

Ghulam Nabi Azad quits Congress

Blames Rahul Gandhi for party's failings

REUTERS, New Delhi

A veteran leader of India's main opposition Congress party quit yesterday, issuing a scathing resignation letter in which he blamed the scion of the influential Gandhi family for the decline of the party that dominated Indian politics for decades.

After ruling for much of India's post-independence period, the 137-year old party, which traditionally promoted a secular state, has floundered against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The BJP has won two successive general elections since 2014 with landslides and looks well-placed to win the next one, due by 2024.



G h u l a m Nabi Azad, a former federal minister who also ruled the disputed region of Kashmir, said he was leaving Congress after nearly 50 years and blamed the party's de facto second-in-command, Rahul Gandhi, the son of party chief Sonia Gandhi, for its failings.

"Unfortunately after the entry of Shri Rahul Gandhi into politics and particularly after January, 2013 when he was appointed as vice president by you, the entire consultative mechanism which existed earlier was demolished by him," Azad said in a letter to Sonia. "All senior and experienced leaders were sidelined and new coterie of inexperienced sycophants started running the affairs of the party."

Congress spokesman Jairam Ramesh questioned the timing of the letter, saying it came as the party was working to organise campaigns against price rises, employment and religious polarisation.

"Unfortunately, at the national level we have conceded the political space available to us to the BJP and state level space to regional parties," Azad added in his letter blaming the party for giving the leadership to a non-serious person.



A family with their belongings wade through rain waters following rains and floods during the monsoon season in Jamshoro, Pakistan, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

MONSOON FLOODING

Pakistan declares emergency

34 killed in last 24 hrs; more than 900 killed since June; 33m 'badly affected'

AFP, Sukkur

Heavy rain pounded much of Pakistan yesterday after the government declared an emergency to deal with monsoon flooding it said had affected more than 30 million people.

The annual monsoon is essential for irrigating crops and replenishing lakes and dams across the Indian subcontinent, but each year it also brings a wave of destruction.

The National Disaster Management Authority yesterday said that more than 900 people had been killed this year -- including 34 in the last 24 hours -- as a result of the monsoon rains that began in June. Officials say this year's floods are comparable to 2010 -- the worst on

record -- when over 2,000 people died and nearly a fifth of the country was under water.

"I have never seen such huge flooding because of rains in my life," octogenarian farmer Rahim Bakhsh Brohi told AFP near Sukkur, in southern Sindh province.

Like thousands of others in rural Pakistan, Brohi was seeking shelter beside the national highway, as the elevated roads are among the few dry places in the endless landscapes of water.

A statement from Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's office said 33 million people had been "badly affected" by the flooding, while the country's disaster agency said nearly 220,000 homes were destroyed and half a million more badly

damaged.

Two million acres of cultivated crops had been wiped out in Sindh alone, the provincial disaster agency said.

Climate Change Minister Sherry Rehman, who on Wednesday called the floods "a catastrophe of epic scale", said the government had declared an emergency, and appealed for international assistance.

Premier Sharif cancelled a planned trip to Britain to oversee the flood response, and ordered the army to throw every resource into relief operations.

A national fundraising appeal has been launched. The worst-hit areas are Balochistan and Sindh in the south and west, but almost all of Pakistan has suffered this year.

1m Covid deaths in 2022: WHO

AFP, Geneva

The World Health Organization has announced that a million people had died from Covid-19 in 2022, calling it a "tragic milestone" when all the tools existed to prevent deaths.

Nearly 6.45 million deaths have been reported to the WHO since the virus was first detected in China in late 2019.

But WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus questioned whether the world was really on top of the pandemic, this far in.

"This week, we crossed the tragic milestone of one million reported deaths so far this year," he told a press conference on Thursday.

"We cannot say we are learning to live with Covid-19 when one million people have died with Covid-19 this year alone, when we are two-and-a-half years into the pandemic and have all the tools necessary to prevent these deaths."

"We ask all governments to strengthen their efforts to vaccinate all health workers, older people and others at the highest risk, on the way to 70 percent vaccine coverage for the whole population."

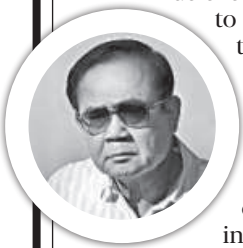
Tedros wanted all countries to have vaccinated 70 percent of their populations by the end of June.


But 136 countries failed to reach the target, of which 66 still had coverage below 40 percent.

Suspended Thai PM to continue as defence minister

REUTERS, Bangkok

Suspended Thai leader Prayuth Chan-ocha said on social media he will continue in his role as defence minister, in his first direct address to the public since a court ordered him to cease his duties as prime minister while it reviews his term limit. The Constitutional Court on Wednesday decided to hear a petition brought by the main opposition party arguing that Prayuth's years spent as the chief of a military junta after he took power in a 2014 coup, should count toward his overall time in office. The constitution stipulates a term limit of eight years for the PM. It remains unclear when the court will deliver a decision on the review. Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan is serving as acting premier of Southeast Asia's second-biggest economy.





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