



!! रामो विग्रहवान् धर्मः !!



**Chhattisgarh**  
the 'Nanihaal' of  
Shri Ram and the land of Mata Shabari  
extends warm wishes for  
**"Shri Ramlala Praan Pratishtha"**  
in Ayodhya

Chhattisgarh  
Government,  
under the leadership of  
Shri Vishnu Deo Sai  
is committed to  
preserve and cherish  
the memories of  
Shri Ram's  
time in Chhattisgarh

Forest land of Chhattisgarh  
bears witness to  
the sacred bond of  
Mata Shabari and Shri Ram



सबका साथ-सबका विकास, सबका विश्वास और सबका प्रयास

Shri Narendra Modi  
Hon'ble Prime Minister, India

Shri Vishnu Deo Sai  
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Chhattisgarh

# THE WORLD

TOP OF THE  
WORLD



Imran Khan. File

PAKISTAN

Imran warns of more instability if polls aren't fair

**Islamabad:** Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has sought a level playing field for his party in the run-up to the February 8 general elections, saying a lack of fairness in conducting polls would lead to further "instability and uncertainty". The remarks by Khan, 71, the founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, came during an informal media interaction at the Adiala Jail on Saturday. Internet users faced major interruptions during the virtual event. He claimed that the PTI is facing obstacles in conducting its election campaign, with restrictions preventing the party from holding public gatherings. PTI

**UGANDA**  
President hails Indian diaspora's contributions

**Kampala:** Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni has hailed the contributions of the South Asian community, especially the Indian diaspora, to the country's economy despite their struggles following their mass expulsion in 1972. Museveni, who hosted the 19th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Kampala from January 15-20, spoke about the mistakes committed by former military ruler Idi Amin who forced Asians, a majority of them Indians, settled in Uganda to leave the country. "NAM countries also make mistakes like in Uganda. Then we had a man called Idi Amin," he said. PTI

**PHILIPPINES**  
Marcos draws ire as official copter taken for conert

**Cairo:** Egypt will not allow any threat to Somalia or its security, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi said Sunday, according to a statement from the presidency, after Ethiopia said it would consider recognising an independence claim by Somaliland. Trying to "jump on a piece of land" to try to control it is something that no-one will agree to, Sisi said at a news conference with Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud in Cairo. Somaliland declared independence from Somalia in 1991 but it has not won recognition from any country. REUTERS

**MEXICO**  
Govt palace set on fire after police kill man

**Mexico City:** Residents of a Mexican town set fire to the municipal palace overnight on Friday in a violent protest after local police shot a young man in the neck, according to his relatives, after he did not stop his car at a check-point. Police shot dead 27-year-old Brandon Arellano, the son of a local teacher, as he arrived outside his grandmother's house. REUTERS

NO INDICATION NETANYAHU'S POSITION UNDER IMMINENT THREAT

## Thousands in Tel Aviv call for regime change as Gaza war toll hits 25,000

Protesters say govt mishandling nation's security, call for fresh polls

REUTERS  
TEL AVIV, RAFAH, JANUARY 21

THOUSANDS of Israelis gathered in Tel Aviv on Saturday to protest against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government, accusing the veteran leader of mishandling the nation's security and calling for a fresh election.

Anti-government protests that shook the nation for much of 2023 ceased after the attacks by Hamas in southern Israel on October 7. Political rifts were set aside as Israelis rallied behind the military and the families of those killed or taken hostage.

The toll of Palestinians killed in Israeli strikes on the Gaza Strip since war broke out between Israel and Hamas in October has passed 25,000, Gaza health officials said, while Israeli attacks and street battles raged across the Hamas-run enclave on Sunday.

Israeli forces and Hamas fighters clashed in several places, from Jabalia in the north to Khan Younis in the south, the focus of recent Israeli operations.



Protesters in Tel Aviv on Saturday. Israel continues to carry out airstrikes in Gaza including areas where civilians take refuge. Reuters

But with the devastating war in Gaza in its fourth month and opinion polls showing lagging support for Netanyahu, calls for leadership changes are growing stronger, though there is no indication that his position is under any imminent threat. This was reflected in Saturday night's turnout in a Tel Aviv square where many of 2023's protests took place.

While the crowd was much

smaller than those seen last year, it still comprised several thousand people, with many banging on drums, yelling their dismay and waving Israeli flags. Israel continues to carry out airstrikes throughout the besieged territory, including areas in the south where it told civilians to seek refuge.

As of Sunday, total of 25,105 Palestinians - many of them women and children - have been killed and 62,681 have been wounded in Israeli strikes since October 7, the ministry said in a statement.

In the southern area of Khan Younis, where Israel says it has expanded its operations against Hamas, witnesses said tanks shelled areas around Nasser Hospital overnight, describing the bombardment as the most intense in many days.

Israel clears plan for Norway to hold Gaza's frozen tax funds

REUTERS  
JERUSALEM, JANUARY 21

ISRAEL'S CABINET approved a plan for frozen tax funds earmarked for the Hamas-run Gaza Strip to be held by Norway instead of transferred to the Palestinian Authority (PA), officials said on Sunday.

Under interim peace accords reached in the 1990s, Israel's finance ministry collects tax on behalf of the Palestinians and makes monthly transfers to the Western-backed PA.

But there have been constant wrangles over the arrangement, including Israel's demand that the funds do not reach Hamas.

The Palestine Liberation Organisation said on Sunday it wanted the money in full and would not accept conditions that prevent it from paying its staff, including Israel's demand that prevent the PA from paying our people in the Gaza Strip are rejected by us," PLO said on X.



The fire after suspected Ukraine strike at a Baltic Sea terminal in Russia's Ust-Luga on Sunday. AP

## Ukraine strikes kill 25 in Donetsk, cause blaze in Baltic Sea terminal: Officials

Russia captures Kharkiv village, Kyiv calls it 'temporary phenomenon'

Ukrainian drones, causing a gas tank to explode.

The blaze was at a site run by Russia's second-largest natural gas producer, Novatek, 165 kilometers southwest of St. Petersburg. In a press statement to Russian media outlet RBC, the company said that the fire was the result of an "external influence." It also said that it had paused operations at the port.

Yuri Zapalatsky, the head of Russia's Kingisepp district, where the port is based, said in a statement that there were no casualties, but that the area had been placed on high alert.

The Russian Ministry of Defense said that four Ukrainian drones had been downed in Russia's Smolensk region, and that two more had been shot down in the Oryol and Tula regions.

In the fighting on the front line, Russia's Ministry of Defense announced Sunday that Moscow's forces had taken control of the village of Krokhamle in Ukraine's Kharkiv region. Ukrainian forces confirmed that the settlement had been occupied, but described its capture as a "temporary phenomenon."

## Haley tries to woo independent voters as New Hampshire primary closes in

REUTERS  
PORTSMOUTH, JANUARY 21



Nikki Haley speaks at a rally in Nashua on Saturday. AP

TOM MITA, a 45-year-old non-profit worker in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, is not registered with a political party. That makes him the perfect target for Nikki Haley, who needs independent voters for a chance to prevail in this pivotal primary state.

Mita is thinking about voting for Haley, he told a pair of door knockers who were canvassing on behalf of the former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations outside his suburban home on Saturday, but he isn't completely sold on her candidacy.

He wants Haley, who has so far spared Donald Trump from some lines of attack, to go after him more aggressively. He considers Trump a threat to democracy for trying to overturn his 2020 election loss to Democratic President Joe Biden. If Haley pulls her punches, he may vote in the Democratic primary instead.

"It's really about stopping Trump," said Mita, standing outside his door, hands stuffed in his pockets, on a 19-degree Fahrenheit day. "Best scenario would be if she comes out and says that she won't endorse Trump for president."

Voters like Mita, who are unaffiliated with either major party, will be crucial to Haley if she is

to pull off an upset and beat Trump in New Hampshire, which holds its primary on Tuesday.

She likely needs a victory here or a very close second to survive, following her third place finish behind Trump and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis last week in Iowa.

Voters untied to either party are the state's most important bloc.

They account for 343,000 of all registered voters, eclipsing both the number of registered Republicans and Democrats, according to data from the secretary of state. Unaffiliated voters are allowed to participate in the primary of their choice.

About 30% are effectively Republicans, 35% align with Democrats, and 35% are truly independent, estimates Andrew Smith, director of the University of New Hampshire Survey Center and a political science professor.



## PRO-IMMIGRATION PROTEST IN PARIS

People protest France's controversial immigration law in Paris on Sunday. The Constitutional Council is reviewing next week the law, to check if it is in line with the Constitution. Reuters

### AMBULANCE FLIGHT TOOK OFF FROM PATTAYA

## 2 killed as Russian plane flying via India crashes in Afghanistan

REUTERS  
ISLAMABAD, JANUARY 21

RUSSIA'S AVIATION watchdog said on Sunday four people survived the crash of a charter plane bound for Moscow in northern Afghanistan, citing the Russian embassy there, and it said the condition of two other passengers on board was not yet clear.

Two Taliban provincial officials said four survivors were now with Taliban administration officials who had reached the remote, mountainous site of the crash. They said that two other passengers had died.

The Taliban administration's

top spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid said the pilot of the plane was among four who had survived. "The investigative team of the Islamic Emirate continues their efforts to search for and provide assistance to the remaining individuals," he said in a statement.

The Russian-registered plane with six people on board disappeared from radar screens over Afghanistan a day earlier, Russian aviation authority Rosaviatsia said Sunday, after Afghan police said they received reports of a crash.

The plane was a charter ambulance flight travelling from Thailand's Utapao Airport in Pattaya to Moscow via India and Uzbekistan.

About 25 minutes before the plane vanished, the pilot warned that fuel was running low and that the plane would try to land at an airport in Tajikistan, Russian news outlet SHOT reported, citing an unnamed source. The pilot then reported that one engine had stopped, and then the second too stopped. Reuters could not confirm the SHOT details.

The DGCA, India's civil aviation authority said, contrary to initial speculation that the aircraft originated from India and/or was an aircraft registered in India, the crashed plane was "neither an Indian Scheduled Aircraft nor a Non-Scheduled (NSOP)/Charter aircraft". WITHENS INPUTS

REUTERS  
SEOUL, JANUARY 21

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT Vladimir Putin expressed his willingness to visit Pyongyang soon when he met with North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui in Russia last week, North Korea's KCNA news agency reported Sunday.

Putin also thanked North Korean leader Kim Jong Un for his invitation to visit, KCNA said, citing North Korea's foreign minister's assistant office.

It would be the Russian leader's first trip to North Korea in more than two decades.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday that Russia hoped a Putin visit to North Korea, at Kim's invitation, would take place "in the foreseeable future", but he said no date had yet been agreed.

KCNA's Korean-language report on Sunday suggested Putin



Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un in Russia in September. File

intended to visit soon, but its later English report said he was "willing" to do so at an early date.

During Choe's visit, Russia thanked North Korea for its support and solidarity in its Ukraine military operation, KCNA said.

Moscow and Pyongyang also expressed serious concern over provocative acts by the United States and its allies against North Korea's sovereign rights, while agreeing to cooperate in dealing with the regional situation, the report said.

RARE EARTHS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR GREEN TECHNOLOGY LIKE ELECTRIC VEHICLES AND WIND TURBINES

## Your junk drawer could be a large source of rare earth minerals

HIROKO TABUCHI  
JANUARY 21

A VAST and largely overlooked source of rare earth metals, materials critical for clean energy, could be in our homes, sitting in the back of our cabinets and junk drawers.

A new study from researchers in China and the Netherlands estimates that reusing or recycling rare earth metals from old cellphones, hard drives, electric motors and turbines could meet as much as 40 percent of the demand for the metals in the United States, China and Europe by 2050.

Rare earths are essential for

green technology, like electric vehicles and wind turbines, which have a critical role in moving the world away from burning fossil fuels. They're also used in industries like aircraft, missile and satellite manufacturing.

Reusing and recycling rare earths can cut down on the need for mining, which can pollute soil and water with toxic heavy metals like arsenic. Rare earth mining operations have also become embroiled in local conflicts and human rights violations.

Being able to tap already-mined rare earths would be another advantage of switching to renewable energy from burning



Being able to tap already-mined rare earths would be another advantage of switching to renewable energy. NYT

fossil fuels, which drives global warming, said Peng Wang, a researcher at the Institute of Urban Environment at the Chinese Academy of Sciences and lead author of the study, which was published this month in *Nature Geoscience*.

"Unlike fossil fuels, which are 'burnt out' and permanently lost once consumed," he wrote, rare earths can be 'recovered' as alternative supply.

The idea of reusing or recycling rare earths isn't new. In the 1980s, Japanese researchers coined the term urban mining to describe collecting rare metals from discarded appliances and electronic devices,

rather than from the earth.

Common metals like iron, copper and aluminum are already widely recycled. But only about 1 percent of rare earths in old products are reused or recycled, researchers estimate. The world instead relies on mining for its supply of rare earths, about 70 percent of which comes from China, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

For the latest study, researchers used modeling to forecast how reusing and recycling rare earths could change that. The scientists found that the United States, the European Union and Japan could eventually accumulate rare-earth stockpiles in their old electronics and other products that far exceed what they would find mining the earth.

Based on their modeling, the researchers predicted that, globally, reuse and recycling could reduce the need to mine neodymium, a rare earth element used in wind turbines, by 60 percent in 2050 compared to a business-as-normal base line. But some big challenges remain.

Rare earths are often combined with other metals, so extracting them can be difficult. Some rare-earth recycling methods require hazardous chemicals and lots of energy.



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**Hamara sankalp  
Viksit Bharat**

# Modi Sarkar ki Guarantee

**Virasat bhi, Vikas bhi**

Construction of new, grand and divine Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple  
Gift of development projects worth thousands of crores rupees to Shri Ayodhya Dham



CPC 22/01/13/0192/928

**SECURITY HIGH AS GUESTS STREAM IN FOR TEMPLE TOWN'S BIG DAY**

# Ayodhya wears festive look, stage set for Ram temple consecration ceremony today

PM to join Pran Pratishta rituals for new Ram Lalla idol, will address the public later

**MAULSHREE SETH**  
AYODHYA, JANUARY 21

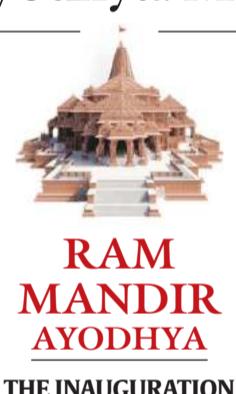
DIYAS WERE lit, flowers from different parts of the country adorned columns, walls inside and outside the new Ram temple, around 8,000 chairs awaited special invitees, dignitaries and celebrities, and the old idol of Ram Lalla Virajman was brought to the sanctum sanctorum as rituals continued all of Sunday, setting the stage for the Pran Pratishta, the consecration ceremony, of the new idol in the new temple in Ayodhya Monday.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



DECKED UP: The Ram Temple on the eve of its consecration, in Ayodhya on Sunday. Vishal Srivastav

**Unique civilisational journey with your each step in Ayodhya: Murmu to PM**

**DIVYA A**  
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 21

PRESIDENT Droupadi Murmu, in a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the eve of his departure to Ayodhya for the consecration ceremony, said Sunday she can "only contemplate the unique civilisational journey that will be accomplished with each step taken by you in the hallowed precincts". She said Lord Ram's "focus on

justice and welfare of the people" is "reflected in the governance outlook of our country" and "we all are fortunate to witness the commencement of a new cycle in the resurgence of our nation".

Conveying her "heartfelt wishes" to the Prime Minister, the President described the "nationwide celebratory atmosphere around the inauguration" of the Ram temple as "an uninhibited expression of the eternal soul of India".

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

**AIIMS ROLLS BACK ORDER, OPD OPEN****1822-2024: THE RAM MANDIR JOURNEY**  
PAGES 10, 14, 20

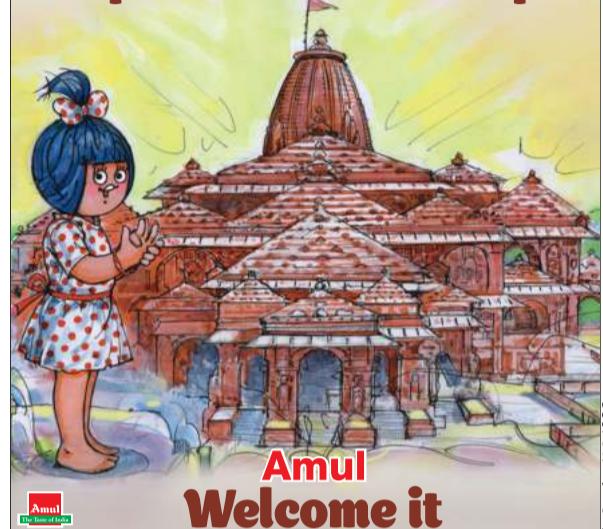
Sukhu declares holiday, Soren half day today

**SAURABH PARASHAR & ABHISHEK ANGAD**  
CHANDIGARH, RANCHI, JAN 21

THE CONGRESS is skipping the Ram Mandir idol consecration ceremony in Ayodhya but two of the three states where it is in power have declared holidays — one for the entire day and the other partial — on Monday to mark the occasion.

Saying that "Ram does not belong to just one party" but to the entire nation, Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Sunday declared a full-day holiday in the state. Jharkhand, where the Congress is junior ally in the ruling coalition led by Hemant Soren's Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), announced "all the offices

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

**Temple of a billion hopes**

daCunha/AB928

**Close to deadline, Bilkis convicts reach Godhra jail**

**ADITI RAJA**  
VADODARA, JANUARY 21

The convicts arrive at Godhra jail on Sunday. Bhupendra Rana

The 11 convicts — Radheshyam Shah, Jaswant Nai, CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

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**Assam Congress chief injured as Rahul yatra convoy is 'attacked'**



Protesters waving BJP flags in Sonitpur, Assam. Sukrita Baruah

Tax sops for low income slabs, higher capex likely in Budget

**AANCHAL MAGAZINE**  
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 21

UNION FINANCE Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the upcoming Interim Budget is unlikely to have any "spectacular announcement", but small tax relief measures and a fillip to welfare spending is likely, according to officials.

Tweaks in certain income tax rates, especially for those at the bottom of the taxpayer pyramid, are expected in the Interim Budget for 2024-25 to be announced on February 1. A hike in standard deduction along with a

higher exemption limit to incentivise taxpayers to shift to the new income tax regime are likely.

Officials said the tax

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

**SUKRITA BARUAH**  
SONITPUR, JANUARY 21

A CROWD wielding BJP flags attempted to attack vehicles involved in the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra as the convoy moved through Assam's Sonitpur dis-

trict on Sunday. State Congress chief Bhupen Borah suffered injuries to his face while confronting the crowd.

Rahul Gandhi, who was travelling on a bus which was also approached by the crowd, said later during a rally in Nagaon

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

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**Meet the Drone Didis of Punjab — rural women set for career as drone pilots**



During a training session in Manesar, Haryana. Express

cessfully flew a drone for the first time as like having "a little part of the world, which I owned and controlled, in my hands".

"I have never travelled in a plane, but it felt like I was flying one. It gave me confidence that I could achieve anything. It was all in my hands," said Kiranpal, who studied until class 10.

Soon, she will be taking her drone and travelling across her district in an e-vehicle to spray fertilisers and pesticides in agricultural fields under the NAMO Drone Didi Scheme launched by

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

**PAGE 1  
ANCHOR****DIVYA GOYAL GOPAL**  
LUDHIANA, JANUARY 21

"BINA AADMII ton uddan vaali vastu (an object that flies unmanned)," is all that Kiranpal Kaur (34) knew about drones until just a few months ago.

Now a trained drone pilot, Kiranpal, from Sekha village in Punjab's Barnala district, describes the feeling when she suc-

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**SRIRAM RAGHAVAN BREAKS DOWN MERRY CHRISTMAS: KATRINA KAIF, TEDDY BEAR, MURDER AND ALTERNATE CLIMAX WHICH CHANGED WEEK BEFORE FILMING**

Sriram Raghavan dissects Merry Christmas: The plot, the twists, the cast and the murder. Sriram Raghavan talks about how he wrote Merry Christmas based on the French novel Le Monte-charge (Bird in a Cage)

**TECH****SAMSUNG GALAXY S24+ VS IPHONE 15+**

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**EXPRESS** **AUDIO****Game Time: The bizarre case of Ishan Kishan's exclusion from team**

Ishan Kishan had expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of breaks amid hectic cricketing schedule. However, when he finally secured some time off, he chose to appear on 'Kaun Banega Crorepati'

**President writes to PM**

"As you prepare yourself to go for the Pran Pratishtha of Prabhu Shri Ram's murti at the new temple built in His birthplace, Ayodhya Dham, I can only contemplate the unique civilisational journey that will be accomplished with each step taken by you in the hallowed precincts," the President said in her letter.

Responding, the PM, in a post in Hindi on X, said, "Thank you very much for your good wishes on the auspicious occasion of Ram Lalla's Pran Pratishtha in Ayodhya Dham. I am confident that this historic moment will further enrich Indian heritage and culture and take our development journey to new heights."

The President, while mentioning the "11-day rigorous Anushtan" that the Prime Minister has undertaken for the ceremony, said it is "not only a sacred ritual but also a supreme spiritual act of sacrifice and submission to Prabhu Shri Ram".

She extolled the universal values that Lord Ram represents, such as courage, compassion and constant focus on duty, and how these "will be taken closer to the people through this magnificent temple".

"Prabhu Shri Ram signifies the best aspects of our cultural and spiritual heritage," she said. "Above all, He represents the good which is in constant battle with evil. His life and principles have influenced many episodes of our history and inspired nation builders. Mahatma Gandhi ji derived strength from Ramanama till his last breath."

The President also mentioned Lord Ram's message of "treating everyone with love and dignity, irrespective of their social back-

ground", and how it "also appealed to the intellect of path-breaking thinkers".

"His focus on justice and welfare of the people, too, is reflected in the governance outlook of our country. In fact, as an illustration of this, you recently released the first installment of various benefits to the people of vulnerable tribal communities under the PM-JANMANI initiative," she wrote to the Prime Minister.

"It was heartening to see you invoke Mata Shabari in your address on that occasion as well. Indeed, she would be doubly happy to see Prabhu Shri Ram's temple as well as the welfare of the people," the President said, signing off with "Siyavaramachandram Kajai!"

On January 12, President Murmu received the invitation for the consecration ceremony. She expressed immense joy on receiving the invitation and said that she will soon decide the time to come and visit Ayodhya, the VHP said in a statement.

Earlier, Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray had demanded that President Murmu be asked to perform the January 22 consecration ceremony as it was a matter of "national pride" and pertained to the "country's self-respect".

He also wrote to the President, inviting her to participate in an aarti at Kalaram temple in Nashik on the day of the consecration ceremony in Ayodhya.

On Monday evening, President Murmu is scheduled to present the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar to 19 children for their exceptional achievements, an official statement said.

**FROM PAGE ONE** FULL REPORTS ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM**Ram temple consecration today**

temple and unveil the Jatajyotis.

The temple town wore a festive look as guests streamed in, ahead of the consecration ceremony that will start shortly after noon Monday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who will take part in the ceremony, is expected to reach Ayodhya at 10:45 am and will be at the Ram Janmabhoomi temple site at 10:55 am.

Officials said the Prime Minister's schedule has been fixed. He will participate in the consecration ceremony from 12:05 pm to 12:55 pm and then leave for a public function where he will address a gathering between 1 pm and 2 pm.

The old idol or "Utsav" murti was placed in a palki decorated with flowers and taken for a tour of the new temple before being taken inside.

As the rituals continued late evening Sunday, the priests said the eyes of the new idol, closed with a blindfold on January 16, will be opened after it is bathed with water from 114 kalash (urns) as part of the ritual. After the blindfold is removed, the idol will be shown a mirror to "absorb energy,

created through chanting of mantras and rituals over the last 6 days". Ghee and honey, kept in a silver bowl, will be applied on the eyes of the idol with a gold stick. Along with the new idol, the old idol will also be placed inside the garba griha and also bathed.

The rituals of "Adhivas" ended with "Shayandhvias" – it means that the idol has been symbolically put to "sleep" after 6 days of rituals.

Officials associated with the rituals said quilts from Jaipur and a sheesham carved bed had come for the Sunday ceremony. While the bed was kept at the feet of the idol, the idol was covered with quilts.

On Monday, priests will reach the temple around 8:30 am to start the remaining rituals. The havan will continue even after the completion of the consecration ceremony.

**Tax sops for low income slabs, higher capex likely****EXPLAINED** **E** Vote-on-account

A BUDGET ahead of LS elections is always a vote-on-account – essentially to seek Parliament approval for expenditure in the first few months of the fiscal. Hence, the government of the day avoids big policy announcements, though minor tax changes or normal increase in spending is par for the course.

than previous years. The Centre had raised the budget estimate for capex to Rs 10 lakh crore for 2023-24 from Rs 7.28 lakh crore in 2022-23 and Rs 5.92 lakh crore in 2021-22.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is likely to see an enhanced budgetary allocation after seeing a 49 per cent reduction (from revised estimate of FY23) in the initial budget estimate of Rs 60,000 crore for FY24. The government had said it was a demand-driven scheme, and more funds would be allocated as and when needed. This has been subsequently reflected with an extra allocation of funds of Rs 16,143 crore for the MGNREGS in the first supplementary demands for grants presented in Parliament in December 2023.

The Budget session of Parliament, the last of the 17th Lok Sabha, will be held between January 31 and February 9. The Interim Budget will be presented by Sitharaman on February 1. The Lok Sabha elections are expected to be held around April-May, following which the elected government is likely to present the full Budget in July.

The government presents a vote-on-account in Parliament to seek approval for meeting expenditure for the first four-five months of the financial year beginning April to pay salaries and meet expenses for ongoing programmes in various sectors with no changes in the taxation structure, until a new government takes over and presents a full Budget that is revised for the full financial year.

**Bilkis convicts surrender**

Govind Nai, Kesar Vohania, Baka Vohania, Raju Soni, Ramesh Chandana, Shailesh Bhatt, Bipin Joshi, Pradip Modhiya, and Mitesh Bhatt – arrived from Singwad in Dahod district to the Godhra sub-jail in Panchmahal district shortly before midnight, in two separate vehicles. Most of the convicts arrived in a 10-seater multi-purpose vehicle that was led by an SUV – the two cars made their way into the jail premises within minutes of each other. Officials of the district police confirmed that they had "tracked and escorted" all 11 accused into the jail premises.

In anticipation of the surrender, the Panchmahal district police had deployed several units of personnel on bandobast outside the Godhra sub-jail since late evening on Sunday. Authorities of Godhra sub-jail confirmed that the 11 convicts had surrendered before the apex court.

Bano was 21 years old and five months pregnant when she was raped while fleeing with her family from Randhipur in the aftermath of 2002 Sabarmati train carnage. In the incident, 14 members of her family, including her three-year-old daughter, were killed.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in November last year.

The scheme was launched after Modi, during his Independence Day speech, had announced a plan to grant remission to the 11 convicts, who had been sentenced to life term for raping Bano and killing her family members during the 2002 Gujarat riots. The court had said the Gujarat government "usurped" the power of the Maharashtra government and lacked competence and jurisdiction in the matter.

The Gujarat government had released the convicts on August 15, 2022 as per its 1992 remission policy, based on a May 2022 Supreme Court order in a petition filed by one of the convicts, Radheshyam Shah. Bano had challenged the state government's decision before the apex court.

Bano was 21 years old and five months pregnant when she was raped while fleeing with her family from Randhipur in the aftermath of 2002 Sabarmati train carnage. In the incident, 14 members of her family, including her three-year-old daughter, were killed.

This comes two days after the Supreme Court dismissed their petitions seeking more time to surrender. The convicts had cited various reasons such as ill-health

around Rs 500-700 a day, and she herself had been earning around Rs 3,000 a month from selling homemade pickles through a self-help group.

Nearly a month ago, she left her quiet village for the training centre in Gurgaon's Manesar, along with her three-month-old child.

"When we reached the training centre, I realised everything was in English, including theory classes and the notes they had provided. I am only a 10th pass, and it was almost 18 years since then that I was touching books again," she said.

She also said that back in her village, questions were raised about whether she would have to compromise on her motherly duties. However, she said that once she got back from training, having become a drone pilot, there was a massive sense of pride.

"Before practically handling a drone, we first had to clear theory. Our trainers were extremely cooperative, and they helped us in translating the notes in Hindi and Punjabi. Once I cleared the theory

**Assam Cong chief injured as Rahul convoy 'attacked'**

district's Kaliabor: "20-25 BJP workers came in front of my bus with flags. When I came out of the bus, they ran away. What do they think, that the Congress party is scared of BJP and RSS workers?... Whichever posters of ours they want to tear, they can tear. No matter how many placards they throw, it won't make any difference to us."

When Rahul's bus passed through the area in Sonitpur's Jamugurihat where the men wielding flags had gathered, they approached the bus chanting "Modi, Modi". Rahul could be seen stepping out of the bus when it reached the crowd, and later blowing kisses at them as his bus left the site.

A video of the incident showed Bhupen Borah approaching the crowd, and a man hitting him with his head. Hemanta Koch, a Congress worker, was also injured.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh took to X and said his vehicle was among those targeted, and alleged that Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma was responsible for the incident. Subsequently, Sarma directed the Assam Police to register a case and look into the allegations.

The men wielding flags had gathered at an area in Jamugurihat before the yatra's convoy passed through. As the first vehicle of the convoy approached, some of them tried to pull out a Congress worker who was in it. When a journalist present at the site attempted to capture what was happening, the crowd snatched his GoPro cameras, which he did not get back. Further down the convoy, other vehicles were also allegedly targeted.

AICC communications coordinator for Assam, Mahima Singh, who was in the same vehicle as

Jairam Ramesh, said, "They rattled our windows and tore down the stickers on the car."

Moving through Jamugurihat on Sunday afternoon, the yatra culminated for the day with a massive rally in Kaliabor.

At the rally, Congress leaders lashed out against the BJP. "We are not scared of anyone – neither (Prime Minister) Narendra Modi nor the Chief Minister. But BJP leaders should explain why today, Assam's youth don't get jobs here," Rahul told the gathering.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge hit out at CM Sarma. "The previous yatra had travelled from Kanyakumari to Kashmir. During that time, there was no violence, no one tried to intimidate anyone even though there were several BJP-ruled states on the way... Why is it happening in Assam? It is because he (Sarma) is Modi ji's chela (disciple)," Kharge said at the rally.

Later in the evening, Rahul was met with chants of "Rahul Gandhi Go Back" at an eatery in Nagaon.

The yatra faced another obstacle when the management committee of Badravati Than – the birthplace of revered Vaishnavite reformer-saint Srimanta Sankaradeva, where Rahul was scheduled to visit Monday morning – was closed till the site as his bus left the site.

The president of the Badravati Than management committee, in his letter, said thousands of people were expected to gather at the Than on Monday (January 22) morning because of the consecration ceremony of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya that is set to take place at the same time.

Earlier that day, CMSarma had also said at a press conference in Guwahati that Rahul should visit

Badravati Than only after the programme in Ayodhya is over, and not in the morning.

"It shouldn't be like there is a competition between Ram Mandir and Badravati... That is not good for Assam. So, we request that we would like it if he goes to Badravati Sattra after the Ram Mandir programme is done..."

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These are sensitive areas. So they should be avoided. But I will not ask them to avoid, because then they will say that I am trying to stop them. Police will be deployed to ensure that there is no conflict or clashes," the CM said.

He also said that directions have been issued for adequate deployment of police and paramilitary forces in all "sensitive areas" on Monday, and said that he requested people of the state to "maintain their own sensitivity", advising people to observe the day in their own homes and religious places.

In addition, he announced that the state government issued instructions for all meat and fish shops in the state to remain closed till 4 pm on Monday, and for eaters to not serve non-vegetarian food till 2 pm.

If someone wants to eat in their homes during the day, they can buy today itself. But I think it's best to maintain a fast during 'pran pratista'. If the Prime Minister has fasted for 11 days, surely we can maintain a fast for part of a day," he said.

**Sukhu declares holiday, Soren half day today**

/establishments/public banks" in the state would remain shut till 2.30 pm while schools would remain closed the entire day. Karnataka, the only other state where the Congress is in power, refused to accept the demand of the BJP and the Janata Dal (Secular) to declare a holiday but Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said he would inaugurate a newly constructed Ram Temple in Bengaluru.

"I will light a lamp in my house and encourage others to do the same. I will definitely visit the temple in Ayodhya in the near future," Sukhu told the media after lighting a lamp at the Ram temple in Shimla, following which a continuous recitation of the Ramcharitmanas began there.

The Himachal CM also an-

nounced that a 111-foot statue of Ram would be installed at the Jakhu Temple in Shimla at an astrologically mandated time. Various Hindu organisations had proposed the construction of the Ram statue alongside the 108-foot statue of Hanuman that exists at the temple complex.

Earlier, two of Sukhu's ministers – former CM Virbhadr Singh's son Vikramaditya who is the Sports Minister and Panchayati Raj Minister Anirudh Singh – had declared their intention to visit Ayodhya at the same time.

In Jharkhand, the notification of the Department of Personnel, Administrative Reforms and Rajbhawan on Sunday comes weeks after CM Soren said he would attend the consecration event if invited. The Jharkhand

Siddaramaiah told reporters in Tumakuru that the government would not declare a holiday on Monday but the Muzrai department would conduct special rituals at all state-run temples during the consecration event in Ayodhya. "Tomorrow (Monday), I am inaugurating a new Ram Temple constructed at Mahadevapura constituency in Bengaluru," Siddaramaiah said.

— WITH ENS BENGALURU

"Before training, I had only seen drones clicking pictures and recording videos during Punjabi weddings," Jaswinder said.

She said that after clearing the theory, the trainers showed them how to pilot a drone on computers, before eventually giving them control of an actual drone.

"A drone takes just around seven minutes to spray one acre. There are three zones – red, yellow, and green – to look out for when flying drones, and we cannot fly in the red zones. There is a tank fitted on the drone, which we fill with 10 litres of water and one litre of fertiliser or pesticide," she explained.

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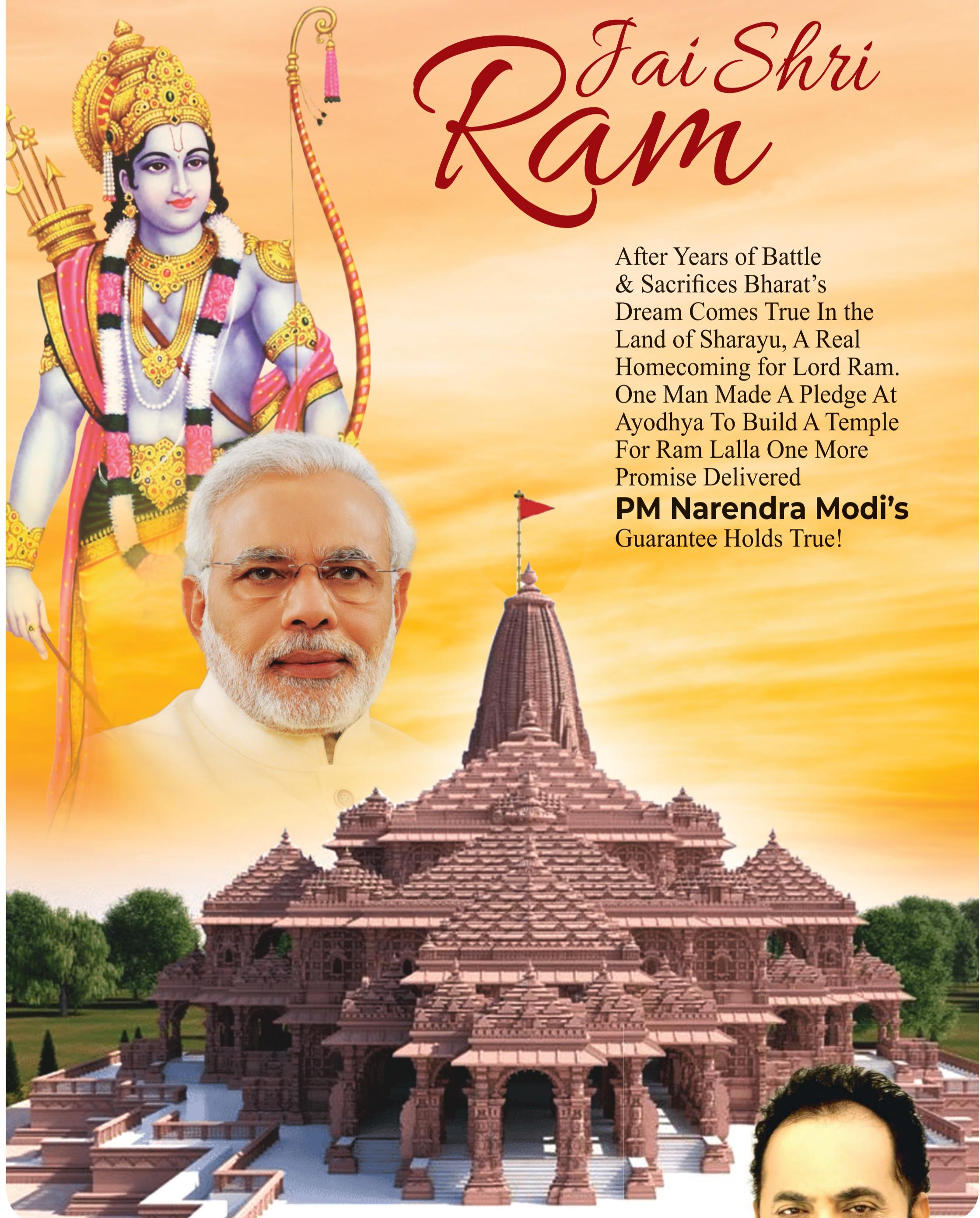
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# Jai Shri Ram

After Years of Battle & Sacrifices Bharat's Dream Comes True In the Land of Sharayu, A Real Homecoming for Lord Ram. One Man Made A Pledge At Ayodhya To Build A Temple For Ram Lalla One More Promise Delivered

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## SANJAY KAKADE

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