

Many Pakistanis hopeful for peace with India

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistanis yesterday voiced hope that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's visit to India for Narendra Modi's inauguration will lead to better ties between the two countries, despite concern over the Hindu hardliner's past.

Modi invited his Pakistani counterpart to yesterday's ceremony in a bold initiative aimed at mending strained ties between the two nuclear-armed neighbours.

Sharif said the trip was a "great opportunity" to strengthen ties, and in Pakistan's major cities, many traders, shoppers and others shared his optimism, though some expressed concern over Modi's past record.

The 63-year-old Modi was chief minister of Gujarat state during 2002 communal riots in 2002 in which 1,000 people were killed, most of them Muslim.

Nisar Ahmed, a 48-year-old fabric worker in Islamabad, said: "It is good for the people of Pakistan and India to have peace, because our culture is the same."

Others said they were hopeful that good ties with India could prove a boon to Pakistan's own, much smaller economy.

Trade between the two countries is presently around \$2.5 billion, with Indian exports accounting for \$1.75 billion, according to the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

"Pakistan will get billions of dollars in benefit if it grants MFN (Most Favoured Nation) status to India... It would also do away with many non-tariff barriers making Pakistani goods accessible to India," said Amin Hashwani, a Karachi-based businessman.

Sharif, a pro-business industrialist, is widely seen as being in favour of such a move.

Amel Irfan, a recent graduate from Kinnaird College for Women in Lahore, said closer ties went beyond economics and it was time for Pakistan to re-evaluate its biggest threats, given its long struggle against homegrown Islamist insurgents.

"It is also important for Pakistan to ensure that it makes peace with its neighbours because of the internal threat of terrorism it faces," she said.

In the disputed territory of Kashmir, which the countries have fought two wars over, there was little hope of a breakthrough.

"Modi has announced an increase in the defence budget after winning elections which is an alarming signal for the region," said Sardar Attique Ahmed Khan, former prime minister of Pakistan-controlled Azad Jammu Kashmir.

Abdul Aziz Alvi, chief of the Kashmir chapter of the Jamaat-ud-Dawa militant group, said armed struggle would continue.

"The meeting will have no impact on the issue of Kashmir, let them talk but the solution is only with Jihad."



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INDIAN ELECTION

MODI'S SWEARING-IN

1. New Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's council of ministers take the oath of office in the forecourt during the swearing-in ceremony at the Presidential Palace in New Delhi yesterday. 2. Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi (L) and her son and party Vice President Rahul Gandhi arrive at the swearing-in ceremony for new Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Presidential Palace. 3. Narendra Modi (R) takes the oath of office as he is sworn in as India's Prime Minister in New Delhi yesterday.

4. Hira Ba (C), 95, the mother of new Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, watches the live broadcast of the swearing-in ceremony of her son with Narendra Modi's brother Pankaj Modi (L) and other relatives from her residence in Gandhinagar. 5. Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif shakes hands with outgoing Indian PM Manmohan Singh as former Indian president APJ Abdul Kalam looks on during the swearing-in ceremony for Narendra Modi.

PHOTO: AFP



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TOP 10 IN MODI'S COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

NDTV Online

Narendra Modi was sworn in yesterday as the 15th Prime Minister of India. A 45-member council of ministers also took oath, making it the leanest ever.



BJP president Rajnath Singh will be Home Minister and Modi's number 2 in government. He took oath immediately after Modi.



Sushma Swaraj will be External Affairs Minister.



Swaraj will be assisted by former Army Chief General VK Singh as Minister of State. The General, who is now the BJP's Ghaziabad MP, will also have independent charge of North East Affairs.



Arun Jaitley will be Finance Minister and will also hold additional charge of Defence.



Jaitley will be assisted in the Defence Ministry by the Gurgaon MP, recently imported by the BJP from the Congress, Rao Inderjit Singh as Minister of State. Singh will also have independent charge of Statistic and Planning.



Former BJP president M Venkaiah Naidu was the fourth BJP leader to be sworn in. He will be Parliamentary Affairs Minister in the new government.



Another former party president Nitin Gadkari is expected to land a mega Transport Ministry.



Sadananda Gowda will have charge of Railways.



Former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Uma Bharti will be Union Minister for Water Resources.



Former Maharashtra deputy chief minister Gopinath Munde is expected to be headed the Rural Development Ministry.



MODI-SHARIF HANDSHAKE

A scene that almost trumped the swearing-in

NDTV ONLINE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi pulled off his first diplomatic coup even before taking office.

Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai and Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa were among some 4,000 guests who watched Modi and his new ministers take the oath of office and secrecy - a historic first for any prime ministerial inauguration.

The invitations to South Asian leaders showed Modi's determination to be a big player on the global stage after years of international isolation over the 2002 riots



in Gujarat, the state he ruled till now.

After the ceremony, Sharif, who had called it a "great moment and great opportunity", was the first to shake hands with the new Prime Minister.

All South Asian leaders posed with the Prime Minister and President Pranab Mukherjee for an unprecedented photograph on the steps of the presidential palace.

THAILAND COUP

Army threatens action against protesters

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's army chief threatened yesterday to "intensify law enforcement" against anti-coup protesters who have pledged to rally in Bangkok for a fourth day over the military's seizure of power.

General Prayut Chan-O-Cha, who was yesterday given royal endorsement to govern the country, said protesters found in breach of martial law could be tried in military courts, in his first press conference as de facto Thai leader.

If rallies continue "I will intensify law enforcement", he warned, adding "when the situation relaxes we can relax those measures".

Asked how long the junta would be in power he said the army would take control "until the situation is resolved" refusing to be drawn on whether he would eventually become prime minister.

As coup-maker Prayut has swept through orders including curbing media freedoms and banning political gatherings of more than five people.

Anti-coup protesters have held several seemingly spontaneous rallies in downtown Bangkok since last Friday.

They have swiftly grown in size, drawing around one thousand angry protesters on Sunday in a rally that rolled through Bangkok's commercial heart.

Demonstrators have scuffled with soldiers and several have been detained, raising fears of a wider crackdown if they continue to breach martial law.

Eurosceptic 'earthquake' rocks European Union

AFP, Brussels

Europe reeled yesterday after eurosceptic and far-right parties delivered a stinging rebuke to Brussels with France's National Front and Britain's UKIP leading the pack of anti-EU parties.

"Earthquake" in Europe, read headlines, summing up a day of trauma for establishment parties and an accepted consensus that the European Union offers the best future for all.

A dismayed French Prime Minister Manuel Valls said he could not understand the "massive abstention" of Socialist voters that left his party a distant third with just 14 percent of the vote to a rampant National Front which topped Sunday's poll with 25 percent.

In response, pro-European Union parties must offer disillusioned voters the real prospect of jobs and growth, Valls said, refusing to step down after just weeks in office.

"I am convinced that Europe can be re-oriented to increase

support for growth and employment, which it hasn't done in years," Valls said.

"Certainly there is a message across Europe of disillusionment with Europe and the EU has got to hear that loud and clear," said Foreign Secretary William Hague in Britain, where Nigel Farage's UK Independence Party scored a stunning victory with 27 percent of the vote.

"This is just about the most extraordinary result in British politics for over 100 years," Farage said, promising more to come. "The penny has really dropped." European Commission head Jose Manuel Barroso put the best gloss on the outcome, stressing that combined, the pro-EU camp of the centre-right, centre-left and Liberals would still have "a very solid and workable majority in the European Parliament".

"Standing together as Europeans is indispensable for Europe to shape a global order where we can defend our values and interests," Barroso said, adding that decisive action to provide

growth and jobs would be the best answer to current concerns.

Analysts said it was clear that voters came out to support anti-euro and anti-immigration parties who had tapped into growing voter frustration after years in the economic doldrums pushed unemployment to record highs while governments cut spending to balance the public finances at Brussel's behest.

Parliament's latest projections give the centre-right European People's Party 214 seats in the new 751-seat assembly, with the Socialists on 189 and the ALDE Liberals 66, followed by the Greens on 52.

The anti-EU vote should produce about 140 seats in all, giving them enough of a voice in the new assembly to live up to promises to weaken the EU from the inside.

Analysts noted, however, that these parties face a potential problem in that to form an official Parliamentary group, they must get at least 25 MEPs from a minimum seven of the EU 28 member states.



Black smoke billows from Donetsk international airport, seen behind a cemetery, during heavy gun battle between the Ukrainian army and pro-Russian militants in the eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk yesterday. Ukraine scrambled fighter jets and combat helicopters to strike rebel gunmen who seized control of the main airport.

PHOTO: AFP

Moscow 'ready' to work with Poroshenko

AFP, Moscow

Russia said yesterday it was ready to talk to Ukraine's new president Petro Poroshenko, raising hopes that after months of tensions Moscow sees in the billionaire a leader it can work with.

"We are ready for dialogue with Kiev's representatives, with Petro Poroshenko," Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in Russia's first reaction to his victory in Sunday's vote.

Lavrov was cautious, saying Moscow was ready for "pragmatic

dialogue, on an equal footing" and warned that for Kiev to continue its military operations against pro-Russian rebels in the east would be a "colossal mistake".

But Poroshenko -- a billionaire with strong Russian business interests and a history of working with both pro-Western and Moscow-backed Ukrainian governments -- is the kind of figure analysts say the Kremlin can see as a partner.

"Poroshenko is an extremely attractive president for the Kremlin... This is a person who will

be able to negotiate with Moscow and find compromise," said Alexander Kononov, president of the Institute of Strategic Assessments.

"There was a camp in the Kremlin that wanted to feed the fire in Ukraine. Now I think they will move into the shadows," he said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has not yet reacted himself to Poroshenko's victory, but he did say he will "respect" the result of the vote and promised to work with Kiev's new authorities.

NEWSIN brief

Egypt Polls predict Sisi to clinch power

Afp, Cairo

Egyptians voted for a new president yesterday in an election expected to give a landslide victory to the ex-army chief who ousted the country's first democratically-elected leader and crushed his Islamist movement.

The two-day election is the first since the frontrunner Abdel Fattah al-Sisi deposed Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in July, a move that unleashed the bloodiest violence in Egypt's recent history.

Tunisia dissolves pro-Islamist group

AFP, Tunis

A court decided yesterday to dissolve a pro-Islamist group accused of inciting violence, as sought by Tunisia's powerful UGTT workers union.

The court ruled that the League for the Protection of the Revolution "was contravening laws on the organisation and creation of associations, and decided to dissolve it and all its branches," court spokesman Soufiene Siliti told AFP.

40 feared dead in Indian train wreck

TNN, Lucknow

40 people are feared dead in the Gorakhdham Express train accident as Gorakhpur-bound train rammed into a goods train at Chureb station between Basti and Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh in India yesterday morning. Nearly 100 people have been hurt in the accident.

Sierra Leone confirms first case of Ebola

AFP, Freetown

Sierra Leone yesterday confirmed its first death from Ebola, with several more suspected to have succumbed to the deadly virus that swept across neighbouring Guinea earlier this year.

"I can categorically confirm that the Ebola sickness has materialised," said health ministry official Amara Jambai. Jambai initially said four cases of Ebola fever had been identified, but later clarified that while four people had died, only one person had so far been confirmed to have had the virus.