



Narendra Modi waves to supporters as he arrives at Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi, yesterday. Inset, Modi touches the feet of senior leader Lal Krishna Advani (2nd R) in a gesture of respect as Sushma Swaraj (L) and Rajnath Singh (3rd R) look on during a meeting at the party headquarters in New Delhi.

PHOTO: AFP

CONGRESS'S POLLS DEBACLE

'Secular' gamble did not work

'Reverse polarisation' made Muslim votes ineffective

STAR REPORT

There is a common saying in Indian politics that the road to Delhi goes through Uttar Pradesh, which has 80 seats.

The Narendra Modi wave was so powerful in Uttar Pradesh that it blurred the deeply-entrenched caste divides and loyalties of the state which have traditionally played a crucial role in winning votes.

Despite a concerted effort by "secular" parties to get Muslims to vote en bloc against BJP by raising the Gujarat riots of 2002, the saffron challenger prevailed largely because of what is being called "reverse polarization".

In both UP and Bihar, which have a significant population of Muslims, the BJP pulled off big wins. Talking to TOI after the results were declared, BJP general-secretary Amit Shah said his party succeeded "because the number of people who are not part of the politics of vote bank are much more".

Indeed, one of the major reasons for BJP's ability to break the caste barriers is it managed to rope in a majority of the increased number of aspiring young voters across India who are more interested in moving up the economic ladder than being bogged down by old ideas of caste and religious divides.

As per the 2011 Census, Muslims are nearly 15% of India's 1.2 billion people. In 35 seats, they number around one in three voters or more. In 38 other seats, Muslims are 21-30% of the electorate. If the 145 seats where they are 11-20% are added to this, Muslim voters have the ability to influence the outcome in 218 seats.

Rahul, Sonia to offer resignation!

PTI, New Delhi

As Congress searches for answers for its worst-ever electoral performance, daggers are already out in the party ahead of the crucial Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting scheduled for tomorrow.

Senior party leaders speaking in private are severely critical of some key advisers of Rahul Gandhi, while some have chosen to go public finding fault with the ticket distribution.

Those who are in the firing line of a section of leaders include Jairam Ramesh, Mohan Gopal, Madhusudan Mistry, Mohan Prakash and Ajay Maken.

There was also media speculation that Congress president Sonia Gandhi and vice president Rahul Gandhi could offer to resign during the CWC meet, which has been called to take stock of the political situation in the aftermath of results.

However, top sources in the party trashed such speculation.

"It is all rubbish. This is not the way to go forward. That is not the solution," the sources close to the top leadership said.

Accepting responsibility for the poll debacle, Sonia and Rahul have conceded that the mandate in the Lok Sabha polls was "clearly against" Congress and said there was "lot for us to think about".

Amid murmurs in the party against Rahul's functioning, the leader dismissed suggestions about the "waning" impact of the Gandhi family and said, "we have seen how Congress fared without the family".

LS POLLS 2014 RESULTS

PARTY	2014		2009	
	SEATS	VOTE%	SEATS	VOTE%
BJP	282	31.2	116	18.8
CONGRESS	44	19.4	206	28.6

UP and Bihar, which have 120 seats between them, have 18% and 16% share of Muslims respectively. So the "secular" gamble was not unreasonable.

In UP alone, out of 80 seats, 32 have a Muslim population of close to 15% or more. Yet, despite a serious pitch as the only force that could stop Modi, SP won only two seats, with 30 going to BJP.

Curiously, the saffron party swept all eight constituencies, including Saharanpur, Amroha, Shrawasti, Bijnor, Muzaffarnagar, Moradabad and Rampur, where the Muslim population hovers around 40%. For the first time since Independence, UP has no Muslim MP.

The trend is similar in Bihar where out of the 17 seats where Muslims have more than 15% of votes, BJP has won 12.

Pollsters, going by trends of past elections, say the Muslim vote is most effective where it is around 10% of the electorate, big enough to sway the result in a multi-cornered contest, by consolidating for a single candidate.

Ironically, where Muslim presence is over 20%, their votes have been mostly ineffective. This is because of a multiplicity of Muslim candidates that divide their votes. In such constituencies, say psephologists, there is often counter-polarization of Hindu votes. In a polarized UP, it's the latter that seems to have helped the BJP.

NEWS IN brief

Obama bids farewell to Manmohan

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama yesterday called India's outgoing Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to convey "gratitude" for "his critical role" in deepening ties between the two allies. Both leaders had hosted each other several times and said to have good relations between them.

Laos deputy PM killed in plane crash

BBC ONLINE

Laos Defence Minister and Deputy PM Douangchay Phichit has been killed along with other senior officials in a plane crash in the country's northern province of Xiengkhouang. The Laotian news agency and the Thai foreign ministry said the minister and his wife had died in the crash. Up to 20 people were believed to be on board.

Floods in Bosnia, Serbia kill 30

AFP, Belgrade

The heaviest rains in more than a century have sparked floods across Bosnia and Serbia, claiming at least 30 lives and leading to the evacuation of some 15,000, officials said yesterday. Some 95,000 homes in Serbia and 60,000 in Bosnia had no power at all, authorities said.

Venezuela to send oil to Palestinians

AFP, Caracas

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro pledged Friday to send oil and diesel to the Palestinian Authority, as part of agreements signed with its leader Mahmud Abbas during his visit to Caracas. Venezuela, which sits atop the world's largest oil reserves, said it would provide an initial shipment of 240,000 barrels of oil, but gave no details as to how it would send them.

Libya fighting death toll hits 43

REUTERS, Benghazi

The death toll from clashes in Benghazi has risen to 43 with more than 100 people wounded, a Health Ministry official said yesterday, as a renegade retired general vowed to continue to fight Islamist militants in the eastern Libyan port. Libya's interim authorities yesterday denounced the offensive as a "coup" bid and threatened action.

Modi takes victory lap to Delhi

BJP awards him with key post before expected swearing in on May 21

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Thousands of flag-waving supporters mobbed Indian prime minister-elect Narendra Modi as he made a triumphant entrance in New Delhi yesterday after securing a historic victory for his Hindu nationalist party.

The victory lap continued to the sacred city of Varanasi, from where he stood for parliament, ending on the banks of the Ganges which is revered by Hindus and is believed to cleanse sins. Modi offered prayers by the river Ganges in a religious ceremony beamed live on television that underlined his Hindu nationalist roots.

"Mother Ganges has decided my course. I will work under her guidance," Modi told the crowd while thanking local residents who elected him by a crushing margin of 370,000 votes.

Meanwhile, party sources said Modi will be elected the leader of the party's parliamentary group on May 20, formally paving the way for his becoming the prime minister of India.

A meeting of BJP Parliamentary Board, the highest decision-making body of the party chaired by BJP chief Rajnath Singh, took the decision to elect Modi, 63, as the parliamentary party leader, which is a mere formality, Singh told the media after a meeting of the Board here.

The Board meeting was attended by Modi, L K Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi, Sushma Swaraj and other top leaders of BJP.

Singh said no date has so far been fixed for Modi's swearing in ceremony but it is likely to be decided on May 20 when the BJP parliamentary party meets.

Sources said Modi may meet President Pranab Mukherjee on May 21 and stake to claim to form government. BJP leaders are also likely consult RSS leadership in forming the government.

Senior leaders like Murli Manohar Joshi, Arun Jaitley and Sushma Swaraj are likely to be inducted into Modi's cabinet.

Meanwhile, as counting of votes

was completed today, BJP finished with 282 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha, ten more than required for absolute majority on its own. The party-led National Democratic Alliance has secured 336 seats. On the other hand, Congress, ended up with just 44 seats.

BIHAR CM NITISH KUMAR RESIGNS A day after his party JD(U)'s poor show in the Lok Sabha elections, Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar resigned yesterday. The JD (U) had managed to get just 2 seats out of 40 Lok Sabha seats in the state. Kumar's resignation has come amid reports of dissent in the party following the poor show in the general elections.

ASSAM CMTO RESIGN Taking responsibility for his party's dismal performance, Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi yesterday said that he would tender his resignation to party president Sonia Gandhi within a week's time. Gogoi said his party's long stay in power might have affected the outcome.

NIGERIA SCHOOLGIRL ABDUCTION War declared on Boko Haram

AFP, Paris

Nigeria and its neighbours yesterday vowed to work together to combat Boko Haram in what Cameroon President Paul Biya described as a declaration of war on the Islamic militants.

Meeting in Paris, Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan and his counterparts from Benin, Chad, Cameroon and Niger approved an action plan designed to counter an organisation blamed for 2,000 deaths this year alone and which has caused global outrage with its abduction of more than 200 schoolgirls.

"We have seen what this organisation is capable of," French President Francois Hollande said at the close of the half-day summit here. "They have threatened civilians, they have attacked schools and they have kidnapped citizens of many countries. France in particular has been a victim of it."

"When more than 200 young girls are being held in barbaric conditions with the prospect of being sold into slavery, there are no questions to be asked, only actions to be taken," Hollande added. The action plan would involve coordination of surveillance efforts, the sharing of intelligence and joint efforts to secure the porous borders in the region, Hollande said.



People take part in a candlelight vigil as part of a demonstration in honour of the victims of the mining accident in Soma, in Istanbul on Friday. Turkey yesterday announced the final death toll from this week's devastating coal blast as 301, after retrieving the bodies of the last two miners trapped underground.

PHOTO: AFP

Security fears mount over Ukraine vote

AFP, Kiev

Ukraine's election body voiced fears yesterday that it may be impossible to hold next weekend's presidential poll in the east, where a pro-Moscow insurgency is threatening to plunge the country into all-out civil war.

The warning came as Ukraine's embattled government held a second round of "national unity" dialogue under a Western-backed plan to try to defuse the crisis, but failed to report any progress.

Russia said Kiev must first halt its month-long offensive against the rebels, questioning the legitimacy of an election held under "the thunder of guns".

While the talks in the eastern city of Kharkiv included a broad spectrum of Ukrainian politicians, including pro-Russians, no separatist leaders were invited.

The West sees next Sunday's election as crucial to defusing the crisis on Europe's eastern flank and preventing the recession-hit country from disintegrating further after Russia's annexation of Crimea.

But the Central Election Commission said it could not prepare for the vote in the

east because of threats and "illegal actions" by separatists who have overrun more than a dozen towns and cities since early April.

It called for the authorities in Kiev to take urgent action to ensure security, saying that violence could prevent almost two million people from voting on May 25, when some 36 million overall will be called to the polls.

Despite a month-long offensive, the Ukrainian military has failed to wrest back control of the main industrial regions of Donetsk and Lugansk, where rebels have declared their own independent republics in defiance of Kiev and the West.

The West has kept up the pressure on Moscow to allow the election to go ahead.

In a phone call Friday, President Barack Obama and French counterpart Francois Hollande "underscored that Russia will face significant additional costs if it continues its provocative and destabilising behaviour".

Obama has already drafted an executive order for sanctions across key sectors such as banking, energy, defence and mining, adding to punitive measures already imposed by Washington and Brussels.

'ALTERNATIVE PM' Thai Senate snubs protesters' call

AFP, Bangkok

Thai opposition protesters suffered a setback in their long-running battle to topple the government as the upper house of parliament snubbed their call to pick an unelected premier.

The dismissal of prime minister Yingluck Shinawatra last week in a controversial court ruling has sent tensions soaring in the kingdom.

Her "Red Shirt" supporters have warned of the threat of civil war if power is handed to an unelected leader, as demanded by the opposition. Anti-govt protesters had urged the Senate to invoke a vaguely worded clause in the constitution to remove the government and appoint a new premier.

Largest dinosaur's fossils found

AFP, Buenos Aires

Paleontologists in Argentina's remote Patagonia region have discovered fossils of what was likely the largest dinosaur ever to roam the earth.

The creature is believed to be a new species of Titanosaurus, a long-necked, long-tailed sauropod that walked on four legs and lived some 95 million years ago in the Cretaceous Period.

The dinosaur weighed the equivalent of more than 14 African elephants, or about 100 tonnes, sources said. The creature was plant-eating and measured some 40 meters from head to tail, Cuneo said. The fossils were accidentally discovered in 2011 by a farm worker in a remote area some 1,300 kilometers south of Buenos Aires.



Reach out to Muslims

Indian papers urge Modi

AFP, New Delhi

Indian newspapers yesterday urged prime minister-elect Narendra Modi to reach out to Muslims and avoid the temptation of triumphalism after the Hindu nationalist leader's crushing election victory.

After winning the first outright majority by anyone for 30 years, Modi will not have to seek out coalition allies who might otherwise act as a moderating influence on his right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party.

But the main newspapers said it was vital Modi allay the fears of minorities who did not jump on his electoral bandwagon, particularly Muslims who remember how around 1,000 people died in communal riots in 2002 soon after he took over as chief minister of Gujarat state.

"The reality remains that there is a huge trust deficit with the minorities, especially the Muslim community, which must be addressed," said an editorial in The Hindu.

"In order to close the credibility gap that persists as regards his acceptability to govern all Indians, Mr Modi must ensure that the idea of India as a pluralist and inclusive landscape in which all citizens have equality before the law as constitutionally decreed, is upheld consistently and transparently, while he is in office as prime minister."

A Modi government "needs to, first and foremost, reach out to those that did not vote for it. It needs to talk to the Muslim community," said an editorial in The Indian Express.

The Hindustan Times said it was vital that what it called the "bad eggs in the party do not make overtly triumphal remarks about any community."