

RUSSIA PARLIAMENTARY POLLS

Pro-Putin party wins big majority

Opposition claims mass fraud

REUTERS, Moscow

Russia's ruling United Russia party, which supports President Vladimir Putin, won an emphatic parliamentary majority after its most vociferous critics were prevented from contesting an election that opponents said was marred by large-scale fraud.

With 98% of ballots counted yesterday, the Central Election Commission said United Russia had won nearly 50% of the vote, with its nearest rival, the Communist Party, at just under 20%. United Russia won 54% in 2016, the last time a vote was held.

The scale of the victory means United Russia will have more than two-thirds of deputies in the 450-seat State Duma lower house of parliament. This will enable it to continue to push through laws without having to rely on other parties.

The Kremlin hailed the result, saying United Russia, which Putin helped found, had confirmed its role as the leading party. It said the election had been competitive, open and honest. Kremlin critics alleged large-scale vote rigging. They said the election was a sham and that a newly-introduced electronic voting system had been used to deprive opponents of United Russia of victory in Moscow.

Some Moscow-based Communists who felt cheated called for a protest in the Russian capital yesterday evening. The central square they named as the venue was sealed off by police yesterday afternoon.



Lava flows behind houses following the eruption of a volcano in the Cumbre Vieja national park at Los Llanos de Aridane, on the Canary Island of La Palma yesterday. The Canary Islands' first volcanic eruption in 50 years has forced the evacuation of about 5,000 people, including around 500 tourists, and destroyed about 100 houses, officials said.

PHOTO: REUTERS

SHADOW GOVT'S CALL FOR WAR AGAINST JUNTA

Myanmar's Suu Kyi has 'no comment': lawyer

AFP, Yangon

Toppled Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi has "no comment" on a declaration of war against the junta by a shadow government dominated by lawmakers from her party, her lawyer said yesterday.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military ousted Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy government in a February coup, sparking huge democracy protests which have triggered a bloody crackdown from the junta.

NLD lawmakers make up the majority of a "National Unity Government" which is working to overturn the military regime and declared a "people's defensive war" earlier this month urging citizens to attack junta assets.

Following the declaration, clashes between local "people's defence forces" and the military have increased, and over a dozen army-owned communications towers have been attacked, according to anti-junta groups.

Suu Kyi had "no comment" when asked by her lawyers about the NUG's declaration of war, her lawyer Khin Maung Zaw said, and would comment only after discussions with others in the NLD leadership.

"She said she never turns against the wishes of the people," he added. Suu Kyi, 76, appeared at a special court in the capital Naypyidaw yesterday for the latest hearing over allegedly importing walkie-talkies illegally and flouting coronavirus restrictions during elections last year that her party won by a landslide.

Avoid new Cold War

Guterres urges US, China ahead of UNGA gathering of world leaders

AGENCIES

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has warned of a potential new cold war between China and the United States, and implored the two major powers to repair their "completely dysfunctional" relationship.

"We need to avoid at all cost a cold war that would be different from the past one, and probably more dangerous and more difficult to manage," Guterres said ahead of the annual UN General Assembly gathering of world leaders - a convening blemished by Covid, climate concerns and contentiousness across the planet.

Guterres said the world's two major economic powers should be cooperating on climate and negotiating more robustly on trade and technology even given persisting political fissures about human rights, economics, online security and sovereignty in the South China Sea.

"Unfortunately, today we only have confrontation," Guterres said on Saturday in an interview with the Associated Press.



"We need to re-establish a functional relationship between the two powers," he said, adding that it is "essential to address the problems of vaccination, the problems of climate change and many other global challenges that cannot be solved without constructive relations within the international community and mainly among the superpowers".

Two years ago, Guterres warned global leaders of the risk of the world splitting into two camps, with the US

and China creating rival internets, currency, trade, financial rules "and their own zero-sum geopolitical and military strategies".

He reiterated that warning in the AP interview, adding that two rival geopolitical and military strategies would pose "dangers" and divide the world. Thus, he said, the foundering relationship must be repaired - and soon.

The so-called Cold War between the Soviet Union and its allies and the US and its Western allies began immediately after World War II and ended with the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The UN chief said a new cold war could be more perilous because the Soviet-US antipathy created clear rules, and both sides were conscious of the risk of nuclear destruction. That resulted in back channels and forums "to guarantee that things would not get out of control," he said.



An asylum-seeking migrant carries a girl as he crosses the Rio Grande river towards Mexico near the International Bridge between Mexico and the US in Ciudad Acuna, Mexico on Sunday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

US risks nuke arms race

N Korea warns over Aukus pact; France pulls out of UK defence talks amid row

AGENCIES

North Korea yesterday warned that the United States risked a dangerous nuclear arms race by providing submarine technology to Australia, criticising its "double standards" and vowing counter-measures.

Last week, the United States clinched Aukus pact, a new trilateral security partnership involving Britain, to provide technological aid to Australia to build at least eight nuclear-powered submarines.

North Korea joined China in decrying the US decision as an "irresponsible one" that destroys regional peace and stability and global non-proliferation efforts.

"These are extremely undesirable and dangerous acts which will upset the strategic balance in the Asia-Pacific region and trigger off a chain of nuclear arms race," the North's foreign ministry said in a comment carried by the official KCNA news agency.

The North criticised Washington's "double-dealing attitude," singling out White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki's

remarks that it does not seek conflict with China but the decision was to shore up regional security.

Her comment "amounts to a stand that any country can spread nuclear technology if it is in its interests, and this shows that the US is the chief culprit toppling the international nuclear non-proliferation system," the ministry said.

"We are closely looking into the background of the US decision and will certainly take a corresponding counter-action in case it has even a little adverse impact on the security of our country."

Meanwhile, France has cancelled a meeting between Armed Forces Minister Florence Parly and her British counterpart planned for this week after Australia scrapped the submarine order with Paris.

Parly personally took the decision to drop the bilateral meeting with British Defence Secretary Ben Wallace, the sources said.

The French defence ministry could not be immediately reached. The British defence ministry declined comment. meeting had been cancelled.

UNIVERSITY SHOOTING

Six killed in Russia, several hurt

AFP, Moscow

A gunman opened fire on a university campus in central Russia yesterday and killed six people before being detained, investigators said, in the country's second mass shooting this year to target students.

Video on social media showed students throwing belongings from the windows of university buildings in the city of Perm, around 1,300 kilometres (800 miles) east of Moscow, before jumping to flee the shooter.

The Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes in Russia, initially said eight people were killed but later revised the number of deaths to six.



SEPTEMBER 21

1939 - In Romania, Prime Minister Armand Calinescu was murdered by the fascist Iron Guard.

1964 - Malta became independent after 164 years of British rule.

1999 - An earthquake of magnitude 7.6 struck Taiwan, killing at least 2,321 people and injuring 8,712.

2003 - Nasa's Galileo space probe made a controlled, fiery crash into Jupiter, ending a 14-year mission that yielded dramatic discoveries about Solar System's largest planet and its moons.

SOURCE: REUTERS

Afghan women outraged by Taliban restrictions on work

AFP, Kabul

Fears were mounting in Afghanistan yesterday as the Taliban tightened their grip on women's rights, slashing access to work and denying girls the right to secondary school education.

After pledging a softer version of their brutal and repressive regime of the 1990s, the Islamic fundamentalists have been stripping away at freedoms one month after seizing power.

"I may as well be dead," said one woman, who was sacked from her senior role at the foreign ministry.

"I was in charge of a whole department and there were many women working with me... now we have all lost our jobs," she told AFP, insisting she not be identified for fear of reprisals.

The acting mayor of the capital Kabul has said any municipal jobs currently held by women would be filled by men.

While the country's new rulers have not issued a formal policy outright banning women from working, directives by individual officials have amounted to their exclusion from the workplace.

Many Afghan women fear they will

never find meaningful employment. Since returning to power on August 15, the Taliban have shown no inclination to honour rights of women.

When pressed, Taliban officials say women have been told to stay at home for their own security but will be allowed to work once proper segregation can be implemented.

"When will that be?" a woman teacher said yesterday. "This happened last time. They kept saying they would allow us to return to work, but it never happened."

Women in the capital remain deeply suspicious.

"The Taliban told us not to come to work and to wait for their second announcement. But it seems like they don't want women to work again," a lawyer in the capital's high court told AFP.

A colleague fears that because of her past role prosecuting Taliban fighters, she will not be allowed to work again, but has noticed some changes in the regime.

"They are not like before but we don't know if it will last. Before we had to be accompanied by a man, today we can come alone," she added.

CLINICAL TRIAL RESULTS

Pfizer jab safe for kids aged 5-11

AFP, Frankfurt

Pfizer and BioNTech yesterday said trial results showed their coronavirus vaccine was safe and produced a robust immune response in children aged five to 11, adding that they would seek regulatory approval shortly. The vaccine would be administered at a lower dosage than for people over 12, they said.

"In participants five to 11 years of age, the vaccine was safe, well tolerated and showed robust neutralising antibody responses," US giant Pfizer and its German partner said.

They plan to submit their data to regulatory bodies in the European Union, the United States and around the world "as soon as possible".

'It is unconscionable'

Former UK PM Gordon Brown calls for urgent action to avert wasting stockpiled Covid vaccines

REUTERS, London

A vaccine summit being hosted by US President Joe Biden must come up with a plan this week to transfer 100 million stockpiled Covid-19 vaccines to poorer countries before they reach their expiry date, former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said.

Biden is due to convene a virtual Covid-19 summit on Wednesday on the margins of the UN General Assembly, aimed at boosting vaccinations worldwide with the goal of ending the pandemic by the end of 2022.

Brown said he had sent Biden and fellow G7 leaders research by Airfinity, a scientific information and analytics company, which found 100 million Covid-19 vaccines stockpiled in rich countries in the northern hemisphere would expire by December without being used.

Out of 5.7 billion doses of coronavirus vaccines administered around the world, only 2% have been in Africa.

"We need a plan to distribute vaccines



quickly," Brown, Britain's finance minister for a decade before serving as prime minister from 2007 to 2010, said in a statement.

"It will be a profound and collective political tragedy if this summit misses the opportunity to act with doses transferred immediately to poorer countries," he said.

The Airfinity data predicts that, without a speed-up in the vaccine roll-out, there will be 100 million more Covid-19 cases by next summer and one million more deaths from lack of ventilators and oxygen.

"It is unthinkable and unconscionable that 100 million vaccines will have to be thrown away from the stockpiles of the rich countries whilst the populations of the world's poorest countries will pay for our vaccine waste in lives lost," Brown said.

Brown called on the leaders to decide whether countries should swap delivery contracts, how regulatory barriers to exports could be overcome and who would underwrite costs of using stockpiled vaccines.

MORE NEWS

Italy inmate shoots at rivals with 'drone-delivered' gun

An Italian prisoner shot at fellow inmates through the bars of their cell with a weapon believed to have been smuggled in by drone, a prison union said yesterday. The 28-year old, who has links to the Neapolitan mafia, fired three shots Sunday at prisoners he had argued with, but without injuring them, Donato Capece, head of the Sappe prison union, told AFP. The man had got permission to leave his cell to have a shower, and once the door was open he pulled out the gun and pointed it at a guard, forcing him to hand over his keys to the other cells, Capece said. Unable to open the cells of his enemies, the inmate shot through the bars instead, he said.

Trudeau future on the line as Canadians vote in election

Voting kicked off in Canadian elections yesterday that are headed for a photo finish, with liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau seeking a third term but threatened by a strong challenge from rookie conservative leader Erin O'Toole. Trudeau called the snap election hoping to parlay a smooth Covid-19 vaccine rollout -- among the best in the world -- into a new mandate to steer the nation's pandemic exit, without having to rely on opposition party support to pass his agenda. But the contest, after a bumpy five weeks of campaigning, appears set for a repeat of the close 2019 general election that resulted in the one-time golden boy of Canadian politics clinging to power.



'Hotel Rwanda' hero convicted on terror charges

Paul Rusesabagina, the "Hotel Rwanda" hero who became a fiercely outspoken government critic, was found guilty of terror charges yesterday after what his supporters labelled a politically motivated show trial. He was convicted by a high court in Kigali of forming a rebel group blamed for deadly gun, grenade and arson attacks in Rwanda in 2018 and 2019. "He founded a terrorist organisation that attacked Rwanda, he financially contributed to terrorist activities," Justice Beatrice Mukamurezi said at the end of a seven-month trial. Rwandan prosecutors have sought a life sentence for Rusesabagina, the 67-year-old former hotelier credited with saving over 1,200 lives during the country's 1994 genocide, and whose actions inspired the Hollywood film.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS