

Ruling party wins Kazakhstan vote

AFP, Astana

Energy-rich Kazakhstan's ruling party has secured a landslide win in parliamentary polls that never threatened to trouble autocrat President Nursultan Nazarbayev's long reign, official results confirmed yesterday.

According to the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) Nazarbayev's Nur Otan party won 82 percent of votes in Sunday's election and will share parliament with the pro-government People's Communist Party and Ak Zhol, who each secured just over 7 percent of the vote.

The vote -- which saw little real opposition to Nazarbayev -- came as the ex-Soviet country sees its once-booming economy slump on the back of falling oil prices and an economic crisis in northern neighbour Russia, but the strongman's grip on power appears as firm as ever.

Celebrating the victory with supporters yesterday, Nazarbayev -- who during the poll warned outsiders "not to rush" Kazakhstan towards democracy -- said he was in a "joyful state" following the announcement of the results.

Why Manna

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Gulshan Police Station on February 25 and March 5 last year, bringing charges against him of instigating the armed forces to topple the government and sedition.

An HC bench of Justice Salma Masud Chowdhury and Justice Kazi Md Ejarul Haque Akondo came up with two rules after petitions had been filed by Manna seeking bail in the cases.

Manna was arrested on February 25 last year, a day after his telephone conversations with BNP leader Sadeque Hossain Khoka about strengthening the anti-government movement, among many issues, was leaked.

On March 5 last year, Gulshan police sued Manna for sedition.

In one conversation, Manna, also former organising secretary of the ruling Awami League, is heard talking to Khoka and the other call was reportedly made to an unknown person. During this conversation, the man asked Manna if he would like to sit with top army officers to talk about bringing a changeover in the country.

Deputy Attorney General Md Bashir Ullah, who opposed the bail petitions, told The Daily Star that Manna submitted the petitions to the HC recently, seeking bail on health grounds.

BNP chief's

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distorted to confuse the people," the BNP acting secretary general told the press at the party's Nayapaltan central office.

BSS reported that the prime minister on Sunday blasted Khaleida "for her ill motive to hold Hasina-free" polls in the future and alleged that the BNP leader was plotting another August 21 attack.

Fakhrul said, "We expected that the ruling party and its president would congratulate us for successfully holding the council to strengthen democracy."

AL is trying to create a controversy over the council, he added.

"We hope Awami League President Sheikh Hasina, its leaders and ministers will accept our chairperson's call...and take steps for resolving the political crisis through discussion."

Asked about a report of The Daily Star that Khaleida did not consult about her "Vision 2030" draft proposal with party standing committee members, Fakhrul said the report was not correct.

BNP standing committee member Nazrul Islam Khan said the newspaper knew nothing about the issue.

When mentioned that a standing committee member had admitted to have known nothing about the draft, Nazrul said the leader made the comment without knowing the matter.

Court starts

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witnesses and also seized "alamats" (evidences) from the scene.

"I handed over 14 out of 16 bodies of those who died on the spot, to their relatives. The identities of the other two could not be known immediately," said Amir.

Meantime, the government decided to hand over the investigation charges to the Detective Branch of Police and in line with the decision, Amir handed over the case docket to the DB on August 23, 2004.

Earlier the court recorded statements of 222 prosecution witnesses including complainant of the cases.

Twenty-four leaders and activists including Ivy Rahman, wife of late President Zillur Rahman, were killed and over 200 injured, in the attack. The then opposition leader Sheikh Hasina narrowly escaped with ear injury.

Aus prevail over

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On the final count Australia may have raced to 158 for seven with nine balls to spare to stay afloat in the competition, but it was not before having their first scary sight of one Mustafizur Rahman. The lethal young Bangladeshi pace bowler made his World Cup debut with two wickets that included Aussie captain Steven Smith and Mitchell Marsh. And both batsmen were comprehensively beaten by his venomous cutters. It could have been a third wicket for him had Mohammad Mithun not dropped Shane Watson at short mid-on.

Tamim's last minute withdrawal served as a blow for Bangladesh for a good start after skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza lost an eighth straight toss and was asked to bat on a very good wicket. Left-handed opener Soumya Sarkar, continuing his disastrous form, he was out for one in the very second over. His departure meant no fireworks from Bangladesh in the first six Powerplay overs, during which they scored 32.

Bangladesh's first sight of aggression came from Sabbir Rahman, who struck two fours in successive deliveries off Hastings but got out to a well-judged catch at mid-on for 12. Mithun started slowly but broke free in the seventh over, smacking Marsh for a four and a massive six over long on. He was the third batsman out, hitting a 22-ball 23, playing a rank long hop straight to mid-wicket.

Shuvagata Hom, one of the three incoming players in a completely different Bangladesh combination, was upgraded for some power-hitting. His cameo of 13 off 10 balls included a six and a four.

Shakib Al Hasan once again played the sheet-anchor role. The left-hander, along with Riyad, accelerated the run-rate with some judicious hitting much to the delight of a Chinnaswamy

Govt bans

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crowd that was rooting for the Tigers. But the moment Shakib was about to cut loose, he suffered a soft dismissal. His 31 off 25 balls contained three fours and a six. Riyad however was again at his best, hitting an unbeaten 49 off 29 balls that contained seven superbly-timed fours and a six. He was particularly savage in the 19th over bowled by Watson that yielded 17 runs. Riyad, along with Mushfiqur, plundered 50 runs off just 26 balls.

The Aussies started their chase in the right footing with their left-handed opener Usman Khawaja hitting the ball beautifully. Bangladesh lost the plot of getting an early wicket despite giving Mustafizur a go for two overs in the first 10 where Mashrafe tried almost all his options in vain.

Australia raced to 82 for one by the end of the 10th, despite losing Watson to a fine throw from Sabbir. It also forced Mashrafe to bring back Mustafizur in the 13th over and he duly obliged by cutting one back through the legs of Smith.

Once David Warner arrived and hit a four and a flat six, Australia appeared in the mood to finish the match off quickly. But when Khawaja was bowled around his legs by Al-Amin Hossain for 58 off 45 balls with seven fours and a six, and Shakib had Warner hitting a full toss straight back to him, Bangladesh sniffed an outside chance.

With Australia at 121-4 after 15 overs, Bangladesh needed one good over from Saqlain Sajib to make a match of it. But Glenn Maxwell punished him to the tune of 14 runs in that over, and the game as a contest was all but over despite the fall of quick wickets in the end.

The defeat, Bangladesh's second in as many games, has vastly reduced their hopes of a place in the knockout stages. Their next game is against host India at the same venue tomorrow.

Dummy explosives

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before signing of a deal with a British firm to upgrade the airport's security.

Contacted, a senior ministry official told this newspaper, "The mock test took place in January. The UK team member was posing as a passenger with dummy explosives and arms in his baggage and cargo. Our screeners could detect none of those."

The minister in his briefing also mentioned another incident when operators screened eight items but recorded 24 in the logbook.

"After these anomalies were found, they [UK team] got extremely annoyed and said if things go on like this, we will be bound to take measures," he said while explaining why the British company, Redline Aviation Security, was being hurriedly appointed.

Later in the afternoon, Shahjalal's acting director Md Nurul Islam and Redline Chief Executive Officer Paul Mason signed the deal in the presence of the minister and top officials of the ministry and Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (Caab).

Under the two-year agreement, Redline will provide advisory, supervisory and operational services under the authority of the airport director, said Menon.

According to officials, the company will find the scopes of improvement in overall airport security and place recommendations accordingly, train local screeners and security personnel and man the cargo complex and passenger terminal for supervision.

Earlier on Sunday, the cabinet committee on economic affairs and the cabinet committee on purchase approved a technical project proposal (TPP) of over Tk 73 crore, paving the way for the deal without any tender.

In a press release issued by the Caab, Redline CEO Paul Mason said, "Redline

Change is going

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did not serve our interests or the interests of the Cuban people," he said.

WHY IS IT GROUND BREAKING?

For a US president to touch down at Jose Marti airport in Havana and be warmly greeted by Cuban's foreign minister was until recently unthinkable.

For decades, the US and Cuba were engaged in a bitter stand-off, triggered by the overthrow of US-backed Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista by Communist leader Fidel Castro in 1959.

The US broke off diplomatic relations and imposed a trade embargo.

But President Obama undertook two years of secret talks which led to the announcement in December 2014 that the two countries would restore diplomatic relations.

Since then, there have been a series of symbolic moments, such as the first formal meeting of Presidents Obama and Castro at a regional summit in Panama and the opening of embassies in Havana and Washington DC.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE VISIT SO FAR

Presidents Obama and Castro shook hands at the Palace of the Revolution in Havana ahead of their bilateral meeting yesterday.

They seemed visibly more relaxed than at their first official meeting at a regional summit in Panama just around a year ago and smiled broadly.

Following his arrival on Sunday, the first stop on President Obama's tour had been the newly re-opened US embassy in Havana, where he told staff it was "wonderful to be here".

But it was the visit to Havana's old town which brought home the long way US-Cuban relations have come since the thaw was announced 15 months ago.

While the plan to interact with Cubans in the streets was disrupted by a tropical storm, the image of the US president and his family braving the rain demonstrated to many Cubans his commitment to the new, warmer relationship.

WHAT ELSE IS IN STORE?

The two leaders' meeting at the Palace of the Revolution will be closely scrutinised for signs of how much practical progress has been made.

Ahead of the meeting, President Obama said he believed that "change is going to happen here and I think that Raul Castro understands that".

He also told US broadcaster ABC that he would be announcing that Google had made a deal with the Cuban authorities to expand Cuba's poor wi-fi and broadband access.

There have been a series of other agreements between the two countries since the thaw was announced, including commercial deals on telecoms and a scheduled airline service, increased co-operation on law enforcement and environmental protection.

Many Cubans are hoping their economy will receive a further boost from further openness and reforms as well as US investment.

Cuban officials are banking on a growth in US tourists visiting the island as restrictions on US citizens travelling there are eased further.

On Sunday, US hotel company Starwood announced it had become the first US firm to agree a deal with the Cuban authorities since the revolution of 1959.

Massive Independence

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done at the museum or through Facebook, she said.

Nishat said it was not mandatory for everyone to walk the full distance; some could parade only 1km.

Participants will also be able to register at the spot -- at Central Shaheed Minar from 5:00am to 6:00am, Dhanmondi 32 from 7:00am to 8:00am, Asad Gate from 7:15am to 8:15am, Shyamoli SOS Shishu Palli from 8:30am to 9:30am, Mirpur Martyred Intellectuals Memorial from 9:00am to 10:00am, Khagain campus of Brac University from 1:00pm to 2:00pm, and Bishmail Bus Stop on Dhaka Aricha Highway from 4:30pm to 5:30pm.

Every participant will get a certificate from the Liberation War Museum, said Nishat.

Mofidul Huque, trustee of the

Nur threatens witnesses

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this year framed charges against 35 people, including Nur Hossain and three sacked Rab officials, in the two cases. Of the 35, 12 are still on the run.

The three sacked Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) officials are Lt Col Tareque Saeed Mohammad, Maj Arif Hossain and Lt Commander MM Rana.

Yesterday, the 23, including Nur Hossain and the three sacked Rab officials, were produced before the court amid tight security. The court proceedings started around 10:15am.

Among the seven persons who gave testimony yesterday was Narayanganj Senior Judicial Magistrate KM Mohiuddin.

It was his court where the sacked Rab officials and Lance Nayek Hira Mia, Purnendu Bala and Nur Hossain's cohorts Mortuja Zaman Churchill and Raham Ali gave confessional statements under Section 164.

He also recorded the statements Nazrul's father-in-law Shahidul Islam, Rabeya Begum and SI Palash Goldar as witnesses.

Public Prosecutor (PP) Advocate

China

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"Road & Belt Initiative".

China and Bangladesh recently reached consensus on building the eighth China-Bangladesh Friendship Bridge and the China-Bangladesh Friendship Exposition Center in Purbachal while China would assist in renovating Bangabandhu International Conference Centre, he added.

About military cooperation, he said both sides were willing to strengthen cooperation.

Fakhrul

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Amanullah Aman, Habibun Nabi Khan Sohel and Shamsur Rahman Shimul Biswas -- are among the accused.

Of the accused, Shimul, Sohel, Bulu, Khokon and 17 others were shown fugitives and the IO appealed to the court to issue arrest warrants for them.

Fakhrul, Aman and 10 others are now on bail in the case.

Court sources say the hearing on whether the charges will be taken into cognisance will be held on April 22.

ARREST WARRANT FOR KHOKA

Another Dhaka court issued arrest warrants against former Dhaka City Corporation mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka and 23 other BNP men in a case filed for throwing petrol bombs at a passenger bus in November 2013.

Earlier in the day, Judge Md Kamrul Hossain Mollah of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court accepted the charges against 37 BNP leaders and activists, including the 24.

Fakhrul, Mirza Abbas, Aman and Gayeshwar are among the accused.

The case was filed with Ramna Police Station for throwing petrol bombs at the bus that left one dead at the city's Malibagh intersection on November 30, 2013.

On August 17 last year, detectives submitted two charge sheets -- one for blasting petrol bombs and the other for killing a person -- against Fakhrul and 36 others.

Rampaging elephants kill five villagers in India

AFP, Kolkata

Five people have been killed by wild elephants that went on the rampage, triggering panic in a village in eastern India, a local official said yesterday.

Another man was critically injured by the four elephants, who entered the village of Bhatar in West Bengal state on Sunday morning after apparently straying from their herd.

West Bengal forest minister Benoy Krishna Burman said the victims were trampled after angering the elephants by throwing stones to try to scare them off.

The male elephant died when it was hit by a tranquilliser dart fired by forestry officials summoned to help, and the other three -- a female and two calves -- ran away, Burman said.

Wildlife experts say encounters between humans and elephants are increasing in India's rural areas due to the destruction of the animals' habitat.

Last month a wild elephant went on an hours-long rampage in a town in eastern India, damaging about 100 homes, shops and other buildings.

Child gives hope

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under observation, the doctor said, adding that one baby could not be saved from the infection due to late detection of the disease of the mother.

Once a pregnant woman is diagnosed with HIV she is immediately given antiretroviral therapy that suppresses HIV. After birth, babies, whose parents have AIDS, are given Nevirapine syrup, also a suppressive drug, for six weeks.

Then babies are given cotrimoxazole for one year when they are fed breast milk, said Prof Dr Saleha Begum Chowdhury, director of the project.

A baby goes through the DNA Polymer Chain Reaction test twice -- at six week old and at thirteen and a half month old, confirming that the baby is free of HIV, the project director said.

Apart from pregnant women, antiretroviral therapy is given free to all

HIV patients for life, she added.

In Bangladesh, mothers with HIV are not forbidden to breastfeed their babies.

"We allow them to feed their babies breast milk, considering their economic condition," Prof Saleha said, adding in many parts of the world HIV positive mothers are not allowed to do so as there is a risk of transmission.

With the risk eliminated, motherhood gives hopes to HIV positive women facing the fear of death and the stigma attached to the disease.

"My life suddenly lost all meaning as I was diagnosed with AIDS. I thought I was going to die within a short time," said the mother.

Except for her family, whoever learnt about her disease hated her, she said. "I feel so blessed whenever I look at my son's face."

The couple have been blessed with another child, a baby girl, last month.