

Kamla again!

Leads UNC to emphatic victory over PNM; TPP takes two Tobago seats



UNC supporters celebrate the party's victory in the General Election at their headquarters in Chaguanas last night. PHOTO BY KRISTIAN DE SILVA



Dejected PNM supporters at Balisier House last night after the party's defeat in the General Election. PHOTO BY ROGER JACOB

GAIL ALEXANDER SENIOR POLITICAL REPORTER

A belated “birthday gift.”

United National Congress (UNC) Leader Kamla Persad-Bissessar, who turned 73 last Tuesday, received a national “Birthday Gift” last night when her party won yesterday’s General Election—tossing the People’s National Movement (PNM) back to 2010 defeat levels— and made history by becoming a female T&T Prime Minister a second time.

“Let us say thanks and praise to Almighty God—when God says yes, nobody can say ‘no’ ... this has been a tremendous blessing ... now that the UNC has won—everybody wins!” Persad-Bissessar declared at 10.48 pm to mammoth cheers from a sea of yellow-clad supporters at the UNC’s Mulchan Seuchan Road, Chaguanas headquarters “It is now that the real work starts ... we’ll be focused on delivering on our promises. I give you the assurance that no one will be left behind—when UNC wins, Trinbago wins,” Persad-Bissessar declared, thanking the partners of the party’s Coalition of Interests.

Persad-Bissessar, prior to close of the campaign, had asked T&T to give her the birthday gift of an election victory.

The UNC retained its 19 seats and also won marginal East-West corridor and San Fernando West seats held by the PNM.

She has also welcomed the Tobago People's Party (TPP)—led by Tobago House of Assembly chairman Farley Augustine—which won the two Tobago seats held by the PNM.

The UNC and TPP will now share the Government in Parliament, while the PNM enters Opposition—making it three parties in Parliament.

PNM Political Leader Dr Keith Rowley conceded defeat at 10.15 pm, ahead of Persad-Bissessar's victory speech.

Rowley said, "Tonight is not a good night for the PNM ... it is clear at this time that we have lost the election. We have done it before, conceding defeat on election night but tomorrow is a new day.

"We conceded in 1986, 1995 and in 2010, so this 70-year-old party, sometimes you win, sometimes you don't win—tonight is one of those nights where surprisingly, we have not done very well in the General Election. But from (Tuesday), the PNM will begin to prepare itself for the next call within the next 60 months. We wish all the leaders well, as our country is now in their hands."

Rowley said if last night's trend held, PNM would end up with 10 or 12 seats. He said he had no regrets in supporting Stuart Young as prime minister.

Young, at Rowley's side, said he had won his Port-of-Spain North/ St Ann's West seat. While saying he was obviously disappointed, Young vowed to keep fighting.

"The electorate has spoken tonight and we look forward to tomorrow morning ... we'll be back on the road, rebuilding and encouraging the youths to come forth ... I certainly look forward to playing a part in that and a leadership role in that."

Last night's UNC victory was a dramatic climax to two years of election hints from the PNM, repeated demands for election by the UNC and a short sharp campaign in the snap poll called by Young, four months ahead of the term's end in August. Young had announced the election date on March 18—a day after he was appointed prime minister.

Rowley said the PNM meets tomorrow to determine the Opposition Leader.

PNM general secretary Foster Cummings (La Horquetta/ Talparo), party PRO Faris Al-Rawi (San Fernando West), Terrence Deyalsingh (Aranguez/St Joseph), Shamfa Cudjoe-Lewis (Tobago West), Ayanna Webster-Roy (Tobago East), Esmond Forde (Tunapuna), and Roger Monroe (Toco/ Sangre Grande) were among those PNMTes who lost their seats.

The PNM is said to have retained the Diego Martin, Port-of-Spain, Arouca/Lopinot and other seats.

The Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) is expected to give preliminary results and voter turnout figures later today.

Yesterday's voting featured long lines in many of the 2,316 polling stations. While some inner-city stations had a slow beginning from 6 am, steady streams were reported. In the 2020 General Election, turnout was 58.08 per cent.

Kamla open to Farley

After close of the poll at 6 pm, the UNC showed an early lead with figures in certain key marginals, as well as its traditional "safe seats," starting with Persad-Bissessar's Siparia. She was the first candidate to declare victory.

Persad-Bissessar had arrived at her UNC's Siparia constituency headquarters around 8.45 pm to shouts of "Victory tonight!" from enthusiastic supporters. Preliminary figures for her win was

9,565 votes.

At that time, Persad-Bissessar said she was confident the UNC would win the election, as the trend was very good for the UNC.

On whether the UNC would be open to an arrangement with the TPP, Persad-Bissessar said, “I always said there are many rooms in the House of the Rising Sun, there’s a space and place for all. We need to work together to rebuild T&T so all are welcome and all will be welcome—we have to rebuild T&T.”

Dennis, Griffith concede early

First figures following the close of polls began developing from around 8 pm with Tobago East, where the race emerged with TPP’s David Thomas ahead of PNM’s Ayanna Webster-Roy.

Just after 8 pm, figures for marginal Tunapuna showed UNC’s Roger Alexander ahead of PNM’s Forde, maintaining a lead.

The UNC was also leading in marginal Aranguez/St Joseph with UNC Devesh Maharaj over PNM’s Deyalsingh.

By 8.30 pm, UNC’s Chaguanas East candidate Vandana Mohit showed a healthy lead over PNM’s Richie Sookhai. UNC’s Mayaro candidate Nicholas Morris also showed a large lead over PNM’s Beatrice Bridgelal.

By 9.20 pm, UNC had called the seats of Chaguanas West (Neil Colin Gosein), Oropouche West (Dr Lackram Bodoie) and Barataria/ San Juan (Saddam Hosein).

By 9.30 pm, the UNC was leading in 13 seats, the PNM in five and TPP in Tobago East and West.

At that time, Tobago PNM Council leader Ancil Dennis conceded that the PNM would not have won Tobago East, saying it was not his happiest election. Dennis speculated that voters may have decided to withdraw participation.

Also at that time, National Transformation Alliance Gary Griffith conceded saying, “ The results show that T&T was not prepared for a third option, we just didn’t have the opportunity for people to break away from that PNM or UNC—til they die mindset. I hope whoever is in Government that you do well.”

It was a subdued atmosphere at PNM’s Balisier House headquarters in Port-of-Spain. A large stage was set up. But up to 9.15pm, MPs were in their constituencies and few party officials were present.

Candidates needed to secure one-eighth of the votes cast to get back their deposit.