

Unite to defeat BJP

Sonia Gandhi urges all Indian opposition parties to set aside differences ahead of 2024 polls

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Congress President Sonia Gandhi yesterday said time has come for all Indian opposition parties to rise above their different compulsions and “plan systematically” and unitedly for the 2024 parliamentary election against Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party.

“We all have our compulsions, but clearly, a time has come when the interests of our nation demand that we rise above them,” Sonia said while virtually addressing a congregation of 15 opposition leaders including West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

She said the ultimate goal is 2024 Lok Sabha polls and must plan systematically to give a government which believes in values of freedom movement and in the principles of the Constitution.

“The 75th year of Independence occasion to reaffirm our collective resolve. Congress will not be found wanting,” Sonia said.

Mamata proposed a core group of opposition leaders to decide on joint programmes and movements.

She urged opposition parties to keep aside differences and work together to defeat BJP in 2024 parliamentary polls.

Among other opposition leaders who

attended today’s meeting were Maharashtra Chief Minister and Shiv Sena leader Uddhav Thackeray, DMK leader and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin, Nationalist Congress Party leader Sharad Pawar, Rashtriya Janata Dal’s Tejashwi Yadav and CPI(M) Sitaram Yechury.

However, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav stayed away from the meeting while Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) leader Mayawati and Delhi Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party’s Arvind Kejriwal were not invited.

Mamata Banerjee who is sparing no chance to remind the Congress that they can’t call the shots till they buck up themselves, too said that all parties need to come together.

The Opposition also plans to step up protests all over the country from September 20 to 30 addressing various public issues.

Over the next few days more such meetings are expected to be held with an eye on polls. But two messages from Sonia Gandhi were clear: One her meet was a rebuttal to the dinner meet called by the rebel G23 leader Kapil Sibal in which most top leaders attended. Second, pointed to Mamata and the likes questioning the Congress, the party may be down but it was definitely now out.



In this image courtesy of the US Marine Corps taken on Thursday and released yesterday, fortunate evacuees wait for their flight out of Afghanistan at Hamid Karzai International Airport, Kabul, Afghanistan.

PHOTO: AFP

MORE NEWS

EU says no recognition of Taliban, no political talks

The European Union has not recognised the Taliban, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said yesterday, nor is it holding political talks with the militants, a week after they seized control of Afghanistan. The head of the EU executive spoke after visiting a reception centre in Madrid for Afghan employees of EU institutions evacuated from Kabul. Von der Leyen said she would propose an increase in the 57 million euros (\$67 million) in humanitarian aid which the Commission had allocated this year for Afghanistan. She said EU development aid is tied to respect of human rights, good treatment of minorities and respect for the rights of women and girls. “We may well hear the Taliban’s words but we will measure them above all by their deeds and actions,” von der Leyen told a news conference. She said the Commission was ready to provide funding to EU countries which help resettle refugees, and she planned to raise the resettlement issue at a G7 meeting next week.

Suicide attack targeting Chinese national kills 2 in Pakistan

A suicide bomb attack in Pakistan on a motorcade carrying Chinese personnel injured one Chinese national and killed two local children, the Chinese embassy in Islamabad said yesterday. The attack took place on Friday at the Gwadar East Bay Expressway project in Balochistan, the embassy said. Several wounded people were treated at a local hospital, it said. The embassy called on the Pakistan authorities to conduct a thorough investigation of the attack. No group has claimed responsibility for the incident. In July, a suicide bomber attacked a bus carrying workers to a dam construction site in northern Pakistan, killing 13 people, including nine Chinese nationals. Pakistan’s foreign minister said Pakistani Taliban militants known as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan were behind that attack. Beijing is investing over \$65 billion in infrastructure projects in Pakistan as part of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, under its wider Belt and Road initiative.

Taliban websites disappear from internet, reason unclear

The official websites of the Taliban, who swept to power in Afghanistan on the back of a lightning offensive last week, appeared to have vanished from the internet late on Friday. It was not immediately clear whether a technical fault or something else was to blame. The Taliban operate separate websites in Pashto, Dari, Arabic, Urdu and English. All five appeared to be unreachable on Friday. A spokeswoman for CloudFlare, which online records list as providing protection for the Taliban sites, did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The outage was first reported by The Washington Post.

SOURCE: WEBSITES

Delta variant continues to disrupt life

AGENCIES

Covid-19

Police arrest hundreds of protesters as Australia reports record cases

Shanghai places hundreds in quarantine after airport cases

Sri Lanka announces lockdown as coronavirus cases surge

Australian police arrested hundreds of anti-lockdown protesters in Melbourne and Sydney yesterday and seven officers were hospitalised as a result of clashes, as the country saw its highest ever single-day rise in Covid-19 cases.

Mounted police used pepper spray in Melbourne to break up crowds of more than 4,000 surging toward police lines, while smaller groups of protesters were prevented from congregating in Sydney by a large contingent of riot police.

Victoria state police said that they arrested 218 people in the state capital Melbourne. They issued 236 fines and kept three people in custody for assaulting police. The arrested people face fines of A\$5,452 (\$3,900) each for breaching public health orders.

Police in New South Wales, where Sydney is the capital, said they charged 47 people with breaching public health orders or resisting arrest, among other offences, and issued more than 260 fines ranging from A\$50 (\$35) to \$3,000. The police said about 250 people made it to the city for the protest.

Sydney, Australia’s biggest city with more than 5 million people, has been in a strict lockdown for more than two months, failing to contain an outbreak that has spread across internal borders and as far as neighbouring New Zealand.

The vast majority of the 894 cases reported across Australia yesterday were found in Sydney, the epicentre of the Delta variant-fuelled outbreak. Australia has had about 43,000 COVID-19 cases and 978 deaths. But while those numbers are low, only about a third of Australians aged 16 and above have been fully vaccinated, according to federal health ministry data released on Saturday.

Meanwhile, authorities in Shanghai have quarantined hundreds of people in an attempt to halt a fresh Covid-19 outbreak in the city after infections were detected in cargo workers at its airport, the municipal government said yesterday.

Two of the cargo workers, a Chinese national and an Ethiopian national, were included among four locally transmitted cases in mainland China’s tally of 20 new confirmed infections for Aug 20, announced yesterday.

In Sri Lanka, authorities announced a 10-day lockdown starting on Friday night in an effort to curb the spread of the coronavirus, as surging infections and deaths overwhelm the island’s health system.

The Indian Ocean nation recorded its highest single-day death toll of 187 and 3,793 cases on Wednesday.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa met with members of the presidential task force on coronavirus and was expected to address the nation on Friday evening.

Daily infections have more than doubled in a month to an average of 3,897, according to the Reuters Global COVID tracker.

TALIBAN TAKEOVER THROUGH TWO AFGHANS LENSES

Questions are swirling in the air after the Taliban took control of Afghanistan last week ending the rule of West-backed government of Ashraf Ghani. It took the Taliban just over a week to seize control of the whole country and to obliterate government forces, trained for years and equipped by the United States and others at a cost of billions of dollars. The Taliban have offered a pledge of reconciliation, vowing no revenge against opponents and to respect women’s rights, press freedom. They have also pledged an ‘inclusive government’ based on Sharia. But there are huge concerns globally and within Afghanistan about the Taliban’s brutal human rights record and tens of thousands of Afghans are still trying to flee. Pockets of resistance have emerged against the new ruler of Afghanistan, where one’s ethnic identity often eclipses national one. Can the Taliban be trusted this time? What form of government is on the cards? Will it be inclusive? What will be the future of their new regime? Can they deliver for Afghans? Will there be another civil war? — questions like these are making the headlines in Western-backed news media around the world. But little is coming out from the Afghans themselves. The Daily Star’s correspondent Mostafa Shabuj has asked these questions and more to two Afghan youths from two major ethnic groups of Afghanistan. Here is their conversation:

THE DAILY STAR: How is the situation there? Why people are fleeing?

Ali from Kabul: The situation is calmer after the Taliban’s take over. The people who are leaving the country are mostly (80 percent) Pashtuns who were the translators, interpreters, and employees of US/ western entities. These people are leaving the country, not for the Taliban but to grab the opportunity of a better life abroad.

Irfanullah Irfan from Kunar province: At the beginning, people were scared because they thought that the Taliban would torture or kill them. But the sense of panic ebbed as Taliban announced general amnesty. Now people are feeling relatively safe.

TDS: Why did the Ghani regime fail? Why didn’t the Afghan army fight?

Ali: Although I don’t support the Taliban, I am happy that it (the Ghani regime) collapsed. It was an epitome of corruption, injustice, and nepotism and it heavily prioritised Pashtuns. So was the Karzai regime. Therefore, they collapsed. I would blame more on the Afghan technocrats than the western powers. Corruption and shameless patronizing of Pashtun ethnic groups resulted in empowering the Taliban. Both Karzai and Ghani had sympathy for the Taliban because both are Pashtuns. They wanted the Taliban to be a force, a pressure group, against non-Pashtuns especially the Tajiks (the second dominant ethnic group in Afghanistan).

Irfan: Yes, due to the ethnicity biases the previous

government has collapsed.

TDS: Do you trust this Taliban?

Irfanullah Irfan: The Taliban have pledged to rebuild the country, save it from corruption and nepotism. We are welcoming them this time. Besides, they said they won’t repeat the past mistakes and promising an inclusive government taking in all major ethnic groups on board. That is giving me hope.

Ali: As I said before, corruption, injustices, and Pashtun ethnocentrism pushed the Afghanistan people from the previous government. Even during their past stint,

Irfanullah Irfan, a 28-year-old from the Pashtun ethnicity, is working for an international NGO in Afghanistan.

urban life, they don’t know the bureaucracy to run the government.

TDS: what will happen to progressive groups if the Taliban imposes Sharia laws?

Irfan: See, we are Muslims and we have no issue with the Sharia laws. Yes, they will apply the Sharia rules. No doubt about this but as I said, they already allowed women in works and they have no problems with the media and social media. Taliban said they are not against any groups that follow the Sharia rules. But the concern remains how moderately they will apply the Sharia.

Ali, a 30-year-old from Hazara ethnicity, is a former consultant of World Bank and Afghan ministry of urban affairs.

The Taliban courts were transparent and delivered justice faster than the Ghani regime. Nevertheless, only Pashtuns are keeping their faith in the Taliban, not the others yet.

TDS: Can Taliban deliver?

Irfan: Taliban should form a unity government along with the other ethnic groups and they have already promised to do so. We hope they stick to their promises, including their commitment to build good relationship with other countries.

Ali: Taliban would not be able to govern properly. It won’t be easy for them. Taliban only have the Sharia ideology. Most of them are from rural areas and most of them are Durrani Pashtuns, they don’t know the

Ali: Pakistan, Iran, China, and Russia will be the big players. India is out.

Irfan: The Taliban government should maintain a good relationship with all the nations.

TDS: What will happen to your Afghan cricket team?

Irfan: We are worried about our cricket teams as the T20 world cup is knocking at the door.

Ali: I don’t know what is waiting for the cricket team but I like Pakistan cricket team.

TDS: Last question. Are there any chances of civil wars?

Ali: We might have another civil war in a year or two but it will depend on how the Taliban behave. Much depends on the government formation. Will it be inclusive and power-sharing or not? If not, then pockets of resistance will start especially in the Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbek areas. We have a rich ethnic diversity. The Afghan constitution recognizes 16 ethnic groups but there are more than 40 ethnic groups according to researchers. Pashtuns are around 39%, Tajiks around 30%, Hazara 23%, Uzbek, Turkmen 18%, etc. Right now every group wants a share of the governmental power. The ruling Pashtuns never wanted to conduct a census because they feared that if a census is done then their real numbers might come out and they will no longer be able to claim that they are the majority.

Irfan: This Taliban is reformed and they promised a unity government. But I can’t say anything about it because we don’t know how the Taliban will treat the new generation who emerged for the democracy in a republic era.



AUGUST 22

1910 - Korea was annexed by Japan after five years as a protectorate.

1973 - Henry Kissinger was named US Secretary of State.

2006 - All 170 passengers and crew on board a Russian Tu-154 airliner were killed when it crashed in Ukraine.

2010 - Thirty-three Chilean miners trapped underground for 17 days manage to send message to surface, making first contact with rescuers.

SOURCE: WEBSITES

Advertisement for Ruby Cement and Scan Cement, featuring product images and contact information in Bengali.

Advertisement for Laboratory Equipment (ITB) tender, including details on the project, bidding process, and contact information for icddr,b.

Advertisement for Malaysia PM sworn in, featuring a photo of Ismail Sabri Yaakob and text about his appointment and political background.

Advertisement for Sri Lanka bans 'drunk driving' of elephants, featuring a photo of an elephant and text about the new regulations for elephant welfare.