



People take part in a demonstration in favour of the new copyright directive ahead of the vote on copyright in the Digital Single Market at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, eastern France, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Thai factions jostle

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It is more than 400,000 ballots ahead of Pheu Thai, the populist party topped from power by the 2014 coup and affiliated with self-exiled former premier Thaksin Shinawatra.

But Pheu Thai still appeared set to become the largest party in the lower house, on track for 137 constituency seats compared to Phalang Pracharat's 97, according to early figures.

Experts predict days -- perhaps weeks -- of messy negotiations, with both parties claiming the right to form a government.

Disqualifications of candidates and disputes over poll irregularities are likely to reshape the balance of the lower house before May 9, when final results are to be published.

As the horse-trading plays out, questions are also swirling over election irregularities, with millions of invalidated ballots, dodgy oversight of polling and bungling by election authorities that may have wildly skewed initial numbers.

The Election Commission is also releasing the results in a staggered fashion, claiming "human error" when reporters pointed out that a handful of provinces returned more ballots than the voter turnout.

It also came under fire for declaring some 1,500 ballots from New Zealand void because they did not arrive on time.

Regional election monitor ANFREL yesterday announced in a statement the initial ballot tabulation process was "deeply flawed", which did "further damage to the perceived integrity" and public trust in the results.

About 5.6 percent of the ballots - or just under 1.9 million - were invalidated, according to ANFREL, which said the statistic was "high" compared to an average of two to three percent.

"It is very confusing and someone needs to clarify it," said Watcharee Chanpeng, a 41-year-old voter in Bangkok.

Prayut, a stern army chief who engaged in increasingly bizarre publicity stunts ahead of polls as part of an image-makeover, was in playful form

as he arrived for a cabinet meeting on Tuesday, playing a flute taken from music students in front of cameras.

But later comments to reporters were more direct.

"I will put this country on the road to unity and reconciliation to move the country forward", he said, adding that "in this world, nothing comes easy".

The serious business of forming a government still lies ahead.

Pheu Thai said Monday it was entitled to try to put together an anti-junta coalition as the majority party in the lower house.

That effort would lean on the Future Forward party, which took over five million votes, emerging from nowhere to become the third biggest party in Thai politics.

Bangladeshi man

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my other phone, the iPhone XS Max because I was texting on that phone," he tweeted.

He added that he knew it was going to be good shot, as the place had great lighting, the man's clothes were great, and his eyes were a "must be photographed eyes".

"He was very shy. He didn't really know where to look at, maybe because this is a phone? I pointed to the camera many times, and many shots were not good. It was only until he truly looked at the camera. I finally got it. Isn't he beautiful?" he tweeted.

Many Twitter users were in awe of the man's chiseled looks.

DrewWeah said the photograph reminded him of the 1984 National Geographic cover of Sharbat Gula, which was photographed by journalist Steve McCurry.

Sharbat was known as the Afghan Girl with striking green eyes in a red headscarf looking into the camera.

Meanwhile, there were other Twitter users who were impressed with the Google Pixel 2 XL picture quality.

Nisae said: "I'm so dumping my iPhone 6s and getting Google Pixel nextlol".

More foreign friends

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number was raised to 650. But after awarding 338 persons and institutions in seven phases until October 2013, the government stopped handing over the award.

The only exception was in June 2015 when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his visit to Bangladesh, received the award on behalf of BJP leader and former Indian prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The award winners this time would be getting crests made of silver as the government decided not to give them gold crests following the scandal over precious metals in 2014.

Previous Awards

In 2011, a committee prepared a list of foreign friends and institutions from 29 countries. Among them, 254 were Indians, 88 Americans, 39 Pakistanis, 36 British, 16 French, and 14 each from Russia, Nepal, and Japan.

The awards were in three categories -- Bangladesh Freedom Honour, Bangladesh Liberation War Honour, and Friends of Liberation War Honour.

Until October 2013, Bangladesh awarded 338 foreign friends and institutions of 21 countries, including 225 Indians, 29 Americans, 17 Pakistanis, 13 British, 11 Russians, nine Nepalese, eight Japanese, and two French.

Sixty foreign friends were awarded during the seventh ceremony held in October 2013.

Bangladesh Freedom Honour, the

highest honour, has been conferred only on former Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in July 2011.

Indian National Congress Party head Sonia Gandhi, the daughter-in-law of Indira Gandhi, received the award from president Zillur Rahman at a ceremony in Dhaka.

Indira took a firm, principled stand to side with the oppressed people of then East Pakistan in 1971. She travelled across the world to drum up support for the independence of Bangladesh.

The second highest award, Bangladesh Liberation War Honour, was conferred on 15 people and the third highest award, Friends of Liberation War Honour, was conferred on 312 people and 10 organisations.

CREST SCAM BEHIND 6-YEAR PAUSE

When asked why no such ceremony took place since 2013, the liberation war affairs minister said it was "due to various reasons" and he refused to provide further details.

Sources at his ministry, however, said it was due to the scam over crests.

In 2014, reports surfaced in the media that the gold crests handed to the foreign friends of the Liberation War effort had very little precious metals.

Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) found the crests to have only 2.63 grams of gold when they were supposed to have 11.66 grams.

The BSTI test also confirmed that

the crests, which should have been made of 351 grams of silver, had no silver at all. They were made of an alloy of brass, copper and zinc.

A committee formed by the government later found 13 people, including a former minister, guilty of fraudulence.

"The government has decided that it will no longer present crests made of gold to foreign friends. There will be silver crests and some traditional gifts," Minister Mozammel said.

Some officials at the ministry also pointed out the awardees' inability to travel to Bangladesh due to health issues as a reason for not holding the ceremony sooner.

Shahriar Kabir, a member of the committee that prepared the list of foreign friends, said no ceremony was held in the last six years due to the crest scam.

"Now we have selected 650 foreign friends and the government should honour all of them. We had decided that Bangladesh would arrange the ceremonies at respective embassies or high commissions in case the awardee was unable to travel.

"If the foreign friends cannot come to the embassies or high commissions either, then the programme will be organised at their places. If someone is honoured posthumously, then their families or relatives would be handed over the award," Shahriar told this paper.

Another foreign

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He pointed that Singapore and Malaysia do not impose any charge on the new airlines in the first year of their operation in a bid to attract more foreign airlines.

On the flipside, Bangladesh does not offer anything to attract the foreign airlines. Instead, Dhaka is a bad destination for foreign airlines as they need to spend more money due to the high price of fuel in Bangladesh, added Dr Momen.

He said foreign airlines face various troubles while operating their flights in Dhaka, mostly due to the shortage of boarding bridges and prolonged time period required for luggage handling.

Momen also said local air operators can utilise the vacuum as an opportunity to flourish themselves.

Asked Kamrul Islam, general manager at the US-Bangla Airlines, said different foreign airlines have different reasons for quitting their operations in Dhaka.

"Many of those abandoned their operation as part of their marketing strategy and some pulled out having failed to compete in the growing market," he said.

Kamrul, who has been working in the aviation sector for two decades, said flight operation expenses to and from Dhaka became costly due to the high charge on landing, parking, route navigation, airport security and high price of jet fuel.

National flag carrier Biman Bangladesh Airlines, local private airlines US-Bangla Airlines, Regent Airways and two foreign air operators Singapore Airlines and Scoot have been operating direct flight on Dhaka to Singapore route.

Dhaka-Singapore route has been seeing more passengers in recent years due to an increased volume of export and import between the two countries.

Bullet-hit

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near Nayapara Rohingya refugee camp, said Abdus Salam, sub-inspector of Nayapara Refugee Camp Police Outpost.

Police went to the spot after hearing gunshots from a hilly area nearby at night and recovered the body, he added.

Sadek was a resident of Nayapara camp.

Locals said murders, abductions and clashes have become frequent in the camps for the purpose of establishing supremacy after infamous Rohingya robber Nurul was killed in a gunfight. Most of the clashes are between Nurul's gang and its opponents, they added.

Meanwhile in Ukhia, police recovered the body of Ayesha Begum, 18, from Balukhali refugee camp, said Mizanur Rahman, sub-inspector of Balukhali refugee camp Police Outpost.

The body bore injury marks, he added.

According to the victim's neighbours, Ayesha's husband Javed Hossain beat her to death, Mizanur said.

Both bodies were sent to Cox's Bazar General Hospital for autopsy.

Earlier on Sunday, a group of criminals shot Master Abdul Motaleb, 66, president of Rohingya Development Committee, at Leda refugee camp in Teknaf, around 10:00pm, SI Abdus Salam said, adding that Motaleb was undergoing treatment at Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

Motaleb is highly educated among the Rohingya community and a famous nationalist leader. He came to Bangladesh in 2012.

Massacre lost from pages

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Forty-eight years after independence, Nasim still carries her wound although her husband succumbed to the ravages of the war in 2001.

And though wounds have found a way to heal, the residents of Dogacchi have never forgotten that tragic day, even though the rest of the country is yet to recognise it.

Over 50 innocent villagers were martyred and several hundred injured during the onslaught.

Almost the entire village was razed in an attempt to take revenge on the villagers who had sheltered freedom fighters at one time.

"The villagers' only fault was that they had given shelter and food to freedom fighters during the liberation war. Local collaborators of the Pakistan army passed the information and the attack was launched," Md Islam Ali Pramanik, a local businessman, told The Daily Star.

He added that some of the villagers still bore marks of the massacre and the memories remained fresh.

The martyrs of the day though are yet to be recognised, with the villagers lamenting the lack of initiatives to do so.

Till today, however, an exact date of the incident cannot be pinpointed but those who were alive at the time say it to be the last Monday of April in 1971.

The brutality the occupation forces unleashed on the village was not confined to any single killing ground.

In fact, the whole village became one as farmers, day labourers, local businessmen -- many of them Hindus -- fell to an unending hail of bullets.

Without a single freedom fighter present at the time, the villagers put up little resistance.

The sanctity of their homes was violated as their houses turned into their graves.

The attack began in broad daylight when the villagers were busy in their daily works. Few escaped with their lives, according to eyewitnesses.

"When I was going to my office at about 9:00am, I happened upon a convoy of occupation troops nearing the village.

"I returned home to receive the body of my mother," Abdur Rouf, an 80-year old retired postman of the village said.

He said he was still haunted by the images of the many bodies lying around the village with nobody to bury them.

"A few of the villagers and I later buried them. Most people are yet to identify the graves of their dear ones in the village," Rouf said.

Talking to The Daily Star, President of Pabna Chamber of Commerce and Industries Saiful Alam Shopon Chowdhury, he said he knew the exact spot where his father and grandfather lay buried.

"My father Ehia Malitha and grandfather Golam Moula Malitha both received martyrdom during the massacre. I was a one-year-old infant during the incident. My uncle Mozammel Malitha saved himself and me by jumping into the river," he said.

Although Saiful built a proper grave for his lost ones once he found where they were buried, he wished there was a monument to commemorate those who lost their lives in the massacre.

The events that unfolded in Dogacchi were not restricted to brutal killings but also acts of torture.

According to eyewitness Ratan Sarkar, the Pakistan occupation army tied two siblings Haripada Shaha and Benu Shaha to the back of an army jeep and then dragged them around the village.

It happened because they had been vocal against the killing of a Muslim boy in front of Ratan's family temple

(Shitola Mondir). The temple was burnt to ashes.

"We buried four bodies here in the temple ground. But no steps have been taken to mark the spot," he said.

"There are several graves of martyrs in the village. Every corner of the village still carries the tragic memories but the villagers are so unfortunate that the martyrs are yet to be recognised. There has been no initiative to build a memorial there."

Talking with The Daily Star, Habibur Rahman Habib, former commander of Pabna Muktiyuddho Sangshad, said though they remember the mass killings, they often forget that many martyrs were yet to be recognised.

"We demand that the government establish a memorial there in the village for the sake of spreading the history of the liberation war to future generations," Habib said.

Contacted, Pabna Deputy Commissioner Md Jasim Uddin said the district administration would take steps if the people demanded it.

"As the matter has come to our notice, we will try to find out whether the locals or freedom fighters demand that we take initiatives to establish a memorial here in the village to recognise the martyrs," he said.

Bodies of two

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at his family graveyard in Joypura village under Palash upazila of Narsingdi," said Sharif Sarkar, brother-in-law of Zakaria.

On March 15, a total of 50 people were shot dead as a white supremacist shot and killed devotees at two mosques -- Al Noor and Linwood -- at Christchurch.

Among the dead, five were identified as Bangladeshi nationals.

'Ceasefire' eases

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As in past escalations that ended with Egyptian mediation, Israel denied it had agreed to a ceasefire with Hamas, which it views as a terrorist group.

"Netanyahu is trying to portray himself as a hero to his people, therefore he publicly denies the understanding reached with the Egyptians," Islamic Jihad official Khader Habib said. "Resistance factions are committed to calm as long as the enemy abides by it."

Rocket warning sirens, which had sounded in Israeli towns near the border on Monday night, fell silent by morning.

The UN Middle East envoy Nickolay Mladenov told the Security Council yesterday he had been working with the Egyptians to secure a ceasefire.

"A fragile calm seems to have taken hold," he said.

Mladenov condemned indiscriminate firing of rockets by Hamas toward Israel as provocative acts that increased the risk of escalation and he urged maximum restraint by all parties.

The escalation was the biggest since November between Israel and Hamas, which fought three wars between 2007 and 2014 and have come to the brink of all-out conflict several times since.

In the 2014 Gaza war, more than 2,100 Palestinians, most of them civilians, were killed in seven weeks of fighting. Sixty-six Israeli soldiers and

seven civilians in Israel were killed.

Security is a major issue as Netanyahu, in power for a decade, faces his strongest electoral challenge from a centrist coalition led by an ex-general. Netanyahu is beset by corruption allegations which he denies. He says he has kept Israelis safe with a tough stance towards the Palestinians that could be weakened if he leaves office.

Meanwhile a peace process aimed at ending the Israel-Palestinian conflict based on a two-state solution has all but collapsed.

In Washington, Netanyahu met US President Donald Trump, who reversed decades of US policy to sign a proclamation recognising Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, which Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 Middle East war.

A senior Israeli official said Trump's move was proof that Israel could retain land captured in what he called a "defensive war", an apparent suggestion of a permanent hold over other areas captured in 1967, such as parts of the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

The Israeli military blamed Hamas, the dominant armed group in Gaza, for Monday's initial strike that destroyed a house in Mishmeret, a village north of Tel Aviv. It said the rocket had been launched from the enclave, some 120 km (70 miles) away.

Mapping genocide

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torture cells of Khulna to create a visual map based on the accounts of eyewitnesses and survivors of the 1971 genocide.

"Unfortunately, the generation that was supposed to work on it did not. Our generation is now faced with the problems of lack of documentation and archiving. We are the last generation to be able to meet and record the survivors," said 27-year-old Turjoy.

The project visually represents the major locations in Khulna where mass killings took place. The photographs revisit and (re)interpret the atrocities that occurred in certain sites by photographing them in their current state, drawing a conceptual link between the past and the present.

"Historians have written books about these sites. I started as a photographer, and I wanted to explore how to connect the present and the past timelines through visual representation," said Turjoy. He called it a "creative research project".

The photojournalist visited the spots where atrocities were carried out by the Pakistani army, photographed their current states and interviewed survivors. The aim was this -- history must not be lost in the annals of amnesia.

He selected Khulna for documentation, because it is his birthplace, but also because of the district's role in the war.

"The very first Razakar camp and concentration centre was set up in Khulna. The Chuknagar massacre which took place on May 20, 1971 is said to be one of the worst mass killings during the war. In addition, one of the largest killing fields in the country, Gollamari, is also in Khulna," said Turjoy.

The documentarian describes the surreal feeling of visiting the sites. "I went to Forest Ghat first," said Turjoy, referring to a jetty on the Bhairab river where people were killed every single day. Historians say that the dead were thrown into the river from this jetty.

"After 49 years there was no trace of anything. I visited in the afternoon when the local people go to Forest Ghat to take walks, hang out and eat jhalmuri. When I tried to reimagine what the jetty was like in 1971, it was such a big contrast to what it is now," he said.

The locals knew nothing about the genocide that took place on the jetty, he added.

And this amnesia, this not-knowing is what the project is hoping to counter in the future.

"This is a part of a bigger project and I hope to cover the rest of Bangladesh too," stated Turjoy.

To see the interactive project online, scan this QR code on your phone or visit <http://campaign.thedailystar.net/genocide/>