

## Pak polls sees rise of anti-blasphemy party

A relatively new anti-blasphemy party whose leader has reportedly vowed to nuke the Netherlands should he ever come to power did surprisingly well in Pakistan's elections last week, which were tainted by the rise of extremist groups. Islamic fundamentalist parties fielded more than 1,500 candidates in Pakistan's provincial and national elections that were won by cricket hero turned politician Imran Khan. Here AFP looks at how the main extremist parties fared during Wednesday's polls.

### ANTI-BLASPHEMY PARTY

The performance of Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP), led by radical preacher Khadim Hussain Rizvi, will worry mainstream politicians and human rights activists the most. The group, founded in 2015, entered the national consciousness last year when it blockaded the capital Islamabad for several weeks calling for stricter enforcement of Pakistan's controversial blasphemy laws. It wants the automatic death penalty for anyone deemed to have insulted Islam or the Prophet Muhammad.

Rizvi reportedly told journalists recently that if he took power in the nuclear-armed country he would "wipe Holland off the face of the earth", over cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed published there. Fortunately for the Netherlands, TLP failed to win any of the 272 seats up for grabs in Pakistan's National Assembly.

It did, however, capture two seats in the provincial assembly of Sindh. TLP polled over 2.23 million votes in the national assembly elections, its first general election, and more than 2.38 million provincial votes, election commission website data shows.

### GROUP LINKED TO MUMBAI ATTACKS

Allah-o-Akbar Tehreek was backed by Hafiz Saeed, the man accused of masterminding the 2008 Mumbai attacks that killed 166 people. Saeed



has been designated a terrorist by the United Nations and has a \$10-million bounty on his head. Allah-o-Akbar Tehreek was formed after Pakistan banned the Milli Muslim League -- the political party of hardline militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba, which is headed by Saeed -- from the election. None of the party's candidates won seats but they did register more than 435,000 national and regional votes.

### SUNNI HARDLINERS

Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ) is a radical Sunni group that frequently spouts hatred against Pakistan's Shia minority community, considering them heretics. "If we get power in the evening and if a single Shia is alive by the morning in Pakistan then change my name," leader Muhammad Ahmed Ludhianvi told an election rally. ASWJ is considered to be the political face of sectarian militant group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), which has been behind numerous bloody attacks on Shia Muslims in Pakistan. Its candidates ran as independents and were known to have won at least one seat, in the Punjab assembly.

Political commentator Fasi Zaka told AFP that while votes for extremist parties did not translate into many seats in a first-past-the-post system, their sizable vote banks will give them clout in an increasingly competitive political landscape.

SOURCE: AFP



Afghan security personnel secure a road during an attack between Afghan security force and suicide attackers in Jalalabad yesterday. *Inset*, an injured man leaves the area. At least two blasts were heard before the gunmen stormed a government building. Story on page 16

### ZIMBABWE POLLS

## Tense count as opposition claims victory

AFP, Harare

Zimbabwe's opposition MDC party yesterday claimed victory in the country's historic elections, setting the scene for a showdown with the ruling ZANU-PF that has held power since independence in 1980.

Senior MDC official Tendai Biti said party leader Nelson Chamisa had won the presidential race, and alleged that the authorities were delaying the publication of results.

"The results show beyond reasonable doubt that we have won the election and that the next president of Zimbabwe is Nelson Chamisa," Biti told a press conference at the party's headquarters in Harare.

"We are however seriously concerned about evidence of interference... there is a deliberate delay in announcing the results. This delay is totally unacceptable."

President Emmerson Mnangagwa, 75, has also said he was confident of victory in Zimbabwe's first election since former leader Robert Mugabe was ousted in November.

"The information from our reps on the ground is extremely positive! Waiting patiently for official results as per the constitution," Mnangagwa said on Twitter early yesterday.

The rival claims pointed to a contested result, raising the prospect of competing fraud allegations and a possible run-off vote in September -- required if no candidate wins at least 50 percent of ballots in the first round.

Analysts have said it was unclear whether the country's generals would accept a win by the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

Defeat for the ruling party would likely lead "to a denunciation of the election by the Mnangagwa administration and the potential for the military to intervene to secure power for ZANU-PF," the London-based BMI risk consultancy said.

## War can breed tragedies N Korea working on new missiles

Imran Khan tells Modi in first post-election call as both leaders discuss regional peace

REUTERS, Islamabad

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi called Imran Khan to congratulate him on his party's victory in the Pakistan general election, with both men discussing regional peace.

It was their first call since Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) emerged victorious from last week's vote that has been marred by claims of pre-election rigging and irregularities on the day.

Relations between the nuclear-armed rivals have frayed in the last couple of years, with direct talks stalled amid diplomatic rows and military firing across the Line of Control frontier that divides the disputed region of Kashmir.

Khan, widely seen as Pakistan's prime minister-in-waiting, is now courting independent candidates and minor parties to form a coalition government in a nation that has fought three wars with India.

In the phone call on Monday, Modi "reiterated his vision of peace and development in the entire neighbourhood", according to a statement by India's Ministry of External Affairs.

Khan declared in his victory speech that he wanted to resolve the long-standing territorial dispute over Kashmir, saying "if India comes and takes one step towards us, we will take two".

Khan's media team said he had told Modi it was vital both countries focus on pulling millions out of poverty.

The PTI said Khan had also told Modi that issues between the two nations must be resolved through talks. "Wars can breed tragedies instead of facilitating resolution of conflicts," he said, according to a PTI statement.

"Prime Minister (Modi) expressed hope that democracy will take deeper roots in Pakistan," the Indian ministry said in a brief statement.

### Says US as Koreas hold military talks

AGENCIES

North and South Korea discussed reducing tension but didn't announce any detailed agreements after military talks yesterday, while the United States detected renewed activity at a North Korean missile factory, casting more suspicion over the North's intentions.

The meeting, the second since June and held in the border village of Panmunjom, was designed to follow on from an inter-Korean summit in April at which leaders of the two Koreas agreed to defuse tension and halt "all hostile acts".

US intelligence agencies have found that North Korea is building new missiles, based on satellite photographs taken in recent weeks and other new evidence, The Washington Post reported Monday.

The factory outside Pyongyang in Sanumdong where the work is underway produced the North's first ICBMs capable of reaching the United States.

Following the Singapore summit in June, Trump had declared that Pyongyang was "no longer a Nuclear Threat," and touted his own diplomatic achievements.

But Kim did not publicly promise to end work at the country's nuclear and missile facilities, instead speaking of eventual denuclearization.



Arab-Israeli poet Dareen Tatour, 35, reacts at the magistrate court after being sentenced to five months in prison, in Nazareth, Israel yesterday. Tatour was convicted for inciting violence and supporting a terrorist organisation in poems and other social media posts.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Ready to meet Rouhani

Says Trump, sets no preconditions for talks; Iran says meeting must include return to nuclear deal

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

President Donald Trump, who has pulled the United States out of a multinational nuclear deal with Iran and has repeatedly attacked the government in Tehran, has said he is willing to meet the Iranian leadership with no preconditions.

Trump made the comments on Monday during a joint White House news conference with Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte.

"I would certainly meet with Iran if they wanted to meet. I don't know that they're ready yet. I ended the Iran deal. It was a ridiculous deal. I do believe that they will probably end up wanting to meet and I'm ready to meet any time that they want to," he said in Washington, DC, after being asked whether he would be willing to meet his Iranian counterpart Hassan Rouhani.

Trump said he had "no preconditions" for a meeting with the Iranians, adding: "If they want to meet, I'll meet."

His remarks come amid heightened rhetoric in the wake of the US' withdrawal from the landmark nuclear deal with world powers in May and its reimposition of sanctions against Iran.

Washington has since threatened countries with financial consequences if they did not halt all imports of Iranian oil from November 4.



An adviser to the Iranian president said yesterday that any talks with the US had to start with reducing hostility and a return to the nuclear deal.

"Respect for the great nation of Iran, reduction in hostilities, US returning to the nuclear deal... That will open the rocky path of the moment," wrote Hamid Aboutalebi on Twitter.

Earlier this month, Rouhani hinted that Iran may block regional oil exports if its own sales are halted following the US' withdrawal from the deal, which was signed in 2015 by the US, UK, France, Germany, Russia, China and the European Union.

## NEWSIN brief

### Thailand asks UK to extradite Yingluck

REUTERS, Bangkok

Thailand has asked Britain to extradite former prime minister Yingluck Shinawatra, overthrown in a coup in 2014 and sentenced in absentia to jail for negligence, Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha said yesterday. Yingluck fled the country last August to avoid being jailed over a rice subsidy scheme that ran up losses in billions of dollars.

### Trump 'looking into' rules on printed guns

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump said yesterday he was "looking into" whether Americans should be able to print their own guns, dipping his toe into the latest contentious debate over the right to bear arms. "I am looking into 3-D Plastic Guns being sold to the public," Trump said, appearing to favor curbs, "already spoke to NRA, doesn't seem to make much sense!"

### LS passes bill for death to child rape convicts

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

A Bill providing for death penalty to those convicted of raping girls below the age of 12 years was passed by the Lok Sabha, lower House of Indian parliament, on Monday. The legislation seeks to replace the Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance following a nation-wide outrage over the rape and murder of a minor Muslim girl in Jammu and Kashmir state.

## 'I changed a lot in prison'

Palestinian teen says no regrets after release from Israeli jail after eight-month sentence

AFP, Nabi Saleh

Palestinian teenager Ahed Tamimi said Monday she was deeply changed by her eight-month sentence in an Israeli jail for slapping two soldiers, but does not regret any of her actions.

Tamimi, who was 16 when she was arrested in December for hitting and kicking soldiers in front of her house in the occupied West Bank, was released Sunday and swarmed by media from across the globe.

In an interview the day after her release, the now 17-year-old told AFP that she understood she had become a "symbol" of the Palestinian cause.

"Of course my life has been changed a lot. I changed a lot in prison," said Tamimi.

"I became more focused, more aware also. Prison ages a person. In one day you age 100 years," she said in the backyard of her home in the West Bank village of Nabi Saleh.

Asked if she would have done the same thing if she had known it would land her behind bars for months, she said yes.

She pointed to the circumstances in which the soldiers had entered the garden of her house in December during a day of major protests that saw her cousin shot in the head with a rubber bullet.

Her confronting of the Israeli soldiers was recorded and went viral online.

"I didn't do anything wrong that I should regret," she said.

"If I had known I would be in jail eight months, of course I would have done it because it was a natural reaction to a soldier being in my house shooting at people, people from my village," she said.

"Any person in this situation -- I hit him, maybe there are people that would have killed him."

Tamimi said she hoped to study law to expose the issue of Israel's occupation to the rest of the world.



## Myanmar forms probe commission

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Manalo, 82, a former undersecretary of foreign affairs of the Philippines, will chair the commission.

The two local members are lawyer Mya Thein and Aung Tun Thein, an economist and former UN official. That was last year appointed by de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi to a key role in Myanmar's response to the Rakhine crisis.

In an interview with The Daily Star in April this year, Thein had said tortures (on Rohingya) happened in Rakhine, but he was not concerned about the international community terming it "ethnic cleansing, genocide or war crime".

"Whatever has happened in Rakhine is not systematic," he had said.

Over 700,000 Rohingyas fled Myanmar's western Rakhine State after a military crackdown that started in August last year in response to attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army or ARSA on security posts. Myanmar has rejected accusations of ethnic cleansing and dismissed most accounts of atrocities, blaming Rohingyas "terrorists", Reuters mentioned.

Independent journalists or human rights groups were not given access to Rakhine State since the military campaign began.

Yanghee Lee, UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, has not been allowed to visit Myanmar by the country's government since December last year to carry out her work mandated by the UN Human Rights Council.

Amid global calls for accountability, pre-trial chamber of International Criminal Court in June wrote to Myanmar to know its observations on "intentionally deported" Rohingyas into Bangladesh.

Myanmar State Counsellor Office Director General Zaw Htay said ICC does not have the right to take action against it as Myanmar is neither a member country nor has signed the agreement.

Against this backdrop, Myanmar has formed its own commission.

"The Independent Commission will investigate the allegations of human rights violations and related issues, following the terrorist attacks by ARSA," said the office of President Win Myint, referring to the ARSA, a Rohingya armed group, reports Reuters.

Meanwhile, the UN has recently said the situation in Rakhine is not yet conducive to the return of the Rohingyas though Myanmar signed a repatriation deal with Bangladesh in November last year, and signed a tripartite agreement with UNDP and UN refugee agency.

Rohingyas want guarantee of citizenship in Rakhine, UN-led peacekeepers, return to their own homes and not the camps that Myanmar has set up, freedom of movement when they return and recognition as Rohingya, not illegal Bengalees.

Myanmar, however, says Rohingyas have to accept national verification card (NVC), which is a pathway to citizenship. But Rohingyas say there is little chance for them to get citizenship through NVC that identifies them as illegal foreigners in the first place.

The new commission to look into human rights abuses in Rakhine State has been criticised by observers yesterday as a "political gimmick", as Myanmar tries to stave off further censure over its treatment of Rohingyas, AFP adds.

Yangon-based analyst David Mathieson called the new commission a "political gimmick".

International Commission of Jurists legal adviser Sean Bain pointed out that previous inquiries on Rakhine had produced no tangible result.

Human Rights Watch Myanmar researcher Rich Weir said the new body would be used like previous commissions "as distractions and shields from criticism and pressure".