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# RAM RETURNS TO AYODHYA AFTER A FIVE CENTURY EXILE



DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ AYODHYA

It was goosebumps at exactly 12:29 pm on Monday when Ram Lalla's covered face was revealed to all those present on the newly constructed Ram Mandir premises in Ayodhya. Millions of Ram Bhakts across the globe, hooked to televisions, mobiles, or other screen platforms telecasting live the consecration of the metallic Ashtadhatu carved five-year-old Raghav Ram Lalla, were left spellbound as soon as the conch shells resonated in the temple, marking the conclusion of the "Praan Pratishthaa Karyakram Sampan".

All the rituals were performed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the presence of a host of dignitaries as special invitees on the occasion. Throughout more than an hour, Modi was observed chanting mantras while dressed in traditional dhoti kurta with angavastram and a rudraksha garland, the



Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Praan Pratishthaa ceremony of Shree Ram Janmaboomi Temple in Ayodhya on Monday

worship paraphernalia needed for the spiritual moment.

Army helicopters showered flower petals on the newly constructed Janmabhoomi temple as the praan pratishthaa

ceremony took place. Celebrations broke out in parts of this Uttar Pradesh temple town, with people singing and dancing.

Modi, who had laid the

foundation of the temple almost two years ago in the midst of the Covid pandemic, performed a series of rituals in the "grabha griha" — the sanctum sanctorum — with the

praan pratishtha taking place during the 84-second Abhijeet muhurta. At the end, the PM prostrated himself before the 51-inch idol that depicts Ram Lalla.

The ceremony took place in the presence of Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, and RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat.

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## New kaal chakra begins, says Modi

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ AYODHYA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday underlined the significance of "January 22" both in the country and worldwide throughout ages, marking the dawn of a new era with the "return of Lord Ram" to his birthplace, Ayodhya, symbolising the origin of a "new kaal chakra".

Soon after conducting the rituals of the Ram Temple consecration, the Prime Minister emphasised that the joyous and festive mood of the entire nation was on a constant rise since the "Bhoomi Pujan" of Ram Janmabhoomi Temple and the progress of the developmental works enthused new energy into the citizens leading them to celebrate Diwali.

Addressing the gathering that comprised India's who's who from every field, the Prime Minister exclaimed that our Ram has finally arrived after centuries.

"After centuries of patience, uncountable sacrifices, renunciation and penance, our Lord Ram is here," PM Modi remarked and congratulated the citizens on the occasion.

The Prime Minister said that experiencing the divine consciousness inside the Garbh Grih (inner sanctum) cannot be put into words and his body is pulsating with energy and the mind is devoted to the moment of Praan Pratishthaa.

"Our Ram Lalla will not reside in the tent anymore. This divine temple will be his home now," the Prime Minister said expressing confidence and reverence that the events of today can be experienced by Ram Bhakts all around the country and the world.

"This moment is supernatural and sacred, the atmosphere, environment and energy signify the blessings of Lord Ram upon us," Modi said.

"Today, we have received the heritage of centuries of patience, today we have got Shri Ram's temple," the Prime Minister said. He underlined that the nation that breaks the shackles of the mindset of slavery and derives inspiration from the experiences of the past is the one which writes history.

PM Modi said that today's date will be discussed in a thousand years from now and it is by the blessings of Lord Ram that we are a witness to this momentous occasion unfolding itself.

"Days, directions, skies and everything are brimming with divinity today," the Prime Minister said, stating that this is not an ordinary time period but an indelible memory path being imprinted on time.

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## Yogi fortifies UP for historic event

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ AYODHYA

The seamless and secure consecration of Ram Lalla owes much to the strategic vision of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, transforming Ayodhya into an impregnable fortress for the historic event. The city's security, orchestrated under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's watchful eyes, showcased meticulous planning and execution, making it a testament to Yogi's commitment to maintaining law and order.

In a bold declaration, Yogi emphasised the remarkable transformation, saying, "Ayodhya mein pahle goli chalti thi, par ab solar boat chalti hai," highlighting the paradigm shift in the law and order situation under his administration. Commandos, armed with machine guns and AK-47s, stood vigilant throughout the city, overseeing security measures, while an extensive network of CCTV cameras and helicopters enhanced surveillance. Ayodhya's borders were sealed, permitting access only to those with invitations for the praan pratishthaa and



necessary passes. Commandos and vehicles with blaring sirens patrolled the roads, maintaining strict control over the city as the consecration programme unfolded at the Ram

Temple. Simultaneously, Ayodhya witnessed the landing of 60 chartered planes carrying VVIP guests at the new airport.

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## GEMS FOUND FROM GROUND

### IAF mobile hospital saves devotee's life

Ayodhya: In a timely medical intervention, a mobile hospital of the IAF's rapid response team saved a devotee who suffered a heart attack while attending the Praan Pratishthaa event at the Ram temple. A team of BHISHM Cube led by Wing Commander Manish Gupta evacuated him within a minute of the incident and provided on-site treatment, capitalising on the critical golden hour.

### Consecration ceremony takes internet by storm

New Delhi: The people watching Ram Lalla's consecration ceremony on TV with folded hands or Prime Minister Narendra Modi prostrating before the idol during the ceremony are among the many images that took the internet by storm on Monday as netizens greet the devotees of Lord Ram with congratulatory messages.

## Ram pervades universal landscape

SWARN KUMAR ANAND ■ NEW DELHI

In a historic celebration resonating across continents, the consecration of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya transcended geographical boundaries, with countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Denmark, New Zealand, Mexico, Mauritius, Fiji, and others in India's northern and southern neighbourhoods organising events to commemorate this historic

milestone. As the world united in reverence, Ayodhya's praan pratishthaa ceremony became a shared cultural experience, resonating with people of diverse backgrounds and beliefs. Unfolding in an atmosphere of unity and shared respect, it underscored broad-based support across religious and cultural spectra. This tacit backing was evident through the absence of discord and

collective participation in commemorating the occasion, serving as a testament to the inclusive spirit prevailing in India. Muslims refrained from holding any protest rallies, with some even actively celebrating the event. Sending a message of Hindu-Muslim unity, a Muslim woman in Firozabad named her newborn "Ram Rahim".

Therefore, the coverage of the event by the majority of the

global media was generally impartial, except for a few instances where efforts were made to sow discord against the Hindu community. However, the negative narrative that attempted to inject a sense of apprehension and concern among Muslims, suggesting potential tension arising from the inauguration of the Ram temple by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, found no traction given the broader participation abroad to mark the praan pratishthaa in Ayodhya. In Paris, the Ram Mandir inauguration featured a unique Ram Rath Yatra. In Queretaro in Mexico, the first Lord Ram temple received a proud reception on the Ayodhya event day. Devotees and the Indian diaspora

gathered at Times Square, New York, for live-broadcasted prayers, car rallies, and events celebrating Ram Lalla's consecration. Times Square became a central focal point, adorned by images of the Ram Mandir on the NASDAQ screen, with laddoos distributed by the Overseas Friends of Ram Mandir.

In Houston, the Hindus of Greater Houston organised an event uniting members from various countries venerating Lord Ram. Los Angeles hosted a grand car rally.

After the praan pratishthaa ceremony in Ayodhya, the World Hindu Council of America and Vishwa Hindu Parishad of Canada announced a yatra covering over 1,000 temples.

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# Prayers in JK temples to mark praan pratishthaa

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Devotees of Lord Ram here in the city of temples and the Kashmir valley Monday performed special prayers across several historic temples to mark the consecration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. Chants of Jai Shri Ram echoed as religious festivities reached their crescendo ahead of the Pran Pratishtha ceremony at Ayodhya.

Braving cold weather conditions the devotees were seen lined up in large numbers across Mata Vaishno Devi shrine, Shankaracharya temple in Srinagar, and Raghunath temple in Jammu to participate in religious gatherings. Shri Mata Shrine board authorities had decked up the shrine premises in Diwali fervor.

Week-long religious festivities peaked as the city wore a festive look.

King-size posters of the sprawling Ram temple were raised across vantage locations, Jammu city wore a festive look as several markets were decked up with buntings, and saffron flags.



Flower decorations were done along with erecting welcome gates to add color to the festive atmosphere.

Temple premises were decorated with a variety of fresh flowers. Dipped in devotion, jubilant Ram Bhakts were seen preparing 'rangolis' and lighting earthen lamps. Children and women participated in the celebrations in large numbers in nearby temples in several residential colonies.

Similar gatherings were witnessed across a dozen other famous temples of the region including the Sun temple at Mattan in Anantnag and the Hanuman temple in Amarikadal area of Srinagar. At several places, the local authorities and management

committees of religious places had organized special screenings to witness the historic occasion on big screens.

Devout Ram Bhakts also participated in the Bhajan kirtan and Ramayan recitation across several temples. In the evening, thousands of devotees light up diyas to mark the momentous occasion. The skyline was filled with colorful fireworks. Elaborate security arrangements were made across the city to prevent any untoward incident. The devotees were served refreshments and prasad across community kitchens/special langars organised to celebrate the consecration ceremony.

# Ayodhya celebrations echo in Maharashtra

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra on Monday reverberated to the events that unfolded in Ayodhya leading up to the historic consecration of Ram Mandir, with scenes of joy, traditional pomp, gaiety and enthusiasm, as the people across Mumbai and elsewhere in Mumbai took out processions, chanted prayers, hymns, organised special pujas, rang temple bells hailing Lord Rama, sprayed gulal, burst crackers and distributed 'Prasad' and "Maha prasad" among devotees.

Mumbaikars and their counterparts in cities like Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur, Thane, Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar (Aurangabad) and Nashik woke up to an unprecedented festive atmosphere, as thousands of temples, religious institutions and hundreds of housing complexes and societies across the metropolis organised special pujas for Lord Ram to celebrate the Pran Pratishthan' of Lord Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

Decorated with flowers and



beautified with rangolis, the temples and Hindu religious places came alive, as priests chanted mantras, hymns, performed 'havans' 'Maha aartis' and offered prayers to Lord Ram to commemorate the restoration of legacy of Lord Ram in Ayodhya after 500-long years.

Several leading temples had put up LED screens for the live telecast of the events taking place in Ayodhya. The temple authorities also

distributed 'prasad' and 'maha-prasad' (meal) for the thousands of devotees visiting their premises to offer prayers.

Given that Mumbai has several Ram temples, devotees thronged leading Ram Mandirs like the ones at Walkeshwar, Borivli, Goregaon, Vile Parle, Dadar and Wadala all through the day.

There are hundreds of Ram temples in Mumbai, but a few

stand out for their unique history, traditions and the sentiments of devotees, including the Ram Mandirs in Borivali, Goregaon, Vile Parle, Dadar, Wadala, Bhuleshwar, or Walkeshwar, which witnessed massive crowds since early today.

With the Maharashtra government having declared a holiday to mark the consecration of Ram Mandir, lakhs of people visited nearby temple to offer prayers to Lord and celebrated the occasion by taking part enthusiastically organised in their housing complexes and localities.

Ahead of the consecration of Ram Mandir, many temples had initiated a special cleanliness drive, led by the Chief Minister Eknath Shinde in the past few weeks. As per the chief minister's directive, each day, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) had undertaken cleaning and sprucing up of major temples in each of the 24 civic wards in the metropolis in the run-up to the Ram temple 'Pran Pratishthan'.

# Bhagwat arrives in Kolkata



PNS ■ KOLKATA

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat was visiting Bengal on a three-day trip whence he would pay homage to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose on his 127th birth day on Tuesday besides attending a marriage ceremony and holding some important organisational meetings, sources said.

This is his second visit in the past one month as Bhagwat had visited Kolkata last year in the month of December when he attended the Gita Paath ceremony.

The RSS chief's visit to Kolkata just after the inauguration of the Ram Temple Ayodhya assumes importance in view of the upcoming general elections scheduled to take place in a few months from now.

# Uddhav visits Nashik temple for maha aarti



TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Having skipped the Ram temple consecration ceremony held in Ayodhya, Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Monday offered prayers and performed "maha aarti" at the historic Kalaram temple at Nashik in north Maharashtra.

Accompanied by his wife Rashmi and son Aaditya Thackeray, Uddhav visited the Kalaram temple and offered prayers to Lord Ram on the occasion of consecration of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. He also performed a 'maha aarti' on the bank of Godavari river at Nashik.

Uddhav, who is on a two-day visit to Nashik, will launch the campaign of Shiv Sena (UBT) for the Lok Sabha polls at the grape city on Balasaheb

Thackeray's birth anniversary on Tuesday.

Ahead of his LS election rally that he will address immediately after the state conference of Sena (UBT), Uddhav paid tributes to late Veer Savarkar at the latter's memorial at Bangur in Nashik district.

He also went around Savarkar's memorial where the rare photographs of the late freedom fighter have been displayed.

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, as Veer Savarkar was known for most part of his life, was born on May 28, 1883 in Bhagur village of Nashik district where he spent his childhood days..Savarkar has written in detail about his birthplace Bhagur and Savarkar Wada in his autobiography 'My Memories- Bhagur'.

# Golden crown adorning Ram Lalla at Ayodhya made in Surat

PTI ■ SURAT

A gold jewelled crown with precious stones adorning the Ram Lalla idol at the new temple in Ayodhya and two silver replicas of the shrine were precious gifts from Gujarat's Surat that shone at the consecration ceremony led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday, people familiar with the matter said.

The silver replicas of the majestic temple weighing 3 kgs, which were gifted by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to Modi and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) head Mohan Bhagwat after the 'pran pratishtha' (consecration) ceremony in Ayodhya, were made by a Surat jeweller. The new Ram Lalla idol was consecrated at the Ayodhya temple in an event led by PM Modi and watched by lakhs of people on television at their homes and in temples across the country.

Modi took part in the 'pran pratishtha' rituals in the presence of Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel, Adityanath and Bhagwat. Surat-based industrialist Mukesh Patel, who heads Greenlab Diamonds, gifted a Rs 11-crore golden crown for the Lord Ram idol which is embedded with precious stones and weighs 6 kgs.

The silver temple replicas weighing 3 kgs were built by Surat's D Khushaldas



Jewellers around four months ago when the date of consecration of the idol at the Lord Ram temple was announced, said its owner Deepak Chokshi.

"Surat is famous for gold, silver and diamond, and the two silver temple replicas prepared by D Khushalbhai Jewellers were gifted to PM Modi and Bhagwatji. Four months back, we had met (UP CM) Yogi with the temple model, and he suggested that we install Ram Lalla in the temple model and make some other changes," Chokshi said.

He said it took artisans three-and-a-half months to prepare the two models and the miniature temples have been made from handicraft.

The golden crown for Ram Lalla made with gold and precious stone, and gifted to the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra — the Ayodhya temple trust — was made by Surat-based Greenlab Diamonds, national treasurer of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Dinesh Navdia said. Two employees from the Surat firm were sent to Ayodhya by a plane on January 5 to measure the head of the Ram Lalla idol to prepare the crown accordingly, Navadia said.

The golden crown consists of four-and-a-half kgs of the yellow metal. Small and big size diamonds, rubies, pearls and sapphires, among other precious stones, have been embedded in it, the makers said. Industrialist Patel gifted the Rs 11-crore crown to the temple trust members for it to adorn the idol of Ram Lalla which was consecrated amid rituals at an elaborate ceremony in the Uttar Pradesh town, Navadia said.

# Ram Temple Trust unveils guidelines for Ramopasana

PNS ■ AYODHYA

The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust has released detailed worship guidelines of Ram Lalla after the consecration ceremony and they will come into effect from January 23.

The guidelines have been named Shri Ramopasana.

Trust general secretary Champat Rai has outlined the procedures, providing insight into the intricate preparations and rituals that will form the daily routine at this revered temple. The worship rituals are set to commence promptly at 3 am each morning, marking the beginning of a day devoted to spiritual practices. Ram Lalla will 'wake up' at 4 o'clock, initiating a sequence of sacred observances.

The tradition of performing aarti five times a day, established in the temple's past, will be continued in the future also. As per the prescribed code, Ram Lalla will be offered fruits and milk at hourly intervals, underscoring a continuous engagement in divine rituals.

"The temple gates will remain open for devotees from 8 am to 10 pm every day. In

anticipation of an influx of devotees post the Pran Pratishtha ceremony, the temple management is contemplating extending the darshan duration to 14-15 hours," Rai said.

Ram Temple priest Satyendra Das said that Ram Lalla would wear dress of different colour corresponding to the day of the week. "The tradition dating back to 1949 when Shri Ram Lalla first appeared will continue even in his new abode," Das said.

Ram Lalla will don white attire on Monday, red on Tuesday, green on Wednesday, yellow on Thursday, light yellow or cream on Friday, blue on Saturday and pink on Sunday. The new 'Balroop' idol, a significant addition to the temple, will don clothes prepared on handloom by the Heritage and Handweaving Revival Charitable Trust of Pune. As many as 10-15 lakh artisans from across the country have contributed to the weaving process.

The chief priest said that following the completion of Pran Pratishtha ceremony on January 23, the temple will enter a phase of purification, worship and embellishment

# New kaal chakra...

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Speaking about the presence of Lord Hanuman in every work of Shri Ram, the Prime Minister bowed to Hanuman and Hanuman Garhi. He also bowed to Lakshman, Bharat, Shatrughan and Mata Janki. He acknowledged the presence of divine entities over the event. On the occasion Prime Minister apologised to Lord Ram for the delay in seeing today's day and said that as today that vacuum has been filled, surely, Shri Ram will forgive us.

Recalling, Sant Tulsidas's return of Shri Ram in 'Treta Yug', the Prime Minister recalled the happiness that Ayodhya of the time must have felt.

"Then the separation with Shri Ram lasted for 14 years and was still so unbearable. In this age Ayodhya and the countrymen suffered the separation of hundreds of years", he said.

Modi continued, despite Shri Ram being present in the original copy of the Constitution, a prolonged legal battle was fought after the independence. The Prime Minister thanked the Judiciary of India for "keeping the dignity of justice intact. Embodiment of justice, Shri Ram's temple was constructed through just means, he emphasised.

The Prime Minister informed that the entire nation, including small villages, is witnessing processions and cleanliness campaigns are being carried out in temples. "The entire nation is celebrating Diwali today.

Every household is prepared to light up the 'Ram Jyoti' in the evening," Modi said.

Recalling his visit to Arichal Munai, the starting point of Ram Setu a day earlier , the Prime Minister said that it was the moment which altered the Kaal Chakra. Drawing an analogy to that moment, the Prime Minister said that he got the belief that today's moment will also be the one to alter the circle of time and move forward.

Modi informed that during his 11-day anushthan, he attempted to bow before all the places where Lord Ram had set foot. Mentioning Pancwati Dham in Nashik, Thriprayar Temple in Kerala, Lepakshi in Andhra Pradesh, Shri Ranganathswamy Temple in Srirangam, Shri Rameswaram and Dhanushkodi, the Prime Minister expressed gratitude for the journey from the sea to river Sarayu.

"From the sea to the Sarayu river, the same festive spirit of Ram's name is prevalent everywhere", he continued, "Lord Ram is connected to every particle of the soul of India. Ram resides in the hearts of Indians".

He added that the feeling of oneness can be found within everyone's conscience anywhere in India and there could not be a more perfect formula for collectiveness.

Recalling his experience of listening to Shri Ram Katha in many languages, the Prime Minister said that Ram is there in the memories, festivals of traditions. "In every age, people have

lived Ram. They have expressed Ram in their style and words. This 'Ram Ras' is continuously flowing like the flow of life. Ram Katha is infinite and Ramayan too is endless. Ideals, values and teachings of Ran are the same everywhere".

The Prime Minister expressed gratitude for the sacrifice of the people who made today's day possible. He paid tributes to Saints, Kar Sewaks and Ram Bhakts.

The Prime Minister said, "Today's occasion is not only a moment of celebration, but at the same time it is also a moment of realization of the maturity of Indian society. For us, this is not only an occasion of victory but also of humility."

Explaining the knots of history, the Prime Minister pointed out that the outcome of a nation's struggle with its history is seldom happy. "Still", he said "the gravity and sensitivity with which our country has opened this knot of history shows that our future is going to be much more beautiful than our past".

Remembering the doomsayers, the Prime Minister said that such people did not realize the piousness of our social ethos. "The construction of this temple of Ramlala is also a symbol of peace, patience, mutual harmony and coordination of Indian society. We are seeing that this construction is not giving birth to any fire, but to energy. Ram Mandir has brought inspiration to every section of the society to move forward on the path of a bright future", he said.

# Modi announces launch of solar power scheme to light up one crore homes

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Asserting that the Ram temple ceremony in Ayodhya strengthened his resolve to have rooftop solar systems at people's houses, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday announced the launch of a scheme under which one crore homes will have this power source.

"I have taken my first decision after returning from Ayodhya that our government will launch 'Pradhan Mantri Suryoday Yojna' with the aim to install

rooftop solar systems in one crore houses," Modi said on X. He posted pictures of him discussing the scheme with officials here following his return from Ayodhya where he attended the consecration ceremony.

Devotees across the world always draw energy from the light of "suryavanshi" Lord Ram, he said.

The scheme, he said, will not only reduce the electricity bill of the poor and the middle class but will also make India self-reliant in the energy sector.

# Yogi fortifies UP for historic event

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After disembarkation, these planes were strategically parked within a 1000-kilometre range at airports across five States. To address the limited parking capacity in Ayodhya, reserved spaces were allocated at 12 airports in UP, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttarakhand.

From a security standpoint, Ayodhya was divided into 10 zones and 26 sectors, with the Ram Mandir, Hanuman Garhi, and Saryu Ghat collectively forming the Super Zone. This Super Zone implemented heightened security protocols, incorporating stringent measures such as crash-rated

bollards, under-vehicle scanners, tire killers, and boom barriers to prevent any suspicious items from reaching the Ram temple.

Special teams, including STF and ATS commandos, were strategically deployed to manage and oversee these security devices. Recognising that visitors to Ayodhya often extended their visits to Saryu Ghat and Hanumangarhi, both areas were included in the Super Zone, fortified by a 7-layer security setup.

Aerial surveillance, conducted using helicopters, closely monitored the temple premises, with strict restrictions imposed on drones, airplanes, or choppers passing over the temple.

# Ram pervades...

From Page 1

In New Zealand, Indian communities led processions symbolising Lord Ram's arrival in Ayodhya. In Trinidad and Tobago, 5,000 individuals joyously sang popular Ram songs at cultural events. Mauritian Prime Minister Pravind Kumar Jugnauth granted a special leave for two hours to Hindu public servants for prayers marking this "landmark" inauguration. In Fiji, the Ram Lalla Utsav from January 18-22 commemorated the inauguration with fervour, organised by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and Shree Sanatan Dharm Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji.

Even in Denmark, devotees joyfully danced at a local temple preceding the Ayodhya event. The global resonance of this historic event, marked by diverse celebrations and displays of devotion, reflects the unity of communities honouring Lord Ram's consecration.

# RAM RETURNS TO AYODHYA AFTER A FIVE CENTURY...

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Later, Modi moved to another location in the complex to address a gathering of about 8,000, including sadhus, individuals associated with the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, and celebrities from fields like entertainment, sports, and industry. As soon as the PM left, the temple was thrown open to these invitees. Hundreds rushed in the garbha griha.

The PM also visited the Kuber Tila shrine, unveiled a statue of the Ramayana figure Jatayu, and showered petals.

The first phase of the temple, built by a trust, has so far cost Rs 1,100 crore. It is expected

to open to the public on Tuesday. The new idol depicts Ram at the age of five and was carved from black stone by Mysuru-based sculptor Arun Yagiraj. Fifty traditional musical instruments from across the country were part of a devotional 'mangal dhvani' that resonated during the ceremony. Orchestrated by Ayodhya's celebrated poet Yatindra Mishra, the rendition was supported by New Delhi's Sangeet Natak Akademi, as reported exclusively by The Pioneer last week.

'Ramdhun' played in the streets from early morning as security personnel kept a tight vigil across the Ayodhya

districts. Religious fervor gripped Ayodhya, and the city wore a festive look. Chants of 'Jai Shri Ram' and traditional songs extolling Lord Ram were heard playing on loudspeakers at every corner. A band from the Uttar Pradesh Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) played tunes such as 'Ram Aayenge,' 'Sare Jahan se Achha,' 'Raghu pati Raghav Raja Ram,' and others.

Devotees arrived from several parts of the country to the temple town to be part of the occasion, though the main ceremony was only for the invitees. Lakhs of people watched the 'pran pratishtha' ceremony on television at

their homes and in neighborhood temples, becoming part of the historic event held just months ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. Ceremonial gates depicting 'Jai Shri Ram' in floral patterns and illumination visible at night added to the aura of the ancient city, which has undergone massive infrastructural growth in the last couple of years. The invitees were presented a 'Ram patka' and welcomed with 'tilak.' All invitees were given a bell which they rang during the 'aarti.'

The Ram Janmabhoomi Mandir has been constructed in the traditional Nagara style. Its east-west length is

380 feet, width 250 feet, and height 161 feet. It is supported by 392 pillars and has 44 doors.

The pillars and walls showcase intricately sculpted depictions of Hindu deities. The consecration rituals began from the Sarayu river banks on January 16 and were completed Monday afternoon.

Temples across the country had announced special festivities as several states declared a half-day holiday. From Washington DC and Paris to Sydney, events were planned in various parts of the world by the Vishva Hindu Parishad, or the Hindu Diaspora.



# City immerses in devotion on praan pratishthaa day

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Lord Ram posters dotting the city, saffron flags with the deity's picture everywhere, devotional songs blaring through loudspeakers and special screens live-telecasting the Ram Lalla 'pran pratishtha' from Ayodhya! Delhi was drenched in the devotion of Lord Ram on Monday. There was a Diwali like atmosphere as many residential societies, temples and markets across the national capital were decorated with special lights and flower patterns while chants of 'Jai Shri Ram' rent the air as people held Sundarkand recitals, took out rallies and organised 'bhandara' . Priests performed puja at decked-up temples, while

'havans' were also held at several places on the occasion. Over 25 lakh diyas were lit in 700 markets across the capital city. In the evening, people lit diyas (earthen lamps) at their homes and burst firecrackers to celebrate the consecration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. Markets were illuminated with diyas in different formations of words like Ram, Om and swastika symbol. People in the religious processions danced to devotional songs. Arrangements were made for special prayers in temples across the national capital. With demand skyrocketing, the prices of saffron flags, Lord Ram posters and photos have gone up. The new idol of Ram Lalla was



Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

consecrated at the newly constructed temple here amid grand celebrations in the temple town, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi participating in the rituals. At the heart of Delhi -- Connaught Place -- the bustling hub of commercial and leisure activities, arrangements were made to show the live telecast of the 'pran pratishtha' ceremony from Ayodhya. There was a "bhajan-kirtan" programme with a playlist curated by five DJs. An 11-kg laddoo was offered to Lord Ram. Chamber Of Trade and Industry (CTI), one of the leading organisations of traders and industrialists in Delhi, said special programmes were organised in small and large 700 markets of

Pitampura, Connaught Place, Karol Bagh, Rajouri Garden and Tilak Nagar. CTI Chairman Brijesh Goyal said there was a Diwali-like atmosphere in the markets across the national capital. "There was an atmosphere of joy and happiness in markets. Traders distributed sweets at many places. Sunderkand recitals were organised. People took out Shobha Yatras and burst crackers. In many areas, music bands also performed," Goyal said. Amit Gupta, joint secretary of the New Delhi Traders' Association, said the celebrations in Connaught Place commenced at 11 am. There is a "bhajan-kirtan" programme with a playlist curated by five DJs. An 11-kg laddoo was

offered to Lord Ram. Gupta said they will light up diyas at the inner circle of Connaught Place. Rakesh Kumar Yadav, president of Sadar Bazar Trade Association, said, "Puja and aarti have been completed, and 'dhol' was played. Bhandara prasad was also distributed among the devotees." The temples in the city performed special puja and aarti. The offered food through bhandaras while people were seen donating winter clothes. The Shri Sidh Shakti Peeth Shanidham Mandir at Asola installed its own idol of lord Ram. "We have installed an idol of Lord Ram in the temple coinciding with Ayodhya's idol installation ceremony," it said.

## From Kashmir to Kanyakumari crores celebrate: Traders body

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

From Kashmir to Kanyakumari, over one lakh Jai Shri Ram programmes were held on the day of the consecration of Ram Mandir on Monday as per a data shared by the traders' bodies. More than 30,000 business organizations across the country organized over 50,000 programs in their respective markets to express joy and enthusiasm for the consecration of the Shri Ram Mandir. These events involve the recitation of Shri Sundarkand to the singing of Shri Hanuman Chalisa to live telecast of the consecration of ram mandir ceremony from Ayodhya. According to Praveen Khandelwal, secretary general of the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT), as per initial reports, more than one lakh programmes were held in the cuntry, involving the recitation of Shri Sundarkand to the singing of Shri Hanuman Chalisa to live telecast of the consecration of ram mandir ceremony from Ayodhya. "It is estimated that 10,000 LED screens were set up by business organizations across the coun-



try. Moreover, more than 50,000 locations organized recitations of Sundarkand, Hanuman Chalisa, and kirtans. Around 10,000 musical events featuring Shri Ram songs and bhajans took place, along with 5,000 Shri Ram

processions and 25,000 bhandaras organized by traders nationwide", Khandelwal said. "From Kashmir to Kanyakumari, every city has been colored in the hue of Ayodhya. The entire country, by lighting millions of lamps,

celebrated Diwali and expressed faith and devotion towards Lord Ram," he added. In Delhi alone, all major markets and bazaars were illuminated. Over 2,000 bhandaras are set up in Delhi today, and more than 500 markets have

installed LED screens to broadcast live coverage from Ayodhya, connecting traders and citizens directly with the proceedings. In Connaught Place, the New Delhi Traders Association illuminated one lakh twenty-five thousand diyas together, while elaborate arrangements for lighting lamps on a large scale are in place across all markets in Delhi to celebrate a grand Diwali. According to traders' a total business is estimated over Rs 1.25 lakh crore so far. Leading multiplex chain PVR INOX on Monday said the live broadcast of the consecration ceremony of the Ram temple in its theatres had over 70 per cent occupancy. "The live broadcast in cinemas conducted in association with Aaj Tak received an overwhelming response with over 70 percent occupancy with people across all age groups and communities choosing to witness the auspicious occasion on the big screen. We are glad that audiences appreciated our endeavour coming out in huge numbers to be part of the celebration inside our cinemas," Gautam Dutta, Co-CEO, PVR INOX Ltd, said in a statement.



A 51-foot tall idol of Lord Hanuman unveiled at Prachin Sidh Hanuman Mandir, Geeta Colony area, on the occasion of Praan Pratishthaa of Ayodhya's Ram Mandir, in New Delhi on Monday

## People from all walks of life celebrate Ayodhya event



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

People from various walks of life including residents and college students celebrated the auspicious occasion of the Ayodhya Ram temple consecration ceremony on Monday with much fervor and devotion by organising 'havans', lighting diyas, 'bhandaras' and Sundarkand recitals. The 'Pran Pratishtha' of the new idol of Ram Lalla was done at the temple in Uttar Pradesh in the event led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. At Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), students participated in a 'shobha yatra' while 'Havans' and 'bhandaras' were also organised at the university's hostels. Similarly, to mark the occasion, a recital of the Hanuman Chalisa was held at the Delhi University by the Arundhati Vashishtha Anusandhan Peeth and Jigyasa DU. The peeth, a research organisation, was founded by late Vishva Hindu Parishad leader Ashok Singhal. In a statement, the organisations said the programme to mark the 'Pran Pratishtha' was organised at the campus of the Arts Faculty of the Delhi University. "Several teachers from the Muslim community were also present at the pro-

gramme and participated in the recitation of the Hanuman Chalisa," it said. Students participated in large numbers, the national media convenor of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-affiliate ABVP, Ashutosh Singh, said. "We also lit 2.5 lakh 'diyas' (earthen lamps) from the Vishwa Vidyalaya Metro Station to the Hansraj College," he said. Madhuban Enclave, IAS Officers Colony, East Delhi organized mega festivities which included lighting of 11,000 diyas, a cultural program, and Sunderkand Path. The program was attended by Sh. Om Prakash Sharma, MLA, Vishwas Nagar, East Delhi, and Sh. Ramesh Garg, Counsellor, Preet Vihar, East Delhi among others. At Civil Lines, the residents said that major roads are being illuminated with diyas while the Mukherjee Nagar RWA had an elaborate arrangements organised by the Bal Sri Ram Leela Committee and Mukherjee Nagar Dusehra Committee, featuring 51,000 diyas, Ram and Hanuman hoardings, kirtan, rangoli and the gathering of devotees. Similarly, residents of Madhuban enclave IAS Officers Colony, East Delhi organized mega festivities

which included lighting of 11,000 diyas, a cultural program, and Sunderkand Path and Bhajan Sandhya by Prem Mehra (T-Series Fame). Harish Seth, President, Madhuban Mandir Samiti, said, "I have been serving the Madhuban Mandir Samiti since 1980, and it gives me immense joy to witness the resurrection of the holy Ram Mandir in Ayodhya ji." The program was attended by Om Prakash Sharma and Ramesh Garg, MLA, Vishwas Nagar, and Counsellor, Preet Vihar respectively from East Delhi. In a testament to the enduring cultural richness of the Ramayana, we also organized a religious procession from their Colony to a nearby Shiva Temple chanting Hanuman Chalisa and name of the Ram God with great enthusiasm and devotion, said Anil Kumar, Treasurer of the RWA, Pocket F Mayur Vihar Phase II, East Delhi. In Greater Noida West's Casa Woodstock Society in Gaur City 1 township, the residents also joined millions of residents in praying in glory of the God Ram and organized Sunderkand at the community Hall of the premises, said Vidit Goel and Ravi Bhushan, the residents and organizers of the event.

## PM, other BJP leaders light diyas in their homes



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari, and several other BJP leaders lit 'diyas' (lamps) at their residence on Monday following the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya. The prime minister has urged citizens to light the 'Ram Jyoti' on the auspicious occasion and welcome Ram Lalla. Modi took to X to share photos lighting a 'diya' in front of a photograph of the Ram statue from the Ayodhya temple at his official 7, Lok Kalyan Marg residence. The prime minister had urged the devotees to light 'Ram Jyoti' at home and celebrate a 'mini Diwali' to mark the consecration ceremony. The defence minister also shared photographs on X lighting a 'Ram Jyoti' at his residence. "Today Ram Lalla is seated in his new, divine and grand temple in Ayodhya Dham. The whole country is celebrating Diwali. On this auspicious occasion, lighting a 'Ram Jyoti' at home with family," Singh said. Gadkari was joined at his residence by the students from a school for hearing impaired children, who participated in the prayers with the minister and his family.

## Praan Pratishthaa ceremony takes internet by storm, netizens congratulate devotees

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The people watching Ram Lalla's consecration ceremony on TV with folded hands or Prime Minister Narendra Modi prostrating before the idol during the ceremony are among the many images that took the internet by storm on Monday as netizens greet the devotees of Lord Ram with congratulatory messages on what many say is a 'historic day'. The new Ram Lalla idol was consecrated at the Ayodhya temple on Monday. It was led by Prime Minister Modi and watched by lakhs of people on television at their homes and in temples across the country. The religious fervour and festive atmosphere that gripped the temple town of Ayodhya was visible on social media platforms too as the Ram temple -- including prominent figures attending the grand launch event -- trended on X. The people across religions, geographies and social identities joined in to celebrate this historic event, touted to be a seminal occasion in India's political and religious history. "Congrats Bharat! Today is a very proud day for India... The new temple looks like a marvel of art and beauty. It promises to stand as a symbol of the new India - proud of its history and heritage, rapidly developing, ready to be a major power in the 21st century," tweeted United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) former executive director Erik Solheim. "I sense a different energy everywhere leading up to this day of Ram Mandir inauguration. And it's so nice to see this. I hope everything goes perfectly today, and the values of Lord Ram bless everyone with happiness and growth," said Shahzeb Khan in his post on X. "The wait of 500 years has come to an end. And my moth-



er is feeling blessed, happy and emotional that Pran Pratishthaa of Shri Ram Mandir is taking place on her Birthday. For us, her birthday will always be special for generations to come," tweeted handle @BHKslams. While Modi took part in the 'pran pratishtha' rituals in the presence of Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat; senior BJP leaders, including party chief J P Nadda and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, watched the live streaming of the ceremony. The other prominent figures, who attended the mega event included actors Amitabh Bachchan, Ranbir Kapoor, Alia Bhatt, Vicky Kaushal, Katrina Kaif, former cricketer Sachin Tendulkar, and industrialists Mukesh Ambani and Anil Ambani. Many people on the occasion also congratulated Prime Minister Modi for ascending Ram Lalla to his 'rightful throne'.

"Love him or hate him, Indian Civilization will never forget Narendra Modi for next 5000 years. He has become immortal. Ram Lalla ascends to his rightful throne as PM Modi performs Pran Pratishtha," read a tweet by Deepak Kumar. Another post, tweeted by handle @imzyan07, purportedly shows PM Modi addressing a rally in 1990s, read: "A temple for Ram in Ayodhya is not just a dream of the BJP. An expression of Pm Modi's soul-melting devotion can be seen in his heart-melting tears for the Ram Temple at a rally held in 1992." Besides visuals of the newly constructed Ram temple in Ayodhya, many people also shared visuals of the Indian diaspora celebrating the 'pran pratishtha' ceremony in foreign lands -- be it lighting up the iconic New York's Times Square with Lord Ram's illustration or the one of devotees' chanting 'Jai Shri Ram' at the iconic Eiffel Tower in Paris. Several BJP-run states had declared the day a holiday to allow the people to watch the ceremony on TV and also take part in events at neighbourhood temples. That said, not everyone shared the same sense of euphoria or elation over the 'pran pratishtha' ceremony and in fact said the celebration is not about divinity but one of

"intimidation and humiliation of the minority community". "Never forget how it started. A criminal act of vandalism is turned into a national celebration. This celebration is not about divinity. It's about intimidation and humiliation of the minority community. The degeneration of India is complete. #RamMandir #BabriMasjid," tweeted Gaurish. In another post, Ankur Mishra, who describes himself as an advocate at the Delhi High Court, said he apologises to all his brothers and sisters who follow other religions in the country. "Whatever is happening, is breaking the secular fabric of India, politicisation of religion and serious threat to the integrity of India. I pray for my India," said Mishra in his post on X. The 16th century Babri mosque, which many Hindus believe was constructed on the site of Lord Ram's birthplace, was demolished by the kar sevaks on December 6, 1992. After a protracted legal battle, the Supreme Court in November 2019 ruled in favour of the construction of the temple. It also ordered allotment of a five-acre plot for the construction of a mosque.



# Ram Temple to attract crores of devotees annually

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The grand opening of the Ram temple in Ayodhya may help the town attract at least 50 million tourist a year — higher than religious tourism hotspots of Golden Temple and Tirupati Temple — as massive spend on infrastructure such as airports will put the once out-of-the-way town in Uttar Pradesh on the tourism circuit.

Temple tourism in India is set to get a major boost after the inauguration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. At least 100 million people are expected to visit the Ram temple in Ayodhya, every year, according to Jefferies analysts. In comparison, about 9 million people visit the Vatican city which is home to the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church. About 20 million people visit Mecca, the holy place for Muslims.

Brokerage Jefferies in a report estimates that a USD 10 billion makeover of Ayodhya with a new airport, revamped railway station, township and improved road connectivity will likely drive a multiplier effect with new hotels and other economic activities. It “could attract 50 million+ tourists a year”.

Golden Temple in Amritsar gets an estimated 30-35 million footfalls a year while

Tirupati temple sees 25-30 million visits. Globally, Vatican city gets around 9 million tourists every year and Mecca in Saudi Arabia around 20 million.

“Religious tourism is still the biggest segment of tourism in India,” according to Jefferies. “Several popular religious centres attract annual tourist traffic of 10-30 million despite the existing infrastructural bottlenecks. And hence, the creation of a new religious tourist centre (Ayodhya) with improved connectivity and infrastructure can create a meaningfully large economic impact.”

Tourism contributed USD 194 billion to FY19 (pre-



Covid) GDP and is expected to grow at an 8 per cent CAGR to USD 443 billion by FY33, it said, adding tourism to GDP ratio in India at 6.8 per cent of GDP is below most of the large emerg-

ing/developed economies; which are higher by 3-5 percentage points.

Stating that Ayodhya could be a template for India's tourism boost, it said Rs 85,000 crore (USD 10 billion)

makeover is set to transform the ancient city from a sleepy town to a global religious and spiritual tourist hotspot.

“Tourism is projected to surge and increase economic and religious migration to Ayodhya, multiple sectors stand to benefit, including hotels, airlines, hospitality, FMCG, travel ancillaries, cement etc,” the brokerage said.

Phase 1 of a new airport at Ayodhya has become operational and can handle 1 million passengers. Additional domestic capacity and an international terminal is expected by 2025 with a capacity to handle 6 million passengers. Railway station

has been upgraded to double the capacity to 60,000 passengers per day. A 1,200-acre greenfield township is being planned and road connectivity is being beefed up as well.

At present Ayodhya has around 17 hotels with 590 rooms. 73 new hotels are in the pipeline, of which 40 are already under construction. While Indian Hotels, Marriott and Wyndham have already signed deals for hotels, ITC is exploring opportunities in Ayodhya. Oyo plans to add 1,000 hotel rooms in Ayodhya.

Jefferies said India offers geographical variety, diversity, culture, heritage sites and a treasure trove of art, music

and cuisines to make it a popular global tourist destination. And the temple at Ayodhya will only help unlock tourism potential of India, which has distinct advantages — ranked 7th most beautiful country by Forbes in 2022, home for 42 Unesco World Heritage sites, one of only three countries in the world to have both hot and cold deserts and ranked 10th in the Medical Tourism Index. The report notes that currently India generates \$200 billion (7% of India's economy) in revenue from tourism. The Indian Government's financial support to pilgrimage sites in the country is set to boost tourism in a major way.

## BJP leaders watch consecration live in Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Top BJP leaders, including party chief JP Nadda, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, watched live streaming of the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya and joined festivities at different in the national capital on Monday morning. BJP leaders, including Union ministers also hailed Prime Minister Narendra Modi after consecration of Ram Lalla idol at the newly built temple in Ayodhya and said it was an “unforgettable day” for Ram devotees.

Nadda, accompanied by Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva and party leaders, was present at the Jhandewalan Temple here while Shah, along with Union Minister Meenakshi Lekhi and other BJP leaders, were present at Lakshmi Narayan Temple, also known as Birla Temple. They offered prayers at these temples on the occasion.

Rajnath Singh offered prayer at Shri Sanatan Dharma Mandir at Daryaganj. Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw participated in Special Pooja at Jagannath Temple in the Hauz Khas area of Delhi. Vaishnaw watched the live proceedings of the Pran Pratistha ceremony on a big screen installed at the temple with hundreds of people. Hardeep Singh Puri, also watched the live streaming of the ceremony and took part in special prayers held at different



parts of the city. In a post on X, Shah has said that with the completion of the resolution of consecration of Ram Lalla in the Ram temple in Ayodhya, the wait and promise of 5 centuries has been fulfilled today. “Jai Shri Ram. The wait and resolve of five centuries was fulfilled today. It is an unforgettable day for the crores of Ram devotees today,” Home Minister Amit Shah said in a post on X after the event. He said many gen-

erations passed waiting for this moment but “no fear and terror could shake the resolve and faith to build the temple again at Ram Janmabhoomi (birthplace of Lord Ram)”.

“Today, this resolve stands fulfilled under the leadership of Honorable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. For this, I express my gratitude to him from the bottom of my heart,” Shah added. The home minister further said, “Today, when our Ram Lalla was seated in his

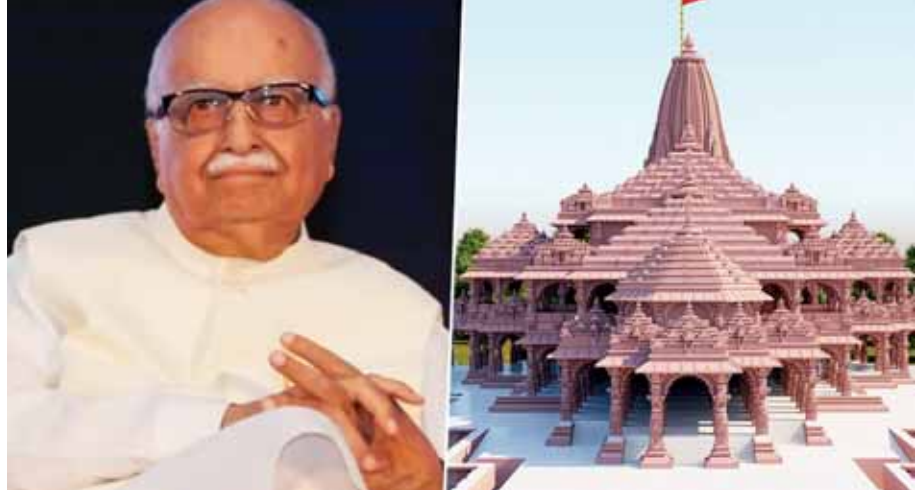
grand temple, I too was overwhelmed with emotions like countless Ram devotees. It is not possible to capture this feeling in words.

He added that the struggle of Vishwa Hindu Parishad, thousands of great saints and innumerable known and unknown people has yielded a pleasant and successful result today. Shri Shah said that this huge Ram Janmabhoomi temple will remain a unique symbol of the eternal and imperishable Sanatan culture for ages. The new Ram Lalla idol was consecrated at the Ayodhya temple on Monday, an event led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and watched by lakhs of people on television at their homes and in temples across the country. Modi took part in the ‘pran pratistha’ rituals in the presence of Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh described the event in Ayodhya as a “revolutionary work” and said those who witnessed this moment are fortunate. “This is a revolutionary work happening,” Singh told reporters here. “Everyone feels that a new era is beginning. As a result of Ram Lalla's Pran Pratistha, we all are feeling that after a long time, Maryada Purushottam Ram is returning again to Ayodhya,” he added. Singh said the ‘pran pratistha’ of Ram Lalla's idol in Ayodhya is a matter of great joy “for all of us”.

“We all are fortunate that we are getting the opportunity to witness the moment,” he said, adding, “Our prime minister has started a new era. And, he has the blessings of Lord Ram.” In his remarks, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said the soul of a civilisation found expression “once again” with the ‘pran pratistha’ of Ram Lalla's idol at his temple in Ayodhya. “At the Pran Pratistha ceremony today, the soul of a civilisation finds expression once again. And the message of virtue, honour, justice and commitment reverberates around the world,” Jaishankar wrote on X. BJP chief J P Nadda called it an “emotional sacred moment” and said Prime Minister Modi installed the idol of ‘prabhu’ (Ram Lalla) fulfilling his duties, following 11-day “strict rituals”.

“It's an emotional sacred moment today after more than 500 years of continuous struggle. Lord Shri Ram Lalla has been consecrated in the ‘dharma nagri’ of Shri Ayodhyadham as per the rituals. It is the utmost fortunate moment for our generation that we are witness to this moment,” he wrote on X. On this occasion, Nadda also gave a call to people to dedicate their lives to the ideals and life values ??of Lord Ram and to the country's society and culture as well. “Come, let us all dedicate ourselves to the ideals and life values ??of Bhagwan Shri Ram as well as to the society and culture,” he said.



## LK Advani, the man who promised this day, could not be there

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Veteran Bharatiya Janata Party leader and former Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani stayed away from the pran pratistha ceremony of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, citing the extreme cold conditions in north India. Advani is now 96.

The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra had reportedly told him and his colleague, Murli Manohar Joshi, not to attend the January 22 ceremony. However, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad then made a show of inviting the two senior BJP leaders.

The 96-year-old BJP veteran's appearance was met with much skepticism. The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra, or Ram Mandir trust, has pre-

viously stated that LK Advani and his senior party colleague Murli Manohar Joshi are unlikely to attend the ‘Praan Pratistha’ owing to their health and age.

Earlier this month, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad announced that it had invited BJP heavyweights Lal Krishna Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi to attend the Ram Temple's consecration event. The decision came after an uproar over Ram Temple Trust general secretary Champat Rai's comment that both leaders were ‘requested’ not to attend the event due to their advanced age.

“Invited respected Lal Krishna Advani ji and respected Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi ji, the pioneer of Ram Mandir movement, to attend the Praan

Pratistha programme of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya on 22 January 2024,” said the right wing outfit in a post on X after BJP suffered backlash following Rai's statement.

“Both the seniors said they will make every effort to come,” said Alok Kumar, VHP's International Executive President. Previously, Champat Rai told reporters, “Both are elders of the family and considering their age, they were requested not to come, which was accepted by both.” Earlier on January 12, Advani said that destiny had decided that a grand temple of Lord Ram would be built in Ayodhya and it chose Prime Minister Narendra Modi for this. He stated this in an article ‘Ram Mandir Nirman, Ek Divya Swapna Ki Purti’.

# Prominent faces visible in Ayodhya on historic day





# Offerings from across the nation pour into Ayodhya

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■**  
AYODHYA

In a touching demonstration of devotion and collective spirit, Ayodhya is adorned with gifts from every corner of the country, marking the consecration of the magnificent Shri Ram temple. Among the standout offerings are:

**JALESAR RESONANCE: A 2,100 KILOGRAM BELL**

A colossal 2,100 kilogram Ashtadhatu bell, hailing from Jalesar, Etah, Uttar Pradesh, now proudly stands as the largest bell in the temple complex. This monumental creation, constructed over four years at a cost of Rs 25 lakh, reaches a height of six feet and spans five feet in width. The bell's reverberations are expected to travel far and wide, creating an enchanting melody that captivates all who listen.

**UJJAIN SENDS FIVE LAKH LADDUS**

Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, joins the celebration by sending a sweet offering of five lakh laddus. Acting on the directive of State Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav, these delectable treats are meticulously crafted at the Mahakaleshwar temple complex's laddu prasad



manufacturing unit. Composed of pure desi ghee and an assortment of dry fruits, these mouthwatering laddus, weighing around 250 quintals, add a sweet touch to the auspicious occasion.

**CHHATTISGARH SENDS RICE**

Chhattisgarh, the maternal

birthplace of Lord Ram, plays an active role in the grand ceremony. On December 30, 2023, the state dispatched 3,000 quintals of rice, a collective effort from all 33 districts. This rice, including premium varieties, played a crucial role in the Mahabhandara of Lord Shri Ram on January 22. Addition-

nally, the state contributed 100 tonnes of vegetables to enhance the elaborate preparations.

**RAJASTHAN SENDS MUSTARD OIL**

From the heartland of Rajasthan, 2100 casks of mustard oil embark on a journey to Ayodhya for the



consecration ceremony. Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma flagged off the yatra, underlining the significance of this aromatic contribution. This mustard oil, sourced from diverse regions across the country, will play a pivotal role in preparing the Prasad for the devotees visiting Ramlala.

**GUJARAT OFFERS INCENSE STICKS AND SAREES**

Vadodara, Gujarat, contributes to the grandeur with a 108-feet-long incense stick, crafted from a blend of desi cow dung, ghee, and aromatic herbs. Weighing 3,610 kilogram, this colossal incense stick is set to burn for one and a half months,

diffusing its fragrant aroma up to 50 km. Additionally, a special saree from Surat, embellished with a Ram Temple-themed necklace made of 5,000 American diamonds and two kg of silver, is generously gifted to the Ram Mandir Trust by a benevolent diamond merchant.

**MAHARASHTRA SENDS RAM HALWA**

Chef Vishnu Manohar from Nagpur contributes a culinary delight to the festivities — 7,000 kilogram of 'Ram Halwa.' This sweet treat promises to be a gastronomic delight for those attending the Pran Pratistha ceremony.



## Bihar sees special prayers, processions

**PTI ■ PATNA**

Special prayers at various temples were held and processions were taken out in Bihar's capital Patna on Monday as part of the celebrations of the Ram Mandir consecration in Ayodhya. Temples have been decorated with flowers, while thousands of 'diyas' would be lit up in the evening to mark the occasion. Women devotees of Lord Ram with religious flags started 'kirtan' (devotional songs) at the Hanuman Mandir in Priyadarshi Nagar on Bailey Road here while Sri Krishna Pranami Temple took out a religious procession with many people carrying 'Kalash'. As many as 108 women devotees hit the street carrying the Ramayana on their heads, temple convener Sukhdev Pranami said. A replica of the Ayodhya temple has been displayed near Dak Bunglow Chowk in Patna where 'Sri Ramnavami Shobhayatra Abhinandan

Samiti' organised a daylong programme on Sunday. Talking to reporters, samiti convener and former Bihar minister Nitin Nabin said, "Altogether 51,000 diyas would be lit up around Dak Bunglow Chowk in the evening on Monday." The function is expected to be attended by several high-profile dignitaries including, Bihar Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar. ISKCON temple at Patna will also light up 1.25 lakh diyas to mark the historic occasion at Ayodhya, its spokesperson Nand Gopal Das said. Eight tonnes of flowers were brought in from different states for decoration of the temple, he said. In the evening, tableaux of Lord Ram, Goddess Sita, Lord Hanuman and others would be taken out, he said. "Ramjyoti Utsav will be celebrated at the Panchmukhi Hanuman Temple on Nehru Path (Bailey Road) on Monday evening," Union Minister Nityanand Rai told reporters here.

## Hymns, verses reverberate in Kerala temples

**PTI ■ THRISSUR/KOTTAYAM (KERALA)**

Hymns, verses and songs about Lord Ram reverberated in temples, including the Tripprayar Sree Ramaswamy temple in Thrissur district that was visited by Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently, across the state on Monday on the occasion of Ram Temple consecration at Ayodhya. Kerala Governor Arif Mohamed Khan and BJP leaders in the state visited various temples on the occasion. Khan offered prayers at the Ramadevi Temple in Vazhuthacaud in the state capital while BJP state

president K Surendran paid tribute at the Sree Ramaswamy Temple at Ramapuram in Kottayam district. BJP's Kerala in-charge Prakash Javadekar offered prayers at Ganesh Mandir in Wayanad district along with NDA's state convener Tushar Vellappally. Celebrations were held in temples connected with Ramayana across the southern state. People turned up at the Tripprayar temple early in the morning and performed various rituals and made offerings to Lord Ram there, the temple's melsanthi (head priest) told TV channels. The Tripprayar Sree Ramaswamy temple, situated on the bank of the Karuvannur



river also known as the Theevra river, is dedicated to Lord Ram, the seventh avatar of Lord Vishnu, depicted with four arms holding a conch, a discus, a bow, and a garland. The temple is renowned for the Nalambalam yatra — a pilgrimage to the abodes of

Lord Ram and his brothers Bharat, Lakshman, and Shatrughan — and worshipping at all these temples on a single day in the Malayalam month of Karkidakam is considered auspicious, drawing many devotees.

'Meen oottu' (fish feeding) is one of the main and popular offerings at this temple. The Sree Ramaswamy Temple at Ramapuram in Kottayam is also one of four temples in Kerala's southern Kottayam district where the deities are the four sons of King Dasaratha of Ramayana. The Ramapuram Sree Ramaswamy Temple, Koodappulam Sree Lakshmanaswamy Temple, Amanakara Sree Bharathaswamy Temple and Methiri Sree Sathrugnaswamy Temple, together referred to as the 'Nalambalam' (four temples), are centered close to each in a three kilometer radius of Ramapuram in Kottayam.



## Celebrations organised across Karnataka coast

**PTI ■ MANGALURU**

The 'Pran Pratistha' of Ram Lalla idol in Ayodhya was celebrated by devotees across the coastal areas of Karnataka on Monday. Devotees thronged temples in Dakshina Kannada conducting pujas. Special pujas are being offered at various shrines including Kateel Sri Durgaparameshwari temple, Polali Sri Rajarajeshwari temple and Kudroli Sri Gokarnanatha temple. Special arrangements have also been made to watch the live telecast of the 'Prana Pratistha' at various places in the district including temples. Dharmasthala dharmadhikari D Veerendra Heggade MP, RSS leader Kalladka Prabhakar Bhat and VHP leader M B Puranik are among those who have already left for Ayodhya from the district to take part in the ceremony. In Udupi Sri Krishna mutt, special prayers were offered at the Lord Krishna temple on the auspicious day. 'Suvarna Kavacha Alankara Seve' was offered to Lord Krishna at the Krishna mutt.

## Mathura celebrates Ram return to his birthplace

**PTI ■ MATHURA (UP)**

From Sunder Kand recitals to sand art decorations, the consecration ceremony at Ayodhya's Ram temple is being celebrated with great fervour here with over 700 temples decked up to mark the occasion. All major intersections of Mathura, home to the Krishna Janmasthan Temple, have been decorated and 'bhandaras' (community kitchen) have been set up in many parts of the city. At the Radha-Krishna mandir inside the temple complex, the idols were given the appearance of Lord Ram and Sita, said Kapil Sharma, secretary of Shri Krishna Janmabhoomi Seva Sansthan. The idol of Lord Krishna at the Banke Bihari Temple held a bow and arrow, besides the standard flute, in a nod to the 'pran pratistha' of 'Ram Lalla' in Ayodhya.



Thakur Dwarkadhish Temple has been decorated with lights and lamps would be donated in the evening. 'Prasad' was distributed at the temple from 10 am to 11 am. Sunder Kand recitals were held and

devotees sang songs in the morning at the Keshavdev Temple, which was festooned for the occasion. The Govardhan intersection (Atal Chowk) drew a huge crowd for a sand art of Ram temple - the creation of

artist Sameer from Jhansi. At Deorha Ghat and Kanha Gaushala, sand art of the temple and Lord Ram were created by artists from Odisha using sand from the Yamuna, said Gopal Vashishtha, tax inspector at the Vrindavan office of the municipal corporation. Customers have been swarming the markets for the past two days. Earthen lamps, other lighting devices, flags etc. Have been sold in abundance. A 'deepotsav' will be held at Devraha Baba Ghat at 4 pm while various cultural programmes have been planned at Jugl Ghat, which has been bedecked with a 'rangoli' made with 500 kg flowers, said a senior district administration official. District Magistrate Shailendra Kumar Singh and Senior Superintendent of Police Shailesh Kumar Pandey said that consecration ceremony-related events are being organised in about 700 temples in the district.

## Shinde plays dhol

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Monday celebrated the consecration of the new idol of Ram Lalla at the Ayodhya temple by playing 'dhol' along with his party workers in Thane. The idol was consecrated at the Ram temple in Uttar Pradesh's Ayodhya city on Monday, an event led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and watched by lakhs of people on television at their homes and in temples across the country. Fifty traditional musical instruments from across the country were part of a devotional 'Mangal Dhvani' that resonated during the consecration ceremony. After the ceremony in Ayodhya, Shinde and his party workers assembled at an open space near the Kopineshwar temple in Mumbai's neighbouring Thane city, the political turf of the chief minister, where he played the 'dhol' (a percussion instrument) to celebrate the occasion. Speaking to reporters later, Shinde said a 500-year-old dream to have a grand Ram Temple in Ayodhya has finally come true. "It was the dream of Balasaheb Thackeray and millions of Ram devotees. During kar seva, Anand Dighe (Shinde's mentor) led us and he even donated a silver brick for the construction of the temple. The Ram Temple is a matter of faith and prayers and not politics," Shinde said. He said some opposition parties used to taunt that 'mandir wahi banayenge par tareekh nahi batayenge' (we will build the temple there but will not reveal the date) but Prime Minister



Narendra Modi set the date and the temple is now open for devotees. "Today's day must be written in gold. When Lord Ram went on exile, he first came to Nashik. The teak used in the temple is from Maharashtra," he added. The CM will also participate in a 'shobha yatra' in the evening from Shivaji Park in Dadar to Bhoiwada Ram Mandir in Lower Parel area of Mumbai, a distance of nearly five kilometres. The CM on Sunday said he plans to take his cabinet as well as MLAs and Lok Sabha members from the state for 'darshan' to the Ram Temple in Ayodhya later and, hence, was not attending the idol consecration ceremony in the Uttar Pradesh city. Ahead of Monday's ceremony, Shinde had given instructions to officials to carry out a cleanliness drive in temples and also decorate them with lights.

## Arunachal soaks in religious fervour

**PTI ■ ITANAGAR**

Arunachal Pradesh on Monday soaked in religious fervour on the occasion of the consecration ceremony at the newly constructed Ram temple in Ayodhya, with special prayers and rallies organised in various parts of the northeastern state, an official said. In the state capital, markets were closed voluntarily to witness the historic occasion. A large number of private schools in the state also declared a holiday for the occasion, the official added. Capital SP Rohit Rajbir Singh told PTI that adequate security personnel were deployed to maintain law and order.



ceremony from Ayodhya, which was attended by senior BJP leaders, ministers and MLAs. Union Earth Sciences Minister Kiren Rijiju witnessed the historic event at the Northeast Regional Institute of Science & Technology (NERIST) campus at Nirjuli, Chief Minister Pema Khandu at Lower Dibang Valley, Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein at Namsai and BJP state president Biyuram Wahge at the party office here.

## Rajasthan in festive mood

**PTI ■ JAIPUR**

The entire Rajasthan was in a festive mood on Monday for the consecration of the Ram Lalla idol in Ayodhya with temples and houses decked up with flowers, saffron flags and lights while people exchanged wishes on the occasion. Religious events were



organised across the state with bhajan, kirtan and Ramayan recitation performed in temples in many places. Processions were also taken

out at different places, including Jaipur. Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma reached Dehlawas Balaji temple on Shyampur Pratap Nagar road and Prem Mandir in Pratap Nagar to offer prayers there. He is scheduled to visit Salasar Balaji temple in Churu and Khatu Shyamji temple in Sikar later in the day.

## Goa celebrates Ayodhya resurgence

**PTI ■ PANAJI**

Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Monday said the consecration of the Ram Lalla idol at the Ayodhya temple is a moment of civilizational resurgence and renaissance in the country. The new idol was consecrated at the Ram temple in Ayodhya city of Uttar Pradesh on Monday, an event led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and watched by lakhs of people on television at their homes and in temples across the country. Army helicopters showered flower petals on the newly constructed Janmabhoomi temple as the 'pran pratistha' ceremony took place - a seminal occasion in India's political and religious history. Sawant in a post on X said the 'pran pratistha' of Shri Ram Lalla it is a joyous and proud moment. "It is moment of civilizational resurgence, civilizational renaissance in the country. It is a moment of fulfillment of

promise, pledge to Mandir Vahin Banaenge!" he said. "On this occasion I remember and pay tributes to all the Karsevaks, and all those who contributed to make the dream come true. I extend my best wishes. Jai Shri Ram! #RamLallaVirajma #RamMandirPranPratistha," the CM said. In the morning, Sawant visited the Shree Rudreshwar Temple at Harvalem in North Goa district where he and his wife offered prayers. A group of people from Sankhalim, the assembly constituency represented by Sawant, also accompanied the CM during the prayers. The chief minister also visited the Shri Dev Chandreshwar Temple at Kothambi, his ancestral village in Bicholim taluka of North Goa. As part of the Ram temple consecration celebrations, the CM on Saturday visited Sanvordem village in South Goa where the Bajrang Dal is creating a large portrait of Lord Ram from 50,000 dice.



## In a chokehold

Home Minister Amit Shah aims to root out the scourge of Naxalism within the next three years

Home Minister Amit Shah has declared a bold and comprehensive plan to financially cripple and eliminate Naxals within three years. Naxal insurgency, also commonly called Maoist insurgency, continues to pose a significant threat to the nation's internal security, and has plagued several States for decades. The affected regions primarily include Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha and parts of Maharashtra, among others. The Naxalites, inspired by Maoist ideology, aimed to establish a communist State through armed struggle, often targeting security forces and Government institutions. The conflict has led to several challenges, including loss of lives, displacement of communities and hindrance to development. On the other hand, several cases have been reported where innocent villagers were harassed on the notion that they were helping insurgents. Though the Minister's statement is welcome, it falls short of detailing the comprehensive plan; it is more of a tactical operation which may get some quick results but may not eliminate the root cause of the problem. The situation in many of the above-mentioned States is deplorable. Besides crop failure leading to farmer suicides, very few avenues for employment and abject poverty worsen the situation in these areas. The Naxals exploit the socio-economic vulnerabilities of tribal communities and establish their parallel rule. The outlaws strategically align themselves with the grievances of these marginalised groups, advocating for their rights while simultaneously using them as foot soldiers. The lack of access to education, healthcare and employment opportunities creates a fertile ground for recruitment by Naxal cadres, besides land



disputes and resource exploitation. The Home Minister's three-year plan to financially choke and eliminate Naxals, though a good starting point, does not take into account the root causes. Naxalism can be eliminated only when the reasons that offer a fertile ground to Naxals are eliminated. Thus, the Government would do well to address the socio-economic disparities in Naxal-affected regions through targeted development initiatives. This includes improving infrastructure, providing quality education and healthcare, and ensuring access to basic amenities. By addressing the root causes of discontent, the Government can hope to undercut the appeal of Naxal ideology. Simultaneously, there has to be increased focus on security operations to neutralise Naxal cadres. Shah has rightly emphasised the importance of intelligence-led operations to minimise collateral damage and ensure civilian safety. Indeed, the Government cutting off the financial lifelines of Naxals can be effective. This includes cracking down on illicit activities such as extortion, illegal mining and smuggling. Disrupting their financial network is a crucial step in weakening the Naxal infrastructure. It would, of course, need strong political will. We will have to wait and watch how effectively the Government walks the talk or whether it is one of those election promises which are quickly forgotten.



Gathering during the consecration ceremony at the Ram Mandir, in Ayodhya

## Congress inner circle in turmoil

To win the 2024 elections, Rahul Gandhi needs to review his strategy, select the right people to work with and build strong leaders in each state

Is Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's judgement coming under scrutiny? The critics wonder whether he promoted aides who ultimately betrayed him and the Congress. The recent departure of former minister Milind Deora has shrunk his inner circle, leaving only a few close aides who remain loyal. It's worth noting that the BJP has welcomed many aides who have left Congress and even encouraged some to defect from the Party. I Why have Rahul Gandhi's friends joined other political parties recently? The simple answer was that they were disenchanted with the Congress and its leaders.

It is important to remember that wise advisers are crucial for the success of any leader. Rajiv and Rahul had similar political and personal experiences, and both started their political careers on a high note. However, Rajiv's political education came from learning on the job. Four years after entering politics, Rajiv became the Prime Minister due to unforeseen circumstances. While he was out of power, Rajiv learned his political lessons well. Rahul is still learning. In 1989, Rajiv Gandhi was targeted by his political opponents through negative campaigning, leading to his political downfall. Several notable members, including Arun Nehru, Arun Singh, V.P. Singh, and Amitabh Bachchan, left Rajiv's team during this period. Rajiv's trusted friends were from the Doon School, collectively known as the Dosco team. Rahul's team of image makers put much effort into presenting him as a capable leader. He is credited with creative solutions to address issues related to religion, caste, and economy and to bring India together towards progress. However, the BJP attempted to present him as an inept and entitled leader who lacked vision and could not lead the country towards prosperity. They often called him 'pappu' to reinforce this negative perception. Frustrated with the continuous electoral losses, most of Rahul's inner circle sought greener pastures. They belonged to influential political dynasties and were ambitious. They were in a hurry



to take over from the old guard. After enjoying power, most of his handpicked team left. For instance, Jyotiraditya Scindia, a close friend of Rahul Gandhi, was disappointed when the Congress leadership did not appoint him as the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh after the 2018 Assembly polls. As a result, he played a significant role in toppling the Madhya Pradesh government, eventually leading to the establishing of the BJP government two years ago. Scindia was offered a ministerial position in the Centre for his support. Recently, Jitin Prasad has joined the Yogi government in Uttar Pradesh. At the same time, Kapil Sibal, Alpesh Thakur, and R.P.N. Singh have all moved to different parties. Moreover, Ghulam Nabi Azad has ended his relationship with Congress due to his dissatisfaction with Rahul Gandhi's leadership. Captain Amarinder Singh left the Congress Party in Punjab and established a new political party. Sunil Jakhar, another prominent Congress leader, has also left. Twenty-three leaders challenged the Congress Party's leadership



THOUGH RAJIV AND RAHUL SHARED SIMILAR POLITICAL AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AND STARTED WELL IN POLITICS, RAJIV LEARNED ON THE JOB

after the 2019 general elections when the Party lost. There is a growing dissatisfaction over the departure of some of Rahul's close aides. Rahul had previously promoted them as ministers in the Manmohan Singh government. He later gave them higher positions within the Party. Some even held positions in the Congress Working Committee, which usually requires years of dedication. Congress lost power in the 2014 and 2019 elections, and they may only be able to secure at most 100 seats in the upcoming 2024 election. Fearing for their future, they cannot afford to spend another five years without being in power. Rahul's inner circle started exploring other options. They were not disappointed as they got tempting offers from the BJP. Though Rajiv and Rahul shared similar political and personal experiences and started well in politics, Rajiv learned on the job. Tragic circumstances made Rajiv Prime Minister four years after entering politics. Rajiv learned his political lessons well while he was out of power. His misguided advisors and political inexperience marred Rajiv's good

intentions. The Sri Lanka Peace Accord failed, and the decision to send the IPKF was catastrophic. He was assassinated in Tamil Nadu as a result. In the past 20 years, Rahul's growth could be more impressive. He has been handed powerful positions without seeking them. With Congress President Mallikharj Kharge being a mere figurehead and his mother, Sonia Gandhi, taking a back seat, Rahul has complete control over appointing crucial personnel to important positions within the Congress. To win the 2024 elections, Rahul Gandhi needs to review his strategy, select the right people to work with and build strong leaders in each state. His ongoing Bharat Nyay Yatra is an effective way to connect with voters, just like his previous Bharat Jodi Yatra did. The most important thing is to get the voters to the polling booth. Rahul must learn from past experiences, make necessary changes promptly, earn the trust of Congress workers and coalition partners, and, above all, find a new narrative. *(The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)*

## India Maldives ties: Turbulence in paradise

A recent series of reckless events, triggered by political shifts in the Maldives, has cast shadows over the long-standing friendship

In the realm of idyllic beaches, where nations often showcase international camaraderie, a storm is brewing in the relationship between India and the Maldives. The Maldives, renowned globally for its pristine beaches, finds itself in the midst of a development surge on Lakshadweep, leaving India looking on with a touch of envy. This sentiment encapsulates the current India-Maldives controversy, shedding light on a relationship that has historically been characterized by mutual support and collaboration. India has long been a key contributor to the Maldives' tourism industry, constituting nearly 11.8% of the market share in 2023. The two nations share a history of mutual assistance, exemplified during the 2004 Tsunami when India was the first to extend a helping hand. In the domain of security, joint defense exercises such as Ekuverin, Dosti, Ekatha, and Operation Shield underline the strategic partnership between the two nations. Both India and the Maldives play pivotal roles in securing the Indian Ocean region,



aligning with the broader SAGAR vision. Notably, a 2021 agreement named Uthuru Thila Falhu signifies their joint commitment to developing the National Defence Force Coast Guard Harbour. India's support extends beyond tourism and security, encompassing infrastructure development in health and education. India is a consistent pillar of support for the Maldives, evident in the ongoing Greater Male Development Project and the Hanimaadhoo International Airport Development initiative. In 2022, the National College for Policing and Law Enforcement (NCPL) was inaugurated in the Maldives by the Indian External Affairs Minister, solidifying their commitment to education and institutional development.

However, the harmony in India-Maldives ties has recently hit a rough patch, coinciding with the election of the Maldives' new president. President Muizzu's "India Out" campaign has raised concerns, particularly as he broke tradition by visiting Turkey and China before New Delhi. The president's persistence in pressuring India to evacuate military personnel and the Maldives' participation in China's One Belt One Road initiative have strained relations further. The controversy took an unexpected turn when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's social media posts promoting Lakshadweep tourism inadvertently triggered an international dispute. The posts, highlighting domestic tourism and economic development, lacked any explicit mention of India-Maldives friendship. In response, three Maldivian deputy ministers labeled Prime Minister Modi as a 'clown' and made derogatory remarks about India. The fallout resulted in the suspension of these ministers and the emergence of the '#BoycottMaldives' hashtag

on Indian social media platforms. This digital backlash took a toll on Maldives' tourism industry, with reports of canceled trips and a shift in focus by tour and travel companies from Maldives to Lakshadweep. The ripple effect reached the hotel industry, with numerous cancellations reported on popular booking platforms. As the region witnesses multiple elections this year, India faces the imperative of safeguarding the fundamental framework of bilateral ties and regional stability. The Quad's Blue Dot initiative offers a potential counterbalance to China's One Belt One Road, requiring coordination with stakeholders like the United States and Australia in the Indian Ocean region for trade and defense purposes. In this evolving scenario, maintaining consistency in international relations and diplomatic finesse becomes paramount for India to navigate the stormy waters of the India-Maldives controversy. *(The writer is lecturer of law at Sanskriti University; views are personal)*



SHAMBHAVI TIWARI

### SPIRITUAL TOURISM

Sir — Religion is a way of life in India, given its rich and varied pantheon of diverse personal belief systems in the form of Jainism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, etc. However, over the years, the widespread tendency has been to view it solely from a narrow perspective, overlooking the country's intrinsic and historical value and the fact that several travellers make a beeline for these sites due to their varied cultural traits and symbolic significance. Moreover, India has a peculiar civilizational unity amidst deep-rooted diversity. If popular cities like Rome's St. Basilica in Vatican City, Mecca Medina, Kaaba, U.A.E., Dubai, etc., can have world-class facilities, there is no reason why India, with a plethora of religious cities like Sanchi, Kashi, Ajmer, Sarnath, Mathura, Ujjain, Haridwar, Prayagraj, to name a few, cannot provide its visitors with rich and fulfilling experiences. Ayodhya's USD 85,000 crore infrastructural investment fuels India's religion-based tourism, offering immense potential for employment and socio-economic growth. As the consecration of Ram's idol approaches, Ayodhya, the ancient capital, strides into the 21st century, fulfilling the dreams of millions. This transformation promises to elevate Indian tourism, addressing material needs and delivering profound spiritual experiences.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital

### GLOBAL CONFLICTS

Sir — We do not brush up on history. Do we recall that the WWI had a very modest beginning in the assassination of the Archduke of Austria by Serbian nationalists, in June 1914? Austria then invaded Serbia, Germany invaded Belgium & Luxembourg, France & Russia attacked Germany and within weeks the major powers were at war. Post WW I, the political and economic instability in Germany following the unequal demands on it made by the Allied powers in the Treaty of Versailles spawned Adolf Hitler who rearmed Germany. His

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Rapid Urbanisation



India is a developing country. It is rapidly expanding its infrastructure and other developmental projects. The number of cities is growing in India and India is experiencing rapid urbanisation. Urbanization is the process by which towns and cities are formed and become larger. The rapid urbanisation brings infrastructural developments and clearing up greeneries which led to serious global and micro level climate change. An increase in urban population,

city expansion, and change in vegetation cover can pose serious threats to climate change. It is leading up to a rise in temperature and an increase in the frequency of natural calamities and many more it is observed from the studies that the warming of cities is more due to the local activities. The warming is due to the trapping by the concrete and asphalt materials used to build the city. The decreased evapotranspiration due to the replacement of natural surfaces with artificial impervious is also contributing to the warming of the environment. These unsustainable changes will have a disastrous impact on society. Building climate-resilient cities that will be sustainable and environmentally friendly is the need of an hour. To ensure the health, safety, and comfort of all, it is necessary to adopt specific science-driven planning for urbanization.

Deba Prasad Nayak | Dhenkanal

alliances with Italy and Japan triggered WW II, with his invasion of Poland on Sept. 1, 1939. Ongoing conflicts worldwide, such as the enduring Ukraine war and escalating tensions in Gaza, along with persistent turmoil in Syria, Lebanon, and the wider West Asia region, signify a concerning global trend. New flashpoints, exemplified by Pakistan and Iran, add to the growing list. The Taiwan issue, akin to a simmering volcano, poses unpredictable risks. Regrettably, the UN, ostensibly a global peacekeeper, appears ineffective, reduced to bureaucratic rituals, vague resolutions, and rhetorical exercises. Its potential to restore global sanity seems compromised, leaving it as a mere decorative emblem in the face of mounting global challenges.

R Narayanan | Mumbai

#### MANIPUR STATEHOOD DAY

Sir — Prime Minister Modi extended his wishes to the residents of Manipur on its statehood day. However, he faced criticism from opposition leaders who condemned his failure to visit the state amidst the ongoing

ing ethnic violence that erupted on May 3, 2023, between the Valley-majority Meiteis and hill-majority Nagas and Kukis, constituting 40% of the population. Despite the severity of the situation, the Prime Minister not only refrained from visiting Manipur but also neglected to directly address the issue with Chief Minister Nongthombam Biren Singh, opting instead to delegate the responsibility. In contrast to his handling of the Gujarat carnage, where Modi cleared the Special Investigation Team (SIT) and the court, the Manipur ethnic violence, resulting in the loss of hundreds of lives, highlights a perceived failure on Modi's part as the Prime Minister to exercise effective control. There is a hopeful expectation that, following the consecration of Rama's plan, Prime Minister Modi will adopt a more proactive and decisive approach to address the issues in Manipur and restore peace to the state.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

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FIRST COLUMN

EMBRACING A SIMPLE AND HAPPY LIFE

Embrace happiness by transcending societal expectations and self-discovery



RAVI VALLURI

The promos of an upcoming television serial were being aired incessantly by a TV channel. The plot seemed to revolve around a young girl hailing from a family of bureaucrats, jurists, and police officers, among others, who merely wished to be 'happy'. Her academic performance was way below par, verging on failure. When confronted about her plans by an unsettled family, she retorted by saying that her only desire in life was to be 'simply happy'.

A person assumes the human form and arrives on planet Earth. He or she grows up and gets educated, then the family and the individual in question are in pursuit of a high-ranking job. On securing the job the person is married off into as pretentious a family as possible and soon begets children. Surely enough, he plans for the upbringing of the offspring and their future....

This perennial cycle continues in an undisturbed manner. Whenever questioned as to when he/she would choose to be happy, the answer is that upon the successful completion of the next task or event in the sequence, he/she would unfailingly find time to seek happiness.

Contrast this with the emotions of a child, who is happy every moment, be it the prattle or jibber-jabber, winking at the mother or devouring a piece of chocolate with relish. The child is in the present moment and with gay abandon enjoys every moment of life. That is why it is surmised to be childlike and not childish in your approach to life. A child-like attitude symbolizes innocence while being childish signifies arrogance.

A Zen Master would be often accompanied by his pet dog on his evening stroll. The Master would throw a stick and point to it for the dog to fetch, which it did routinely. One evening the Master invited his brightest tutee to join him. The student was always doleful and gloom-ridden. He was confronted with what he perceived to be contradictions in the teachings of Buddhist doctrine.

The teacher compassionately explained that words are mere signposts and symbols for the seeker. They should not act as a roadblock to the spiritual progress and happiness of the student. To illustrate the point, the Master asked the dog to fetch the moon shining in the sky. The dog merely looked at the Master's finger, and the teacher explained that the spiritual progress and happiness of the canine were limited to certain symbols, whereas the mentee needed to transcend the symbols and discover the eternal truth, which is nothing but happiness. To be in a cheery state, an individual should eschew misery from his cognitive framework of mind.

Humans who wish to be happy should share their moments of happiness and joy and not their woebegone moments. By the law of nature and the universe, happiness would grow manifold. Sharing gloom only magnifies despondency among the individual and people surrounding him. Over time, he would become a loner, lost and friendless.

Individuals as a habit realize that negative moments in life are infinitesimal in comparison with the problems confronting the world. And say by undertaking acts of service, people can overcome their gloom-ridden moments. Enlightened Masters emphasize that performing service transforms our inner self, which deepens the quality of meditation. And meditation leads to contentment and increased joy.

Individuals need to take full responsibility for their actions and inaction too. Taking up responsibility empowers us and ignites the spark of happiness and joy and remain happy. "Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony," rightly said the Mahatma.

*(Ravi Valluri is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. and is a faculty of the Art of Living, views are personal)*

# Silent guardians of the forests

Tree bark suffers the first injury inflicted by a human axe as it attempts to harm its species in the name of development

In our previous article, we delved into the fascinating phenomenon of leaf orientation and the intriguing features of branches and trees while responding to their microenvironment. Now let us cast a spotlight on the often overlooked yet incredibly vital component of trees - the bark. Amidst the rustling leaves and towering trees, it stands quiet, not as spectacular as the vibrant flowers of spring or as commanding as the sprawling branches reaching for the sky. Tree bark, however, unveils itself to the keen observer as a masterpiece of nature's ingenuity, serving as a crucial player in the intricate dance of the forest ecosystem. It goes far beyond its appearance, performing a myriad of functions vital for the survival and growth of its arboreal host as well as that of humans. At the forefront of its responsibilities, bark acts as a robust shield against the constant threat of aphids, fungi, and bacteria. These relentless organisms are always on the prowl, seeking to plunder the tree's bountiful treasures of sugar, cellulose, lignin, water, and an array of valuable minerals. A detailed examination shows that the tree's protective bark is, in fact, a fortress wall, akin to a securely locked door, staunchly guarding the tree's cherished reserves against would-be invaders. Interestingly, many trees have evolved unique adaptations within their bark, for example, acacia trees have unique stipular spines to deter browsers, honey locust trees employ long thorns on their bark to save themselves from herbivores, white-bark pine trees have bark rich in resin and chemicals that keep insects and fungal pathogens at bay, and semal or silk cotton tree has tough thorns to protect it from damage against potential predators. The battle for survival in the forest takes on a fascinating strategic dimension, where each tree's bark is a testament to its evolutionary prowess.

The protective prowess of tree bark extends beyond defending against biological threats; it also serves as a resilient shield against various physical challenges like fire, ultraviolet rays, and harsh weather conditions. Beyond its protective role, it also regulates temperature, preventing the tree from overheating in summer and freezing in winter. Remarkably, some bark can even photosynthesize, providing nourishment to the trees when leaves are absent. Some species of eucalyptus trees possess thick, fire-resistant bark; the cork oak tree features a unique bark structure that offers protection against ultraviolet rays; the peeling bark of paperback maple tree not only provides insulation against extreme temperatures but also regulates the tree's temperature, preventing overheating in summer and providing warmth in winter; and the Pacific madrone exhibits bark capable of photosynthesis. When one zooms out to encompass the broader ecological tapestry, the role of tree bark as a water reservoir also emerges as a pivotal element in the symphony of the forest ecosystem. This vital function is exemplified by various tree species like the thick, fibrous bark of redwood trees serving as an effective water reservoir; paper birch tree's bark aiding in maintaining soil moisture, and transformation of stored water within the bark into vapour providing a natural defence mechanism for the living tissues. Trees,



THE TREE'S BARK, AKIN TO A LIVING CANVAS, BEARS THE INDELIBLE IMPRINTS OF ITS SURROUNDINGS. ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS SUCH AS TEMPERATURE, MOISTURE AND SUNLIGHT EXERT PROFOUND INFLUENCES ON THE BARK

as vibrant living entities, necessitate a unique breathing mechanism facilitated by specialized structures known as lenticels. These microscopic pores, derived from stomata, play a crucial role in the exchange of gases between the tree and the atmosphere. The Banyan tree showcases distinctive lenticels on its greyish-brown bark, appearing like white dot-like formations. Some eucalyptus species boast a reddish-brown bark adorned with dark line-like lenticels. Further, the jamun tree's smooth, dark bark is complemented by light spot-like lenticels, and the sal tree, with its rough, scaly bark, features yellow dot-like lenticels. One can easily appreciate that bark not only contributes to the tree's individuality but also adds to the rich biodiversity of the surrounding environment.

Coming closer, the colour, texture, and smell of the bark convey valuable details about the tree's health, age, and species. Additionally, chemical signals, such as pheromones, emitted by the bark, play a role in attracting or repelling other organisms, contributing to the overall biodiversity of the forest. The richness of diversity within tree bark extends beyond the realm of lenticels to encompass a spectrum of characteristics. One can study, for instance, the eucalyptus tree adorned with its distinctive smooth, white, peeling bark. This unique feature unfolds as the tree's wood surpasses the bark's capacity, prompting it to gracefully shed.

The result is not only an individualized appearance but also a survival strategy: the peeling bark aids in reflecting sunlight, keeping the tree cool, and minimizing water loss—an invaluable adaptation in arid climates. The Dalbergia, Arjun, and peepal

trees stand out for their resilience. Cloaked in thick, rough bark that becomes more fissured with age, these trees weave a tale of endurance. The fissures in their bark serve dual purposes, acting as havens for diverse organisms like insects and fungi, thus fostering the tree's ecosystem and promoting biodiversity. Beyond this, the fissures increase the tree's surface area, potentially enhancing its capacity to gather essential resources like moisture and nutrients.

The robust, rough, and fissured bark additionally acts as a formidable shield, safeguarding the tree against a myriad of environmental stresses. The appearance of a tree's bark undergoes a discernible transformation influenced by its age. In its youth, a tree boasts thin, smooth, and light-coloured bark. However, as the years advance, the bark evolves, becoming thicker, rougher, darker, and acquiring ridges. This metamorphosis results from the accumulation of dead cells and secondary metabolites, forming a protective layer that shields the tree from environmental stresses.

This ageing process is prominent observed in trees like the ash, celebrated for its bark characterized by deep ridges and furrows. For specific species, observing the status of bark can reveal its growth rate too. Trees with a faster growth pace tend to exhibit thicker bark, often enriched with more cork—a testament to their robust and vigorous expansion in the natural tapestry. The intricate interplay between age, growth rate, and bark characteristics unveils the dynamic journey of a tree, narrating the story of its resilience and adaptability over time. The tree's bark, akin to a living canvas, bears the indelible imprints of its surroundings.

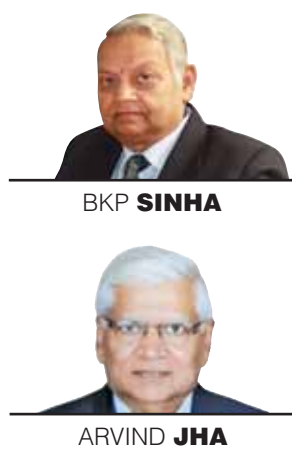
Environmental factors such as temperature, moisture, sunlight, and fire exert profound influences on the bark, notably shaping its colour through effects on pigment production and determining its texture.

Barks yield useful items like tannin, medicines like aspirin from willow bark, spices and flavourings, herbal remedies, natural fibres, essential oils, mulch and compost etc. While observing barks, one must not miss some of the most interesting evidence of the existence of wildlife in the forest areas.

One must look for the trees whose barks are conspicuously abraded due to deer rubbing their antlers still in velvet, scratch marks by tigers often made to mark their territory and for cleaning and sharpening their claws, the nail marks left by sloth bears that climb trees in search of honey, and during summers, you may find trees with their bark stripped and eaten by bison and sambar. Every tree has a unique story to tell through its bark—a story of life, lessons, charity, and beauty.

Bark, the protector of the channel of the flow of energy between the root and the shoot, the connection between the hidden and the visible, the link between earth and the sky, and the provider of a great variety of services to all living beings, is a silent but indispensable participant in the intricate dance of nature. It stands as a testament to nature's ingenious strategies and adaptations for ensuring the survival and thriving of trees. The same bark, unfortunately, is the first to suffer an axeman's assault on trees in the name of development!

*(The writers are former principal chief conservator of forests, UP and Maharashtra; views are personal)*



ARVIND JHA

# Ram temple combines ancient art with modern engineering

This three-storey marvel not only reflects a rich heritage but also incorporates innovative techniques, ensuring its endurance for over a millennium

The recently constructed Ram Temple stands as a testament to architectural brilliance and engineering innovation, combining ancient design principles with modern techniques to create a structure of unparalleled significance. Architectural designer Chandrakant Sompura, who hails from a family with a rich heritage of designing temples spanning 15 generations, envisioned the temple as a magnificent creation, setting it apart not just in India but on a global scale.

The Ram Temple, built in the Nagara style, a North Indian temple design, spans a total area of 2.7 acres with a built-up area of approximately 57,000 square feet



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

across three stories. Remarkably, no iron or steel has been used in the construction, as Sompura believes the lifespan of iron is only 80-90 years. The temple reaches a height of 161 feet, about 70% of the iconic Qutub Minar. The construction of the temple embraces a unique approach, utilizing the best quality granite, sandstone, and marble. Dr. Pradeep

Kumar Ramancharla, Director of the Central Building Research Institute (CBRI), played an active role, emphasizing the absence of cement or lime mortar in the joints. Instead, a lock and key mechanism, utilizing trees and ridges, was employed throughout the entire structure. CBRI ensured that the structural design was earthquake-resistant and capable of withstanding earthquakes with a return period of 2,500 years. Shri Nripendra Mishra, chairman of the temple construction committee, asserts that the temple was built to last for more than a thousand years, a claim supported by the collaboration with top Indian scientists, including those from ISRO. The



involvement of ISRO scientists underscores the prestige and significance of the project. One of the unique challenges faced during construction was the sandy and

unstable ground beneath the temple, owing to the proximity of the Saryu River. However, scientists devised an ingenious solution. The entire temple area was excavated to a depth of 15

meters, where engineered soil was laid to a depth of 12-14 meters. No steel rebars were used, and 47-layered footings were compacted to resemble solid rock. A 1.5-meter thick M-35 grade metal-free concrete raft reinforced the foundation, topped with a platform of 6.3-meter thick solid granite stone from South India. The visible part of the temple is constructed with 'Bansi Paharpur' stone, a pink sandstone quarried from Rajasthan. The CBRI reports a total of 160 pillars on the ground floor, 132 on the first floor, and 74 on the second floor, all made of sandstone and adorned with intricate carvings. The sanctum sanctorum is lined with white Makrana marble, the same

material used in the construction of the Taj Mahal. The construction process involved extensive analysis, including the examination of approximately 50 computer models. The chosen model, designed for both performance and architectural integrity while preserving the Nagara style, is a dry-jointed structure consisting only of interlocked stones without steel reinforcement. CBRI states that this design ensures a lifespan of 1,000 years.

Dr Sarada Srinivasan, an archaeologist specializing in heritage metals, highlights the traditional dry masonry used in earlier temple architecture, emphasizing the absence of mortar and iron. The Ram Temple incorpo-

rates these traditional elements while incorporating modern finite element analysis, sophisticated software tools, and 21st-century building codes, according to Dr. Ramancharla. In conclusion, the Ram Temple is not just a heritage architecture but a modern marvel, blending the ancient principles of construction with cutting-edge engineering. The collaboration of skilled artisans, architects, and scientists ensures that this magnificent structure will stand the test of time, echoing the spirit of devotion and craftsmanship that has been a hallmark of Indian architectural heritage for centuries.

*(The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)*



# Poland PM visits Ukraine in latest show of support

AP ■ KYIV

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk arrived in Ukraine's capital on Monday for talks with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on how Poland can keep supporting the country's almost two-year war with Russia and resolve a dispute between the neighbouring nations over grain shipments and trucking.

Tusk, who returned to power in Poland last month and is keen to show that a change in government won't bring a change in Ukraine policy, was also due to meet with Ukrainian Defence Minister Denys Shmyhal.

"There are some conflicts of interest, we know it well and we will talk about them, but not only in the spirit of friendship, which is obvious, but with the attitude to solve these problems as soon as possible, not to maintain or multiply them," Tusk said, according to comments posted on X, formerly Twitter, by his office.

"For me, it is very important to build the feeling that Poland is the most reliable, most stable ally of Ukraine in this deadly clash with evil," Tusk said. His visit took place the day after Moscow-installed officials in eastern Ukraine reported that Ukrainian shelling killed at least 27 people on the outskirts of a Russian-occupied city. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called the shelling outside Donetsk a "monstrous terrorist act," and the Russia-backed local authorities declared a day of mourning.

The Ukrainian military, however, denied it had anything to do with the attack. It was not immediately possible to verify either side's claims. Ukraine's allies have in recent weeks sought to reassure the country that they are committed to its long-term defense against the Kremlin's forces amid concerns that Western support could be sagging. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and France's new foreign minister also traveled to Kyiv recently.

Located on NATO's eastern flank, Poland has been one of Ukraine's strongest allies in its fight to defeat Russia. The government in Warsaw has provided weapons and humanitarian



Poland's Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki (right) and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy (left) met in Warsaw, Poland, Wednesday, April 5, 2023. Poland's prime minister said on late Wednesday his country is no longer sending arms to Ukraine, a comment that appeared aimed at pressuring Kyiv but put Poland's status as a major source of military equipment in doubt as a trade dispute between the neighboring states escalates.

AP/File

aid, and opened its borders to Ukrainian refugees since Moscow's troops invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

But relations soured last year as economic competition from Ukrainian food producers and truckers angered Poles who said their livelihoods were under threat. Polish farmers and truckers blockaded border crossings, causing backups and threatening the flow of some aid going into Ukraine.

Polish farmers complained that imports of Ukrainian foods had caused prices to fall, hurting their incomes, while truckers said they were being undercut by their Ukrainian counterparts. The issue surfaced during the war as Ukrainian products were blocked and food producers turned to road routes through Europe to get their products to market.

At one point, Poland and some other European nations banned Ukrainian grain imports because of the trade dispute. Poland's farmers and trucks have ended their protests for now, but Tusk is seeking ways of addressing their con-

cerns. He has said that his country wants to help Ukraine economically but not at the expense of Polish businesses. He has suggested that Ukraine needs to better regulate its trucking industry.

Tusk was also scheduled to honour Ukrainian fighters and attend observances of the Day of Ukraine's Unity, which marks Ukraine's long struggle to be independent from both its eastern and western neighbours. In other war-related developments, Ukraine's air force said it intercepted all eight Shahed drones that Russia launch overnight over southern and central regions of Ukraine. Debris from three drones shot down over the central Dnipropetrovsk region started a fire at an unnamed business but no human casualties were reported. Meanwhile, major Ukrainian digital banking platform Monobank said it came under a massive denial-of-service (DoS) attack by unidentified hackers. The attack was successfully repelled, the bank said, with no major consequences.

# 2 dead, 4 rescued in Russian jet crash

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

Four people have been rescued and two died following the crash of a private Russian jet carrying six over the weekend in Afghanistan, the Taliban said on Monday. The crash on Saturday took place in a mountainous area in Badakhshan province, some 250 kilometers (155 miles) northeast of Afghanistan's capital, Kabul. Rescue teams were dispatched to the remote rural area that is home to only several thousand people.

On Monday, the chief Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, posted videos on X, previously known as Twitter, showing the four rescued crew members. He said they were given first aid and were being transferred from Badakhshan to Kabul. He said the four are in good health. Local authorities in Badakhshan said the bodies of the two killed in the crash will be recovered from the site. The Taliban have not identified any of the six victims of the crash. The Taliban's Transportation and Civil Aviation Ministry

said in an online statement the plane was found in the district of Kuf Ab district, near the Aruz Koh mountain.

On Sunday, Abdul Wahid Rayan, a spokesman for the Taliban's Information and Culture Ministry, blamed an "engine problem" for the crash, without elaborating.

In Moscow, Russian civil aviation authorities said a 1978 Dassault Falcon 10 went missing with four crew members and two passengers. The Russian-registered aircraft "stopped communicating and disappeared from radar screens", authorities said. It described the flight as starting from Thailand's U-Tapao-Rayong-Pattaya International Airport. The plane had been operating as a charter ambulance flight on a route from Gaya, India, to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, and on to Zhukovsky International Airport in Moscow.

Russian officials said the plane belongs to Athletic Group LLC and a private individual. The Associated Press could not immediately reach the owners for comment. The plane had



been with a medical evacuation company based in Morocco. However, a man who answered a telephone number associated with the company Sunday said it was no longer in business and the aircraft now belonged to someone else.

International carriers have largely avoided Afghanistan since the Taliban's 2021 takeover of the country. Those that briefly fly over rush through Afghan airspace while over the sparse-

ly populated Wakhan Corridor in Badakhshan province, a narrow panhandle that juts out of the east of the country between Tajikistan and Pakistan.

Typically, aircraft heading toward the corridor make a sharp turn north around Peshawar and follow the Pakistani border before briefly entering Afghanistan. Zebak is just near the start of the Wakhan Corridor. Though landlocked, Afghanistan's position in central

Asia means it sits along the most direct routes for those travelling from India to Europe and America. After the Taliban came to power, civil aviation simply stopped, as ground controllers no longer managed the airspace. While nations have slowly eased those restrictions, fears persist about flying through the country. Two Emirati carriers recently resumed commercial flights to Kabul.

# Pakistan, Iran agree to reinstate envoys

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan and Iran have "mutually agreed" to reinstate their ambassadors in each other's country, the Foreign Office (FO) said on Monday, restoring bilateral ties downgraded following last week's tit-for-tat attacks on each other's territory. Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian will also visit the country on January 29 at the invitation of cash-strapped Pakistan's Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani, the FO said in a statement.

Tensions escalated between Islamabad and Tehran after Pakistan conducted "precision military strikes" against what it called "terrorist hideouts" in Iran's Siestan-Balochistan province that killed 9 people in the wee hours on Thursday.

The attack was seen as retaliation to Iranian missile and drone attacks last Tuesday on two bases of the Sunni Baloch militant group Jaish al-Adl in Pakistan's unruly Balochistan

province. "Following the telephone conversation between the foreign ministers of Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, it has been mutually agreed that ambassadors of both countries may return to their respective posts by January 26, 2024," the statement said.

Information Minister Murtaza Solangi said Jilani "deserves all the credit for his visionary engagement and managing possibly one of the fastest de-escalations of the diplomatic history". The development comes amidst the reported visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Sun Weidong to Pakistan on a mediation mission. China on Monday said it is maintaining close contacts with Pakistan and Iran to "bridge their differences" after the two nations conducted airstrikes against each other last week. China on Thursday last offered to play a "constructive role" to ease tension between Islamabad and Tehran after relations between Iran and Pakistan nose-dived following the strikes.

# Pakistan temporarily closes armed forces-run universities

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan authorities on Monday temporarily shut down at least three leading institutions, including the National Defence University, due to the fear of possible attacks by the militants.

The move by the Pakistani authorities to temporarily close down the armed forces run National Defence University, Air University and Bahria University in addition to other institutions, came after a security alert was issued by intelligence organisations about a possible attack on military-linked educational institutions of higher learning.

"At least three armed forces-run universities that include the National Defense University, Air University and Bahria University and a few other higher institutions were shut temporarily after intelli-

gence was received about a possible attack on them," said a source. The measure was taken as the identities of the Baloch militants killed in the airstrikes in Iran were revealed, showing those killed were important rebels wanted for the attack in Balochistan province.

The three premier universities are respectively run by the Army, the Air Force and the Navy. The duration of closure was not shared but apparently, they will remain shut until an order for their reopening is issued, said the source. The Islamabad Police chief said that security had been increased but the situation was under control and there was no reason to panic.

"The law and order and security situation in Islamabad is under control," Islamabad Police Inspector-General (IGP) Dr Akbar Nasir Khan

stated in a video message. He also imposed a complete ban on public gatherings and emphasised not to conduct any such gatherings amid the situation.

He added that the police will continue to maintain a safe environment in which the upcoming elections will be held. Meanwhile, heads of police stations have been asked to increase patrolling in their respective areas and sub-divisional police officers tasked to monitor patrolling.

Earlier, Pakistan authorities claimed that the airstrikes of January 18 on the bases of the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) outfit killed important terrorists who were involved in multiple terror attacks in Balochistan. Pakistan alleged militants linked with various Baloch groups sneak into Iran after carrying out attacks in the remote region of the country.

# 7 killed, 40 missing in SW China landslide

PTI ■ BEIJING/KUNMING

At least seven people were killed and 40 others went missing after a landslide struck southwest China's mountainous Yunnan province on Monday. The disaster struck the Liangshui village of Zhaotong city at 5:51 am Beijing time, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Seven people were confirmed dead and 40 others remain missing in the landslide, the report said. The 47 victims are from 18 different households, rescue officials said. Over 500 residents were evacuated from the landslide-hit areas as the provincial commission for disaster reduction activated a Level-III emergency response for disaster relief, state-run CCTV reported.

Efforts are on to rescue the people trapped under the landslide, official media reported. A

total of 795 rescue workers equipped with one drone and 120 vehicles, including excavators, loaders and transport vehicles, are carrying out search and rescue work at the site. As many as 33 firefighting vehicles and 10 loading machines are also mobilised to search for the missing. More than 100 tents, 400 quilts, 200 cotton coats and 14 sets of emergency lighting equipment have also been provided. Chinese President Xi Jinping ordered an all-out search and rescue of the people missing in the landslide.

"[We should] promptly organise rescue teams, make all-out efforts to search for missing individuals, and minimise casualties to the greatest extent possible," Xi was quoted as saying in the Xinhua report. Xi, the general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission,

called on party cadres to watch out for other natural disaster risks and hidden dangers "to effectively ensure the safety of people's lives and property" as a result of the wave of cold weather that swept across southern China just three weeks before the Lunar New Year.

Chinese Premier Li Qiang also ordered an all-out rescue effort in Liangshui and emphasised the need to maintain social stability, in light of the area's high altitude and ethnic diversity. "It is necessary to promptly evacuate the threatened population, handle resettlement properly, effectively ensure the safety of people's lives and property, and maintain overall social stability," Li was quoted as saying by the official media. The cause of the landslide was not immediately known. The local weather forecast said there will be light snow in the town on Tuesday, with the lowest temperature expected to reach -3 degree Celsius, the report said.

# Taiwan says 6 Chinese balloons flew through its airspace; warplanes, ships also detected

AP ■ TAIPEI

Taiwan said on Monday that six Chinese balloons either flew over the island or through airspace just north of it, while Chinese warplanes and navy ships were also detected in the area. The dispatch of such balloons, which generally disappear into the Pacific to the east, appears to be on the rise, though their purpose has not been publicly announced.

The Defence Ministry noted the balloon sightings on a list of Chinese People's Liberation Army activity in the waters and airspace around Taiwan. One passed near the southern city of Pingtung, while the others flew just north of the port of Keelung, where Taiwan has an important naval base. It remains unclear whether the balloons have an explicit military function, but they appear to be part of a campaign of harassment against the self-governed island, which China claims as its own territory and has vowed to reclaim by force if necessary.

In the US's early last year, President Joe Biden vowed sharper rules to track, monitor and potentially shoot down unknown aerial objects after a three-week drama sparked by the discovery of a suspected Chinese spy balloon transiting much of the United States.

The US labelled the balloon a military craft and shot it down with a missile. It recovered what it said was sophisticated surveillance equipment. China responded angrily, saying it was only a weather balloon that had blown off course and called its downing a major overreaction.

Those are sometimes referred to as China's "gray area tactics" that cause consternation among its foes without sparking a direct confrontation. China has long blurred the lines between military and civilian functions, including in the South China Sea, where it operates a huge maritime



militia — ostensibly civilian fishing boats that act under government orders to assert Beijing's territorial claims. China's campaign of intimidation against Taiwan includes the regular deployment of Chinese warships and planes in waters and airspace around the island, often crossing the middle line of the 160-kilometre-wide Taiwan Strait that divides them. The two split following the seizure of power by Mao Zedong's Communists on the Chinese mainland.

Between Sunday and early

Monday morning, four Chinese warplanes and four navy ships were detected around Taiwan, the Defence Ministry said. Taiwan's military monitored the situation with combat aircraft, navy vessels and land-based missile systems, the ministry said.

In the leadup to Taiwan's presidential and legislative elections January 13, China had been stepping up such activities, along with its rhetorical threats, though Beijing's threats are generally seen as backfiring.

The independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party won a third straight term in the presidency, this time under current Vice President Lai Ching-te, or William Lai. The pro-unification Nationalist Party won just one more seat in the legislature than the DPP.


Both saw some votes siphoned away by the party of former Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je, who appealed especially to young people fed up with politics as they are.

# SL Catholic church to declare Easter Sunday bomb attack victims saints

**Colombo (PTI):** Sri Lanka's Catholic church has decided to move towards declaring as saints all the 273 people, including 11 Indians, killed in the 2019 Easter Sunday suicide bombings on its fifth anniversary. Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, the Archbishop of Colombo, announced the move while addressing a mass on Sunday. "A person can be named a saint only after the completion of 5 years since one's sacrifice. Therefore, we will move towards declaring Easter Sunday victims as saints on April 21 this year," Ranjith said. On April 21, 2019, nine suicide bombers belonging to the local Islamist extremist group National Thawheed Jamaat (NTJ) linked to ISIS carried out a series of blasts that tore through three churches and as many luxury hotels in Sri Lanka.

"Those who died in churches in April 2019 sacrificed their lives for what they believed in. They came to church because they believed in Christ," Ranjith said. Over the last 5 years, Ranjith was at log-gerheads with the government seeking justice for the victims. He slammed all investigations as a sham and a political cover-up. He has asked for an international investigation into the attacks. The government says it has arrested hundreds of people and the legal proceedings are moving forward.

Previously, it was known that 270 people had died in the attacks. The then president Maithripala Sirisena and his top defence hierarchy were accused of inaction to prevent the attack despite the availability of prior intelligence from India. Sirisena and the police top brass were ordered to pay compensation to the victims by the court. Reportedly, only part payments had been made so far. Sirisena denies the charge and blames the then defence establishment for the lapse which led to the coordinated attacks.

<div><div>Office of the General Manager (ADMIN), Head Office, <b>UTTARAKHAND PEYJAL NIGAM</b> 11-Mohini Road, Dehradun, Phone:- 2678078, 2672404, Fax:- 0135-2672337, E-Mail: upsvnm@gmail.com</div></div>			
<b>E-Tender Notice</b>			
Letter No.- 33/Nivida/17		Dt. 22.01.2024	
S. No.	Name of Scheme	Estimated Cost of Work (Rs. In Lakhs) (Including G.S.T.)	Completion Period (In month)
1	Construction Of Residence Building for Police Personnel at Kapkot, Distt-Bageshwar	209.94	12
2	Construction Of Residence Building for Police Personnel at Laxmanjhula & Lansdowne, Distt-Pauri Garhwal	376.83	12
3	Construction Of Residence Building for Police Personnel at Patel Nagar, Distt-Dehradun	404.17	12
4	Construction Of Residence Building for Police Personnel at Champawat, Distt-Champawat	214.00	12
5	Construction Of Residence Building for Police Personnel at Lohaghat, Distt-Champawat	217.39	12
6	Construction Of Residence Building for Police Personnel at Bhagwanpur, Distt-Haridwar	396.63	12
Name & Address of Officer Inviting the Bid:-		General Manager (Admin), Head Office, Uttarakhand Peyjal Nigam, Dehradun.	
Date and Time of Availability of bid documents in the portal:-		23-01-2024 - 12.00 Hrs.	
Last Date/Time for receipt of bids in the portal:-		09-02-2024 - 12.00 Hrs.	
Details of subsequent addendum/corrigendum/cancellation etc. may be obtained from the website. Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal " <a href="https://www.uktenders.gov.in">https://www.uktenders.gov.in</a> "			
		General Manager (Admin)	

AP ■ PUTRAJAYA

Former Malaysian leader Mahathir Mohamad attacked a graft probe into his associates as politically motivated, a week after his eldest son was ordered to hand over information to investigators. Mahathir, a two-time prime minister who's been a fixture in Malaysian politics for decades, said Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's government is using corruption charges to go after political rivals.

Mahathir came out of retirement in the wake of the massive 1MDB corruption scandal, joining hands with the opposition in 2018 for a short second term as premier after ousting a long-ruling coalition he once led. Businessman Mirzan Mahathir and tycoon Daim Zainuddin were revealed to hold millions offshore in the Pandora Papers, a 2021 document leak that

revealed offshore accounts held by some of the world's wealthiest people and politicians.

The anti-graft agency ordered Mirzan to declare all his assets within 30 days on Jan 17. It had earlier opened a probe into Daim, a former Finance Minister and ally of Mahathir. Mirzan has also been accused of shady dealings in relation to the sale and acquisition of a government-linked company.

Mahathir, 98, said he believed Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim was fishing for evidence to implicate him, and accused Anwar of selective prosecution. Prosecutors dropped 47 graft charges against Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi last year while the trial was at an advanced stage.



"This is Malaysian justice under Anwar's regime," Mahathir told a news conference. "The law is being abused for political ends. I'm saying very clearly that the people who are against the government will have the law thrown in their faces. Those who are for the government can escape," he said. Mahathir held office from 1981-2003, and again from 2018-2020. He has a

long political history with Anwar, who was his deputy and finance minister in the 1990s before they fell out amid the Asian financial crisis. Anwar was later jailed for corruption and sodomy, charges he said were framed to kill his political career. The pair joined hands for the 2018 general elections to oust the long-ruling coalition, while Anwar was in jail for a second sodomy charge. He was pardoned by the king shortly after their victory. Mahathir became premier a second time in a deal that called for him later to hand over power to Anwar, but their alliance collapsed amid infighting. Mahathir now supports the opposition Malay-Islamic alliance, and has constantly slammed Anwar's unity government, took power in November 2022.

The anti-graft agency has said it began investigations in



# EU pushes for Palestinian statehood

AP ■ BRUSSELS

European Union foreign ministers argued Monday that the creation of a Palestinian state is the only credible way to achieve peace in the Middle East, and they expressed concern about Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's clear rejection of the idea. "The declarations of Benjamin Netanyahu are worrying. There will be a need for a Palestinian state with security guarantees for all," French Foreign Affairs Minister Stéphane Sejourne told reporters in Brussels, where the EU ministers met to discuss the war in Gaza.

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz and Jordan's foreign minister, Ayman Safadi, also were in Belgium's capital for the discussion. The issue of Gaza's future also has set Israel in opposition to the United States and its Arab allies as they



Relatives and supporters of the Israeli hostages held in the Gaza Strip by the Hamas militant group block a road with tents during a protest calling for their release outside Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's residence, in Jerusalem on Sunday. AP

work to mediate an end to the fighting in the besieged Palestinian territory. The Palestinian death toll from the war between Israel and Hamas surpassed 25,000, the Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza reported. Israel said Sunday that another of the

hostages taken during the Oct 7 attack that triggered the war had died. The EU is the world's top provider of aid to the Palestinians, but holds little leverage over Israel, despite being its biggest trading partner.

# Storm Isha leaves many without power

AP ■ LONDON

A motorist was killed, tens of thousands of people were without electricity and hundreds of trains were cancelled Monday after the latest in a wave of winter storms lashed Britain and Ireland with heavy rain and wind gusts of almost 100 miles (160 kilometers) an hour. The UK's Met Office weather service issued an unusual blanket wind warning for the whole country before Storm Isha, which reached its peak overnight. The storm uprooted beeches in Northern Ireland made famous by the "Game of Thrones" and littered roadsides and rail tracks across the country with trees that blocked trains.

An 84-year-old man was killed when the car he was riding in struck a fallen tree in Scotland on Sunday night. A 99-mile-an-hour gust was recorded at Brizlee Wood radar station in northeastern England. Ireland and the UK have been hammered since fall by a series of gusty and wet storms that



A tree branch fallen on a car on Lisburn Road in Belfast, Northern Ireland, during Storm Isha, Sunday. AP/PTI

have knocked out power and caused flooding along river valleys. Isha is the ninth named storm since September and a 10th, named Jocelyn by the Irish forecaster Met Eireann, is due to bring more winds and rain on Tuesday and into Wednesday. The railway operator for Scotland halted train service Sunday night and through most of Monday

morning. Network Rail, which owns the railway infrastructure in England, Scotland and Wales, placed speed limits on most lines to prevent engines from running into debris, disrupting Monday's commute. Several major roads in Scotland and northern England were shut because of high winds, downed trees or overturned trucks.

# Elon Musk visits Auschwitz



AP ■ KRAKOW (POLAND)

Elon Musk visited the site of the Auschwitz-Birkenau World War II Nazi German death camp on Monday, after the billionaire faced criticism for subscribing to an antisemitic conspiracy theory and allowing hate messages on his social media platform, X, formerly

known as Twitter. The private visit was apparently in response to calls from some Jewish religious leaders for Musk to see with his own eyes the most symbolic site of the horrors of the Holocaust. Musk was photographed visiting the Birkenau site. Birkenau is an area near Oswiecim, in southern Poland,

# Rep. Nancy Mace of South Carolina backs Donald Trump

Charleston (US) (AP): Donald Trump has picked up another endorsement from Nikki Haley's home state of South Carolina, with Rep. Nancy Mace backing the former president in this year's GOP presidential primary. Mace had stayed out of the 2024 Republican primary as two fellow South Carolinians — Haley and Sen. Tim Scott — entered the race last year. On Monday, a day ahead of the New Hampshire primary, Mace told The Associated Press that she was backing Trump over Haley, who lives in her congressional district and supported her in 2022 against a Trump-backed challenger. "I don't see eye to eye perfectly with any candidate. And until now I've stayed out of it," Mace said. "But the time has come to unite behind our nominee." The South Carolina

Republican's backing comes as Trump angles to bolster his dominance thus far in Republican balloting, following his record-setting win last week in the Iowa caucuses. Over the weekend, Trump was joined by a slew of South Carolina leaders as he campaigned in New Hampshire, seen as yet another blow from South Carolina against Haley. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis' departure from the race on Tuesday leaves Haley as the main GOP candidate remaining to challenge Trump. New Hampshire votes on Tuesday, but South Carolina's primary is in a month, and the state's Republican leadership has largely already lined up behind Trump. Mace's endorsement means that Trump has secured four of the state's six Republican US House members, with Reps.

# Saudi's top diplomat won't recognise Israel without path to Palestinian state

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Saudi Arabia's top diplomat said the kingdom will not normalise relations with Israel or contribute to Gaza's reconstruction without a credible path to a Palestinian state — a nonstarter for Israel's government. Prince Faisal bin Farhan's remarks in an interview with CNN broadcast late Sunday were some of the most direct yet from Saudi officials.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu — who faces mounting domestic pressure over the plight of Israeli hostages, including an angry protest inside a parliamentary committee meeting on Monday — has rejected Palestinian statehood and described plans for open-ended military control over Gaza.

The dispute over Gaza's future — as the war rages with no end in sight — pits Israel against its top ally, the United States, as well as much of the international community, and poses a major obstacle to any plans for postwar governance or reconstruction of the impoverished coastal enclave that is home to 2.3 million Palestinians. Before the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel that triggered the war, the US had been trying to broker a landmark agreement in which Saudi Arabia would normalise relations with Israel in exchange for US security guarantees, aid in establishing a civilian nuclear programme and progress toward resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In September, Netanyahu had said Israel was on "the cusp" of such a deal.

In the interview with "CNN's Fareed Zakaria GPS," the host asked: "Are you saying unequivocally that if there is not a credible and irreversible path to a Palestinian state, there will not be normalisation of relations between

Saudi Arabia and Israel?" "That's the only way we're going to get a benefit," Prince Faisal replied. "So, yes." Earlier in the interview, when asked if oil-rich Saudi Arabia would finance reconstruction in Gaza — where Israel's offensive has caused unprecedented destruction — Prince Faisal gave a similar answer. "As long as we're able to find a pathway to a solution ... then we can talk about anything," he said. "But if we are just resetting to the status quo before October 7, in a way that sets us up for another round of this, as we have seen in the past, we're not interested in that conversation." The Palestinians seek a state that would include Gaza, the Israeli-occupied West Bank and annexed east Jerusalem, territories Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast war. Israel views all of Jerusalem as its capital and the West Bank as the historical and biblical heartland of the Jewish people. It has built scores of settlements across both territories that are home to hundreds of thousands of Jewish settlers. The last of several rounds of peace talks broke down nearly 15 years ago. At a meeting about the war on Monday, European Union foreign ministers said the creation

of a Palestinian state was the only way to achieve peace and expressed concern about Netanyahu's rejection of the idea.

## OVER 25K KILLED IN GAZA

The current war between Israel and Hamas — the fifth and by far deadliest — began when Palestinian militants broke through Israel's defences and rampaged through several nearby communities, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 people hostage. Israel's offensive has killed at least 25,295 Palestinians in Gaza and wounded more than 60,000, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-ruled territory. The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants but says around two-thirds of those killed were women and children. Medics reported heavy fighting in the southern city of Khan Younis, saying dozens of dead and wounded people were brought to the city's already overwhelmed Nasser Hospital. Families could be seen fleeing south, to areas already packed with hundreds of thousands of displaced people.



I, Harvinder Kaur, W/o Sh. Amarjeet Singh, R/o V-272, Third Floor Rajouri Garden, West Delhi-110027, hereby declare that Harvinder Kaur and Harvinder Kaur Arora both are same person. In future I shall be known as Harvinder Kaur for all purposes.

PD(250)C

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

This is bring to the notice of the general public that two nos. ID Cards of Bitu Panwar having id card No-2338876 and Manjeet Manjeet having id card No 2338778 issued by ICICI Bank Ltd. has been found missing and /or lost on 20th January 2024. Anyone who finds the said ID Cards, is requested to return the said ID card to the Manager Debt Services & Managements Group, ICICI Bank Limited, S.D. Tower Rohini Sec-8 New Delhi-110085, therefore all the customers of ICICI Bank Limited are hereby notified not to make any payment to any unauthorized person holding the said ID cards nos. Bitu Panwar -2338876 & Manjeet Manjeet -2338778. Please take further notice that anybody making payment to any person holding the said ID Card shall do so at his/ her own costs risk and peril and ICICI Bank shall not be bound and/or responsible for any payments. Please take further notice that anybody making payment to any person holding the said ID Card shall do so at his/her own costs, risk and peril and ICICI Bank shall not be bound and /or responsible for any payment.

Date: 23-01-2024  
Place: Delhi

For ICICI Bank Limited SD

**Online Tender Document for M.P. Police**  
**POLICE HEADQUARTER, M.P., BHOPAL**  
No. PHQ/15/GPC/7520-4/2024 Bhopal, Dated 12/01/2024  
**"ONLINE TENDER NOTICE"**

Online tender are invited by Deputy Inspector General of Police (Provisioning) Police Head Quarter, Bhopal on behalf of DGP MP Bhopal for FSL Items on website <https://mptenders.gov.in/nicgep/app>

Equipments for Chemistry Lab of Ratlam, Rewa and Jabalpur				
Sr	Name of Equipment	Quantity	EMD Paid Online Through mptenders.gov.in	Tender Fees (Rs.)
1	GC-MS (with library)	3	585,000	10,000
2	UV visible spectrophotometer	3	270,000	5,000
3	ALCOLYZER ME All in one	3	540,000	10,000
4	ATR-FTIR	3	225,000	5,000
5	Viscometer	3	45,000	2,000
6	Densitometer	3	45,000	2,000
7	Melting point apparatus	3	90,000	3,000
8	Water purification system	3	90,000	3,000
9	Gas Generator (Nitrogen and Hydrogen)	3	225,000	5,000
10	Research Binocular Microscope with work station and Auxiliary access	3	45,000	2,000
11	Automatic Melting point Apparatus	3	90,000	3,000
12	Refrigerated Centrifuge (Table Top)	3	36,000	2,000
<b>TOTAL EMD &amp; Tender FEES</b>			<b>2,286,000</b>	<b>52,000</b>

1. Cost of tender document (Tender Fee) is non refundable and cannot be exempted in any condition & must submit online through website <https://mptenders.gov.in/nicgep/app>.

2. Tender document can be download from the website of MP Police ([www.mppolice.gov.in](http://www.mppolice.gov.in))

3. Bids shall be submitted online only at MP Tenders website: <https://mptenders.gov.in/nicgep/app>

4. Critical Date Sheet:

Published Date	13/01/2024 Time 14:00 PM
Bid Document Download Start Date	13/01/2024 Time 16:00 PM
Pre Bid Meeting Date	18/01/2024 Time 12:00 PM
Bid Submission Start Date	24/01/2024 Time 11:00 AM
Bid Submission End Date	01/02/2024 Time 14:00 PM
Bid Opening Date	02/02/2024 Time 16:00 PM

5. Intending Bidders are advised to visit this website regularly till closing date of submission to keep themselves updated as any change/modification in the tender will be intimated through this website only by corrigendum/addendum/amendment.

6. Bids will be opened as per date/time as mentioned in the Tender Critical Date Sheet. After online opening of Technical-Bid the results of their qualification as well Price-Bid opening will be intimated later.

(D.R. Teniwar)  
D.I.G. (Provisioning)  
For: Director General of Police M.P.

G-23255/23

**Online Tender Document for M.P. Police**  
**POLICE HEADQUARTER, M.P., BHOPAL**  
No. PHQ/15/GPC/7520-1/2024 Bhopal, Dated 12.01.2024  
**"ONLINE TENDER NOTICE"**

Online tender are invited by Deputy Inspector General of Police (Provisioning) Police Head Quarter, Bhopal on behalf of DGP MP Bhopal for FSL Items on website <https://mptenders.gov.in/nicgep/app>

Equipments for Biological Lab of Ratlam and Rewa				
Sr	Name of Equipment	Quantity	EMD Paid Online Through mptenders.gov.in	Tender Fees (Rs.)
1	Compound trinocular Microscope	2	30,000	2,000
2	Binocular Microscope	4	30,000	2,000
3	Cooling centrifuge	2	30,000	2,000
4	Electrophoresis unit	2	12,000	1,000
5	Digital weiging machine	2	9,000	1,000
6	Incubator	4	12,000	1,000
<b>TOTAL EMD &amp; Tender FEES</b>			<b>1,23,000</b>	<b>9,000</b>

1. Cost of tender document (Tender Fee) is non refundable and cannot be exempted in any condition & must submit online through website <https://mptenders.gov.in/nicgep/app>.

2. Tender document can be download from the website of MP Police ([www.mppolice.gov.in](http://www.mppolice.gov.in))

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(D.R. Teniwar)  
D.I.G. (Provisioning)  
For: Director General of Police M.P.

G-23252/23



# EVs adoption to play major role in India's transition to low carbon economy: DPIIT Secy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The vision to make India a developed nation by 2047 includes a major shift towards electric vehicles, supported by tax incentives, production linked incentive schemes, and the mandatory provision of charging infrastructure, a top government official said on Monday. Secretary in the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) Rajesh Kumar Singh said that the development and adoption of Electric Vehicles (EVs) play a pivotal role in India's transition to a low-carbon economy. "The comprehensive vision for 2047 includes a substantial shift towards electric vehicles across various segments, supported by tax incentives,

Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes, and the mandatory provision of charging infrastructure," Singh told PTI. He said that a shift in the modal share of freight from road to rail will be an effective lever to decarbonise the freight transport sector. He added that the government's authorisation of 100 per cent Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) for renewable power projects underscores the nation's dedication to sustainable development. Viksit Bharat @2047 is the vision to make India a developed nation by 2047, the 100th year of independence. The vision encompasses various aspects of development, including economic growth, social progress, environmental sustainability, and good gover-



nance. Singh said that he discussed these things in a session on 'Financing Industrial Ecosystems of the Future' at the recently concluded World Economic Forum (WEF) meet at Davos.

"The agenda for the session was to discuss how public and private institutions can provide financing that will benefit the cluster partnership model in creating shared infrastructure and innovative decarbonisation projects," he said.

He added that key reforms such as the PM Gati Shakti programme and the Unified Logistics Interface Platform were showcased in the meeting, highlighting India's dedication to sustainable development and robust infrastructure growth. The fast-growing EV market in India is catching the eye of global players. India's electric vehicle market is expected to grow to 1 crore units in annual sales by 2030 and create five crore direct and indirect jobs, according to the Economic Survey 2022-23. As per industry estimates, the total EV sales in India stood at around 10 lakh units in 2022. On the back of increasing EV demand, the Indian government is providing fiscal incentives to promote domestic manufacturing of these cars.

The government has rolled out PLI schemes for Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) battery storage with an outlay of Rs 18,100 crore and Rs 26,058 crore PLI scheme for auto, auto-components and drone industries. In India, Tata Motors is the leading player in passenger electric vehicles. Describing his participation in the WEF as a "highly successful" one, the secretary said India has consistently fostered an environment of trust and confidence among investors and stakeholders. "This impactful presence at the World Economic Forum 2024 solidifies India's commitment to establishing itself as a reliable and influential player on the global stage," he added.



## Sony terminates merger with Zee Entertainment

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Culver Max Entertainment, formerly known as Sony Pictures Networks India (SPNI), has terminated merger agreements with Zee Entertainment, which could have otherwise created a USD 10 billion media enterprise in the country. "SPNI, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Sony Group Corporation, today issued a notice terminating the definitive agreements entered into by SPNI and Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL) relating to the merger of ZEEL with and into SPNI, which was...Announced on December 22, 2021," a statement by Sony Group Corporation said. As per the deal, the merger was to be completed before December 21, 2023, including regulatory and other approvals with grace period of one month to complete the transaction. If the merger did not close by 24 months after their signature date, the parties would be required to discuss an extension of the end date required to make the merger effective by a reasonable period of time, it said. Such discussions were required to be held for a period ending 30 days after the end date. "The definitive agreements fur-

ther provided that if the parties are unable to agree upon such an extension by the end of the discussion period, any party could terminate the definitive agreements by providing written notice," it said. However, the merger did not close by the end date as, among other things, the closing conditions to the merger were not satisfied by then, it said. Sony sent a termination notice to Subhash Chandra family-promoted media and entertainment firm ZEEL after the end of one month grace period. On December 17 last year, ZEEL sought an extension of the deadline from Culver Max and Bangla Entertainment Pvt Ltd (BEPL) under the 2021 agreement. On December 19, SPNI had stated that it had not yet agreed to the deadline extension request by ZEEL. However, a day after it agreed to discuss the matter. The proposed USD 10-billion merger had already received regulatory approvals from fair trade regulator CCI, NSE and BSE, shareholders and creditors of the company. In August last year, the Mumbai bench of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) also gave a go-ahead to the merger.

## 'Tax buoyancy to give headroom for higher social sector budget'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The increased tax buoyancy as reflected in both income tax and GST monthly collection data will provide headroom to the government to allocate more funds for farmers and social sector schemes in the forthcoming interim budget, without sacrificing fiscal prudence, sources said. The focus in the interim budget, which will be the last major economic document of the Modi 2.0 Government ahead of the general elections, is likely to be on the issues being faced by poorer sections of the society, especially in rural areas. According to sources, collections from income and corporate taxes have been showing buoyancy in the current fiscal, and the total direct tax mop-up is likely to exceed budget estimates by about Rs 1 lakh crore. The government had budgeted to collect Rs 18.23 lakh crore from direct taxes in this fiscal. Till January 10, the mop-up stood at Rs 14.70 lakh crore, which is 81 per cent of budget estimates. On the Goods and Services Tax (GST) front, Central GST revenues are expected to exceed budget estimates of Rs 8.1 lakh crore by about Rs 10,000 crore. According to estimates, there will be a shortfall of around Rs 49,000 crore in excise and customs duties collections in this fiscal year. The Centre's gross tax revenues are expected to exceed the Budget



estimates of Rs 33.6 lakh crore by Rs 60,000 crore. ICRA in its interim budget expectations report had said that it expects gross tax revenues to grow 11 per cent in the next fiscal (2024-25), led by direct taxes and GST collections, even as the growth in excise and customs duty collections is likely to be subdued. "With ICRA's nominal GDP growth forecast of 9.5 per cent, tax buoyancy is assumed at a healthy 1.2 in FY2025 (against 1.4 expected for FY2024), in line with the historical average seen during FY2015-19," ICRA said. This tax buoyancy has given the government headroom to allocate more funds for social sector schemes, like MGNREGA, rural roads, PM Kisan Samman Nidhi, PM Vishwakarma Yojana without deviating from the fiscal consolidation path of lowering fiscal deficit to 4.5 per cent by 2025-26. In the current fiscal, the fiscal deficit, which is the difference between government receipts and expenditures, is estimated at 5.9 per cent of GDP. Deloitte India Partner Sanjay Kumar said at the moment there is certain amount of fiscal space that the government has and they would want to spend that.

## Tata Motors to commence EV production at Sanand plant from April

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Motors plans to commence production of electric vehicles at the Sanand plant, acquired from Ford India, from April this year, as per a top company official. Tata Passenger Electric Mobility Ltd, a unit of Tata Motors, acquired the facility from Ford India for Rs 725.7 crore in January last year. "We are planning to commence electric vehicle production at Sanand with Nexon EV from April," Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles MD Shailesh Chandra told PTI. The company has already commenced production of internal combustion engine-powered versions of the Nexon at the manufacturing plant with an installed capacity of 3 lakh units per annum.



It can be further scaled up to 4.2 lakh units per annum. Chandra said the company is also looking to produce upcoming models at the facility. When asked about the company's product pipeline, he said that Curvv EV would be introduced around the second or third quarter of this calendar year.

"We are also hoping that by the fag-end of this year, we should also be able to introduce Harrier EV and internal combustion engine (ICE) version of Curvv," Chandra said. On sales outlook for the next fiscal, he noted that the passenger vehicle industry is expected to grow by 5 per cent. "We have few launches planned, so will be targeting to grow better than the industry," Chandra stated. On the Budget wishlist, he stated that extending FAME benefits to personal electric cars would help in accelerating the growth of electrification in the country. Chandra noted that an increase in sales of electric cars was witnessed in states like Maharashtra and Gujarat when they offered incentives to the buyers.

## Air India begins operations of wide body A350 aircraft

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Private carrier Air India on Monday commenced the commercial operations of its first wide-body A350 aircraft with a flight taking off for Chennai from the Mumbai airport. The 316-seater A350-900 aircraft has a three-class cabin configuration with 28 private business suites with full-flat beds, 24 premium economy and 264 economy seats. "Air India flight AI-589 took off from Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport on Monday for Chennai, with a full-capacity load of passengers," the airline said in a statement.



The aircraft will initially fly on domestic routes — Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, and Mumbai — for crew familiarisation and regulatory compliance. It will later be deployed for long-haul flights to destinations across continents, strengthening Air India's growing wide-body fleet, comprising its own and recently leased aircraft, the airline said.

line said. The first of Air India's own 20 Airbus A350-900 aircraft, registered VT-JRA, arrived at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport late last month from Airbus' Toulouse manufacturing facility in France. The induction of the A350 in Air India's fleet is a part of the airline's 470 new aircraft order that it placed early last year.

## Domestic coal based power generation rises 7 per cent in April-December

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Domestic coal-based power generation increased 7.14 per cent to 872 billion units (BU) in the April-December period of the current fiscal. The rise in domestic coal-based electricity generation reflects an ample supply of coal to meet the growing energy demand in the country, the coal ministry said in a statement. Domestic coal-based power generation was 813.9 BU in the year-ago period, it said. In the country, power is generated from conventional sources — thermal, nuclear and hydro — and renewable sources — wind, solar, biomass etc. Thermal power producers use



coal as the main fuel to run the units and the dry fuel contributes to more than 70 per cent of the total electricity generation. Coal-based power generation in the country registered a growth of around 10.13 per cent during April-December period of FY'24, as compared to the corresponding period of previous year while overall power generation grew 6.71 per cent during the same period, the ministry statement said.

Coal imports for blending dropped by 40.66 per cent to 17.08 MT during April-December period of current fiscal from 28.78 MT in the corresponding period of previous year, despite the rising power demand. "It showcases the nation's commitment to self-reliance in coal production and minimising overall coal imports," it said. Coal-based power generation has played a significant role in meeting India's energy demands. The country is experiencing a substantial increase in power demand, driven by a combination of factors like industrial growth, technological advancements, population growth, and economic development.

## Hero MotoCorp to set up assembly plant in Nepal with partner CG Motors

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hero MotoCorp on Monday said it will set up a facility for assembling products in Nepal in partnership with CG Motors, its newly appointed distributor in the country. The facility will be located in Nawalpur district and have a capacity of 75,000 units per annum, the country's largest two-wheeler maker said in a statement. Operations will begin in March 2024, it added. Hero MotoCorp forayed into Nepal in 2014. Over the years, the company has established itself as a leading player in the country. "With their vast expertise and diversified business knowledge, Chaudhary Group (CG) will provide an enormous fillip to our operations here," Hero MotoCorp Head-Global Business Sanjay Bhan said. In the near future, the company plans to further strengthen its operations across the country and introduce a slew of new products that will excite the market, he added. "This partnership marks CG Motors' ambitious re-entry into the automotive market, leveraging Hero MotoCorp's renowned products and services," Chaudhary Group Managing Director Nirvana Chaudhary stated.

## 'Increase import duty on paper, paperboards to 25 per cent in Budget'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Domestic paper and paperboard manufacturers have demanded a hike in import duty to 25 per cent on paper products and the imposition of a quality control order in the upcoming Budget to discourage cheap inward shipments. The Indian Paper Manufacturers Association (IPMA), in a statement on Monday, said that in its pre-budget submissions to the government, it has urged for increasing the basic customs duty on the import of paper and paperboard from 10 per cent to 25 per cent as India's WTO Bound rate is 40 per cent on these products. The association has also asked for the issuance of quality control orders (QCOs) for different grades of paper to ensure the supply of quality products to Indian consumers and check the import of sub-standard products into the country. IPMA President Pawan Agarwal urged the gov-

ernment to keep paper and paperboard on the negative list while reviewing the existing FTAs (ASEAN, South Korea and Japan) and formulating new ones. He mentioned that any increase in customs duty will not impact the duty-free imports coming into the country under the FTAs. "Suitable safeguard, anti-dumping and countervailing duties on imports of various grades of paper should be expeditiously imposed, especially after the recommendation of the Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR). "With a 43 per cent increase in imports of paper and paperboard in H1 of FY24 on the heels of a 25 per cent increase in FY23 in volume terms, India's Paper Industry has asked for suitably increasing import duty on Paper in the upcoming Budget to provide a level playing field for domestic manufacturers," IPMA said in the statement.

## Don't cut import duties on parts used in making smartphones in Budget: GTRI to Government

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government should not cut import duties on electronic components used in making smartphones in the forthcoming Budget as the current tariff structure has already proven successful and changing them could harm local manufacturing, a GTRI report said on Monday. The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said that maintaining the current rates would help balance industry growth and long-term development in India's growing smartphone market. "Currently, tariffs on imported parts for smartphones in India are between 7.5 per cent and 10 per cent. The Budget should maintain these taxes. The Budget should not cut the

import tariffs on parts used to make smartphones," it said, adding that the current rate of levies supports duty-free imports for making products to exports. The Budget is scheduled to be presented on February 1. The suggestion is in contrast to the demand of industry body India Cellular and Electronics Association (ICEA) that import duty cuts on mobile phone components can increase domestic production of handsets by 28 per cent to USD 82 billion, boost exports, and support indigenous manufacturing. The think tank said that Indian manufacturers "must pay" duties on smartphones sold within India, but exports should be exempted from such duties. "Firms can import necessary

inputs or capital goods duty-free for manufacturing and exporting electronic items. This is facilitated through schemes like Advance Authorisation, Export Promotion Capital Goods, and operating in Special Economic Zones (SEZs) or 100 per cent Export Oriented Units. Additionally, firms can use the customs bond scheme for duty-free imports without localisation requirements," GTRI Co-Founder Ajay Srivastava said. The GTRI report also said that India's smartphone industry, with exports booming from USD 7.2 billion in 2022 to USD 13.9 billion in 2023, becomes the top performer for the PLI (production linked incentive) scheme by a wide margin and over 98 per cent of smartphones sold in India are made locally.

## Colgate-Palmolive India Q3 profit up 35.7 pc to ₹330 cr

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

FMCG major Colgate-Palmolive India Ltd on Monday posted a 35.71 per cent increase in net profit to Rs 330.11 crore for the December quarter mainly led by a double-digit growth in the toothpaste segment. The oral hygiene product maker had posted a net profit of Rs 243.24 crore in the year-ago period. Colgate-Palmolive India Ltd (CPIL) said in a regulatory filing. Its sales were up 8.21 per cent to Rs 1,386.41 crore in the third quarter of the current fiscal. It was at Rs 1,281.21 crore in the corresponding period a year ago. CPIL's total expenses were Rs 970.14 crore, marginally down during the quarter. CPIL's total income in the quarter under review was at Rs 1,413.54 crore, up 8.6 per cent. "We are pleased with top line growth for the quarter supported by the strong performance of our core equities. Profitability indicators are on an upward trend and we continue to enhance the investment support behind our brands," Prabha Narasimhan MD & CEO said. Current performance underscores the effectiveness of our strategy, focus on technology, securing the right talent, and efforts in governance and cost management.

## Technology industry of choice for Gen Z students: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The technology industry in India continues to draw Gen Z students with 77 per cent of them showing interest towards the sector, a report by Nasscom-Indeed said. Millennials and Gen Zs constitute around 90 per cent of the tech workforce in India enabling higher generational diversity and driving a shift in preferences. "Learning and Growth and Culture and Ethics are the top criteria for both Millennials and Gen Z when selecting

an organisation, highlighting the employers' continued focus on skilling and upskilling to navigate the current work environment and develop their desired career paths," the Nasscom-Indeed Future of Work report 2024, which was released on Monday, said. "The technology industry in India continues to be the industry of choice for Gen Z students with 77 per cent... Showing interest towards the industry," it said. The survey by Nasscom and Indeed involved 185 employers and over 2,500 individuals from current and future



workforces. As much as 84 per cent of organisations are exploring or are open to gig models, with startups and the Business Process Management (BPM) sector

leading in hiring in this segment, it said. For the future workforce, criteria for selecting an organisation remains similar, whereas career progression, compensation, benefits, and learning opportunities are the primary factors that drive them to continue with an organisation, it said. The report examines the transformational landscape across three pivotal pillars -- the future of jobs, workforce dynamics, and the evolving workplace. Generation Z refers to individuals born in late 1990s and the early 2010s.

The gig economy has profoundly transformed traditional job roles and organisational structures, leading to more diverse skills, increased resource allocation agility, dynamic team configurations, and updated role definitions. "The primary drivers for Gen Zs and Millennials opting for gig roles are flexible job locations and a focus on specialised skills. Organisations are capitalising on gig workers in areas such as software development, data annotation, and business analytics, tapping into the benefits of on-demand talent and specialised expertise," it said.



# INDIA PLACED IN TOUGH POOL B IN MEN HOCKEY COMPETITION

PTI ■ LAUSANNE (SWITZERLAND)

Asian Games champions and Tokyo Olympics bronze medalists India have been placed in a tough Pool B in the men's hockey competition at this year's Paris Games. Eight-time champions India, who clinched a historic bronze medal in Tokyo after a hiatus of 41 years, have been clubbed with reigning Olympic champions and world no.2 Belgium, mighty Australia, Rio Games gold medalist Argentina, New Zealand and Ireland.

The Indians are currently ranked third in the world, behind Belgium and the Netherlands, and they had found it tough to beat Tokyo silver medalist Australia and Argentina in the past.

Pool A, meanwhile, consists of Netherlands, Germany, Great Britain, Spain, France and South Africa.

The International Hockey Federation announced the pools of both men's and women's hockey competition after the



completion of the FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifiers on Sunday.

In the women's competition in Paris, there will be no representation from India, who finished a creditable fourth in Tokyo, as

they failed to qualify, having finished fourth after losing to

Japan 0-1 in the Olympic Qualifiers in Ranchi on Friday. Germany, USA and Japan sealed their berths from the Ranchi event.

Reigning Olympic champions Netherlands are placed in Pool A with Belgium Germany, Japan, China and hosts France, while Pool B comprises Australia, current silver medalist Argentina, Great Britain, Spain, USA and South Africa.

The participating teams have been allocated their respective pools on the basis of the FIH World Rankings as on Sunday. The 12 teams per gender have qualified for the Olympic Games either as hosts, winner of their continental qualifier or top three finisher of their FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifier.

The top four teams from each pool in both men's and women's competitions will qualify for the quarterfinals.

The Paris Olympics will be held from July 26 till August 11 and hockey competitions will start from July 27 and end on August 9.



## Deepak, Nishant make cut, Panghal misses out

Paris Olympics world qualification boxing tourney

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

World Championships bronze medalists Deepak Bhoria and Nishant Dev will be among nine Indian boxers in the running to seal Paris Olympic quotas at the first qualification tournament, scheduled to take place in Busto Arsizio, Italy from February 29 to March 12.

Six-time Asian Championships medalist Shiva Thapa (63.5kg) and 2022 Commonwealth Games bronze winner Jaismine Lamboria (60kg) were also named in the nine-member Indian squad announced by the Boxing Federation of India (BFI) on Monday.

Apart from Deepak (51kg), who once again pipped 2019 World Championships silver medalist Amit Panghal based on BFI's evaluation process, and Nishant (71kg), 2022 Worlds bronze winner Mohammad Hussamuddin (57kg), who was out with a knee injury for most of last year, makes a return.

Youth women's world champion Ankushita Boro (66kg), reigning national champions Lakshya Chahar (80kg), Sanjeet Kumar (92kg), Hangzhou Asian Games bronze medalist Narender Berwal (+92kg) have also been included, and they will fight for Paris Games quotas in their respective categories.

The players have been selected after a comprehensive evaluation process, conducted by the high-performance unit based on various performance parameters. "Our aim is to maximise India's participation at the Paris Olympic Games 2024 and to achieve that, we have undertaken a thorough and careful selection process for the first World Qualification Tournament," BFI Secretary General Hemanta

Kalita said.

"The high-performance team conducted a detailed evaluation process, gave points to boxers and those securing highest points were selected. We are confident and believe that these boxers possess the mettle to not only compete but triumph and secure coveted spots at the Olympics."

India is yet to secure an Olympic quota in the men's section. The country's women pugilists have already secured four quotas for the Paris Olympics with Nikhat Zareen (50kg), Preeti (54kg), Parveen Hooda (57kg), and Lovlina Borgohain (75kg) confirming their berths with impressive performances at the Asian Games.

India had nine boxers competing at the Tokyo Olympics with Borgohain returning with a sole medal in the sport — a bronze. The first World Qualification Tournament will have 50 Olympics quotas up for grabs, including 22 in the women's section, whereas between 45 and 51 boxers will qualify through the second World Qualification Tournament, to be held in Bangkok from May 23 to June 3.

The countries which do not have any qualified boxer in a specific weight category through their continental qualification tournament or the first World Qualification Tournament will be eligible to enter one athlete per weight category.

### THE INDIAN SQUAD:

**WOMEN:** Jaismine (60kg), Ankushita Boro (66kg).

**MEN:** Deepak Bhoria (51kg), Md Hussamuddin (57kg), Shiva Thapa (63.5kg), Nishant Dev (71kg), Lakshya Chahar 80kg, Sanjeet (92kg), Narender (+92kg).

## India look for win against Syria

To keep alive faint hopes of reaching Asian Cup knockouts

PTI ■ AL KHOR (QATAR)

Winless, and pointless, after losing two group matches, India need nothing more than a win against a tricky Syria to keep alive their faint hopes of making the knockout stage of AFC Asian Cup football tournament here on Tuesday.

A 0-2 and 0-3 defeat to Australia and Uzbekistan laid bare India's inability to give strong competition to the top teams of the continent but a win against Syria can salvage some pride for the Sunil Chhetri-led side.

Syria are currently ranked at 91st in the FIFA chart, 11 places above India (102nd) but a victory is not impossible for the Igor Stimac-coached side as they had won in the past — in 2007, 2009 and 2012 Nehru Cup tournaments.

The last time the two sides met, the match ended in a 1-1 draw in the 2019 Intercontinental Cup in Ahmedabad, and Stimac was also in charge of the Indian team then.

India will finish third in Group B if they beat Syria at Al Bayt Stadium but even that will not guarantee them a place in the round of 16.

With a goal difference of minus five — the deciding factor if



teams are tied on points — after two matches, it may be difficult for India to be one of the four third-placed teams out of six to progress to the knockout stage. The last group matches will be held on Thursday (Group E and F) and India will have to wait till then to know their fate even if they beat Syria on Tuesday. India adopted an ultra defensive approach against the mighty Australians who have been a regular in the FIFA World Cup for some time but they tried to express themselves a bit in the match against Uzbekistan and, coupled with some costly mistakes by defenders, they failed to put up a good fight.

It was not that India did not get any chance against Uzbekistan. They did get at least three, including the one from Rahul

KP that hit the crosspiece. With nothing to lose from the match, Stimac may be tempted to go all out for a win against India but he could be wary of any mistake from his players, like the one committed by Rahul Bheke, which led to Uzbekistan's second goal in the 18th minute. "At this level, there's never a convenient time to concede goals. If you allow time and space to a side like Uzbekistan, they will kill you," Stimac said.

"We need to work on ourselves, close these gaps in our game, and look forward to winning the crucial matches that lie ahead of us."

"They were far more clinical than us. They didn't give away anything and they took their chances. Whatever problems we had, came from ourselves.

We allowed them to take those chances. That's the difference." Usually highly reliable in front of goal, captain Chhetri has also been not at his best as could be seen once each against Australia and Uzbekistan, though nobody can fault him as he has been the lone ranger most of the time to get goals for India for many years.

Syria, who have one point from two matches, will also be looking for a win as doing so will boost their knockout prospect. So, the West Asian side are expected to come down hard on India, who, however, can exploit the situation to their advantage if they score first.

India would take heart from the fact that Syria are also yet to score in their earlier two matches — 0-1 with Australia and 0-0 with Uzbekistan.

More importantly, Syria have managed only one shot on target in the tournament, which is fewer than any other team. India have done better at least in that aspect of the game.

The status of Sahal Abdul Samad, who missed the first two matches as he was recovering from an injury, is not yet known though the midfielder himself hinted that he could be available for the Syria match.

## Inter Kashi, Bengaluru FC settle for draw in inconsequential match

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Bengaluru FC and Inter Kashi played out a 1-1 draw in their inconsequential Group D match in the Super Cup here on Monday.

Both teams had been knocked out of the competition and the result meant they registered their first points on the board.

A game with no real returns for either team — other than the opportunity to end the tournament on a high — predictably started off at a sedate pace, with both sides trading possession in midfield but unable to find composure in the final third. The texture of the contest was changed by a moment of pure brilliance by Kashi's Edmund Lalrindika in the 15th minute. The midfielder, on loan from Bengaluru FC, picked up the ball on the left of the box, turned, twisted and cut past three defenders before curling a finish to the far post, beyond Sahil's desperate dive.

Bengaluru could have had an equaliser almost immediately, if



Javi Hernandez and Halicharan Narzary showed more composure at the other end of the pitch. The former was guilty of looping a header high and the latter of blasting wide from a tight angle soon after. Sahil kept Bengaluru in the game, saving smartly from a close-range attempt in the 22nd minute, and 10 minutes later Bengaluru almost had their equaliser. Ashish Jha conjured up almost an exact replica of Kashi's goal, only to shoot off target.

Bengaluru's search for restoring parity picked up pace in the second half, with Hernandez, Roshan Singh and Jha all coming close once again.



## Indian Davis Cup team begins preparation for Davis Cup tie against Pakistan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Braving cold conditions, the Indian Davis Cup team began its preparatory camp for the upcoming grass court tie against Pakistan, keen to find a second singles player in the absence of top-ranked Indian Sumit Nagal. Country's top singles players — Nagal (ranked 137) and Sasikumar Mukund (ranked 463) — have pulled out of the tie February 3-4 tie in Islamabad. Their absence means that Ramkumar Ramanathan is the only singles specialist player in the team.

Captain Rohit Rajpal has to choose between Yuki Bhambri and N Sriram Balaji to play the second singles. Bhambri, at 61 in the ATP doubles list, is the team's highest ranked player and will certainly play the doubles rubber as well. Veteran Rohan Bopanna, who is India's best doubles player, has retired from Davis Cup. Niki Poonacha is also an option but he is ranked as low as 783 and the team may not field him in singles. Both Bhambri and Balaji took a day off since they travelled straight from Melbourne after competing in the Australian Open.

Ramkumar, Poonacha and Saketh Myneni had a light session that lasted two and a half hours. They had two hitting partners —

Udit Kamboj and Maan Kesarwani — from the National Tennis Centre (NTC) to help them warm up.

"They are all coming from tournaments. The idea is to get warmed up nicely. Grass courts require a different type of momentum. Lot of running, short sprints to the net, serve and volley. The tempo will build up as we go along," Rajpal told PTI. "We will make a decision on our second singles players in a couple of days. I have to see the players, how they play on grass," he said when asked about possible combinations.

"Pakistan have beaten good teams on grass so we have to prepare well and not take anything for granted. They know how to put pressure on grass, how to come in (charge net), we need try to and get used to that. We are planning our preparations accordingly, lot of drills are based on that," he added. Coach Zeeshan Ali said getting used to the surface is a challenge. The balls stay low on grass and courts are quicker and unpredictable. Where the ball will and how much the ball bounces, is difficult to predict.

"These guys do not get to play on grass. Acclimatising to surface is key and that's why this camp has been organised. The strokes remain the same but it is movement which is crucial on grass," said Zeeshan.

## Prannoy to lead Indian charge

PTI ■ JAKARTA

Singles ace HS Prannoy will spearhead the Indian challenge at the Indonesian Masters Super 500 badminton tournament beginning here on Tuesday after the pull-out of crack doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Ran-kireddy and Chirag Shetty. Having finished runners-up in back-to-back tournaments of Malaysia Super 1000 and India Open Super 750, the reigning Asian Games champions have given the tournament a miss with an eye on their workload with a gruelling season ahead of them.

The duo's absence may have taken some sheen of the tournament, but world No. 9 Prannoy will look to keep the Indian flag high continuing his consistent run.

Prannoy is only seeded Indian player at No. 7 in the men's singles draw of 32 as he will begin his campaign against Loh Kean Yew of Singapore, against whom the Indian has a 4-1 win-loss record.

The world No. 11 Yew's solitary win against Prannoy was at the



2021 World Championships and since then the Indian has won twice in a row with the last coming in bronze-medal winning run at the last year's World Championship.

Besides the that coveted bronze medal, Prannoy won the Malaysia Masters and finished second in the Australian Open last year.

He has been at his consistent best and had a last-four after being ousted by eventual champion Yu Qi Shi of China in the Indian Open last week.

Before that, Prannoy made an opening round exit in the

Malaysia Open Super 1000. The other Indian, who will be in focus will be world No. 19 Lakshya Sen, looking to end his opening round jinx, when he is up against Weng Hong Yang of China.

The world No. 16 Chinese has a 3-2 win-loss ratio against the young Indian and goes into the match on the back of his Malaysia Open win less than two weeks back.

Since his Canada Open triumph last year, Sen has been on a downward spiral and has capped eight opening round exits in a row.

## Bopanna, Ebden duo enters quarter finals of Australian Open

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

India's Rohan Bopanna and his Australian partner Matthew Ebden entered the men's doubles quarterfinals of the Australian Open with an impressive 7-6 7-6 victory over Wesley Koolhof of the Netherlands and Croatia's Nikola Mektic here on Monday.

The 43-year-old Bopanna and Ebden, who are seeded second in the draw, were broken early in both sets but showed themselves to be up to the task with some great returns against the 14th seeds.

The Indo-Australian pair will next meet the sixth-seeded Argentine duo of Maximo Gonzalez and Andres Molteni.

They are also the highest seeded pair to remain alive in the men's doubles competition and Monday's win was a praiseworthy one against the former top ranked doubles pair in the world. Bopanna's service let him down initially as he was broken in the second game of the first set with the 14th seeds racing to a 3-0 lead within first 15 minutes of the start. However, the veteran Indian, who recently retired from Davis Cup duties, was back in his groove with some signature backhand down the lines and deft overhead lobs which were placed inches inside the baseline.

In the seventh game of the first set, Mektic and Koolhof made some glaring unforced errors, allowing the Indo-Aussie pair to get their foot in the door. There was no looking back for them after



that as they held both nerve and serve. Bopanna was a livewire at the nets and his anticipation won him half of the points as he used deft volleys in the alley between Koolhof and Mektic. The bisection was very precise, leaving the opponents wrong-footed.

In the second set also, Bopanna lost his first service game with the Dutch-Croat duo going up 4-2 and showing signs of a revival, which looked imminent but was not to be.

Mektic's first serve really let their team down as they had a success percentage of a mere 55 percent compared to a whopping 77 percent by the winners, despite conceding breaks in both games. Ebden didn't lose a single game on his serve.

In the eighth game of the second set, Bopanna upped his game once again and forced the opposition to commit errors, and they made a comeback into the contest.

## Pak hockey team fails to qualify for Olympics

PTI ■ KARACHI

Pakistan's embattled men's hockey team has failed to qualify for the Olympic Games for a third consecutive time after losing its final shot at a Paris ticket in the FIH Qualifiers in Oman, a result that left the game's former greats here sad and outraged in equal measure. After losing 0-4 to Germany in the tournament's semi-final, Pakistan went down 2-3 to New Zealand in the third-place match last night, ending their chances of making it to this year's Paris Olympics as only the top-three made the cut.

Pakistan's last Olympic appearance was in the 2012 Games where the team signed off 7th,

a marginal improvement from its worst ever 8th place finish in the Beijing Games in 2008. The team is overall an eight-time medalist in the mega-event, three of them being gold (1960, 1968, and 1984).

"What do you expect bhai (brother), when the team is sent to the Olympic qualifiers with just 18 days training whereas all the other teams have come there with months of preparation and training," Olympian Wasim Feroze, who was a member of Pakistan's 1994 World Cup and Champions Trophy winning teams, said.

Pakistan hockey has been in doldrums and was faced with a financial crisis leading to non



payment of allowances and contract salaries to players and coaches. The financial crunch at times forced the PHF to pull out of international events. But two months back the crisis took a new turn when Brigadier

(ret'd) Khalid Sajjad Khokar, who was PHF President since 2015, was removed by the patron in chief, the caretaker prime minister Anwar ul Haq Kakar. This led to total chaos with

Khokar refusing to accept the government decision and effectively created a situation of parallel authorities with the players also not sure about their future and coaches coming and going. Khokar even threatened to go to the FIH and get the PHF suspended as he claimed only he was recognised by the world body.

Arch-rivals India qualified for Paris with an Asian Games gold last year.

Feroze, who has remained a national selector, said the country should suspend playing international hockey events until it sort out its internal problems. "There is no money for players and there is so much politics in the national federation and even

at grass root level. Better we first resolve these things then go and play in international events and get embarrassed," he said. Former captain, Samiullah said he felt depressed after seeing the level to which Pakistan hockey had fallen.

"I mean, if we can't even win one match which was like a final for us what is going to happen? In the last quarter of the match against NZ the players just didn't have the fitness or spirit to secure victory," he said. Samiullah said it was a shame that Pakistan would now miss its third successive Olympics. His contemporary, Islahuddin Siddiqui agreed and said the players were just not well-prepared for the qualifiers.



# SURYA NAMED CAPTAIN

PTI ■ DUBAI

Flamboyant middle-order batter Suryakumar Yadav has been named the captain of the ICC men's T20I Team of the Year, which also includes three more Indians in opener Yashasvi Jaiswal, spinner Ravi Bishnoi and left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh. The ICC Team of the Year recognises 11 outstanding individuals who have impressed throughout the year with the bat, ball or their all-round exploits. Suryakumar found a place in the side for a second straight year and is in the running for T20I men's Cricketer of the Year. The right-handed stroke-maker from Mumbai had a solid 2023. His first innings of just seven to start the year against Sri Lanka was a mere speed bump in another prolific year, as he made scores of 51 (36) and 112 not out (51) in the next two matches. Consistent scoring in 20s to 40s continued, before an innings of 83 (44) against the West Indies in Providence proved his class. He ended the series against the West Indies with a knock of 61 (45) in Florida.



ICC MEN T20I TEAM

Surya also became India captain with Rohit Sharma taking a break in the back end of the year. He made half-centuries against Australia (80 off 42 balls) and South Africa (56 from 36 balls), before posting a 100 against the Proteas off just 56 balls in their final T20I of the year in Johannesburg. Besides the Indian quartet, the 11-member team also has England's Phil Salt as Jaiswal's opening partner, West Indies' Nicholas Pooran as wicket-keeper, Mark Chapman of New Zealand, Zimbabwe's Sikandar Raza, Uganda all-rounder Alpesh Ramjani, Ireland's Mark Adair and Richard Ngarava of Zimbabwe. Among women, off-spinner Deepti Sharma is the lone Indian to find a place in the 11-member side to be led by Sri Lanka's Chamari Athapaththu. The women's side features four Australians — Beth Mooney (wk), Ellyse Perry, Ash Gardner and Megan Schutt, two from England in Nat Sciver-Brunt and Sophie Ecclestone, Laura Wolvaardt of South Africa, West Indies' Hayley Matthews and Amelia Kerr of New Zealand.



## Virat withdraws from first two Tests against England

PATIDAR, SARFARAZ IN CONTENTION

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's batting mainstay Virat Kohli has pulled out of the first two Tests against England due to personal reasons which "demand his presence and undivided attention", the BCCI said on Monday. The BCCI urged the fans and media to refrain from speculating about the exact reason for his forced break before the five-match series begins in Hyderabad on January 25. The Board said it will name a replacement for the star batter soon. "Virat Kohli has requested the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to be withdrawn from the first two Tests of the upcoming IDFC First Bank Test series against England, citing personal reasons," BCCI secretary Jay Shah said in a statement. The BCCI also said that Kohli has discussed his decision with skipper Rohit Sharma and the team management. "Virat has spoken to captain Rohit Sharma, the team management and the selectors and has emphasized that while representing the country has always been his top priority, certain personal situations demand his presence and undivided attention," the release further stated.

Shah also said that BCCI completely backs its star player and has faith in the team and its ability to get results even without its best batter. "The BCCI respects his decision and the Board and team management has extended its support to the star batter and is confident in the abilities of the remaining squad members to step up and deliver commendable performances in the Test series," the secretary said. He also urged everyone to respect Kohli's privacy. "The BCCI requests the media and fans to respect Virat Kohli's privacy during this time and refrain from speculating on the nature of his personal reasons. "The focus should remain on supporting the Indian cricket team as they embark on the upcoming challenges in the Test series," Shah said. It has been learnt that both Shah and chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar were kept in loop about the possibility of Kohli needing a break at some point during the England series. Recently, Kohli also skipped the first T20I game against Afghanistan due to "personal reasons". Before that, he had taken a short break, again for personal reasons, during India's tour of

South Africa where he missed an intra-squad practice game and flew to London, within days after arriving in South Africa. The last time he took a break, which was not linked to any injury, during a Test series was a paternity leave in 2021 when his daughter Vamika was born. He only played the first Test of that series. **RAJAT PATIDAR VS SARFARAZ KHAN AS REPLACEMENT:** It is understood that one among the two heavyweight India 'A' performers — Rajat Patidar of Madhya Pradesh and Sarfaraz Khan of Mumbai — are frontrunners to replace Kohli. Patidar recently scored 151 against the England Lions in an unofficial Test and Sarfaraz scored a half-ton in the second innings of the same game. There is talk of including veteran Cheteshwar Pujara in the line-up considering his experience of 20,000 plus first-class runs, including 7000 in Tests. However, it will be interesting if the current selection committee under Agarkar is ready to look back or move forward. The batting line-up for first Test will comprise Yashasvi Jaiswal, Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill, KL Rahul, Shreyas Iyer, Ravindra Jadeja, and KS Bharat (wk).

## Rohit walks the talk as a leader: Zaheer

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India left-arm pacer Zaheer Khan on Monday described Rohit Sharma as a leader who "walks the talk" and reckoned he will contribute handsomely both as a captain and batter in the upcoming five-Test series against England. "Everyone knows of the influence and impact that Rohit has had on the whole group," Zaheer said on JioCinema. Zaheer said the hallmark of Rohit's captaincy is his ability to communicate well. "He talks about communication. He gives enough confidence to every player and brings out the best in them. "That has been the hallmark of his captaincy and he leads from the front as seen in the World Cup. He walks the talk. "When you have a leader walking the talk, it gives you better efficiency within the whole group. So, I think he's a proven leader."



Ever since Rohit took on the role of an opener in Tests, he has achieved notable success, including scoring impressive centuries in challenging conditions. "You've seen him adapt nicely in England

when it came to leaving the ball. He said that he had worked a lot on it," Zaheer said. "You've seen that in Chennai when he played a match-defining knock.

Winning the toss, batting first and getting the opposition completely out in the first innings and being instrumental in that, is something which gives satisfaction to any player playing at the highest level. "So, he's had that kind of impact as well. You will see something on those line in this series (against England). It's a five-Test series so there will be a lot on his mind, not just as a batter but also as a leader. "He has to work it out with Rahul Dravid and the selectors to see how he can rotate players. "Both teams will be looking to do that because a five-Test series brings its own challenges and you got to be staying on top of that tactically, planning about the resources who are more useful in which conditions and get the maximum impact from every individual," Zaheer said. The series against England begins in Hyderabad on Thursday.

## England uncapped spinner Bashir yet to join squad in India due to visa issues

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

A delay in paperwork has forced England's uncapped off-spinner Shoaib Bashir to stay back in the UAE ahead of their five-Test series against India, starting on Thursday. The 20-year-old Bashir, whose parent's are of Pakistani origin, has been left behind following the conclusion of an England training camp in Abu Dhabi. Stuart Hooper, who has recently joined the ECB as their new managing director of cricket operations, is accompanying Bashir, reported ESPNcricinfo. Meanwhile, England's red-ball head coach Brendon McCullum informed that the ECB has raised the issue with the relevant authorities in the BCCI as well as the Indian government, while expecting the issue to be resolved within 24 hours. Although the delay will cause Bashir to miss out on preparations for around two days, McCullum has assured that the Somerset player will remain in contention for selection for the first Test. "Bash will join us hopefully tomorrow as well. He's got a couple of issues with his visa coming through. We're confident on the back of the help from the BCCI and the Indian government that will sort itself out pretty quickly as well," McCullum said. "Things take time, don't they? Everyone is doing what they can. It's a process we need to go through. "We're pretty confident that we're close. The time that Bash had with the squad over in Abu Dhabi, where he fitted in seamlessly, will serve him greatly. "We've also got a little bit of support out there for him, so he's not on his own. We're hoping the news will come through today that his visa has been approved, then we'll get him to sink his teeth into this series," he added.

## Gough hails Anderson

PTI ■ LONDON

Former England cricketer Darren Gough is full of admiration for James Anderson's unwavering commitment to the game, especially as the 41-year-old fast bowler made adjustments to his run-up ahead of the gruelling five-Test series in India. Set to become the oldest player to feature in an overseas Test for England in almost three decades, Anderson in an interview has earlier revealed that he is coming with a "better run-up to get that speed and momentum". He has worked on it after a forgettable Ashes at home last year where he returned with five wickets from four Tests at 85.40 apiece. "It just goes to show the desire to carry on playing. The only thing is when you've been doing something so long as Jimmy has, when you start quickening up, you bring more injuries into play, more hamstring, calf, groin-type injuries," Darren Gough told English publication inews. "Let's hope not because I think even at his age he can perform. Everybody talks about his age but with Jimmy you have to take age out of it. If he keeps taking wickets he keeps playing. If he doesn't, he doesn't, it's that simple," Gough said. Anderson will also return after his longest ever lay-off having last played in July last year in the final Ashes Test at the Oval. The managing director of cricket for Yorkshire also voiced his concerns about the potential injury risks associated with changing a well-established bowling dynamic.



"When you start having injuries they tend to follow you. He's such an athlete. But changing your run-up? It could be brilliant but like anything when you change your dynamics it could set off injuries," Gough added. Anderson has a commendable track record in Tests in India, with 34 wickets in 13 games since 2006 at 29.32 apiece. Gough emphasised that if Anderson continues to take wickets, age should not be a limiting factor in his selection even though England selectors need to make a decision. "He's put himself up for a very difficult tour, it tends to be for a fast bowler when you go to India. But if he has a good series he can do one more (summer)...If he doesn't what's he going to do? Keep going because he wants to go out on a high? England might have to make a decision," Gough concluded.

## Indian team will go with Gujarat spinner: Harbhajan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Having got to play only eight Tests since making his debut against Australia in 2017 does make Kuldeep Yadav one of the luckiest Indian cricketers in recent times. And if the Indian team management under Rahul Dravid follow the "rank turner" template for the upcoming England series starting January 25, Kuldeep can be seen warming the bench at least in the initial stage of the five-match series. India spin great Harbhajan Singh, who is known for his forthright opinions, feels that although in terms of skill and quality Kuldeep will be ahead of the Gujarat left-arm spinner, there is no better choice than Axar if pitches are diabolical in nature. "Look, the way I look at it that when both R Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja are in playing eleven and you are looking at a third specialist spinner, it should be Kuldeep. "Because Kuldeep as a wrist



spinner will bring that variation. But I believe Axar's selection in Test matches is purely on his batting skills. At No 8 or 9, he can bat and that's what he brings to the table," Harbhajan, who is currently in Dubai, told PTI when asked about his preferred choice. But the "Turbanator" wanted to set the record straight. "While Axar brings his superior batting to the table (compared to Kuldeep), I don't see

a logic why you need a superior batter at No. 9 when his skill-sets are completely identical with that of Jadeja's. "You are then taking the aspect of variation out of equation. So for me, ideally, Kuldeep should play," he reasoned. Axar had taken 50 wickets in 12 Tests but it's only fair to mention that 27 out of those 50 wickets came in his first three Tests against England in 2021 and the next 23 wickets have

come in nine games. Against Australia at home, he got only three wickets in four Test matches including going wicketless in two of those games (Delhi and Indore). The five Tests will be held in Hyderabad, Visakhapatnam, Rajkot, Ranchi and Dharamsala. Except for the last game on a track which is traditionally known to help pacers but of late has turned into a batting better, all the other four venues will offer significant help for Ashwin and Jadeja. Axar's biggest plus point on rank turners is not trying to turn the deliveries and just landing it on spot allowing the pitch to do the rest. On crumbling surfaces, he bowls those under-cutters, where the ball skids after landing on its skin rather than seam. These type of deliveries stay low and batters from SENA countries are often confused whether to go on front-foot or back-foot. But on better tracks, Axar has been found wanting as he doesn't have too many variations in his repertoire.

## RANJI TROPHY

# MUMBAI DEMOLISH KERALA

PTI ■ THUMBKA (KERALA)

Spin duo of Shams Mulani and Tanush Kotian exploited the conditions beautifully to trigger a stunning batting collapse as Mumbai registered a handsome 232-run win after skittling out Kerala for 94 in their Ranji Trophy Group B match here on Tuesday. On a turning fourth day wicket, the home side crumbled under relentless pressure with left-arm spinner Mulani returning with 5/44 from his 16 overs. Off-spinner Kotian provided the perfect support, claiming 5-1-6-2. Mulani is now the leading wicket-taker for Mumbai with 17 to his name. Veteran seamer Dhawal Kulkarni (2/32) triggered the collapse in the first over of the day when he dismissed Jalaj Saxena (16). He followed it up with Krishna Prasad (4) in his third over before the spin duo took over. Kerala, who were 24 for no loss overnight, chasing a stiff 327 lost all their wickets in 27 overs with the match getting over half-an-hour before

lunch on the final day. This was Mumbai's third successive victory as they consolidated their position atop Group B standings with 20 points. Captain Sanju Samson was Kerala's lone warrior, displaying resilience and determination on a challenging fourth-day pitch. With wickets tumbling around him, Samson stood firm in his unbeaten knock of 15 runs off 51 balls. Mohit Avasthi was adjudged player-of-the-match for his seven-wicket haul and valuable contributions with the bat (16 and 32). **ANDHRA WIN BIG VS ASSAM:** In Dibrugarh, Andhra posted their maiden win of the season defeating hosts Assam by 172 runs and log six points. Andhra now have nine points from three matches. Chasing an imposing 363, Assam managed to add 109 runs to their overnight total before being bowled



out for 190 in 48.2 overs. Overnight 46, skipper Riyan Parag ended up with 75 and after his dismissal wicketkeeper-batter Sumit

Ghadigaonkar put up a resistance in his 60 (102 balls). But he lacked support at the other end as Andhra bowlers kept taking wick-

ets at regular intervals. Lalith Mohan (4/81) was the pick of Andhra bowlers, while Girinath Reddy and Manish Golamaru returned with three apiece. Ricky Bhui was awarded player-of-the-match for his impactful second innings score of 125. **CHHATTISGARH DENY BENGAL 3 POINTS:** Bengal were left rueing their luck as visitors Chhattisgarh showed resilience, led by Ashutosh Singh's gritty 88 from 240 balls, that denied the home side a first innings lead. Despite the pressure, the No. 4 batter displayed commendable shot selection and stayed firm at the crease as Chhattisgarh saw through the final day, finishing at 214/6. As the innings was incomplete on the fourth day, both the teams returned with one point each. In hindsight, Bengal could have made an early declaration instead of choos-

ing to bat two full days keeping in mind the overcast conditions. Only nine overs were possible on the penultimate day. Bengal had made an overnight declaration at 381/8 after day two.

### BRIEF SCORES

**IN THUMBKA:** Mumbai 251 and 319. Kerala 244 and 94; 33 overs (Rohan Kunnummal 26; Shams Mulani 5/44, Dhawal Kulkarni 2/32, Tanush Kotian 2/6). Mumbai won by 232 runs. Points: Mumbai 6, Kerala 0. **IN DIBRUGARH:** Andhra 188 and 334. Assam 160 and 190; 48.2 overs (Riyan Parag 75, Sumit Ghadigaonkar 60; Lalith Mohan 4/81, Girinath Reddy 3/57, Manish Golamaru 3/19). Andhra won by 172 runs. Points: Andhra 6, Assam 0. **IN KOLKATA:** Bengal 381/8 declared. Chhattisgarh 214/6; 92 overs (Ashutosh Singh 88; Suraj Sindhu Jaiswal 4/29). Match drawn. Points: Bengal 1, Chhattisgarh 1. **IN MEERUT:** Bihar 260. Uttar Pradesh 45/3. Match drawn. Points: Bihar 1, UP 1.