

Sanatan Rakshak Dal removes Sai Baba statues from multiple Varanasi temples

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

VARANASI: Statues of Sai Baba were removed from multiple temples in Varanasi on Tuesday following a campaign launched by a group called 'Sanatan Rakshak Dal'.

Of these, the group removed a Sai Baba statue from the Bada Ganesh Temple here and placed it outside the temple's premises. Rammu Guru, the head priest of the temple, said, "Sai Baba was being worshipped without proper knowledge, which is forbidden according to scriptures."

Similarly, Shankar Puri, the head priest of the Annapurna Temple, said, "There is no mention of the worship of Sai Baba in the scriptures."

Meanwhile, Mahant of Ayodhya's Hanumangarhi temple Raju Das told PTI, "Sai can be a 'dharma guru' (religious preacher), a 'mahapurush' (a great person), a 'peer' or an 'aulia', but he cannot be a 'Bhagvaan' (God). I am thankful to the person in Varanasi who has removed the idol (of Sai Baba). I urge all the Sanatanis in the country to remove the idol of 'Chaand Peer' (Sai Baba) from the temples."



Ajay Sharma, state president of the Sanatan Rakshak Dal, said, "Only the worship of Lord Shiva, the supreme deity, should take place in Kashi (Varanasi)."

Respecting the sentiments of devotees, statues of Sai Baba have already been removed from 10 temples. In the coming days, statues will also be removed from the Agastyakunda and Bhuteshwar temples, he said.

The priest of the Sai Temple located in Sant Raghuvir Das Nagar in the city's Sigra area, Samar Ghosh, said, "Those who claim to be Sanatanis today are the same people who established Sai Baba in the temples, and now they are the ones who have removed him from there. All gods are one. God can be seen in any form. Such acts are not right. They will hurt people's faith and spread discord in society." Ghosh mentioned that

this Sai Temple opens daily from 7 AM to 10 PM, and Sai devotees come to worship every day. "Particularly on Thursdays, around 4,000 to 5,000 devotees visit the temple to pay their respects," he said. Vivek Srivastava, a Sai Baba devotee, said the removal of Sai Baba's statue is an extremely distressing event. "This incident has hurt the faith of millions of Sai devotees. All gods are one. Everyone has the right to worship God in whichever form they believe. As for whether Sai Baba was Hindu or Muslim, it is we who have created those divisions. God does not make distinctions among humans," Srivastava said. Reacting to the developments, Uttar Pradesh Congress spokesperson Manish Hindvi told PTI, "It is unfortunate that the BJP and those supporting it have made religion a wrestling arena ('akhara') of politics,

which should not be done. Sanatan Dharma is a religion, which incorporates, imbibes and integrates all the good aspects of everyone (including other religions). If in the name of fanaticism ('kattartaa'), they want to remove the idol (from temples), then it is certainly not in the interest of the country." Spokesperson of the SP Sunil Singh Sajjan, when contacted said, "It seems that the BJP is the number 1 player; when it comes to play with one's 'aasthaa' (faith in Gods). Now, they have even started discriminating and division among Gods. Division and hatred seems to be the core character of the BJP. Sai Baba has erases of followers. When the Constitution does not indulge in discrimination, then who are we to do so?" Sai Baba, revered as a spiritual leader, is known for his teachings of love, forgiveness, and charity, transcending religious boundaries. On its website, the Shree Saibaba Sansthan Trust, Shirdi, states that Sai Baba is revered as one of the greatest saints ever seen in India, endowed with unprecedented powers, and is worshipped as a God incarnate. (SAI meaning Sakshaat

Ishwar) (God the absolute). "This mysterious Fakir first made his appearance in Shirdi as a youth and remained there throughout his long life. HE transformed the lives of those who met him and continuously is doing so even after his Samadhi in 1918 for those whose hearts are touched by his love and who pray and call him at any emergency in life for his blessings," the website states.

The trust also mentions that an outstanding aspect of Sai Baba is that he is "beyond distinctions" of religion, caste or creed. He embodied all religions and preached the Universal religion of Love.

"Devotees of all faiths find their meeting point in the Sai and people from all communities and all walks of life are united by the great love and reverence Baba inspires in them. Baba had great regard for his Hindu devotees and their Gurus and he responded to their needs and permitted worship according to the Hindu and other religious rituals. At the same time his dwelling place was a masjid (mosque) and the name of Allah was ever on his lips....," it added.

Ashok Kumar Verma takes charge as Northern Railway General Manager



■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: Indian Railway Stores Service officer Ashok Kumar Verma assumed the charge of General Manager of Northern Railway on Tuesday, the Railways said in a statement.

"In addition to GM/Northern Railway, Verma is also holding the charge of General Manager, Central Organization for Railway Electrification, (CORE) Prayagraj," it added.

According to Himanshu Upadhyay, CPRO, NR, Verma is a 1987-batch officer and has served Indian Railways in various

capacities. "Apart from his vast experience in stores related issues, he also has experience in handling general administration. Verma has served as Principal Chief Material Manager in North Western Railway, as Divisional Railway Manager of Bengaluru Division of South Western Railway and Additional Divisional Railway Manager of Jhansi Division," Upadhyay said. "Verma also previously served as Executive Director Railway Stores in Railway Board. He holds a degree in Civil Engineering from Motilal

Nehru National Institute of Technology, Prayagraj and an MBA degree from IIM Kolkata," he added. According to the statement after formally taking charge on Tuesday, Verma held a meeting with all the principal heads of departments. "All the Divisional Railway Manager also joined the meeting through video conferencing. While addressing the meeting Verma outlined his priorities stating that punctuality and safety are the most important parameters in railway functioning," the statement said.

Fresh PIL seeking CBI probe into Tirupati laddus row filed in SC

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: A fresh PIL was filed in the Supreme Court on Tuesday seeking a CBI probe into alleged use of animal fat in making Tirupati laddus under the previous Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy-led regime. The PIL was filed by one K A Paul, a social activist and president of organisation 'Global Peace Initiative', seeking a 'comprehensive investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) into the allegations of corruption and mismanagement surrounding the procurement and preparation of the Laddu Prasadam'.

A bench comprising Justices B R Gavai and K V Viswanathan is already seized of as many as four petitions on the issue. On September 30, the top court observed that Gods should be kept away from politics while questioning Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's public statement that animal fat was allegedly used in making Tirupati laddus under the previous regime. The apex court also said the laboratory test report was "not clear at all" and it prima facie indicated that "rejected ghee" was subjected to test. "It is very clear from the report that this is not the Ghee which has been used. Unless you are sure, how did you go

public with that?" the bench had asked. Paul, in his fresh PIL, said allegations levelled by the chief minister that standard ingredients were used in the preparation of 'Laddu Prasadam', including adulterated ghee, have raised serious concerns among devotees and tarnished the sanctity of this sacred offering. The petition underscored the growing communal tensions and the violation of fundamental religious rights, citing Article 25 of the Constitution, which guarantees the freedom to practice and propagate religion. "The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams is one of the biggest sites for Hindus around the world. The Laddu Prasadam holds immense religious and cultural significance for all Hindus.

"Any compromise on its sanctity not only affects millions of devotees but also tarnishes the reputation of this institution. I have filed this petition in the interest of the devotees and to ensure that political manipulation and corruption do not undermine our sacred traditions" Paul said. The chief minister had claimed earlier this month that animal fat was used in preparing Tirupati laddus during the previous Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy-led government in the state, triggering a massive political row.

The YSR Congress Party accused Naidu of indulging in "heinous allegations" for political gains and the ruling Telugu Desam Party in the state circulating a laboratory report to back its claim.

PM of Jamaica calls on Vice President Dhankhar

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister of Jamaica Andrew Holness on Tuesday called on Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar here and their discussions focussed on areas like south-south collaboration.

Holness arrived here on Monday. It is the first-ever bilateral visit of a prime minister of Jamaica to India.

According to the vice president's secretariat, Holness and Dhankhar focused on areas like south-south collaboration, including India's flagship Indian technical and economic cooperation programme effectively used by Jamaica for capacity building and the desire of Jamaica to replicate India's Digital Public Infrastructure and high economic growth trajectory.

Jamaica also expressed interest in cooperating in education, technology and innovation sectors.

Actor Govinda injured after revolver accident, out of danger

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

MUMBAI: Actor Govinda was injured in the leg on Tuesday after his revolver accidentally went off at his Mumbai residence when he was about to leave for the airport, police said.

Dr Ramesh Agarwal, who tended to the 60-year-old actor after the accident, said Govinda is recuperating in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of a private hospital and will be discharged in a few days.

Govinda, a favourite with audiences for his impeccable comic timing and dancing skills, later issued a statement informing his fans he is doing better.

"With the blessings of my fans, my parents and god, I am doing better now. I was hit by a bullet, which has now been removed.

"I thank the doctor here, Dr Agarwal ji. I thank all of you for your prayers," the "Hero No 1" actor and a member of the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena said in the audio message.

According to the doctor, the bullet hit him below his left knee and that he had got 8-10 stitches.

"He came to me at 5 am. His daughter and I brought him to the hospital later. He had an X-ray there following which he



underwent the operation.

"The bullet was stuck, we have removed it. He was bleeding, but it stopped later. He is comfortable now. He will be in the hospital for one-two days. He got 8-10 stitches, otherwise everything is ok," Agarwal told reporters here.

Mumbai Police on Tuesday enhanced security outside the actor's Juhu residence, an official said.

The accident happened around 4.45 am when he was about to leave home to catch a 6 am flight to Kolkata for a show, according to his manager

Shashi Sinha. The trigger of the licensed revolver got pushed accidentally while the actor was keeping it in the cupboard.

A bullet then hit his leg, police said.

According to Govinda's brother Kirti Kumar, it was a "strange" incident, adding he was "lucky to survive".

"He was just checking the revolver when it accidentally slipped from his hand and fired. Thankfully, he reached the hospital on time. He's okay now.

"The operation was successful. The doctors say

he's recovering well and needs to stay in the hospital for 2-3 days. But if he feels better, he might go home today itself," Kumar told reporters here.

Earlier in the day, a police official said Govinda had been discharged and was recuperating at home. The injured actor was admitted to the Criti Care Hospital near his residence for treatment.

No one has lodged any complaint in this matter, police said, adding that an investigation had begun. A police team reached Govinda's home in the morning to conduct panch-

nama. The licensed revolver, which accidentally went off, has been seized by the police officials for further probe, an official said.

Crime branch officials also visited the actor at the hospital, he said.

Govind Arun Ahuja, better known by his stage name Govinda, made his film debut with the 1986 film "Love 86".

A ruling star of Hindi cinema in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Govinda has appeared in more than 165 films in his career spanning four decades.

His film credits include "Ilzaam", "Gambler", "Aankhen", "Raja Babu", "Saajan Chale Sasural", "Bade Miyan Chote Miyan", "Bhagam Bhag", and "Partner".

The actor was last seen in 2019's "Rangeela Raja". In March, a month before the Lok Sabha elections, Govinda joined the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena.

This marked Govinda's re-entry into the political landscape after nearly two decades. The actor won the 2004 poll battle from the Mumbai North Lok Sabha constituency on a Congress ticket before stepping away from politics in 2008.

NSA Doval calls on French President Macron; conveys PM Modi's greetings



■ AGENCY

PARIS: National Security Advisor Ajit Doval on Tuesday called on French President Emmanuel Macron and conveyed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's greetings.

He also met the Armed Forces Minister of France and discussed enhancing bilateral defence relations and advancing space collaboration, as well as the "evolving" global situation.

"NSA Ajit Doval calls on

French President HE @EmmanuelMacron. Conveyed PM @narendramodi's greetings. Reiterated commitment to implement the India-France Horizon 2047 roadmap," the Indian embassy in France said in a post on X.

"President stressed the value of India-France efforts to advance peace and address global challenges; appreciated PM Modi's initiatives," it added.

Doval held extensive dis-

cussions with French Armed Forces Minister Sebastien Lecornu. "Their dialogue aimed at deepening bilateral defence cooperation and advancing space collaboration, while also sharing insights on the evolving international geopolitical landscape," the Indian mission said in another post.

Lecornu also took to X and said they discussed "our bilateral defence cooperation: Rafale Marine, Scorpene submarines, space. As well as the international situation, particularly in Ukraine."

Doval also led the Strategic Dialogue in Paris with Emmanuel Bonne, the Diplomatic Advisor to French President Emmanuel Macron.

The dialogue "anchors the India-France strategic partnership of great trust and comfort, and high ambitions and responsibilities in the Indo-Pacific and beyond, and from cyber to space", the Indian embassy said.

India U19 crumble against Aussie spinners despite Suryavanshi hundred on Day 2

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

CHENNAI: Opener Vaibhav Suryavanshi struck a quick hundred but India U19's middle and later order batters crumbled against Australian spinners Thomas Brown and Vishwa Ramkumar to throw away the advantage on the second day of the four-day first unofficial Test, here on Tuesday.

Suryavanshi, resuming from overnight 81, duly completed his century (104, 62b, 14x4, 4x6) and added 133 runs for the opening wicket with Vihaan Malhotra (76, 108b, 13x4, 1x6).

But rest of the batters did not follow it up, as India, overnight 103/0, were bundled out for 296 in their first innings, three runs more than Australia's first-dig score.

In their second innings, the tourists were placed at a gingerly 110 for four; but still hold a 107-run advantage as chasing anything close to 200 in the fourth innings could be a tricky proposition here.

But for that slight edge, the Aussies should thank their wily spinners - off-spinner Brown (3/79) and the Indian-origin leg-spinner Ramkumar (4/79).

After Christian Howe's direct throw caught Suryavanshi short of crease, Brown and Ramkumar never allowed the Indians to settle, as the visitors plucked the remaining nine wickets for 163 runs.

The next significant stand in the first innings was of 57 runs between Abhigyan Kundu (32) and skipper Soham Patwardhan (33) for the fifth wicket, but India could not even cross the 300-run mark.

In their second essay, opener Riley Kingsell (48) and Oliver Peake (32) added 72 runs for the second wicket but leg-spinner Mohammed Enaan grabbed two wickets to peg them back a bit. Brief scores: Australia U19: 293 all out and 110/4 in 39 overs (Riley Kingsell 48; Mohammed Enaan 2/33) vs India U19: 296 all out in 62.4 overs (Vaibhav Suryavanshi 104, Vihaan Malhotra 76; Thomas Brown 3/79, Vishwa Ramkumar 4/79).

Shah asks BJP leaders to iron out differences before Maharashtra elections

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

MUMBAI: Union minister Amit Shah on Tuesday asked BJP leaders and workers in Maharashtra to resolve internal differences ahead of the assembly elections in the state.

In his third visit to Maharashtra in a fortnight, Shah held a meeting with Bharatiya Janata Party MLAs and a select group of party workers here.

Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, state BJP president Chandrashekhar Bavankule and the party's Mumbai unit head Ashish Shelar were present at the meeting in Dadar where Shah addressed the gathering.

He asked party workers to iron out internal differences before the elections that are expected to be held in November, BJP sources said.

"There are differences of opinion even in a family. If there is disappointment about an MLA or Member of Parliament, an amicable solution should be found so that

voters remain with the party," Shah was quoted as saying.

He asked local leaders to appoint ten workers for every polling booth. "These workers should remain active within the booth jurisdiction from Dussehra until the last day of the campaign, Shah said.

"An organisation where workers function in different directions never succeeds. We need to address these differences before the elections," Shah stressed.

"The state BJP unit will draw up a plan ahead of the polls. Party workers should reach out up to the ward level and it will ensure our victory," he said.

The senior BJP leader also asked workers to refrain from seeking votes when enrolling new party members. "Do not ask new members to vote for the BJP when registering. Once they become members, they will realise the importance of voting. Party workers should aspire to add 20 new voters in every booth," he said.

"There are certain types of

tasks which no one wants to undertake. However, a loyal party worker is one who takes up such critical tasks and completes them. Disagreement takes place when people start working together. We should be able to overcome our such disagreements," Shah was further quoted as saying.

The BJP is part of the ruling Mahayuti alliance in the state that also includes the Shiv Sena and NCP. Last month Shah visited the Vidarbha region where he engaged with party workers and local legislators, and also North Maharashtra, Marathwada and Western Maharashtra.

In 2019, the BJP had won 105 out of the 164 assembly seats it contested in Maharashtra. It had a pre-poll alliance with the undivided Shiv Sena then. Of 36 assembly seats in Mumbai, the saffron party had won 16.

But in the 2024 general elections, it fared badly, winning only nine of the 28 Lok Sabha seats it contested in the state.

Sports minster to lead nationwide coastal and beach cleanliness drive in Porbandar

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya will lead a nationwide coastal and beach cleanliness drive from the historic city of Porbandar in Gujarat on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti on Wednesday.

This initiative aims to eliminate single-use plastic waste from India's beaches and coastal areas, marking the culmination of the broader "Swachhata Hi Seva" campaign, which

runs from September 17 to October 2 under the theme "Swabhav Swachhata - Sanskaar Swachhata."

Mandaviya will commence the cleanup in Porbandar, the birthplace of Mahatma Gandhi. His participation underscores the commitment to sustainable environmental practices, aligning with the vision of a clean and plastic-free India.

The organisers MY Bharat, under the Department of Youth Affairs, has taken a proactive role in this year's Swachhata Hi

Seva campaign, encouraging active youth participation in promoting cleanliness and environmental responsibility.

The drive will target over 1,000 locations along India's 7,500km coastline, focusing on the collection, segregation, and disposal of single-use plastics.

More than 100,000 MY Bharat volunteers will participate in this nationwide effort, showcasing the power of collective action in achieving environmental sustainability.

Mandaviya has also written to MPs of all coastal districts, urging them to participate in the Swachhata Hi Seva campaign, which has already seen significant success, with over 5.6 million MY Bharat youth volunteers actively removing millions of kilograms of waste across the country.

Cleanup efforts have spanned more than 100,000 villages, over 15,000 community centres, 9,501 Amrit Sarovars, and various historical and public spaces.