

Sisi sweeps to third term as Egypt prez with 89.6% of votes

Cairo: Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has swept to a third, six-year term as Egypt's president, winning 89.6% of votes in an election in which he faced no serious challengers, the National Election Authority announced on Monday. The election took place as Egypt struggles with a slow-burning economic crisis and tries to manage the risk of spillover from the war in Gaza, which borders Egypt's Sinai Peninsula.



Some voters said the eruption of conflict in Gaza had encouraged them to vote for Sisi, who has long presented himself as a bulwark of stability in a volatile region. Voting in Egypt was held over three days on December 10-12, with the state and tightly controlled domestic media pushing hard to boost turnout, which the election authority said had reached 66.8% — above the 41% recorded at the last presidential election in 2018. The election featured three other candidates, none of them high profile. The most prominent potential challenger halted his run in October, saying officials and thugs had targeted his supporters.

Sisi, a former general, has overseen a sweeping crackdown on dissent across the political spectrum since leading the 2013 overthrow of Egypt's first democratically elected leader, Mohamed Mursi of the Muslim Brotherhood. Sisi was elected to the presidency in 2014, and re-elected in 2018, both times with 97% of the vote. The constitution was amended in 2019, extending the presidential term to six years from four, and allowing Sisi to stand for a third term. REUTERS

N Korea tests its most advanced ICBM which can reach the US

Seoul: North Korea on Monday test-fired its most advanced intercontinental ballistic missile that has the potential to reach the US, extending a record-breaking number of weapons tests this year and triggering further international condemnation. South Korea said the North fired an ICBM that used solid fuel, which makes missiles easier to transport and faster to fire than liquid-fuelled versions.

Monday's launch was the third time the North tested a solid-fuel ICBM after launches in April and July, which analysts said signalled consistent efforts to improve the technology. The North said the previous two were "Hwasong-18" missiles but did not comment on Monday's launch.

The US, South Korea and Japan all quickly condemned the missile test, stating it was

Reuters



A Nov 15 photo of North Korea testing new solid-fuel engines for an ICBM

in breach of UNSC resolutions and would make the Korean peninsula less secure.

Japan's defence ministry said the ICBM had a potential range of over 15,000km, which would cover all of the US.

China, a close ally of North Korea, offered no direct response to the latest launches and instead released a statement highlighting the deep

trust between the two nations.

South Korea's military initially said it had detected the launch of a long-range ballistic missile from Pyongyang area that flew 1,000km before splashing down in East Sea. It said the missile flew up rather than across, a method Pyongyang has said it employs in tests to avoid flying over neighbouring countries. AFP

Jaishankar meets Europe, Lanka Parlt delegations

NEW DELHI, Dec 18 (PTI)

EXTERNAL Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Monday met a delegation of members of the European Parliament and discussed issues such as geopolitical convergence, supply chain security and digital sensitivities.

“Glad to meet with Members of European Parliament on a visit to India. A useful discussion on geopolitical convergence, supply chain security, digital sensitivities, AI and maritime security,” Jaishankar said on ‘X’. The External Affairs Minister also held an interaction with a Sri Lankan Parliamentary delegation.

“A good interaction with the Sri Lankan Parliamentary delegation led by Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardana. Appreciate the warm sentiments expressed about India’s support to Sri Lanka in its economic recovery,” Jaishankar said. “Discussed further deepening of our cooperation in various sectors,” he said.

Separately, Jaishankar also held talks with Foreign Minister of Benin Olushegun Adjadi Bakari. “Delighted to welcome FM @shegunbakar of Benin today. Discussed growing our political, economic and development partnership,” the External Affairs Minister said.

With \$125bn, India retains top spot in remittance chart: WB

Says Strong Labour Mkts In Source Countries Key Drivers

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

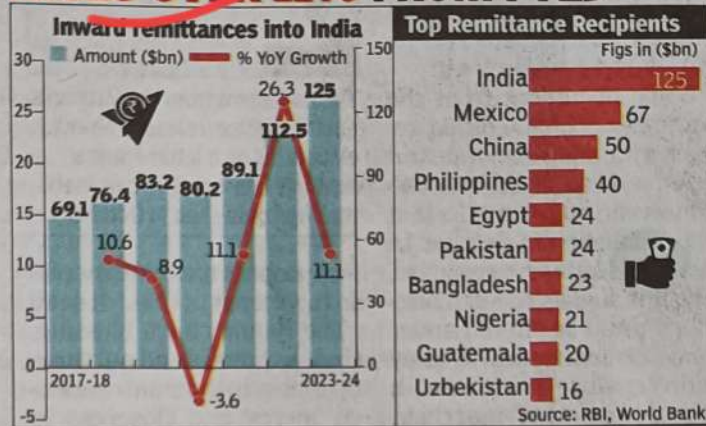
New Delhi: Remittances to India are estimated to rise over 11% to \$125 billion in 2023, helping it retain the top spot ahead of Mexico (\$67 billion) and China (\$50 billion), data released on Monday showed.

A strong base of skilled and unskilled workers in the US, the UK, Singapore and Gulf nations is expected to result in an 8% increase in flows to around \$135 billion in 2024, World Bank's latest migration and development brief showed.

Driven by remittances to India, flows to South Asia are estimated to have grown 7.2% in 2023 to reach \$189 billion, tapering off from the over 12% increase in 2022. These flows are significant for a country like India as it helps reduce the impact of falling foreign direct investment and higher trade deficit.

It said the key drivers of remittance growth in 2023 are a historically tight labour

RISES OVER 11% FROM FY23



market in the US, high employment growth in Europe reflecting extensive leveraging of worker retention programmes, and a dampening of inflation in high-income countries. The US has continued to be the largest source of remittances, followed by Saudi Arabia. As a share of GDP, however, Saudi Arabia has a significantly larger volume of outward remittances than the US. Top remittance source nations include seven

countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

The main contributing factors are declining inflation and strong labour markets in high-income source countries, which boosted remittances from highly skilled Indians in the US, the UK, and Singapore, which collectively account for 36% of total remittance flows to India.

The report said that remittance flows to India were also boosted by higher flows from

the GCC, especially the UAE, which accounts for 18% of India's total remittances and is the second-largest source of them after the US. Remittance flows to India benefited particularly from its February 2023 agreement with the UAE for setting up a framework to promote the use of local currencies for cross-border transactions and cooperation for interlinking payment and messaging systems.

"The use of dirhams and rupees in cross-border transactions would be instrumental in channelling more remittances through formal channels. More generally, despite low oil prices and production cuts, and a near collapse in GDP growth in the GCC from 8% in 2022 to 1.5% in 2023, lower inflation (2.6% in 2023 compared with 3.3% in 2022) orchestrated by domestic policy played a key role in sustaining Indian migrants' ability to continue to send remittances to India," said the report.

India's 1st winter Arctic expedition to kick off today

Panaji: On Tuesday, India will commence its first ever winter expedition to the Ny-Alesund research base in Svalbard, Norway, where the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR) has a research station, Himadri, reports **Newton Sequeira**.

The expedition and the associated experiments will continue till the end of March with research teams spending a month each in the frigid climate.

Thamban Meloth, director of NCPOR, said the research will help collect data on atmospheric processes like the aurora borealis (northern lights), atmospheric electricity during winter, and other space physics studies.

"We are conducting a wintering expedition for the first time to carry out some experiments that we could not conduct during the summer. The Arctic is warming dramatically, and the impact is seen the world over, so it is important to collect data throughout the year and ensure there are no knowledge gaps," Meloth told **TOI**.

The first team of researchers will consist of 4 scientists, who will travel by flight to the Himadri research station, where temperatures are known to drop to -14°C .

Reuven Azar Israel's new envoy to India



■ By Harinder Mishra
JERUSALEM, Dec 18 (PTI)

ISRAELI Government on Sunday approved the appointment of Reuven Azar as the new ambassador to India.

Azar, who is in his late 50s, will also serve as the non-res-

ident ambassador to Sri Lanka and Bhutan, a statement from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs said. His appointment is one of the 21 new Heads of Missions cleared by the Israeli Government to assume service soon.

Foreign Minister Eli Cohen, congratulating the new appointees, said they will "represent Israel and its citizens, strengthen its economy and strengthen international support for the State of Israel".

Azar is currently serving as the Ambassador of Israel to

Romania. It is not yet known when he will take charge in New Delhi. Azar will replace Naor Gilon, who has been serving as the Israeli ambassador to India since 2021.

Azar has earlier served as Head of the Israel-US-China internal task force at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, immediately after serving for three years as Deputy National Security Advisor for Foreign Policy at the National Security Council and Foreign Policy Advisor to the Prime Minister of Israel.

How Agnipath scheme evolved

■ By Manash Pratim Bhuyan

NEW DELHI, Dec 18 (PTI)

IN A meeting with the Prime Minister weeks after becoming the Army chief, General M M Naravane sounded out in early 2020 about the 'Tour of Duty' scheme for inducting soldiers for short-term tenure but months later the PMO came out with a formulation with a much wider scope to include all the three services.

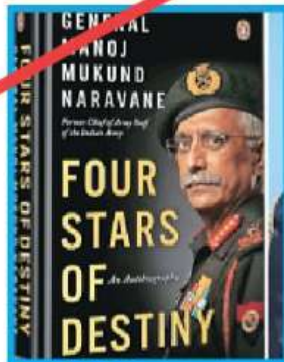
This is what General Naravane says in his memoir 'Four Stars of Destiny' while elaborating on the birth of the 'Agnipath' recruitment scheme -- considered India's most radical military recruitment policy.

Naravane, who served as the 28th Army chief from December 31, 2019, to April

30, 2022, notes that various models of the scheme were deliberated upon and the Army's initial view was that 75 per cent of the personnel to be recruited could be retained while 25 per cent should be released. In June 2022, the Government rolled out the Agnipath recruitment scheme for short-term induction of personnel with an aim to bring down the age profile of the three services.

It provides for recruiting youths between the age bracket of 17-and-half years and 21 for four years with a provision to retain 25 per cent of them for 15 more years.

In the book, published by Penguin Random House India, Naravane also recalled that the first year's starting salary for the inductees was kept at just Rs 20,000 per



month (all-inclusive) and that was "not acceptable".

"This was just not acceptable. Here, we were talking about a trained soldier, who was expected to lay down his life for the country. Surely a soldier could not be compared with a daily wage labourer? Based on our very strong rec-

Gen Naravane sheds light in his memoir

ommendations, this was later raised to Rs 30,000 per month," he says.

After the new formulation of the scheme, General Naravane says, the Army was "taken by surprise by this turn of events, but for the Navy and Air Force, it came like a bolt from the blue."

"When I had first sounded out the PM about the Tour of Duty scheme, it was more on the lines of a short-service option at the soldier level, similar to the Short Service Commission scheme for officers that was already in vogue." Just as a limited number of SSC officers are taken each year, likewise a limited number of jawans would be

similarly enrolled and released after the completion of their 'tour' with the option of re-enlisting for another tour, if found to be fit," he writes.

Naravane writes that nothing much happened in the next couple of months as the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic grabbed all the attention, followed by the clashes in Galwan in eastern Ladakh.

"However, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) was considering this proposal but with a much wider scope and applicability. In the PMO formulation, not only should the complete intake of the year be short-service based, but it would also apply to all three services," he writes.

Rains, flooding bring southern TN to its knees

39 places record extremely heavy rainfall: IMD

CHENNAI, Dec 18 (PTI)

AS MANY as 39 regions in southern Tamil Nadu witnessed extremely heavy rainfall, the India Meteorological Department said on Monday.

Heavy to extremely heavy rainfall was recorded in Thoothukudi, Tirunelveli, Tenkasi and Kanyakumari districts and light to moderate rainfall at most places in southern Tamil Nadu, the IMD said in a bulletin.

It is for the 24-hour duration commencing 8.30 am on December 17 and ending at 8.30 am, the following day.

The rainfall is due to the influence of an upper air cyclonic circulation extending up to the mid-tropospheric levels over the Comorin area and neighbourhood.

Heavy to very heavy rain was recorded at isolated places in Theni, Virudhunagar, Sivaganga and Ramanathapuram districts and isolated heavy rain in Madurai district.

There were 39 extremely heavy rainfall reports, 33 very heavy rainfall reports and 12 heavy rainfall reports from such southern regions. Kayalpattinam in Thoothukudi district reported 95 cm, followed by Tiruchendur and Srivaikuntam (both in Thoothukudi district) reporting 69 cm and 62 cm respec-



A drone view shows severe waterlogging in Thoothukudi as parts of Tamil Nadu receive incessant rainfall on Monday. (ANI)

tively. The upper air cyclonic circulation over the Comorin area and neighbourhood extending up to mid-tropospheric levels persists.

Rainfall over and above 21 cm is graded as extremely heavy. Between 12 and 20 cm, it is very heavy and from 7 to 11 cm heavy. The classification is based on accumulated rainfall for a 24-hour duration (cm/day). On December 19, heavy rain is likely at one or two places in Kanyakumari, Tirunelveli, Thoothukudi and Tenkasi districts.

DAMS BRIM, SURPLUS WATER BEING RELEASED: THE storage in major dams and reservoirs in southern Tamil Nadu ranged between 80 and 100 per cent on Monday following heavy rainfall, the Government said.

The Army and Coast Guard are set to be involved in rescue and relief operations and a total of 425 disaster relief personnel have been deployed and Thoothukudi airport is closed.

While the storage in Manimuthar dam was 83.10 per cent, it was 89.54 per cent

and 80.73 per cent in Papanasam and Servalar dams respectively, an official release said. Vadakku Pachaiyyar and Nambiyar dams reached 100 per cent storage. In Kodumudiyar and Kadanadanadhi it was 88.25 per cent and 89.88 per cent. Surplus water continues to be released with copious inflows. All the dams are in Tirunelveli district.

In Kanyakumari district, the storage in four key dams and reservoirs ranged between 91.77 per cent and 94.70 per cent.

About 800 train passengers stranded for over 20 hours

MADURAI (TN), Dec 18 (PTI)

DUE to floods, approximately 800 train passengers were stranded at Srivaikuntam in Thoothukudi district of Tamil Nadu, an official said on Monday.

The passengers of a Chennai bound express train from the temple town of Tiruchendur were stranded for nearly 20 hours at Srivaikuntam, which is in the worst flood-hit region.

An official said 'all efforts are on to rescue them' and NDRF authorities have also been alerted. The Tiruchendur-Chennai Egmore Express (Train No 20606) departed from Tiruchendur to Chennai at 20.25 hours on December 17.

The train was, however, stopped at Srivaikuntam railway station, about 32 km away from Tiruchendur due to heavy rain and flood situation, a railway official said here.

In total, 800 passengers are stranded and of them, approximately 500 are in the Srivaikuntam railway station and about 300 are in a nearby school, he added.

The passengers could not, however, venture outside as the entire area was heavily inundated.

Southern Railway announced traffic suspension on the Tirunelveli-Tiruchendur section, between Srivaikuntam and Seydanganallur, as the ballast has been washed away in floods and the track is 'hanging' and water is flowing over the railway tracks.



A view of an inundated railway station in Thoothukudi. (ANI)

EAM visits Kuwaiti mission, condoles demise of Emir

NEW DELHI, Dec 18 (PTI)

INDIA will always remember the contributions of Emir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in strengthening India-Kuwait ties, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Monday on the demise of the Kuwaiti ruler.

Jaishankar visited the Kuwaiti embassy in Delhi on Monday morning and paid his respects to the departed leader.

"Visited the Embassy of Kuwait in Delhi today morning to express condolences and pay my respects on the passing away of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar during a visit to Embassy of Kuwait to convey his condolences on the passing away of Kuwait's Emir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in New Delhi on Monday. (PTI)

Amir of the State of Kuwait," he said on X. "The Government and people of India will always remember his notable contributions to the strengthening of our ties," he said.

Emir Jaber Al-Sabah, played a key role in boosting India-Kuwait relations, died at the age of 86 on Saturday. India observed a "statemourning" on Sunday as a mark of respect for the departed leader.

In the demise of Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Kuwait has lost a visionary leader who took the country towards progress and prosperity, the Ministry of External Affairs in its statement said on Sunday.