

Biden seeks reset with high-risk TV interview

AFP, Washington

With his reelection bid on the line, US President Joe Biden sits down Friday for a crucial TV interview to persuade doubters of his physical and mental fitness for a second White House term.

The one-to-one with the ABC network has been hyped as the most consequential of the 81-year-old's long career, after a disastrous campaign debate with Donald Trump triggered panic within his Democratic Party and calls for him to pull out of the race.

The Biden campaign has pushed back hard on any suggestion he may withdraw, and just hours before the ABC interview it released an aggressive campaign travel schedule



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer and his wife Victoria pose on the steps of 10 Downing Street in London yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

As Europe turns right, UK steers to centre

REUTERS, London

The centre-left Labour Party's crushing victory in the British election stands in stark contrast to recent gains by the far right across Europe.

But the party's triumph was not so much a rejection of populism by voters, but rather an echo of the same disenchantment with their political leaders.

Keir Starmer swept to power yesterday winning a large parliamentary majority and condemning Rishi Sunak's Conservative Party to its worst defeat in history.

The victory comes days after Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally (RN) party scored historic gains to win the first round of the parliamentary election in France.

That followed similar advances by populist parties in last month's European Parliament elections where German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democrats recorded their worst result ever.

Before his poll triumph, Starmer said progressive politicians had to demonstrate that they had learned the lessons from the rise of nationalism and populism.

But rather than a bulwark against a European populism wave, Starmer's success was built on the same voter desire for change and to punish perceived incompetence by incumbent governments that is driving

support for the far right.

Britain, once renowned for political stability, has lurched from crisis to crisis since the 2016 vote to leave the European Union, through the Covid-19 pandemic, increasingly stretched public services and a cost of living crisis.

The Conservative Party, in power for 14 years, had increasingly followed a more populist agenda with a focus on immigration, including a plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda, promising to tackle immigration and to reshape the economy, but its credibility was shattered by years of economic stagnation and the failure to stop tens of thousands of asylum seekers arriving in small boats.

"The Tories were populist, but it hasn't gone very well so people are fleeing," said Professor Geoffrey Evans from Oxford University.

"I wouldn't say that is a reaction against populism. I would just say that is a reaction against the perceived incompetence of the party and generally bad economic circumstances that the country finds itself in."

The strong performance of Reform in the British election, where it won four seats and four million votes, would appear to bear that out.

Labour's likely foreign minister David Lammy said: "The truth is when we see the

tide of nationalism across Europe and in other parts of the world, he (Starmer) knows if he doesn't deliver for the working people, then populists and those with a different account of how you deliver will be coming back and will be biting at our heels."

Meanwhile, Britain's Labour Party suffered significant election setbacks in areas with large Muslim populations yesterday amid discontent over its position on the war in Gaza, despite a landslide victory in the parliamentary vote.

Pro-Gaza independents also won in Blackburn, and Dewsbury & Batley, beating Labour into second in both. Labour also failed to win in Islington North, where its former leader, veteran left-winger and ardent pro-Palestinian activist Jeremy Corbyn won as an independent.

Corbyn resigned as Labour leader in 2019 after the party suffered its worst election defeat since 1935, and Starmer threw him out of the parliamentary party less than a year later, accusing him of undermining efforts to tackle anti-Semitism.

While Labour has said it wants the fighting in Gaza to stop, it has also backed Israel's right to defend itself, angering some among the 3.9 million Muslims who make up 6.5% of Britain's population.

Russian strikes kill 2, wound 15 in Ukraine

AFP, Kyiv

Russian attacks killed two and wounded more than a dozen others in the eastern Donetsk region of Ukraine yesterday, regional officials said.

Moscow has centred its firepower on the industrial region, which it claims to have annexed and has been partially controlled by Kremlin-backed forces since 2014.

"A village council employee was killed and 14 of her colleagues were wounded during hostile shelling in the Volnovakha district," prosecutors said in a statement.

The head of the region said one person was killed and another was wounded in a Russian Smerch rocket attack on the town of Ukrainsk.

"The Selydivska community is constantly under enemy attack – it is dangerous to stay here, as well as in the rest of Donetsk region," said governor Vadym Filashkin.

Russian forces are pushing towards the hilltop settlement of Chasiv Yar in the Donetsk region. Images distributed by Ukrainian forces of the town show rows of destroyed and smouldering Soviet-era housing blocs.

Russian President Vladimir Putin told Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban that Ukraine must abandon four regions in the east and south – including Donetsk – that Moscow claims as its own if Kyiv wants peace.

PRESIDENTIAL RUN-OFF Iranians vote amid apathy

REUTERS, Dubai

Iranians voted yesterday for a run-off presidential election that will test the clerical rulers' popularity amid voter apathy at a time of regional tensions and a standoff with the West over Tehran's nuclear programme.

The final result will be announced today, although initial figures may come out sooner.

The run-off follows a June 28 ballot with historically low turnout, when over 60 percent of Iranian voters abstained from the snap election for a successor to Ebrahim

Raisi, following his death in a helicopter crash. The low participation is seen by critics as a vote of no confidence in the Islamic Republic.

The vote is a tight race between low-key lawmaker Masoud Pezeshkian, the sole moderate in the original field of four candidates, and hardline former nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili, a staunch advocate of deepening ties with Russia and China.

While the election is expected to have little impact on the Islamic Republic's policies, the president will be closely involved in selecting the successor to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's 85-year-old Supreme Leader who calls all the shots on top matters of state.



Martinez saves Messi's blushes

FROM PAGE 12

attempted an audacious 'Panenka' chip to outwit the goalkeeper. However, his shot clipped the crossbar, leaving fans and teammates stunned.

Yet, Argentina's No.1 quickly turned the tide once again, making crucial saves on consecutive penalties, demonstrating his unwavering nerve

in pressure situations and redeeming Messi's earlier miss.

Reflecting on Martinez's impact, Messi remarked, "When we're at this stage, that's an advantage."

Coach Lionel Scaloni emphasized Martinez's pivotal role in the penalty shootout, stating, "The team has complete faith in our goalkeeper.

Even with Leo missing, we knew something positive would happen."

Despite Messi's penalty miss, Argentina's shooters remained composed throughout the shootout, scoring four in a row to secure their place in the semifinals, where they await the winner of today's match between Venezuela and Canada.

Six lives lost as bus hits truck

FROM PAGE 12

Farid Hossain said, "A bus of Nabil Enterprise was traveling from Dhaka to Ranisankail upazila in Thakurgaon. Around 6:00am, as the bus approached Chawkrampur village, the driver lost control and collided with a speeding truck coming from the opposite direction."

Upon receiving the emergency call, police and the rescue response team from Dinajpur Fire Service and Civil Defence promptly arrived at the location.

They rescued 30 people, mostly passengers of the bus, and rushed them to M Abdur Rahim Medical College Hospital. Three of them died at the hospital.

The accident damaged the truck's cockpit and the front of the bus. Police had to cut through the mangled wreckage of both vehicles to recover the bodies. It took police an hour to clear the wreckage and restore road communication on the highway.

In a separate incident, later in the afternoon, a collision between a truck and a cattle-laden three-wheeler

in Phulbari upazila resulted in two fatalities and four injuries.

The incident occurred around 2:00pm on the Dinajpur-Gobindaganj regional highway, near the Phulbari Upazila Health Complex in North Sujapur, said Phulbari Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mostafizar Rahman.

The deceased were identified as three-wheeler driver Menhazul, 40, and cattle trader Aman, 45, both from Joypurhat's Panchbibi upazila.

According to police and local sources, a truck was heading towards Dinajpur while the three-wheeler, carrying nine cattle, was travelling from Amabari Hat towards Panchbibi. As they reached the road bend near North Sujapur on the Dinajpur-Gobindaganj highway, a head-on collision with a truck severely damaged the front parts of both vehicles. Menhazul and Aman died on the spot.

Police and fire service personnel, along with locals, rescued the injured and took them to the health complex.

Efforts to secure Gaza

FROM PAGE 12

Gaza health authorities say more than 38,000 Palestinians have been killed in the Israeli offensive launched since last Oct 7.

The war has displaced hundreds of thousands of Gazans and caused a humanitarian crisis. It has also fuelled tension across the region, triggering exchanges of fire across Israel's northern border with the Iran-backed Hezbollah group in Lebanon.

Hamas said it had told Hezbollah it had agreed to a ceasefire proposal in Gaza and that the Lebanese group's leader had welcomed the step, two sources familiar with the matter said.

"If there is a Gaza agreement, then from zero hour there will be a

ceasefire in Lebanon," said one of the sources, an official in Hezbollah, which says its rocket and drone attacks on northern Israel are in support of the Palestinians.

Turkey's president, Tayyip Erdogan, was quoted by Turkish media as saying he hoped a "final ceasefire" could be secured "in a couple of days", and urged Western countries to put pressure on Israel to accept the terms on offer.

Some far-right partners in Netanyahu's governing coalition have indicated they may quit the government if the war ends before Hamas is destroyed. Their departure would probably end Netanyahu's premiership.

Merino's 119th-minute winner sends

FROM PAGE 12

for penalties, Olmo lofted a cross for Merino, who headed Spain into the semi-finals and on course for a record-breaking fourth Euros crown.

Germany's exit brings to an end the hosts' hope of a summer fairytale Euros victory after a decade of poor performances at major tournaments, while also lowering the curtain on Toni Kroos' stellar career.

The battle between the two most successful Euros nations, with three titles apiece, was billed as a final come early, with the in-form Spaniards against Nagelsmann's reborn hosts.

Spain nominated Kroos as Germany's most dangerous pre-match but the midfielder had a huge, even if unintended impact early, colliding with Pedri, who was then subbed off with a leg injury for Olmo.

Germany, with the oldest squad at Euro 2024, struggled with Spain's speed during the first half, frequently coming into duels a fraction too

late, but the two best chances of the opening half fell to the hosts – and both to Kai Havertz.

The Arsenal forward leapt highest to head a cross directly at Unai Simon early and then scuffed a tame shot at the goalie later in the half with just the 'keeper to beat.

After a goalless first half, Nagelsmann took off surprise starter Emre Can for the pink-haired Robert Andrich, while the ineffective Leroy Sane was hooked in place of Wirtz.

The substitution who would make his mark however was Olmo, who gave Spain the lead six minutes into the second half, slicing through the sleepy Germany defence to perfectly place a Yamal pass past Manuel Neuer in the bottom left corner.

The goal kicked Germany into gear with Wirtz particularly dangerous.

The Bayer Leverkusen starlet linked with Fuellkrug on the counter with a quarter of an hour remaining but the striker, under heavy attention

from the Spanish defence, could only hit the post.

With 10 minutes remaining Nagelsmann made his final substitution, bringing veteran Thomas Mueller from the bench.

But it was Wirtz – 13 years his junior – who made the difference, skimming a Joshua Kimmich header across the grass and in at the far post in the final minute, sending the game to extra time.

Mikel Oyarzabal, on for Williams, curled a 104th-minute shot just wide of the post and Wirtz did the same a minute later with the goal beckoning.

Germany appealed strongly for a penalty in the second period of extra time, after a goal-bound Jamal Musiala shot clearly connected with Marc Cucurella's outstretched hand.

After the penalty drama, Olmo curled in a cross for Merino, who leapt high to head the ball past Neuer and put Spain into the Euros semi-finals.

Padma Bridge a source of huge pride

FROM PAGE 1

with pride in the international arena... This is the biggest achievement," she said.

Hasina was addressing a rally in Mawa marking the closing of the Padma Bridge construction work.

She said that the mindset of those who used to show an attitude towards Bangladesh that it cannot do without their support has changed.

"This Padma Bridge is the structure of our pride.... Now the people honour Bangladesh in the international arena..."

The PM said the country would be transformed into a developed, prosperous and Smart Bangladesh by 2041 through socio-economic development.

"We will continue to move forward at an irresistible pace overcoming all obstacles, no matter how many are in the way. We will take Bangladesh forward by implementing the ideals of the Father of the Nation."

Hasina said the Padma Bridge has opened the door for socio-economic advancement of the southwestern region.

She said Bangladesh's independence, which came at the cost of tens of thousands of martyrs,

has not gone in vain.

The premier thanked the consultants, workers, and others involved in the Padma Bridge project. She also expressed her gratitude to those local families who gave up their land for the project.

Hasina recalled the contribution of late Dr Jamilur Reza Choudhury, an eminent civil engineer who served as the chair of an international committee of experts, and late communications minister Syed Abul Hossain.

Criticising the role of Dr Muhammad Yunus in the withdrawal of the World Bank's offer of funds for the Padma Bridge project, the PM said she never got the answer as to why a Nobel laureate is so obsessed over the mere post of the managing director of a bank.

Now the people can know what kind of honey was in the MD post when they see the labourers filing lawsuits and cases being lodged for tax evasion and corruption (against Dr Yunus), she said.

"More information will come out when the auditor's report on Grameen Bank is revealed."

On her arrival at the rally venue at 3:50pm, Hasina was received by Road Transport and Bridges Minister

Obaidul Quader.

Former cabinet secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam, Bridges Division Senior Secretary Monjur Hossain and Project Director Shafiqur Islam also spoke at the event, with Quader in the chair.

The Bridges Division secretary said the project was completed on June 30 at a cost of Tk 30,770.13 crore.

A documentary on the Padma Bridge was screened at the programme.

On June 25, 2022, Hasina inaugurated the 6.15-km Padma Bridge which directly connects the country's 21 southern and south-western districts with the capital.

PM PAYS HOMAGE TO BANGABANDHU

In the afternoon yesterday, the prime minister travelled to her ancestral home at Tungipara of Gopalganj by road.

She paid tributes to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman there and offered prayers at his mausoleum.

Hasina joined a prayer seeking eternal peace of the departed souls of Bangabandhu and his family members who were killed on August 15, 1975.