

## 'People have spoken'

Says Imran as party-backed candidates lead in Pakistan polls

ANI, Islamabad

As the counting of votes was underway for the Pakistan general elections held on Thursday, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan claimed victory, saying that the people demonstrated their resolve to elect his party by turning out in large numbers to vote.

The jailed Pakistani leader also insisted on protecting 'Form 45' to guard the people's mandate and expressed confidence over his victory, saying, "no force can defeat an idea whose time has come."

"Despite every possible method employed to undermine the will of the people, our people have spoken via #MassiveTurnout for vote today. As we have repeatedly stated, "no force can defeat an idea whose time has come."

It is now critical to guard the vote by getting Form 45," Imran Khan posted from his X handle.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Supporters of former prime minister Imran Khan's party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), shout slogans during a protest outside a temporary election commission office demanding free and fair results of the election, in Peshawar, Pakistan yesterday.

## Pak stocks drift lower by polls uncertainty

REUTERS

Emerging market stocks edged lower yesterday while currencies were muted in a quiet session with many markets shut for a holiday, while assets in Pakistan were pummeled by uncertainty over the outcome of the general election.

Pakistan's sovereign dollar bonds fell more than 5 cents, Tradeweb data showed yesterday, as both Imran Khan and Nawaz Sharif claimed victory in neck-and-neck results from Thursday's elections in the debt-laden nation.

Analysts predict there may be no clear winner in the election.

"Consensus expectations were of a PMLN (Pakistan Muslim League) victory, an alignment of military and civilian forces, and a smooth negotiation of the next IMF programme," said Hasnain Malik, head of equity research at Tellimer.

## Fractious Pakistan polls fertile ground for disinfo

AFP, Islamabad

Fake boycotts, fictional ballots and blasphemy smears: a deluge of disinformation accompanied Pakistan's contentious election, with a delayed vote count underway yesterday.

Pakistan's poll is the most fraught of recent years, with ex-prime minister Imran Khan jailed and his arch-rival Nawaz Sharif appearing to be the favourite of the powerful military-led establishment.

Early results show Khan's anointed candidates faring better than expected, after a polarised campaign rife with accusations of rigging and still with no clear winner.

"All different political parties made sure that they participated" in the flow of false information, director of internet watchdog Bytes 4 All Shahzad Ahmed told AFP.

There was also an information vacuum when authorities blocked mobile phone and data services during Thursday's

polling hours, citing security concerns a day after 28 people were killed in twin bombings claimed by the Islamic State group near candidate offices.

Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) were both falsely claimed to have called for election boycotts, with AFP debunking several such posts on social media.

The false boycott claims were seen by observers as apparent bids to stifle turnout of the 128 million Pakistanis eligible to vote on Thursday.

One video on X – viewed nearly 130,000 times – supposedly featured PTI-backed candidate Raja Basharat relaying boycott orders from Khan because supporters were being harassed.

However, Basharat has said the video was a "deepfake" fabricated by artificial intelligence and not an official statement by him.

PTI had not called for a boycott and the

PTI's central information secretary Raouf Hasan told AFP they were urging voters to turn out.

In Sharif's case, footage was dredged up from 2007, when he pledged to sit out a vote under military ruler Pervez Musharraf, and released on TikTok with misleading context.

Like his opponents, he made no such call during campaigning for the current election.

Posts also claimed Pakistan's election commission printed a huge surplus of voting slips, touting it as evidence of a plan to stuff ballot boxes and influence the outcome.

"Election Commission is crossing all limits to defeat PTI," said one such TikTok video "liked" nearly 50,000 times.

Disinformation has also targeted the character of candidates, with PML-N video content edited and taken out of context on Facebook to give the impression of a party official comparing Sharif to God.

## SUDAN CONFLICT

### 700,000 children could die without more aid: UN

REUTERS, Geneva



Unicef said yesterday that 700,000 children in Sudan were likely to suffer from the worst form of malnutrition this year, with tens of thousands who could die. A 10-month war in Sudan between its armed forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has devastated the country's infrastructure, prompted warnings of famine and displaced millions of people inside and outside the country. "The consequences of the past 300 days means that more than 700,000 children are likely to suffer from the deadliest form of malnutrition this year," James Elder, spokesperson for Unicef, told a press conference in Geneva. "Unicef won't be able to treat more than 300,000 of those without improved access and without additional support. In that case, tens of thousands would likely die." Elder defined the most dangerous form of malnutrition as severe acute malnutrition, which makes a child 10 more likely to die from diseases. He said 3.5 million children were projected to suffer acute malnutrition.

## 'Miracle' rescue nearly 60 hrs after Philippine landslide

AFP, Manila

The rescue of a child yesterday nearly 60 hours after a landslide hit a gold-mining village in the southern Philippines has been hailed as a "miracle" after searchers had given up hope of finding more survivors. The girl, who the Philippine Red Cross said was three years old, had been among the more than 100 people missing after the rain-induced landslide hit the village, killing at least 15 people. She was found as rescuers used their bare hands and shovels to look for survivors in Masara village on southern Mindanao island, disaster agency official Edward Macapili of Davao de Oro province told AFP. "It's a miracle," Macapili said, adding that searchers had believed those missing were probably dead. "That gives hope to the rescuers. A child's resilience is usually less than that of adults, yet the child survived." Video of a rescuer carrying the crying, mud-caked child in his arms was shared on Facebook.

## Ensure sugar

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commodities to Bangladesh, especially ahead of the Ramadan, to ensure stability in prices of essentials."

Hasan also requested him to take measures for removing tariff and non-tariff barriers for the export of Bangladeshi products to India.

Goyal said India is committed to ensuring the economic and financial stability in Bangladesh and assured him of accommodating the request for supplying essential commodities.

Bangladesh imports commodities from India worth \$14 billion while exports to India worth \$2 billion.

The two ministers discussed in detail the trade relationship, cooperation in the areas of trade and commerce, connectivity, defence, security and water sharing.

Meanwhile, Indian President Droupadi Murmu yesterday lauded Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for remarkable socio-economic development and women empowerment in Bangladesh.

Murmu said both countries should work together to focus on women empowerment to foster economic development, reports UNB.

The Indian president made the remarks when the foreign minister met her at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

She said all the women in South Asia should be proud of Hasina for her capability and leadership.

The Indian president said a "strong, stable, and prosperous" Bangladesh is in India's interest, and there is immense political will on both sides to see the relationship grow.

She expressed satisfaction at the progress made in almost all areas of bilateral cooperation, such as border and security, trade, connectivity, power, infrastructure, and people-to-people contacts.

The president conveyed felicitations to Hasina for her unprecedented fourth consecutive term as the prime minister of Bangladesh.

Hasan requested Murmu to visit Bangladesh at her earliest convenience.

He was scheduled to return to Dhaka last night after attending a civic reception in Kolkata at the Bangladesh Deputy High Commission.

## Students struggle to open profiles for dollar crisis

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of credit (LC) for the same reason as well.

Rahman, however, said the fact that export and remittance earnings have increased is encouraging, and if this trend continues in the upcoming months, the ongoing crisis should soon come to an end.

The remittance earnings in January rose 7.69 percent year-on-year to \$2.10 billion, marking the highest monthly inflow in the past seven months.

On the other hand, export earnings in January reached a record \$5.72 billion, the highest ever in a single month.

From July to November of the current fiscal year, \$240 million was sent abroad for higher education purposes, while the figure was \$235 million for the same period of the 2022-23 fiscal year, as per the latest data from Bangladesh Bank.

A senior central bank official said that this amount increased only

slightly compared to what it could have been due to banks' restrictions on opening student files as the demand for higher studies abroad has been ever-rising.

Usually, banks face pressure to open student files in the June-July period when admission opens at foreign universities.

In 2022, at least 49,151 Bangladeshi students went abroad to study in 58 countries, according to the latest data from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco)

The number was 24,112 in 2013 and 16,609 in 2008.

The United Arab Emirates is the top destination for Bangladeshis with 11,157 students, followed by the USA with 8,665 students, and Malaysia with 6,180.

The UK, Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan, and some European countries are also among the destinations usually most preferred by Bangladeshi students.

## Sultanganj river port

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ensure that both countries benefit from their waterways for trade and commerce, he added.

The distance of this route is only 18 kilometres. During the dry season, 200-300 tonnes of goods can be transported in each cargo. During monsoon, transportation of goods will be a bit difficult due to the strong current in the river, said a UNB report.

Rajshahi City Corporation Mayor AHM Khairuzzaman Liton said, "We have been working to set up the river port for a long time. It finally happened because of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's sincere efforts."

"When the river port becomes fully operational, it is going to create job opportunities and lower the prices of different commodities due to the low transportation costs."

On the same note, Exporters' and Importers' Association of Chapainawabganj President Kazi Md Shahabuddin said a 500-tonne

capacity barge in the river is equivalent to 25 trucks on the road, and barges use less fuel oil, he said, adding that, "Prices of goods will naturally fall."

Business leaders said the river port will primarily be used to import stones, fly ash, coal, fruits, and spices from India, as well as to export jute and garments.

Meanwhile, Rajshahi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) President Masudur Rahman Rinku said the river has lost its navigability and must be excavated before the full benefits of the river port can be realised.

He also suggested that the riverport's connectivity be later extended to Rajshahi city, Pabna's Rooppur, and the Mongla port.

At that, Mayor Liton said the government has plans to extend the river route to Mongla port and conduct joint capital dredging for the river's navigability by India and Bangladesh.

## 3,300 cases

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Some 190 accused were sentenced along with fines while 93 were acquitted in those cases.

Dhaka has the highest number of cases, 878, pending in the courts, while 2,116 cases are pending in the courts outside Dhaka.

Meanwhile, 359 cases of the ACC are still awaiting disposal in different courts with proceedings of 177 cases stayed by the HC and 182 cases under trial.

Thirty-eight of the cases were disposed of where five individuals got punishment and 25 got acquittals.

Md Jahurul Haque, commissioner of the ACC, said once a case is filed, it goes to the court's jurisdiction and the commission has nothing to do there.

"The ACC is sincerely making efforts to present evidence and information to the court in a timely manner. However, in comparison to the other cases, the judgement of cases of ACC are fast," he said.

Attorney General AM Amin Uddin said the HC has a specific bench to deal with the cases of the ACC.

"The commission has a panel of lawyers. They handle these cases. But if they ask me to handle these cases, I can help. They made such requests in several cases and I also tried to solve them quickly."

ACC's lawyer Mosharraf Hossen Kajol said witnesses play a big role in non-completion of the cases.

"If the witness does not come, the case gets delayed."

"We face a big problem of witnesses [turning up in court] in the cases filed during the tenure of the Anti-Corruption Bureau," Kajol said.

## Aid groups

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as "over the top".

Residents reported fierce gun battles in the enclave's north, and witnesses said eastern parts of Khan Younis in the south had been shelled. Medics and Hamas media said an Israeli drone strike had killed two people in Khan Younis.

Palestinian health officials said at least 15 people were killed in the latest air strikes, including eight in Rafah, reports Reuters.



Supporters attend an election campaign rally for Indonesia's Defence Minister and presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto at the Gelora Sidoarjo Stadium in Sidoarjo, East Java yesterday, ahead of Indonesia's presidential and legislative polls scheduled to be held on February 14.

PHOTO: AFP

## January most violent month in Haiti in two years: UN

AFP, Geneva

More than 1,100 people were killed, injured or kidnapped in Haiti in January alone, making it the most violent month in the country in two years of conflict, the UN rights chief said yesterday.

"The already dire human rights situation has deteriorated even further, amid unrelenting and expanding gang violence, with disastrous consequences for Haitians," Volker Turk said in a statement.

The rights office said at least 806 people not involved in violent exchanges taking place were killed, injured, or kidnapped in January, while around 300 gang members were killed or injured.

That brings the total number of people affected to 1,108 – more than three times the number recorded in January 2023, it said.

UN rights office spokeswoman Marta Hurtado said that of those affected during the month, 547 had been killed and 266 had been kidnapped.

The Western hemisphere's poorest nation, Haiti has been in turmoil for years, with armed gangs taking over

parts of the country and unleashing brutal violence, leaving the economy and public health system in tatters.

The 2021 assassination of president Jovenel Moise plunged the country further into chaos. No elections have taken place since 2016 and the presidency remains vacant.

Gangs now run rampant in large swaths of the country, and homicides in Haiti more than doubled last year to nearly 4,800 according to a UN report released Tuesday.

The rights office said the impact of the violence on children was of particular concern, with 167 children killed or injured by bullets last year.

"Some were executed by gangs or so-called 'self-defence' groups for their suspected support for rivals," the statement said, adding that "the recruitment of children into gangs remained extremely worrisome."

The office noted that gang violence was impacting all communes in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area, and that gangs were escalating their activities in areas outside the capital.

"The intensity of clashes which, in some cases, have lasted several hours, may indicate that some gangs have recently received new ammunition," it said.