

Ram temple already built, but we have to start new movement to protect it: Uddhav

NAGPUR: Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday targeted the BJP over the alleged theft of donations at the Ayodhya Ram temple, saying the shrine has already been built and it is now time to launch a new movement to protect it. He also attacked Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, asking him to clarify whether he backed temple “looters” or those who “protect” Ram. Thackeray was addressing a gathering as part of his party’s ‘Ram Raksha’ protest, after offering prayers and performing aarti at the Ram temple in the Ram Nagar area of Nagpur. He was joined by his son Aaditya Thackeray, party MP Sanjay Raut, legislators and



workers. Years ago, Shiv Sena founder late Bal Thackeray gave momentum to the movement to build the Ram temple in Ayodhya, but now Shivsainiks are once again preparing to fight for the temple, he said. “I’m disheartened that although the Ram temple has been built, we have to start

a new fight to protect that temple,” said Thackeray. He attacked Fadnavis over the latter’s recent remark that the Sena (UBT) head should first recite ‘Ram Raksha’ (a Sanskrit hymn dedicated in praise of Lord Ram). “Fadnavis ji, reciting Ram Raksha may be your work, but ‘Ram Raksha’ (protect-

ing Lord Ram) is the work of us Ram bhakts (devotees). We are ‘Ram Rakshaks’,” he said. Thackeray said hundreds of ‘karsevaks’ (volunteers) made sacrifices during the Ram temple movement, but it was not done to provide for these “thieves”. “When the Babri mosque fell, none of those in power today came forward. The BJP people then were saying this was not their work. It was only Balasaheb Thackeray who stood up for the cause,” claimed Thackeray. Fadnavis should make it clear whether he stands on the side of the temple “looters” or backs those who “protect Lord Ram”, he said. “We usually believe that Lord Ram protects us. But now, it is Ram devotees who

must protect the Lord under BJP rule. They grabbed power using Ram’s name, but we are the ones who have to protect him. What greater misfortune could there be for Hindus than this?” he asked. Thackeray also questioned Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat, asking whether RSS had envisioned this “Hindu Rashtra” under the BJP government, in which “temples are looted, students’ concerns ignored, examination papers leaked, and political parties split”. He also targeted Shiv Sena chief and deputy CM Eknath Shinde without naming him. “You were making allegations against me that I have left the ideology of Balasaheb Thackeray.

Left parties condemn Sonam Wangchuk’s removal; use of force; back ongoing protest

NEW DELHI: Left parties on Saturday condemned the police action against activist Sonam Wangchuk and protesters at Jantar Man-tar, and accused the Centre of suppressing democratic dissent instead of addressing the alleged irregularities in the NEET examination, while extending support to the continuing student-led agitation. Their comments came after educator and climate activist Wangchuk, who has been on a hunger strike for 21 days, was forcibly removed from Jantar Man-tar earlier in the day by the Delhi Police and whisked away to Safdarjung Hospital. The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation said the protest would continue despite

Wangchuk’s removal from the protest site, with three members of its student wing AISA -- Neha, Manish and Aameen -- continuing their indefinite hunger strike. The party also appealed to people to join the July 20 Parliament march. CPI(M) general secretary M A Baby and Communist Party of India (CPI) general secretary D Raja also criticised the police action, alleging that the government had resorted to force instead of responding to the protesters’ demands and calling for Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan’s resignation. In a statement, CPI(ML) Liberation alleged that the Modi government had chosen “intimidation, force and the suppression of democratic dissent” be-

cause it had “no answers to the growing anger against corruption, paper leaks and the systematic destruction of the public education system”. The party’s general secretary, Dipan-kar Bhattacharya, said in a post on X that police had acted when fewer protesters were present. “In the early hours of day 21 of the protest fast at Jantar Man-tar, when the presence was a little thin, Delhi Police succeeded in removing Sonam Wangchuk from the protest site. But students foiled the disruption design of the police, and comrades Neha, Manish and Aameen are now continuing the fast from the main stage. Salute the exemplary strength and resolve of the student protesters,” Bhattacharya said.

Tarun Tejpal sexual assault case: Defence concludes final arguments, seeks upholding of acquittal

PANAJI: Former Tehelka editor-in-chief Tarun Tejpal’s counsel on Saturday concluded final arguments before Bombay High Court in the Goa government’s appeal against his acquittal in a 2013 sexual assault case, contending that the complainant’s testimony was unreliable and that the trial court’s verdict be upheld. Tejpal was personally present in the court when senior advocate Aabad Ponda argued on his behalf. The case stems from allegations made by a former colleague of Tejpal, who accused him of sexually assaulting her inside a hotel elevator on November 7 and 8, 2013, during ThinkFest event organised by Tehelka magazine in Goa. While a court in Mapusa, Goa, had acquitted Tejpal of all charges in May 2021, the state government had challenged the acquittal in HC. Ponda, appearing for Tejpal before HC’s Goa bench comprising Justices Dr Neela Gokhale and Amit Jamsandekar on Saturday, argued that the complainant’s conduct before and after the incident, along with contemporaneous emails, WhatsApp messages and documentary records, contradicted the prosecution’s case. Questioning the complainant’s explanation that

she did not leave the Think-Fest venue immediately after the alleged assault because she feared losing her job, Ponda submitted that digital records indicated she had already been exploring alternative employment opportunities before the incident. According to the defence, these included correspondence with the editor of another publication stating that her “time is running out” at Tehelka, a higher-paying job opportunity connected with another television programme, and an application for a fellowship to write a book on violence against women carrying a monthly grant of around Rs 1 lakh, which she allegedly secured soon after the incident. The defence also argued that instead of immediately initiating criminal proceedings, the complainant was engaged in discussions regarding a “closure”. Referring to emails and WhatsApp messages, Ponda said these included discussions on a “severance package” from Tehelka, advice from her family member to negotiate a better settlement instead of accepting an apology immediately, consultations with a senior advocate on legal options and exchanges discussing the possibility of seeking Rs 100 crore as compensation.

Maharashtra: Regional Transport Authorities to fix base fare of school buses; CCTV, seat belts mandatory

MUMBAI: The Maharashtra government has empowered the Regional Transport Authorities (RTAs) to fix the base fare of school buses, and introduced stricter safety measures including mandatory CCTV cameras, seat belts and GPS tracking mechanism in these vehicles. For the first time, school bus fares have been brought under government regulation. The Maharashtra Motor Vehicles (Regulations for School Buses) (First Amendment) Rules, 2026, notified on July 16, introduced several changes to the 2011 rules governing school buses, school vans and educational institution buses. The RTAs will now fix the base

fare per kilometre per student. The earlier rules had no such provision. “The fare collected on a monthly or quarterly basis shall not be less than 10 percent or more than 10 percent of the fare fixed by the Regional Transport Authority,” the amended rule reads. Further, the School Transport Committees shall verify fare compliance, address parents’ complaints relating to fares and safety, and submit quarterly compliance reports to District School Bus Safety Committees. Another major change is the introduction of a Digital Safety Monitoring System, making GPS-based live tracking, CCTV surveillance, digital attendance, automated



alerts and mobile application access for parents mandatory. CCTV footage will have to be preserved for at least 30 days and

made available to parents through a mobile app. The notification also makes seat belts mandatory in school transport vehicles. Ev-

ery vehicle must be fitted with a Vehicle Location Tracking Device (VLTDD) with a panic button. A Fire Detection and Alarm System (FDAS) must be installed in the engine compartment and near emergency exits. The permissible age limit of school buses has been increased from 15 years to 20 years. The amendments make police verification and medical fitness certification of drivers and attendants compulsory. A bus must have a lady attendant for students up to Class V. Daily digital records of students boarding and de-boarding buses, and special arrangements for children with disabilities also have been made mandatory.

Dhami halts tree felling for Rishikesh Bhaniyawala four-lane project in Uttarakhand

DEHRADUN: Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami on Saturday announced a halt to the proposed felling of around 3,000 trees for the Rishikesh-Bhanyawala four-lane project, saying the exercise would remain suspended until a consensus was reached among all stakeholders. In a social media post, he said that while development is essential, no decision will be taken by ignoring public sentiments, environmental concerns or interests of locals. He said instructions had been issued to the principal secretary and concerned officials to initiate a fresh,

detailed dialogue with all stakeholders, experts, residents and public representatives. “The felling of trees under this project will remain suspended until an atmosphere of trust and a satisfactory consensus among all parties is established,” the chief minister said. “For me, Uttarakhand’s environment, public sentiment and the state’s development are all equally important. Our government will move forward only after dialogue, consensus and the larger public interest,” Dhami said. There is a proposal to cut around 3,000 trees to widen nearly 20 km of the Ri-

shikesh-Bhanyawala road, which passes through a sensitive elephant corridor of the Rajaji National Park. Environmentalists, locals, students and others have been protesting against the project in the Saat Mod area for the past several days. Tree-felling work was being carried out under police protection amid the protests. Dhami said he has taken serious note of the concerns and suggestions expressed by citizens, environmentalists and residents regarding the project over the last few days. He said the project of the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) was be-

ing executed in compliance with high court directives and all necessary statutory and environmental clearances. The chief minister said the project also provides for a nearly 3.5-km underpass and special culverts to facilitate the movement of wildlife, which would help reduce human-wildlife conflict and road accidents involving wild animals. He reiterated that the felling of trees for the project would remain suspended until a satisfactory consensus was reached. Dhami said concerned officials have been instructed to re-engage in dialogue with all stakeholders.

Lok Sabha Speaker forms 10-member Committee for National Legislative Index

NEW DELHI: Lok Sabha Speaker and Chairperson of the All India Presiding Officers’ Conference (AIPOC) Om Birla has constituted a 10-member high-level committee to develop a National Legislative Index, an initiative aimed at benchmarking the performance of legislative bodies across the country through objective parameters. According to sources, the committee has been constituted in pursuance of Resolution No. 6, which was unanimously adopted during the 86th All India Presiding Officers’ Conference (AIPOC) held in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, from January 19 to 21. The proposed National Legislative Index is intended to establish an objective framework for evaluating the functioning of legislatures, with the broader objective of promoting accountability, transparency and good governance. The index is also expected to encourage healthy competition among legislative institutions and improve their efficiency in serving the public. The committee will be chaired by Rajya Sabha Deputy



Harivansh. The sources further added that the members of the committee are Satish Mahana, Speaker of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly; Sharingain Longkumer, Speaker of the Nagaland Legislative Assembly; Surama Padhy, Speaker of the Odisha Legislative Assembly; Prem Kumar, Speaker of the Bihar Legislative Assembly; Narendra Singh Tomar, Speaker of the Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly; Rahul Narwekar, Speaker of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly; Gaddam Prasad Kumar, Speaker of the Telangana Legislative Assembly; and J.C.D. Prabhakar, Speaker of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly.

Babua wakes up at noon, hits gym in evening, no time for people: Adityanath’s swipe at Akhilesh

BULANDSHAHR: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Saturday took an apparent jibe at Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, saying that he would wake up at noon, head to the gym in the evening and would have no time for people when he was the state’s chief minister. He also claimed that Akhilesh lacked a vision for development and added that people were deprived of free ration and LPG connection during his tenure. Adityanath made these remarks while addressing a gathering in Bulandshahr, where he inaugurated and laid foundation stones of 57 development projects worth over Rs 574 crore.



“The entire nation is benefiting from the guidance and leadership of Narendra Modi ji. Under his guidance and leadership, we are moving for-

ward on this journey that embraces both heritage and development. However, the situation was quite different before 2017, he said.

“Back then, ‘Babua’ would wake up at noon and would get ready by 2 pm. By 5 pm, it was time for the gym, and after that he would settle into his own social gatherings,” Adityanath said while apparently referring to Akhilesh Yadav. The BJP leader further said that Akhilesh rarely gave time to the people and claimed that he has been losing elections because Lord Ram has ensured he remains out of power. “Where was the time for the public? Where was the time to meet the people? He had no vision for the youth, the poor, women, the farmers who feed the nation, or the traders and entrepreneurs. He did nothing in the past, and Lord Ram has ensured that he is no longer in a position to do any-

thing in the future either,” he said. Adityanath said that the previous SP government had failed to provide free ration and LPG connections to the people, which the BJP government was doing. “They did not provide it. The benefits of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana or the Mukhya Mantri Awas Yojana, which the poor are receiving now, could have been provided earlier, yet they were not. The health insurance coverage worth lakhs of rupees which young people and poor families should have received under Ayushman Bharat or the Mukhya Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana could have been provided prior to 2017, but the Samajwadi Party or the Congress never did so,” he said.

Uddhav has no right to invoke Lord Ram: Nirupam

MUMBAI: Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Nirupam on Saturday targeted Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray over his Ram Raksha agitation, saying that the former Maharashtra chief minister had no right to invoke Lord Ram after abandoning the Hindutva ideology. Those who are doing the drama of reciting the Ram Raksha hymn are actually trying to save their “broken and scattered” party, said the former MP who belongs to the Shiv Sena headed by Eknath Shinde. “Uddhav Thackeray, who severed ties with Ram, sacrificed Hindutva, abandoned the ideals of Bal Thackeray and aligned with the Congress, has no moral authority to take the name of Ram,” he said. Notably, Nirupam, who start-

ed his career with the undivided Shiv Sena headed by Bal Thackeray, was himself with the Congress for several years. Thackeray was a mute spectator when sadhus were lynched in Palghar district during his tenure as chief minister. Nirupam further claimed, referring to a 2020 incident where a mob of villagers killed two religious leaders and their driver on suspicion that they were child-lifters. “When such people recite Ram Raksha stotra, it feels like Raavan is reciting it,” he said. Thackeray, along with MPs, MLAs and workers of his party, offered prayers and performed ‘aarti’ at a Ram temple in Nagpur on Saturday ahead of his ‘Ram Raksha Andolan’ against the embezzlement of donations at the Ayodhya Ram temple.

JD(S) announces padayatra against acquisition of farmers’ lands for GBIT project near Bidadi

BENGALURU: JD(S) on Saturday announced a ‘padayatre’ (march) opposing the acquisition of farmers’ lands for the proposed GBIT project near Bidadi near here, a day after its alliance partner BJP announced one. The mass protest march has been planned for three days from July 30 to August 1, starting from Byramangala Circle near Bidadi to Freedom Park in Bengaluru. JD(S) legislature party leader Suresh Babu and Core Committee Chairman Krishna Reddy told reporters. Union Minister H D Kumaraswamy is scheduled to flag off the Padayatra and Nikhil Kumaraswamy, State President of the JD(S) youth wing, will lead the march, they added. JD(S) leaders said the party demands immediate withdrawal of the final notification issued for the land acquisition for the Greater Bengaluru Integrated Township project (GBIT) project. “Over the past two days, local leaders, farmer leaders, and farmers have been

consulted. They have all expressed overwhelming support for this grand Padayatra,” Reddy said. Earlier, on June 21, under the leadership of Nikhil Kumaraswamy and senior party leaders, JD(S) had conducted an 11-kilometre march from Kanchagaranahalli to Hosur Village, near Bidadi, strongly opposing the government’s move to acquire fertile agricultural land. On Friday, addressing a protest meeting against the land acquisition for the project, BJP state President B Y Vijayendra had announced a march from Bidadi to Bengaluru. “BJP will organise a Bidadi to Bengaluru ‘padayatre’ ahead of the legislature session, demanding to drop the Bidadi project and to consider the places around Tumakuru for Bengaluru’s second airport instead of Kanakapura,” he said, adding that the party would announce the dates after discussion. Despite opposition from farmers and local people, the government has is-

sued two sets of final notifications for land acquisition for the GBIT project, which is projected as India’s “first AI-powered integrated township”. According to sources, the Bidadi project requires acquisition of 9,600 acres spread across nine revenue villages and 16 non-revenue villages. The state government had, in March last year, issued a preliminary notification to acquire a total of 7,481 acres across nine villages in the region, for the proposed project, and more notifications are expected in the coming days. Meanwhile, farmers have continued to protest against the project locally. On Monday, women wielding brooms in their hands chased Joint Measurement Committee (JMC) survey officials in Mandalahalli, prompting the police to register criminal cases against them. With a section of farmers holding demonstrations in favour of the project, there have been instances of a face-off between farmers who demand and oppose the project.

Goa Crime Branch seizes 1.3 kg ‘liquid’ gold worth Rs 1.5 crore; two held

PANAJI: Two persons from Kerala were held in Goa after the Crime Branch recovered nearly 1.3 kg of “liquid” gold worth about Rs 1.5 crore from their possession, police said on Saturday. Hassan Niyaz (35) and Muhammed Khunhi (57), both natives of Kasaragod district in the northern state, were intercepted at Sukhe Kulan in Dhargal in North Goa, they said. Preliminary investigation showed that Niyaz had allegedly arrived in Goa from Dubai on a flight carrying the liquid gold. Khunhi had travelled from Kasaragod to Margao by train before proceeding to Manohar International Airport at Mopa to receive the consignment, police said. The two, who later travelled together, were stopped by the Crime Branch team. During a search, cops recovered nearly 1.3 kg of liquid gold, concealed inside specially stitched cavities in the inner garments worn by the accused, an official said. The seized gold is estimated to be worth around Rs 1.5 crore, police said. Both were taken into custody and subsequently handed over to the Customs authorities at Mormugao for further investigation and legal action.