

Morrison concedes defeat in Australia election, ending 9 years of right-wing rule

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Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison leaves from a Liberal election night event after the Australian general election in Sydney on May 21, 2022. (AFP Photo)

Canberra, May 21 (RHC)-- Australia's prime minister Scott Morrison conceded defeat in the country's general election on Saturday, ending almost a decade of conservative rule.

Morrison was quick to admit defeat to the opposition leader Anthony Albanese as the Australian prime minister must attend a Tokyo summit on Tuesday with US, Japanese and Indian leaders.

"Tonight I have spoken to the leader of the opposition and the incoming prime minister, Anthony Albanese, and I have congratulated him on his election victory," Morrison said.

The veteran conservative leader said that he took responsibility "for the wins and the losses" and would stand down as leader of the Liberal Party.

The 54-year-old outgoing leader admitted that people had suffered "great upheaval" over the past few years, which have been marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, drought, bushfires, and floods.

"I think about the upheaval that is taking place in our nation, and I think it is important for our nation to heal and to move forward," he said. The defeat ends eight years and nine months in power for Morrison's conservative coalition.

The incoming premier, Albanese, said he wanted to unite the country. "I think people want to come together, look for our common interest, look towards that sense of common purpose. I think people have had enough of division, what they want is to come together as a nation and I intend to lead that," he told his supporters.

Partial results on Saturday showed that Morrison's Liberal-National coalition faced the wrath of voters in affluent urban areas and Western Australia in particular. Final results could take some time as counting of a record number of postal votes is completed.

While it is certain that Albanese will be Morrison's successor, it is not clear yet if Labor will form a majority government or minority government and there'll be a hung parliament.

The outgoing Australian leader, who was highly critical of China in particular and Asian countries in general, had earned the wrath of Asian-origin voters, according to some poll observers. He had earlier accused his main opponent of being Beijing's preferred candidate.

The harsh political rhetoric of his campaign prompted Chinese-Australian community leaders to warn against the rise of anti-Asian attacks, ahead of the election.

According to a survey released in April, one in three Chinese Australians had suffered discrimination due to their heritage. The survey conducted by the Lowy Institute shows almost 20% of those polled said they had been threatened or attacked because of their heritage while one in four had been called offensive names.

"There's a real sense there has been a massive shift over the past year," he said. "That has coincided with this sort of toughening rhetoric and the specter of the threat of China being raised in an electoral context," Osmond Chiu, a Sydney-based research fellow at the Per Capita think tank, was quoted as saying by The Standard.

Relations between China and Australia have strained since 2018 when Australia became the first country to ban Chinese telecom giant Huawei Technologies Co. from its 5G wireless networks.

Ties with Beijing got even worse during the pandemic after Morrison called for a probe into the origins of the coronavirus, toeing the line of U.S. leaders.

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