

## Rahul Gandhi chopper take-off delayed Congress complains to election body

NDTV ONLINE

India's Congress party MP and Leader of opposition in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, faced an unexpected delay yesterday as his helicopter remained grounded in Jharkhand's Godda awaiting clearance from Air Traffic Control (ATC).

The chopper was allowed to take off after a delay of 45 minutes amid high-stakes campaigning for the final phase of the state's assembly elections.

The Congress claimed the hold-up was a calculated move to disrupt Gandhi's campaign schedule. Party



leaders pointed fingers at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rally near Deoghar, suggesting that the ATC's decision prioritised the PM's event over Gandhi's movements.

The Congress has written to the Election Commission of India (ECI) over the incident. The Congress has alleged that Gandhi and his staff had secured all the requisite permission for travelling across the state.

"There should be a level playing field in campaigning. The PM's campaign cannot take precedence over that of all others. Today Rahul Gandhi got delayed in Jharkhand on this account," wrote Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on X.

In its letter to the ECI, the Congress alleged misuse of protocol to hinder opposition leaders' electoral campaigns. "If such a situation is allowed to prevail, then the ruling regime and its leaders can always take undue advantage of such protocols and limit the election campaign of opposition leaders," the letter read.



Newly-elected members of the US Congress pose for a photo on the steps of the US Capitol in Washington DC yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Musk's efficiency panel will issue reports

Says Trump on streamlining US govt, picks RFK Jr to lead health dept

REUTERS, Palm Beach

US President Elect Donald Trump said on Thursday that a government efficiency panel headed up by billionaire Tesla CEO Elon Musk will issue reports in its work to streamline the US government.

"They will be coming out with individual reports and a big one at the end," Trump said in a speech at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, providing the first new detail on the panel's output since it was announced earlier this week.

Trump on Tuesday said the panel would "provide advice and guidance from outside of government," on slimming down the government, cutting regulations, reducing spending and restructuring federal agencies.

Trump, for example, wants to sharply cut the "deep state" - career federal employees he says are clandestinely pursuing their own agendas.



Meanwhile, Trump said on Thursday he has selected Robert F. Kennedy Jr, an environmental activist who has spread misinformation on vaccines, to lead the Department of Health and Human Services, the United States' top health agency.

In a post on X, Kennedy vowed to work to end chronic disease, clean up corruption and provide Americans with the data they need to make informed decisions, vowing to Trump he would work to "Make America Healthy Again."

Trump also said that North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum, a wealthy former software company executive, will be his pick for interior secretary.

"He's going to head the Department of Interior, and it's going to be fantastic," a tuxedo-wearing Trump said at a gala at his Mar-a-Lago Florida retreat.

Burgum, 68, has portrayed himself as a traditional, business-minded conservative. He ran against Trump for the Republican presidential nomination before quitting and becoming a loyal Trump supporter, appearing at fundraisers and advocating for Trump on television. The interior secretary will oversee policies guiding the use of 500 million acres of federal and tribal land, a fifth of the nation's surface area.

Since his victory, Trump has chosen several loyalists with little experience for key cabinet positions, stunning some allies and making clear that he is serious about reshaping America's institutions.

'EXTREME' CLIMATE

## Swedish daily DN halts posts on X

AFP, Stockholm

Sweden's newspaper of reference, Dagens Nyheter (DN), said yesterday it would stop publishing its articles on Elon Musk's social media platform X, citing a "harsh and extreme" climate.

DN's announcement followed similar moves this week by The Guardian and Spain's La Vanguardia.

"Since Elon Musk took over, the platform has increasingly merged with his and Donald Trump's political ambitions, while the climate on X has grown more harsh and extreme," editor-in-chief Peter Wolodarski said in an article posted on X.

"Therefore, we will not publish anything on there from our official accounts for the time being," editor-in-chief Peter Wolodarski said.

Musk has consistently courted controversy with his use of X, particularly during the recent United States presidential election when he endorsed victorious Republican candidate Donald Trump.

The tech billionaire used his personal account, boasting nearly 205 million followers, to sway voters in favour of Trump.

TOXIC SMOG

## Pakistan's Punjab declares health emergency

REUTERS, Karachi

Pakistan's Punjab declared a health emergency due to toxic smog yesterday, banning construction, shutting schools for another week and moving universities online, with a 3-day lockdown possible, the province's senior minister said yesterday.

Punjab battles toxic smog every winter as cold air traps dust, emissions, and smoke from illegal stubble burning on fields. Air quality has deteriorated drastically in recent weeks and the province's capital Lahore currently ranks as the world's most polluted city, says IQAir.

"A complete lockdown will be enforced on Friday [yesterday], Saturday, and Sunday (next week) if the situation does not improve by Wednesday," said Punjab Senior Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, addressing a press conference in Lahore.

Citizens were advised to stay indoors. Air Quality Index readings in Lahore reached 637 at 3:00 pm, according to IQAir, significantly higher than levels recommended by the WHO.

## Get ready for youth-led ballot revolution

FROM PAGE 12

Secretariat. If necessary, we will be compelled to return to the focal point of the people's power."

Addressing the event, Nagorik Committee member Moshir Rahman said, "Even though Sheikh Hasina has fallen, we could not compel the president to step down."

He said that the principles of BKSAL and the principles of Bangladesh's constitution are "the same".

"Can the state be governed under

such a constitution? At a time when the students are demanding the resignation of the president, leaders of political parties are saying that he can remain in office as jobs can be done by putting pressure on him. These leaders are eager to see the election is held so that they can go to power," said Moshir.

Another member of the committee, Akram Hossain, said, "Those who are afraid of calling the Awami League fascist have no

right to do politics in Bangladesh. Our struggle will continue until the Awami League's fascism is completely removed from the country."

Nagorik Committee members Nizam Uddin and Sanjida Islam Tuli, among others, also spoke at the programme.

The Committee was formed on September 8 to work towards fulfilling the goals of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement that toppled the AI government.

## Maulana Saad loyalists to hold gathering

FROM PAGE 2

As a result, vehicular movement remained closed on these roads since the morning.

After the Juma prayers, the announcement of the December 7 gathering was made through megaphone from inside the mosque.

A follower who came to Kakrail from the city's Kalyanpur area in a group of 20 said any division in the Tabligh Jamaat activities is not expected, since it is a pathway of religion.

He said that although he is a follower of Maulana Saad, he feels

that every school of thought within Tabligh should work together for the greater good.

Mizanur Rahman, a follower of Maulana Saad who came from Barishal to join the gathering, said the Saad faction has been holding the second phase of Biswa Jtama, but this time they want to hold the first phase.

He added that they also want the presence of Maulana Saad at the Jtama venue.

On Wednesday, the Tabligh Jamaat faction loyal to Maulana Saad demanded that the government allow the followers of Delhi's Nizamuddin

Markaz (the Tabligh headquarters controlled by Maulana Saad) to hold the first phase of Biswa Jtama next year.

Speaking at a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club, leaders of the faction also demanded that the Kakrail Markaz, the main centre of Tabligh Jamaat in Bangladesh, be handed over to the followers of the Nizamuddin Markaz.

"It will be a big mistake if anyone tries to deny us our due rights and property," said Muhammad Azimuddin, imam of Kakrail Mosque.



Paramedics assist a woman evacuated from an apartment building damaged during Russian missile and drone strikes in Odesa, Ukraine yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Robbers snatch away baby girl

FROM PAGE 12

Yesterday morning, Farzana's parents left for their village home in Pirojpur's Mathbaria. Soon after, the woman left the home, telling Farzana that she needs to go out for some shopping, the neighbours said.

But after a few minutes later, around 9:00am, the woman, along with three unknown men, entered the home.

"They then tied up Farzana, looted Tk 1.5 lakh, and some gold ornaments

and left with her daughter around 9:25am," said Md Rana, husband of a colleague of Farzana, quoting her.

Farzana's next-door neighbours said they could not sense anything. They said they learnt of the incident only after law enforcers and officials of intelligence agencies came to the home in the morning.

Farzana and Zafar got married 17 years ago. She has been working at the home ministry for the last six years.

Shocked heavily, Farzana was crying nonstop and could not speak clearly, said her relatives.

Law enforcers and officials of intelligence agencies were found at the house around 8:00pm.

They were scrutinising CCTV camera footage to identify the robbers, said the relatives.

Aminul Kabir Tarafdar, assistant deputy commissioner of police (Lalbagh zone), said they were working to rescue the girl.

## President's leftist bloc wins by a landslide

FROM PAGE 12

bailed the country out of its economic crisis, they said.

The new government is also expected to face a talent challenge as the coalition has few leaders with governance and policy-making experience.

Dissanayake, a political outsider in a country dominated by family parties for decades, comfortably won the island's presidential election in September.

But his coalition had just three seats in parliament, prompting him

to dissolve it and seek a fresh mandate in Thursday's snap election.

Sri Lanka typically backs the president's party in general elections, especially if voting is held soon after a presidential vote.

"The president has a huge mandate now to carry through the reforms but also huge expectations from the people," said Bhavani Fonseka, a researcher at Colombo think tank Centre for Policy Alternatives.

"People are looking beyond the issues of the past... people want to see

a direct impact on the cost of living," she said.

Dissanayake's Marxist-leaning National People's Power (NPP) coalition won 159 seats in the 225-member parliament, the election commission said yesterday, a massive two-thirds majority and one of the biggest in the country's history.

NPP secured almost 62 percent or almost 7 million votes, up from the 42 percent Dissanayake won in September, indicating that he had drawn more widespread support including from minorities.

## UK scrambles jets to monitor Russian military plane over North Sea

AFP, London

UK jets were scrambled to monitor a Russian reconnaissance aircraft flying close to UK airspace, the defence minister in London said yesterday.

Two Typhoons from RAF Lossiemouth in Scotland followed the Russian Bear-F aircraft as it flew over the North Sea on Thursday, the ministry said.

"At no time was it able to enter UK sovereign airspace," it added.

The Typhoons were supported by a Voyager refuelling aircraft.

"Our adversaries should be in no doubt of our steadfast determination and formidable ability to protect the UK," said armed forces minister Luke Pollard.

"The Royal Navy and RAF (Royal Air Force) have once again shown they stand ready to defend our country at a moment's notice and I pay tribute to the professionalism and bravery of those involved in these latest operations," he added.

The Royal Navy also shadowed Russian military vessels passing through the Channel this week, said the defence ministry.

## Tell us whether he is alive

FROM PAGE 1

"Sometimes I lie awake at night worrying about how I will buy food the next day," Nasrin said in despair.

Rawshan Ara, aged over 70, attended the event to talk about how her son, Mahbubur Rahman Ripon, a Juba Dal activist, never returned after he had been picked up by men in plainclothes in 2014.

Ripon's two daughters are now aged 16 and 10.

Odhikar in a statement said at least 709 people became victims of enforced disappearance during the Awami League rule in 2009-2024. Of them, 155 still remain missing.

Law Adviser Asif Nazrul said the interim government was committed to ensuring justice.

"We may have limitations in our capabilities, but our sincerity and courage is genuine," he said.

No other government formed a commission for the disappeared persons, he said.

"The family members of those people who give orders to make someone disappear should be brought to an event like this... Let them see with their own eyes what

their father, their son or brother has done."

Enforced disappearance is a crime worse than murder, said the adviser.

"When someone is killed, there is a dead body. But with enforced disappearances, there is an unending wait. You don't know if they are alive or dead."

The roots of fascism run deep and fighting it is not an easy task.

The Awami League consolidated its position over 15 years, he added.

"There could be coordination between the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances and the International Crimes Tribunal. The information we obtained through this commission could be useful for conducting the trial."

Adilur Rahman Khan, adviser to the Ministry of Industries, said that the current government stands in solidarity with the families of the disappeared.

Attorney General Asaduzzaman requested the law adviser to prioritise drafting an ordinance to fight it. This would ensure that no one dares to commit such acts, he added.

The programme was presided over by CR Abrar, president of Odhikar.