

NEWSIN
brief

Taliban declare 'spring offensive'

AFP, Kabul

Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan announced the start of their annual "spring offensive" yesterday, vowing a final summer of bloody attacks on foreign forces before the 13-year Nato combat mission ends. The extremists said that the offensive, beginning on Monday, would also target Afghan government officials and politicians. Afghanistan's fighting season traditionally begins in April or May as snow recedes, and the Taliban mark the occasion with an annual declaration to attack foreign forces and unseat the government.

Strong quake shakes Mexico City

AFP, Mexico City

A strong 6.4-magnitude earthquake rattled Mexico City yesterday, causing buildings to sway, knocking out power and sending people fleeing into the streets. There were no immediate reports of damage or injuries. The US Geological Survey said the quake was centered 15 kilometers north of the town of Tecpan de Galeana in southern Guerrero state. The earthquake had a depth of 23 kilometers. The USGS initially measured it at 6.8-magnitude before revising it down.

Planetary scientist Colin Pillinger dies

AFP, London

British planetary scientist Colin Pillinger, the driving force behind the ill-fated Beagle 2 mission to Mars, died yesterday at the age of 70, his family said. The professor, hailed by his colleagues as an inspirational figure with boundless enthusiasm for his subject, suffered a brain haemorrhage on Wednesday.

Threat closes US's Yemen embassy

AFP, Sanaa

The US embassy was closed to the public in Yemen yesterday after a spate of attacks against foreigners and fears that al-Qaeda will seek revenge for a deadly offensive in the south. The developments came as the operation against the Islamists entered its 10th day yesterday and the defence ministry announced that the army had seized control of a major AQAP stronghold in Azzan, in southern Shabwa province.

Head of S Korea ferry owner detained

AFP, Seoul

The head of the maritime company that owns the South Korean ferry that sank with the loss of around 300 lives last month was detained yesterday ahead of formal manslaughter charges. Prosecutors said Kim Han-Sik, chief executive of Chonghaejin Marine Co., was taken into custody at his home and would be formally arraigned later in the day. Handcuffed and wearing a cap and surgical mask that hid his face, Kim was paraded before TV cameras after he was detained.

Pak court frees FBI agent on bail

AFP, Karachi

A Pakistani court yesterday granted bail to an American FBI agent who was arrested this week for trying to board a plane while carrying ammunition. The agent was arrested at Karachi airport on Monday when security staff found him carrying 15 bullets for a 9mm handgun during routine checks for a flight to the capital Islamabad.

BJP may not get majority

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Officially, India's main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party, led by its prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi, has been maintaining that National Democratic Alliance led by it will secure majority in national elections which is in its last lap.

But after completion of eight of the nine phases of polling, concerns appear to persist in certain quarters of the party that it may fall well short of the half way mark of 272 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha, lower House of bicameral parliament.

So, is BJP cagey? Some analysts interpret Modi's aggressive use of caste identity politics and Hindutva, as manifested in his playing his own backward caste and raising a high pitch on Muslim immigrants from Bangladesh as BJP's apprehensions that BJP may not achieve the majority mark.

Modi's interpretation of Priyanka Gandhi's attack on him through the words "neech rajniti" (low-level politics) as a dig at his backward caste, use of a huge portrait of Lord Rama as a backdrop at a Modi rally in Faizabad near Ayodhya and Modi aide Amit Shah's description of Azamgarh, a Muslim-dominated area of India's largest state of Uttar Pradesh, as a "den of terrorists" in the last four to five days—all this is seen as a departure from BJP's use of development plank in the first six to seven phases of the long-drawn elections.

This change of campaign strategy



PHOTO: AFP

A BJP supporter listens to a speech during a protest against the Election Commission in New Delhi, yesterday. BJP workers protested against the denial of permission for BJP prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi to hold a rally at a venue of his choice in Varanasi and requested the EC to remove the Electoral Officer of Varanasi.

and in electoral discourse came just before the last two phases of polling as BJP and Modi pushed for an aggressive burst of electioneering with as many as 105 parliamentary seats going to the poll on May 7 and May 12.

One can understand the change in BJP's change in strategy as backward

caste factor and Muslim voters will play a major role in the 15 seats in central part of Uttar Pradesh and seven seats in northern part of Bihar, where polling was held on Wednesday.

On May 12, together with the 18 seats of eastern UP, six in the adjoining areas in Bihar are going to

polls.

The outcome of polling Uttar Pradesh (with a total of 80 seats) and Bihar (total 40 seat) in phase eight and nine could well make it a make-or-break case for BJP eyeing to get back to power nationally.

During the past two decades, BJP has gradually lost out to regional outfits in Uttar Pradesh Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) which consolidated their hold over backward and extremely backward caste vote banks and has been reduced to a marginal player in the political landscape of the state considered crucial electorally as it has the largest number of parliamentary seats.

In the 2009 parliamentary polls, BJP had won just four of the 18 seats in eastern part of UP and only one of the six seats in adjoining areas of Bihar and this time the party is eyeing to recapture socially and economically backward caste votes. The extent of BJP's success will depend on how much it can make a dent in SP and BSP vote banks.

With Muslims perceived to be backing BSP in seats going to the poll in the last two phases of this year's elections, BJP's Hindutva card was essential to attract Hindu votes cutting across caste barriers through polarisation. Ground reports suggest BJP may find it difficult to do that but if it happens, SP could be badly hit in Uttar Pradesh.

BJP had fared poorly in central and eastern parts of UP in 2009 when it could manage just four of the 33 seats going to polls in the last two phases of polling today and the last

SECTARIAN VIOLENCE IN ASSAM

Political ill games behind carnage

STAR DESK

Officials in Assam have said 43 people were killed, mostly Muslim women and children, in a spate of attacks by suspected tribal militants as a weeks-long general election re-opens ethnic divisions.

The Hindu, in its editorial, has said the violence is a deadly reminder of systematic efforts towards ethnic cleansing that is under way in that area.

And the timing of the attacks has also raised questions.

Assam has a history of sectarian violence and armed groups fighting for greater autonomy or secession from India. In 2012, clashes erupted in which dozens of people were killed and 400,000 fled their homes.

Police suspect militants from the Bodo tribe were behind the latest attacks in a region where tension between ethnic Bodo people and Muslim settlers has simmered for years.

But the difference this time is that the atmosphere has been vitiated seriously in the context of elections. Media reports said Muslim villagers were targeted as a punishment for not voting for candidates backed by the rebels.

In a manifesto released for Assam in April, the State BJP unit made a potentially incendiary promise that it would identify and expel all illegal immigrants staying in Assam — but with a caveat. It promised to protect Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and members of the Scheduled Castes who have come there from Bangladesh following "religious, political and social persecution", and not to treat them as illegal migrants.

Even, BJP's prime ministerial candidate



Narendra Modi has repeatedly said that illegal immigrants from Bangladesh in the nearby state of West Bengal should have their "bags packed" in case he came to power, accusing the state government of being too soft.

Meanwhile, survivors claimed to have identified some of the attackers as surrendered militants of the erstwhile Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT). The Bodoland People's Front (BPF), formed by former leaders of the BLT, that holds the reins of the Bodoland Territorial Council, is also a coalition partner of the Congress in Assam but has indicated it might team up with the BJP, post-election. Significantly, BPF legislator Pramila Rani Brahma had alleged that its candidate for the Kokrajhar constituency was likely to lose as a majority of Muslims did not vote for him. The constituency has about six lakh Bodo voters, nine lakh non-Bodo voters, and four lakh Muslim voters.

Narrow election-related interests have complicated the situation, yet it is important that the investigating agencies are able to identify the culprits and reassure the minority communities of the safety of their lives and property. Urgent steps are needed to ensure their security and protection.

EC hits back after Modi accusations

AFP, New Delhi

India's election commission yesterday hit back at claims of bias from frontrunner Narendra Modi, saying it "deplored" attempts to undermine its neutrality in the final stages of the marathon contest.

"There shall never be a situation or an occasion where the commission will deviate from neutrality," VS Sampath, the head of the commission, said at a press conference in New Delhi.

"We also deplore any attempt by anyone to cast aspersions on the constitutional institution like the Election Commission of India at a very sensitive time like the present one that could cause long term damage to the independence and neutrality of the commission," he added.

Sampath's comments came after Modi accused the commission of bias by not sanctioning one of two rallies that the Bharatiya Janata Party leader had planned to stage in Varanasi, in Uttar Pradesh, yesterday.

After accusing the commission of a failure to ensure "free and fair polls" in the last three phases of the six-week election, Modi said Sampath's organisation had been "acting partially".

The independent monitoring agency is widely credited for ensuring free and fair elections in India, in which 815 million voters have been called to the polls over five weeks.

Modi, who is standing for parliament in the holy city on the banks of the Ganges, was allowed to address another rally elsewhere in Varanasi which votes on Monday. But the commission said it would not allow him to address supporters in the centre of the city on security grounds after his last such appearance drew crowds of more than 100,000.

India on course for record voter turnout

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India's national elections registered a record turnout of voters, surpassing the previous record in 1984, as 66.27 per cent polling was reported in 502 Lok Sabha seats where polling has been held conducted this time, according to the country's Election Commission.

Until now, the highest voting percentage was recorded in 1984 when the turnout was 64 per cent, Election Commission Director General Akshay Rout told reporters here on Wednesday evening.

He said the turnout of women voters also recorded the highest figure ever as they outnumbered men in 13 states this time.

Polling has been completed in 502 of the total of 543 parliament seats and the total voter turnout was 66.27 per cent, as against 57.74 per cent in those seats in the last elections five years ago.

Rout said the total voting percentage in these seats is likely to go up further as postal ballots have not been taken into account yet.

The last phase of polling for 41 seats will be held in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal on May 12 before vote counting is held on May 16.



Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Vacancy Announcement (Re-advertisement)


Issued on: 09 May 2014
Deadline for Application: 22 May 2014

The FAO Representation in Bangladesh is inviting applications from qualified candidates to the following vacant positions for its project **"Strengthening the Environment, Forestry and Climate Change Capacities of the Ministry of Environment and Forests and its Agencies (GCP/BGD/053/USA)"** to be filled as soon as possible:

1. National Consultant – Strategic Planning and Investment
2. National Consultant – HRD/Training and Research
3. Office Secretary

(UN Salary scale and benefits for similar position apply).

Interested qualified candidates will find the post descriptions, the link to the Personal History Form or Personal Profile Form (as applicable) and the information on how to apply in the following web link: <http://www.fao.org/asiapacific/bangladesh> or www.bdjobs.com. All applicants must submit their PHF/PPF to: FAOBD-Vacancies@fao.org by close of business on **22 May 2014**. Those who has applied before do not need to apply again.



Expression of Interest (EOI)

Pre-qualification of Hotels/Guest Houses/Resorts to hire Venue for UNDP Bangladesh

Reference: EOI-BD-2014-003

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Bangladesh seeks Expression of Interest from interested Hotels/Guest Houses/Resorts for the purpose of **Pre-qualification to hire Venue for UNDP Bangladesh**.

All interested Hotels/Guest Houses/Resorts may download the EOI documents from <http://www.bd.undp.org/content/bangladesh/en/home/operations/procurement/>

Submission of EOI: The envelope should state the EOI subject mentioned above. The EOI must be submitted as per the instructions specified in the document uploaded in above web link by the deadline below to the **Registry, UNDP Bangladesh**, IDB Bhaban (12th Floor), Begum Rokeya Sharani, Agargaon, Dhaka-1207.

The deadline for submission of EOI is **Wednesday, 21st May, 2014, 02:30p.m.** Local time.



VACANCY NOTICE

United Nations Development Programme in Bangladesh announces a vacancy for the following position with **"Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme (CDMP-II Project)"**:

1. DMIC/IT Associate - (Service Contract, SB3 Level)	1 (One) position
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The Service Contract is subject to renewal on an annual basis upon satisfactory performance and availability of funds.

For details of the Job Description and instructions to apply for the above position, please visit our website: <http://www.undp.org.bd/jobs>. Applications should be received no later than on **Saturday, 10 May, 2014**.

Only short-listed candidates will be contacted.
Female candidates are encouraged to apply.



Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Vacancy Announcement

Issued on: 09 May 2014
Deadline for Application: 18 May 2014

The FAO Representation in Bangladesh is inviting applications from qualified candidates to the following vacant position for its project **"Integrated Agriculture and Health-based Interventions for Improved Food and Nutrition Security in Selected Districts of Southern Bangladesh (GCP/BGD/049/USA)"** to be filled as soon as possible:

- National Logistics and Procurement Assistant

(UN Salary scale and benefits for similar position apply).

Interested qualified candidates will find the post descriptions, the link to the Personal History Form (PH-Form) and the information on how to apply in the following web link: <http://www.fao.org/asiapacific/bangladesh> and www.bdjobs.com. All applicants must submit their PH-Form to: FAOBD-Vacancies@fao.org by close of business on **18 May 2014**