

Modi wave triumphs

FROM PAGE 1
riding on a sympathy wave following the assassination of his mother Indira Gandhi.

On the other hand, the ruling Congress led by Sonia Gandhi is poised to crash to its worst electoral defeat struggling with bagging or leading in just 44 seats and the party-led-United Progressive Alliance in 59.

The stunning results exceeded all poll forecasts, as firecrackers exploded at party offices around the country and sweets were handed out by BJP activists in celebrations that began only a few hours after the first figures filtered out soon after vote counting began at 8:00am.

With the BJP declaring the start of a "new era" in the world's biggest democracy, the ruling Congress conceded defeat.

Sonia Gandhi and her son Rahul, Congress vice president and scion of Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, accepted moral responsibility for the party's humiliating debacle and wished all success to the new government.

Making a brief appearance before the media at the party headquarters without taking any questions, the two congratulated the new BJP government and wish all the best.

Rahul, who spearheaded the Congress campaign, said the BJP has got the mandate of the people. "I congratulate them... I wish them all the best".

He said Congress has done badly in the elections and will need to think about it. "As the Congress vice-president, with all humility I take responsibility for this."

Sonia said "the people's mandate is against us and I humbly accept the verdict... As Congress President, I take responsibility for it."

Extending congratulations to the new government, she, however, said, "We hope that it will not compromise with the social unity and national interests. Congress will continue to fight for its principles and will not make any compromise."

The tenure of Congress-led government comes to an end today when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh submits resignation to President Pranab Mukherjee.

After leading his party to the landslide victory, Modi tweeted "India has won!" He went to seek the blessings of his 90-year-old mother Heeraben in Ahmedabad.

He is expected to take oath on May 21.

In a gracious 45-minute speech at a victory rally in Vadodara city in his home state of Gujarat, one of the two parliamentary constituencies from he won, Modi said the government does not belong to any particular party but

to all the people of the country.

"For a government, no one is a favourite, nor is anyone an alien," he asserted to a cheering crowd of supporters whom he thanked for giving him a victory by 5.70 lakh votes in Vadodara.

Committing himself to running the country in the best spirit of the constitution, Modi said "my responsibility is to take everyone along in running the nation."

"In a democracy, there are no enemies but only competitors. That competition ends with elections," he said, adding his motto is "sabka sath, sabka vikas (with all, development for all)."

"People wanted me to say something, but my wish was if I had to say something I would say it in Vadodara," he told a lustily cheering crowd in Gujarat city 139 km from state capital Gandhinagar.

"How do you feel, tell me," he posed to the crowd before engaging them in his by now known style of oratory. He used the "Ache din ane wale hain" (Good days are coming) catchphrase to great effect in his first address after the sweeping win.

Modi said "Ache din" and the crowd completed "aane wale hain". This played out twice, adds The Hindustan Times.

Modi, the 63-year-old son of a tea vendor belonging to a socially backward caste, who had built a presidential-style campaign around him uncharacteristic of a party like BJP where personality cult is discouraged, won by a huge margin of over 5 lakh votes from Vadodara.

He was also leading in the temple town of Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh against his upstart anti-graft outfit Aam Aadmi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal.

Modi single-handedly led an indefatigable campaign travelling three lakh kilometres across India and celebrations erupted at BJP offices across the country including the flower-festooned party headquarters in Delhi.

BJP's previous best showing was in parliamentary elections in 1998 and 1999 under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the party had governed India till May 2004 when it was voted out of power by Congress and its allies.

One message that clearly emerges from the results of this time's elections is that while Congress has suffered massively due to anti-incumbency arising out of slowing economy, string of corruption cases hitting the party-led UPA government and mounting

inflation, BJP has held on its own even in states where it is in power.

So comprehensive was the defeat of Congress that the party failed to win a single seat in a number of states including Gujarat, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand and many of the party's federal ministers like Foreign Minister Salman Khurshid, Telecom Minister Kapil Sibal and Sachin Pilot lost.

At the heart of BJP's remarkable show lies its unprecedented victory in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state with the highest number of 80 Lok Sabha seats, where the party is leading in set to bag 71 of the 80 seats, decimating traditional key players in UP Mayawati-led Bahujan Samaj Party and Samajwadi Party headed by Mulayam Singh Yadav. BJP had won just ten seats in the previous national elections in the state.

BJP's win in Uttar Pradesh is a personal triumph for Modi and his close aide Amit Shah who was appointed by the former as the chief strategist to revive the party from a morass in Uttar Pradesh where regional caste-based outfits like Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party which have ruled the roost for close to two decades.

Congress, which had won 22 seats in 2009 in Uttar Pradesh, shrunk to only two with Sonia Gandhi and vice president Rahul Gandhi retaining their Rae Bareilly and Amethi seats respectively.

Another highlight of BJP's victory march was the party's remarkable performance in western state of Maharashtra where it, along with ally Shiv Sena, is poised to make a clean sweep of all but 7 of the total of 48 seats.

In eastern state of Bihar, one more key battleground state with a total of 40 seats, BJP got five seats and led in another 22.

In West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress checked the saffron surge by securing or leading in 34 out of the total of 42 seats.

Varun Gandhi won from Sultanpur on BJP ticket claiming his share of legacy in Nehru-Gandhi Bastion. His mother Maneka, also contesting as BJP candidate, is leading in Pilibhit. Mulayam Singh Yadav is leading in Mainpuri and his daughter-in-law Dimple is leading in Kannauj.

In the northeastern state of Assam, BJP led in seven of the total of 14 parliamentary seats while Congress, which rules the state, is ahead only in three.

Taking responsibility for the poor show by Congress, Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi said he would resign.

2 killed in road crash

Angry relatives torch police van

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Agitated relatives torched a police vehicle in Keraniganj after two people were killed when a truck ramed the CNG-run three-wheeler carrying them in Munshiganj early yesterday.

Officer-in-Charge Jamal Uddin Mir of South Keraniganj Police Station said a truck laden with iron rods ramed the three wheeler heading to Dhaka at Keotkhali of Sreenagar around 3:00am, killing driver Shah Alam, 42, and passenger Forkan, 35, on the spot.

When the driver's body was taken to his home at Chankutia of Keraniganj around 8:00am, police went there to inquire about it. The agitated relatives of Alam then set fire to the pick-up van of police.

Sixteen people were arrested in connection with the arson, the OC told The Daily Star.

Death toll

FROM PAGE 1

As of late last night, the rescuers could not say for sure how long it would take to get the vessel close to the shore.

The modern BIWTA rescue vessel Prattay has the capacity to recover vessels weighing 250 tonnes and the double-decker MV Miraj-4 weighs only 130 tonnes. Tug boats Durbur and Duronto are assisting Prattay as well, still the vessel refused to budge.

BIWTA Chairman Shamsuddoha Khandker told journalists about their plan to flip the launch right side up to allow divers to search for bodies.

He told journalists late last night that they were planning to remove luggage and cargo from inside the launch to lighten it so that it could be hauled ashore. He hoped to have the launch pulled ashore in the wee hours of today.

Meanwhile, in the heat of the summer and hungry with no food around, the relatives of the victims marched chanting slogans demanding the bodies of their loved ones.

A group of them even swooped on newsmen.

Those travelling on MV Miraj-4, which was heading for Shariatpur from Dhaka Thursday afternoon, were largely from Shariatpur's Naria and Sakhipur. Their relatives thronged the shore closest to the site of the accident.

Mohammad Khokon came from Ruhitpur of Keraniganj late in the evening of Thursday. His uncle and his four family members were on the launch.

He has received four bodies, his uncle's, his wife's, and their two children's, by yesterday afternoon. He has given up the hope of finding his aunt alive. He was waiting for her body.

"The harassment we are facing here is because of sheer negligence of the rescuers. I demand punishment to those responsible for keeping the launch in mid-river during a storm which is a regular phenomenon this time of the year.

"I want a probe. I want to know who were responsible for wiping out the entire family of my uncle," he said.

This is the second launch capsized in two weeks.

India 'to stop'

FROM PAGE 16

The 600 metres long and 25 metres wide structure has been under construction for the last two months and earth filling work there has been completed. Once built, the barrage would seriously affect water flow in Bangladesh.

A city of fear

FROM PAGE 16

seven-murder incident still at large, many even don't want to speak up fearing reprisals.

"What is the benefit of saying anything? Have we seen justice in any past incident like this?" said a middle aged man, referring to the Twaki murder.

Tanvir Mohammad Twaki, 17-year-old son of Narayanganj Gonojagoron Moncho organiser Rafiqur Rabbi, was abducted on March 6 last year and was found dead in the Shitalakkhya river two days later. People, including the victim's father, blamed the members of a particular family in the city for the murder. But the killers are yet to be arrested.

A teacher of Narayanganj Girls' High School believes had the murders of Twaki been arrested, the situation could have been entirely different now.

"We thought of seeing justice after the brutal murder of Twaki. But now we have lost that hope," said the teacher, who did not want to be named either.

However, his optimism for a better day has not faded away yet. "We no more want to see our brothers and sons getting murdered," he said.

Ties to reach

FROM PAGE 1

people's mandate given to both of them they can work together to take the relationship to "increasingly greater heights".

"I am delighted to see a great friend of Bangladesh leading an extremely friendly country, India, in the coming days," she said in the letter to Modi.

"I hope that you would find my country your second home and first destination for your official visit abroad," she added.

Hasina also said "The decisive verdict given by the people of your great country is a strong testimony to your dynamic, inspiring and visionary leadership qualities and a manifestation of the trust and confidence reposed in you by the people of the largest democracy in the world."

Pointing out that Bangladesh and India are natural and contiguous development partners, she said, "Our shared history and culture... our inseparable bond of friendship was permanently cemented when the entire political leadership and the people of India provided unprecedented support to our historic War of Liberation in 1971."

The premier said the two countries have "made significant collective strides in the bilateral relationship which must continue to move forward".

"On this historic occasion and joyous moment of your victory, I wish you and the friendly people of India all the very best."

In a separate letter to BJP President Rajnath Singh, Hasina, also chief of Awami League, said "The magnitude of BJP's victory is clearly reflective of the charismatic leadership quality of yours and the prime ministerial candidate of BJP Shri Narendra Modi, your top office bearers and election campaign strategists and managers, as well as the huge degree of trust and confidence that the people of India have chosen to repose in your party and in your leadership."

She recalled Atal Bihari Vajpayee's contribution to the cause of Bangladesh's independence and said "The people of Bangladesh are thankful for the unprecedented degree of support and all-round assistance extended by the people of India to us during our Liberation War."

"Both our parties have been in government at the same time in the past and have worked very closely together to take our bilateral relationship forward to scale new heights," she said, adding: "The forces and dynamics of history have once again placed our respective parties in the same position today."

End of Manmohan era

FROM PAGE 16

economic growth for much of his tenure as PM.

However, mounting inflation averaging almost ten percent for almost a decade, halving of economic growth from nine to 4.5 percent, rising food and fuel prices and a string of scams in the last four years took the sheen out of Singh's performance as a prime minister.

Scams in allocation of telecom spectrum and coal mines allocation and holding of Commonwealth Games here in 2010 and a policy paralysis of his government stymied 81-year-old Singh's performance as PM.

It is ironic that a man whose personal integrity has never been questioned came to preside over a government that was hit by a series of scams.

However, he has achieved the distinction of serving two continuous full five-year terms as prime minister, becoming the longest-serving PM outside the Nehru-Gandhi family. India's first PM Jawaharlal Nehru had occupied the post for 17 years.

Manmohan entered politics at the peak of India's balance of payment crisis in 1991 when late prime minister PV Narasimha Rao inducted him into the government as finance minister.

Together they lifted the economy out of the crisis and then paved the way for the economic reforms on which no

Hasina said the two countries and parties once again have the opportunity to "ring in a new era in the relationship between our two countries, consolidating what we have already laid on the ground in the last five years and strengthening the mechanisms".

This, she said, "will enable us to transform for the better not only the lives of our peoples in our respective countries but also those beyond in the region, in the process ensuring lasting peace, security and all-round development and prosperous growth for all".

The Awami League president vowed to work with BJP and the elected government of India to bring about "meaningful, tangible and positive changes in our close and friendly relations".

She also invited Rajnath Singh to visit Bangladesh.

KHALEDA GREETES MODI
Khaleda has sent a greeting message to Modi through the Indian High Commission in Dhaka, BNP vice-chairman Shamsur Mobin Chowdhury told The Daily Star yesterday.

In the message, Khaleda hoped that the new government of India would take proper initiatives to resolve bilateral issues through dialogue, Mobsin said.

BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir also extended his greetings to Modi, hoping that the new government of India would take effective steps to ensure due share of Teesta water and stop border killings.

"I expect that the Modi government would be able to understand the sentiments of Bangladesh people and resolve the longstanding feud between the two countries," he added.

Fakhrul made the remarks while addressing a function at the Jatiya Press Club in Dhaka, reports our staff correspondent.

ERSHAD'S CONGRATULATION
In a press statement, JP Chairman HM Ershad and its Secretary General Ziauddin Bablu had congratulated Modi, who is all set to become the prime minister of India.

"Friendly relations between the two countries will be strengthened under the new government and unsettled bilateral issues would also be resolved," Ershad said in the statement.

GREETINGS FROM JAMAAT
Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami has congratulated Modi on his party's victory in the Lok Sabha elections.

"We hope India will uphold its tradition of keeping religious harmony among people under the leadership of Modi," Jamaat acting ameer Moqbul Ahmed said in a written statement.

S Korea president apologises to ferry disaster relatives

AFP, Seoul

President Park Geun-Hye made a direct apology Friday to relatives of the victims of South Korea's ferry disaster and vowed to reform the country's safety standards from scratch.

"I apologise again for the government's insufficient response," Park said at a meeting with 17 relatives who were invited to her presidential office.

It was the first time she has made an expression of regret directly to the victims' families, who had criticised a previous apology she issued during a cabinet meeting as impersonal.

Obama calls

FROM PAGE 2

White House spokesman Jay Carney. "We congratulate Narendra Modi and the BJP on winning a majority of seats in this historic election.

"Once the government is formed, we look forward to working closely with the prime minister and the cabinet to advance our strong bilateral relationship based on shared democratic values."

Kerry tweeted: "Congrats to @narendramodi and BJP."

"Look forward to working w/you/growing shared prosperity/security w/world's largest democracy."

The United States refused Modi a visa in 2005 over claims he failed to quickly curb deadly anti-Muslim riots three years before when he was chief minister of the state of Gujarat.

But as it became increasingly clear Modi was riding a political wave in India, outgoing US ambassador Nancy Powell shook hands with him before closed-door talks, reports The Hindustan Times.

Obama forged close ties with outgoing Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and in 2010 visited a country which is a key target of his policy of pivoting US power to Asia. But relations have drifted recently, antagonized by the arrest of an Indian diplomat in New York who was strip searched over claims she mistreated a domestic servant.

Cops in cantonment

FROM PAGE 1

On April 27, Nazrul and his four aides and Chandan and his driver were kidnapped from the Dhaka-Narayanganj link road around the same time in broad daylight.

Six bodies, including those of Nazrul and Chandan, were found

floating in the Shitalakkhya river on April 30, and another was found the following day. The other victims are Moniruzzaman Swapan, Tajul Islam, Liton, Jahangir and Ibrahim.

More than two weeks on, police have failed to arrest any of the six accused, but nabbed 21 suspects.

China defiant as US warns over sea row with Vietnam

AFP, Beijing

An unrepentant China on Friday defended its actions in disputed Asian waters amid warnings of war with Vietnam, as Washington voiced "serious concern" after riots left two Chinese workers dead and more than 100 injured.

Vietnam has been shaken by its worst anti-China unrest in decades following Beijing's deployment of an oil rig in contested South China Sea waters, which triggered ramming incidents involving Vietnamese and Chinese vessels.

As tensions mounted, a top Chinese general warned that Beijing "cannot afford to lose an inch" of what it considers its territory.

China has accused Hanoi of "connivance" with protesters who have targeted hundreds of foreign-owned factories in Vietnam, as long-simmering enmity between the communist rivals boiled over.

Two Chinese citizens were killed and more than 100 injured, Beijing's foreign ministry said, expressing "serious concern".

China's state-run Global Times newspaper turned up the rhetoric with a strident editorial supporting the use of "non-peaceful" measures against Vietnam and the Philippines.

"The South China Sea disputes should be settled in a peaceful manner, but that doesn't mean China can't resort to non-peaceful measures in the face of provocation from Vietnam and the Philippines," it said.

"Many people believe that a forced war would convince some countries of China's sincerely peaceful intentions," the paper added.

An AFP photographer who was taken by Vietnamese authorities to the scene of the maritime standoff saw dozens of Chinese ships, including naval vessels, facing off against

Vietnamese ships near the controversial oil rig.

Whenever Chinese vessels approached, the Vietnamese ships broadcast messages saying: "We are warning you -- you are entering Vietnamese sea waters, violating our exclusive economic zone and the law of the sea."

At one point what appeared to be a Chinese surveillance plane flew overhead.

On land, calm appeared to have returned to flashpoint industrial zones across Vietnam on Friday after riot police were deployed to restore order.

Vietnam's Communist regime, wary of public gatherings that could threaten its authoritarian rule, has in the past alternated between tolerating anti-China rallies to send a message to Beijing, and violently breaking them up.

Beijing, which claims almost the whole of the South China Sea, appears to have "miscalculated" the reaction to the oil rig deployment, said Bill Hayton, author of "Vietnam: Rising Dragon".

"It has simultaneously outraged Vietnamese public opinion, hardened attitudes in the Vietnamese government, revitalised the 'China Threat' narrative in Southeast Asia and made the region more receptive to the United States' pivot to Asia", he said.

US Vice President Joe Biden on Thursday "underscoring the United States' serious concern about China's unilateral actions in waters disputed with Vietnam" at a meeting with a top Chinese general at the White House, his office said in a statement.

"The vice president reaffirmed that while the United States does not take a position on the competing territorial claims, no nation should take provocative steps to advance claims over disputed areas in a manner that undermines peace and stability in the region."

successive government has looked back.

A technocrat who had occupied various positions, including as Reserve Bank governor and secretary general of South-South Commission, he had earned a name for probity and integrity that made him the automatic choice for Sonia Gandhi when she decided not to stake her claim to the post of Prime Minister in May, 2004.

Notwithstanding pulls and pressures of coalition politics, especially of Left parties, Manmohan displayed considerable determination to go ahead with the Indo-US nuclear deal and to end the sanctions regime against India even at the risk of survival of his government.

One wished if he could display the same firmness when it came to land boundary agreement and Teesta deal.

The perceived dual power centre in Congress in the form of power vesting with party chief Sonia Gandhi also came to haunt him with critics attacking him as the weakest prime minister India has had, a PM who was looking the other way when the scams were taking place and doing precious little to stem the rot.

A tell-all book by Manmohan's former media adviser Sanjaya Baru only helped reinforce such a perception. However, he himself maintained history will be kinder to him than the contemporary media.

Fierce clashes in Libya between govt and rebels

AFP, Benghazi

Fierce clashes erupted in Libya's eastern city of Benghazi Friday between Islamists and forces led by a retired general seeking to purge it of "terrorists", an AFP journalist and witnesses said.

The witnesses said a group led by Khalifa Hafter, a former rebel chief in the 2011 uprising that toppled Moamer Kadhafi, was backed by warplanes that pounded a barracks occupied by the Islamist "February 17 Brigade" militia.

Militiamen responded by opening up with anti-aircraft fire.

The two groups also clashed in the Sidi Fradj area of south Benghazi, the AFP journalist said.

Hafter's group calls itself the "National Army" and a spokesman for the

force, Mohammed Al-Hijazi, told a local broadcaster it has launched "a large-scale operation to flush terrorist groups out of Benghazi".

However, the chief of staff of the regular army, Abdesslem Jadallah al-Salih, denied the force was involved in clashes in Benghazi.

In a statement on national television, Salihin called on "the army and revolutionaries to oppose any armed group that tries to control Benghazi by force of arms".

Salihin, who had been an officer in Kadhafi's special forces before joining the uprising, was appointed chief of staff by the country's highest political body the General National Congress in July last year.