



Duterte tightens grip on power in Philippine polls

US billionaire's gift to graduates fuels debt debate



JAKARTA: Indonesian anti-riot police take their positions to disperse a mob during a violent demonstration near the Elections Oversight Body (Bawaslu) yesterday. —AFP

Six dead after election riots in Jakarta

Authorities restrict access to social media to stop rumors and fake news

JAKARTA: At least six people were killed as Indonesia's capital erupted in violence yesterday when police clashed with protesters opposed to the re-election of President Joko Widodo. Dozens were arrested and parts of Jakarta were littered with debris and burned-out cars, as the violence triggered security advisories from the US and Australian embassies. Authorities also restricted access to some social media in a bid to stop rumors and fake news from spreading online.

National police chief Tito Karnavian said six people had died, but denied authorities had fired live rounds on protesters, and called for calm. "Some had gunshot wounds, some had blunt force wounds but we still need to clarify this," he told reporters. Jakarta's governor Anies Baswedan said earlier that about 200 had been injured. The violence came after Indonesia's election commission on Tuesday confirmed Widodo had beaten retired military general Prabowo Subianto for the presi-

deny in a poll held on April 17. Subianto has said he would challenge the results in court - as he did, unsuccessfully, against Widodo in 2014 - but also warned his claims of widespread cheating could spark street protests. That was borne out early Wednesday as protesters set market stalls and cars on fire while hurling fireworks and rocks at security personnel clad in riot gear and holding shields, an AFP reporter on the scene said. Authorities blamed the violence on paid "provocateurs", citing money-filled envelopes found on some of nearly 70 demonstrators who had been arrested. The early morning clashes started after several thousand Subianto supporters rallied peacefully near the election supervisory agency's office in the heart of the capital on Tuesday.

'Don't want chaos'

Later, roads were blocked off in parts of the sprawling metropolis - with some shopping malls, businesses

and schools also closed as small groups of protesters engaged in skirmishes with police. "I open myself to anyone to work together to build and develop this nation, but I won't tolerate anyone who tries to disrupt public security, the democratic process or the unity of our... country," Widodo said at a press briefing, flanked by his chief security ministry and the head of the military. Subianto repeated calls for supporters to avoid violence. "We support people's constitutional rights (to protest) as long as they are civilized, peaceful and non-violent," he told reporters.

By yesterday afternoon, a crowd of several thousand demonstrators had flowed into the city's business and commercial heart for a rally. Election officials and analysts have discounted Subianto's claims, but many supporters appeared convinced of rampant cheating in the world's third-biggest democracy. "We came here to demand justice because there was fraud in this presidential election," protester Mato told AFP. "We don't

want chaos, but that depends on the police," he added. More than 30,000 troops had been deployed across the city in anticipation of unrest, and the elections commission office was barricaded with razor wire and protected by scores of security personnel. "Avoid areas where demonstrations are occurring & exercise caution in the vicinity of any large gathering," the US embassy said on Twitter.

Elsewhere, hundreds took part in a peaceful rally over election cheating claims in Sumatra's Medan city, while a police station was torched in Pontianak on Borneo island. The protests in support of Subianto have sparked a backlash online from opponents with the hashtag #Tangkapprobawo (#ArrestPrabowo) trending widely on social media. Tensions have also spiked since police said last week that they had arrested dozens of Islamic State-linked terror suspects who had planned to cause chaos by bombing protests. —AFP

Duterte orders garbage shipped back to Canada

MANILA: President Rodrigo Duterte has ordered tons of garbage dumped in the Philippines years ago to be shipped back to Canada, his spokesman said yesterday, escalating a festering diplomatic row. Duterte's spokesman warned also that if Ottawa would not formally accept the shipment of trash it would be dumped inside Canada's territorial waters. The rubbish is stored in dozens of containers which a Canadian firm sent to the Philippines in 2013 and 2014 - ostensibly for recycling - and the issue of what to do with it has rankled for years.

Last week Manila recalled its ambassador from Ottawa because Canada missed a May 15 deadline to repatriate the garbage. "As a result of this offending delay, the president has instructed the appropriate office to look for a private shipping company which will bring back Canada's trash to the latter's jurisdiction," Duterte spokesman Salvador Panelo told reporters. "If Canada will not accept the trash, we will leave the same within the territorial waters or 12 nautical miles out to sea from the baseline of any of their country's shores." Panelo said the order would be carried out "immediately".

The Canadian embassy in Manila referred requests for comment to officials in Ottawa, who were not immediately available. Canada has agreed to take back the dozens of shipping containers, but has not given a timeline. Diplomatic ties were already tested after Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, soon after taking office, questioned Duterte's deadly drug crackdown.

Duterte fiercely pushes back against any international criticism of his signature policy, which has seen police kill over 5,300 alleged addicts and pushers since 2016. Last year the president cancelled the Philippine military's \$235 million contract to buy 16 military helicopters from a Canada-based manufacturer after Ottawa put the deal under review because of Duterte's human rights record. During a speech in April, Duterte threatened to unilaterally ship the garbage back to Canada, saying: "Let's fight Canada. I will declare war against them." The president is notorious for foul-mouthed speeches that frequently include threats and hyperbole aimed at critics or perceived enemies. —AFP

Gandhi says gloomy Indian exit polls 'fake'

NEW DELHI: Indian opposition leader Rahul Gandhi yesterday dismissed as "fake" exit polls predicting a clear election victory for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a day before the scheduled release of results. A slew of exit polls released after the world's largest election ended on Sunday projected that Modi and his allies would return to power with between 282 and 313 seats out of 543 in parliament.

"My dear Congress party workers. The next 24 hours are important. Stay alert and vigilant. Don't be afraid. You are fighting for the truth," Gandhi, head of the Congress party, said on Twitter. "Don't get disappointed by the propaganda of fake exit polls. Keep faith in yourself and the Congress party. Your hard work won't go to waste. Jai Hind (Bow to the motherland)," he wrote.

Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) welcomed the predictions and Indian stock markets rose strongly on Monday, but exit polls in India are notoriously unreliable. In 2004 they predicted that Prime Minister Atal Vajpayee's BJP-led government would be re-elected but results showed the opposite, bringing a Congress-led alliance to power under Manmohan Singh. In the last election in 2014, the BJP won 282 seats, the first time a party had won a majority on its own in 30 years. It then cobbled together

Fears rise China could weaponize rare earths

BEIJING: The US has hit China where it hurts by going after its telecom champion Huawei, but Beijing's control of the global supply of rare earths used in smartphones and electric cars gives it a powerful weapon in their escalating tech war. A seemingly routine visit by President Xi Jinping to a Chinese rare earths company this week is being widely read as an obvious threat that Beijing is standing ready for action.

"We should firmly grasp the strategic basis of technological innovation, master more key core technologies and seize the commanding heights of industry development," Xi said during the visit, the official Xinhua news agency reported yesterday. "Rare earth is not only an important strategic resource, but also a non-renewable resource," he added, in comments likely to further fuel speculation.

an alliance with a commanding 334 seats. Counting of the roughly 600 million votes cast was due to begin at 8:00 am (0230 GMT) today. If there is a clear trend this should be evident by around midday.

Voting machine doubts

Party volunteers yesterday joined armed police to guard strongrooms containing the four million electronic voting machines (EVMs) used in the election before counting begins. On Tuesday more than 20 opposition parties had called on the election watchdog to ensure the machines were not manipulated after video clips emerged on social media purporting to show irregularities. The Election Commission moved swiftly to refute the reports, saying voting machines were "absolutely safe in strongrooms" and those shown in video clips were reserves.

Amit Shah, president of the BJP, said yesterday that the opposition was rattled by their likely defeat and were "tarnishing" India by raising questions about the electoral process. Vijay Singh, an election agent for the Samajwadi Party in Lucknow - capital of the key state of Uttar Pradesh - was one of those keeping an eye on the strongroom, a common practice during elections, despite the baking heat. "We sit there in shifts of eight hours. The administration has provided a tent where we camp round the clock," Singh told AFP.

"We are the foot soldiers of the party and are always ready to serve our party under any circumstances. And we are there around the strongroom to ensure there is no security breach." Indian government issued an advisory to the regional governments to be vigilant when the votes are

However, analysts say China appears apprehensive to target the minerals just yet, possibly fearful of shooting itself in the foot by hastening a global search for alternative supplies of the commodities. Xi's inspection tour "is no accident, this didn't happen by chance," said Li Mingjiang, China program coordinator at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) in Singapore. "At this moment, clearly the policy circles in China are considering the possibility of using a rare earth exports ban as a policy weapon against the US."

The United States last week threatened to cut supplies of US technology needed by Chinese telecom champion Huawei, which Washington suspects is in bed with China's military. The US move has fanned speculation that Xi could impose retaliatory measures and in an indication of the importance of rare earths to the US, Washington did not include them in a tariffs increase on Chinese goods this month.

China has leverage

China occupies a commanding position, producing more than 95 percent of the world's rare earths, and the United States relies on China for upwards of 80 percent of its imports. Rare earths are 17 elements critical to manufacturing everything from smartphones and televisions to cameras and



NEW DELHI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (center) gestures as he is garlanded by BJP president Amit Shah, Shiv Sena party chief Uddhav Thackeray, former Chief Minister of Punjab Parkash Singh Badal and other leaders during an NDA dinner meeting on Tuesday. —AFP

counted Thursday. The home ministry "alerted" the state governments and police chiefs "regarding possibility of eruption of violence in different parts of the country in connection with the counting of votes tomorrow".

"(The ministry) has asked the states and union territories to maintain law and order, peace and public tranquility," the government statement said. "This is in the wake of calls and statements made in various quarters for inciting violence and causing disruption on the day of counting of votes," it added. —AFP

lightbulbs. That gives Beijing tremendous leverage in what is shaping up largely as a battle between the US and China over who will own the future of high-tech.

"China could shut down nearly every automobile, computer, smartphone and aircraft assembly line outside of China if they chose to embargo these materials," James Kennedy, president of ThRE Consulting, wrote Tuesday in National Defense, a US industry publication. China has been accused of using its rare earth leverage for political reasons before. Japanese industry sources said it temporarily cut off exports in 2010 as a territorial row flared between the Asian rivals, charges that Beijing denied.

In 2014, the World Trade Organization ruled the country had violated global trade rules by restricting exports of the minerals. The case was brought by the United States, European Union and Japan, which accused China of curbing exports to give its tech companies an edge over foreign rivals. China has cited environmental damage from mining and the need to conserve supplies as the reason for any past limits on output. While disruptive, any leverage gained from a supply block may be short-lived, experts said. "This would accelerate moves to find alternative supply sources," said Kokichiro Mio, who studies China's economy at NLI Research Institute. —AFP