

POLLS RESULTS

Venezuela opposition calls mass protests

AFP, Caracas

Venezuela's opposition leader Maria Corina Machado called Thursday for protests "in every city" in the nation today to denounce the disputed reelection of President Nicolas Maduro.

The oil-rich Latin American nation was plunged into political crisis after Maduro was announced the victor of Sunday's election -- a result that defied pre-election polls and has drawn global criticism.

"We must remain firm, organized and mobilized with the pride of having achieved a historic victory on July 28, and the awareness that to claim victory we will also go all the way," Machado said on social media.

Earlier Thursday, she wrote in the Wall Street Journal that she was in hiding and "leaving for my life" after Maduro's contested victory, which led to hundreds of arrests following deadly protests this week.

Machado reiterated her claim that opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia was the rightful winner, saying he won "67 percent to



30 percent" based on tallies obtained from most of the nation's polling stations.

The government-aligned National Electoral Council declared that Maduro won with 51 percent of the vote. Maduro has said he has evidence of his victory and was "ready to present 100 percent of the records."

"You have blood on your hands," Machado said Wednesday, referring to Gonzalez Urrutia and Machado. "They should be behind bars."

Machado -- who was barred from running in the election by institutions loyal to Maduro -- said most opposition figures were now in hiding.

"I could be captured as I write these words," Machado wrote, calling for "those who reject authoritarianism and support democracy to join the Venezuelan people in our noble cause."

In a message to his supporters, Gonzalez Urrutia wrote on X: "I will never leave you alone, and I will always defend your will!"

France's medals

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as the wild acclaim for superstar swimmer Leon Marchand shows.

"The bet is off to a good start and perhaps even beyond our greatest hopes, but we remain focused on what comes next and are very clear about the difficulty," Claude Onesta, a successful former handball coach and the architect of France's high-performance sports strategy, said in radio interview on Friday.

In 2017, the year Paris was awarded the 2024 Olympics, French sports officials concluded that the country's national sporting excellence plan needed a reboot, said Yann Cucherat, a former gymnast turned sports official who will lead high performance at France's National Sports Agency after the Games.

France's strategy had not changed since one unveiled for the 1960 Olympics in Rome, and French officials had watched with a mixture of admiration and envy as the British strategy for the 2012 Games in London paid off handsomely, with 29 gold medals for Britain, Cucherat said.

"In high-performance sports, if you're stagnating, you're regressing," Cucherat told Reuters.

France came seventh with 11 golds in 2012, remained in the same spot in Rio de Janeiro with 10 golds but slipped to eighth in Tokyo in 2021 despite winning the same tally.

In 2019, France created the National Sports Agency with the Paris Games five years later as its north star, Cucherat said. Under the control of Onesta, the agency's "Blue Ambition" plan outlined a pathway to success in Paris.

French officials studied the British 2012 model, but chose not to copy it. Onesta told Le Figaro that British officials sought to inculcate sporting excellence in schools, while France sought to lift up levels in clubs across the country.

"We wanted to do it in a French way," Cucherat said.



In this handout photograph taken yesterday and released by India's National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), relief personnel conduct a search and rescue operation after the landslides in Wayanad, Kerala. Army teams yesterday pushed deeper into Indian tea plantations and villages struck by landslides that killed more than 200 people, working on the assumption that nobody was left alive to rescue.

PHOTO: AFP

Harris secures Democratic presidential nomination

AFP, Washington

US Vice President Kamala Harris effectively secured the Democratic party's presidential nomination yesterday, confirming her remarkable rise to party standard bearer in November's showdown against Republican Donald Trump.

Harris, 59, was the sole candidate on the ballot for a five-day electronic vote of nearly 4,000 party convention delegates. The first Black and South Asian woman ever to secure a major party's nomination, she will be officially crowned at a Chicago convention later this month.

"I am honored to be the presumptive Democratic nominee for president of the United States," Harris said on a phone-in to a party celebration after securing enough votes by the second day of the marathon virtual vote.

In the two weeks since Joe Biden ended his reelection bid, Harris has gained full control of the party, smashing fundraising records, packing arenas and erasing the polling leads Trump had built over the president.

"I couldn't be prouder," Biden posted on X after her nomination.

The nomination milestone came with Harris preparing to hit the campaign trail next week for a swing across seven crucial election states alongside her yet-to-be-

named running mate.

The Democratic Party decided on a virtual nomination process -- departing with tradition and mirroring the procedure used in the pandemic-hit 2020 election -- because of an early deadline in Ohio for submitting the names of certified candidates.

The virtual roll call marks the official beginning of the 2024 convention, with the more traditional festivities getting going when thousands of party faithful descend on Chicago on August 19.

The gathering will feature a ceremonial vote for Harris in what is expected to be a raucous celebration of her rise from California prosecutor to historic candidate vying for the nation's highest office.

Trump's White House bid was turned upside down on July 21 when 81-year-old Biden, facing growing concerns about his age and lagging polling numbers, withdrew his candidacy and backed Harris.

WAVE OF MOMENTUM

Energetic and two decades younger than 78-year-old Trump, the vice president has made a fast start, raising \$310 million

in July, according to her campaign -- more than double Trump's haul.

She and her running mate are scheduled to rally Tuesday in Pennsylvania -- a crucial swing state, where Democratic Governor Josh Shapiro is on the shortlist to join Harris's ticket.

Biden beat Trump in Pennsylvania in 2020 by around 80,000 votes and it is seen as the biggest prize of the closely fought battlegrounds that decide the Electoral College system.

The Keystone State is part of the so-called blue wall that carried Biden to victory in 2020, alongside Michigan and Wisconsin, two states where Harris is due to woo crowds on Wednesday.

Harris will also tour the more racially diverse Sun Belt and southern states of Georgia, North Carolina, Arizona, North Carolina and Nevada as she seeks to shore up the Black and Hispanic vote that had been peeling away from the Democrats.

In a sign that the Harris campaign is thinking big, US media reported that a raft of senior advisors from Barack Obama's own historic candidacies in 2008 and 2012 have taken up top positions with her.



Heat claims over 175,000 lives a yr in Europe: WHO

AFP, Copenhagen

Heat kills over 175,000 people a year in Europe, where temperatures are rising quicker than the rest of the globe, the World Health Organization's (WHO) European branch said Thursday.

Of the roughly 489,000 heat-related deaths recorded each year by the WHO between 2000 and 2019, the European region accounts for 36 percent, or on average 176,040 deaths, the WHO said.

The health body noted that temperatures in the region are "rising at around twice the global average rate."

The WHO's European region comprises 53 countries, including several in Central Asia.

"People are paying the ultimate price," Hans Kluge, the WHO's regional director for Europe, said in a statement.

According to the WHO, there has been a 30 percent increase in heat-related mortality in the region over the past two decades.

"Temperature extremes exacerbate chronic conditions, including cardiovascular, respiratory and cerebro-vascular diseases, mental health, and diabetes-related conditions," Kluge said.

He added that extreme heat can in particular be a problem for elderly people and be an "additional burden" for pregnant women.

Krasikov, freed by Germany, is FSB operative: Russia

AFP, Moscow

The Kremlin yesterday confirmed that Vadim Krasikov, freed by Germany in Thursday's prisoner swap deal with the West, is an operative with Russia's FSB security service.

Moscow also said that the children of an undercover spy couple released by Slovenia did not even know they were Russian until they boarded the plane back to Moscow.

"Krasikov is an FSB employee," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters yesterday, adding that he served in the agency's elite and secretive "Alpha" unit.

Peskov also said that Krasikov "served with some of the people working in the president's security detail".

Krasikov was serving a life sentence in Germany for the murder of a Chechen rebel commander in a Berlin park in 2019 -- an assassination that German judges said was ordered by the Russian state.

An investigation by Bellingcat had previously found Krasikov had links to Russia's FSB, though yesterday's admission was the first time Moscow has publicly confirmed he was an FSB agent.

Putin on Thursday had hailed the return of the Russian prisoners -- some of whom he said had "a direct connection" to the military -- telling them: "The Motherland never forgot about you."

Peskov confirmed that a Russian couple released from Slovenia were also spies.

78 HSC examinees get bail

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take their remaining Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) exams, it added.

However, these students have not been cleared of the charges brought against them, said their parents and lawyers. They demanded that the cases against them be withdrawn as soon as possible saying it would put undue pressure on the students ahead of their exams.

In Dhaka, two courts granted bail to 42 college students, who were arrested in 33 violence cases.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Md Rashidul Alam granted bail to 37 examinees, while Dhaka Senior Judicial Magistrate M Mustafizur Rahman granted bail to five examinees, reports our court correspondent.

Earlier in the day, the defence filed separate petitions with these two courts, seeking bail for the 42 college students.

Of them, 37 were arrested in 29 cases filed with 14 police stations in Dhaka city, while five were arrested in four cases filed in Savar, Ashulia, and

South Keraniganj.

The charges in the cases mostly included illegal gathering, rioting, assaulting police, damaging properties, and arson attacks.

Meanwhile, according to multiple media reports, two Chattogram courts granted bail to 16 HSC examinees.

Chief Judicial Magistrate Md Shahidul Islam granted bail to three students while Chattogram Metropolitan Magistrates Md Oli Ullah granted bail to 13.

They passed the order after their guardians appealed to the court, said public prosecutor Iftekhar Saimul Chowdhury.

According to court and Chattogram prison sources, more than 130 students have so far been arrested across the port city and district in violence cases.

In Satkhira, a district court granted bail to six HSC examinees.

Senior Judicial Magistrate Court Judge Md Salauddin Ahmed passed the order in the evening, said defence lawyer Abdul Mazid.

Facebook again blocked for 7hrs

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Student Movement to condemn the killings and arrests of protesters over the quota reform protests.

The sources said an agency under the Ministry of Home Affairs instructed mobile operators to enforce the restrictions around noon.

Officials of mobile service operators said they were asked to lift the restrictions in the evening.

Mobile data users said they could access the Facebook and Messenger services around 7:00pm.

The service shutdown came after the government blocked social media services like Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp and YouTube across the country on July 17 amid widespread violence over the quota reform protests.

As the violence escalated further, mobile internet was shut down across the country the next day. At least 12.7 crore people use mobile internet in the country.

A day later, on July 18, broadband internet was blocked severely affecting public life and a wide range of economic activities including utility bill payments, online banking, international communications, clearance of goods from ports and digital commerce.

The government restored broadband internet on a limited scale on July 23.

Mobile internet was resumed on July 28 while social media platforms were unblocked on July 31.

Yesterday, Telegram, a messaging platform that allows users to send large files, was blocked.

The Daily Star called State Minister for Telecoms and ICT Zunaid Ahmed Palak multiple times after the service disruption, but his mobile phone was unreachable.

PALAK APOLOGISES

Meanwhile, Palak at an event yesterday sought apology from

the young generation for internet disruption and failure to prevent rumours on social media.

He said this while addressing a discussion organised by Singra upazila Awami League at his residence in Singra of Natore, marking the month of mourning, in the afternoon.

Palak said, "If I have made any mistakes, as a worker of Sheikh Hasina, and Awami League, I apologise publicly. I also take responsibility for the internet disruption, and failure to prevent rumours on social media. I promise to accept any punishment or decision in this regard."

Palak said it is not the students' fault for the distance created. "It is our fault. This is our responsibility... we cannot avoid this failure," he added.

"Please don't misunderstand people's leader Sheikh Hasina. If she is not safe, then Bangladesh will not be safe," he said.

Statement from DB office

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The six were released from DB custody around noon on Thursday.

"We did not voluntarily give the video message about the withdrawal of the movement from the DB office. No decision on the anti-discrimination student movement can come from the DB office. No decision will be taken as final without the participation of all coordinators and agitating students across the country."

They said in the statement that they were forced to sit on the dining table and then the video statement was forcibly filmed.

"It was assured that we would be released, so our families were called and made to sit for 13 hours and false statements were made to the media. When our teachers came to meet us, they were not allowed to."

They said they sought safety and assurances that they would not be victims of enforced disappearances, arrested, or tortured.

"We wanted to guarantee our right to express. But we were kept in DB custody unconstitutionally and illegally. At first, we were told about security, but later they talked about the court, [that] we cannot be released without a court order."

"No one can be safe in the custody of those who shoot and kill unarmed students and citizens. We don't want this farce security from the government, we want justice for the murder of our brothers and sisters."

Israel's 'end getting closer than ever'

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Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani also attended.

Senior Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri told Reuters by phone: "Our message to the occupation (Israel) today is that you are sinking deep in the mud and your end is getting closer than ever. The blood of Haniyeh will change all equations."

"Nahid Islam, Asif Mahmud, and Abu Baker started a hunger strike at the DB office on July 30 in protest of the unjust arrest of the coordinators, and arrest and torture of the students across the country. Later, Sarjis Alam, Hasnat Abdullah, and Nusrat Tabassum also joined the hunger strike."

They said that the hunger strike was kept secret from the family and the media. After over 32 hours of hunger strike, it was called off when the DB chief gave the final decision to free the six coordinators.

"In the last seven days, harassment, torture, and a drama were staged with us and our families in the DB office. We strongly condemn and protest it," they said.

"We were unjustly detained on the orders of the home minister. The government has put law enforcers face-to-face with students and citizens. The government is still continuing its repression on the students and continuing to arrest and torture of the protesting students in the country and continuing to obstruct peaceful programmes."

"The anti-discrimination student movement will continue demanding the trial of the killing of students and citizens and the release of the detained innocent people. Students and citizens across the country will be urged to take to the streets defying the government's propaganda and repression. The blood of the martyrs will not go in vain," the statement ended.

105 more held

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and several hundred thousand unnamed individuals

The cases were filed mostly by the law enforcers at different police stations over violence, vandalism, arson, and killings.

Unprecedented violence gripped the country since mid-July when students' protests for quota reform in government jobs turned violent following attacks by ruling party men on protesters. More than 200 people have lost their lives since then.