

Balen Shah's RSP sweeps Nepal polls

KATHMANDU, Mar 9 (IANS)

AS COUNTING of votes concluded in 163 electoral constituencies out of 165 under the First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) system in Nepal's parliamentary elections by Monday evening, the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) secured nearly 76 per cent of the seats in the House of Representatives in a sweeping electoral victory.

The three-and-a-half-year-old party, led by its President Rabi Lamichhane and Prime Ministerial candidate Balen Shah, secured victory in 125 seats, as one heavyweight leader after another from traditional political parties — including former Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli — fell before the RSP wave sweeping the country.

In one of the remaining seats, Arjun Kumar Karki, a candidate from the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML), is leading against



RSP candidate Mingma Sherpa. There is also a legal dispute over the election in Dhanusa-1 constituency in Madhes province, after the RSP candidate was disqualified by the Election Commission of Nepal for being blacklisted by the Credit Information Bureau of Nepal.

Shah, the former Mayor of Kathmandu Metropolitan City, secured victory against Oli with 68,348 votes — the largest vote tally by any candidate in Nepal's parliamentary history — from Jhapa-5 constituency in eastern Nepal, which had long been considered Oli's stronghold.

As the RSP is also leading under the proportional representation

PM Modi speaks to Nepal leaders Rabi Lamichhane, Balendra Shah

NEW DELHI, Mar 9 (PTI)

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Monday spoke to leaders of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) of Nepal Rabi Lamichhane and Balendra Shah and congratulated them for their election victory and conveyed India's commitment to work with them for mutual prosperity, progress and well-being of the two countries.

In his telephonic conversations with the two leaders of Nepal, PM Modi said he was

confident that with the joint endeavours, India-Nepal relations will scale new heights in the coming years.

"Had warm telephone conversations with Mr. Rabi Lamichhane, Chairman of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) and Mr. Balendra Shah, Senior Leader of the RSP," he said in a post on 'X'.

The Prime Minister said he congratulated both leaders on their electoral victories and RSP's resounding success in the Nepal elections.

electoral system with over 48 per cent of the vote share by Monday evening, and if the trend continues, the party is likely to secure close to a two-thirds majority — around 184 seats — in the 275-

member House of Representatives, the lower house of Parliament. No single political party since the 1991 elections has secured a two-thirds majority in the lower house.

Indonesia inks pact to buy BrahMos missile from India

NEW DELHI, Mar 9 (IANS)

INDONESIA has entered into an agreement with India to buy the BrahMos missile system, its Defence Ministry spokesperson Rico Ricardo Sirait said on Monday.

Rico told the Reuters news agency that the agreement was “part of Indonesia’s modernisation of military hardware and defence capabilities, especially in the maritime sector”.

BrahMos, a company co-owned by the Indian and Russian Governments, has been in discussions with Indonesia for the sale of the cruise missile. The agreement follows prolonged negotiations that gained momentum during high-level visits, including



discussions at the India-Indonesia Defence Ministers' Dialogue in 2025.

Jakarta has become the second foreign buyer of the supersonic cruise missile after the Philippines. In January 2022, Manila signed a \$375 million contract for three shore-based anti-ship BrahMos batteries, with the first batch of deliveries taking place in 2024. The Philippines military top brass has described the system as a game-changer and expressed interest in additional procure-

ments. The Philippines deal also paved the way for broader interest in the missile in the region.

BrahMos produces supersonic cruise missiles that can be launched from submarines, ships, aircraft, or land platforms. It is a supersonic cruise missile jointly developed by India and Russia and is one of the Indian Armed Forces' key weapons, used by the army, navy, and air force.

During the four-day conflict during Operation Sindoor, the missile was used with devastating effect in strikes on Pakistani air bases and other military infrastructure.

The Defence Ministry cleared a major order for additional BrahMos systems for the Indian Navy's warships.

Indian contingent arrives in Seychelles for joint military exercise 'LAMITIYE-2026'

VICTORIA, Mar 9 (IANS)

AN INDIAN Armed Forces contingent has reached Seychelles to participate in the 11th edition of the joint military exercise "Exercise LAMITIYE-2026" with the Seychelles Defence Forces (SDF).

The Exercise LAMITIYE-2026 is scheduled to be held from March 9 to 20 at the Seychelles Defence Academy.

'LAMITIYE', which means 'friendship' in the Creole language, is a biennial training exercise conducted in Seychelles since 2001, aimed at strengthening military cooperation between the two nations.

This year's edition marks a significant milestone as it features participation from all three services of the Indian Armed Forces.

The Indian contingent includes personnel from the Assam Regiment, along with rep-



resentation from the Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force. The Indian Navy has deployed INS Trikand, while the Air Force is participating with a C-130 aircraft, officials said in a statement.

The exercise will focus on enhancing synergy in sub-conventional operations in a semi-urban environment and improv-

ing cooperation and interoperability between the two forces during peacekeeping operations. It will also provide an opportunity for both sides to exchange skills, operational experiences and best practices while strengthening bilateral military relations, they added.

During the 12-day exercise,

troops from both countries will jointly train, plan, and execute a range of tactical drills aimed at neutralising potential threats in semi-urban settings. The exercise will also showcase the use of new-generation equipment and technology.

The training programme will include field training exercises, combat discussions, case studies, lectures and demonstrations, culminating in a two-day validation exercise. Officials said the joint exercise is expected to enhance mutual understanding and strengthen operational coordination between the armed forces of India and Seychelles.

Meanwhile, earlier on February 19, the Indian Navy held a series of high-level bilateral interactions with naval leaders from Seychelles on the sidelines of the International Fleet Review 2026 held in Visakhapatnam.

India has 74-day reserves of oil, petroleum products: Minister

NEW DELHI, Mar 9 (IANS)

INDIA currently has a total capacity for storage of crude oil and petroleum products for 74 days, which can help to tide over disruptions in case of adverse situations such as geopolitical conflicts, the Parliament was informed on Monday.

"The Government has established Strategic Petroleum Reserves facilities with a total capacity of 5.33 million metric

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tonnes (MMT), which can act as a buffer for short-term supply shocks such as geopolitical conflicts. This is meant to provide for about 9.5 days of crude oil requirement. In addition, Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) in the country have storage facilities for crude oil and petroleum



products for 64.5 days. Hence, the current total national capacity for storage of crude oil and petroleum products is 74 days," Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas Suresh Gopi told the Rajya Sabha in a written reply.

To further augment the petroleum reserves' capacity, the Government, in July 2021, had

also approved the establishment of two additional facilities with a total storage capacity of 6.5 MMT at Chandikhol (4 MMT) in Odisha and Padur (2.5 MMT) in Karnataka on Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode. This expansion will increase the oil reserve equivalent to 12 days of imports.

Basic savings, Jan Dhan accounts not subject to penalty

ABOUT 72 crore Basic Savings Bank Deposit Accounts (BSBDA), including those under the PM Jan Dhan scheme, are not subject to any penal charges for non-maintenance of minimum balance, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Monday.

In a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha, she said banks offer zero-balance savings accounts facility in Basic Savings Bank Deposit Accounts (BSBDAs), including the accounts opened under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), to ensure universal access to banking facilities, particularly for unbanked, vulnerable and small depositors, and to promote financial inclusion.

India calls for dialogue to bring peace in West Asia, says Jaishankar



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar speaks in the Rajya Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament, in New Delhi, on Monday. (PTI)

■ **Delhi Bureau and Agencies**
NEW DELHI, Mar 9

INDIA on Monday advocated de-escalation of tensions in West Asia and called for dialogue and diplomacy to resolve all underlying issues, as it put the safety of around one crore Indians in the region as its top priority, along with securing energy security and trade.

The US and Israel launched a major military attack on Iran on February 28, and killed its 86-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The war has so far killed at least 1,230 people in Iran, 397 in Lebanon and 11 in Israel, according to officials. Making a suo-motu statement in Parliament, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said

Oppn MPs stage protest in Parlt demanding debate on Iran conflict

NEW DELHI, Mar 9 (PTI)

OPPOSITION MPs, including Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, former party chief Rahul Gandhi and SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, staged a protest in Parliament House complex on Monday, demanding a discussion on the West Asia conflict and slamming the Government for its “silence” on critical issues related to it.

Earlier, Opposition parties’ floor leaders met in Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Kharge’s chamber in Parliament House complex to deliberate on the strategy for the second half of the Budget session.

New Delhi stood for maintaining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states in the region. He defended allowing the Iranian ship to dock at an Indian port as the right decision taken on humanitarian grounds.

He said the Indian Government has been constantly monitoring the evolving situation in the region at the highest level and has already brought back 67,000 stranded Indians from the

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Khamenei's son Mojtaba is Iran's new supreme leader



Mojtaba Khamenei

■ By Jon Gambrell, David Rising and Samy Magdy
DUBAI, Mar 9 (AP)

IRAN named the hard-line Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei to succeed his late father as

No letup in war as oil prices surge to nearly USD 120 a barrel

supreme leader on Monday, signalling no letup in the war launched by the United States and Israel. Oil prices surged as Iran attacked regional energy infrastructure and the US and Israel bombed targets across Iran.

With Iran's theocracy under assault for more than a week, the country's Assembly of Experts chose the secretive, 56-year-old cleric with close ties to the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard as the new supreme leader. The Guard has been firing missiles and drones at Israel and Gulf Arab states since Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who had ruled Iran

for 37 years, was killed during the war's opening salvo.

The appointment marked a new sign of defiance by Iran's embattled leadership after more than a week of heavy US and Israeli bombardment, suggesting that Tehran is not close to giving up on what it considers a fight for the country's existence.

World markets plummeted following the news, and Brent crude oil, the international standard, surged to nearly USD 120 a barrel on Monday, about 65 per cent higher than when the war started, before retreating.

Iran's attacks in the Strait of Hormuz have also all but

stopped tankers from using the key shipping lane through which a fifth of the world's oil is carried. Fire broke out at an oil facility that Iran attacked in the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain's only oil refinery was apparently also hit, and Saudi Arabia said it had intercepted several drones attacking its Shaybah oil field.

In Israel, sirens blared multiple times on Monday as Iran's drones and missiles were unrelenting.

New Iranian leader seen as even more hard-line than his father: The younger Khamenei, who has not been seen in public since the war started, was long considered a potential successor - even before the Israeli strike killed his father. His wife, Zahra Haddad Adel, was killed

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