

Congress CMs In Hindi Heartland Sworn In

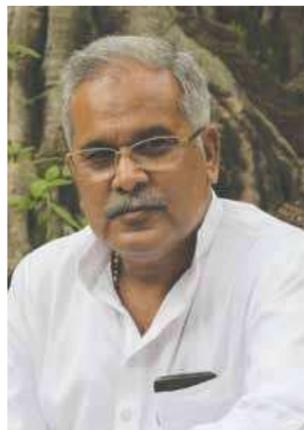
JAIPUR/BHOPAL/RAIPUR: Congress veterans Ashok Gehlot, Kamal Nath and Bhupesh Baghel were on Monday sworn in as new Chief Ministers of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, ending BJP's rule in the Hindi heartland.

The occasions were marked by opposition bonhomie, with a host of prominent opposition leaders sharing the stage with Congress President Rahul Gandhi.

Coming days after leaders of 21 opposition parties on December 10 resolved to work together to "defeat the BJP-RSS", the swearing-in ceremonies turned into a platform to showcase the opposition unity ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

However, Mayawati-led Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Akhilesh Yadav-headed Samajwadi Party -- both of which supported the Congress in government formation in Madhya Pradesh -- were conspicuous by their absence.

Gehlot, along with his deputy Sachin Pilot in Rajasthan, Kamal Nath in Madhya Pradesh and Baghel in Chhattisgarh were administered the oath of office and secrecy by the Governors in the presence of Rahul Gandhi, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and a number of opposition



From left: New Chief Ministers - Ashok Gehlot, Bhupesh Baghel and Kamal Nath

leaders.

Among those present from the "anti-BJP camp" included NCP chief Sharad Pawar, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister and TDP chief N. Chandrababu Naidu, former Prime Minister and JD(S) supremo H.D. Deve Gowda, NC patriarch Farooq Abdullah, LJD leader Sharad Yadav, and DMK leaders M.K. Stalin and Kanimozhi.

The RJD was represented by Tejashwi Yadav, Trinamool Congress by former Railways Minister Dinesh Trivedi; Jharkhand Vikas Morcha chief Babul Marandi and AAP leader Sanjay Singh were also present.

Congress General Secre-

tary and former Union Minister Gehlot took over the reins of Rajasthan for the third time, while Sachin, who won his maiden Assembly elections, is Gehlot's "co-pilot" after being sworn in as the Deputy Chief Minister.

Riding on huge anti-incumbency against the Vasundhara Raj-led BJP government, the Congress with farm loan waiver as its major poll plank came to power in the state winning 99 of the 199 seats at stake.

In Bhopal, nine-time MP and former Union Minister Kamal Nath became Madhya Pradesh's 18th Chief Minister, prompting attacks from the BJP which alleges Kamal Nath's involvement

in the riots in the national capital.

With the BJP and ally Shiromani Akali Dal attacking the Congress for its choice in Madhya Pradesh, Kamal Nath responded to the charges alleging "politics" behind the attacks.

"I took oath in 1991 and several times after that, no one said anything. There is no case, FIR, or charge-sheet against me. Today they are raking up this matter. You can understand the politics behind this," said Kamal Nath.

Credited with steering the party to victory in the saffron stronghold, Kamal Nath, immediately after assuming power, cleared files for waiving loans of farmers to the tune of Rs 2 lakh each.

With this, the Congress which won 114 seats in the 230-member House, delivered its pre-poll promise of cancelling farm loans within 10 days of coming to power.

In Raipur, state Congress President Bhupesh Baghel, credited for powering his party to a landslide victory, became the third Chief Minister of the tribal-dominated state.

Baghel, who represents Patan Assembly constituency in Durg district, was administered the oath of office and secrecy in the presence of Gandhi, Manmohan Singh, former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah and a host of other top Congress leaders.

After the swearing-in ceremony, Gandhi took to Twitter to thank the people of the state and vowed to build a "new Chhattisgarh". Baghel, had taken over the reins of party nearly a year-and-half after the top state leadership was wiped out in a Maoist attack in 2013, including the then state unit chief Nand Kumar Patel and party veteran Vidya Charan Shukla. He led from front in scripting the rout of Raman Singh-led BJP which was in power for 15 years, enabling the Congress to win 68 seats in the 90-member Assembly.

Cow's Death More Significant Than That Of Cop: Naseeruddin

MUMBAI: Actor Naseeruddin Shah, who is "angry" about the rise of mob violence, has said "poison" has spread in the Indian society where at some places, the death of a cow is given more significance than of a police officer, an indirect reference to the recent Bulandshahr violence where a police officer was killed allegedly by cow vigilantes.

The actor, married to Ratna Pathak Shah, raised concerns about the safety of his children who, he said, do not follow any specific religion.

His comments, which have provoked a debate, are a part of a video interview with Karwan-e-Mohabbat India. It was shared on its YouTube channel earlier this week. The Congress has endorsed Naseeruddin's views, and tweeted: "Naseeruddin.. we concur, do not fear the hate, fight it."

"The poison has spread. It will be very difficult to capture this djinn back into the bottle again. There is complete impunity for those who take law into their hands. In many areas we are wit-

nessing that the death of a cow is given more significance than that of a police officer," said the actor.

The father of actors Vivaan Shah and Imaad Shah, Naseeruddin said he feels worried about his children. "I had received regional education as a child.

"Ratna is from a liberal household, so she had next to none. And we chose not to give any religious education to our children. Because I believe that being good or evil has nothing to do with religion.

"We taught them what our beliefs are. I did make them learn a few verses from the Quran Sharif because I believe reciting them improves one's articulation. Just like one's Hindi articulation improves after reading the Ramayana and Mahabharata in its original (form)," he said.

Naseeruddin said: "Because tomorrow if a mob surrounds them, and asks, 'are you a Hindu or a Muslim?'... They will have no answer. It worries me because I don't see the situation improving anytime soon.

President's Rule Imposed In J & K

NEW DELHI: President's rule will be imposed in Jammu and Kashmir from Wednesday midnight with President Ram Nath Kovind signing a proclamation to give effect to the recommendation of the state Governor Satya Pal Malik.

Home Ministry officials said that Kovind has signed the proclamation based on the proposal sent by the ministry following a report by the state governor.

The term of Governor's Rule, imposed in the state in June this year, comes to an end on Wednesday. The state had plunged into a political crisis in June this year after BJP withdrew from the coalition government with People's Democratic Party. Last month Malik dissolved the state assembly which had been kept in suspended animation.

Under the provisions of Jammu and Kashmir Constitution, Governor's rule can be imposed for six months, but with consent of the President. The Constitution grants special status to Jammu and Kashmir.

Amazon Slammed For Doormats With Golden Temple Image

WASHINGTON: Online retail giant Amazon has been slammed by several Sikh bodies for reportedly selling doormats, rugs and toilet accessories bearing the image of the highly-revered Golden Temple and was asked to immediately remove the "disrespectful products" that hurt the sentiments of the community worldwide.

Prominent community body in the US, the Sikh Coalition, said in a statement on Tuesday that it was alerted to Amazon selling doormats, rugs and toilet seat covers with the image of Golden Temple. The civil rights organisation said it "immediately contacted Amazon to remove the products while detailing the culturally insensitive problems with the items being sold and the offensive message it sent to Sikhs around the world".

"The Golden Temple is not a doormat," it tweeted, adding that in the hours since, through community outreach, several pages had been removed from the Amazon portal. Another group, NGO United Sikhs, issued a statement

calling on Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos to do the same and said it had received "numerous complaints" from members of the community about the products.

Some of the items had been removed from the website on Wednesday, but the Golden Temple toilet accessories remained available, the group said.

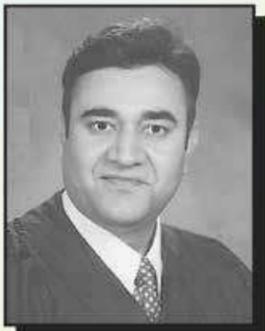
"It's shocking and extremely disappointing that Amazon offers these products for sale," said United Sikhs operations manager Rajesh Singh.

"The merchandise featuring the disrespectful placement of Darbar Sahib shows a total lack of understanding on behalf of Amazon and its employees. We demand Bezos address this issue immediately."

The group offered "Sikh awareness training" in "an effort to educate Amazon's staff and prevent anti-Sikh products from being sold on the site in the future". It also "reached out to the manufacturers of the merchandise to demand their production to be ceased immediately".

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