

Balendra Shah's RSP heading towards landslide victory in Nepal elections

KATHMANDU, Mar 6 (PTI)

RAPPER-turned-politician Balendra Shah's newly-formed Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) was on Friday heading towards a landslide victory in Nepal's first general elections since the violent Gen Z protests toppled the K P Sharma Oli-led Government in September.

According to the Election Commission's data available from 161 of the total 165 constituencies, the RSP has won four seats and is ahead in 110 others, local media reported.

The Nepali Congress has won two seats and is leading in 12 others, while the CPN-UML is leading in 10 constituencies. The Nepali Communist Party has won one and is leading in six constituencies.

The outcome is expected to



Supporters of RSP celebrate by ringing a bell, the party's election symbol, outside the Election Commission ahead of announcement of results in general elections, in Kathmandu, Nepal on Friday. (PTI)

provide a strong government in the politically fragile Nepal, which has had 14 governments in the last 18 years.

The election was being close-

ly watched by India, which hopes for a stable government in the politically fragile Himalayan nation to take forward the developmental partnership between

the two sides. "We look forward to working with the new Government of Nepal to further build on the robust multifaceted ties between our two countries and peoples for mutual benefit," Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in Delhi on Thursday.

He said India has "consistently supported peace, progress and stability in Nepal and in keeping with our commitment, provided logistical supplies as per request from Government of Nepal for these elections".

Balendra Shah, who was the Mayor of Kathmandu till recently, is leading in Jhapa-5 constituency against four-time Prime Minister and CPN-UML chair Oli in the latter's stronghold. Shah, popularly known as Balen, received 6,551 votes, while Oli got just 1,428 votes.

Iran slams US attack on 'UNARMED' vessel returning from India

NEW DELHI, Mar 6 (PTI)

TWO days after a US submarine torpedoed and sank an Iranian warship off Sri Lanka's coast, Iran on Friday warned that the attack on an "unarmed ship cannot go with impunity."

The Iranian frigate, IRIS Dena, was returning home after participating in the Milan multilateral naval exercise hosted by India. At least 87 Iranian sailors were killed in the attack, which marked a major escalation in the conflict between the US and Iran outside of the Persian Gulf.



Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Saeed Khatibzadeh, who is visiting India, emphasised that the IRIS Dena was in a non-combat configuration, returning from the Indian naval exercises and the US action against it was a serious violation of international law.

"This is a very sad, very unfortunate incident. That vessel was by invitation of our Indian friends, attending an international exercise. It was ceremonial. It was unloaded. It was unarmed," he said.

"It is very unfortunate. Many
(Contd on page 3)

No question of providing any input to US on Iranian warship: India

NEW DELHI, Mar 6 (PTI)

TOP Government sources on Friday described as "baseless and preposterous" claims that the Indian Navy provided Intelligence to the US on an Iranian frigate that was sunk by a US military submarine. There is no question of providing any input to the US and the claims

are completely baseless, the sources said.

The US sank the Iranian warship IRIS Dena off the coast of Sri Lanka on Wednesday when it was returning home after participating in the Milan exercise hosted by India. There were reports that alleged that the Indian Navy provided some inputs to the US military.

Intense Israeli strikes hit Iran, Lebanon

Bombardment will 'surge dramatically': US; Iran death toll 1,230, Lebanon 120

- Iran fires missile and drone attacks into Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, all countries that host US forces
- US says, it struck an Iranian drone carrier
- Trump again urges Iranians to take back their country



Smoke rises following an Israeli airstrike in Dahiyeh, Beirut's southern suburbs in Beirut, Lebanon on Friday. (AP/PTI)

DUBAI, Mar 6 (AP)

INTENSE Israeli airstrikes pounded the capitals of Iran and Lebanon on Friday as the United States apparently struck an Iranian drone carrier at sea in its unrelenting campaign against the Islamic Republic's fleet of warships. Iran launched new retaliatory attacks in the Middle East at the end of a full week of bombardment, which US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth warned was "about to surge dramatically."

Israel's military said on Friday morning it had begun "a broad-scale wave of strikes" on Tehran, Iran's capital. Witnesses

described the Israeli airstrikes as particularly intense, shaking homes in the area. Others reported explosions around the Iranian city of Kermanshah in an area that is home to multiple missile bases. The Israeli military said strikes have already destroyed most of Iran's air defences and missile launchers.

The war has escalated to affect countries across the Middle East and beyond. Early Friday, Iran

fired missile and drone attacks into Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, all countries that host US forces. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

In Lebanon, where the war has rekindled fighting between Israel and Iran-allied Hezbollah militants, Israel launched a series of airstrikes late on Thursday into Friday in the southern suburbs of Beirut and other areas. Motorists jammed roads trying

'UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER' or no talks: Trump to Iran

DUBAI, Mar 6 (AP)

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump appeared to rule out negotiations with Iran to end the conflict in the Middle East.

He said in a social media post Friday that there will be no deal absent 'unconditional surrender' from Tehran.

"After that, and the selection of a GREAT & ACCEPTABLE Leader(s), we, and many of our wonderful and very brave allies and partners, will work tirelessly to bring Iran back from the brink of destruction, making it economically bigger, better, and stronger than ever before," Trump said.

to flee or seek shelter.

The US and Israel have battered Iran with nationwide strikes, targeting their military capabilities, leadership and nuclear programme.

(Contd on page 3)

US issues 30-day waiver allowing Indian refiners to purchase Russian oil

■ By Yoshita Singh

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, Mar 6 (PTI)

AMID the escalating conflict with Iran, the US said it is issuing a temporary 30-day waiver to allow Indian refiners to purchase Russian oil.

"President Trump's energy agenda has resulted in oil and gas production reaching the highest levels ever recorded. To enable oil to keep flowing into the global market, the Treasury Department is issuing a temporary 30-day waiver to allow Indian refiners to purchase Russian oil," Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said on Thursday.

He said this "deliberately short-term measure" will not provide significant financial benefit to the Russian Government, as it only autho-



rises transactions involving oil already stranded at sea.

"India is an essential partner of the United States, and we fully anticipate that New Delhi will ramp up purchases of US oil. This stop-gap measure will alleviate pressure caused by Iran's attempt to take global energy hostage," Bessent said in a post on X.

US President Donald Trump had imposed 25 per cent punitive tariffs on India for buying Russian oil.

Rajnath calls for Indian maritime leadership amid West Asia crisis

KOLKATA, Mar 6 (PTI)

IN THIS era of changing geopolitics, oceans have once again come to the centre of the world's power balance and it is India's responsibility to provide leadership with confidence and capability, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Friday, referring to the escalating conflict in West Asia. The unfolding developments in West Asia are "highly unusual" and the situation in the region could adversely impact the global economy, he said addressing an event here.

"What is happening in West Asia is highly unusual. It is difficult to make any firm comment at this stage on the direction in which conditions in West Asia might proceed going forward," he said. "If we look at the Strait



Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh lit the lamp at the inauguration of Sagar Sankalp—Reclaiming India's Maritime Glory, a defence and maritime dialogue jointly organised by Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE) Limited and a private media organisation, in Kolkata on Friday. (PIB/ANI)

of Hormuz or the entire Persian Gulf region, it is an extremely

important area for the world's energy security. When there is disturbance or disruption in this region, it directly impacts the supply of oil and gas," he said.

"Not only that, today we are witnessing supply chain disruptions not just in the energy sector, but in other sectors as well. The direct impact of these uncertainties falls on the economy and global trade," he said.

Singh said the current situation has once again reflected the importance of oceans.

"In this era of changing global geopolitics, oceans have once again come to the centre of the world's power balance. At such a time, as a major maritime nation, it is India's responsibility to provide leadership with confidence, capability, and a clear vision," he said.

'India to contribute 17 pc to global GDP'

NEW DELHI, Mar 6 (IANS)

INDIA is expected to contribute as much as 17 per cent to global real GDP growth in 2026 as it continues to be the world's fastest-growing major economy, according to the latest data compiled by the IMF.

Among the other countries in the IMF's top 10 list, the USA is expected to contribute 9.9 per cent to the world's real GDP growth, followed by Indonesia with 3.8 per cent, Turkiye 2.2



per cent, Saudi Arabia 1.7 per cent, Vietnam 1.6 per cent, while both Nigeria and Brazil are expected to contribute 1.5 per cent each. Germany, which is ranked at the 10th spot, is expected to contribute 0.9 per

cent to the global GDP growth, while the rest of the European countries do not figure on the IMF's top 10 list.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has already raised India's economic growth projection for 2025 by 0.7 percentage points to 7.3 per cent.

In the World Economic Outlook update, the IMF said the upward revision reflects strong momentum in the fourth quarter of the current financial year ending on March 31, 2026.

Oil could touch \$150 in weeks if war continues: Qatar Energy Minister

NEW DELHI, Mar 6 (IANS)

QATAR'S Energy Minister Saad al-Kaabi has warned that war in the Middle East continuing for a "few days" could cause Gulf exporters declaring force majeure, halting deliveries, pushing oil to \$150 a barrel and natural gas to \$40 per MMBtu (Metric Million British Thermal Unit) within weeks.

"Everybody that has not called for force majeure we expect will do so in the next few days if this

continues. All exporters in the Gulf region will have to call force majeure," the minister told the Financial Times. "If they don't, they are at some point going to pay the liability for that legally, and that's their choice," he was quoted as saying by the daily.

The minister said that crude prices could reach \$150 a barrel within two to three weeks if tankers and other vessels remain unable to pass through the Strait, while natural gas prices could jump four times.

'Govt will use every policy tool to help exporters deal with West Asia crisis'

NEW DELHI, Mar 6 (PTI)

THE Government will use all policy tools and support measures to help domestic exporters deal with the ongoing West Asian crisis, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Friday.

He said that the Government has set up an inter-ministerial group to look into the issues on a daily basis.

"And the Government will use every policy tool and the export promotion mission to support our exporters," Goyal told reporters here on the sidelines of IIFT's vice chan-



cellors' conclave. "We will be formalising some ways to give comfort to our exporters," he said.

Exporters are facing issues with

regard to the movement of consignments to West Asia following the joint attack launched by the US and Israel on Iran.

"Every day the inter-ministerial group talks to the exporters... They take feedback, and we will not be found wanting in supporting our exporters in any way," he said.

He added that India would continue to meet all the commitments that the country's industries have made to foreign buyers in goods and services.

The commerce ministry is in dialogue with the ministry of shipping and with shipping companies on the issues of exporters. "And I do hope we will find a resolution to this issue also," he said

Increase export-oriented agri production to join global supply chains: PM to farmers

NEW DELHI, Mar 6 (IANS)

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said that the time is ripe for increasing export-oriented agriculture production to join the global supply chains, which will create new jobs and empower our farmers.

Addressing a post-Budget webinar on the theme "Agriculture and Rural Transformation" via video conferencing, PM Modi said that agriculture is the mainstay of our economy and a strategic pillar.

"The second quarter of this 21st century has started, and we will ensure the flow of new energy for the agriculture sector. Global demand is changing, and discussions should be around export-oriented farming, crop diversification and integration of new-age technologies in farming," the Prime Minister stressed.

Highlighting that the Union Budget 2026-27 has heralded several reforms to enhance pro-



ductivity and incomes for the farmers, PM Modi urged coordinated action from stakeholders towards creating a high-value agriculture to make the country globally competitive.

"Agriculture experts, industry and farmers should come together and help the country integrate better with global markets. Quality and branding standards also need to be promoted," said PM Modi.

The Prime Minister also

stressed holistic healthcare via promoting organic and natural farming, urging stakeholders to come forward. "Fisheries can become a big export-oriented sector. New business models for rural prosperity and high-value crops need to be created, and for this, we all need to work collectively," said PM Modi.

The Prime Minister also focused on promoting high-value agriculture by unlocking the potential of crops such as cashew, coconut, sandalwood, agarwood, almonds, walnuts, and pine nuts.