

Bypolls: AAP ahead in Punjab, Gujarat's Visavadar, Cong-led UDF in Kerala

**NEW DELHI, JUNE 23:** The AAP was leading in Punjab's Ludhiana West and in Gujarat's Visavadar, while the Congress-led UDF surged ahead of its rivals in Kerala's Nilambur and the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal's Kaliganj on Monday, according to latest trends available for bypolls in four states.

The BJP was ahead in Gujarat's Kadi seat, the trends showed.

The bypolls in five constituencies in four states were held on June 19.

While the deaths of the incumbent MLAs necessitated the bypolls in one seat each in Gujarat, West Bengal and Punjab, the resignation of two legislators led to the polling in Kerala and another seat in Gujarat.

The ruling AAP in Punjab was ahead of its rivals with party candidate Sanjeev Arora leading with a margin of 2,286 votes against Congress nominee Bharat Bhushan Ashu from the Ludhiana West assembly seat.

After six of the 14 rounds of counting, Arora had polled 14,486 votes and Ashu 12,200 votes.

BJP's Jiwan Gupta returned to the third spot with 10,703 votes after briefly taking over Ashu. Shiromani Akali Dal candidate Parupkar Singh Ghuman was fourth with 3,283 votes.

The bypoll was necessitated following the death of AAP MLA Gurpreet Bassi Gogi in January.

The AAP is also doing well in Gujarat's Visavadar seat, according to the latest



trends.

AAP candidate Gopal Italia took a comfortable lead against rivals in Visavadar seat while the BJP was set to retain Kadi seat as the counting for bypolls to the two constituencies of Gujarat was nearing conclusion.

After the completion of 18 out of the total 21 rounds of counting, AAP's former Gujarat president Italia was leading over his nearest rival in Visavadar by 14,073 votes.

While Italia received 65,295 votes, BJP candidate Kirit Patel was behind him with 51,222 votes after 18 rounds, as per the latest data shared by the Election Commission.

In Kadi seat, reserved for the Scheduled Caste candidates, BJP's Rajendra Chavda was leading by a wide margin of 35,608 votes over Congress' Ramesh Chavda, after the end of 16 out of 21 rounds of counting.

The Visavadar seat in Junagadh district fell vacant in December 2023 after the then AAP legislator Bhupendra Bhayani resigned and

joined the ruling BJP.

Despite its near-total dominance in the state, the BJP has not won the Visavadar seat since 2007. Party leaders earlier said they were hopeful of overcoming the 18-year jinx this time.

AAP, which suffered a setback in the Delhi Assembly polls, is hoping to improve its fortunes in the bypolls.

In Kerala, the Pinarayi Vijayan-led LDF government received a setback as the opposition UDF surged ahead in the Nilambur seat.

By the end of the final round of counting, Election Commission figures showed Aryadan Shoukath, the Congress-led UDF candidate, had taken a lead of 11,077 votes over M Swaraj of the ruling CPI(M).

Shoukath is the son of the late Congress stalwart Aryadan Muhammed, while Swaraj is a state secretariat member of the CPI(M). The Left candidate congratulated Shoukath.

Swaraj said the LDF would closely examine the results but rejected suggestions of

anti-incumbency against the Left government. Shoukath said the outcome was expected.

"It was a victory anticipated by the people of Kerala -- a major win against the LDF government," he said.

Independent candidate and two-time legislator P V Anvar delivered a strong performance in the Nilambur by-election, surprising both the UDF and the LDF.

The Nilambur seat fell vacant following the resignation of sitting MLA Anvar, triggering a fierce political battle in the forest-fringe constituency.

The bypoll is being seen as a mid-term test for the LDF government, now in its fourth year in office.

For the Congress-led UDF, a win here would provide a much-needed boost ahead of the Assembly polls next year.

In West Bengal, the ruling Trinamool Congress was leading by over 19,000 votes in the by-election to the Kaliganj assembly seat in Nadia district.

After seven rounds of counting, TMC candidate Alifa Ahmed secured 32,308 votes, while her nearest rival, Congress candidate Kabil Uddin Shaikh, backed by the CPI(M), bagged 13,144 votes. BJP nominee Ashis Ghosh was trailing in the third position, securing 11,987 votes, election officials said.

The bypoll was necessitated following the demise of sitting TMC MLA Nasiruddin Ahmed in February this year. His daughter, Alifa Ahmed, has been fielded by the party to retain the seat.

Punjab: AAP retains Ludhiana West seat, Sanjeev Arora defeats Cong's Ashu

**LUDHIANA, JUNE 23:** Punjab's ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Monday retained the Ludhiana West assembly seat with its candidate Sanjeev Arora registering a victory in a fierce electoral fight against his nearest rival and Congress nominee Bharat Bhushan Ashu by a margin of 10,637 votes.

Arora (61) secured 35,179 votes while Ashu got 24,542 votes, according to the Election Commission data.

BJP's Jiwan Gupta polled 20,323 votes while Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) nominee Parupkar Singh Ghuman received 8,203 votes. Ghuman lost his security deposit.

The bypoll was necessitated following the death of AAP MLA Gurpreet Bassi Gogi in January.

Following AAP's victory, celebrations broke out at the residence of Arora and the party office in Ludhiana. His family members and supporters were ecstatic over the victory in the assembly constituency.

AAP leaders and cabinet ministers distributed sweets and danced to the beats of 'dhol' (drums) over the victory of Arora.

With AAP retaining the seat, its strength in the 117-member Assembly has remained unchanged.

AAP has 94 MLAs in the House while the Congress has 16 MLAs, SAD has three, BJP two and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) one while one seat is held by an Independent.

Following his victory, Arora will now resign from the Rajya Sabha seat, which he has been holding since 2022.

During the poll campaign, AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal had announced to make Arora a cabinet minister.



Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, while congratulating the people for the party's victory, said this win with a huge lead is a clear indication that the people of the state are "extremely happy" with the government's work.

"We are working day and night with complete honesty and without any discrimination for the progress and prosperity of Punjab," he said.

"We will fulfil every promise made to Punjabis during the byelection on a priority basis. Congratulations to Sanjeev Arora ji. Also, many congratulations to the entire leadership and volunteer team who worked tirelessly day and night for this victory," said Mann in a post on X.

A victory march, led by Punjab AAP president Aman Arora, was taken out by the party workers in Ludhiana.

Arora secured 39.02 per cent of the total 90,160 votes polled for the bypoll while Ashu got 27.22 per cent and Gupta 22.54 per cent votes, according to the ECI data.

SAD nominee Ghuman got just 9.1 per cent of the total votes polled.

Reacting to his victory, AAP's Arora thanked the vot-

ers of the Ludhiana West assembly seat. He also thanked Kejriwal and Punjab CM Mann for his win in the bypoll. "This is the victory of Ludhiana residents," said Arora.

AAP had fielded Arora, who is a Rajya Sabha member and a Ludhiana-based industrialist.

Congress nominee Ashu congratulated Arora for his victory and assured his full support for the development of Ludhiana.

Ashu had lost to AAP's Gogi by a margin of 7,512 votes in the 2022 assembly polls. Ashu had been MLA twice from this seat in 2012 and 2017.

There were 14 candidates in the fray.

AAP's senior leader Manish Sisodia said the opposition was calling the Ludhiana byelection a semi-final. "The AAP has won the semi-final, and now, under the leadership of Bhagwant Mann, we will win the final as well. This victory is a triumph of AAP's politics of work," he said.

The opposition parties, however, attacked the AAP government for allegedly "misusing" state machinery in the bypoll.

Punjab Congress president Amarinder Singh Raja

UP CM okays bridge on Ganga, road overbridge in Bhadohi; backs carpet industry revival

**LUCKHNOW, JUNE 23:** Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath approved the construction of a bridge over the Ganga river and a road overbridge during his visit here on Monday as he lauded artisans for the local carpet industry's "resurgence".

Noting the famed carpet industry of Bhadohi has led to Uttar Pradesh gaining a 60 per cent share in India's carpet exports, he emphasised the state's support to boost the industry's global footprint.

"Ten years ago, this industry was in a poor state. But local artisans have revived it with encouragement from Prime Minister Narendra Modi. As a result, Uttar Pradesh now accounts for 60 per cent of India's carpet exports, with Bhadohi contributing the largest share," Adityanath said.

He stressed that the industry's Geographical Indication (GI) tag and the development of the Carpet Expo Mart were the results of co-ordinated efforts by both the



Central and state governments.

The government is also supporting entrepreneurs and artisans through various initiatives to promote India's ancient handicrafts globally, the chief minister highlighted.

In a major infrastructural push, Adityanath approved the construction of a bridge over the Ganga river near Dengarhpur in Sitamarhi and a road overbridge on the railway line between Gopiganj and Mirzapur.

The chief minister directed officials to expedite the de-

velopment of an already approved mini-stadium and said an auditorium that has been sanctioned at the district headquarters would now be developed as a multipurpose hall.

He said efforts were underway to prioritise residential facilities for government officers and staffers. The status of outsourced sanitation workers under the Panchayati Raj Department was being reviewed, and steps would be taken to improve connectivity to roads linked with the district headquarters, Adityanath said.

Adityanath also inspected the district hospital, describing it as a "living monument of the previous government's apathy and corruption." He said his administration had restarted work at the facility and was overseeing the construction of a 50-bed critical care centre.

"Funds have been sanctioned for the renovation of the old hospital building and the target is to complete it by this December."

The chief minister also hinted at plans to establish a medical college in Bhadohi under the public-private partnership model and said preparations were ongoing to meet required norms.

Referring to local education infrastructure, Adityanath spoke about the expansion of Kashi Naresh Government PG College.

"A proposal has been sought for land allocation. With the establishment of the agriculture faculty and staffing, the college could be developed into a state university if over 50 acres of land is made available, he said.

Pak politicians, others ask govt to review Trump's nomination for Nobel Peace Prize

**ISLAMABAD, JUNE 23:** Several Pakistani politicians and notable figures have asked the government to reconsider its decision to recommend President Donald Trump for the 2026 Nobel Peace Prize after the US bombed Iran's three nuclear sites.

The government, in a surprise move on Friday, announced that it would nominate Trump for the prestigious award due to his peacemaking efforts during the recent India-Pakistan conflict.

A letter of recommendation, signed by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, has already been sent to the Nobel Peace Prize Committee in Norway.

But the decision came under scrutiny after the US bombed Iran's Fordo, Isfahan and Natanz nuclear sites, joining Israel to dent Tehran's nuclear programme.

The Dawn newspaper reported that

some leading politicians demanded the government review its decision in light of the latest development.

Veteran politician Maulana Fazlur Rehman, who heads the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI-F), demanded that the government rescind its decision.

"President Trump's claim of peace has proven to be false; the proposal for the Nobel Prize should be withdrawn," Fazl told workers at a party meeting in Murree on Sunday.

He said that Trump's recent meeting and lunch with Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Field Marshal Asim Munir "pleased Pakistani rulers so much" that they recommended nominating the US president for the Nobel Prize.

"Trump has supported the Israeli attacks on Palestine, Syria, Lebanon and Iran. How can this be a sign of peace?" Fazl questioned.

"With the blood of Afghans and Palestinians on America's hands, how can he claim to be a proponent of peace?"

Trump had campaigned for office as a "peacemaker" who would use his negotiating skills to quickly end wars in Ukraine and Gaza, but both conflicts are still raging five months into his presidency.

Former senator Mushahid Hussain wrote on X: "Since Trump is no longer a potential peacemaker, but a leader who has willfully unleashed an illegal war, Pakistan government must now review, rescind and revoke his Nobel nomination!"

He said Trump had been "trapped by (Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu and the Israeli war lobby, committing (the) 'biggest blunder of his presidency'."

**WASHINGTON, JUNE 23:** The Trump administration on Sunday sent a series of conflicting messages to Iran — with US officials initially indicating a willingness to resume negotiations after a surprise attack on three of the country's nuclear sites and President Donald Trump talking up the possibility of regime change.

"It's not politically correct to use the term, 'Regime Change', but if the current Iranian Regime is unable to MAKE IRAN GREAT AGAIN, why wouldn't there be a Regime change???" Trump posted on social media. "MIGA!!!"

The posting on Truth Social marked something of a reversal from Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth's Sunday morning news conference that detailed the aerial bombing.

"This mission was not and has not been about regime change," Hegseth said. The Trump administration has made a series of intimidating statements even as it has simultaneously called to restart negotiations, making it hard to get a complete read on whether the US president is simply taunting an adversary or using inflammatory words that could further widen the war between Israel and Iran.

Up until the US president's post on Sunday afternoon, the coordinated messaging by Trump's vice president, Pentagon chief, top military adviser and secretary of state suggested a confidence that any fallout would be manageable and that Iran's lack of military capabilities would ultimately force it back to the bargaining table.

Hegseth had said that America "does not seek war" with Iran, while Vice Presi-



dent JD Vance said the strikes have given Tehran the possibility of returning to negotiate with Washington.

But the unfolding situation is not entirely under Washington's control, as Tehran has a series of levers to respond to the aerial bombings that could intensify the conflict in the Middle East with possible global repercussions.

All of that raises the question of whether the strikes will open up a far more brutal phase of fighting or revive negotiations out of an abundance of caution. Inside the US, the attack quickly spilled over into domestic politics with Trump choosing to spend part of his Sunday going after his critics in Congress.

Trump, who had addressed the nation from the White House on Saturday night, returned to social media on Sunday to lambaste Rep Thomas Massie, who had objected to the president taking military action without specific congressional approval.

"We had a spectacular military success yesterday, taking the bomb right out of their hands (and they would use it if they could!)" Trump said as part of the post on

Truth Social.

At their joint Pentagon briefing, Hegseth and Air Force Gen Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that "Operation Midnight Hammer" involved decoys and deception, and met with no Iranian resistance.

Caine indicated that the goal of the operation — destroying nuclear sites in Fordo, Natanz and Isfahan — had been achieved.

"Final battle damage will take some time, but initial battle damage assessments indicate that all three sites sustained extremely severe damage and destruction," Caine said.

Vance said in a television interview that while he would not discuss "sensitive intelligence about what we've seen on the ground," he felt "very confident that we've substantially delayed their development of a nuclear weapon."

Pressed further, he told NBC's "Meet the Press" that "I think that we have really pushed their program back by a very long time. I think that it's going to be many many years before the Iranians are able to develop a nuclear weapon."

The vice president said the

Warring accepted the people's mandate and said the party will have an introspection over the outcome.

"I acknowledge and appreciate the @INCPunjab workers in Ludhiana West by putting up the best fight against all odds when it was against the entire government machinery. This, after all, was just a by-election.

"Our fight will continue and we will take it to the logical conclusion in 2027. We will also do a serious in-house introspection as we believe we could have done much better," Warring said in a post on X.

Punjab BJP chief Sunil Jakhar said his party contested with complete unity and the votes received by the party indicate that the people of Punjab are now looking for a solid alternative to AAP and the Congress for the state.

"We thank our voters and accept the people's verdict. These elections are a signal that it is high time for BJP to start its work with full preparation and planning for 2027.

At the same time, these elections are a mirror for the AAP government, which fought its entire campaign relying on government machinery but could only secure a victory by a narrow margin," said Jakhar.

Union minister and BJP leader Ravneet Singh Bittu, who aggressively campaigned in favour of Jiwan Gupta, said they accept the verdict of the people.

"I also want to thank the voters of Ludhiana West who supported the BJP, and especially our candidate Shri Jiwan Gupta ji, who secured over 20,000 votes in just 14 days of campaigning -- a remarkable achievement," he said.

US had "negotiated aggressively" with Iran to try to find a peaceful settlement and that Trump made his decision after assessing the Iranians were not acting "in good faith."

"I actually think it provides an opportunity to reset this relationship, reset these negotiations and get us in a place where Iran can decide not to be a threat to its neighbours, not to be a threat to the United States, and if they're willing to do that, the United States is all ears," Vance said.

Trump has previously threatened other countries, but often backed down or failed to follow through, given his promises to his coalition of voters not to entangle the United States in an extended war. It was not immediately clear whether Iran saw the avoidance of a wider conflict as in its best interests.

Much of the world is absorbing the consequences of the strikes and the risk that they could lead to more fighting across the Middle East after the US inserted itself into the war between Israel and Iran.

Israeli airstrikes that began on June 13 local time targeted Iran's nuclear facilities and generals, prompting retaliation from Iran and creating a series of events that contributed to the US attack.

While US officials urged caution and stressed that only nuclear sites were targeted by Washington, Iran criticised the actions as a violation of its sovereignty and international law.

Iran's foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, said Washington was "fully responsible" for whatever actions Tehran may take in response.