's efforts to overcome a widespread dislike of his personal style and anger over three years of economic gloom are not working.

A week after protestors pelted his escort with eggs in the southwest of France, Sarkozy's impending arrival in Saint-Just-Saint-Rambert triggered a protest by some 200 youths

waving banners with slogans such as "no to the president" or "Sarkozy, you're the security problem".

A Reuters reporter saw riot police move in to clear the crowd and prevent them nearing the rally location.

Setbacks

Campaign spokeswoman Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet - who was lambasted as out of touch after she was unable to tell a radio presenter the price of a Paris metro ticket - lamented this week that the race had descended into distracting polemic.

Sarkozy launched his campaign in mid-February, several weeks after Hollande, and has opted for a strategy of unveiling his ideas - such as a new minimum tax on company profits, making the unemployed sign up to training to get their benefits and holding policy referendums - week by week.

After a strong start that saw him trim the gap with Hollande by a few points, he suffered setbacks in his second week, including being jostled by left-wing militants while out on the campaign trail, and has now lost his initial bounce.

Meanwhile Hollande has consolidated his lead position after announcing a surprise 75 per cent tax rate on annual income above 1 million euros, a move nearly two in three voters support.

On Thursday's radio show, Sarkozy proposed a new household fund for women abandoned by fathers of their children, a new renovation programme for city suburbs and said he would cut the number of lawmakers by 10 to 15 per cent to trim public spending.

Socialist politician Bernard Cazeneuve said the raft of measures smacked of a last-minute panic, and mocked Sarkozy for diverting attention with talk of life after the presidency.

"We don't care what he does if he loses, what we want to know is what he'll do if he's elected," he told BFM TV.

Sarkozy, whose main focus is on structural reform and tighter immigration rules, is expected to give his first real campaign overview at a big campaign rally on Sunday in the Paris suburb of Villepinte. — Reuters

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2012 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/world/article/sarkozy-says-will-bow-out-if-french-dont-pick-him/>