

# TsuNaMo 2.0 hits Mamata & Naidu

TNN, New Delhi

If Congress faced the brunt of the Modi wave in 2014, regional parties Trinamool Congress and Telugu Desam Party faced the storm in 2019, uprooting their plans to be the fulcrum of a coalition at the Centre that could replace the BJP-led NDA.

TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu, who undertook a tour of state capitals to sew up cooperation among regional parties and Congress, suffered a serious meltdown on home turf, with the rival Jagan Mohan Reddy-led YSR Congress wiping the slate in parliamentary and assembly elections.

The shock defeat, after exit polls had offered conflicting projections, was a jolt that pulled the rug from under Naidu's plans.

Trinamool leader Mamata Banerjee, another seasoned player, also seems to have misread the reality in her state where the Modi phenomenon worked on the ground, posing the most serious political challenge since she took charge as West Bengal chief minister



in 2011. The BJP threat could grow more potent in the run-up to the assembly elections in 2021, what with NDA now firmly ensconced in Delhi.

Mamata Banerjee fought hard to preserve her territory as the BJP campaigned aggressively in 42-seat Bengal. Her Trinamool Congress could only retain 22 of the 34 seats it won in 2014, but the BJP followed closely with 18 seats. More importantly BJP's vote share grew alarmingly.

Other regional parties like DMK

in Tamil Nadu, BJD in Odisha and TRS in Telangana held their ground despite NDA being a challenger, though with varying intensity.

In Andhra, TDP was replaced by another regional player, YSR Congress, and BJP could not make a mark. These parties, however, made no attempt to align with any bloc and stuck to defending or — in the case of YSR Congress — gaining state turfs.

Both Banerjee and Naidu were calculating on BJP falling short of a majority and the possibility of

a regional bloc calling the shots. The Trinamool leader, not keen on Congress leading a coalition, was looking to use a regional front to stall the national party. The political strategising was simply swamped by the saffron surge.

A reason for their efforts not bearing fruit was the calls for opposition unity not translating into effective alliances. Congress and the Left failed to tie up in West Bengal, Congress and Aam Aadmi Party fought separately in Delhi and Congress was on its own in Uttar Pradesh. Yet, with BJP's vote-share crossing 50% in Delhi, being a shade under that in UP and crossing 40% in West Bengal, the party's challenge took on new dimensions.

While Naidu faced anti-incumbency in Andhra Pradesh, there was no BJP to deal with. But in West Bengal, where Banerjee faced anti-incumbency, the Trinamool chief was seen as pushing the Left and Congress to a corner as a result of which supporters of both parties seem to have helped BJP gain ground.

# Congress draws a blank in 18 states, Union territories

## UP, Odisha party chief to quit; Rahul expected to offer resignation today

AGENCIES

The Congress has drawn a blank in 18 states and Union Territories -- an indicator of its decimation in the Lok Sabha polls.

This is the Congress' second straight rout in Lok Sabha elections after it was decimated in the 2014 polls when the party ended up with a tally of 44 seats.

The Congress has been completely routed in Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, Dadar and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Lakshadweep, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Delhi, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tripura and Uttarakhand.

Training his guns on the Congress, BJP chief Amit Shah on Thursday said the grand old party had drawn a "big zero" in 17 states and Union Territories, while the saffron party got more than 50 per cent

votes in 17 states.

Murmurs have already started within the party over taking responsibility for its poor performance across the country, with some of its leaders already sending in their resignation.

Uttar Pradesh Congress chief Raj Babbar and Odisha Congress president Niranjan Patnaik announced their resignation in the wake of the party's electoral debacle in their respective states.

According to sources, the party has convened a meeting of the Congress Working Committee, its highest decision making

body, at 11:00am today.

Rahul Gandhi is likely to offer his resignation at the meet, party sources said.

The top Congress leadership will deliberate on the reasons for the loss and assess them. It bagged only 52 seats in this election.



## 17TH LOK SABHA

# Record number of female MPs elected

REUTERS, Mumbai

A record number of women are set to enter India's parliament after a marathon election that returned Prime Minister Narendra Modi to power, initial results showed yesterday.

With most of the counting complete, 78 of the 542 seats of Lok Sabha went into polls were on course to go to women candidates - a record high in the world's largest democracy, but still well below the global average of nearly one in four seats.

Election Commission of India has suspended vote in Vallore constituency.

India was one of the first countries to have a female leader, but more than five decades after Indira Gandhi became prime minister, women's participation in politics remains stubbornly low.

Almost half of India's 900 million voters are women, and both Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and the opposition Congress Party appealed heavily to female voters in their election campaigns. Both promised a safer life and new opportunities to women, who still earn less, learn less, live poorer, marry younger and risk sexual violence from molestation to rape.

Female voter turnout has historically been low, but this year for the first time women turned out in roughly the same numbers as men at about 67%.

The proportion of women in the lower house now looks set to rise to 14% - two percentage points higher than before the election, but still well behind neighbouring Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Among the biggest upsets in the election was scored by Smriti Irani, a BJP candidate who defeated Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in Amethi - a bastion of the Gandhi family for decades.



This handout photograph released by the media centre of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) yesterday shows Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (C) and BJP president Amit Shah (R) taking blessing at the house of Bharatiya Janata Party senior leader Murli Manohar Joshi (L), in New Delhi.

## NEWSIN brief

### Thai king opens first parliament after coup

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's king yesterday opened parliament five years after a 2014 coup, stressing the importance of "national security" and "people's well-being" as the junta moves within striking distance of cementing its grip on power. Results of the March 24 poll were released almost two months after the vote and showed no clear winner. But the junta-linked Palang Pracharat won 115 seats in the lower house, only 11 votes shy of a majority in the combined parliament.

### Oman trying to reduce US-Iran tensions

AFP, Dubai

Oman said yesterday it was trying to reduce spiralling tensions between the United States and Iran as the Pentagon confirmed it was considering deploying more troops to the region. The small but strategic sultanate, which lies just across the Strait of Hormuz from Iran at the entrance to the Gulf, has maintained good relations with Tehran through successive regional crises. Those relations have at times allowed it to play an important mediating role, including with the United States.

### Net immigration to UK falls to 5-yr low

REUTERS, London

Long-term immigration to Britain fell to a five-year low last year, driven by a fall in the number of migrants from the European Union, official figures showed yesterday. The number of people moving to Britain for more than a year, minus those leaving, sank to 258,000 in the 12 months to December 2018 from 285,000 in 2017, the lowest for a calendar year since 2013. "Since 2016, the pattern of migration to the UK for work has been changing.



### US charges Assange with espionage

The US Justice Department unveiled 17 new criminal charges against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange on Thursday, saying he unlawfully published the names of classified sources and conspired with and assisted ex-Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning in obtaining access to classified information. The superseding indictment comes a little more than a month after the Justice Department unsealed a narrower criminal case against Assange. Assange was initially charged with conspiring with Manning to gain access to a government computer as part of a 2010 leak by WikiLeaks of hundreds of thousands of US military reports about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. He now faces a total of 18 criminal counts, and could face many decades in prison if convicted.

### Three more climbers die on crowded slopes of Everest

Three Indian climbers, two women among them, died of exhaustion while descending the slopes of Mount Everest, Nepali officials said yesterday, taking to 15 the total of mountaineers killed or missing in this year's climbing season. More than 120 climbers scaled the world's highest mountain on Thursday, but some of them were caught in the crowd of people on the slopes, leading to exhaustion, dehydration and death, they said. Nihal Ashpak Bagwan, 27, from India's western city of Pune and Anjali Sharad Kulkarni, 54, from the commercial capital of Mumbai, died on the way down from the summit, 8,850 metres (29,035 feet) high. Lhakpa Sherpa of another agency said his client, Kulkarni, died of weakness while coming down to Camp IV on the South Col of Everest.



### Libya coast guard rescues 290 migrants off Libya coast

Libya's coast guard rescued 290 migrants clinging to inflatable rafts yesterday in two operations near the capital Tripoli, a naval forces spokesman said. The western coast of Libya is the main departure point of hundreds of thousands of migrants fleeing their countries from wars and poverty to reach shores of Italy. A coastguard vessel rescued 87 migrants off Qarabuli, a town 50 km (31 miles) eastern Tripoli, on an inflatable boat, naval forces spokesman Ayoub Qassem told Reuters. The coast guard is part of Libya's Navy. Another group of 203 migrants were rescued from two inflatable boats off Zitini, a town 160 km (100 miles) east of the capital, Qassem said.

# Huawei could be part of US-China trade deal

## Says Trump, calls telecom giant 'very dangerous'

REUTERS, Washington

President Donald Trump said on Thursday US complaints against Huawei Technologies Co Ltd might be resolved within the framework of a U.S.-China trade deal, while at the same time calling the Chinese telecommunications giant "very dangerous."

Washington last week effectively banned US firms from doing business with Huawei, the world's largest telecoms network gear maker, citing national security concerns.

"You look at what they've done from a security standpoint, from a military standpoint, it's very dangerous," Trump said in remarks at the White House. "If we made a deal, I could imagine Huawei being possibly included in some form or some part of it."

Trump predicted a swift end to the trade war with China, although no high-level talks have been scheduled between the two countries since the last round of negotiations ended in Washington two weeks ago.

Shares of S&P technology and industrial

companies, bellwethers of trade sentiment, fell more than 2% on Thursday as the market slumped in a sign the conflict was being seen as a battle not just over trade but also about who controls global technology.

Earlier on Thursday, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo accused the chief executive of Huawei, Ren Zhengfei, of lying about his company's lack of ties to the Beijing government, which he said represented a security risk.

"The company is deeply tied not only to China but to the Chinese Communist Party. And that connectivity, the existence of those connections puts American information that crosses those networks at risk," he said.

Huawei has repeatedly denied it is controlled by the Chinese government, military or intelligence services.

Chief Financial Officer Meng Wanzhou, who is Ren's daughter, was arrested in Canada in December and faces extradition to the United States on charges she conspired to defraud global banks about Huawei's relationship with a company operating in Iran. She and the company deny the charges.



## FIRE AT COACHING CENTRE

# 19 students killed in India's Surat

AFP, Ahmedabad

At least 19 students -- most of them female -- died yesterday in a fire at an Indian building housing a college, officials said, as images showed people jumping to escape the blaze.

"The students lost their life both because of the fire and jumping out of the building," Deepak Saphthaley, a fire official in the western city of Surat, told AFP.

Images showed blazing orange flames and black smoke billowing out of the building.

Saphthaley added that when the blaze began 50 or 60 people were inside the coaching institute on the top floor of the building, which is several storeys high.

The cause was not yet known. "The toll has jumped to 19 and includes 16 females. Sixteen persons died because of burns and three others from injuries after they jumped," Jayesh M Patel, medical officer at Surat Municipal Institute of Medical Education and Research, told AFP.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who comes from Gujarat state where the fire broke out, said on Twitter: "Extremely anguished by the fire tragedy in Surat.

"My thoughts are with bereaved families. May the injured recover quickly. Have asked the Gujarat Government and local authorities to provide all possible assistance to those affected."

# Blasts kill 3 in Pak, Afghan mosques

## 30 devotees injured

AGENCIES

Separate bomb blasts in Pakistan and Afghanistan mosques killed three people and wounded at least 30 devotees who had gathered for worship yesterday.

In Afghanistan, a bomb exploded in a mosque in Kabul, during Friday prayers, officials said, killing three people including a senior preacher and wounding at least 20 men.

The preacher, Samiullah Raihan, was a supporter of the Western-backed Afghan government which Taliban militants are trying to bring down. He was also a member of the National Ulema Council, Afghanistan's top Muslim clerical body.

The neighborhood where the bombing took place is dominated by Sunni Muslims. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack. The explosion hit at a time when dozens of men had gathered for prayers. The death toll could rise, said a second official.

In Pakistan, a bomb at a mosque in Quetta killed two worshippers and wounded 14, officials said.

# India ends Iranian oil imports

AFP, Washington

India has ended all imports of oil from Iran, its ambassador in Washington said Thursday, becoming the latest country to grudgingly comply with threatened US sanctions.

India had already sharply decreased its imports from Iran and bought one million tonnes (tons) of crude in April, the last month before Washington stepped up its pressure campaign against Tehran, Ambassador Harsh Vardhan Shringla said.

Shringla said that energy-hungry India has also ended all imports from Venezuela because it considered itself a partner of the United States -- but said the shift had caused pain at home, with Iran formerly supplying 10 percent of India's oil needs.

**Theresa May's Brexit**

- June 23 2016**: Brexit: The UK votes to leave the European Union
- July 13**: Theresa May becomes prime minister, faced with a divided Tory Party, a divided parliament and a divided country
- Jan 17 2017**: May sets non-negotiable red lines: UK will leave the European Court of Justice, the EU single market and the EU's current customs union
- March 29**: UK triggers its 2-year countdown to leaving the EU, without cross-party debate on the options or their consequences
- June 8**: Snap election strips May of her parliamentary majority. Weakened PM strikes alliance with Northern Ireland's hardline pro-Brexit DUP
- Nov 25 2018**: May clinches draft Brexit deal with the EU
- Dec 12**: Survives attempt by her own party to oust her
- Jan 15, March 12 & 29 2019**: Parliament rejects May's deal three times
- April 3**: May starts Brexit compromise talks with opposition Labour Party
- April 10**: EU extends Brexit deadline until Oct 31
- May 17**: Cross-party Brexit talks collapse
- May 24**: May announces she will step down on June 7

SOURCE: AFP PHOTOS