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Lenin Ndebele

Who's who in Sierra Leone ahead of Saturday's general elections?

Хто є хто у Сьєрра-Леоне перед загальними виборами у суботу?

24 червня 2023 р. жителі Сьєрра-Леоне оберуть свого наступного президента. Президент Джуліус Маада Біо, який двічі здійснив державний переворот, боротиметься за другий термін зі своїм суперником Самурою Камарою. Сьєрра-Леоне - одна з найменших країн Західної Африки з населенням 8,4 мільйона людей. За даними Виборчої комісії Сьєрра-Леоне, зареєстровано 3,4 мільйона виборців, що майже на 200 000 більше, ніж у 2018 році. Група спостерігачів Співдружності — група з моніторингу, створена з метою оцінки того, наскільки справедливо проводяться вибори, — розпочала свою діяльність зі спостереження за виборами із заклику до проведення мирних виборів, що відображають волю народу.

<https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/whos-who-in-sierra-leone-ahead-of-saturdays-general-elections-20230621>

Sierra Leone president calls for 'peaceful' vote ahead of Saturday's polls

President Julius Maada Bio, a two-time coup executor, will battle against his 2018 rival Samura Kamara for a second term.

Kamara will stand for election with a R51 million fraud case pending before the courts.

Idris Elba, a British actor born to a Sierra Leonean father, has called for peaceful, free and fair elections.

Sierra Leoneans will on 24 June choose their next president in what will be another race between incumbent Julius Maada Bio, 59, and the 2018 runner-up Samura Kamara, 72.

Bio is from the Sierra Leone People's Party while Kamara is with the All People's Congress.

In 2018, the two men forced the election into a runoff. In the second round, Bio, a former coup leader, won 51.81% of the vote while Kamara, who represented the incumbent party, received 48.19%.

Sierra Leone is one of West Africa's smallest nations, with a population of 8.4 million people. There are 3.4 million registered voters, an increase of almost 200 000 from that of 2018, according to the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone.

Julius Maada Bio

Bio spent time as a UN peacekeeper in Liberia in 1990. Two years later, however, he was part of a group of soldiers who staged a coup that dislodged the late president Joseph Saidu Momoh.

The coup resulted in his then pal Valentine Strasser becoming the youngest world leader at 25.

Bio would stage a coup against Strasser in 1996, before handing power over to a civilian-led government that came in through elections three months later.

Thereafter, he went on to study, live and work in the US before returning home to active civilian politics.

He stood for election in 2012, gaining 37% of the vote, which cemented him as a formidable opposition leader.

In 2018 he became president, effectively relegating the ruling party under which his current challenger has stood since Ernest Bai Koroma had reached his constitutional term limit.

Samura Kamara

Kamara lost to Bio by a slight margin in 2018, as the ruling party's candidate.

Under president Koroma, Kamara served as reserve bank governor, finance minister and later foreign affairs minister.

He also briefly worked with Bio during the few months of his military government in 1996 as finance minister.

He steps into the race with a fraud rap hanging over his head.

It's alleged that he misappropriated R51.2 million.

Final days of campaign before Sierra Leone's presidential polls

In 2021, he was put on trial on allegations that he misused funds for the refurbishment of the country's embassy in New York, US, during his time as foreign affairs minister.

The trial stopped, but resumed in April this year. Had he been convicted, he would not have managed to stand for election on Saturday.

The trial will continue after the elections.

The world is watching

Idris Elba, a British-born actor with a Sierra Leonean father and Ghanaian mother, asked in a video message for the country to vote peacefully.

He said:

This election, please, let it be peaceful. No violence.

"Young people there, now that you've got this election, you've got the power. If we burn our country down, we have to build it back up. So please, let's not take the country backwards because we need to go forward. We get to change the narrative."

The country's Commonwealth Observer Group - a monitoring group formed to assess whether the election is conducted fairly - launched its election observation activities with a call for peaceful elections that reflect the will of the people.

"The eyes of more than 2.5 billion people in the Commonwealth - more than 60% of whom are young people under the age of 30 - will be upon Sierra Leone. Watching in solidarity and in hope.

"The peaceful and prosperous future of the nation lies in your hands. In that future, violence, division and hate cannot play a part. The hard lessons that history has taught us through the tragic loss of lives and livelihoods, we cannot afford to repeat them," said the monitoring team's leader, Professor Yemi Osinbajo, the former vice-president of Nigeria.

After the elections, Parliament will have 132 elected legislators and 14 paramount chief MPs.

Sierra Leone's Parliament is a single legislative chamber with 146 seats. Of those, 132 are elected during the general elections and are joined by one representative each from each of the country's 14 districts.