

"If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito."
— Dalai Lama

Inking the Truth

IN BRIEF

India slams attacks on gas hubs

NEW DELHI: As fresh attacks on West Asian gas hubs triggered global concerns, India on Thursday said the strikes are "unacceptable and need to cease" even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached out to top leaders of Oman, Jordan, France and Malaysia, emphasising the urgency to restore peace in the volatile region.

Following his phone conversation with Jordan's King Abdullah II, Modi said the attacks on energy infrastructure in West Asia are "condemnable and can lead to avoidable escalation".

New Delhi described the attacks on the gas infrastructure as "deeply disturbing" and that assaults will only serve to further destabilise an already uncertain energy market globally.

An Israeli attack on Iran's strategic gas fields of South Pars on Wednesday resulted in an intense Iranian retaliation on key energy infrastructure in a number of ► P11

Worship of Maa Durga, Maa Sharika connects to primal source of power: LG

'J&K holds potential for prosperous future'



■ EARTH NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU: Jammu and Kashmir Lt Governor Manoj Sinha paid his obeisance at the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi shrine on Thursday, praying for peace, prosperity, happiness and well-being of one and all.

tial for a dynamic and flourishing future, growing into a vibrant center of culture and advancing into a prosperous Union Territory through steady progress.

"Achieving this vision ultimately depends on the younger generation. I sincerely hope that our youth will draw strength from the wisdom passed down by our ancestors and work with determination to elevate Jammu Kashmir to a place among the country's developed regions," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor was speaking at the Navreh celebrations, organised by Kashmiri Pandit Sabha, Amphalla, Jammu. He invoked the blessings of Maa Sharika for the health, prosperity, and well-being of all.

Interacting with the devotees, the Lieutenant Governor wished that the New Year usher in a radiant dawn for everyone, illuminating paths to renewed hope and a thriving future.

"Worship of Maa Durga and Maa Sharika is a profound bow to the primal source of power from which universe spring. As Rigveda ► P11

Choosing noise over nation is a dangerous political drift. Bharat needs statesmen, not Loose Cannons

INKING THE TRUTH



Shivang Satya Gupta
Editor-in-Chief

ocratic space allows for a wide range of views on foreign policy. The problem lies in the manner of expression. When criticism is framed through personal attacks and insinuations against political opponents, it shifts the focus from substance to spectacle. And spectacle, as we are increasingly witnessing, is a poor substitute for statesmanship.

What is more concerning is that this is not an isolated episode. It is part of a pattern that has been unfolding over the past several months.

Only a few months ago, Mehdi refused to sing our national song Vande Mataram in Parliament. He did not stop at refusal. He made it a point to publicly assert that 'we cannot sing it', and that even if asked, 'we will not'. Such absolutist positions, especially when delivered from the floor of Parliament, do little to foster dialogue. In a country where symbols like Vande Mataram carry deep historical and emotional value, such statements demand sensitivity. Instead, Mehdi's remarks, delivered with defiance, harden positions and deepen divides.

There is a difference between speaking truth to power and simply speaking to provoke. In a democracy as vast and diverse as India, strong opinions are not just welcome but essential. But when an elected representative begins to repeatedly cross the line from reasoned dissent into reckless commentary, it is no longer about free speech. It becomes a question of responsibility. And National Conference MP Aga Syed Ruhullah Mehdi is repeatedly choosing controversy over responsibility, noise over nation.

Ruhullah's latest remarks in Parliament, where he described Israel as the "fatherland" of BJP members, marks yet another troubling moment as seen from him in recent times. This was not a moment of passionate argument. It was a deliberate departure from the topic of discussion which was railway budget, a calculated jibe, laced with sarcasm and derision. The remark was not just inappropriate but deeply unbecoming of a Member of Parliament. Parliament is meant to be a forum for serious debate, not a stage for political one-liners that generate headlines but weaken discourse and institutions and erodes public trust.

Criticism of Israel, or any country for that matter, is not the issue. India's dem-

and Kashmir is striving to rebuild its image and economy, pushing behind terrorism and violence to progress and peace, Mehdi's statement was not just irresponsible but also damaging. Words that alienate visitors or create mistrust can have real-world consequences. Tourism is a lifeline for our region. It brings livelihoods and helps integrate regions with the rest of the country. To frame it as an invasion was to undermine both economic recovery and social harmony.

And then there are the legal and ethical clouds that continue to hover over Mehdi, extending the controversies surrounding him into more serious domains. Earlier this month, Mehdi was booked for allegedly circulating misleading content on social media that could disturb public order. This is not a minor issue. In an era where misinformation spreads rapidly and often dangerously, public figures have an even greater obligation to verify before they amplify.

Last year, a chargesheet filed by the Anti-Corruption Bureau in a land compensation case naming Mehdi and his relatives among others adds another layer of concern. While the matter is sub judice and due process must be respected, the very presence of such allegations raises legitimate questions about credibility and judgment. Even past controversies, such as questions raised over discrepancies in official documents of his date of birth continue to resurface. Public life demands not just legality, but also the perception of integrity.

Taken together, these episodes paint a worrying picture. An elected representative is not a social media influencer chasing attention. Nor is he a fringe voice operating without accountability. A Member of Parliament carries the ► P11

J&K to celebrate Eid on March 21

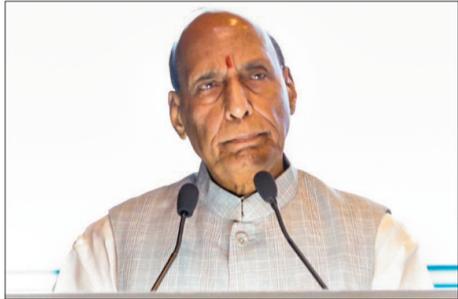
■ EARTH NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR: The crescent moon marking the beginning of Shawwal was not sighted across Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh on Thursday evening, prompting religious authorities to declare that Eid-ul-Fitr will be observed on Saturday, March 21.

Grand Mufti Nasir confirmed that no credible reports of moon sighting were received from any part of the region. "In the absence of verified testimonies, Eid-ul-Fitr will be celebrated on Saturday," he said, adding that the holy month of Ramadan will thus complete 30 days this year.

Separate announcements issued by religious bodies across the Union Territory echoed the same position. The All Jammu and Kashmir Shia Association stated that persistent cloud cover prevented visibility of the crescent and that no reliable testimonies were received either locally or from other parts of the country. It clarified that Friday would mark the continuation of fasting. In Ladakh, the Imam Khomeini Memorial Trust, Kargil, ► P11

India must be self-reliant in Drone making amid conflicts: DM Rajnath



NEW DELHI: India must develop a robust ecosystem for drone manufacturing to enhance its defence preparedness, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Thursday, highlighting lessons

from the Russia-Ukraine and Iran-Israel conflicts.

In an address at an event, Singh asserted that the two conflicts prove that drones and counter-drone technologies will play a "pivotal role"

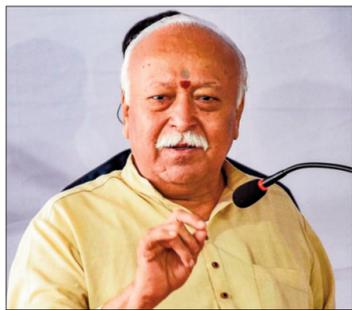
in future warfare.

The defence minister said India must work in mission mode to emerge as a global hub for indigenous drone manufacturing in the next few years to ensure strategic autonomy and boost military prowess.

"As the entire world watches the ongoing conflict involving Russia and Ukraine, along with Iran-Israel, we can clearly see the extremely significant role of drones and counter-drone technologies in future warfare," he said.

"Today, there is a need to build such a drone manufacturing ecosystem in India, in which we are completely self-reliant," he said. ► P11

RSS needs to scale up 'Activism' on social media: Mohan Bhagwat



NAGPUR: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat said on Thursday that the organisation has introduced decentralisation to empower its volunteers amid its expanding work and rising public expectations. Speaking at the centenary event of the

Marathi newspaper Tarun Bharat in Nagpur, he said Gen Z is attracted to ideologies having honesty and service to the nation and underscored that there is a need for RSS to increase "activism" on social media for a good cause.

Asked about key organisational changes that RSS has introduced recently on the occasion of its 100 years of inception, Bhagwat said the Sangh's work has expanded in a big way, and it requires decentralisation.

Smaller units will handle important tasks efficiently, while the core method of building friendships and leading by example remains unchanged, he said.

"Since expectations from the RSS have grown, swayamsevaks will also be required to work a lot. Hence, more smaller units would be set up, and the work that was done from the top level would be carried out by these smaller units. This is a natural change when an organisation grows," he said. Instead of 46 'prants' (administrative units), RSS will now ► P11

J&K Bank sets up Special Cash Counter at SMVD Bhawan for Navratra pilgrims



■ EARTH NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU: On the auspicious occasion of Navratra, J&K Bank on Thursday established a Special Counter at its Business Unit at Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Bhawan

(SMVDB) to facilitate fresh currency notes and provide note exchange services to the devotees visiting the revered shrine.

CEO, SMVDSB, Sachin Kumar Vaishya (IAS) and the Bank's General Manager

& Divisional Head (Jammu), Ashok Gupta, inaugurated the Fresh Cash/Note Exchange Counter in the presence of SDM Bhawan Anshumali Sharma, ADC Mr Sher Singh, Tehsildar Mukesh Thappa, senior officials of the Shrine Board, Head Pandit Gopal Sharma, Branch Head Gourav Modi, officers of the Bank, and a large number of devotees from across the country.

Speaking on the occasion, CEO SMVDSB lauded the Bank's continued efforts in facilitating pilgrims through such initiatives and appreciated its comprehensive banking support to the Shrine Board and ► P11

International cyber fraud racket busted, 7 arrested

■ EARTH NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR: The Jammu and Kashmir Police's Counter Intelligence Wing (CIK) has busted a highly sophisticated international cyber fraud racket by arresting seven persons here, officials said on Thursday.

The CIK-CID received several technical and credible inputs regarding the operation of "covert call centres" involved in fraudulent online activities targeting both foreign and local nationals.

"The CIK promptly constituted specialised teams comprising technical experts and field operatives and carried out systematic surveillance, digital intelligence

gathering and verification across multiple locations, ultimately identifying a key operational hub at the Industrial Area, Rangreth, Srinagar," they said.

Subsequently, a CIK team conducted a swift and well-coordinated raid in different parts of Srinagar city on Wednesday. During the raid, seven suspects were apprehended on the spot, and a large quantity of digital and communication equipment was seized. The seized devices include 13 mobile phones, nine laptops, VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) systems, SIM cards and networking devices, and digital storage media, officials stated. The seized material contains substantial ► P11

Domestic LPG booking near normal

NEW DELHI: Bookings for domestic LPG refills are approaching pre-war normal levels, signalling a gradual return to normalcy, but concerns persist as supply restrictions on commercial consumers, including hotels, remain in place due to ongoing disruptions in input supplies caused by the West Asia conflict.

Over 33 crore domestic LPG consumers had, on average, booked about 55 lakh cylinders daily before the February 28 military strikes by the US and Israel on ► P11

Ram Temple milestones are golden moments in India's history: Murmu

AYODHYA (UP): President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday termed key milestones associated with the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple as "golden moments" in the country's history, while extending greetings to devotees during her visit.

The president said this while addressing a gathering after visiting the Ram temple in Ayodhya on Thursday, and installed a 150-kg gold-plated metal plate called the 'Shri Ram Yantra' as part of special religious ceremonies.

"The bhoomi puja at this sacred Ram Janmabhoomi, the Pran Pratishtha here, the opening of Ram Darbar for



devotees, and the hoisting of the Dharma Dhvaj on the top of the temple -- all these are golden moments in our history," the president said. She began her address

with the chant of 'Jai Sri Ram' and described Ayodhya as "dearer than heaven" to Lord Ram. "Lord Sri Ram was born in this Ayodhya city. It is a matter of great fortune ► P11

CHAITRA NAVRATRI
'Jai Mata Di' chants reverberate as pilgrims throng SMVD shrine

■ EARTH NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU: Braving the rain and bitter chill with fervent chants of "Jai Mata Di", thousands of devotees trekked along the serpentine path to the cave shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi atop the Trikuta hills on the first day of Navratra, to pay obeisance to the deity.

The fresh floral decoration filling the air with fragrance, and multi-coloured lights adding to the visual spectacle, the cave shrine in Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi



district witnessed a rush of pilgrims on Wednesday, with around 15,000 devotees

seeking the blessings of Mata Vaishno Devi on the first day of Chaitra Navratra. Despite

heavy rainfall along the route, hundreds of devotees thronged the pilgrimage base camp in Katra before beginning their ascent to the hilltop shrine. "Over 15,000 devotees have paid obeisance at the cave shrine and a large number of them are on their way," officials said.

They said the yatra is proceeding smoothly amid multi-layered security arrangements.

Groups of pilgrims, with chants of "Jai Mata Di" on their lips, and devotional music playing on ► P11