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Mass protests erupt in Istanbul over Mayor's arrest



Published on March 30, 2025

Document Date: Wed, Apr 02 2025 09:45:34 pm

Category: ,English,International - ,Snippets

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Hundreds of thousands of pro-democracy protesters flooded Istanbul's streets on Saturday, demanding the release of jailed mayor Ekrem Imamoglu. The opposition leader, seen as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's main political rival, was arrested last week on corruption charges, which he denies as politically motivated.

The massive rally spilled into a nearby park as Republican People's Party (CHP) chairman read a letter from Imamoglu, who remains in solitary confinement. "I have no fear because the nation stands united against oppression," he wrote. His wife, Dilek Imamoglu, vowed to continue the fight.

Waving Turkish flags, demonstrators chanted, "Rights, law, justice!" as they protested what they see as an attempt to sideline the popular mayor, who won re-election last year and is the CHP's presidential candidate for 2028. Imamoglu is regarded as the only opposition figure with the potential to challenge Erdogan's ruling party.

While Saturday's protest remained peaceful, earlier demonstrations were met with teargas and rubber bullets. Nearly 2,000 people have been arrested, including journalists, among them BBC correspondent Mark Lowen, who was deported over alleged press accreditation issues.

Erdogan dismissed the protests as "street terrorism" and accused demonstrators of attacking

police and damaging property. His government denies any political interference in Imamoglu's case, insisting on judicial independence. However, concerns persist that the mayor may not receive a fair trial.