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Table with weather forecasts for various cities including Beijing, Colombo, Dhaka, Dubai, Houston, Istanbul, London, Los Angeles, Melbourne, Moscow, New York, Singapore, Toronto, and Washington.

Hasina heads to victory amid oppn's boycott

Voter turnout remained at 40%, in contrast to 80% recorded in 2018; final results expected to be announced today

YESHI SELI @New Delhi

BANGLADESH Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is all set to keep power as the poll closed on Sunday in the country's 12th general election, which was boycotted by the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and saw sporadic incidents of violence.



Bangladeshi polling officials count votes after the voting ended at a polling station in Munshiganj, outside Dhaka in Bangladesh on Sunday | AP

The final results are expected to be announced on Monday. A victory would give Hasina her fifth term (fourth consecutive term). She has urged members of her Awami League party not to take out any victory processions after the results are announced.

The election was boycotted by the opposition led by Khaleda Zia's BNP, which has called the process a sham and urged the people not to take part in it.

As per the election commission, the voter turnout was 40%, in contrast to the 80% recorded in 2018. Though the election day was largely peaceful, there were some reports of violence from different parts of the country.

Two persons were taken to Chattogram Medical College Hospital after they were shot during a clash between supporters of two candidates running for the Chattogram-10 seat. Clashes were also reported from other parts of the country.

Two persons were injured after a clash between supporters of the Awami League candidate and an independent candidate at a polling centre in Jamalpur's Sharishabari.

Two crude bombs exploded near a voting centre in Dhaka's Hazaribagh injuring four persons, including a child. There were also reports of alleged high-handedness by candidates of the ruling Awami League. In one such incident, the election commission cancelled the candidature of a ruling Awami League candidate in northeastern Chattogram after he "scolded and threatened" a police officer. The poll panel also ordered the arrest of Industries Minister Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun's son on charges of electoral fraud.

Meanwhile, an election observer from the United States, Eli M Gold expressed his satisfaction over the presence of polling agents representing various candidates in the elections, local media reported.

Care about citizens and not foreign media: PM

DHAKA

PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina said on Sunday that she does not care about foreign media's approval of the polls as for her acceptance to people of the country is the only important issue.

In response to a question on how acceptable the election will be (in foreign media) while the BNP is boycotting it, Hasina said that her responsibility is towards the people. "Whether people accept this election or not it is important to me. So, I don't care about their (foreign media) acceptance. No matter what did the terrorist party say or not?" she said. "I have to prove credibility. Right, but, to whom, a terrorist party?...No, I have my accountability to my people...and that is important to me," she said.

About foreign countries' interference, she said her Awami League party does not

bother who says what about the election. "Bangladesh is a sovereign and independent country. It may be a small country, but it has a large population—I don't bother who says what, as the people is our main strength," she said.

Hasina expressed her gratitude to the people for their help in ensuring a congenial atmosphere for the election. "There were so many obstacles and hurdles, but the people of the country were cautious about their voting rights. The national election is held every five years. And people will cast their votes freely and we have been able to create that environment," Hasina added.

About confidence in winning, she said, "InshaAllah, we will win the election...we will form the government. No doubt about it. We have faith and confidence in people that they will vote for Boat (her election symbol)." PTI



Palestinians mourn for relatives killed in the Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip outside a morgue in Khan Younis on Sunday | AP

Israel says part of Hamas dismantled in northern Gaza

JERUSALEM

THE Israeli military signalled that it has wrapped up major combat in northern Gaza, saying it has completed dismantling Hamas' military infrastructure there, as the war against Hamas entered its fourth month on Sunday.

Israel did not address troop deployments in northern Gaza going forward. Military spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said late Saturday that forces would focus on the central and southern parts of the territory and strengthen defences along the Israel-Gaza border fence.

The announcement came ahead of a visit to Israel by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who on Sunday was in Qatar. US officials have urged Israel to wind down its blistering offensive in Gaza and shift to more targeted attacks against Hamas leaders.

Meanwhile, an airstrike near Rafah killed two journalists on Sunday, including Hamza Dahdoh, the oldest son of Wael Dahdoh, Al Jazeera's chief correspondent in Gaza. Al Jazeera broadcast footage of Dahdoh, weeping and holding his son's hand, before walking away in a daze. Israel's military had no immediate comment.

Al Jazeera strongly condemned the killings and other "brutal attacks against journalists and their families" by Israeli forces, and urged the International Criminal Court, governments and human rights groups to hold Israel accountable. Dahdoh previously lost his wife, two children and a grandchild in an October 26 airstrike, and was wounded in an Israeli strike last month that killed a co-worker. "The world is blind to what's happening in Gaza Strip," Dahdoh said, blinking back tears. AP

Fire in Rohingya refugee camp in B'desh guts over 1,000 shelters

COX'S BAZAR

A fire raced through a crammed camp of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh's southern coastal district of Cox's Bazar, gutting more than 1,000 shelters and leaving thousands homeless, a fire official and the United Nations said on Sunday.

The United Nations refugee agency said "nearly 7,000 Rohingya refugees" had been left homeless, but that there were no casualties.

The blaze tore through the tightly packed complex of bamboo as well as tarpaulin shelters in the early hours of Sunday morning at a camp in the country's southeast, refugee commissioner Mizanur Rahman said. "At least 711 shelters were fully burnt and 63 were partially damaged," said Rahman, who put the number of homeless at 4,000. "We have ordered a probe into the fire," he further added. "We suspect it is an act of arson."

The UN said 120 facilities, including learning centres, mosques and healthcare centres, had also been "destroyed or damaged by the inferno."

An AP reporter at the scene said that thousands of refugees, including women and children, rushed to a nearby open field with their belongings as the fire started spreading aggressively during the early hours on Sunday. "We are suffering from the cold severely, facing a difficult situation. Currently, we are sitting by a stream with my grandchildren after narrowly escaping a life-threatening situation. Our homes have been destroyed by the fire," said 65-year-old Zuhura Begum. Agencies

AUSTIN VOWS TRANSPARENCY AFTER OFFICIALS WERE IN DARK ABOUT HIS HOSPITALISATION

WASHINGTON

SENIOR Biden administration leaders, top Pentagon officials and members of Congress were unaware for days that Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin had been hospitalised since Monday, officials said on Saturday.

The Pentagon did not inform the White House National Security Council or top adviser Jake Sullivan of Austin's hospitalisation at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center until Thursday. In a statement issued on Saturday, Austin took responsibility for the delays in notification. "I recognise I could have done a better job ensuring the public was appropriately informed. I commit to doing better," said Austin, acknowledging the concerns about transparency.

"But this is important to say: this was my medical procedure, and I take full responsibility for my decisions about disclosure." Austin, 70, remained hospitalised due to complications following a minor elective medical procedure. Air Force Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder said the White House and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were notified about Austin's hospitalisation, but he would not confirm when that notice happened. Ryder said on Saturday that Austin is recovering well and resumed his full duties from Friday evening from his hospital bed. AP

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