

Analysis: Erdogan thrusts NATO expansion issue into Turkey's tense election campaign

ANKARA, Jan 26 (Reuters) - Two provocative incidents in Stockholm this month have energised Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan ahead of tight elections and dimmed Sweden and Finland's hopes of joining NATO before the summer, diplomats, analysts and opposition politicians say.

Erdogan was quick to thrust the issue of NATO expansion into domestic politics after a copy of the Muslim holy book, the Koran, was burned at the weekend, and an effigy of the Turkish leader was strung from a lamppost a week earlier.

The incidents, while not illegal in Sweden, hobbled Stockholm's effort to win Ankara's support for its bid to join U.S.-led NATO, which Sweden made last May alongside Finland in the face of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

For Erdogan, it was an opportunity to rally support and distract from a cost-of-living crisis weighing on voters' minds, analysts said, with polls showing he could lose to some presidential challengers in the May 14 vote.

Facing his biggest political test in two decades in power, he took a stance that has proven effective before - criticising perceived Islamophobia in Europe and support for "members of terrorist organisations and enemies of Islam" in Sweden.

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