

# Modi declares victory for BJP in state polls

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday declared victory for his party in two state elections, including a closely-fought race in his stronghold of Gujarat where the charismatic leader fronted the campaign.

Modi thanked voters in Gujarat, his home state of around 60 million in India's west, and in the northern Himalayan region of Himachal Pradesh, for backing the ruling Hindu national party in the polls.

His rival Rahul Gandhi, who just two days ago replaced his mother Sonia at the helm of the main opposition Congress party, conceded defeat in Gujarat and congratulated the BJP on its win.

The ruling party was also poised to wrest control of Himachal Pradesh from Congress, extending BJP control to 19 of India's 29 states and further bolstering Modi before a general election in 2019.

Congress, which has ruled India for much of its history but was thumped by Modi's BJP in the 2014 national poll, now holds just four states in the world's largest democracy of 1.25 billion people.

Party chief Amit Shah credited Modi's development agenda for prevailing over "family politics" -- a thinly-veiled reference to Rahul and the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty that has led Congress for generations.

As counting continued the election commission said the BJP was on track to win 99 seats in the 182-seat Gujarat parliament as of early evening.

That result would return the BJP to power for a sixth consecutive term in the state but would slash the number of seats from 115 in the last election.

Some experts had forecast a backlash against Modi over unpopular economic reforms that hit businesses hard, including a controversial ban on higher-value banknotes and the introduction of a national goods and services tax.

"The (BJP) have certainly lost a lot of ground (in Gujarat), but Congress should have actually won this election, given the anger in the state against the BJP," political commentator Manisha Priyam told AFP.

Modi's star power was undiminished at BJP headquarters in New Delhi, where supporters danced, threw rose petals and chanted "Long live Modi!" as the results trickled in.

"This was expected... It is a tremendous victory and Modi has come out as the single most popular leader," party supporter Sandeep Kapoor told AFP.

India's Sensex plunged in opening trade yesterday but recovered throughout the day as results turned in favour of the BJP.

# Boy saved

Another survivor, Anil Dutta, 65, was rescued in a critical condition. A matchmaker by profession, Anil went to the programme to pray for the departed only to find himself near the brink of death.

"I do not know what happened...I was pushed from the back in the gathering and fell down...then people were running over me," he said, adding, "I can't believe that I am alive...thanks God for saving me."

During the stampede, another, younger Ashish lay on the ground being trampled, crying for help for over 15 minutes but in the chaos, no one heard him. At last, he got hold of the leg of another man and somehow clambered out of his suffocating state.

The 16-year old became senseless for around half-an-hour after being rescued.

He told The Daily Star that he thought he was going to die. "I fell down suddenly from a slope after being shoved," he said, adding, "Then people trampled me...I was crying for help but no one came to help me...at one stage I just began praying to God."

"As I am the only earning member of my family, I wondered what would happen to my parents and sister if I died," Asishh, a tailor by profession, said.

"After I became senseless... a volunteer poured water on my head," he said.

Mithu Das, another one of the fortunate few, shared his experience of the event with The Daily Star. He went with six of his friends from the same locality (Kotwali) to the qulkhwan.

# 'Several' killed as train derailed

FROM PAGE 16 Olympia, the capital of Washington state.

"There's multiple fatalities," said Ed Troyer, spokesman for the Pierce County Sheriff's Department.

"It's pretty horrific," he said. Troyer put no number on the fatalities, but local media said at least three people were killed.

Local news outlets reported that dozens of people were taken to area hospitals for treatment.

"When we got to the scene, it was obvious there were fatalities and injuries, and some people were able to get off the train," Troyer said.

"No fatalities on the roadway. As you can see by the large response, we have taken them out and people that were able to walk are under the tents being cared for by multiple groups," he said.

Photographs posted online from the scene showed multiple cars having derailed from the train. At least two dropped onto the roadway below, a busy highway that connects Olympia to the busy Seattle metro area just to the north.

The accident snarled morning rush hour traffic and officials warned the highway, Interstate 5, would be blocked in that area for a long period of time.

"We had just passed the city of DuPont and it seemed like we were going around a curve," passenger Chris Karnes told local CBS News affiliate KIRO-TV.

"All of a sudden, we felt this rocking and creaking noise, and it felt like we were heading down a hill," said Karnes, adding that several cars had gone off the tracks and passengers kicked out the windows to escape.

"The next thing we know, we're being slammed into the front of our seats, windows are breaking, we stop, and there's water gushing out of the train. People were screaming."

Karnes said the tracks were supposed to have been upgraded to accommodate higher speeds.

"I'm not sure what happened," he said.

British Ambassador Matthew Rycroft. The Palestinians have sought tougher language in the draft resolution that would have directly called on the US administration to scrap its decision, but the final version was softened to draw maximum support.

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While Haley considers "the veto a source of pride and strength, we will show her their position is isolated and rejected internationally," Palestinian foreign minister Riyad al-Malki said in Ramallah.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas has scrapped a meeting with Pence in protest at the Jerusalem announcement, and will instead head to Saudi Arabia to meet King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman.

Turkey meanwhile said it hopes to soon open an embassy to Palestine in East Jerusalem.

The draft resolution had included a call on all countries to refrain from opening embassies in Jerusalem, reflecting concerns that other governments could follow the US lead.

It also demanded that all member-states not recognise any actions that are contrary to UN resolutions on the status of the city.

Washington's closest allies, France and Britain, came out ahead of the vote to declare their backing for the measure, which they said was in line with the positions enshrined in previous UN resolutions.

French Ambassador Francois Delattre praised the Egyptian draft as a "good text" and argued that "without an agreement on Jerusalem, there will be no peace accord" between Israel and the Palestinians.

The status of the city must be decided through negotiations and "not by the unilateral decision of a third country that would bring us back a century," said the French envoy.

Despite outrage over the US decision, the US "will continue to play an extremely important role in the search for peace in the Middle East," said

to at least 20 people at nearby buildings and shops. They all said they heard nothing suspicious on Saturday and Sunday.

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Khalil said Sajedul had been forcefully holding the possession of his son's apartment in the capital's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar and a case was pending with the court in this regard.

"I don't want the police to harass someone, but I want justice for the killing,"

Sajedul's wife Momtaz Moina, however, said they paid Tk 10 lakh out of Tk 22 lakh, the total price of the flat, to Rafiqul, but he denied receiving any money.

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Based on the list of returnees or information provided by Bangladesh, the Myanmar government will accept all people along with their family members after verification, reads the agreement.

HRW'S STATEMENT Myanmar continued to destroy Rohingya villages even days after signing the refugee resettlement deal with Bangladesh, says Human Rights Watch.

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# Armed forces

FROM PAGE 16 She reaffirmed her commitment to take timely actions to modernise the armed forces in the light of Force's Goal 2030 to strengthen their capacity to face multidimensional challenges of the 21st century.

Hasina said her government was closely monitoring the ever-changing war crafts and technologies, and constantly reviewing the capacity of the country's armed forces.

The government has been working to establish the armed forces as the most professional and well-trained forces equipped with modern technology, she added.

The PM said members of the armed forces have always worked with integrity, commitment and diligence to help people during disasters.

She highly praised the role of the NDC in strengthening the civil-military relations. She hoped the new graduates of the National Defence College would take the nation towards self-reliance.

Referring to sheltering and providing humanitarian assistance to over

one million Rohingyas, she said Bangladesh never hesitated to respond to humanitarian calls despite having various limitations. "That's why Bangladesh is lauded as a compassionate and respectable member in today's world."

A total of 53 officials, including 29 brigadier generals of Bangladesh Army, five commodores of Bangladesh Navy, two air commodores and three group captains of Bangladesh Air Force, 11 joint secretaries of the civil service, two DIGs of Bangladesh Police and the director general of the foreign ministry took part in the National Defence Course, 2017.

Besides, 27 foreign officials, including three each from India and Sri Lanka, 10 from Nigeria, two from Saudi Arabia and one each from Egypt, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Niger, Oman, Pakistan, Tanzania and the USA, participated in the course.

Twenty-five lieutenant colonels, one captain and four commanders of Bangladesh Navy, four group captains and one wing commander of Air Force took part in the Armed Forces War Course.

cooperate with the parents and solve any problems they have."

"Ershad Ali is a diligent headmaster," says the president of the school managing committee Osman Gani. "He has motivated our committee members, along with the school's teachers and local religious leaders to make arrangements to send all children to school. We have become resolute in preventing students from dropping out."

Ershad Ali was recognised at the district level as the best teacher in the dropout prevention category this year, for the third consecutive year. In 2012 and 2014 he was chosen as the district's best teacher.

Young Al Amin, meanwhile, has settled in at the school. "He has a little trouble hearing," says Ershad Ali, "so our teachers take special care. He never misses a day now!"

"To make students interested in education, special initiatives are required," says Ershad Ali. "The learning environment needs to be charming. They get motivated if the school's examination results are good. Ongoing teacher-parent contact is vital."

Drawing and essay-writing competitions on national days, awards for the first three placeholders in each class, regular parent meetings, additional after-school classes for struggling students and an annual sports carnival: these are some of the initiatives of encouragement that have come to life under Ershad Ali's leadership.

"Many of our students travel quite a distance to reach the school," the headmaster says. "Parents have been requested to provide their children's lunches and to make that practical, the school gave every student a tiffin box; and we have a dedicated lunchroom."

Turning around the fortunes of his own school wasn't enough for Ershad Ali. He wants neighbouring schools to follow his lead. "I try to inspire teachers, not only at our school," he says. "At our monthly upazila coordination meetings I have been encouraging every school to adopt a five year plan to promote regular attendance. In each school catchment area there must be a survey to identify all school-age children, to ensure all of them are enrolled. In instances where children are not attending school, there needs to be a committed approach to contacting parents to convince them."

Ershad Ali's dedication has not gone unnoticed. "Our school's headmaster works very hard for the children," says one parent, Bhabatosh Rowaza. "When a child doesn't go to school he tries to

4 women

FROM PAGE 16 Metropolitan Police.

Quoting her, the police official said at gunpoint, the robbers rapped the women, aged between 20 and 25, after looting their house.

Of the four, three are wives of three Dubai expatriate siblings and the other is their husbands' sister, who came to visit her brother's house, said Jahed, adding that the victims were yesterday sent to Chittagong Medical College Hospital for medical tests.

Quoting the victims, AC Jahid said no male members used to live in the house as their husbands were Dubai expatriates and the younger brother of their husbands was studying at a madrasa in Patiya.

Around 1:00am on Wednesday, four robbers, aged about 25-40, entered the one-storey house of the victims, cutting a window grille, said the police official.

He added that the robbers took away gold ornaments worth Tk 3.5 lakh, Tk 87,000 in cash and five mobile sets from the house.

The criminals first raped the sister and then the three others, Jahedul said, adding that the robbers left the house around 3:00am.

As the house is located in an isolated area, locals could not hear the victims' screams during the incident, said Shahidul Mostafa, officer-in-charge of Kamaphuli Police Station.

During primary interrogation, Abu said he worked at the house as a mason when the boundary wall of the house was being constructed around a year ago, but denied his involvement in the incident, the OC added.

Italy bakes

FROM PAGE 16 Bernasconi, owner of the San Gregorio patisserie behind the giant dome-shaped delight, told AFP.

The Milanese factory makes the traditional cake with its candied fruits and raisins not just for Italy but around the world, with some 200 of the golden buns headed to a New York caterer alone each week.

In the run-up to Christmas "we never stop," says Bernasconi's partner Savino Moretti, who is retired but comes twice a week to pass on his 50 years of experience to the pastry team.

The pair, aged 67 and 68, say the secret to their success lies in the mother dough, which they inherited along with the shop from the master baker, who made it -- so legend has it -- by adding a dash of horse urine to the mix for acidity.

It takes 36 hours to turn out a panettone, with raisins and candied peel added to the mix of water, sugar, flour, eggs, butter and vanilla. Once baked, the cakes are hung upside down for 10 hours to allow the butter to drop.

The giant version had to be cooked in a special oven and was baked "a lot longer and more slowly," Bernasconi says.

"It tastes good, but a little different from usual. It's a little dry, otherwise it would collapse," he added.

According to the Italian agricultural association Coldiretti, three quarters of Italians will have a slice of panettone at some point over the Christmas holidays -- perhaps with a dollop of mascarpone cream or washed down with a sweet liqueur.

# UN official warns

FROM PAGE 16 Myanmar denies committing atrocities against the Rohingyas and has rejected UN criticism for its "politicisation and partiality".

The Myanmar military says the crackdown is a legitimate counter-insurgency operation.

Zeid said Myanmar's "flippant" response to the serious concerns of the international community made him fear the current crisis "could just be the opening phases of something much worse".

The UN defines genocide as acts meant to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group in whole or in part. Such a designation is rare under international law, but has been used in contexts including Bosnia, Sudan and an Islamic State campaign against the Yazidi communities in Iraq and Syria.

Around 10 lakh Rohingyas have fled to Bangladesh, including about 660,000 who arrived in the country after August 25, when the Myanmar military launched a brutal crackdown in Rakhine.

UN investigators have heard Rohingya testimony of a "consistent, methodical pattern of killings, torture, rape and arson".

Zeid said he had phoned Suu Kyi in January, asking her in vain to stop the military operation.

Nobel peace laureate Suu Kyi's less than two-year old civilian government has faced heavy international criticism for its response to the crisis, though it has no control over the generals it has to share power with under Myanmar's transition after decades of military rule.

MYANMAR DELEGATION ARRIVES A six-member Myanmar delegation arrived in Dhaka yesterday to finalise the formation of crucial Joint Working Group that will oversee the repatriation of the Rohingyas who have fled to Bangladesh from Myanmar.

Permanent Secretary at Myanmar foreign ministry Myint Thu is heading the team which will meet the Bangladesh delegation led by Foreign Secretary Md Shahidul Haque at State Guesthouse Meghna at 8:30am today.

Sources said a specific instrument on the repatriation would be drawn up after reaching an agreement in a speedy manner. Both the countries may agree on further instruments, as

# 3 suspects

FROM PAGE 16 In the evening, police arrested his two associates from the capital's Mohakhali slum and recovered some money, gold ornaments, and a cell phone from their possession.

The arrestees during primary interrogation said they suspected that they would be able to collect a huge amount of money from the Arjotpara house as Milu's four sons were expatriates, claimed the DMP DC.

According to a plan, the arrestees reached the house and pressed the doorbell of the apartment. Milu, aged about 65, opened the door as Joynal was known to her.

"Stepping in, the accused threatened the victim with a knife and asked her to give them all the valuables. As the victim tried to protest, the accused slit her throat," Biplob said.

The three soon left the house with a cell phone and some valuables before her 80-year-old husband could sense anything going wrong.

Police on Friday recovered Milu's body from her flat. There was a deep gash to her throat. She also suffered a knife injury on her right arm.

Family members said the couple's four sons live in Canada and the USA.

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