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TO WIN HIS MAIDEN
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Modi Paints Hindi Heartland in Bright Saffron

Shivraj's Kamal in Full Bloom in MP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
BHOPAL/NEW DELHI

A robust organisational overhaul, addressing the initial challenges of huge internal factionalism within demotivated workers, coupled with the popularity of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, were the key factors that turned the tide in favor of the BJP in Madhya Pradesh during the last days of the polls.

The nervousness to retain power in the Hindi heartland for the saffron party was evident, given the ground gained by the Congress, especially as the BJP fielded seven sitting party Parliamentarians, including three Union Ministers.

The BJP fielded 21 Union Ministers as MLA candidates with maximum number in MP followed by Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. The task was to get everyone working together at the organisational level for the ultimate goal of bringing the BJP back to power in the coveted State. Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed 14 rallies in Madhya Pradesh during the campaigning for polls.

He reached out to young voters by reminding them of the failures of previous Congress Governments on various fronts, doubling down on the development of all sections.

As BJP devised a strategy to defeat anti-incumbency in Madhya Pradesh which has been under its belt since 2003, barring 18 months from December 2018 to March 2020, Modi reached out to various sections of voters, including women, youngsters, tribals, besides the traditional supporters of the saffron party. Party devised a strategy of assigning 14 senior leaders to 14 districts, where they interacted with the local functionaries as well as the elected representatives of the municipal corporations and panchayats. They organised more than 50 meetings, in which Chouhan listened to the grievances and suggestions of the party workers.

Notably, the BJP didn't project any leader from the State as its Chief Minister face, apparently to beat anti-incumbency, and sought votes for 'lotus', the poll symbol of the party. The ruling BJP retained power in Madhya Pradesh with an emphatic win over the Congress.

Road to 2024 clear



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with BJP National President JP Nadda, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Union Home Minister Amit Shah during celebrations after party's victory in elections to the Legislative Assemblies of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, at BJP headquarters, in New Delhi, on Sunday

CHHATTISGARH RECLAIMED

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI/RAIPUR

The BJP comfortably regained control in Chhattisgarh on Sunday, dislodging the five-year rule of the Congress by winning 54 seats in the 90-member Assembly. The BJP was in power in the State for 15 years consecutively after the creation of the State bifurcated from Madhya Pradesh where too BJP remained the undisputed political party.

The Chhattisgarh outcome was a surprise for many, as the Congress had high hopes of retaining power in the State. The promises made by the BJP, promoted as 'Modi ki Guarantee 2023', seemed to have worked in its favor in the tribal-dominated State, where it secured a thumping majority. In the 2018 Assembly polls, the Congress had registered a landslide victory largely because of a "strong" anti-incumbency against the then BJP dispensation and the grand old party's

promise of freebies and welfare measures. In the outgoing Assembly, the Congress presently has 71 members, BJP 13, JCC (J) 3 and BSP 2 while one seat lying vacant. The BJP this time made populist promises in its manifesto, titled 'Modi ki Guarantee 2023' for Chhattisgarh. They included procurement of 21 quintals of paddy per acre at ₹3,100 per quintal, and annual financial assistance of ₹12,000 to married women under the 'Mahtari Vandan Yojana'.

BJP Conquers Rajasthan Fort

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI/JAIPUR

Rajasthan upheld its tradition of changing governance every five years and ousted the Congress-led Ashok Gehlot Government by voting the BJP into power on Sunday. The second winning surge for the BJP came in Rajasthan after retaining neighbouring Madhya Pradesh and winning over Chhattisgarh, where it comfortably wrested power from the faction ridden grand old party.

Till reports last filed according to the Election Commission updates, the BJP won 115 seats leaving Congress at 70 of the total of 200 Assembly seats. The elections were conducted over 199 seats while Sriganganagar's Karanpur seat was postponed due to the death of Congress candidate Gurmeet Singh Koonar. The Bharat Adivasi Party had won one seat and was leading on two.

The BSP won one seat and led on another while the Rashtriya Loktantrik Party led on two and the RLD on one. Independent candidates were leading or winning from seven seats. Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot submitted his resignation to

Governor Kalraj Mishra late in the evening to pave the way for several names, including former CM Vasundhara Raje Scindia, who are currently doing the rounds. Gehlot said the Assembly poll results were 'unexpected for everyone' and added that the party humbly accepted the people's mandate.

For almost full term, Gehlot struggled with his former deputy and political bete noire Sachin Pilot who had carried a massive revolt within two years of formation of the Congress Government in the State. Despite having several welfare schemes in place, the culturally sound State was marred by the public airing of dirty laundry involving Congress leaders. This situation worked in favour of the BJP, as the saffron party, right from day one, kept the pressure on Gehlot.

Gehlot said all the schemes introduced by the Congress Government in the past five years, including the old pension scheme and the Chiranjeevi health insurance scheme, should be taken forward by the next Government. In the current Assembly, the ruling Congress has 107 MLAs, BJP 70 and Rashtriya Loktantrik Party (RLPT) three.

MADHYA PRADESH
BJP 163 INC 66

RAJASTHAN
BJP 115 INC 69

CHHATTISGARH
BJP 54 INC 35

TELANGANA
INC 64 BRS 39

WINNERS

- Union Ministers Narendra Singh Tomar, Prahlad Patel from Madhya Pradesh
- Kailash Vijayvargiya (BJP) defeats Congress' sitting MLA Sanjay Shukla in Indore, MP
- BJP MPs Diya Kumari, Rajyavardhan Rathore, Kirodi Lal Meena, Baba Balak Nath in Rajasthan
- Former Chhattisgarh CM Raman Singh
- K Venkata Ramana Reddy (BJP) defeats Telangana CM K Chandrasekhar Rao (one seat)
- Telangana PCC chief Revanth Reddy wins from one seat lose another

LOSERS

- Union Minister Faggan Singh Kulaste in MP
- BJP MPs Narendra Kumar, Bhagirath Chaudhary, Devji Patel lost in Rajasthan
- Leader of Opposition in MP Assembly Govind Singh (Congress)
- Amit Jogi (Ind) Chhattisgarh
- Present Rajasthan Assembly Speaker C P Joshi (Congress)
- Minister Pratap Singh Khachariyawas
- Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao lost in one seat and won in other seat
- BJP MPs Sanjay Bandi, Bapurao Soyam, Arvind Dharmapuri
- Md Azharuddin (Congress)

Congress delivers the Impossible in Telangana

ENHANCES PRESENCE IN SOUTH INDIA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI/HYDERABAD

The Congress is on its way to achieving the magic mark of 60 seats on Sunday to form the first non-BRS Government in Telangana. This southern success comes in the midst of a saffron sweep of the Hindi heartland, where the BJP wrested two States from its rival and retained one. Telangana becomes the second southern State in the Congress kitty in 2023, after it emerged triumphant in Karnataka in May. Factors such as anti-incumbency, voter fatigue, and dissatisfaction among the youth contributed mainly to the poor performance of BRS.

Despite the towering image of incumbent Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao, along with the party's extensive grassroots network and welfare programmes, the perceived inaccessibility of its leaders contributed to the growing anti-incumbency sentiments. Additionally, the Opposition projection of what they called the BRS family rule in the State further exacerbated this sentiment. The Congress had mounted a spirited election campaign with a view to unseat BRS, even as the BJP also

launched a no holds-barred attack against the ruling dispensation. According to the Election Commission figures till the reports, the grand old party registered a massive lead against the ruling BRS, as the party won 47 seats and was ahead in another 17 of the 119 Assembly seats. The BRS, which has 101 members in the outgoing Assembly, emerged victorious in 22 and was leading in 17 others till last filed. Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao submitted his resignation to Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan following his party's poor performance. The Governor has asked Rao to continue in office till the formation of the new Government.

The BJP bettered its tally, winning six seats and was leading in two other segments, according to the EC update. It has three members in the outgoing Assembly. The AIMIM won five seats and was leading in two. The Congress good show sparked off celebrations by party workers. While the BRS Government introduced various welfare schemes, its alleged failure to fulfill key election promises, including providing housing for the poor, ensuring significant job creation, dol-



ing out unemployment relief, as well as the delayed implementation of farmers' loan waivers and the leak of recruitment test question papers worked against them. The BJP was initially considered the main Opposition to the BRS, but the scenario changed after the Congress gained momentum following win in the Karnataka elections in May. Allegations of an implicit understanding between the BRS and the

BJP, particularly regarding the Delhi Excise Policy case involving KCR's daughter Kavitha, weakened the BJP, leading anti-establishment votes to consolidate in favour of the Congress. Unlike previous elections where sentiments for separate Statehood played a crucial role, emotional issues did not significantly sway this election. In 2018, the Congress and the TDP formed an alliance, with BRS accusing TDP

Chief N Chandrababu Naidu of being anti-Telangana. However, the TDP chose not to contest the recent Telangana Assembly election due to ongoing legal issues and Naidu's imprisonment in Andhra Pradesh. Similarly, YSR Telangana Party (YSRTP) led by YS Sharmila, daughter of former undivided Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y S Rajasekhara Reddy, withdrew from the contest, declaring support for the Congress. The Congress ran an assertive campaign centered on the theme of change, encapsulated in the slogan 'marpu kavali — Congress raval' (there should be change - Congress should come), which effectively resonated with the electorate. Anumula Revanth Reddy, who led the Congress' charge, finds himself on the brink of a potential chief ministership. The 56-year-old leader met top police officials of the State and discussed the security arrangements for the swearing-in ceremony, likely on December 4 or 9. He welcomed the people's mandate in favour of the national party while the BRS expressed disappointment over its failure to ensure a hat-trick. BRS working president and KCR's son K T Rama Rao said the

Assembly poll results were "disappointing" though he is not "saddened".

Interestingly the BJP's vote share surged from 7 per cent in 2018 to 13.88 per cent in the present Assembly polls even as its number of seats has gone up to eight. The party also won two by-polls, giving it three members in the outgoing Assembly.

K Venkata Ramana Reddy emerged as a giant killer by defeating the Chief Minister and BRS supremo K Chandrasekhar Rao and Telangana PCC chief Revanth Reddy in Kamareddy. He vanquished his nearest rival KCR by a margin of 6,741 votes. However, on the flip side, all the three BJP Lok Sabha MPs were defeated. Controversial legislator T Raja Singh is the only BJP candidate from the city who won in 2018 Assembly polls and has repeated his feat this time. He retained his Goshamahal seat for the third time in a row. The BJP's firebrand MP and former State chief Bandi Sanjay Kumar lost to BRS rival Gangula Kamalakara Reddy by 3,163 votes. The BJP's promise of making a Backward Caste candidate as Chief Minister also didn't seem to cut ice with the voters.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The much-awaited Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) Bloc meeting of Opposition leaders to finalise their plan for taking on Modi's juggernaut in the Lok Sabha polls has been scheduled for Wednesday in the national Capital.

The leaders have decided to meet at the residence of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, and maximum participation is anticipated due to the presence of leaders for the Winter Session, which begins on Monday. This decision is also set against the backdrop of the grand old party wrestling power in another southern State, Telangana, six months after registering a signif-

icant win in Karnataka. Sources have indicated that, while leaders are expected to discuss the 2024 strategy, members will also delve into the damage caused by alliance partners such as the Samajwadi Party and the AAP in the recently concluded election results in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. According to reports, SP candidates garnered the same number of votes that accounted for the Congress's loss, thereby paving the way for the BJP's candidate to win. The INDIA Bloc meeting was delayed as the Congress awaited the results of Assembly elections in five states — Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh,

INDIA Bloc to meet on Wednesday



Chhattisgarh, Telangana, and Mizoram — before finalising the Opposition Bloc's strategy and seat-sharing arrangement for the general elections.

NCP chief Sharad Pawar said the outcome of the Assembly elections in four States will not have any impact on the INDIA Bloc, which comprises more than 26 Opposition parties led by the Congress.

"I don't think this will have any impact on the INDIA alliance. We will be meeting at Kharge's residence in Delhi. We will speak to those who know the ground reality. We will be able to comment on it after the meeting only," Pawar said.

Pawar's NCP is part of INDIA, which has so far held three rounds of deliberations in Patna, Bengaluru, and Mumbai.

Janata Dal (United) took a swipe at the Congress following its rout in three Hindi heartland States, saying it is clear that the main Opposition party is unable to win on its own. JD (U) spokesperson K C Tyagi said the INDIA Bloc was missing in the elections. The Congress is in a coalition Government with the RJD in the Bihar Government led by JD(U) leader Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

Some parties like Trinamool Congress, Aam Aadmi Party and Samajwadi Party wanted early finalisation of seat-sharing but the talks were delayed due to the Assembly polls.

Cyclone to trigger rains in State till Dec 6

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

As predicted by the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the deep depression over southwest Bay of Bengal intensified into a cyclonic storm, 'Michaung', on Sunday. Even though there is no direct threat of the cyclone over the Odisha coast, several parts of the Sate are likely to experience heavy rainfall activities under its influence.

Light to moderate rainfall at

most places with isolated heavy rainfall is likely over south coastal and adjoining south interior Odisha during December 4 to December 6 with isolated very heavy rainfall over the same region on December 5.

On Monday, heavy to very heavy rainfall is likely to occur at one or two places over the districts of Malkangiri, Koraput, Rayagada, Gajapati and Ganjam, said the IMD issuing an Orange warning.

On Tuesday, heavy rainfall (7 to 11 cm) is very likely to occur at one or two places over the districts of Nabarangpur, Kalahandi, Kandhamal and Puri.

Also heavy rainfall (7 to 11 cm) is very likely to occur at one or two places over the districts of Ganjam, Gajapati, Nayagarh, Khordha, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Kandhamal, Koraput, Malkangiri and Rayagada, said the IMD issuing a Yellow warning.

State mops up gross GST of Rs 4,295 cr in Nov

Rise of 3.19%

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

State has recorded Gross GST collection, inclusive of CGST, IGST, SGST and Cess of Rs 4,295.08 crore during November this year against collection of Rs 4,162.26 crore during November last year with a growth rate of 3.19 per cent.

The progressive gross GST collection during the Financial Year 2023-24 (till November 23) is Rs 35,188.25 crore with a growth of 9.75 per cent over the corresponding period, that is, Financial Year 2022-23.

The State Government has recorded the highest ever collection of State GST (OGST + IGST settlement) with mop up of Rs 2,791.45 crore during November 2023 against a corresponding collection of Rs 1,390.36 crore recorded during November 2022 thereby

registering a phenomenal growth rate of 100.77 per cent.

The progressive collection of State GST (OGST + IGST Settlement) upto the month of November 23 is Rs 14,913.16 crore against a collection of Rs 11,719.64 crore upto November this year registering a growth rate of 27.25 per cent.

The collection under all Acts monitored by the Commissionerate of CT and GST, Odisha including OGST/IGST Settlement, VAT, Entry Tax and Professional Tax during last month is Rs 3,856.72 crore against a collection of Rs 2,308.92 crore during November 2022 with a growth rate of 67.04 per cent.

The progressive collection under all Acts upto November 23 is Rs 22,510.56 crore with a growth rate of 18.91 per cent over corresponding collection till November 2022.

In Cuttack Criminal nabbed in encounter; gun seized



PNS ■ CUTTACK

A notorious criminal, Susant Sahu alias Lipu, was nabbed following an encounter with police in Salepur of Cuttack district on Saturday night.

Police officials said Lipu along with one of his associate was planning for a dacoity when a police team raided the Asureswar playground.

On seeing the police team, the accused fired two rounds in a bid to escape from the spot. However, he was injured in the retaliatory firing by police.

Lipu, who sustained a bullet injury on his left leg, was admitted to the SCB Medical College Hospital in Cuttack. However, Sahu's associate

managed to escape from the spot.

Police sources said that more than 54 criminal cases are pending against Lipu at various police stations.

"A police team was engaged in patrolling when they got information that some criminals had assembled near the playground with a motive to plan for a robbery. When the police team reached the spot, the accused opened fire. Later, he sustained a bullet injury in firing by police," said a police official.

Some police personnel have also sustained minor injuries in the encounter. A mobile phone, a gun and some other articles were seized from the criminal.

In Sundargarh CMS staff loots Rs 6L from ATMs, arrested

PNS ■ SUNDARGARH

A staff of a cash management service (CMS) company had looted around Rs 6 lakh from separate automatic teller machine (ATM) kiosks of the State Bank of India in Sundargarh district. However, the accused was arrested by a team of local police and forwarded to court on Sunday.

The employee was identified as 28-year-old Anil Kumar Behera from Khordha district. He had looted the total cash in phases at different times from separate SBI ATM kiosks. He

was an employee of the company and was in charge of the organisation's Sundargarh office.

A manager of the bank's branch had earlier lodged an FIR with police, acting on which Anil was arrested. He had learned the technique of opening an ATM when he was the head of the cash management company. A probe team had previously picked up four employees of the company, including Anil, and interrogated them. During the probe, he confessed to his crime, a senior police official said.

Cocaine seizure: Stevedore's role under scanner

PRASANTA ROUT ■ PARADIP

The discovery of 22 packets of cocaine valued at Rs 220 crore at the Paradip International Cargo Terminal (PICT) on December 1 has prompted a joint probe by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), Coast Guard, Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) and the Special Task Force.

The inquiry is multifaceted, delving into various angles to unravel the complexities of the cocaine smuggling operation.

Interrogations 21 individuals are on. They include the ship's captain.

However, concerns have been raised about the procedural aspects of the investigation,

particularly the oversight of key processes crucial for pinpointing the main culprits behind the incident.

Notably, questions are raised about a stevedoring agency's role and advocates for social justice are urging a thorough examination of this aspect.

The vessel in question, MV Debi Panama, before berthing at the PICT berth, had undergone clearance processes from over 18 organisations, including Immigration, Customs, Dock Safety and various other regulatory bodies. Despite these clearances, the cocaine was discovered during the loading of steel plates, leading to a swift response from authorities.

On November 29, eight packets of cocaine were initially found in a bucket, triggering action from the Odisha Police. Subsequently, a joint operation involving CISF, Customs, and Odisha Police sniffer dog squad uncovered a total of 22 packets.

The seizure has ignited widespread concern in the port city, demanding immediate action against the organisations and individuals involved. The cocaine discovery raises questions about the operations of the private stevedore company. With its dedicated security agency, the role of the stevedore agency is now under scrutiny in the unfolding investigation.

OES seminar 'Enrich rural economy through carbon reduction'



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

While the climate change negotiations are underway at Dubai under UNFCCC's annual meeting COP-28 in which Prime Minister Modi is also participating, the Orissa Environmental Society (OES) on Sunday organised a seminar on 'Carbon Sequestration Mechanism' befitting to the occasion and dwelling on the subject in Odisha's perspective.

The objective was to discuss on improving rural livelihood through the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) project of the UN involving marginal farmers to join in the global carbon market and create carbon sink in their farmland by raising tree plantation.

This will pave the way for bringing more fallow land in green cover and help achieve the country's voluntary declaration to raise 5 million hectares of sink by 2030 committed in COP-26 at Glasgow, UK.

It may be noted that the Clean Development Mechanism is a United Nations-run

carbon offset scheme which allows countries to fund greenhouse gas emissions-reducing projects in other countries and claim the saved emissions as part of their own efforts to meet international emissions targets. In this context, endeavour needs to be made at all levels to reduce the problem creator carbon emissions by involving all stakeholders, including the rural mass.

Experts expressed such views while speaking in a seminar on the theme 'Improving rural livelihood through carbon sequestration' organised by the OES.

Chaired by OES president Dr Sundara Narayana Patro, the seminar was attended by Ashok Kumar Sharda, secretary of the Utkal Chamber of Commerce and Industry as chief speaker. Narrating his experience as a former vice-president of the JK Paper Mills, Rayagada, he stated how the company has developed a project under the CDM under the Kyoto Protocol for linking small and marginal farmers taking up plantations and

linking it with the global carbon market. It was the first of its kind in Southeast Asia under LULUCF (Land Use & Land Use Change & Forestry) Project to sell emission reductions earned through carbon sequestration by plantations.

He further discussed how the tribal farmers of Odisha of Koraput, Rayagada and Kalahandi districts have taken the lead for joining the first A/R CDM project of the country.

OES president Dr Patro opined that the global scenario of climate change demands for changing lifestyles to reduce carbon footprints, thus contributing to the desired decrease in global warming. In his welcome address, OES secretary Dr Jaya Krushna Panigrahi said rural economy can be reinforced by involving the people in plantation programmes under the CDM project and thus the environment would also be protected.

OES vice-president Dr Lala AK Singh introduced the guests and Prof BS Patro presented a vote of thanks.

Among others, former PCCF Dr Bijay Ketan Patnaik, Prof Nimai Charan Mishra, Dr Sudhakar Kar, Prafulla Kumar Dhal, Nidhi Kumar Routray and Dillip Kumar Satpathy also presented their views on the theme. A magazine titled 'The Green Horizon', edited by Nihar Ranjan Acharya, was released on the occasion.

During November 2023, 20.85 lakh of waybills were generated vis-à-vis 18.19 lakh waybills generated during November 2022 recording a growth of 14.62 per cent reflecting the buoyancy in the economic sector.

Out of the 20.85 lakh e-way bills generated during November 2023, 12.39 lakh were intra-State waybills while 8.46 lakh were inter-State waybills (3.45 lakh of incoming and 5.01 lakh of outgoing waybills).

Further, till November end, 2.12 crore of e-invoices were generated by taxpayers of Odisha with total transaction value of Rs 5,92,999.53 crore.

Blow to BRS as S Odisha leader Pangti quits party



Joins Congress; more BRS leaders likely to cross over

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Jayaram Pangti on Saturday quit the Bharatiya Rashtra Samiti (BRS) and joined the Congress at a Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) executive meeting in the presence of PCC president Sarat Pattanayak and many other senior leaders.

Sources said a few other BRS leaders, including former Chief Minister Giridhar Gamang and his son Sishir Gamang, are also likely to re-join the Congress soon.

Pangti, a leader of southern Odisha, has immense influence on the voters in four districts, Koraput, Rayagada, Malkangiri and Nabarangpur.

His resignation from the BRS comes as a blow to the Telangana-based party, which had announced its entry into Odisha politics a few months ago at a grand ceremony in Hyderabad. Many top leaders of the Congress and the BJD and some other influential persons were flown to Hyderabad to join the BRS.

Along with Pangti, former Talsara BJD MLA Ranjit Bhitirra also joined the Congress on Saturday. Their joining the Congress has come as a shot in the arm of the party ahead of the 2024 elections.

On the other hand, the BJP camp was in a joyous mood after its former leader Gyana Beura, who was in the Congress, returned to the saffron party fold. Beura joined the BJP in the presence of party State president Manmohan Samal in Bhubaneswar.

Expectations soar high in Odisha BJP camp

NALINI SAHU
BHUBANESWAR

The hat-trick victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in three Hindi heartland States, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, has apparently come as a major morale booster for the party's Odisha leaders, who claimed that their State unit would put up a similar "spectacular" performance in the 2024 elections.

BJP State president Manmohan Samal said he is quite optimistic that Odisha voters would now have "greater love" for his party.

"The BJP got a chance for the first time to be the main opposition in 2019 by replacing the Congress in Odisha. In 2024, we will definitely form the government in Odisha," said Samal.

Asked about a persistent perception that if the BJD and the BJP will have a friendly match in the 2024 elections, Samal termed it as "baseless,"

saying that it is a "conspiracy" of the ruling party as part of its strategy to create confusion among people.

"Since 2009, when the BJP parted its way from the BJD, we are looking after our own organisation and performing as an opposition party," he said.

Samal asserted that the poll results in the three States proved the popularity of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has done commendable works like scrapping of Article 370, Ram Mandir and good governance.

BJP national vice-president and former Kendrapada MP Baijayant Panda credited Modi's leadership for the "superb" performance of the party in the three States.

"A few months ago, it was being said that Chhattisgarh was one State where BJP cannot win. But in Chhattisgarh, BJP has registered a landslide victory. Many people from Odisha, including me, worked hard in Chhattisgarh," said Panda.

City's oldest colonial bldg on verge of precipice

Dak Bungalow can be restored as a museum of artifacts: INTACH

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Dak Bungalow of the Old Town, the earliest surviving colonial vestige of Bhubaneswar, is probably slated for demolition for the construction of a Kalyan Bhavan. Located at the western-most portion of the Ekamra Kshetra, the Dak Bungalow has an interesting history.

It was built sometime in the late 1850's for the convenience of British officers and was also the staging point for mail runners of the Imperial Mail Service. It also served as a makeshift courthouse for proceedings held by the British officials. The many properties in the Old Town that were taken up by the gentry of Bengal



under the draconian Sunset Law were auctioned at this place. It was also used by the surveyors of the Great Indian Trigonometrical Survey held between 1840 and 1870. The Bengal Nagpur Railways officials too camped here when the railway was being laid. It is just 500 metres from the railway line to Puri. It was converted into the Settlement office and remained as the RI office for years before a new adjoining building was made. The modest two-roomed

bungalow was set in a thickly wooded plot with a well and two outhouses for the Khansama and Chowkidar. The large walled compound was dotted with trees, many fruit-bearing and others for shade. Just a single tamarind tree remains. The Dak Bungalow was renovated during the visit of Lord Curzon in 1899; it was from here that he went to the Curzon Tower to view the Lingaraj Temple. The place has been known as the Dakabangala Chhak for ages.

Old-timers tell of the times when leopards would come and rest in its veranda.

Today, the building that has been a witness to so much history and has survived the vicissitudes of time lies neglected. Locals believe that the place is haunted and it has its share of strange paranormal happenings. Some old-timers recollect that there were two graves of Englishmen inside the compound; however, no trace of them can be found. A portion of the Dak Bungalow

was razed a few years back to build a small office of the Revenue Inspector. The other half is ruined. Broken walls, wild vegetation creeping in through the windows and filth are all that one could see on the premise of a structure that is historically significant.

A team from INTACH had inspected the place two years ago and found it to be structurally intact. Convener of INTACH's Bhubaneswar Chapter Anil Dhir says that several letters have been written to the Government to restore the Dak Bungalow. The thick walls and the wooden roofbeams are undamaged; the building can be easily restored with some conservation efforts. Even the outhouses and the horse stable are in a restorable condition. Built of thick laterite stone blocks and chunurkhi, the walls have little damage except for the peeling plaster.

Dhir says that he has dis-

covered several accounts of Britishers who stayed here for months, convalescing from diseases like malaria and tuberculosis. Many physicians of Calcutta would recommend patients to go to Bhubaneswar and imbibe the therapeutic mineral water of the well inside the Kedar Gouri temple complex. It was believed that the water had curative and rejuvenating properties. A two-storied sanatorium had been made near the present-day Ravi Talkies, which too catered to the convalescing Britishers. Unfortunately, it was demolished ten years ago and a block of flats has come up at the place.

INTACH State convener Amiya Bhushan Tripathy is of the opinion that the structure can easily be restored and can be used as a museum and interpretation centre of the various artifacts of the Old Town. INTACH will soon be sending a proposal to the Government in this regard, he added.

In Kendrapada Beauty parlour owner held for blackmailing girl

RAJESH BEHERA ■ KENDRAPADA

Police have arrested the owner of a beauty parlour in Kendrapada district on the charge of raping a Dalit girl by blackmailing her with obscene photos.

The accused identified as Pratap Sahu of Nilikanta village has been booked under Sections 376, 328 and 384 of IPC and relevant Sections of SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 and IT

Act, said Pattamundai Model police station IIC Ranjit Mohanty.

According to police, the 22-year-old girl was working in Sahu's beauty parlour at Dandisahi Bazaar in Pattamundai some days ago. Sahu had allegedly clicked some obscene photos of the girl by providing her sedative-laced food stuffs. He later raped the girl several times by threatening her to make the photos viral on social media.

Subsequently, the victim

discontinued her job at Sahu's parlour and started working at some other place in Kendrapada town. However, Sahu barged into the girl's working place recently and once again threatened her with the obscene photos, sources said.

The girl informed the incident to her family members. Sahu allegedly hurled abuses at the girl's family members when they confronted him. The girl lodged an FIR in this connection at the Pattamundai Model police station on Saturday.

PWD temp staffs' regularisation demanded

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Members of the Nikhila Odisha Works Department Temporary Employees' Association assembled here on November 24 in front of the quarter of PWD Chief Engineer (Civil) demanding fulfilment of their one-point agenda.

As many as 340 temporary employees getting a paltry sum have been serving the department and they are not given their salaries through H/R. Association president Surendra Kumar Swain said, "It

is indeed difficult to maintain our families within this paltry sum and our employees are dying many times a day. If the government does not listen to our demand for regularisation of the 340 employees, we are ready to self-immolate as a protest against the injustice meted out to the poor temporary workers."

Notably, two predecessor Chief Engineers, including Bijan Behera, have officially counted the numbers of the temporary employees working in the department as 340

and have recommended for regularisation of their services, but the present Chief Engineer is blissfully ignoring the genuine demand of these employees, association general secretary Jitendra Tripathy added.

The daylong strike before the residence of Chief Engineer ended with a resolve to continue the stir ahead if the government continues to remain apathetic towards the demand for regularisation and payment of salaries through H/R.

Chest physician Mishra gets nat'l honour



PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

Prof Dr Narayan Mishra, national president of Indian Chest Society and National College of Chest Physicians of India, was honored with one of the highest national honours, "R Viswanathan Memorial Chest Oration Award" for his extraordinary contributions in the field of pulmonary medicine at the National Conference of Pulmonologist NAPCON-2023, at Hyderabad on November 30. It was handed over to him

by Padma Vibhusan Dr Faraokh E Udawadia in the presence of the chief guest Padma Vibhusan Sri Sri Ravishankar. The four-day long conference was attended by more than 3,000 delegates from across the country and abroad.

Dr Mishra, in his deliberation "My journey with COPD" mentioned that now COPD is the 3rd main cause of death in the world. The steps for prevention, early detection, and proper management is highly essential for our country to tame the disease, he said.

HC to construct new court complex in B'pur



PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

A new court complex is going to be constructed at the existing court area of Brahmapur by the Orissa High Court. It is learnt that the complex will be four storied in an area starting from old post office to the SDJM Court.

The oldest Bar Association office of Brahmapur and its library will be demolished to construct the new building, informed association president Minati Rath. On November 18, the Ganjam Bar Association convened its general body meeting, where they appreciated the decision of the High Court.

The members of the Bar

Association also met Acting Chief Justice BR Sadangi, Ganjam Protocol Judge Debabrata Dash, Registrar General Pratap Patra and discussed over the matter. The association drew the attention of Acting Chief Justice on safety of the old journals, books and furniture and urged for alternate arrangements for members of the Bar Association, until new building is constructed.

Odisha Bar Council member Sanjit Kumar Panigrahi informed that the proposed Adarsh District Bar Association will be of four storied with parking facilities in ground floor and a conference hall on the top floor.

BU Political Sc Dept holds 2-day nat'l talk

Distinguished speakers join

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

The Berhampur University's PG Department of Political Science and Public Administration in collaboration with Indian Political Science Association (IPSA) organised a two-day national seminar titled "Tribals in India: Rights, identity and problems" on November 28 and 29.

Vice-Chancellor of Berhampur University Prof Geetanjali Dash presided over the inaugural function. At the outset, Dr Rajesh Seth, Coordinator of PG Department of Political science introduced the theme and Sanjay Meher, Coordinator of PG Department of Public administration introduced the guests.

Keynote speaker Professor Jagannath Ambagudia from TISS, Guwahati campus, pre-



sented a holistic approach to the issues of the tribes starting from colonial period to today's content. Chief guest Prof Jayant Kumar Mahapatra elucidated the causes of deprivation and encouraged everyone to have sustainable solution.

Distinguished guest Professor Sanjeev Kumar Sharma highlighted the need for positive interventionist approach

of the State. Guest of honour Prof Sukanta Kumar Tripathi described the role of political scientists in the tribal studies. Vice Chancellor Dash in her concluding address highlighted the various aspects of tribal deprivation and as well as development, while Assistant Professor of PG Department of Political science Sharada Prasanna Raut offered a vote

of thanks.

The PG Department of Political Science and Public Administration also organised Professor Harihara Das memorial lecture in the evening of November 28.

The students organised a cultural programme named "ADI SANSKRITI". On 29th November 2023, in the plenary session II was held.

Depts, faculties transferred from MSCB Univ



Discontent in Mayurbhanj Outfits demand immediate revocation of order

KAVI VISHNU SATPATHY ■ BARIPADA

There is now widespread resentment among intellectuals in Mayurbhanj district over transfer of five subjects and their faculties from Maharaja Sriram Chandra Bhanjdeo

(MSCB) University to DD University Keonjhar. Different local organisations too have vehemently criticised the State Government's decision.

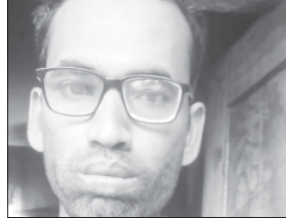
The Departments of Odia, Sanskrit, English, Geology and Material Science, which were till recently a part of MSCB University (2nd campus), and their respective faculties have now been transferred to (and merged with) Dharanidhar University, Keonjhar. This has happened as per a State Government notification on Thursday (Notification No. 52566, H.E., dt.

30-11-2023).

The Mayurbhanj Senior Citizen Forum, Bhanjasena and many other social organisations have, on Saturday, reacted very strongly to the latest government notification. Local leaders of different political parties too have opposed the move. They all have demanded immediate withdrawal of the controversial declaration.

MSCB University, formerly known as North Orissa University, it may be pointed out, came into being about 25 years ago to meet the aspirations of the students and the education-loving community of the region. Later, its second campus was set up at Keonjhar and to cater to the need of the students of Keonjhar. But suddenly, on Thursday a Higher Education Department notification transferred the subjects and their faculties to the DD University. This has now shocked and saddened many intellectuals here. They all want immediate revocation of the order.

Worker killed in Barbil plant mishap



PNS ■ KEONJHAR

A fatal accident occurred in Shremetallic iron plant at Rugudi near Barbil on Saturday killing a worker. The deceased was identified as Sukanta Kumar Das (38), a native of Narendrapur village under Aul block of Kendrapada district.

He was working as shift in-charge in the Shremetallic plant for the last 6-7 years. After the postmortem, police handed over the body to his kin and registered a case of unnatural death. Meanwhile, the workers union of the factory has demanded suitable compensation, besides a job to one of the family members of Sukanta.

Forest Dept gears up for turtles' arrival in Rushikulya

Holds preparatory meet

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

In anticipation of the annual arrival of the rare Olive Ridley turtles at the Rushikulya estuary for their mating and spawning season, the Forest Department convened a preparatory meeting here on Friday.

With the imminent visit of the Olive Ridley turtles expected in the coming days, the discussions centered on coordinating efforts among front-line workers and organisations crucial for the protection of these rare creatures.

Last year the coast of Ganjam witnessed a significant influx of turtles to the estuary for spawning, prompting heightened vigilance this



year. The turtles are known to lay their eggs across a 52 km stretch from Prayagi to Anantaraipur sea beach, with Ludabandh beach spanning 5 km from Podampeta hosting the largest nesting population while sporadic nesting occurs elsewhere.

To safeguard the nesting grounds, the Forest Department has divided the Ludabandh area into 50 zones, assigning teams of five indi-

viduals to protect the turtles and their eggs in each zone. Last year's successful management of the nesting process, achieved through interdepartmental coordination, set a significant benchmark for mass egg laying, an accomplishment the departments aim to replicate this year, Regional Chief Conservator of Forests Sanjay Swamy said.

Considering the potential threats to the eggs from wild

animals, there are plans for constructing a GI wire security fence covering a kilometer long stretch where the highest egg laying occurs.

Managing Director, Zoological Survey of India, Brahmapur, Anil Mahapatra, Forest Officer Sunny Khokhar, Gopalpur Rocky Martin Managing Director Tata SZ, Additional Conservator of Forests Prabhakar Naik, Manoj Patro, Manikeswari Hasda, former Wildlife Warden Rabindranath Sahu, and WWF State coordinator Swadhwa Sindura, besides representatives from the Coast Guard, Fisheries Department, Police Officers, IRA staff, local villagers, employees of Gopalpur Port, and members of voluntary organizations, were present in the meet.

SUJ B'garh unit office-bearers nominated

PNS ■ BARGARH

The Bargarh branch of the State Union of Journalists (SUJ) convened a meeting on Wednesday, focusing on the crucial themes of unity and impartiality in journalism. The event kicked off with the ceremonial lighting of the lamp at Goodess Samleswari, setting the tone for discussions that followed.

SUJ district president Bijay Kumar Sahu and State president Kailas Chandra Nayak presided over the meeting, emphasising the pivotal role journalists play as mirrors reflecting society. Guest speakers, including State assistant secretary Mahendra Darjee, national executive member Gagan Sharma, and State executive member Shashibhushan Sarangi, highlighted the essential link between organisational strength

and justice.

A notable highlight was the announcement of nomination of office bearers for the Bargarh SUJ branch. Bijay Kumar Sahu was elected as president, with Balaji Bibhuranjan Tarasia and Prabhakar Dash as vice-presidents. Similarly Madhab Prasad Sahu was nominated as secretary, Narsingh Charan Sahu and Sushant Panda as assistant secretary, and Nityananda Bag as treasurer. Balkishore Khadanga, Rakesh Kumar Joshi, and Ashit Swai will serve as advisors.

Representatives from various blocks of Bargarh district, alongside journalists from Sambalpur and Subarnapur and Balangir districts attended.

The district association took a moment to honor prominent journalists, on the occasion.

INBRIEF

ONE DIES, 2 CRITICAL AS CAR HITS BUS IN BHUBANESWAR

Bhubaneswar: A person died and two others sustained critical injuries when the car in which they were travelling hit a bus near a fuel station at Chandrasekharpur in Bhubaneswar on



Sunday. The driver of the speeding car lost control over the wheels, following which it dashed against a median and subsequently hit the bus on the other side of the road. The car was mangled under the impact of the collision. The injured ones were hospitalised for treatment. Police began investigation into the incident.

BIKE RIDER KILLED IN MISHAP IN ROURKELA

Rourkela: A motorcyclist was killed on Sunday when a private bus hit the two-wheeler near Bajrang Chhak at Lathikata of Rourkela on the 3rd day of Zero Fatality Week. The bus was on its way from Rourkela to Barbil when it met with the accident on the National Highway. The motorcyclist died on the spot.

PPA OBSERVES DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Paradip: The Paradip Port Authority (PPA) organised an event on the occasion of International Day of Persons With Disabilities. PPA Chairman PL Haranadh saluted the spirit of



determination of children of Jagruty School and said the PPA would take steps within its ambit for all-round development of the school. PPA Secretary Dr PN Bahekar and DC Capt Alekh Sahoo were present. The PPA Chairman announced Rs 25,000 assistance to Laxmi Singh, a Class-X student of the school, who recently participated in the Indian Blind & Para Judo Championship at Amritsar. He also distributed gifts to PPA differently-abled employees. Paradip Ladies Club president P Girija Sundari presented school kits to the children.

SCRIBE MISHRA HONOURED FOR HIGHLIGHTING DESI BIHAN

Balangir: "The Pioneer" local Correspondent Sudhir Mishra was felicitated with the Kumar Hasan Memorial Award at the 10th Seed Festival held at Sambalpur on Saturday for highlighting the cause, preservation and promotion of Desi Bihan for healthy and debt-free life of farmers and alternative re-



porting since 2009. Padmashree Haldhar Nag, along with other guests, honoured him with a shawl and a citation. Mishra has written extensively on different issues of Balangir and west Odisha which includes distress migration, water scarcity, forest and environment, forest fire, wildlife besides the need to save Desi Bihan and minor millets.

KEONJHAR LAWYERS FELICITATED

Keonjhar: Prominent lawyers of Keonjhar district were felicitated for their contributions in the field of law continuously for 50 years by the District Bar Association in its annual function at the Sanskruti Bhawan on Sunday.



JSW FOUNDATION HOLDS FREE HEALTH CAMP

Bhubaneswar /Keonjhar: Over 400 people from Koira, Jajang and adjacent villages availed the benefit of free medical ser-



vices at a two-day free health camp provided by the JSW Foundation in association with Jagannath Cancer Aid Foundation (JCAF). The health camp took place from December 1 to 2 with a focus on cancer screening and other tests such as diabetes, high blood pressure, SPO 2, pulse, BMI, cardiology, orthopedic and gynecological screenings.

Improve power supply: Min to TPSODL

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

In an emergency meeting held at the office chamber of Energy Minister Pratap Keshari Deb on Wednesday, Brahmapur MLA cum Ganjam District Planning Board member Bikram Kumar Panda, BeMC Mayor Sanghamitra Dalai, BeMC Commissioner J Sonal and CEO, TPSODL joined and held wide discussions regarding improvement of power supply in Brahmapur.

Minister Deb strictly asked Tata Power authority (TPSODL) to ensure improved and uninterrupted power supply with minimum disruption to Brahmapur Municipal area.

Deb said he received lots of complaints from consumers on frequent power cuts and low voltage. He advised that the field staff and technical experts should work rapidly for the satisfaction of the consumers.

BJP wins in Hindi heartland set stage for 2024 Lok Sabha polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The BJP tightened its stranglehold in the Hindi heartland with Assembly victories in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh while the Congress ousted BRS from Telangana on Sunday, the three-one poll score setting the stage for the 2024 General Elections. Together, the five states have 84 Lok Sabha seats - Madhya Pradesh with 29, Chhattisgarh 11, Rajasthan 25, Telangana 17 and Mizoram two.

While the saffron party retained Madhya Pradesh with a projected decisive win, it wrested Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh from the Congress. Congress lost those two states but won Telangana from the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), the upset in the southern state giving the grand old party at least something to celebrate. BJP's Chhattisgarh manifesto,

for instance, titled "Modi's Guarantees", promised annual financial assistance to married women and landless agricultural labourers, paddy procurement at Rs 3,100 per quintal and cooking gas cylinder at Rs 500 to poor families. "The election results show people accept Prime Minister Narendra Modi's guarantee of delivering on guarantees," Union Minister Pralhad Joshi said.

Joshi, who was BJP's election-in-charge for Rajasthan, also took a dig at the Congress and the promises it made in the run up to the elections. "People have blessed BJP in three states, endorsed Prime Minister Modi's leadership and rejected Congress' false promises," Joshi said. For the Congress, looking for political revival, and the BRS, it was time to take stock ahead of the general elections just six months away. "Congress' performance in Madhya Pradesh,



Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan assembly polls disappointing," said party chief Mallikarjun Kharge, adding that it will

overcome temporary setbacks and prepare fully for Lok Sabha polls along with its partners in the INDIA alliance.

The elections, which set the momentum for the 2024 polls and threw up clear, unambiguous mandates in all four

states, saw the BJP and the Congress go head to head in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. And Telangana was a direct contest between the Congress and the BRS. Madhya Pradesh rang the victory bell loud for the BJP by giving it another term in power with the party winning or leading in 166 seats out of 230, well over the halfway mark, and the Congress trailing at 63. "Our Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji is in the hearts of the people of Madhya Pradesh. The state is also in the heart of Modi ji," said four-term Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan. The BJP has been in power in the state for 18 years. Basking in his hour of glory, he said the state government implemented schemes like the Ladli Lakshmi and Ladli Behna and a lot of work was done for the welfare of farmers, poor people and youth. Veteran Congress leader

Kamal Nath, who had projected himself as the next chief minister, was leading in his own seat Chhindwara but failed to steer his party to victory. While the saffron party was way to register 115 seats in Rajasthan, Congress was at 69. Voting was held in 199 seats as polling in one was put off due to the death of a candidate. Congress, driven by factionalism, was helmed by Ashok Gehlot in the state with his deputy Sachin Pilot the challenger. Taking a swipe at Gehlot, born into a family of magicians, Union minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat said the magic has ended and people have voted for the honour of women and for the welfare of the poor. "The way we are moving towards a huge majority in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, it is clear that the people trust Modi's guarantee and has

rejected the Congress' gimmicks (nautanki). Modi magic is the real magic and every other magician has failed," added BJP spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla. Chhattisgarh too came as a surprise for many Congress leaders who were hoping for another stint in power in the state. The day began with both parties neck and neck but, as counting continued, the BJP consolidated its lead and won or was ahead in 57 seats and the Congress in 33 in the 90-member house. Senior BJP leader Raman Singh told reporters in Raipur that the people had rejected Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel. Echoing his party colleagues, he said the people had demonstrated their faith in Modi's work and guarantees and not in Baghel's promises. BRS working president K T Rama Rao congratulated the Congress for great Telangana win.

PM Modi hails BJP victories

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday hailed BJP's big win in the Assembly polls as a victory for his Government's agenda of self-reliant India, asserting that its hat-trick in the states is a guarantee of its hat-trick of Lok Sabha poll wins in 2024. "The results show popular support for our battle against corruption," he told a crowd of cheering supporters at the BJP headquarters here, adding that they have served a lesson to the Congress and the opposition's INDIA bloc that mere collecting some dynasts on dais may make for a good photograph but cannot win people's confidence. Voters have delivered a warning to these parties involved in corruption to mend their ways or people will finish them off, he said. No one should come in between the Centre's development and people, or the masses will



remove them, Modi said in a stinging attack on opposition parties. Some people are already saying our hat-trick in the states is a guarantee of hat-trick in the Lok Sabha polls in 2024, he said. He told opposition parties to not support those working against the country's interests at a time when development

is taking place at a fast pace. Addressing a big gathering of BJP members, including many Union ministers, Modi said these results will ensure the world's belief in India and infuse more confidence into global investors for the country. It shows that people are increasingly supporting our agenda for a developed

India, he said, adding that the world is watching that people are voting for a stable government which enjoys a strong majority. People can distinguish between selfish politics and the politics of national interest, Modi said, asserting that they have realised that a strong BJP leads to the devel-

opment of the country and every family. He reiterated that women, youth, the poor and farmers are the four biggest castes and their empowerment will lead to the country's empowerment. Noting that most members of Other Backward Classes and Scheduled Tribes belong to these categories, he said they have endorsed policies and roadmap presented by the BJP. Every farmer, young voter and the poor and deprived are saying that they have won, Modi said, adding that the youth looking for a better future and every citizen wanting a developed India by 2047 is feeling successful following the poll results. "I want to tell you with full honesty that your dream is my resolve," he said, noting how the country's infrastructure is undergoing a transformation while its economy remains the fastest growing in the world.

BJP now to be in power in 12 States on its own

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

With the BJP emerging victorious in three out of the four States the results of which were declared on Sunday, the party will now be in power in 12 States on its own, while the Congress, the second largest national party, will come down to three after losing Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. The Aam Aadmi Party, with its government in Delhi and Punjab, is third among national parties. The BJP, which rules the centre, is in power in Uttarakhand, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Goa, Assam, Tripura, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, and is all set to get Madhya Pradesh back and snatch Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh from the Congress after today's vote count. Besides, BJP is also part of the ruling coalition in four states - Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Sikkim. The Congress will now be in



power in three states on its own - Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, and Telangana, where it's on its way to victory, defeating its closest rival, the ruling Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS). The Congress is also part of the ruling coalition in Bihar and is an ally of the DMK which rules Tamil Nadu, however, it is not a part of the state government. The results also consolidated AAP's position as a major Opposition party, making it the second biggest Opposition party with government in two states, as Congress' share declined. "After

today's results, Aam Aadmi Party emerges as the largest opposition party in north India with two state governments - Punjab and Delhi," AAP leader Jasmine Shah said. India, at present, has six national parties - BJP, Congress, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), CPI(M), National People's Party (NPP), and AAP. The next round of assembly polls will be held in 2024, when Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh will go to polls. Assembly polls are also pending for Jammu and Kashmir.

We prepare for 2024 LS polls with hope, firm resolve: Congress



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Suffering defeats in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, the Congress on Sunday recalled that 20 years ago it had lost the three states while winning only Delhi but bounced back in the 2004 Lok Sabha polls, and said it prepares for the forthcoming general election with hope and a firm sense of resolve. While Congress lost two states but won Telangana from the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), the upset in the southern state giving the grand old party at least something to celebrate. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the party's performance in the assembly polls in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh was disappointing and added it would overcome the "temporary setbacks" and prepare fully for the Lok Sabha elections along with INDIA bloc partners. He thanked the people of Telangana, where the party is on course to dislodge the BRS from power and form the government. "We humbly accept mandate of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan - battle of ideology will continue. Thankful to people of Telangana, we will definitely fulfil promise of making 'Prajalu Telangana'," said former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Congress' assembly poll win in the state. Rahul

campaigned extensively in Telangana where the party also claimed the results bore fruits of his Bharat Jodo Yatra. Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra hailed the Congress' victory in Telangana. She said the people of Telangana have created history and given the mandate in favour of the Congress party. "This is the victory of the people of the state and every worker of the Congress Party. Thank you from the bottom of my heart to the people of Telangana. Congress party is committed to peace, prosperity and progress in Telangana," she said in statement. "The people of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh have assigned the role of opposition to the Congress Party. Humbly accept people's decision," Priyanka Gandhi said. Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said, "Exactly 20 years ago, the Indian National Congress had lost the state elections in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, while winning only Delhi. But within a few months, the party bounced back and went on to emerge as the single largest party in the Lok Sabha polls and formed the government at the Centre." "It is with hope, confidence and a firm sense of resolve and resilience that the Congress prepares for the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls. Judega Bharat, Jeetega INDIA!" Ramesh posted on social media.

Chouhan emerges as favourite in MP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

All the talk about the BJP receding into the background on a day Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan made a strong statement about his popular acceptability as the party appeared set to retain power with a stunning two-thirds majority. The BJP had chosen to head into the Assembly polls without naming a chief ministerial face in any of the states. While Chouhan has emerged as a favourite to remain at the helm in MP despite the presence of some challengers, the leadership race is wide open in Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, two states where the BJP has snatched power from the Congress. Many possible contenders for the top job across the three Hindi-speaking states have not contested the assembly polls but this may not be a factor as the party has in the past placed its trust in leaders who were not a member of state



assemblies, such as Yogi Adityanath in 2017. Union ministers Narendra Singh Tomar, who contested from Dimani assembly assembly seat, and Jyotiraditya Scindia have long been seen as

chief ministerial aspirants in Madhya Pradesh. In Rajasthan, political watchers believe a comfortable majority for the BJP means that the party leadership may turn to a new face as its chief

ministerial choice, even though two-term former chief minister Vasundhara Raje is a natural contender due to her stature and sizeable support base. Union ministers Gajendra

Singh Shekhawat and Arjun Ram Meghwal, state party president C P Joshi, Diya Kumari, who was among the more prominent faces during the campaign, and Mahant Balaknath are being talked about as probables. That Meghwal comes from Scheduled Castes and Balaknath is a Yadav, the most numerous OBC community in Hindi-speaking states, and a Hindutva face is seen as an advantage for them. BJP sources said someone like Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, who has been a three-term MLA and enjoys the confidence of the party leadership, will also be a natural contender. With the next Lok Sabha polls merely four months away, the party is likely to factor in the larger social narrative in picking its chief ministerial choices in the three states, a view which may be handicap for someone like Shekhawat in Rajasthan as he is a Rajput, the caste both Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath and Uttarakhnd CM Pushkar Singh Dhami come from.

This also favours someone like Chouhan, the only chief minister from the OBC community in the BJP and a popular one at that. However, some party leaders also pointed out that the results underscore the wider support for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's agenda across the states and the verdict should be seen in that context, although in Telangana it remains a distant third despite its vote share and seat tally improving from a low base. "The mandate gives the party leadership a free hand in deciding on chief ministers on all three states," a senior leader said, without going into names. In Chhattisgarh, former chief minister Raman Singh, state BJP president Arun Kumar Sao, leader of opposition Dharamlal Kaushik and former IAS officer O P Chaudhary are seen by political watchers as among the contenders for the top job. Except for Singh, all three leaders come from the Other Backward Classes (OBC).

Poll strategist Kanugolu plots yet another Congress win

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Poll strategist Sunil Kanugolu has yet again proven to be the man with the Midas touch, plotting the Congress' amazing turnaround in Telangana months after being the architect of the grand old party's return to power in Karnataka. Kanugolu was largely credited for shaping the Congress' win in Karnataka and was later accorded Cabinet rank in the Siddaramaiah government. This time, Kanugolu along with PCC chief A Revanth Reddy formed a formidable pair to chalk out the Congress' strategy to pull down the K Chandrashekhara Rao-led BRS government that

was eying a third term in the southern state. Kanugolu had also made forays in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh following a directive from the party's central leadership but regional satraps Ashok Gehlot and Kamal Nath reportedly were not on the same page as the poll strategist. Ahead of the Rajasthan elections, Kanugolu had made an assessment about the winnability of probable candidates but Gehlot reportedly did not agree to his suggestions and brought in Naresh Arora's Designboxed to construct the Congress government's narrative in the run-up to the assembly polls. Sources say that the success of Kanugolu in Karnataka and



Telangana was the result of the free hand given to him and allowing his team to work freely. Kanugolu, who hails from Karnataka and is in his early 40s, has been considered largely as the brain behind the Congress' narrative in Karnataka with the 'PayCM'

campaign against the BJP. In the run-up to the polls in Telangana, he highlighted the alleged corruption of the K Chandrashekhara Rao dispensation as part of Congress' campaign that seemed to have struck a chord with the people. The campaigns run by the

Congress in Karnataka and Telangana have been very similar as both highlighted the alleged graft of the ruling dispensation and projected welfare guarantees that seemed to have struck an instant connection with the public. Interestingly, Kanugolu has also been involved in several BJP poll campaigns in the past. In 2018, he worked with the BJP in Karnataka and the party managed to become the single largest party with 104 seats. He had also worked on Narendra Modi's campaign in 2014, as well as the party's political campaigns in Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat. Kanugolu, a former consultant with McKinsey, was also associated with DMK chief MK

Stalin and oversaw the party's 'Namakku Naame' (we are for ourselves) campaign during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. In 2021, he also worked with AIADMK against the DMK and led the party to win 75 seats in the Tamil Nadu assembly elections. Kanugolu had joined the Congress last year and worked closely with the Karnataka campaign. He is also credited with strategising Rahul Gandhi's cross-country 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' from Kanyakumari to Kashmir last year. Having delivered Karnataka and Telangana to the Congress, Kanugolu is likely to be given more responsibilities by the party in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls.

‘Election results show people’s faith in Modi’

PTI ■ BENGALURU

With the BJP’s overwhelming results in three out of four states assembly polls, the party’s Karnataka unit chief B Y Vijayendra said on Sunday that the party will win all the 28 seats in the state in the Lok Sabha elections in 2024. Addressing reporters, Vijayendra said people have once again expressed their desire to see Narendra Modi as the prime minister of the country through these election results. ‘We will win all the 28 seats from Karnataka in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections,’ Vijayendra, son of former chief minister B S Yediyurappa, said. People were calling the elec-



tions in five states as semi-finals. It is now very clearly visible there is a ‘BJP Tsunami’ in the country, the Shikaripur MLA said.

He was confident that Modi will return to power for the third time at the Centre in the Lok Sabha elections, which may take place in April or May.

Taking a swipe at the ruling Congress in Karnataka, he said, ‘The significant part of this election is that people are expecting the safety of the country and not the guarantee of baits to grab power. Congress has also realised this.’ Vijayendra alleged that the Congress came to power in Karnataka by luring people on the pretext of five guarantees, but now people are repenting. The BJP was racing towards power in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh while the Congress was poised to form a government in neighbouring Telangana where counting of votes is underway today. The counting of votes for the Mizoram elections will be held on Monday.

BJP win in 3 States prelude to LS polls, says Fadnavis

PTI ■ NAGPUR

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday said the BJP’s good showing in the Assembly polls in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh shows what is in the heart of the people and asserted there would be a repeat in the Lok Sabha and state polls here in 2024. The BJP is all set to win in MP, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh as per vote counting trends, while the Congress is ahead in Telangana. Addressing a press conference here, the BJP leader said the party’s success is due to people’s faith in Prime Minister Narendra Modi and this win is about the transparent development agenda for the people of the country. ‘The credit for this win goes

to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This is the result of his name and fame. The credit also goes to BJP president J P Nadda, master strategist Amit Shah and the national team,’ Fadnavis said. He said the BJP’s vote share has increased by 14 per cent in Chhattisgarh, 8 per cent in Madhya Pradesh and around 10 per cent in Telangana. ‘It is an unprecedented result. In a way, it shows what is in people’s hearts. It is a prelude to what the Lok Sabha results would be for the BJP and NDA. Similarly, it also indicates the people have rejected the (opposition’s) INDIA alliance and the agenda used by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. Only Modi is in the hearts of people,’ Fadnavis said. Fadnavis further claimed the Congress-led Indian National



Developmental Inclusive Alliance would convene a meeting and blame the EVMs for the poll loss. The atmosphere of victory is seen in Maharashtra as well, as the Mahayuti (ruling alliance comprising BJP, Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar faction of NCP) won two-thirds of the seats in gram panchayat elections recently.

Fadnavis said the BJP’s rise in Telangana was commendable. It has won three seats and was leading on five there. ‘In the last Lok Sabha elections, the BJP won four seats. In the next Lok Sabha polls, the BJP will be the number one party in Telangana,’ he claimed. ‘The Congress has realised who the real ‘panauti’ (someone who jinxes a venture) is. I am certain they will never again use this word against Modiji,’ he said. Fadnavis also said while Modiji constantly works for the people, and his efforts are long-lasting, events like the Bharat Jodo Yatra of Rahul Gandhi only create media buzz. People have realised they have made a mistake by electing the Congress in Karnataka, Fadnavis said, adding that the BJP would win 20 Lok Sabha seats there if polls are held now.

Poll results build momentum for over 350 seats in LS polls: Himanta

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

As the BJP looks to form governments in three out of four states where counting of votes was underway on Sunday, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the mandate will set the tone for the ruling alliance to win over 350 seats in Lok Sabha elections next year. Sarma had extensively campaigned in Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Telangana for the party in October and November. ‘I bow down to the people for giving us this mandate & reaffirming their faith in the leadership of Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri @narendramodiji. ‘These results will build a momentum to secure 350+ seats in the Lok Sabha, ensuring a third term for Adarniya Modi ji,’ the chief minister said in a post on X. He said one can only feel humbled and bow before the people of India for giving such a decisive mandate to the party. ‘Under the leadership of @narendramodiji, India will become a BiswaGuru and our



Sanatan will enlighten the entire world. Jai Hind,’ Sarma said in another post. The BJP is racing towards power in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, while the Congress is poised to oust the BRS in Telangana in a crucial electoral exercise ahead of Lok Sabha polls just months away. On Saturday night, Sarma said the recent state elections were like pilgrimages for him as he travelled extensively in the four states. He, however, did not campaign in the fifth state, Mizoram, which also went to polls along with the other four. Counting of votes in Mizoram will take place on Monday.

‘It was the first time in my political career that I had traveled extensively outside of the North East region and addressed 79 meetings and a few road shows. I feel a sense of rebirth as a proud BJP Karyakarta,’ Sarma said in a post on X. He said that during his campaign trail, he witnessed tremendous love and affection for the prime minister. ‘I also observed unprecedented development of unparalleled magnitudes. Poverty is rapidly declining, and the living standards have significantly improved. India has truly entered a new era. May the Almighty always bless Bharat,’ Sarma added.

BJP good show due to PM Modi’s guarantees, says Prahlad Patel

PTI ■ NARSINGHPUR

Union Minister Prahlad Singh Patel said the Bharatiya Janata Party’s stellar show in Madhya Pradesh and others states in the Assembly polls was due to the ‘guarantees’ of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. As per trends emerging after initial rounds of counting of votes, the BJP seems set to wrest Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh from the Congress and emphatically retain MP. ‘The reason behind the BJP’s good showing is due to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s guarantees, like his resolve for welfare of the poor, empowerment of women, employment for youth, respect and fair prices to farmers,’ Patel said. ‘Development was the guarantee of Modiji,’ said Patel, a Lok Sabha MP who was fielded by the party from Narsingpur.



He has a lead of 29,833 votes over the Congress’ Lakhman Singh Patel after 17 rounds of counting. Hailing Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Patel said the former’s toil and plan for the state pulled off such a resounding victory. ‘Thanks to BJP chief JP Nadda from the bottom of my heart. He toured the entire country,’ Patel added.

He said the Congress was devoid of any development model. ‘The Congress does not have a leader, leadership, and future leadership. Such people can’t win elections. The Congress believed some people unhappy with the BJP would vote for them. That was not possible,’ he claimed. Patel is among the probable chief ministerial candidates in the BJP.

Four of seven BJP MPs win Rajasthan Assembly elections

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Four of seven BJP MPs who fought the Rajasthan Assembly elections won their respective seats while three others lost the polls. Rashtriya Loktantrik Party (RLP) convener and Nagaur MP Hanuman Beniwal also won from the Khinwsar assembly constituency by defeating BJP candidate Rewant Ram with a narrow margin of 2,059 votes. In the November 25 polls, the BJP had fielded Rajasmand MP Diya Kumari, Jaipur Rural MP Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore, Ajmer MP Bhagirath Choudhary, Alwar MP Baba Balak Nath, Jhunjhunu MP Narendra Kumar, Jalore MP Devji Patel and Rajya Sabha MP Kirodi Lal Meena. Diya Kumari, member of erstwhile Jaipur royal family, won Vidhyadhar Nagar seat with a huge margin of 71,368

votes. She defeated Congress candidate Sitaram Agarwal. Vidhyadhar Nagar seat was held by former vice president Bhairao Singh Shekhawat’s son-in-law Narpat Singh Rajvi but he was shifted to Chittorgarh in order to accommodate Diya Kumari. However, Rajvi lost Chittorgarh seat where BJP rebel Chandrabhan Singh Aakya won. Rajvi managed to secure third position there. Two-time MP and former Union minister Rajyavardhan Rathore won Jhotwara seat by defeating Congress candidate Abhishek Choudhary with a margin of 50,167 votes. Rathore, a retired army officer and former Olympian, is BJP national spokesperson. Alwar MP Baba Balak Nath, who contested the elections from Tijara seat, won with a margin of 6,173 votes. He defeated Congress candidate Imran Khan.

‘South vs North’: Cong leader after Telangana win; deletes post after controversy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Praveen Chakravarty triggered a controversy Sunday with his remarks that the south-north boundary line is getting ‘thicker and clearer,’ as the party edged out the BRS in Telangana to register a second win in the southern region where the BJP is not in power in a single state. Chakravarty, however, deleted his post on X as it drew sharp reactions from various quarters, with BJP leaders accusing the Congress of promoting divisive politics. The Congress is facing defeat in three Hindi heartland states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh at the hands of the BJP. These

went to assembly polls between November 7 and 30 along with Telangana and votes were counted on Sunday. ‘The South-North boundary line getting thicker and clearer!’ Chakravarty, who is the chairman of the Professionals’ Congress and the party’s data analytics department, posted on X along with a picture captioned ‘South Vs North’. These have been deleted. Congress MP from Tamil Nadu Karti Chidambaram on X only posted ‘the South’. Warning against posts such as that of Chakravarty, Congress sympathiser Tehseen Poonawala said that ‘just like people did not like the abuse of Sanatan Dharma, they won’t tolerate the north-south

divide’. In a post on X, he said, ‘Warning: “The north-south divide will backfire! Don’t indulge in it and reduce the legacy of the Congress, the first nationalist and the oldest political party of this great nation! Just like people did not like the abuse of Sanatan dharma, they won’t tolerate the north-south divide!’ Earlier this year, the Congress wrested power from the BJP in Karnataka. With the Telangana win it has strengthened its base in the south. The Congress is in alliance with the ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu, but is not part of the government there. Tagging Chakravarty’s post, BJP general secretary B L

Santhosh hit back, saying that ‘Already Sir ...!!! They always keep two cards ready. Now they have taken out second card... Right from the drawing room of ‘Bharat Jodo’ and ‘Mohabbat Ki Dukaan...’ Santhosh also shared a screenshot of Chakravarty’s post on X. Kerala BJP president K Surendran on X said that after failing on their regular capsules of ‘Hindu party, caste politics, EVMs and freebies, @INCIndia adopts the ‘south-north’ separatist narrative, echoed by the @cpimspk.’ ‘Ironically, these are the same people behind ‘Bharat Jodo Yatra.’ @BJP4India’s southern strength is clear: ruling in Goa, Pondicherry; strong in Karnataka; rising in

Telangana; holding key Lok Sabha seats. BJP will win more seats in 2024, including in Kerala,’ he said. C R Kesavan, the great grandson of noted freedom fighter and India’s last governor general C Rajagopalachari, who left the Congress to join the BJP earlier this year, said the Congress’ ‘toxic plan is to attack Bharat with north-south divide’. ‘The dynastic Congress party’s agenda to divide Bharat on caste lines and uproot Sanatana dharma, has been outrightly rejected by our people. Now, their toxic plan is to attack Bharat with north-south divide. In 2024, the Congress will be consigned to the dustbin of history,’ the leader from Tamil Nadu said.

Rajasthan Assembly poll results unexpected: Gehlot

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Sunday said the assembly poll results were ‘unexpected for everyone’ and added the party humbly accepted the people’s mandate. The BJP was appeared set to win the assembly polls in Rajasthan, defeating the Congress. According to latest available trends, the BJP won 52 seats and was ahead in 63, while the Congress won 26 and was leading in 43. In a post on X, Gehlot said, ‘We humbly accept the mandate given by the people of Rajasthan. This is an unexpected result for everyone. This defeat shows that we were not completely successful in taking our plans, laws and innovations to the public.’ ‘I wish the new government



all the best. My advice to them is that despite working hard, we were not successful, it does not mean that they should not work after forming the government,’ he said. He said all the schemes introduced by the Congress government in the past five years, including the old pen-

sion scheme and the Chiranjeevi health insurance scheme, should be taken forward by the next government. ‘I thank all the Congress workers who worked hard in this election and express my gratitude to all the voters who believed in us,’ he said.

Counting of votes for Mizoram Assembly polls today

PTI ■ AIZAWL

Elaborate arrangements have been made for the counting of votes for the assembly elections in Mizoram, which saw a three-way fight between the ruling MNF, the ZPM and the Congress, on Monday. The counting was supposed to happen on Sunday along with Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Telangana. However, it was deferred by the Election Commission following appeals by political parties, NGOs, churches and students’ bodies as Sunday holds a special significance for the people of Mizoram, a Christian-majority state. The state’s Additional Chief Electoral Officer H Lianzela



told PTI that the counting will begin in all 13 centres at 8 am amid tight security.

One counting hall has been set up for each of the 40 assembly seats at these 13

centres, he said. Postal ballots will be counted first, and from 8.30 am, the

votes polled in the EVMs will be counted, he added. Besides three counting centres in the Aizawl district, which has 12 assembly constituencies, one centre each has been set up in the 10 other districts, Lianzela said. In some of the seats that have a lesser number of voters, only two rounds of counting will be held, but in most of the constituencies, five rounds will be counted, he said. More than 4,000 personnel will be involved in the counting process. In all, there will be 399 tables for the EVMs and 56 for the counting of postal ballots, he said. Polling was held on November 7, and over 80 per cent of the state’s 8.57 lakh voters exercised their fran-

chise. A total of 174 candidates, including 18 women, were in the fray. The MNF, ZPM and Congress contested 40 seats each, while the BJP fielded candidates in 13 seats. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which contested the assembly polls here for the first time, fought in four seats. Also, there were 17 Independent candidates. Some exit polls have predicted a clean sweep by the ZPM, but the majority indicated a hung House with no party getting a clear majority. In the last assembly elections, held in 2018, the MNF had won 26 seats and the ZPM secured eight seats, relegating the Congress that bagged five seats to the third place. The BJP had won one seat.

EC suspends Telangana DGP hours after he meets State Congress chief amid counting

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission on Sunday ordered the suspension of Telangana Director General of Police (DGP) Anjani Kumar for violation of the model code of conduct as the counting of votes was underway in the state, sources said. They said the DGP, along with state police nodal officer Sanjay Jain and nodal officer (expenditure) Mahesh Bhagwat, met Anumula Revanth Reddy, the state Congress president and a candidate, with a bouquet of

flowers at his residence in Hyderabad amid the counting of votes. The DGP opting to meet a contesting candidate out of the total of 2,290 and the star campaigner of one political party out of 16 political parties in the fray was a clear indication of mala fide intention of seeking favour, sources said. They said the poll panel has ordered the suspension of DGP Kumar. The Congress was set to oust the Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) from power in Telangana, assembly poll results and trends showed.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Saffron wave, again

Triumphs in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh; Cong snatches Telangana from KCR

The climax of the nail-biting suspense thriller is revealed and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP emerge the undisputed hero in four of the five Assembly elections held recently --- the party comfortably retains Madhya Pradesh and wrests Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh from the Congress. The 'grand old party', for its part, pushes KCR out of the Chief Minister's Office in Telangana and increases footprint in the south, after forming the Government in Karnataka. But the verdict is clear --- people are favouring the BJP over all other Opposition parties in the Hindi heartland. Its win in the three major States speaks volumes about its election strategy and public mood. As political pundits analyse the results' implications, attention naturally turns towards the broader impact on the 2024 general elections. The BJP's resounding victory underscores its continuing popularity in the traditionally significant States. In Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, the BJP successfully encashed the anti-incumbency sentiment, presented a united front and resonated with voters on key issues. In Madhya Pradesh, where the party did not project even a CM face, it managed to retain power by addressing local concerns and effectively countering the Opposition's narrative. The results highlight the importance of regional factors in influencing voters and the significance of a strong leadership in the BJP's poll strategy. The Congress' sole victory underscores its appeal to the Telangana electorate and its successful positioning on key State-specific issues.



The overall scenario serves as a reminder that

Indian politics is diverse, with regional dynamics playing a crucial role in shaping outcomes. The four results, while showing the potential for regional variations as in Telangana, strengthen the BJP's position nationally. The party's ability to address regional concerns in key States like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh positions it as a formidable contender in the general elections. However, it is important to acknowledge the fluidity of Indian politics, where last-minute developments, local issues, alliances and changing dynamics can significantly impact the outcome. The Congress, buoyed by its victory in Telangana, may aim to consolidate its position in other States with a similar strategy. The results in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Telangana paint a nuanced picture of Indian politics. As the nation waits for the 2024 general elections, political parties must carefully chalk out their strategies, taking into account the diverse socio-political landscapes across States. These results serve as a crucial barometer, offering an insight into voter preferences, regional dynamics and the challenges and opportunities in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. But the General elections are stil months away and that is a long time in Indian politics.

PICTALK



Disabled People participate in a tricycle race, on International Day of Persons with Disabilities, in Nadia

PTI

Kissinger had counterparts in Kerala!

The uniqueness of Kissinger was his expertise in making the impossibilities a possibility

Henry Kissinger, the US State Secretary during the Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford era, who breathed his last on Wednesday at the age of 100, was a popular person in Kerala though he had nothing to do with the State and has not visited this part of the country even once in his lifetime. Kissinger, who is credited with a new style and art of diplomacy reigned supreme during the peak of the Cold War and was known as one of the architects of the US-China ties through Ping-Pong (Chinese term for the game of table tennis). The diplomatic ties between US and China got a shot in the arm with the Ping-Pong games between the two countries and this paved the way for the 1972 State visit to China by President Nixon. The former State Secretary was known for his talents to make any unfriendly countries the friends of the US. For him there were no permanent friends or enemies but only permanent interests, that was the US commercial and strategic inter-



ests. Full credit should be given to Henry Kissinger for his farsightedness and visionary-like forecasts. It was Kissinger who warned the world about the impending Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism which would upset peace in Asia and cause damage to India. While addressing the Davos Symposium on 31 January 1980, Kissinger said: "The problem of India has the component that, for India, the existence of a strong, fundamentalist, Islamic state presents problems of its own internal cohesion and may create its own incentives for war. On the

other hand, if India is worried about our policies, it must give some assurances, other than rhetoric, that it will not act in collusion with the Soviet Union and that it will not cooperate in an attack on Pakistan," said Kissinger (Henry Kissinger: For The Record). Kissinger is also known as the person who pointed out the folly behind the Non-Aligned Movement, which he termed as a means to strengthen the hegemony of the then Soviet Union. There was no denying his hatred for socialism and communism. The Kerala media, which was quick in reacting to international developments, especially in singing paeans to Communism and comrades in the USSR and China portrayed Kissinger as a villain. The party cadre, despite their ignorance about the stance of Kissinger viz-a-viz the socialist countries, did not waste even a single opportunity to taunt and ridicule the Nobel laureate. When the Muslim League was split in the early 1970s, the then Congress strong-

man K Karunakaran deputised Baby John, a leader of the RSP to negotiate with the League leadership to somehow avoid the break up in the outfit. Baby John, whose RSP was an ally of the Congress, reached Parappanangadi in Malappuram district, to broker peace between the warring factions. The CPI-M which was in the opposition, wanted the Muslim League to split so that the former would get the support of the breakaway faction. Baby John's brief was to somehow prevent the split and keep the leadership in good humour. The day after Baby John landed at Malappuram, CPI-M mouthpiece had this headline as the lead news: "Kerala Kissinger in Parappanangadi to broker peace in Muslim League". But Kerala Kissinger, despite all his charming manners, failed in the mission and the League was split vertically, though only for a brief period.

(The writer is a special correspondent with the Pioneer, the views are personal)



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

Kissinger: Cold warrior of realpolitik

While history will judge Henry Kissinger's many accomplishments and misdemeanours, the art and science of diplomacy has lost an ace practitioner and innovator



BHOPINDER SINGH

Amongst the eulogies offered to the highest priest of realpolitik i.e., Henry Kissinger, and the accompanying divide on his unique style of diplomacy, the most prescient was from the former Prime Minister of Great Britain, Tony Blair, who said, "If it is possible for diplomacy, at its highest level, to be a form of art, Henry was an artist". Admired as much for his intellectual clarity, as for his questionable morality and intent, the artist of diplomacy may have been the most famous soothsayer to many in power in the White House, but his legacy will remain deeply contested and polarising. No less than the sitting President of the United States, Joe Biden, himself conceded, "Throughout our careers, we often disagreed. And often strongly. But from that first briefing - his fierce intellect and profound strategic focus was evident". Admittedly, diplomacy is not for idealists or even the fainthearted. The names of Machiavelli to Metternich are synonymous with statecraft which naturally entails a ruthless pursuit of self-interest, that can readily compromise which publicly maintained façade of values. Even the doyen of Indian treatise on politics and statecraft i.e., Chanakya realistically noted, "There is some self-interest behind every friendship. There is no friendship with self-interests. This is a bitter truth". Naturally, the extent of moral compromises, leniencies and even suppressions done by Superpowers in their quest to assert their geopolitical agendas and interests, is even more pronounced.

As the definitive 'Cold Warrior' in the extreme freeze of the Cold War era, Kissinger personified contradictions between noble rhetoric with brutal manipulation and opportunism, to further the interests of the United States of America. Subcontinental memories are understandably rife with the wounds of deliberate indifference, uncouth behaviour, and even a clear tilt in favour of the oppressor (read, Pakistan) during the genocidal birth of Bangladesh - part of a far larger legacy of amorality that routinely manifest-

ed in supporting dictators, supporting suppression and partaking hypocritical conduct. But what remains undeniable is that Kissinger served American interests (often at the cost of other stakeholders and even purported 'allies') and institutionalised the way Washington DC would conduct diplomacy, thereafter. Kissinger can claim to have singularly introduced the 19th Century German neologism of realpolitik, in diplomatic parlance and practice. If anything, it eased up the untenable stodginess of ideology or idealism, in favour of considerations based on realism, practicality and situational possibilities - which optimized the draw of hand to still deliver the most agreeable solution, given the situation. Many partook realpolitik like Zbigniew Brzezinski, Lee Kuan Yew, Deng Xiaoping to even Xi Jinping, but Kissinger is synonymous with realpolitik. To that extent, it birthed subsequent concepts like 'Strategic Ambiguity', which implied remaining deliberately ambiguous towards operational and positional policies e.g., the implied commitment of the United States towards Taiwan, despite maintaining the 'One China' position. Even the much bandied 'Strategic Independence/Autonomy' deployed by India in recent times owes itself to the foundational principle of realpolitik, as it allows the practition-

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er to not get closeted within the linear grouping and associated puritanism of 'allies'/blocs to which a sovereign subscribed. As India's External Affairs Minister, S Jaishankar, quipped on the task for Indian diplomacy which may not have been possible to state earlier, "This is a time for us to engage America, manage China, cultivate Europe, reassure Russia, bring Japan into play, draw neighbours in, extend the neighbourhood, and expand traditional constituencies of support." Contradictory at one level, given the ambition of keeping equations with America and Russia in the same breath, whilst the back-draw of the Ukraine War ensued, a clear reflection of practicality triumphing binarism, in an ode to principals of realpolitik as popularised by Kissinger. Another attributed facet of modern-day diplomacy to Henry Kissinger was the decidedly more moral role of 'back-channeler' amongst the seemingly intractable stakeholders. Kissinger had famously flown secretly to China in July 1971 to restore and repair relations with America, something he did yet again, just a few months back at the ripe age of 100 years to meet Xi Jinping. 'Back channels' is an oft-deployed tact that is frequently invoked by conflicting countries, to avoid getting the engagement getting derailed

by prying eyes, opinions and pressures that can lead to immediate cessation of thawing talks. The template was used in Track 1 and Track 2 by peaceniks in the Indo-Pak realm earlier or towards the more recent fruition of 'Abrahamic Accords' besetting Israel-Arab Sheikdoms, all from the playbook of Kissinger's school of diplomacy. While history will judge Henry Kissinger's many accomplishments and misdemeanours at ease and with the benefit of reflection, the art and science of diplomacy (both moral and otherwise) has lost an ace practitioner and innovator, of the same. Another priceless lesson that he leaves for posterity, even though he alluded to his own country, yet applicable to all major powers is, "America has no permanent friends or enemies, only interests". As India meanders and navigates its rise in global relevance and animus simultaneously, it would do well to mull over and keep pace with the evolving nature of diplomacy. In the end, Kissinger got away with much to answer for as his fellow Jew, Senator Bernie Sanders once said, "I am proud to say that Henry Kissinger is not my friend", and so went Henry Kissinger. (The writer is a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. Views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PROTECTING THE PRIVACY

Sir — Law agencies seize digital devices like laptops, mobiles, and pen drives from the houses of the accused and even journalists in the name of investigation. These agencies even snatch away their financial, personal and professional privacy. The Supreme Court told the government that the nine-member constitution bench of this court has considered the right to privacy as a part of Article 21 (life and personal liberty) under the fundamental rights in the year 2017. The Supreme Court has asked the government to make guidelines regarding the confiscation of personal digital devices and has also stressed that the professional interests of journalists should be kept in mind. On the other hand, due to the use of AI, our privacy is being destroyed within minutes and crime is also being encouraged. Recently, a picture of an actress created with a deepfake went viral. AI is going to make a big contribution to public welfare, especially in education, health, agriculture and other production efforts, but ways will have to be found to avoid the destructive effects of its misuse. Anyway, every new technology is a double-edged sword. A conscious society avoids its ill effects and accepts it. The government will also have to keep privacy in mind while confiscating such devices.

N Ashraf | Mumbai

TAKE STRICT ACTION

Sir — A 15-year-old girl was allegedly raped by her neighbour after holding her hostage in his house in the Pataudi area with the help of his mother on November 29 but came to light on Friday when the victim's mother lodged a complaint at women's police station, Manesar. According to the complaint filed by the mother, her 15-year-old married daughter is living with her. On November 29, the girl was passing through the house of the accused when he called her inside his house, the mother said. After this, the

India's third woman grandmaster!



Vaishali, Praggananandhaa World's first brother-sister Grandmasters' duo'. We have seen siblings making their parents and country proud in games like Cricket, Tennis, Hockey, Football and Archery, like Dhyan Chand and Roop Singh, Dola Banerjee and Rahul Banerjee, Mohinder and Surinder Amarnath, Vijay and Anand Amritraj, it is the first time in Chess that a brother sister pair have achieved the title of Grandmaster. Finally R. Vaishali has come out of the shadow of his famous brother Praggananandhaa. In the process she has become India's third woman GrandMaster after Koneru Hampi and Dronavalli Harika. Kudos to their parents who gave it all despite coming from a very poor and humble background. Success story of siblings Vaishali and Praggananandhaa is true inspiration to thousands of young children in our country to take up this mind sport.

Bal Govind | Noida

accused's mother locked the main gate and he raped my daughter at night. Meanwhile, I kept searching for her the whole night. My daughter managed to escape from captivity on November 30 morning, when the accused was sleeping. She reached home and told me about her ordeal. Then I approached the police with her. This sort of accident occurs from time to time somewhere. Therefore, the police must strictly look into this kind of accident and punish such exemplary punishment so other people can get lessons. Jahangir Shaikh | Mumbai

PRISONS REFORM

Sir — The Prisons Act, 1894 focused more on retribution and less on reform. So, the Home Ministry's finalisation of the "Model Prisons Act, 2023", is just and reasonable. The provisions of the new Act place emphasis on reform and rehabilitation. India has the third highest undertrial population in Asia. Most of the country's jails are packed with

inmates with little provision for ensuring their health and hygiene. The plight of women and children is excruciating. Delay in trials has overburdened prisons and courts. In the USA, 20% of the prisoners are undertrials compared to a whopping 60% in India. Stress on technology is the right way to go. The new Act should decongest prisons; the rest will fall in line. Segregation of prisoners based on the gravity of the crime, like first-time offence, is an excellent idea. So are the proposals to introduce parole, furlough and remission to undertrials because emotional stability can go a long way. Since legal knowledge and assistance are hard to come by, concessions and incentives to prisoners are most welcome. Special courts and increasing the lawyers-to-prisoners ratio to hasten legal aid can also be considered. Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

HOLD BACK THAT RAGING ANGER!

One needs to overcome the anxiety and fear that lead to anger



SAKSHI **SETHI**

Nobody likes to feel angry, but all of us experience this kind of emotion from time to time irrespective of age. In the words of Buddha, “Whoever can retain the rising anger, like holding back a moving cart, then he is called a true driver.” Anger is a secondary feeling to deeper, perhaps more vulnerable emotions. It is a normal, natural emotion that not only adults but children of all age groups especially nowadays experience at some point in time. As per recent surveys and studies, it has been found that children in the age groups of 6 to 11 years in the US and approximately 129 million children and adolescents worldwide have been diagnosed with problems of anger followed by other mental health conditions including ADHD, autism, OCD and many more. They tend to yell, scream, get physical and above all say hurtful and disturbing things. But the question arises where lies the root cause for such rising anger among the children? Are we to blame only the technology for this or is it someone else who is to be blamed for such a changed behaviour?

There is no denying the fact that anger can fuel courage, one needs to overcome the fear and protect boundaries that uphold the values. At the same time, it also prevents an individual from thinking clearly. That is why learning how to manage it consciously is vital. Also, if we are to blame only technology in this regard then no one can deny the fact that technology has become so firmly established that it is being widely used in almost all sectors of the economy. In education too, these advancements have provided children of all age groups with various resources that enable them to stay connected everywhere and anywhere with the click of a button which as a result has drifted a child and a parent to a lot many extent, so in so that if a child seems to be in trouble, he or she will prefer to take the help of technology over its parents or guardians which becomes a matter of great concern.



Adults do play a significant role in modelling nonviolent communication and behaviour. Often it is observed that when a child feels that he or she is being heard or understood, they feel safer and braver. They tend to express and experience all emotions with confidence and when such things are performed on repeat, it wires the brain for self-regulation, empathetic responses, rational thinking and even problem-solving. By listening without judgement, parents learn the real reason behind the changed behaviour of their child and the children also feel safe to release the uncomfortable and daunting emotions.

It is particularly important to stay with the child through scary emotions, take them to places of their wish, play with them, engage them in productive activities such as dancing, gymnasium, meditation and many more, problem solve with them when they are ready and then guide them back to peace. Once, everything gets to settle, then is the time to offer them better ways of expressing themselves in the future.

Remember, when a child is upset or dysregulated, they need the elders to be their support system to keep them calm. The best thing one can do for their child is to ensure they never witness anger, fear or conflict at home. Let them grow up in an environment and atmosphere of joy and love. Anger and aggressive behaviour can be a mask for anxiety. When children are overwhelmed by internal feelings, they do not know how to process them, it turns into outbursts and then melt down.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Balochistan: An undeclared war zone-I

The war between Balochistan-Pakistan raging for years now but it is not visible in the media because there is no media in Balochistan, writes **Mir Khan Baloch**



The schools have been turned into carriages, villages into concentration camps. Houses-to-house search operations have become a daily routine. University and college students are harassed and intimidated on campuses. Women being raped, and female students are sexually molested. Journalists are picked up by the Pakistan army and forces, and later their mutilated dead bodies are thrown on roadsides and barren land across Balochistan. This is what Balochistan looks like today. Baloch youth are facing dire consequences not over charges of drugs or weapons but for having books which are punishable sins in occupied Balochistan. We watch the Hamas-Israel war on TV and media but the war between Balochistan and Pakistan is not visible in the media because there is hardly a single Baloch media outlet in Balochistan. Balochistan is a black hole for information. Smuggling of narcotics and weapons are easy because Pakistan supports it but writing on human rights violations and the ongoing Balochistan war is not easy, Baloch are smuggling the news and publishing them on social media. If any Baloch is found writing on Pakistan's war crimes, he/she is taken away and killed after some time. On 16 November, Pakistan's military and police opened fire on Baloch students of Lasbela Uthal Agricultural University for Water and Marine Science. Dozens of students were injured and the remaining were arrested and taken to undisclosed locations. Video footage of the incident sparked fear, and anger among the people of the area who came to protest on the streets of Lasbela. On 19 November 2023, Pakistan ISI took three Baloch hostages namely Adil, Shahjahan and Nabi Dad, tied their



BALUCH YOUTH ARE FACING DIRE CONSEQUENCES NOT OVER CHARGES OF DRUGS OR WEAPONS BUT FOR HAVING BOOKS WHICH IS PUNISHABLE SIN IN OCCUPIED BALUCHISTAN

hands with rope, put them inside an explosive-loaded vehicle and detonated the car killing all of them in the Hoshab area of Turbat. Two of them were brothers. Three of them belong to the same family who were abducted on 22 August 2023 from Turbat at 3:00 pm city by the Pakistan military during a raid on their homes. This seems a new tactic of the Pakistan army but in the past, there were numerous instances of Baloch hostages thrown out of low altitude flying helicopters. **Balochistan needs world attention** It is the need of the hour that a debate on national and international levels must be resumed. The academic think tanks and institutions of friends of occupied Balochistan should involve Baloch leadership and people to participate and chalk policies towards getting closer to each other and work on unified goals. Let's break the rhetoric of Pakistan's deep state and the army about Balochistan that can't be discussed globally. After the partition of the subcontinent, we have seen India facing border infiltration from Pakistan and China. Beijing's growing aggressive policies towards India indicate that the PLA is not willing to abandon its policy of bleeding India, for the last many decades. China is leaving no stone unturned to encircle India from all fronts. Delhi is not only facing threats from the border but also is being deliberately engaged in internal conflicts where China

is providing all sorts of support to militants who are fighting against Indian national interests. The non-state actors funded by China often get diplomatic backing from Beijing even at the forums of the UN Security Council. Balochistan deserves India's attention. Many people are working tirelessly to this end. The efforts by the overseas diplomatic leadership of occupied Balochistan are bearing fruits and now there are indicators that in coming years Balochistan is heading towards taking a centre point for global powers. India should take advantage of the Balochistan uprising on global forums and lend her full diplomatic, political and other support to help the Baloch for their liberation. To chalk a long-term 100-year policy to secure India's energy needs, and stability and disperse threats to its economy, it is needed that Delhi should open an official channel with Balochistan to pave the way for future cooperation. If India supports Balochistan, it will no longer rely on oil imports from Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela because Balochistan has more oil than the gulf and Venezuela. India's 42% of liquefied natural gas (LNG) requirements were fulfilled from Qatar till 2021 but with Doha's recent court decision to sentence to 8 former Naval personnel, the import of the energy may get disrupted. At this point, India has the option to buy LNG from Balochistan as it has huge reserves of natural gas.

Balochistan is highly rich in minerals and once it is liberated, that would give a boost to India's economy, national security, defence, and global position. The issue of Balochistan is not a political issue. It is the issue of the invasion of Pakistan. We can't accept the false narrative of Pakistan that Balochistan willingly joined Pakistan. No substantial or legal evidence proves Pakistan's claim on Balochistan. I have researched and come to know that Balochistan before the withdrawal of the British from the subcontinent was ruled under the British in a similar way to India was under British occupation. When the British decided to withdraw from the subcontinent, the King of Balochistan's Kalat State announced its independence on 11 August 1947. It is a well-documented fact that Balochistan remained independent for about 7- 8 months. In this period the founder of Pakistan, Mr. M.A Jinnah kept pressurizing the Khan of Kalat Mir Amed Yar Khan that Balochistan should join Pakistan but he refused to join his country into Pakistan. Both the houses (House of Lords and House of Common) of Balochistan unanimously rejected the proposal of Jinnah to join Pakistan. *(The writer is a Baloch human rights activist covering Balochistan, Central Asia and the Middle East. Views are personal)* *This is the first part of a two-part series on Balochistan. To be continued...*

Artificial Intelligence: Benefits outweigh the detriments

The calling has been there for the government statisticians to embrace AI albeit with caution and calibration



ROHIT **BHARDWAJ**



PANKAJ KP **SHREYASKAR**

Learning, Natural Language Processing, Large Language Models, Cognitive Computing, etc. The usage also is of varying kinds depending on the field in which it is applied. One of the tools of governance, the Official Statistical System is a field where the calling has been there to embrace but the hand-shake is yet to take place. The collection of data is one of the most important ingredients of Official Statistics. The Collection of data is done mostly through Census Surveys and as a by-product of administrative action like data generated as part of tax collection exercise. While undertaking Census and Surveys, one of the biggest problems faced is data quality and non-response which leads to missing data. With the help of AI,

the task of finding missing and problematic data and imputation i.e. task of altering incorrect values and inserting missing values can be done in a much faster manner by applying the ML models. Another possible use of AI could be the use of a Large Language model-based Chatbot in the data collection process. This Chatbot like Chat GPT would assist in providing information instantly to the enumerator from the fieldwork manual. It would save them from the trouble of going through the voluminous documents time and again which leads to drudgery and monotony in the fieldwork. Another use case in a country like ours which has more than twenty Official languages could be an AI-based utility that helps in two-way

conversation between the enumerator and the respondent which will go a long way in resolving the language barrier faced by our data warriors in the field. Further, the multi-modal bots with the capacity to read images would be of great help as they would be able to give immediate clarification to the enumerator in case confusion regarding definition arises while collecting data. Another potential use of AI, especially ML could be the classification and coding of Textual Data for official statistics. In the context of the coding and classification work in statistical organisations, the given set is typically a text or narrative provided by the respondent from a survey or administrative data source.

For example, it could describe an individual's occupation or the economic activity of the company described in an administrative business register. With the increasing use of new data sources, the text data that statistical organisations might work with could also include product descriptions scraped from the internet or text posts obtained from social media platforms such as Twitter. The aim of classification and coding in this scenario could be to classify the descriptions into international or corporate statistical classification systems, such as Standard Industrial Classification (SIC), and Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) for easy understanding and quick analysis.

Image data is still a relatively new type of data for statistical organisations but there is a growing need for exploring how image data can be used for the production of statistics. These models could associate the variables of interest (e.g., building type, land cover type) with the images in the training data set and classify new images with reasonable levels of accuracy. Automation (or partial automation) of these tasks can allow a large volume of information in the image data to be processed in a reliable and fast way. The cost of deployment including the computation required is one of the major factors affecting the deployment of AI in an organisation. The other main challenge facing statistical organisations to advance the use of

AI in organisations is bringing together the required skills as AI requires people from Domain, Computer Science and Statistics; all working together on a project together for its meaningful use. The alignment of AI use cases with the vision of the organisation is the most important aspect of the adoption of AI. The development of AI should not be an ad-hoc process but a part of a well-thought-out strategy which has the support of the top management and confidence of all stakeholders as a tool for reducing their burden rather than replacing them or their work. *(The writers are Dy Director Generals in the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, views are personal)*

Israel widens evacuation orders

AP ■ KHAN YOUNIS

Israel's military on Sunday ordered more areas in and around Gaza's second-largest city of Khan Younis to evacuate, as it shifted its offensive to the southern half of the territory where it says many Hamas leaders are hiding. Heavy bombardments were reported overnight and into Sunday in the area of Khan Younis and the southern city of Rafah, as well as parts of the north that had been the focus of Israel's blistering air and ground campaign.

Many of the territory's 2.3 million people are crammed in the south after Israeli forces ordered civilians to leave the north in the early days of the 2-month-old war.

With the resumption of fighting, hopes receded that another temporary truce could be negotiated. A weeklong cease-fire, which expired Friday, had facilitated the release of dozens of Gaza-held Israeli and foreign hostages and Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. "We will continue the war until we achieve all its goals, and it's impossible to achieve those goals without the ground operation," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in an address Saturday night.

On Sunday, the Israeli military widened evacuation orders in and around Khan Younis, asking residents of at least five more areas and neighbourhoods to leave for their safety.

Residents said the Israeli military dropped leaflets ordering them to move south to Rafah or to a coastal area in the southwest. "Khan Younis city is a dangerous combat zone," the leaflets read.

The main hospital in Khan Younis received at least three dead and dozens wounded Sunday morning from an Israeli strike that hit a residential building in the eastern part of the city, according to an Associated Press journalist at the hospital. Separately, the bodies of 31 people who were killed in Israeli bombardment across the central areas of the strip were taken to the Al-Aqsa



Palestinian supporters calling for an immediate ceasefire stage a mock funeral with dolls and people wrapped in white cloth smeared with red paint to resemble Palestinian victims of the Israel-Hamas war, in front of the White House in Washington, Saturday.

Martyrs hospital in Gaza's central city of Deir al-Balah, said Omar al-Darawi, an administrative employee at that hospital.

AP video showed bodies in white body bags on the ground outside the hospital in Deri al-Balah as dozens of people held funeral prayers Sunday morning. The bodies were then taken on a truck for burial.

One woman wept, cradling the body of a child on her lap as she sat on a chair. Another adult carried the body of a baby as he got into a truck.

UN monitors said in a report issued before the latest evacuation orders that those who were told to leave make up about one-quarter of the territory of Gaza — home to nearly 800,000 people before the war.

The United States, Israel's closest ally, has warned Israel to avoid significant new mass displacement.

The Israeli military said on Sunday that its fighter jets and helicopters "struck terror targets in the Gaza Strip, including terror tunnel shafts, command centres and weapons storage facilities" overnight,

while a drone killed five Hamas fighters.

In northern Gaza, rescue teams with little equipment scrambled Sunday to dig through the rubble of buildings in the Jabaliya refugee camp and other neighbourhoods in Gaza City in search for potential survivors and dead bodies. "They strike everywhere," said Amal Radwan, a woman sheltering in Jabaliya, an urban refugee camp. "There is the non-stop sound of explosions around us."

Mohamed Abu Abed, who lives in the Sheikh Radwan neighbourhood in Gaza City, also said there were relentless airstrikes and shelling in his neighbourhood and surrounding areas. "The situation here is imaginable," he said. "Death is everywhere. One can die in a flash."

The Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza said Saturday that the overall death toll in the strip since the October 7 start of the war had surpassed 15,200, a sharp jump from the previous count of more than 13,300 on November 20. The ministry does not differentiate between

civilian and combatant deaths, but it said 70 per cent of the dead were women and children. It said more than 40,000 people had been wounded since the war began.

US appeals to protect civilians came after an offensive in the first weeks of the war devastated large areas of northern Gaza. Much of Gaza's population is packed into the territory's southern half. The territory itself, bordering Israel and Egypt to the south, is sealed, leaving residents with the only option of moving around within Gaza to avoid the bombings.

"Too many innocent Palestinians have been killed. Frankly, the scale of civilian suffering and the images and videos coming from Gaza are devastating," US Vice President Kamala Harris told reporters Saturday during the COP28 climate conference in Dubai. Mark Regev, a senior adviser to Netanyahu, said Israel was making "maximum effort" to protect civilians and the military has used leaflets, phone calls, and radio and TV broadcasts to urge Gazans to move from specific areas. He added that Israel is considering creating a security buffer

zone that would not allow Gazans direct access to the border fence on foot.

Israel says it targets Hamas operatives and blames civilian casualties on the militants, accusing them of operating in residential neighbourhoods. It claims to have killed thousands of militants, without providing evidence. Israel says at least 78 of its soldiers have been killed in the offensive in northern Gaza. Bombardments on Saturday destroyed a block of about 50 residential buildings in the Shijaiyah neighbourhood of Gaza City and a six-story building in the urban refugee camp of Jabaliya on the northern edge of the city, said the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. More than 60 people were killed in the Shijaiyah strikes and more than 300 buried under the rubble, the monitors said, citing the Palestinian Red Crescent.

Mahmoud Bassal, a spokesman for Gaza's Civil Defence, said rescuers lack bulldozers and other equipment to reach those buried under the rubble, confirming the Red Crescent estimate of about 300 people missing. He said the block had housed over 1,000 people.

"Retrieving the martyrs is extremely difficult," he said in video comments from the site of the attack.

Meanwhile, Harris told Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi in a meeting that "under no circumstances" would the U.S. permit the forced relocation of Palestinians from Gaza or the West Bank, an ongoing siege of Gaza or the redrawing of its borders, according to a US summary.

The war was sparked by an October 7 attack by Hamas and other militants that killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, in southern Israel. Around 240 people were taken captive. The renewed hostilities have heightened concerns for 137 hostages, who the Israeli military says are still being held after 105 were freed during the recent truce. Israel freed 240 Palestinians during the truce.

ICC prosecutor says will intensify probe in Palestinian territories

AP ■ NETHERLANDS

The chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court said Sunday that his office will "further intensify its efforts to advance its investigations" in the occupied Palestinian territories, after he visited the region for this first time since his appointment.

There have been widespread claims of breaches of international law by Hamas and Israeli forces since war erupted after the deadly Oct. 7 attacks by Hamas and other militants that killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, in southern Israel.

Around 240 more were taken hostage.

The Hague-based court has been investigating crimes in the Palestinian territories committed by both sides since 2021 but has yet to announce any charges. Israel is not a member state of the court and does not recognize its jurisdiction. Prosecutor Karim Khan said in a written statement issued after his visit that he witnessed "scenes of calculated cruelty" at locations of the Oct. 7 attacks.

"The attacks against innocent Israeli civilians on 7 October represent some of the most serious international crimes that shock the conscience of humanity, crimes which the ICC was established to address," Khan said, adding that he and his prosecutors are working "to hold those responsible to account."

He added that he is ready to engage with local prosecutors in line with the principle of complementarity - the ICC is a court of last resort set up to prosecute war crimes when local courts cannot or will not take action. Khan also visited Palestinian officials in Ramallah, including President Mahmoud Abbas.

He said of the war in Gaza that fighting in "densely populated areas where fighters are alleged to be unlawfully embedded in the civilian population is inherently complex,



but international humanitarian must still apply and the Israeli military knows the law that must be applied".

He said Israel "has trained lawyers who advise commanders and a robust system intended to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law. Credible allegations of crimes during the current conflict should be the subject of timely, independent examination and investigation."

The Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza said Saturday that the overall death toll in the strip since the Oct 7 start of the war had surpassed 15,200. The ministry does not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths, but it said 70% of the dead were women and children. It said more than 40,000 people had been wounded since the war began. Khan also expressed "profound concern" at what he called "the significant increase in incidents of attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians in the West Bank," saying that "no Israeli armed with an extreme ideology and a gun can feel they can act with impunity against Palestinian civilians". He called for an immediate halt to such attacks and said his office is "continuing to investigate these incidents with focus and urgency".

Khan said he would seek to work with "all actors" in the conflict to "ensure that when action is taken by my Office it is done on the basis of objective, verifiable evidence which can stand scrutiny in the courtroom and ensure that when we do proceed we have a realistic prospect of conviction."

Trump calls Joe Biden as 'destroyer' of democracy

Cedar Rapids (Iowa) (AP): Former President Donald Trump on Saturday attempted to turn the tables on his likely rival in November, President Joe Biden, arguing that the man whose election victory Trump tried to overturn is "the destroyer of American democracy."

Trump's allegations about Biden, a Democrat, echo the ones that Biden has been making for years against his predecessor. As Trump has dominated the Republican presidential primary and talked about targeting his rivals and the news media if he wins the White House again, Biden has stepped up his own warnings, contending Trump is "determined to destroy American democracy."

On Saturday, Trump made his most explicit argument to date on why voters should instead see his rival as the bigger democratic threat. Trump repeated his longstanding contention that the four criminal indictments against him show Biden is misusing the federal justice system against his rival. "He's been weaponizing government against his political opponents like a Third World political tyrant," Trump said to a crowd in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. "Biden and his radical left allies like to pose as standing up as allies of democracy," Trump continued, arguing: "Joe Biden is not the defender of American democracy, Joe Biden is the destroyer of American democracy." Ammar Moussa, a Biden campaign spokesman, responded: "Donald Trump's America in 2025 is one where the government is his personal weapon to lock up his political enemies. You don't have to take our word for it — Trump has admitted it himself." On Saturday, though, the former president extended his arguments about Biden's threat to democracy to lawsuits filed by two liberal organizations seeking to rule him ineligible for office under a rarely used Civil War-era constitutional provision that prohibits those who "engaged in insurrection" from returning to office.

British military reports explosion off Yemen coast

AP ■ DUBAI

A "potential explosion" has struck a key shipping route off the coast of Yemen, the British military said Sunday. The British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations issued a brief warning to shippers that the incident happened in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait that separates East Africa from the Arabian Peninsula.

The UKMTO said drone activity also had been reported in the area. The Bab el-Mandeb links the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden.

That area has seen a series of attacks in recent weeks attributed to Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels, who have also launched missiles and drones toward Israel over its war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The Houthis did not immediately acknowledge the incident.

Philippine Prez: Foreign militants bombed 4 Christian worshippers

Manila (AP): The Philippine president blamed "foreign terrorists" for a bomb blast that killed four people Sunday, wounded dozens of other Catholic worshippers in the south and sparked a security alarm, including in the capital, Manila, where state forces were put on alert.

The suspected bomb, which the police said was made from a mortar round, went off and hit students and teachers who attended a Mass in a gymnasium at Mindanao State University in southern Marawi city, Taha Mandangan, the security chief of the state-run campus, told The Associated Press by telephone. Dozens of students and teachers dashed out of the gym and the wounded were taken to hospitals.

Regional military commander Maj Gen Gabriel Viray III said four people were killed by the explosion, including three women, and 50 others were brought to two hospitals for

treatment.

Six of the wounded were fighting for their lives in a hospital, said Gov Mamintal Adiong Jr of the Islamic province of Lanao del Sur, which has Marawi as its capital. "I condemn in the strongest possible terms the senseless and most heinous acts perpetrated by foreign terrorists upon the Mindanao State University," President Ferdinand Marcos Jr said in a statement. "Extremists who wield violence against the innocent will always be regarded as enemies to our society."

Marcos did not explain why he immediately blamed foreign militants for the high-profile bombing. Defence Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr later told a news conference without elaborating there was a strong indication of a "foreign element" in the bombing.

Military chief of staff Gen Romeo Brawner Jr said the bomb attack could be retaliation

by Muslim militants for a series of battle setbacks.

"We are looking at possible angles," Brawner said. "It could be a retaliatory attack."

He cited the killing of 11 suspected Islamic militants in a military offensive backed by airstrikes and artillery fires on Friday near Datu Hoffer town in southern Maguindanao province. Regional police director Brig Gen Allan Nobleza said the slain militants belonged to Dawlah Islamiyah, an armed group that had aligned itself with the Islamic State group and still has a presence in Lanao del Sur province. Mosque-studded Marawi city came under attack from foreign and local Islamic militants who had associated themselves with the Islamic State group. The five-month siege left more than 1,100 dead, before it was quelled by Philippine forces backed by airstrikes and surveillance planes deployed by US and Australia.

UN COP 28: Host UAE allowing limited protests, critics in

AP ■ DUBAI

Participants at the United Nations' COP28 climate talks on Sunday found themselves greeted by the rarest sights in the United Arab Emirates — public protests. From the largest demonstration seen in the UAE since the start of the raging Israel-Hamas war to environmental issues, activists allowed into the UAE can protest under strict guidelines in this autocratic nation inside the summit.

Meanwhile, human rights researchers from organizations long banned by the country also have been let in, providing them some of the opportunity for the first time in about a decade to offer criticism — though many acknowledge it may see them never allowed back in the country. "One of our major issues with COP28 is the fact that the UAE govern-

ment is using this to burnish its image internationally and the fact that limited protests are allowed ... is a good thing," said Joey Shea, now on her first trip to the Emirates as a researcher focused on the country at Human Rights Watch. "But at the end of the day, it helps to create this very false image that the UAE does have respect for rights when in fact it does not."

The UAE, a federation of seven sheikhdoms led by Abu Dhabi's ruler, bans political parties and labour unions.

All power rests in each emirate's hereditary ruler. Broad laws tightly restrict speech and nearly all major local media are either state-owned or state-affiliated outlets.

Laws also criminalise the very few protests that take place by foreign labourers. The Emirates' overall population of more than 9.2 million

people is only 10 per cent Emirati.

The rest are expatriates, many of them low-paid labourers seeking to send money back home to their families.

Many avoid saying anything as they see their livelihoods at risk for speaking up as their visas and residencies remain tied to their employers. The UAE's diplomatic ties to Israel, reached in 2020, also make protesting on behalf of the Palestinians that much more fraught. However, the UN and the UAE agreed before COP28 that free expression would be allowed. Activists described a process of having to seek approvals with organisers for their demonstrations.

UN rules at the summit have seen demonstrators avoid waving national flags or specifically calling out countries.

But Sunday afternoon, over 100 people gathered as

part of a solidarity protests on behalf of the Palestinians, only a short distance from Israel's pavilion at Dubai's Expo City.

The same number of onlookers and journalists watched as they chanted, read names of the dead and held their fists up to the sky. Some cried as they listened.

Israeli security personnel watched from a distance. That morning, they briefly had argued over another smaller protest with United Nations police on hand guarding the Blue Zone, an area overseen by the UN where the negotiations take place.

Criticism of Israel's conduct in the war has peppered much of the summit from world leaders, as well as activists who can be seen through the site wearing the traditional checkered keffiyeh, or scarf, associated with the Palestinians.



Supporters of Taiwan President and Democratic Progressive Party presidential candidate William Lai cheer as Lai launches his election campaign in Taipei, Taiwan, Sunday. Taiwan will hold its presidential election on Jan. 13 2023.

Paris police arrest man who killed 1, injured 2

Paris (AP): French police arrested a man who targeted passersby in Paris on Saturday night, killing a German tourist with a knife and injuring two others, France's interior minister said.

Police subdued the man, a 25-year-old French citizen who had spent four years in prison for a violent offense.

After his arrest, he expressed anguish about Muslims dying, notably in the Palestinian territories, and claimed that France was an accomplice, French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said. The attacker apparently cried "Allahu Akbar" (God is great), Darmanin added.

"This person was ready to kill others," Darmanin told reporters. The attacker went after a German couple with a knife, killing the man. He then used a hammer to injure two others. The

attacker, who was not identified by name, left prison after four years in 2020 and was under surveillance and undergoing psychiatric treatment, the minister said, painting a brief portrait of the assailant, who was born in Neuilly-Sur-Seine, a Paris suburb.

The attack happened in the 15th district of the French capital with the assailant using a knife to kill and a hammer to attack the injured. Details about the victims were not immediately known.

The attacker was stopped by police who twice fired a taser at him in the stomach, the minister said, praising the officers for their quick response and reiterating that "there would doubtless have been other dead."

France has been under a terror alert, and the attack raised the fear level in the French capital.

UK Labour Party leader praises Margaret Thatcher in poll pitch

PTI ■ LONDON

In a bid to woo voters aligned with the governing Conservatives, UK Opposition Labour Party leader Keir Starmer on Sunday piled pressure on one of the most prominent former Tory prime ministers for unleashing the country's "natural entrepreneurialism".

Starmer's praise for Margaret Thatcher in a column for 'The Sunday Telegraph' comes as the UK prepares for a general election year in 2024, with the Labour Party on the left comfortably ahead in the opinion polls over Prime Minister Rishi Sunak led Conservatives on the right of the country's political debate.

In a bid to bolster the party's chances further, the Labour leader hoping to be the next prime minister likened Thatcher to his own party's former premiers such as Tony Blair. "Margaret Thatcher

sought to drag Britain out of its stupor by setting loose our natural entrepreneurialism. Tony Blair reimagined a stale, outdated Labour Party into one that could seize the optimism of the late 90s," he writes.

"A century ago, Clement Attlee wrote that Labour must be a party of duty and patriotism, not abstract theory. To build a 'New Jerusalem' meant first casting off the mind-forged manacles. That lesson is as true today as it was then," he notes.

Thatcher, Britain's first female prime minister, remains a deeply divisive figure in UK politics having overseen a radical era of crushing miners' strikes and privatisation until a doomed poll tax levy ultimately led to her downfall. However, she has often been praised by successive Tory leaders, including Boris Johnson and now Rishi Sunak, for her firm actions aimed at enhanced

economic growth and enterprise in the 1970s and 80s.

In a bid to connect with that electorate, Starmer claimed that the Labour Party under his leadership is extending a hand of friendship to all Britons, irrespective of who they have supported in the past at the ballot box.

He writes: "Britain's priorities are once again Labour's priorities. Delivering them is going to require all our efforts. That's why we extend the hand of friendship to you, no matter where you are or who you have voted for in the past."

"National renewal demands it. It is only together that we will build the better future we all want."

He acknowledged that many voters may still be uncertain about Labour but urged them to take a "look at us again", claiming the governing Conservatives have failed to capitalise on Brexit.

Kyiv says Russian forces shot surrendering Ukrainian soldiers

AP ■ KYIV

Ukrainian officials on Sunday accused Russian forces of killing surrendering Ukrainian soldiers, a war crime if confirmed, after grainy footage on social media appeared to show two uniformed men being shot at close range after emerging from a dugout.

The video shows the servicemen, one of them with his hands up, walking out at gunpoint and lying down on the ground before a group of Russian troops appears to open fire. It was not immediately possible to verify the video's authenticity or the circumstances in which it was taken.

The Ukrainian General Prosecutor's office on Sunday launched a criminal investigation, hours after the Ukrainian military's press office said in an online statement that the footage is genuine. "The video shows a group in Russian uniforms shooting, at point-blank range, two unarmed servicemen in the uniform of the Armed Forces of Ukraine who were surrendering," the prosecutor's office said in a Telegram update on Sunday.

Kyiv, its Western allies and international human rights organizations have repeatedly accused Moscow of breaching international humanitarian law since it launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The Kremlin denies these allegations.

The video first appeared Saturday on DeepState, a popular Ukrainian Telegram channel covering the war. The post claimed the footage came from the front lines near Avdiivka, a Ukrainian holdout in the country's part-occupied east where there has been fierce fighting in recent weeks.

The General Prosecutor's Office on Sunday said that the incident took place in the Pokrovsk district, which includes Avdiivka and surrounding areas.

"It's clear from the video

Former president barred from leaving Ukraine

Kyiv (AP): Former President Petro Poroshenko was denied permission to leave Ukraine for a planned meeting with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, Ukraine's security service said on Saturday.

Poroshenko announced Friday that he had been turned away at the border despite previously receiving permission from Parliament to leave the country. Under martial law, Ukrainian men between 18 and 60 years of age are not allowed to leave the country without special approval.

The 58-year-old, who lost his re-election bid in 2019 to current Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said that he had planned to meet with US House Speaker Mike Johnson, and the Polish parliament during his trip.

But security officials said that Poroshenko had also agreed to meet Orban, who has previously praised Russian President Vladimir Putin and refused to support Kyiv's bid for EU accession. In a statement on social media, they said

such talks would make Poroshenko a "tool in the hands of the Russian special services."

On Saturday evening, Orban's spokesman said that Hungary "does not wish to play any part in (President Zelenskyy's) internal political struggles", without confirming or denying that a meeting had been planned between Poroshenko and the Hungarian leader. Zoltan Kovacs made the remarks in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter. Poroshenko, who called his experience at the border an "attack on unity", is yet to comment on the allegation that he planned to meet Orban.

As of late morning on Sunday, there was no further comment from Ukrainian authorities regarding Poroshenko's planned trip. Ukraine's Parliament speaker on Sunday accused Poroshenko's political party, the center-right European Solidarity, of having made false claims in the past that its law-

makers were being systematically prevented from travelling abroad.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant was left on "the verge of a nuclear and radiation accident" Saturday after it was unable to draw power from two of the lines connecting it to the local energy grid, the country's nuclear energy operator said. It said that the plant switched to diesel generators to stop the plant from overheating before off-site power was restored by Kyiv.

Russia occupied the Zaporizhzhia plant in the early stages of the war. Over the past year, the station has become a focal point of concern for international observers, with both Moscow and Kyiv accusing each other of shelling the plant. In a statement on social media, Petro Kotin, head of Ukraine's nuclear energy operator, accused Moscow of "incorrect, erroneous, and often deliberately risky operation of the equipment" at the site.

claim that a rocket strike had caused the blast.

Also on Sunday, Ukraine's energy ministry reported that close to 1,000 towns and villages suffered power outages that day, with hundreds of settlements in the west battered by wintry weather and others affected by ongoing fighting.

The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank, late on Saturday assessed that military operations have slowed down all along the frontline in Ukraine due to poor weather, with mud bogging down tracked vehicles and making it hard for lighter equipment and infantry to advance.

Nepal partners with USAID to prevent infectious diseases

Kathmandu (PTI): The Nepal government and the US Agency for International Development on Sunday jointly launched a strategic partnership to strengthen the Himalayan nation's capacity to prevent, detect, and rapidly respond to emerging infectious diseases.

The USAID Global Health Security programme will be implemented through 'One Health' — a collaborative, trans-disciplinary approach that recognises the interdependence among the health of ecosystems, wildlife and domestic animals, and humans, according to a press release issued by the US Embassy here.

"USAID's Global Health Security work is helping to fill the gap created by the recent Covid 19 pandemic, by strengthening countries' capacities to prevent, detect, and respond to disease threats before they can become a pandemic, while advancing WHO International Health Regulations targets so that countries can address gaps and priorities at the national level," it said.

Through the health security programme in Nepal, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) will fund the Ministry of Health and Population to strengthen the One Health platform and surveillance systems. USAID will also work through the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). The initiative is a strategic partnership to strengthen Nepal government's capacity to prevent, detect, and rapidly respond to emerging infectious diseases, the release said.

"Through FAO, USAID will support strengthening AMR surveillance in animal health; strengthening of zoonotic disease surveillance; and improving biosafety and biosecurity in Nepal. In total, USAID will provide up to \$6.75 million for these efforts over the next three years, subject to availability of funds," it said.



Snow blanketed Seaton Sluice in Northumberland, England, Sunday, December 3, 2023 as temperatures are tipped to plunge to as low as minus 11C (12.2 F) in parts of the UK over the weekend

AP/PTI

Pakistan records 34% rise in militant attacks in Nov: Report

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Anti-state violence in Pakistan surged 34 per cent in November, with 63 militant attacks recorded in the country during the month, a think-tank report said on Sunday. The 63 militant attacks in November resulted in 83 deaths, including that of 37 security forces personnel and 33 civilians, the Dawn newspaper reported, citing data by the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) think tank.

Additionally, 89 individuals, including 53 civilians and 36 security forces personnel, sustained injuries, according to the Islamabad-based think tank. Compared to October's data, a 34 per cent surge in

militant attacks, a 63 per cent rise in fatalities, and an 89 per cent increase in the number of injured persons was recorded during November.

Pakistani security forces killed at least 59 militants and arrested at least 18 suspected terrorists during the month, according to the report. The data showed an 81 per cent escalation in militant attacks in the first eleven months of 2023 compared to the corresponding period in 2022.

It also showed a 64 per cent rise in the number of injured. The cumulative toll from the 599 militant attacks from January to November 2023 resulted in 897 fatalities and 1,241 injuries, according to the report. Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

province was the most affected, recording 51 attacks with 54 deaths and 81 injuries. The Balochistan province recorded nine attacks, which resulted in 18 fatalities, including that of 15 security forces personnel and three civilians, while Sindh recorded two minor-level attacks.

The Punjab province witnessed a single, high-profile attack on the Mianwali Air Base of the Pakistan Air Force. Heavily armed militants attacked the Pakistan Air Force training base, but soldiers foiled it by killing three of the attackers and cornering three others. Recently, Pakistan has been hit by a wave of terrorist activities orchestrated by various terror outfits.

Indian envoy in SL underscores commitment to country

PTI ■ COLOMBO

The Indian envoy here has visited Sri Lanka's Northern Province to emphasise New Delhi's abiding commitment to the development and well-being of the people of the country through enhanced development cooperation and expanded economic partnership.

Indian High Commissioner Gopal Baglay has completed a three-day visit to the province, the Indian High Commission said in a statement on Saturday. He was accompanied by senior diplomats of the High Commission on the visit from November 29 to December 1.

The High Commissioner visited three islands off Jaffna, Nainativu, Analaitivu and Delft to assess the preparedness for implementing the Hybrid Renewable Energy Systems project. The Government of India have committed to support this project with a grant to address the energy needs of the inhabitants of these islands.

This was the High Commissioner's last of several visits to Jaffna during his assignment to Sri Lanka and underscored India's abiding commitment to the development and well-being of the people of Sri Lanka, including in the

Northern Province, through enhanced development cooperation and expanded economic partnership in accordance with the priorities and the requirements of the people of the region, the statement said.

He visited Thalaimannar and Kankesanthurai passenger facilities in pursuance of the ongoing efforts for enhanced connectivity through ferry services between mutually agreed points in India and Sri Lanka.

"Attesting to the significance of developing railway infrastructure under the India-Sri Lanka development cooperation partnership for the benefit of the people of Sri Lanka, the delegation undertook a journey by Sri Lankan Railways from Colombo to Medawachiya in modern coaches supplied under an Indian credit line.

The train journey also provided an opportunity to experience the riding comfort offered by the upgraded railway line from Anuradhapura. The work is undertaken by reputed Indian public sector company IROCON, under an ongoing Indian line of credit for the upgradation of the Maho-Omanthai segment.

The High Commissioner inaugurated a programme to donate 1,000 school bags to students across Mannar District at

Murunkan Maha Vidyalayam whilst also launching a special financial assistance scheme for underprivileged students at the University of Jaffna. In addition, he distributed dry rations to more than 500 families in Jaffna and Delft Islands. Deep freezers were donated to 15 fishermen cooperatives for the use of fishermen in the Jaffna region.

"Interacting with representatives of the cooperatives at Pasaiyoor, the High Commissioner stressed that India is striving to bring benefits of scientific research and expertise for commercially sustainable development of fisheries in Sri Lanka, including in the Northern Province so that the benefits can directly reach the fishermen and the common people".

At the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) memorial in Jaffna, the High Commissioner paid homage on December 1 to the brave sons of India who made the supreme sacrifice in Sri Lanka. The IPKF was formed under the mandate of the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord signed in 1987 that aimed to end the civil war in the country between militant Sri Lankan Tamil nationalists such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan military.

6 suspects held for attack on bus in Gilgit Baltistan

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

Six suspects were arrested on Sunday in connection with an attack on a passenger bus in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir's Gilgit Baltistan region that killed nine people, including two soldiers, a day earlier, police said.

The bus was travelling from Gilgit to Rawalpindi when unidentified gunmen opened indiscriminate fire at around 6:30 p.m. in Chilas on Saturday, police said. The driver lost control after the attack and the bus collided with a

truck coming from the opposite side, they said.

Nine people, including two soldiers, were killed and 21 passengers received injuries in the attack, police said, adding that the assailants managed to escape after the attack.

No group or individual claimed responsibility for the attack but the region has a history of sectarian attacks by militants. A case has been registered against unknown miscreants, Dawn newspaper reported on Sunday, quoting the public relations officer (PRO) for the Diamer commissioner.

Indonesia's Marapi volcano erupts, spewing ash plumes in villages

Jakarta (AP): Indonesia's Mount Marapi in West Sumatra province erupted Sunday, spewing white-and-gray ash plumes for more than 3,000 metres (about 9,800 feet) into the air, and hot ash clouds blew several miles to the north, according to Indonesia's Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation Centre.

There were no casualties, said Ahmad Rifandi, an offi-

cial at the Marapi monitoring post, adding that villagers were advised to stay 3 km (1.8 miles) from the crater's mouth and be aware of the danger of potential lava. National Disaster Management Agency spokesperson Abdul Muhari said several villages were blanketed with falling ash. He said Marapi's eruption alert was maintained at the second-highest level and that authorities have been closely moni-

toring the volcano after sensors picked up increasing activity in recent weeks. Japan's Meteorological Agency said Sunday it is currently assessing whether there is a possible tsunami in the country because of Marapi's volcanic activity. In case a tsunami reaches Japanese coasts, the earliest possible swelling is expected in the Okinawa region at around 2100 JST (0900GMT), it said.

Clean water scare in some neighbourhoods in drought-prone Kenya

AP ■ BONDENI-JUA KALI

As the sun rises in the Bondeni-Jua Kali neighbourhood on the outskirts of Kenya's capital Nairobi, dozens of women and men step out of their corrugated iron homes with yellow jerricans, skip over pools of sewage and make their way to a nearby water vending station.

There is no piped water or sewage system in the area, and drought has made clean water supplies more scarce and expensive for locals. Twice a week, trucks with 5,000 to 10,000 litres of water will fill up vending stations across Athi River where residents can buy 20 litres for 20 Kenyan Shillings (USD 0.16). A household of four needs about five gallons a day,

and weekly incomes are about USD 13, according to data from Kenya's Finance Ministry. But for those whose homes are kitted out with water filters distributed by a local nonprofit, the nearby river — polluted, prone to drought and usually unsafe for drinking — is becoming a cheaper and sometimes more reliable source of clean water. And while advocates say underlying issues like climate change-fuelled drought and poor water management need to be urgently addressed, solutions like filters make a short-term difference because deliveries are often not enough for the neighbourhoods' needs. Many rely on unsafe alternatives if they miss out on the trucked-in stocks. "Sometimes, we get to the water vending stations and find that

the queue is long and then the water finishes and you have to wait," said 46-year-old resident Joyce Ngui. "Most of the times you don't have money to buy even the salty water sold around. So we have no choice but to use the swamp water," she said.

When The Associated Press met Ngui, she was heading to a swamp to draw water to clean her family's clothes and for cooking. Part of the slimy swamp is clogged with overgrown water lilies. Ngui doesn't have a water filter, so she can't turn the swamp water into something suitable for drinking. Ngui would like a filter, "so that we can be able to filtrate the dirty water and be able to drink it," she said. Otherwise, "it just has germs and diseases." Bucket Ministry, a Christian

nonprofit organisation, has been providing communities around Nairobi and other parts of Kenya with the easy-to-use water filters. It provided over 600 filters, made by the water filtering company Sawyer, to households in the four neighbourhoods in Athi River since August and plans to up that number to 6,000.

The devices are the size of a small water bottle and are fitted with a hose pipe onto a bucket. They can filter water from the river and nearby swamps into potable water that can be used by residents.

"It filters every germ or pathogen that causes water-borne diseases," said Derrick Mesulamu, the country director for the group. "It is designed in such a way that it has micro

holes that don't allow those particles that cause water-borne diseases to pass through."

Josephine Mutile, a resident with a water filter, is already seeing the benefits.

"I have been sick often and visiting the hospital where I am tested and told that I have typhoid, or an amoeba infection or diarrhoea. Boiling water (to kill viruses and bacteria) is expensive because cooking gas is expensive," Mutile said. "Now I have this filter, it will help me a lot." Data from the Machakos County health ministry, of which Athi River is part, says that four out of 10 cases at public health clinics in the area are related to water-borne disease. At least 10 people died following a cholera outbreak in Mavoko area in the region

between October last year and March.

Machakos' local government has been deslitting and cleaning up the river, but most of the pollution, including plastic bags and bottles, happens upstream, where residents in poorer areas of Nairobi dump waste into the Nairobi River that then flows into the Athi River. "Because of water scarcity, residents in Machakos have turned to rivers, shallow wells or other sources which are contaminated with pollutants — including human and animal waste," said Machakos County Governor Wavinya Ndeti. She told The AP that the county government is cracking down on industries that have been disposing chemical waste and other pollutants into the Athi River.

The major decision among others will be the resolution of disputes locally within eight months before escalating them to the International Court of Arbitration. "Today, we have finalised the investment chapter of the FTA with the GCC team in Riyadh," Ejaz was quoted as saying by the Dawn after the meeting. The minister said his team succeeded in creating a graduating approach by adding an eight-month period which will enable both investors for mutual settlement of disputes before going for arbitration to international courts.

In September, Pakistan agreed on the FTA with the GCC. However, the signing of the agreement was postponed as Saudi Arabia demanded to incorporate an investment chapter into the agreement.

This chapter was particularly aimed at including a protection clause, specifically the provision of the forum of the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID).

In August 2004, Pakistan and the GCC, which includes Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and Kuwait, signed a framework agreement to explore the possibility of an FTA. However, only a handful of negotiation rounds occurred in the years that followed. The dialogue was revived in 2021 after a substantial hiatus.

In the previous year, both parties conducted technical-level discussions to assess the feasibility of finalising the agreement. This potential agreement could significantly enhance Pakistan's export capacity to the GCC bloc.

The former government of Imran Khan-led Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) introduced a new template for investment treaties, which only provides for local arbitration as a remedy. This template was introduced in response to the ICSID penalty of USD 6 billion on Pakistan due to its refusal to grant a mining lease for the Reko Diq project to Australia's Tethyan Copper Company. Saudi Arabia, a major player in the GCC, was dissatisfied with this template and insisted on the specific inclusion of the ICSID for arbitration in the event of any dispute. The FTA and investment were tied to the provision of the ICSID, leaving Pakistan with no choice but to reverse its previous decision. In a cabinet meeting presided over by interim Prime Minister Anwaar ul Haq Kakkar, the investment template was revised to include three international arbitration bodies for dispute resolution: the ICSID, the Permanent Court of Arbitration, and the Dubai International Arbitration Centre. Following this amendment, the Pakistani delegation presented the updated investment chapter to the GCC negotiator.

RBI to retain 6.5 per cent interest rate as inflation in check: Experts

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank is likely to maintain the status quo on the short-term interest rate in its monetary policy review later this week, with inflation staying in comfort zone and economic growth moving at an accelerated pace, opined experts.

The RBI has left the benchmark policy rate (repo) unchanged in its past four bi-monthly monetary policies. The RBI had last increased the repo rate in February to 6.5 per cent, thus ending the interest rate hiking spree which began in May 2022 in the aftermath of Russia-Ukraine war and subsequent disruptions in the global supply chain resulting in high inflation in the country. RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das-headed Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is scheduled to begin its three-day deliberations on December 6. Das would unveil the decision of the six-member MPC on December 8 morning. The MPC meeting is scheduled for December 6-8, 2023. India retained the tag of the



world's fastest-growing major economy, with its GDP expanding by a faster-than-expected rate of 7.6 per cent in the July-September quarter on booster shots from government spending and manufacturing. On expectations from the RBI's monetary policy, Madan Sabnavis, Chief Economist, Bank of Baroda, said the central bank is most likely to maintain the status quo on rates as well as stance this time.

"The high growth witnessed in Q2 in GDP will provide assurance that the economy is on track. The low core inflation numbers in the last few months will provide comfort that there is no need to increase rates even while headline inflation is likely to be volatile in the upward direction," he said. Some direction on liquidity will be useful to the market as the system is in deficit for quite some time, he said, and added

there can be some upward revision in the GDP growth numbers though will not be very significant. Aurodeep Nandi, India economist at Nomura, also expects the MPC to unanimously vote to pause at its December policy meeting. "Of particular interest will be RBI's commentary around OMO sales, which were announced in the previous policy meeting, but tight liquidity conditions have so far made the

implementation difficult. Our baseline view is that the RBI will continue with the policy and stance pause for now," Nandi said.

The government has mandated the central government to ensure that the retail inflation based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) stays at 4 per cent, with a margin of 2 per cent on either side.

While anticipating the status quo on the key benchmark lending rate, R G Agarwal, Chairman of Dhanuka Group, said Indian agriculture must embrace technological advancements and implement farm mechanization to boost crop yields and improve farmers' livelihoods.

"This necessitates both public and private sector investments, which hinge on access to affordable financing. While both the Reserve Bank of India and the government have taken prior measures to address this issue, additional incentives, such as monetary and fiscal benefits, are required to promote farm mechanization," he added. The retail inflation eased to a four-month low of 4.87 per cent

in October, mainly due to cooling prices of food items. The Reserve Bank's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), in its October meeting, projected CPI inflation at 5.4 per cent for 2023-24, a moderation from 6.7 per cent in 2022-23.

Mohit Jain, Managing Director, Krisumi Corporation, opined that this successive pause in interest rate hikes reiterates RBI's commitment to provide broad-based growth in the economy with financial stability.

"The policy decision will facilitate a stable ecosystem for economic activity. This will bring a sigh of relief for homeowners since they have been feeling the strain of increased interest rates on long-term loans. In the housing sector, a stable interest rate environment will not only foster confidence among potential buyers but also make housing loans more accessible and affordable," he added. The MPC is entrusted with the responsibility of deciding the policy repo rate with the objective of achieving the inflation target, keeping in mind the objective of growth.



Government receives ₹1 lakh crore foreign direct investment proposals

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government has received foreign direct investment (FDI) proposals worth about Rs one lakh crore since April 2020 from countries sharing land border with India and half of those applications have been cleared so far, a top official said. The remaining are either pending or withdrawn or rejected by the government.

In April 2020, the government came out with a press note under which the Centre made its prior approval mandatory for foreign investments from countries that share land border with India to curb opportunistic takeovers of domestic firms following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Countries which share land borders with India are China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar and Afghanistan. As per that decision, FDI proposals from these countries need government approval for investments in India in any sector.

After that press note, "proposals worth about Rs one lakh crore have come in and in that, 50 per cent have been cleared and the rest are either pending or withdrawn or rejected. So it's not a complete shutdown for that FDI. We are taking a nuanced view on those applications, depending on whether they are adding value to our manufacturing capacities or not," the government official, who did not wish to be named, said.

The pending proposals are there with security agencies and certain ministries.

The number is "very big" for proposals which have been withdrawn, the official added. An inter-ministerial committee has been formed by the government to scrutinise these proposals. The major sectors under which these FDI proposals came included manufacturing of heavy machinery, automobile, auto components; computer software and hardware; trading, e-commerce, and manufacturing of light engineering and electrical. Most of those applications had come from China. Besides, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh too had submitted certain applications.

India received USD 2.5 billion FDI equity from China during the period from April 2000 to September 2023.

During the period, India received USD 0.08 million investments from Bangladesh, USD 4.51 million from Nepal, USD 9 million from Myanmar and USD 2.57 million from Afghanistan.

China's largest automaker SAIC Motor has last month inked a joint venture agreement with the JSW Group to accelerate the transformation and growth of MG Motor in India, which has been struggling to raise capital to fund future growth.

As per the shareholder agreement, share purchase and share subscription agreement signed in London, JSW Group will hold a 35 per cent stake in the Indian JV operations.

Honda Cars to hike prices of its entire model range

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Honda Cars India plans to increase prices of its vehicles from January in order to partially offset the impact of rising input costs, according to a senior company official. The Japanese car-maker sells three models -- Elevate, City and Amaze -- in the Indian market.

In an interaction with PTI, Honda Cars India Vice President (Marketing and Sales) Kunal Behl said the company will increase the prices of its models from next month due to pressure on input costs.

"The model-wise amount of increase will be finalised by the end of this month. Our new model Elevate which was launched at an introductory price has been well received by the market with very high customer consideration. The introductory price will be valid till December 23 and price will be revised from January 2024," he noted.

Maruti Suzuki, Mahindra & Mahindra and Audi India have also announced plans to hike prices of their passenger vehicles in January 2024 citing reasons, including cost pressure driven by overall inflation and increased commodity rates.

Besides, Tata Motors and Mercedes-Benz India are mulling increasing the prices of their models from January.

Mcap of nine of top-10 most valued firms up ₹1.30 lakh cr; Airtel, TCS biggest gainers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The combined market valuation of nine of the top-10 most valued firms climbed Rs 1,30,391.96 crore last week, with Bharti Airtel and Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) emerging as the biggest gainers, amid an overall optimistic trend in equities.

Last week, the BSE benchmark jumped 1,511.15 points or 2.29 per cent. Barring Reliance Industries, nine other companies including HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank,

Infosys and Hindustan Unilever witnessed addition in their market valuation.

Bharti Airtel's valuation rallied Rs 23,746.04 crore to Rs 5,70,466.88 crore.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of TCS jumped by Rs 19,027.07 crore to reach Rs 12,84,180.67 crore.

HDFC Bank added Rs 17,881.88 crore, taking its market valuation to Rs 11,80,588.59 crore.

ITC's mcap climbed Rs 15,159.02 crore to Rs 5,61,159.09 crore and that of



Bajaj Finance soared Rs 14,480.29 crore to Rs 4,48,446.82 crore.

The valuation of ICICI Bank surged Rs 12,085.42 crore to Rs

6,63,370.71 crore and that of Hindustan Unilever advanced Rs 11,348.53 crore to Rs 6,02,258.98 crore.

The mcap of State Bank of

LIC intends to set up office in GIFT City during this financial year

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) is planning to open office in GIFT International Financial Services Centre Gandhinagar (Gujarat) during the current fiscal to further its overseas business.

LIC's presence in the Gujarat International Finance Tec (GIFT) City-International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) will enable the company to expand its global business.

"We are going to open our branch very soon in the GIFT City. It should happen during the current financial year itself. This will enhance our foreign operations," LIC Chairman Siddhartha Mohanty told PTI in

an interview.

He said LIC has presence in 14 countries through branch offices, subsidiaries and joint ventures.

The Corporation directly operates through its branch offices in Fiji (Suva and Lautoka), Mauritius (Port Louis) and United Kingdom (Watford). Besides, it has subsidiaries in Life Insurance Corporation (International) Bahrain, Life Insurance Corporation (Nepal) Ltd, Life Insurance Corporation (Lanka) Ltd, Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) of Bangladesh Ltd.

It also has a foreign wholly-owned subsidiary -- Life Insurance Corporation (Singapore) Pte Ltd.



Asked about the plans with regard to foreign operations, Mohanty said, the idea is to consolidate and strengthen those operations so that they generate greater return for the Corporation. As part of its digital transformation exercise, insurance behemo-

moth is exploring the possibility of setting up a fintech unit. LIC has initiated a total digital transformation project DIVE (Digital Innovation and Value Enhancement) and appointed a consultant to steer the project, he said.

"Our objective is to get best-in-class digital initiatives for all our stakeholders, customers, intermediaries, marketing people and everybody through the project DIVE," he said.

In the first phase, the customer acquisition part is going to be transformed, he said.

Customer acquisition is done through three modes -- agent, bancassurance and direct sale. LIC gets most of its new customers through its agents.

'NFRA has retrospective jurisdiction over offences by delinquent Chartered Accountants'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has upheld the penalty imposed by the National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) on auditors of Dewan Housing Finance Corporation Ltd (DHFL) observing that it has retrospective jurisdiction in the case of misconduct.

Dismissing a bunch of appeals by DHFL's auditors, NCLAT in its 156-page long order said NFRA has a "clear and required retrospective jurisdiction" over the alleged offences by delinquent Chartered Accountants for a period even prior to its formation.

Earlier in April 2023, NFRA had passed an order imposing a fine

of Rs one lakh each on 18 DHFL auditors, barring 14, for six months to a year, citing misconduct in branch audits.

Four of them - Harish T K, Ayna Tamtam, M Baskaran and Sam Varghese - who were debarred for one year had challenged the order by filing an appeal before NCLAT.

The preliminary ground of the appellants was that NFRA does not have any retrospective jurisdiction since the watchdog was constituted on October 10, 2018. The NFRA Rules were notified on November 13, 2018, whereas the financial statements of DHFL in question pertain to FY 2017-18.

However, a two-member NCLAT bench rejected all the points raised by the auditors and

said section 132 (4) of the Companies Act, 2013, under which the auditors were debarred, can be applied retrospectively.

"After taking into consideration the background for forming NFRA, the judgment of the Apex Court, proven scams, need to restore shaken confidence of public and investors at large and prevent any adverse impact on the Indian economy, we hold that NFRA has clear and required retrospective jurisdiction over the alleged offences by delinquent Chartered Accountants for period prior to formation of NFRA or prior to coming into effect relevant portion of Section 132 of Companies Act, 2013," it said.

FPIs infuse ₹9,000 cr in equities in Nov; inflow in debt at 6 years high

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

After turning net sellers in the past two months, FPIs again made a comeback in the Indian stock markets in November and pumped in Rs 9,000 crore amid fall in US treasury bond yields and the resilience of the domestic market.

Additionally, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) made a net investment of Rs 14,860 crore in the debt market last month, making it the highest level in six years, data with the depositories showed.

Going forward, FPI response will be crucially determined by the market trend, which, in turn, will be influenced by the state election results, VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said. If the state election results turn out to be favorable for the ruling dispensation, the market will stage a rally, and overseas investors are unlikely to miss that rally by big selling, he added.

According to the data, FPIs made a net investment of Rs 9,000 crore in Indian equities in

November.

This came after FPIs dumped Indian equities worth Rs 24,548 crore in October and Rs 14,767 crore in September. Before the outflow, FPIs were incessantly buying Indian equities in the last six months from March to August and brought in Rs 1.74 lakh crore during the period.

The latest inflow can be attributed to fluctuations in the US Treasury yields and crude oil prices. Last month, the market witnessed the remarkable listing of two IPOs - IREDA and Tata Tech - potentially indicating a positive trend for foreign investors, Bharat Dhawan, Managing Partner, Mazars in India, said.

"While the decline in US treasury bond yields could have prompted FPIs to turn their focus back to the Indian market for better returns, listing of IPOs would have also bought foreign investors back," Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager, Research at Morningstar Investment Research India Private Limited, said.

India needs to flag misconception that exports, imports add to global carbon emissions: GTRI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

This is a complete misconception that exports and imports contribute significantly to global carbon emissions and India needs to flag this issue in the discussions on global trade and climate change in Dubai, think tank GTRI said on Sunday.

On December 4, United Nations climate change conference COP28 in Dubai is dedicating a day to explore the relationship between global trade and climate change. The World Trade Organization (WTO) is the co-lead of the Trade Day event.

The primary goal is to nudge governments worldwide to integrate climate-friendly measures into their national trade policies, the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said in its report.

Other potential topics of discussions include green trade policies, the role of renewable energy in trade, and carbon pricing strategies, it added.

"India must highlight the misconception that trade significantly contributes to global emissions. It must be corrected as trade-related activities account for only about 3 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, not the often-cited 25 per cent," the report said.

The other two important issues which India should raise include suggesting the 164-member Geneva-based global trade body WTO to focus only on prioritizing its core mandate of regulating trade, rather than



overreaching into areas better managed by specialized agencies, such as the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) efforts in decarbonizing global shipping; and highlight the potential conflicts of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) with the Paris Agreement, it said. About correcting the misconception that trade significantly contributes to global emissions, GTRI Co-Founder Ajay Srivastava said that this discrepancy stems from a misinterpretation of trade-related emissions, which can be bifurcated into two primary categories.

"Firstly, emissions resulting from the transportation of goods, particularly via shipping, account for about 3 per cent of the global total. Secondly, emissions related to the production of goods - though occurring at the production site - are often mistakenly attributed to the trade process, thereby inflating its perceived environmental impact," he added.

He also said that the WTO's fundamental role is regulating trade, rather than overextending into realms already effectively managed by specialized agreements or agencies.

The IMO has recently outlined a comprehensive strategy for decarbonizing global shipping, setting ambitious targets for 2030 and 2040, and aiming for net-zero emissions by 2050, the think tank said.

"With the WTO struggling to fulfil its primary trade regulatory functions for over two decades, it is crucial for the organization to focus on internal reform and avoid encroaching on areas outside its expertise. The WTO has saddled itself with many new subjects and is unable to deliver even on core trade related subjects," he said. On CBAM or carbon tax, a kind of additional import duty, the report said that India must underscore how the CBAM potentially undermines the Paris Agreement's goals of fostering global cooperation, respecting differentiated responsibilities, supporting sustainable development, and utilizing market-based emission reduction mechanisms.

Godrej Properties net debt up 17 per cent in Jul-Sep mainly to fund land acquisitions

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm Godrej Properties' net debt rose 17 per cent in the July-September quarter to Rs 6,174 crore mainly due to fund acquisition of land parcels.

According to its investors presentation, the net debt of Mumbai-based Godrej Properties stood at Rs 6,174 crore as on September 30, 2023. Its net debt was Rs 5,298 crore as on June 30, 2023 and Rs 3,649 crore at the end of the last fiscal.

Last month, Godrej Properties Executive Chairperson Pirojsha Godrej had said that the net debt has risen because of aggressive land acquisitions done by the company since last April.

Most of the land acquisition has been done outright which requires upfront payment, he had said.

However, Pirojsha Godrej maintained that the debt position is comfortable as the net debt-equity ratio is 0.65.

During the last financial year, Godrej Properties acquired multiple land parcels across various cities to develop housing pro-

jects that can generate a revenue of Rs 32,325 crore.

In the current fiscal, the company targets to acquire land parcels that can help generate revenue of Rs 15,000 crore. In the first six months, it has already added projects worth Rs 7,175 crore.

Pirojsha said the net debt might further rise in the next few quarters before stabilising.

On the operational front, Godrej Properties is confident to meet its target to sell properties worth Rs 14,000 crore this fiscal as it expects strong demand for its ongoing and upcoming housing projects.

Godrej Properties, the real estate arm of Godrej Group, had sold properties worth Rs 12,232 crore in the previous fiscal.

"We are confident of meeting the annual guidance of Rs 14,000 crore of sales bookings. Hopefully we can do better," he had said.

The company has achieved 48 per cent growth in its sales bookings to Rs 7,288 crore during April-September period of 2023-24 fiscal from Rs 4,929 crore in the year-ago period.

GUWAHATI HOSTS HALF MARATHON

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Thousands of runners from all across the country on Sunday participated in a 'Half Marathon' in the capital city of Assam, showcasing the grit, determination and enthusiasm of people. The 'Coal India Guwahati Half Marathon' was organised under the aegis of Eastern Command of the Indian Army in association with the Assam government and title sponsor Coal India Ltd. Nazeem Pulikkal and Phurba Tamang won the race in men's and women's categories respectively, an official said. Emphius Nongrum and Teiboklang Biam came second and third among the men, while Bandasharai Marwein and Fulmoni Urang won the second and third positions among the women respectively, he added. "The event witnessed participation of over 5,000 participants under the categories of 21 km, 10 km and 5 km in different age groups. The determination and grit shown by the differently



Over 5,000 participate

abled who participated in the 5 km run further added to the spirit of the event," Defence PRO Lt Col Mahender Rawat said. Over 800 women and girls participated in the run in various categories, reflecting 'Naari Shakti' in the true sense, he added. The Sarusajai sports complex was decked up in colourful themes, symbolising celebration and festival. The route of the run was interspersed with cheering zones, dance troupes and bands all along, thereby keeping the adrenaline of the runners pumping high. "The unwavering commitment and tireless efforts of Army's Eastern Command and the Assam government have laid the foundation for many such future events in Northeast India, forging a legacy that will be remembered for years to come," Rawat said. The run represented a shared dream of unity, fitness, sports adventure and above all peace and prosperity across the region, he emphasised.



Scheffler primed to win his maiden HWC title

Woods pleased with his recovery

PTI ■ NASSAU

World number one golfer Scottie Scheffler maintained his lead in the Hero World Challenge with a 7-under 65, his best round of the week thus far, on the moving day here on Saturday. Scheffler, who finished runner-up to Viktor Hovland in the previous two editions, had shot a 69 and 66 on the first two days. He will be challenged by Matt Fitzpatrick on the final day as the Englishman jumped three spots to be second with a 7-under 65. With the overall aggregate of 203, he is three shots behind 2022 Masters winner Scheffler. Justin Thomas is two shots behind Fitzpatrick after a 4-under 68 in the third round. Fitzpatrick's 46-foot eagle putt on the 15th stood out. Another big mover on the day was Jason Day who gained four spots to be Tied-4th alongside Tony Finau, who both have tallied 206 for the week. Tournament host and 15-time major winner Tiger Woods is way back in the 20-man field but he is happy with how his body has responded in his first event since April. He is Tied-16th alongside Hovland after carding a 1-under 71 on Saturday. Woods, who is 16 shots behind the leader, had managed 75 on the opening day before improving to a 70 on Friday. "I still have the game. It's whether or not the body can do it. I'm very pleasantly surprised at how I've recovered every day. My activations in the gym have been good," said Woods. "To be able to knock off some of the rust as I have this week and showed myself that I can recover each and every day, that was kind of an unknown. 'I've walked this far. I've done all my training. But add in

playing and concentration and adrenaline and all those other factors that speed up everything, I'm very excited how the week's turned out," added an upbeat Woods, who plans to play one tournament a month next year if his body permits. Leader Scheffler has been consistent through the week and is primed to win his maiden HWC title. He is particularly pleased with his putting having made a change to his putter this week. Scheffler was on fire from the get go and collected two eagles and four birdies before losing a shot on the 18th hole. "Like I said at the beginning of the week, I feel as if I'm much more clear in what I need to be working on and a lot of that has to do with how I'm set up over the ball. "When I'm set up in the right position, then I feel like my mechanics are really good. That's what I'm focused on. I'm not focused on setting up perfectly. 'I have my feels that I'm trying to get to in the setup and then not trying to be perfect, just trying to hit good putts," he said. Scheffler is much better placed to lift the trophy having missed out on the last two years. He is backing himself to go all the way. "Yeah, I think I've been kind of on the outside looking in going into Sunday. I could be wrong, but I remember it being I had two really good back nines to give myself kind of an outside chance. "The first year was definitely outside chance. I think last year I maybe was one or two back going into 18. Like I said, I was kind of on the outside looking in going into the tournament -- sorry, going in the back nine. "Yeah, it's nice to be in position this week to win," added the Texan.

Nantes supporter dies before game



AP ■ NANTES (FRANCE)

A supporter from Nantes died on Saturday following a fight that took place before the club's 1-0 win over Nice in the latest outbreak of violence to mar French soccer this season. Nantes said in a statement overnight that the fan was "fatally injured" close to the club's stadium. According to the L'Equipe newspaper, the fan was a member of the Brigade Loire, Nantes' main group of diehard fans. "In circumstances which are the subject of an ongoing judicial investigation, the 31-year-old collapsed, hit in the back," the club said. "Despite the intervention of emergency services, the fan could not be saved." Nantes said the public prosecutor's office has launched an investigation into voluntary manslaughter. Nantes public prosecutor Renaud Gaudeul said the incident took place shortly before 8 PM local time when several private hire vehicles carrying Nice fans on their way to the match were attacked by groups of Nantes supporters. "The very first forensic investigations show that the victim had a wound on his back, possibly caused by a bladed weapon," the prosecutor said, quoted by French media. Local newspaper Ouest

France said the suspected assailant initially fled the scene before turning himself in at a police station. French sports minister Amélie Oudéa-Castéra expressed her "great sorrow" in a message posted on X, the social network formerly known as Twitter. "My thoughts are with his family, his loved ones and his friends in the stands," she wrote. Nantes coach Jocelyn Gourvennec, who was appointed this week, said he only found out about the supporter's death after the match. "I can't imagine how you can go to a soccer match, sometimes with your family, and be between life and death after a match," he said. "It's inconceivable. The players talked about it a lot in the dressing room, they were very touched." The French soccer league has been making headlines for all the wrong reasons this season following an upsurge of violence in stadiums over the past two campaigns. According to Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin, more than 100 police officers were injured in soccer-related incidents last season. In October in Montpellier, a match was stopped in added time after fans threw a firework from the stands that landed next to Clermont goalkeeper Mory Diaw.

AFI to stop national camps after Paris; will leave door open for public, private entities

PTI ■ AMRITSAR

In a significant development, the Athletics Federation of India on Sunday decided to stop running national camps for elite athletes after the Paris Olympics, leaving the door open for public and private entities to take care of the top players. "We have decided to wind up national senior training camps after Paris (next year). We have communicated this to the sports ministry, which has appreciated our move," AFI president Adille Sumariwalla said on the concluding day of the federation's AGM here. "There are so many good facilities at SAI NCOEs (National Centres of Excellence). Reliance, JSW, Tata and other private entities also have good facilities. They have made huge investments and appointed foreign coaches. "They can train athletes at their facilities. Not only the private entities, the Army Sports Institute, Railways, Air Force, Navy, ONGC, other public sector entities and even state governments can also train their athletes. "We have 5-10 SAI centres but we can have 200 such centres (for training with public and private entities' participation). The athletes will have more access, they can stay at their homes and not at camps for training." The AFI's move would mean that top athletes like Neeraj Chopra, Murali Sreeshankar and Avinash Sable will not train under the aegis of the AFI after 2024 Paris, though it will continue to monitor them. The athletes can now come directly under public and private entities, including states such as Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, which have also appointed foreign coaches. The AFI will, however, monitor the athletes through a team



of coaches. Currently, the AFI conducts centralised national training camps of around 130-150 elite athletes under the supervision of 50-60 support staff, mainly at NIS Patiala, Bengaluru SAI Centre and LNCPE in Thiruvananthapuram. Chopra mainly trains outside India while Sreeshankar is coached by his father S. Murali in Kerala. Both are supported by JSW. Sumariwalla said the idea is to decentralise the camps and spread them through the country so that the athletes can train closer to their homes. The AFI is, however, yet to chalk out the modalities of how the public and private entities will take charge of running the training camps and how the federation will monitor the athletes. Junior programme, 4x400m relay teams to remain under AFI The junior national training

camps, being held at the National Centres of Excellence (NCOEs) in collaboration with AFI, will remain with the federation. The AFI added that it will continue to train the men's 4x400m, women's 4x400m and mixed 4x400m relay teams. "The three relay teams will have to be under the direct supervision of AFI as the relay members cannot train separately as they need coordination. We will also continue to hold competitions," AFI Planning Commission chairman Lalit Bhanot said. The AFI will also take care of the athletes during foreign exposure tours. The federation's decision to stop running national camps would mean less control over dope testing of athletes. The AFI, while admitting this, said the pros outweigh the cons. One reason behind the move to

allow public and private entities to enter the training domain is to increase the size of the athletes' pool, which currently stands between 100 and 150. "If the training camps are spread across the country, they will be accessible to a lot more athletes. The pool of elite athletes will be more and the competition will be tougher. We hope this will produce more world beaters," said Bhanot.

It's in the best interest of athletics: Anju Legendary athlete and AFI senior vice-president Anju Bobby George said the exit of the AFI from running training camps was the right decision and the way forward to achieve more success on the international stage. "The study (academics) of athletes was also a major concern. If an athlete is training at NIS or Bengaluru or Thiruvananthapuram for 11 months in a year, it is very difficult for them to study. Now they can train closer to their homes and can also study properly," said the 2003 World Championships bronze medalist long-jumper on the sidelines of AFI's AGM. "Not just the athletes, the coaches also have to leave their families and stay at the national camps for 11 months in a year. They can now opt for training camps near their homes." She admitted that there could be issues during the initial months but it would take Indian athletics forward. "Currently, the AFI can call any body from any part of the country for camps at NIS or Bengaluru. But now what will happen if for example an athlete from Tamil Nadu wants to train in Kerala? These kinds of things we will have to deal with initially but ultimately it will, hopefully, lead us to a better system," she said.

AP ■ LONDON

Ravaged by injuries and hurtling from a cruel VAR call in midweek, Newcastle was hardly in ideal shape as the same 11 players were sent out by manager Eddie Howe for a third straight game for the English Premier League meeting with Manchester United on Saturday. You'd never have known. Newcastle's dominant 1-0 win at St. James' Park was testament to the unwavering spirit in a squad being stretched to the limit as the Saudi-owned club challenges for trophies on all fronts. At the same time, it was a reality check for Man United after its recent revival in the league marked by narrow, scrappy wins and sensational goals. Anthony Gordon's 55th-minute goal proved to be enough for Newcastle, which - in the space of a week - has beaten Chelsea and Man United either side of being denied a famous Champions League win at Paris Saint-Germain because of a roundly condemned handball decision. "It's been a massive week for us," Gordon said. "The same 11 players have played three games on the bounce and we've pulled through.

Newcastle defies long injury list

To earn dominant win over Man United, Arsenal leads by 4 in EPL

"It's not just the guys who are injured - the guys who are playing are injured. We've got kicks and bruises all over." Indeed, injuries are really starting to bite. The list was already into double figures before goalkeeper Nick Pope went off in the 86th minute with a suspected dislocated shoulder, sustained when he dived to stop a shot that never actually reached him. The schedule doesn't get any easier, though. Newcastle doesn't have a midweek off in December, during which the team plays in the League Cup quarterfinals and finishes off its Champions League group campaign. Its remaining fit players are running on fumes but are still decently placed in fifth - seven points behind Premier League leader Arsenal, which beat Wolverhampton 2-1 on Saturday. United, which had won five of its previous six league games, dropped to sev-



enth place and had only one shot on target in a tired-looking display coming three days after a 3-3 draw at Galatasaray in the Champions League.

FOUR POINTS CLEAR Arsenal stretched its lead to four points after scoring early goals through Bukayo Saka and Martin Odegaard before

hanging on against Wolves. Manchester City and Liverpool - the teams who started the weekend placed second and third - are in

action on Sunday and can trim the gap back down to one point. Both of Arsenal's goals were well worked, with Saka scoring in the sixth minute after a buildup including Gabriel Jesus and Takehiro Tomiyasu and Odegaard converting a cross from Oleksandr Zinchenko from the left. Zinchenko was at fault for Wolves' goal, scored by Matheus Cunha in the 86th, and there were some nervy moments in stoppage time. "The team was extraordinary again today," Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said of his players, who were coming off a 6-0 win over Lens in the Champions League in midweek.

15-SECOND GOAL Jay Rodriguez got the ball rolling for Burnley in its 5-0 thrashing of 10-man Sheffield United by scoring inside 16 seconds, yet that wasn't his fastest goal in the league.

Almost 10 years ago to the day, the striker netted after just 13.58 seconds for Southampton against Chelsea. No other player in the competition's history has two goals that quick. It was a dismal start to a forgettable match for Sheffield United, which was 2-0 down by the time Oli McBurnie was sent off in first-half stoppage time for collecting two yellow cards. Both of them were for elbowing Burnley defender Dara O'Shea in the face. Burnley scored three goals in a seven-minute span from the 73rd to tie for the biggest ever league win by a team that started a match in last place. The win ended Burnley's record seven-match losing run at home to start this season. That losing streak at home was nine matches in total in the Premier League, taking in the final two games of the 2021-22 campaign when the team was relegated.

Sheffield United dropped to last place and has conceded 39 goals in 14 games.

EVERTON'S MISSION Everton was plunged into the relegation zone on the back of its record 10-point deduction for financial mismanagement. The team is unlikely to stay there for long. A 1-0 win at Nottingham Forest gave Everton its first points since the sanction and lifted Sean Dyche's side to within two points of safety. With Luton - which lost at Brentford 3-1 - immediately above and Burnley and Sheffield United below, Everton can capitalize on there being three weak teams near the bottom of the league. Dwight McNeil scored Everton's winner at the City Ground, arrowing a diagonal shot into the top corner in the 67th minute to cap a strong display by the visitors. There were jeers from the home fans at the final whistle. Forest manager Steve Cooper joins Sheffield United's Paul Heckingbottom in being under big pressure after 14 games, with - somewhat unusually - no coaches having been fired so far this seas

RINKU IS CONTENDER FOR T20 WORLD CUP SPOT

But it's too early: Ashish Nehra

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Explosive left-hander Rinku Singh has emerged as a “contender” for the finisher’s spot in India’s T20 World Cup squad, according to Ashish Nehra, but the former India pacer also believes that the batter will face stiff challenge for the position from fellow cricketers. The T20 World Cup will be played in the West Indies and the USA in June next year. Rinku has been in blazing form in the ongoing five-match T20I series against Australia, and, in the fourth match in Raipur on Friday, his 46 off 29 balls was vital in India’s 3-1 series-clinching 20-run win. “There is no doubt that Rinku Singh is a contender for inclusion in India’s T20 World Cup squad,” the former left-arm pacer told JioCinema. “But the World Cup is still far away and the spot he’s fighting for has many challengers.” Rinku has played some defining knocks in the ongoing series. His 31 not out from nine balls played a big role in India’s 44-run win in the second T20I at Thiruvananthapuram. With no clarity on whether



Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli will be in India’s scheme of things for the global showpiece, there could be major changes in the T20 squad for the World Cup and Rinku could emerge as a leading contender for the slot overs. “You can look at Jitesh Sharma (wicketkeeper-batter) and Tilak Varma. We’ll have to discuss the positions where Shreyas

Iyer, Suryakumar Yadav and Hardik Pandya will play,” the cricketer-turned-commentator said. “So, we have to see how many spots are available in the 15-member squad. But one thing is sure, he (Rinku) has opened everyone’s eyes and put everyone under pressure. But there’s still a lot of time to go. The trip to South Africa is coming up

followed by the IPL,” averred Nehra. Nehra defended the young Indian pace attack, which has been criticised in some quarters for leaking 200-plus totals in the first three T20Is against Australia. The squad for the five-match series is without stalwarts Mohammed Shami, Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj, who have been rested. “The conditions for the first three matches were different and a lot of the bowlers have changed. Your experienced bowlers like Mohammed Shami, Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj have been rested. “If you speak of Avesh Khan and Mukesh Kumar, they have just been introduced to international cricket. And then we saw over 200 runs being scored in the first three matches. So, it’s not that only the Indian bowlers leaked runs, even Australia’s bowlers have given away a lot of runs. “In these circumstances, Mukesh Kumar has been a big positive for India. The way he has bowled with wet balls, his execution of yorkers and bowling in the death overs has been terrific,” he added.

Euro 2024 draw event interrupted by noises

AP ■ HAMBURG (GERMANY)

Unexplained moaning noises disrupted the draw ceremony for the European Championship in men’s soccer on Saturday and competed for attention with the team names being read out on stage. The interruption, which seemed to sound like sexual noises, was clearly heard for several minutes on the ceremony broadcast from a concert hall in Hamburg. A British prankster claimed credit on social media for the stunt and posted footage of himself making cell phone calls to activate a ring tone in the venue which has excellent acoustics. A later clip posted to the social media site X, formerly known as Twitter, appeared to show the prankster inside the venue during a rehearsal for the hour-long Saturday evening event. It was the latest security lapse at a high-profile event of UEFA, which declined to comment. In July 2021, violence broke out before the final of the previous European Championship at Wembley Stadium in London.

Warner named in Australia squad for 1st Pakistan test

AP ■ SYDNEY

David Warner has been handed the chance of a hoped-for Sydney Cricket Ground farewell after being named in Australia’s squad for the first of three home tests against Pakistan. The squad named Sunday, which includes the 37-year-old opener, is only for the first test at Perth from Dec. 14-19. If he hold his place for the second test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground starting on Boxing Day, Warner will be in line for his dream farewell on his home ground in Sydney from Jan. 3 to 7. Warner’s recent test form has been mixed and he has averaged 28 in test matches since the summer of 2019 when he made a triple century against Pakistan at Adelaide. He has made clear his wish to end his Baggy Green career at Sydney while continuing to play for Australia in white ball cricket. Warner will start the summer opening the batting with Usman Khawaja while opener candidates Cameron Bancroft, Matt Renshaw and Marcus Harris will have a chance to



stake their claims with the Prime Minister’s XI which plays Pakistan at Canberra from Dec. 6 to 9. Fast bowler Lance Morris is closer to a test debut after being recalled to the 14-man squad. Cameron Green also returns after previously losing his test spot to Mitch Marsh and Alex Carey has been named wicketkeeper after losing that role at the recent one-day World Cup. Spinner Nathan Lyon is back after recovering from a calf injury which ruled him out of the latter stages of the Ashes series. He replaces Todd Murphy. Chairman of selectors George Bailey said the incumbents had earned the opportunity to play the first test of the summer

after an outstanding winter in which Australia won the World Test Championship and retained the Ashes. “Thirteen members of the squad were part of the victorious World Test Championship and successful Ashes tours over the winter and Lance Morris has been recalled after recovering from his back injury over the same period,” Bailey said. “As ever, there will be opportunities in the short to medium term to break into this squad and we look forward to seeing the continued strong performances from players who have been performing domestically, many of whom will get a tremendous opportunity in the PM’s XI fixture against Pakistan later this week.” Morris has taken 11 wickets at 25.5 in three Sheffield Shield matches for West Australia since returning from the back injury which ruled him out of the Ashes. Warner’s decision to publicly announce his hope for a Sydney finish was met with strong criticism from his former Australia teammate, fast bowler Mitchell Johnson.

Rodman’s goal caps 3-0 win for US women over China

AP ■ FORT LAUDERDALE (FLORIDA)

Trinity Rodman had a goal and two assists to help the United States beat China 3-0 in an exhibition match on Saturday. Sophia Smith and Lindsey Horan also scored in the first of two exhibition games against China. The second is set for Tuesday in Frisco, Texas, outside of Dallas. The matches close a difficult year for the United States after the four-time champions were eliminated from the Women’s World Cup this summer in the round of 16, the team’s earliest exit ever. Smith scored in the eighth minute, beating China goalkeeper Xu Huan off a pass from Rodman. It was Smith’s 15th goal in 37 national team appearances. Horan made it 2-0 in the 52nd minute, striking the ball from distance before it bounced past Xu. It was her 30th goal. Rodman capped the scoring in the 77th with an assist from Jaedyn Shaw. Rodman celebrated with a cheeky dance in front of the goal. “She’s just being really intentional, we see that in training, we see that in games. And she’s starting to play more and more with the players around her as well,” interim U.S. Coach Twila



Kilgore said about Rodman. “She’s obviously a very gifted individual player and she’s looking to play more with her teammates.” Veterans Alex Morgan, Becky Sauerbrunn, Alyssa Naeher and Crystal Dunn were given some time off as Kilgore focused on youth for her roster. Among the players called up for the matches were three teenagers: Shaw, Olivia Moultrie and Alyssa Thompson. It was also the first roster appearance for Jenna Nighswonger, who plays for Gotham FC in the National Women’s Soccer League, and Paris Saint-Germain midfielder Korbin Albert. Moultrie and Nighswonger both made their U.S. Debuts as second-half substitutes. Kilgore, an assistant under former U.S. Coach Vlatko

Andonovski, chose the roster in consultation with U.S. Soccer Sporting Director Matt Crocker and Emma Hayes, the new coach who will join the team in May after finishing out the season with Chelsea. Hayes visited the team during the training camp ahead of the two final matches. “Twila’s been doing such an amazing job in going from being an assistant coach to being the interim head coach,” Rodman said. “She’s done it so seamlessly and she has a game plan she wants us to execute. She’s so good at communicating it and she holds us to a standard.” Veteran defender Abby Dahlkemper started against China, making her first appearance for the team in 599 days after having back surgery in October 2022.

Medjedovic upsets Fils to win 5-set

AP ■ JEDDAH (SAUDI ARABIA)

Hamad Medjedovic squandered two match points before he finally upset the top-seeded Arthur Fils and won the Next Gen Finals championship match on Saturday. It was the first five-set final in six editions of the tournament. Medjedovic missed the chance to seal it in four but converted his third match point in the fifth to beat Fils 3-4 (6), 4-1, 4-2, 3-4 (9), 4-1 after two hours, 11 minutes. The 20-year-old Medjedovic did not lose a match on his way to becoming the first Serbian to win the tournament for the top eight players aged 21 or under. The tournament was held in Saudi Arabia for the first time after it was played in Milan ever since the inaugural edition in 2017. Besides shorter sets, other changes to the usual tennis rules included shorter changeovers and less time on the shot clock for some points. “I can’t believe I have won this title, but it’s going to give me a lot of confidence for 2024,” said Medjedovic, the lowest-ranked champion yet at No. 110. The 36th-ranked Fils became the youngest Frenchman in nearly two decades to win an ATP title when he triumphed at Lyon this year.



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