



(From left) A party cadre prostrates himself at the feet of All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) leader Jayalalitha Jayaram in Chennai; supporters of Trinamool Congress celebrate in Kolkata; and Indian Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) chief ministerial candidate Sarbananda Sonwal (C) greets supporters after winning a majority in the Assam state assembly elections in Guwahati, yesterday.



PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS



Erdogan ally nominated as Turkish PM

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey's ruling party named a loyal ally of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan as the new prime minister yesterday, with the incoming premier immediately vowing to "work in total harmony" with the strongman leader.

The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) will officially appoint Transport Minister Binali Yildirim as its chairman Sunday, meaning he will automatically become prime minister.

Yildirim will replace Ahmet Davutoglu, who stepped down after a struggle with Erdogan, as the president seeks to concentrate more power in the presidential office.

"We will work in total harmony with all our party comrades at all levels, beginning with our founding president and leader," said Yildirim after being named party head, referring to Erdogan.

The 60-year-old Yildirim is seen as one of Erdogan's closest longtime confidants and has served an almost unbroken stint from 2002 to 2013 as transport minister and then again from 2015.

They are both strongly opposed to resuming talks with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), the Kurdish militant group that has claimed responsibility for several attacks across Turkey since a two-year-long ceasefire collapsed in 2015.

The new prime minister's main task, observers say, will be to pilot a change in the constitution to transform Turkey from a parliamentary to a presidential system, placing more power in Erdogan's hands.

"And now it's time for the presidential system," Yildirim said earlier in May just after Davutoglu's resignation.

Another critical task facing the new prime minister will be to negotiate with the European Union on a crunch visa deal, a key plank of an accord aimed at easing the EU's migrant crisis.

India in post-Congress era?

State polls results put the old grand party at an all time low

AGENCIES

Will Congress wither away in India? Two years ago, this question seemed quite improbable. It was really audacious on the part of the BJP to raise a slogan like 'Congress-free India' during the Lok Sabha elections in 2014.

In the results announced yesterday, Congress lost its government in Assam, the party-led government in Kerala and finished third in Tamil Nadu. In West Bengal, it finished a distant second to Trinamool Congress but performed better than the CPI-M with which it had an understanding. The good news for Congress came from Puducherry, where it is poised to form government in alliance with the DMK.

The results of polls showed that decline of Congress since the Lok Sabha elections has not ebbed. The party has lost nine assembly elections after the 2014 Lok Sabha elections when its tally had touched a historic low of 44 seats. The Congress was on the winning side in Bihar elections but as the third junior partner of the alliance.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi said the party will introspect reasons for its loss and rededicate itself to the service of people with greater vigour. Vice-President Rahul Gandhi accepted defeat but the real question is whether he can power the grand old party to a revival at the hustings.

Congress leaders talked of introspection and correctives as results showed that geographic spread of Congress rule in states had shrunk to a few states- two states in north India (Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand), one in south India (Karnataka); three states in east India (Manipur, Mizoram,

Meghalaya). That means approximately only 6 per cent of the country's population is under direct Congress rule, a historic new low.

The defeat in assembly polls has come as a big disappointment to Congress and a dampener to its ambitions to replace the Narendra Modi government in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

Analysts said Congress does not have a proper strategy to win states and this is crucial for it to stay in serious contention for power in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

Senior journalist and political commentator HK Dua said Congress state units were ridden by factionalism and the party faces a major challenge to win back states.

"How will they govern the country when they are losing state after state. You cannot come to power at the Centre unless you win major states. It is very important to win Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Gujarat but

Congress strategy is not clear," Dua told IANS.

He said Congress needs to forge unity in its units and promote new leadership in states.

Political analyst Ashok Malik told AFP that yesterday's results showed the BJP was now India's only truly national party.

"This expansion for the BJP comes at a time when the Congress is shrinking, even though they have different social constituencies," said Malik, a fellow with New Delhi-based Observer Research Foundation think-tank.

"And now, the BJP is the only pan-India national party, which the Congress once used to be."



Two powerful woman leaders do it again

TNN, New Delhi

The two most powerful women in Indian politics have once again proved their mettle in the battle of ballots.

With victory in Assam assembly elections, the BJP yesterday moved one step closer to realize its dream of a "Congress-mukta Bharat". From Jammu to Assam, India's map is turning saffron.

But Mamata Banerjee and Jayalalitha yesterday stormed back to power in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu respectively braving all the odds.

While Mamata returned to power with an overwhelming majority, bettering her 2011 performance, Jayalalitha became the first Tamil Nadu chief minister in 32 years to be voted back to power.

Mamata not just decimated the Congress and the Left, who joined hands to defeat her, but also prevented the BJP from making significant inroads in the state, despite a very aggressive campaign.

The Trinamool, which won 184 seats in 2011, is all set to cross the 210-mark, which is way above the two-thirds majority in the 294-member assembly.

Even with limited political capital, BJP has managed to increase its overall voteshare in the state from a meagre 4.06 per cent in the 2011 Assembly elections, to over 10 per cent this time. A thing to worry

for Mamata. For Jayalalitha also, the victory is historic.

She has managed to break a 32-year-old trend in the southern state as she gets ready for a second consecutive term.

At least two exit polls had predicted her defeat at the hustings.



But Jayalitha has managed to prove the pollsters wrong.

Making a victory speech from her Poes Garden residence amid a steady stream of visitors, including top officials, Jayalalitha thanked the voters for choosing her party and vowed to work with a new found energy for the welfare of people of Tamil Nadu.

The 68-year-old actor-turned-politician said she had no interest in her life other than serving people and that her life was "dedicated to them."



Members of Sri Lankan military rescue team work at the site of a landslide at Elangipitiya village in Aranyaka, Sri Lanka, yesterday.

SRI LANKA LANDSLIDES Hopes fade for 150 'buried'

Death toll rises to 41; heavy rains hamper rescue operation

REUTERS, Aranyaka

Hopes faded yesterday for the survival of about 150 people trapped under the mud and rubble of two landslides in Sri Lanka, as heavy rain hampered rescue operations and the death toll from the disaster rose to 41.

Days of torrential rains have forced more than 300,000 people from their homes across the South Asian island nation, official data showed. Eighteen bodies have been retrieved at the landslide sites.

That figure is likely to rise sharply, as authorities battling muddy conditions began to give up hope of reaching 134 people believed to be trapped under rubble at one site, and 16 at another, before time ran out.

"I don't think there will be any survivors," Major General Sudantha Ranasinghe, the officer in charge of the rescue operation, told Reuters.

"There are places where the mud level is up to 30 feet. We will do our best. We will keep going until we can recover the maximum."

Rescue efforts have focused on the town of Aranyaka, 100 km northeast of the capital, Colombo, where three villages were buried late on Tuesday in the central district of Kegalle.

Military officials used hoes and shovels to shift mud as they scrambled in the hilly terrain to find survivors amid heavy rain that made walking difficult.

Material from destroyed homes littered the area, where dog cages, water tanks, and a three-wheeler were swathed in mud.

The military pulled three bodies from rubble at the site of the second landslide that buried 16 people, Ranasinghe said.

Aid agencies in Colombo canvassed for boats to rescue hundreds of people trapped by rising waters near the banks of rivers.

Disaster management authorities said the 300,000 people displaced across the country by the disaster had been sent to 610 safe locations.

Troops used boats and helicopters in rescue operations elsewhere, as the torrential rains since Sunday have caused floods and landslides in nineteen of the country's 25 districts.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Superbug to kill 1 in every 3 seconds

BBC ONLINE

Superbugs will kill someone every three seconds by 2050 unless the world acts now, a hugely influential report says.

The global review sets out a plan for preventing medicine "being cast back into the dark ages" that requires billions of dollars of investment.

It also calls for a revolution in the way antibiotics are used and a massive campaign to educate people.

The report has received a mixed response with some concerned that it does not go far enough.

The battle against infections that are resistant to drugs is one the world is losing rapidly and has been described as "as big a risk as terrorism".

The problem is that we are simply not developing enough new antibiotics and we are wasting the ones we have.

Hiroshima victims want apology from Obama

AFP, Tokyo

Victims of the atomic bombings of Japan want an apology from US President Barack Obama when he visits Hiroshima next week, the head of a survivors' group said yesterday.

Obama will become the first sitting US president to visit Hiroshima, where the first atomic bomb was dropped on August 6, 1945, killing about 140,000 people in total.

Tens of thousands were killed by the fireball that the powerful Hiroshima blast generated, with many more succumbing to injuries or illnesses caused by radiation in the weeks, months and years afterwards.

Vast swathes of the city, including many of its military and industrial installations, were flattened.

State involved with terror groups

Says Pak state minister

PTI, Islamabad

In a startling admission, a senior minister in Pakistan's Punjab province on Wednesday said the government cannot take legal action against militant groups like Jamaat-ud-Dawah (JuD) and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) as the "state itself remained involved" with them.

In an interview to BBC Urdu, Punjab Law Minister Rana Sanaullah was asked why legal action has never been taken against anti-India groups in the province which were close to the "establishment."

"By pro-establishment groups if you mean JuD and JeM, then let me tell you that they have been declared proscribed organisations and they can no longer carry out any activity in the province," he said.

The Minister ruled out the possibility of any legal action against the groups saying, "How can you prosecute a group with whom the state itself has been involved with?"

India accuses Pakistan of patronising terror groups like JuD and JeM who carry out attacks in the country. Pakistan however denies the charge calling them "non-state actors" who are not in its control.

The candid admission by Sanaullah about the Pakistani state's past ties with JuD and JeM may increase international pressure on the country to act against all militant groups.

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