

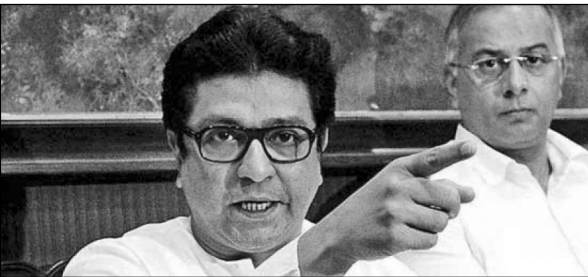
Play Hanuman Chalisa if you hear loudspeakers 'blaring Azaan': Raj Thackeray

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

MUMBAI: Undeterred by registration of a case against him, Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) president Raj Thackeray on Tuesday urged people to play the Hanuman Chalisa on loudspeakers on Wednesday wherever they hear loudspeakers "blaring azaan (Islamic prayer call)." .

In an open letter, he asked people to lodge complaint with the police by dialling 100 if they are distributed by the sound of 'azaan'.

"One must complain daily," the MNS leader said. "I appeal to all Hindus that tomorrow, the 4th of May, if you hear the loudspeaker blaring with azaan; in those places, play Hanuman Chalisa on loudspeakers. That's when they will realise the hindrance of these loudspeakers," Raj Thackeray said in the letter. All local



mandals and vigilant citizens should start a signature campaign over the issue of loudspeakers atop mosques and submit it to the police station in their locality, he said.

Thackeray had earlier given an ultimatum to the state government to remove loudspeakers from mosques by May 3.

Earlier in the day, the Aurangabad police registered a case against the MNS chief, days after he called for "silencing" loudspeakers atop mosques from May 4 while addressing a rally in the cen-

tral Maharashtra city, an official said. In the letter, Raj Thackeray also attacked the Shiv Sena-led Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government, saying the ruling coalition stands feeble over the issue.

Invoking Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray, the MNS president drew Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's attention to a statement of the late leader - "all loudspeakers (rpt loudspeakers) need to be silenced".

"Are you going to listen to this or are you going to follow non-religious Sharad Pawar

who is responsible for keeping you in power? Let people of Maharashtra witness what is going to happen. Our country doesn't have so many jails that can arrest the Hindus of our country. This very fact should be recognised by all the governments," he said. The Sharad Pawar-led NCP is a key constituent of the MVA government.

The MNS chief claimed loudspeakers are "unauthorised" and so are many mosques. How is it possible that the government has authorised permissions to unauthorised masjids to use loudspeakers?

And if permissions are being granted, then Hindu temples need to be given permissions to play the loudspeakers, the MNS leader said. Maintaining that the issue of loudspeakers is not religious, but a social one, Raj Thackeray said people of

every religion are exposed to noise pollution. Which religion propagates assembling and sitting on the middle of the road to pray and cause immense traffic jams? This is main reason for my state-ments to the Muslim community that this is a social issue affecting the public. Kindly take cognisance of the same, he said. If steps are taken to turn this social issue into a religious one, then we, too, can give a befitting reply, Raj Thackeray warned.

He said issues like "unauthorised" mosques, loudspeakers and prayers being held on the middle of the roads need to be addressed duly.

"The Hindu festivals are restricted under the facade of schools and hospitals being around. However, mosques are exempt from such restrictions," he claimed.

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has accused former chief ministers of Jammu and Kashmir Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti of making desperate efforts to fuel unrests similar to those of 2010 and 2016 by making provocative sloganeering so that people get incited to resort to violence.

In a statement issued to media here today, Sham Lal Langer, Convener Trade & Industries Cell, BJP, J&K said that sensing the people's massive inclination towards BJP both these former Chief Ministers along with the National Conference President Dr Farooq Abdullah are feeling highly disturbed and are resorting to every effort to malign the BJP by fomenting trouble in both the provinces of J&K least bothering about the lives of peo-

ple besides destruction of properties. Recalling the previous unrests, Sham Langer said Omar was chief minister when 2010 unrest happened in which over 120 protesters were killed while Mehbooba was ruling J&K during 2016 unrest in which more than 100 protesters died while fighting pitched battles with security forces on the streets of Valley.

The senior BJP leader said that there is no reason for people not to have trust and faith in BJP as the party has proved its mettle on ground by recording unprecedented achievements in every field.

Recalling PM Modi's state-ment in Berlin that no PM will now lament that out of one rupee sent only fifteen paise reaches the intended beneficiary, Sham Langer said this is the magic of Modi led Union Govt that has brought complete trans-

parency to eradicate corruption. He said that massive relief to the needy during Covid-19 pandemic, producing the vaccines against the deadly virus and getting the huge population vaccinated besides providing the vaccine to poor nations free of cost are only a tip of the iceberg so far as achievements are concerned. Moreover, India is today acknowledged as the global leader as the status of the nation has got elevated to an unprecedented level, he added.

Asserting that people are well aware of all these achievements besides BJP Govt's role in establishing peace J&K annihilating terrorists on a regular basis, Sham Langer advised the former CMs to retire from the political arena of J&K as people of J&K have decided to bring BJP to power in J&K whenever elections to the Assembly are held.

82 lakh deaths in 2020 in India; 1.48 lakh due to COVID-19: RGI

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: As many as 81.2 lakh people died in India in 2020, an increase of 6.2 per cent than 2019 when the country had registered 76.4 lakh deaths, according to data prepared by the Registrar General of India (RGI). In 2020, when COVID-19 was first reported in the country, 1.48 lakh people lost their lives due to the pandemic, which is substantially lower than 2021 when 3.32 lakh people died due to the disease.

According to Union health ministry data, provided on Tuesday morning, 5,23,889 people have lost their lives to the virus in the country since early 2020.

In case of registered deaths, the number of registered events has gone up from 76.4 lakhs in 2019 to 81.2 lakhs in 2020, an increase of 6.2 per cent, the RGI's report 'Vital Statistics of India based on the Civil Registration System' for 2020 said.

Some states and union territories (UTs) namely Maharashtra, Bihar,

Gujarat, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Assam, and Haryana have contributed significantly in the increased number of deaths registered from 2019 to 2020.

Officials said many of the deaths had occurred in these states due to COVID-19.

Registered births, the data said, decreased from 2.48 crore in 2019 to 2.42 crore in 2020, a drop of about 2.4 per cent. In the case of registered births, there has been a fall in 2020 in almost all states and UTs except Bihar, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh compared to 2019. Eleven States and UTs namely Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Delhi, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Kerala and West Bengal have contributed significantly to the decrease in registered births in 2020 over 2019.

As many as 11 states and UTs have achieved more than 90 per cent registration of death within the prescribed time limit of 21 days.

Seven states and UTs are in the category of more than 80 to less than or equal to 90 per cent, seven states are in the category of more than 50 to less than or equal to 80 per cent, and the remaining eight states are under the category of less than or equal to 50 per cent in death registration within the prescribed time limit of 21 days.

A total of 15 states and UTs have achieved more than 90 per cent registration of births within the prescribed time limit of 21 days.

Further, two states and UTs are in the category of more than 80 to less than or equal to 90 per cent, nine states are in the category of more than 50 to less than or equal to 80 per cent and, the remaining seven states are under the category of less than or equal to 50 per cent in completing the birth registration within the time limit of 21 days.

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

BHUBANESWAR: Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Tuesday disbursed around Rs 800 crore to farmers under the state's flagship KALIA scheme on the occasion of agrarian festival Akshaya Tritiya.

Patnaik disbursed the amount to 40 lakh farmers through video conferencing, barring the peasants in Jharsuguda district where the Model Code of Conduct is enforced for the May 31 by-election to Brajarajnagar assembly seat.

Each registered farmer will get Rs 2,000 for Kharif crop.

Under the Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation (KALIA) scheme, the state government provides Rs 4,000 to farmers in two phases once during Kharif and another in Rabi season.

Patnaik highlighted farmers' contribution to ensuring food security.

He also launched eight new programmes for agricultural development, including Panasa (jackfruit) Mission and Rejuvenating Watershed for Agricultural Resilience through Innovative Development (Reward) programme. Patnaik said the state

government has allocated more than Rs 20,000 crore under the agriculture budget for 2022-23 fiscal.

He said that Rs 500 crore has been allocated for Reward project to improve the productivity of cultivable land through equitable distribution of irrigation.

A total of Rs 2,808 crore has been allocated under Millet Mission for farmers in 182 blocks in 19 districts, Rs 97 crore under Jackfruit Mission, and Rs 239 crore to include 1.8 lakh farmers in eight districts under special programme for promotion of integrated farming, he said.

CSS officers threaten non-cooperation movement over delay in promotions

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: The Central Secretariat Service officers' association has threatened a non-cooperation movement from Wednesday over delay in their promotion, claiming it was causing irreparable financial loss to them.

The CSS Forum, an association of CSS officers, has written a letter to Secretary, Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) informing about their proposed movement and demanding promotion orders in respect of the eligible employees before May 15, 2022.

It has been unanimously decided in a meeting held on April 30 that all Central Secretariat Service (CSS) officers are now left with only one resort i.e. non-cooperation movement, which is going to be started from 4th May, 2022, the letter said.

CSS officers will now follow the slow and lackluster attitude of our CCA i.e. CS-I

Division DoP&T & will observe the old, customary, slow, procedural working pattern of nodal department, however, same may be against the dynamic working principles laid down by present dispensation under Hon'ble MoS & Hon'ble Prime Minister who always inspires us to have out-of-box thinking and innovative ideas to improve the administrative system, it said.

CSS officers who generally do late sitting on daily basis for betterment of our country, will not work after normal office hours, that is, after 5:30 pm, the letter said.

CSS officers who are overburdened due to lots of vacancies and 1 CSS officer is doing work of at least four officers, will work strictly as per manual of office procedure come what may and will not perform the work tricked down due to empty promotional posts especially cabinet notes/classified matters etc. which are mandated to be

dealt at particular senior officers level, it said in the letter dated May 2.

One day in a week, CSS officers will wear black dress as a sign of hopelessness with the present system of working being followed in CS-I division, the letter said.

Further, even after the above steps, if CS division, DoP&T does not wake up from deep slumber on the issues and if they are left unresolved even by 15 May, the said non-cooperation movement will culminate into indefinite pen down strike in entire central secretariat from 20th May, 2022 onwards, said the letter signed by Mannohan Verma, General Secretary, CSS Forum. The CSS officers form the backbone of central secretariat working.

The officers' body said the Cadre Controlling Authority (CCA) of CSS officers, that is the DoPT, seems unprepared and deliberately creating friction in implementation of its

own guidelines. Same has been clearly showcased in the meetings held in the matter with DoP&T CS-I division officials who are rigid about their intent that they are not going to think dynamically and will work only the old, customary, slow, procedural ways that would the promotions in CSS up to date, the letter said.

In spite of continuous pain, initiatives and assurances of Minister of State for Personnel Jitendra Singh, how is it possible that hundreds of eligible CSS officers have retired/retiring each month without promotions with irreparable financial loss for rest of their life? it asked.

The CSS Forum has been demanding promotion to their members.

There are over 1,900 vacant posts at the levels of section officer, under secretary, deputy secretary and director against their sanctioned strength of over 6,000 a member of the CSS Forum said.

Banners, posters put up for Parshuram Jayanti removed in Ahmedabad; 4 held

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

AHMEDABAD: Police arrested three miscreants and detained a minor for allegedly tearing banners and posters put up on the occasion of Parshuram Jayanti in the Vasna area of Ahmedabad in the early hours of Tuesday, an official said.

Residents of Vasna had organised a 'maha aarti' at a temple to celebrate Lord Parshuram's birth anniversary and put up posters and banners announcing the same in the area on late Monday night, he said.

"When they were putting up banners in Chamunda Nagar part of Vasna, some local youths raised an objection as they did not want those banners near their locality.

During early hours, these youths, out of that grudge, tore apart some banners, posters and also broke a plaque on which Parshuram Chowk was written," said Deputy Commissioner of Police, Bhagirathsinh Jadeja.

After receiving a complaint from the organisers, police checked the CCTV footage and identified four miscreants, one of them a minor, said Jadeja.

Three of them were arrested, while the minor was detained and all four were booked under IPC section 295A (deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs), the DCP added.

Gold sales rebound on Akshaya Tritiya; jewellers expect 10 pc rise in volume

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

MUMBAI: Gold sales rebounded on Akshaya Tritiya after remaining subdued for past two years due to Covid-19 as a decline in the metal's prices along with public holiday on Tuesday led to heavy foot-fall at jewellery stores, industry players said.

Jewellers witnessed heavy interest among customers to buy gold on this Akshaya Tritiya, which is considered auspicious for buying the precious metal, and sales are expected to be 10 per cent higher than last Akshaya Tritiya, according to the industry.

"This Akshaya Tritiya has been very strong. We will keep our shops open till late. We are expecting to comfortably surpass the 2019 level. This year pent up demand, a decline in gold prices and the day being a holiday has contributed to boosting the sales," Saiyam Mehra, the vice-chairman of All India Gem and Jewellery Domestic Council (GJC), told PTI.

He said, with taxes, the price of 22 karat gold was ruling at around Rs 48,300 per 10 grams, which had

recently peaked at Rs 52,100 per 10 grams.

In terms of volume, Mehra said, the industry is likely to have 10 per cent more business this Akshaya Tritiya compared to 2019's.

World Gold Council Regional CEO, India, Somasundaram PR said, "After two years of Covid induced lull, the festive sentiment among trade and consumers appears to be stronger this year, surpassing expectations. Sustained aggressive marketing and trade promotions have played a role in increasing in-store visits and leveraging the occasion."

Digital gold buying platforms also sound upbeat, with small buyers enthusiastically picking up the convenience of purchasing gold for as little as one rupee on their smartphone, without having to worry about purity and transparency, Somasundaram said.

"As the gold prices stabilise, initial market feedback points to a buoyant Akshaya Tritiya with a heightened interest in gold among consumers following risks posed by inflation and global uncertainties, he added. Arun Narayan, Vice

President, Category, Marketing and Retail, Tanishq at Titan Company said, "We have witnessed a very good response from customers who were looking forward to celebrating Akshaya Tritiya after two years.

"Our safety protocols and preparations ensured that we served very large numbers of customers across our 390 stores while sustaining our 'Gold Standards of Safety'. Our newly introduced Gold Coin ATMs also enabled customers to shop quickly and comfortably. We now look forward, enthused by this response, to a good wedding season ahead.

PNG Jewellers Chairman and Managing Director Saurabh Gadgil said this year's Akshaya Tritiya has been phenomenal as people are walking into the stores since early morning, he said adding "we expect buyers to throng the stores right up till 10 pm tonight". Prices have corrected too and there is a lot of demand for gold and diamond jewellery alike and compared to last year, which was an Akshaya Tritiya in lockdown and involved online sales, this year is all about visiting the

store and making purchases, he said.

"We are already seeing an increase in numbers by 30 per cent from 2019 sales, which we expect to further increase by the time this day ends," he said.

Overall the industry is looking at 25 tonnes plus sales in gold this year across the country as Akshaya Tritiya makes a fantastic comeback after a two-year hiatus, he added.

He said, wedding shopping has been the highlight for us this Akshaya Tritiya with as many as 40 lakh weddings are to take place all over India in the next couple of months and, hence, people are capitalising on this auspicious day to make their wedding jewellery purchases.

Kalyan Jewellers Executive Director Ramesh Kalyanaraman said this Akshaya Tritiya, we have witnessed a strong momentum across geographies and product segments, resulting in a positive growth outlook.

"We are encouraged by the significant increase in foot-fall, sales volume and value, even when compared to the pre-pandemic days of 2019.

The higher traction this Akshaya Tritiya could be owing to the lower volatility in gold prices over the past week, further aided by revenge shopping and today's festival holiday," he opined.

While an uptick in sales in the southern markets was expected, the response from the non-South markets has also been extremely encouraging, he added.

CaratLane COO and co-founder Anvish Anand said that Akshaya Tritiya has seen customers inquiring about gold coins and chains, significantly less compared to every other year.

Owing to our digital first omni marketing strategy, a majority of our customers walk into the stores with screenshots of designs they shortlisted from the website and previously researched upon by contacting the physical stores, he added.

"With the wedding season around the corner, we've also seen an uprise in the purchase of engagement rings. Interestingly, this year there has been a good traction across the country and not just specific regions," Anand added.

To encourage crop diversification, Mann announces MSP on maize, pulses, bajra

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

SATJOJ (PUNJAB): To encourage crop diversification in Punjab, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Tuesday announced that his government will provide minimum support price (MSP) on alternative crops such as maize, pulses and bajra.

Mann made the announcement during his interaction with farmers after kick starting the ambitious Direct Seeding of Rice (DSR) drive here. He also appealed to them to take up this technique to check the depleting groundwater table.

Launching the DSR drive from his native village Satoj, he exhorted local farmers to also take up this technique of paddy sowing in a big way.

The chief minister assured farmers that during the tenure of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government in the state, they will get superior quality fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides.

To encourage crop diversification in Punjab, Mann said that his government will provide MSP on alternative crops such as maize, pulses and bajra, and will sell the produce at its own responsibility,

an official statement quoting him said.

"We may sell it to Singapore or Ukraine or any other place, but you will get MSP," the chief minister said.

On the power situation in the state, he said his government is going to resume mining of coal from Punjab's allotted mine in Jharkhand which has been shut since 2015. Mann pointed out that with uninterrupted supply of coal, there will be normal supply of power for the agriculture, the domestic and the industrial sectors.

Expressing deep concern over fast depleting groundwater, Mann said it is the need of the hour to motivate farmers to switch over from traditional paddy transplantation to the advanced DSR technique.

Moreover, it is high time to adopt an alternative technique for paddy cultivation to save the much scarce and precious natural water resource, he said. The Punjab government on Saturday had announced financial assistance of Rs 1,500 per acre to farmers sowing paddy through the DSR technique to check depleting groundwater table.

"To promote the DSR technology, our government has also decided to provide financial assistance of Rs 1,500 per acre to farmers who adopt this water saving method of cultivating paddy," Mann said as he interacted with farmers of his village and listened to their suggestions.

Mann said that farmers of his native village will have to set an example for the entire state by sowing paddy with the DSR method on maximum area of land.

Under the DSR technique, paddy seeds are drilled into the ground with the help of a machine that does seeding of rice and spraying of herbicide simultaneously.

According to the traditional method, first young paddy plants are raised by farmers in nurseries and then these plants are uprooted and transplanted in a puddled field.

On this occasion, Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema, MLA Sunam Aman Arora, Deputy Commissioner, Sangrur, Jatinder Jorwal, SSP Mandeep Singh Sidhu besides Mann's mother were also present.

