

Mata's offerings to be sourced 'locally' to drive community growth

# Shrine Board clears initiatives to posit Shri Mata Vaishno Devi shrine as chief spiritual destination



EARTH NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU: The Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board on Sunday approved a series of initiatives aimed at transforming the revered pilgrimage site and the surrounding region into one of India's most prominent spiritual destinations.

The decisions were taken in a meeting chaired by the

NEET coaching centres approved to support local youth

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, who is also the Chairman of the Shrine Board. The Shrine Board has approved three key initiatives: an international museum dedicated

to Maa Shakti's spiritual heritage, a sound-and-light spectacle modeled on global pilgrimage sites, and a documentary on the Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine. In another important initiative, the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board has decided to fill vacant positions, with recruitment process set to begin shortly.

The SMVDSB ► P11

## KEY DECISIONS TAKEN

- Shrine board doubles pilgrim insurance to Rs10 lakh, approves major infra projects
- Shrine Board rolls out reforms to transform Shrine into a world-class spiritual destination
- Mata's offerings to be sourced locally to directly support community livelihoods
- Board clears 3 projects-Maa Shakti Int'l Museum, global-style sound-&-light show, documentary
- Decision taken to fill posts; speedy recruitment
- Free NEET coaching for youth from nearby areas
- Phased rehabilitation plan cleared for Ponywallas and 'Pithu' operators, in line with NGT directions
- Committee formed to boost pilgrim footfall, and enhance pilgrimage experience
- Board to prioritise procurement from SHGs, women and young local entrepreneurs
- Direct contribution planned for Katra's transformation as a global pilgrimage city
- Focus on making Katra clean, vibrant and equipped with modern infrastructure
- Board to lead sports devp in Jammu region to nurture talent, promote youth fitness

## Communist ideology should end: HM Shah 'RSS role vital in country's evolution'

RAIPUR: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the country needs to get rid of the "destructive" communist ideology at the earliest and appealed to Naxalites to lay down their arms, assuring them a red carpet from the government.

Addressing a conclave titled 'Chhattisgarh@25 Shifting The Lens of Organiser Weekly' in Nava Raipur, Shah said the Maoist problem cannot be linked to the lack of development or considered merely as a law-and-order issue.

"Left-Wing Extremism is an ideology-driven challenge," he added.

Shah said the people of India should understand the

truth of this ideology.

"Wherever communists remained in power, they could not bring development. Communist ideology is an ideology indicative of destruction, and the country is required to get rid of it immediately," he added.

Shah said the communist ideology is no longer present in democratic politics.

"It does not exist in Tripura and Bengal (both of which had several communist governments in the past). In Kerala (currently ruled by the CPM-led LDF), it is surviving to an extent; however, people have started the change from Thiruvananthapuram (referring to BJP winning civic polls in the Kerala ► P11

## Modi: No compromise, no double standards on terror

Malaysia supports India's bid for permanent UNSC seat

KUALA LUMPUR: India and Malaysia on Sunday vowed to expand their ties in the high-priority sectors of trade and investment, defence, energy, advanced manufacturing and semiconductors with Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserting that both sides are committed to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

Following his wide-ranging talks with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, Modi reiterated India's position on combating terrorism as he said: "Our message on terrorism is clear; no double standards, no compromise."

The two sides inked a total of 11 agreements and doc-



uments to expand cooperation in a range of key areas, including a framework pact

for deeper engagement in the semiconductor sector.

Both Modi, who ► P11

## Ancient democracy, modern denial: The grassroots gap in J&K and Ladakh must be filled without delay



Shivang Satya Gupta  
Editor-in-Chief

India is often described as the world's largest democracy. We celebrate elections, voter turnout and constitutional values. But democracy does not live only in Parliament or Assemblies. It lives first in the village. And today, in Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, that grassroots democratic voice is worryingly faint.

If you are one of our readers or following The Earth News's digital channels, you would be aware of the emphasis we have been putting on the revival of grassroots democracy in the union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. While we have spoken a lot on the issue, this column is yet another attempt to situate the problem in its historical significance and how if not addressed, it will hurt the prospects of people of these two frontiers of India, badly, more so in the longer run.

Many of you know me, and for those who do not, I come from a region where people understand the value of representation more than most. When decisions affecting daily life are taken far away, without local voices in the room, governance begins to feel distant. That is why the continued uncertainty around Panchayat elections in Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh should concern not just policymakers, but every

citizen who believes democracy must function at every level and not just selectively.

I would stand up and say it loud and clear. Democracy does not begin in Delhi. It begins in the village. And in parts of our region (including Ladakh also) today, that democratic foundation is worryingly weak. Panchayat elections remain overdue. Terms have ended. Expectations have been raised repeatedly. Yet clarity is missing. This delay is not a routine administrative matter. It directly affects representation, development and public trust.

And it goes against India's own civilisational instinct. Allow me to explain this. There is a mistaken belief that local self-government is a Western democratic idea India adopted after independence. History tells a different story.

Long before the word democracy entered India's political lexicon, its villages were already practicing a form of self-governance that the world now recognises as one of the oldest traditions of local rule. Ancient Indian society was deeply decentralised. Village communities functioned through councils of elders, community representatives and locally respected administrators.

The village sabha and panchayat were embedded in India's own civilisational grammar. Texts refer to assemblies like the Sabha and Samiti, where collective decisions were discussed. From the Vedic assemblies to Kautilya's detailed account of councils that managed revenue, justice, and public works, to the temple inscriptions of South India that record elected village committees, local self rule was the default, not the exception. Even powerful kings governed through layered systems such as ministers, diwans, local

functionaries, not through central command alone. Villages handled disputes, resource management, taxation coordination and welfare activities. In many ways, they were self-governing units long before the word democracy entered modern political vocabulary.

The modern Panchayati Raj system, constitutionally strengthened after independence, formalised what India had long practised, governance close to the people. It is this deep-rooted tradition that the 73rd Constitutional Amendment sought to revive in independent India through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The 74th Amendment did the same for urban local bodies, recognising municipalities as the third tier of governance. These were not cosmetic reforms. They were meant to make democracy deeper, not just wider. These Amendments created a three-tier system and made local self-government a legal right. Across rural India, lakhs of people now vote to choose their sarpanches and panchs, deciding how roads are built, how water is distributed, and how welfare schemes reach their doorsteps.

Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh have remained at the shorter end of the empowering wand for longer periods of time. Even when these amendments did make their way to erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir, the benefits remained few.

In Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, after a long delay, the last panchayat elections were held in 2018 and their terms expired in 2023-2024, and no fresh polls have been conducted since. The result is a democratic vacuum at the village level, where people are governed not by representatives they elect but by officials they did not choose. ► P11

## Army Chief reviews counter-terror Ops, weighs advanced tech infusion

EARTH NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU: Army chief General Upendra Dwivedi has reviewed ongoing counter-terrorism operations and the prevailing security situation during a visit to forward areas here, with deliberations also focussing on the infusion of advanced technologies to further enhance operational capability, the Army said on Sunday.

The chief of army staff attended a high-level security review meeting chaired by Home Minister Amit Shah and visited White Knight Headquarters in Jammu on Friday before touring the twin



border districts of Poonch and Rajouri on Saturday.

"COAS visited Counter Insurgency Force (R), under the aegis of White Knight Corps to review the prevailing security

situation and assess operational preparedness.

"He was briefed on ongoing counter-terrorism operations, the effectiveness of the security grid and ► P11

## Uniform Civil Code should unite, not divide: Bhagwat

'Ready to step down if Sangh asks me to do so'

MUMBAI: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat on Sunday said the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) should be framed by taking everyone into confidence and must not lead to divisions.

Asked whether "achche din" (good days) for the RSS came after the BJP came to power, Bhagwat said it was the "other way round", noting the Sangh had remained committed to the construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya and those who supported it benefitted.

On the long-pending de-



mand for Bharat Ratna for Hindutva ideologue V D Savarkar, Bhagwat said the award's prestige will rise if conferred on him.

He was speaking during an interaction at a pro-

gramme to mark the RSS's centenary. Several prominent personalities were present at the event, including actors Raveena Tandon, Vicky Kaushal, Ananya Panday, filmmakers Karan Johar, Madhur Bhandarkar, Ramesh Taurani and musician Pandit Hridaynath Mangeshkar.

Bhagwat said the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) should be formed by taking everyone into confidence.

"It shouldn't create divisions. In Uttarakhand, three lakh suggestions were made and after talking to all ► P11

## CB busts "digital arrest" fraud, secures Rs 39.9 L

EARTH NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU: Timely intervention by Cyber Crime Investigation Centre for Excellence (CICE) of Crime Branch has secured nearly Rs 40 lakh belonging to a retired Indian Air Force (IAF) officer who lost his hard-earned savings to an alleged 'digital arrest' fraud, police said on Sunday.

The recovered amount shall be remitted back to the complainant's account shortly through court, providing relief to the victim and his family, they added.

CICE Jammu received an online complaint from the retired officer on February 6 regarding a 'digital arrest' which allegedly defrauded him of Rs 52.90 lakh, police said in a

statement.

The police subsequently launched an investigation and the bank accounts to which the swindled funds were transferred were traced.

Within three hours of receipt of the complaint, an amount of Rs 11.90 lakh was traced to a suspected account at Jodhpur and was immediately placed on hold by invoking the newly-issued standard operating procedure (SOP) in such investigations, the statement said.

Additionally, the police said a lien (freeze) of Rs 4.90 lakh was marked in subsequent layers of linked bank accounts.

Further coordinated efforts with the concerned banks led to the tracing of ► P11

## Pak intruder detained along IB

JAMMU: A Pakistani intruder was apprehended while attempting to sneak into the Indian side from across the International Border in Samba district of Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday, officials said.

The Border Security Force (BSF) detected the intruder's movement near Border Outpost Ballar in Ramgarh sector around 7 pm and took him into custody, they said.

The intruder was immediately taken for questioning and further details are awaited, they said.

Security officials said the intruder was ► P11

## Blast in Pak mosque unfortunate: Farooq



EARTH NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR: National Conference (NC) president Farooq Abdullah on Sunday said the blast inside a mosque in Pakistan has shown that people are treading a path that leads to hell fire.

"It is unfortunate that now blasts are taking place inside mosques as well. It shows that how far we have gone from Allah.... We are

treading the path which will lead to hell fire," Abdullah told reporters in Pampore town of Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district.

The former chief minister had gone to the south Kashmir town to offer condolences to Mohammad Riyaz Hamadani for the death of his mother.

Abdullah said the entire Muslim world is in chaos and engulfed in violence.

Asked if Pakistan should be declared a terrorist state, the NC president refused to comment.

A 32-year-old suicide bomber barged into the Khadijatul Kubra mosque in the Tarlie suburbs of capital Islamabad on Friday and detonated his ► P11

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