

# Rath Yatra: Chariot pulling begins in Puri

**STATE TIMES NEWS**  
PURI (ODISHA): Thousands of people pulled forward giant chariots from the 12th century Jagannath temple in Puri towards Gundicha temple, around 2.5 km away, on Sunday afternoon.

The chariot pulling started around 5.20 pm after Puri Shankaracharya Swami Nishalananda Saraswati visited the chariots of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra with his disciples and the Puri's titular king completed the 'Chhera Paharra' (chariot sweeping) ritual.

The wooden horses were fitted to the chariots and the servitor pilots guided the devotees to pull the chariots in the right direction.

President Droupadi Murmu performed a 'parikrama' of the three chariots and bowed down before the deities.

The President, Odisha Governor Raghubar Das, Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Mahji and Union minister Dharmendra Pradhan symbolically started the mammoth exercise by pulling the ropes connecting the principal Jagannath chariot. Leader of Opposition Naveen Patnaik also had a 'darshan' of the sibling deities.

Thousands of people pulled the nearly 45-foot tall wooden chariot of Lord Balabhadra. It will be followed by pulling of chariots of Devi Subhadra and Lord Jagannath.



Rhythmically beating brass cymbals and hand drums, priests surrounded the gods on the canopied chariots as the procession made its slow way through the main street of the temple town.

The air rent with 'Jai Jagannath' and 'Haribol' as frenzied devotees tried to get a glimpse of the holy occasion.

Different artists groups performed 'kirtans' (religious songs) and Odissi dance in front of the chariots before the procession started.

Around a million devotees are estimated to have converged on this town for the annual car festival. While most of the devotees were from Odisha and the neighbouring states, many from abroad also joined in what is considered one of the largest religious processions globally.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Mohan Mahji reached in Puri and met Puri Shankaracharya Swami Nishalananda Saraswati. Mahji said he got the opportunity to meet the Puri

seer, who advised him to provide service and justice to the poor and destitute of the state. The Shankaracharya has also advised the CM to take steps for the renovation of the Srikhetra Puri and Govardhan peeth. Earlier in the day, Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra ascended their respective chariots after the completion of the three-hour-long 'Pahandi' ritual at 2.15 pm. 'Jai Jagannath' chants, sounds of gongs, conches and cymbals reverberated through the air at Lion's Gate of the Puri temple as Lord Sudarshan was first escorted to Darpadalan, the chariot of Devi Subhadra.

Following Lord Sudarshan, Lord Balabhadra was taken to his 'Taladhvaja' chariot. Goddess Subhadra, the sister of Lord Jagannath and Lord Balabhadra, was brought to her Darpadalan chariot in a special procession by servitors.

Finally, Lord Jagannath was taken to the Nandighosa chariot in a ceremonial pro-

cession amid the sounds of gongs. In the 'Pahandi' ritual, deities are brought from the temple to the chariots.

Descending from the 'Ratna Sinhasana', the bejewelled throne, the three deities were taken out of the temple down the 22 steps known as 'Baisi Pahachia' through the Lion's Gate.

Several rituals like 'Mangla Arati' and 'Mailam' were held before the presiding deities set out from the sanctum sanctorum of the temple.

Rath Yatra will be a two-day affair this year after 53 years due to some celestial arrangements. In a departure from tradition, some of the rituals, including 'Nabajouban Darshan' and 'Netra Utsav', will be conducted in a single day on Sunday. These rituals are generally held ahead of the Rath Yatra.

'Nabajouban Darshan' means youthful appearance of deities, who were behind the doors for 15 days in a ritual called 'Anasara' (quarantine), conducted after 'Sana Purnima'.

According to mythology,

the deities fall ill due to excessive bathing on 'Sana Purnima' and therefore remain indoors.

Prior to 'Nabajouban Darshan', the priests performed the special ritual called 'Netra Utsav' in which the eyeballs of the deities are painted afresh.

Tight security arrangements have been put in place, with the deployment of 180 platoons (one platoon comprises 30 personnel) of security personnel, Puri Superintendent of Police Pinak Mishra said.

Artificial Intelligence-based CCTV cameras have been installed at Badadanda, the venue of the festival, and other strategic locations in the pilgrim town, said ADG (law and order) Sanjay Kumar.

Altogether 46 fire tenders were deployed in various parts of the town and along the sea beach for the Rath Yatra, said DG, fire service, Sudhanshu Sarangi.

As hot and humid weather may prevail, water was sprinkled on the crowd, he said.

# Flood-like situation in parts of northern West Bengal, more rains forecast



**STATE TIMES NEWS**  
JALPAIGURI/KOLKATA: Unabated rains in several places of the sub-Himalayan districts of West Bengal led to a flood-like situation in some low-lying areas and affected road communications, with the Met Department on Sunday forecasting more downpours.

Several areas in Jalpaiguri town have been submerged in rainwater, leading to at least 300 families moving to community halls and flood shelters, Jalpaiguri Municipality chairperson Papi Pal said.

Heavy to very heavy rain is likely till July 12 in the sub-Himalayan districts of

Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Jalpaiguri, Coochbehar and Alipurdur, the Met Department said.

National Highway 10, connecting northern West Bengal with Sikkim, has been closed to traffic since Saturday night owing to landslides at some places, an official said.

Traffic movement to and from Sikkim is being regulated through other routes, he said. Police and other departments were taking urgent steps to prevent any breach of National Highway 27 at Dhupguri in Jalpaiguri district, where several places have been submerged owing

to the incessant rains, another official said.

A close watch is being kept on the rise in water levels of Teesta and Korola rivers, he said.

Several places in Dhupguri, Moynaguri and Kranti in Jalpaiguri district, apart from the headquarters town have been affected by the torrential rains.

The families who have taken shelter in community halls in Jalpaiguri town were being provided food and medical facilities, municipality chairperson Pal said.

"We are ready with additional provisions to deal with the evolving situation," she said.

Vast stretches of agricultural land have also been submerged in the Moynaguri and Kranti blocks of the district.

Jalpaiguri town recorded 166 mm rainfall in 24 hours till 8.30 am on Sunday, while Bagdogra received 103 mm rainfall during the same period.

# Surat building collapse death toll rises to 7; FIR against owners, 1 person held

**STATE TIMES NEWS**  
SURAT: The death toll in the collapse of a six-storey building in Gujarat's Surat city has gone up to seven with the recovery of six more bodies overnight, police said on Sunday.

A person who collected rent from the building occupants has been arrested and he and two owners of the structure have been booked on charges of culpable homicide not amounting to murder, they said.

The residential building, which was in a dilapidated condition and located in the Pal area, collapsed at around 2.45 pm on Saturday, as per the police.

A team of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), two teams of the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), police per-



sonnel and fire brigade were involved in the rescue operation, the Surat police said in statement.

After around three hours of operation, they managed to rescue a 20-year-old woman, named Kashish Sharma, and rushed her to the hospital for treatment.

The body of a man was pulled out on Saturday night, an official earlier said.

Rescue teams later pulled out six more bodies from the

debris, according to police.

Seven bodies were recovered from the debris in the operation that continued through the night, Sachin GIDC police station inspector Jignesh Chaudhari said.

The deceased, most of them textile workers from Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, have been identified as Hiranam Kevat (40), Abhishek (35), Brjesh God (50), Shivpujan Kevat (26), Anmol Harijan (17), Parvesh

Kevat (21), and Lalji Kevat (40), the statement said.

An FIR has been registered under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita sections, including 105 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder), against the building owners Raj Kakadiya and his mother Ramlaben Kakadiya, and one Ashwin Vekariya, who collected rent from the occupants, inspector Chaudhari said.

Vekariya has been arrested and efforts are underway to nab the two other accused, he said.

Raj Kakadiya is currently in the US, as per the police.

As per the FIR, the dilapidated building was mostly vacant as the earlier occupants had left due to the danger it posed. A few families, however, continued to live there on rent.

On April 26 this year, the Surat Municipal Corporation issued a notice to the building's owner to get it vacated due to its dilapidated condition, the FIR stated.

The building's occupants repeatedly requested Vekariya to carry out repair works for damages caused to the structure but he told them the owners had refused it and they will get it done next year, it claimed.

The building was constructed in 2016-17, Surat Police Commissioner Anupam Singh Gehlot said on Saturday.

Around five flats were occupied, mostly by those who work in factories in the area, he said.

An NDRF official said the rescue operation concluded by around 9 am on Sunday.

# Punjab Guv inquires about health of Shiv Sena leader attacked in Ludhiana

**STATE TIMES NEWS**  
LUDHIANA: Punjab Governor Banwarilal Purohit on Sunday inquired about the health of Shiv Sena (Punjab) leader Sandeep Thapar who was attacked with swords here two days ago.

After reaching the Circuit House here, Purohit spoke to the doctors attending to Thapar. He also talked to the Ludhiana deputy commissioner and the Ludhiana police commissioner and asserted that he came to the city to gather first-hand information about the incident. Shiv Sena (Punjab) leader Thapar got grievously injured after he was attacked with swords by three assailants in full public view here on Friday.

"As far as his treatment is concerned, he is being given the best available treatment," Purohit said, adding that the Shiv Sena (Punjab) leader was fortunate that he survived the murderous attack.

He suffered head injuries,

but "luckily, his brain and skull remained intact which saved his life," Purohit said. He also has fractures on his hands, he said.

"There will be no disability and he will be able to work normally," Purohit added.

In the purported CCTV footage, the assailants dressed as Nihangs approached Thapar while he was on a scooter with his security personnel riding pillion. While Thapar was speaking to the assailants with folded hands, one of them suddenly attacked him with a sword as passersby looked on. Another assailant appears to be pushing Thapar's security personnel away.

After Thapar fell down, the third assailant also started hitting Thapar with a sword. Later, two of the accused fled on Thapar's scooter, leaving him in a pool of blood.

Two of the three assailants had been arrested.

Thapar (58) was attacked when he came out of the

office of the Samvedna Trust near the Civil Hospital after attending a ceremony to mark the fourth death anniversary of the trust's founder-president Ravinder Arora. On Saturday, Punjab BJP chief Sunil Jakhar lashed out at the AAP government, blaming the alleged "incompetence" of the Bhagwant Mann dispensation for the "deteriorating" law and order in the state.

# Finance Minister wraps up consultations, FY25 budget to be presented on Jul 23

**STATE TIMES NEWS**  
NEW DELHI: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has concluded consultations with various stakeholders, including representatives of industry and social sectors, as part of the budget preparation exercise.

Sitharaman will present her seventh Budget on July 23. This would be the first full budget of Modi 3.0 which is going to set the path for



Vikshit Bharat (developed India) by 2047.

Last month, President Droupadi Murmu, while delivering her address to the joint sitting of Parliament, had said that many historic steps and major economic decisions will be taken in the upcoming budget session. In her first address to the joint sitting of Parliament since the constitution of the 18th Lok Sabha, the President said, "This budget will be an effective document of the government's far-reaching policies and futuristic vision". "Along with major economic and social decisions, many historic steps will also be seen in this budget," she said.

The Finance Ministry in a statement said the pre-budget consultations for Union Budget 2024-25 that started from June 19 onward concluded on July 5, 2024.

In the course of in-person consultations, more than 120 invitees across 10 stakeholder groups, including experts and representatives from farmer associations and agriculture

economists; trade unions; education & health sector; employment & skilling; MSME; trade & services; industry; economists; financial sector & capital markets; as well as, infrastructure, energy and urban sector, participated in the meetings, it said.

These meetings chaired by the Finance Minister witnessed the participation of Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary; Finance Secretary and Secretary Expenditure, T V Somanathan; Economic Affairs Secretary, Ajay Seth, DIPAM Secretary, Tuhin K Pandey, Financial Services Secretary Vivek Joshi and Revenue Secretary, Sanjay Malhotra among others.

In the course of the consultations, Sitharaman expressed gratitude to the participants for sharing valuable suggestions and assured experts and representatives that their suggestions would be carefully examined and considered while preparing the Union Budget 2024-25.

# Hathras stampede: Rahul writes to UP CM; seeks increase in compensation for families of victims

**STATE TIMES NEWS**  
NEW DELHI: Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi has urged Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to increase the amount of compensation for the victims of the Hathras stampede and demanded that those responsible for the incident be given severe punishment.

In a letter to Adityanath, the former Congress chief said the compensation should be given as soon as possible and the injured be given proper treatment.

A total of 121 people, mostly women, died in the stampede at self-styled godman Baba Bhole's 'satsang' in Hathras on Tuesday.

Gandhi had met the victims of the stampede in Hathras here on Friday morning.

Adityanath earlier announced that the families of the deceased would receive Rs 2 lakh each and the injured would receive Rs 50,000 each in compensation.

In his letter to Adityanath dated July 6, Gandhi said, "The compensation announced by the Uttar Pradesh government is very inadequate. I urge that the amount of compensation be increased and it should be given as soon as possible."

At the same time, the injured should be given prop-

er treatment and they should also be given proper compensation, the Congress leader said.

"I am shocked by the news of the death of more than 120 people in the stampede incident in Hathras. I am writing this letter to you with pain in my heart and I know that you too must be feeling the same pain," he said.

Gandhi said he had met many aggrieved families of Aligarh and Hathras districts and tried to share their pain.

"The incident is so tragic that I fell short of words of consolation while meeting the family members (of victims). It is not possible to compensate for what many families have lost in this incident in any way, but we can definitely try to reduce their suffering by helping the affected families in every possible way," Gandhi said in his letter in Hindi.

"The victim families also shared with me that the negligence and insensitivity of the local administration is responsible for this entire incident. A proper and transparent investigation in this case will not only be a step towards preventing such incidents in the future, but it will also restore the faith of these victim families in the justice system," the Congress leader said. From the viewpoint of

justice, it is also necessary that the guilty persons be given "severe punishment", Gandhi said.

"In this hour of grief, it is the responsibility of all of us to support the affected families. All the workers of the Congress Party and I myself are available to provide you every possible support in this matter. It is hoped that seeing the seriousness of this entire matter, you will give special priority to the work to be done in relation to the assistance," Gandhi said.

The Uttar Pradesh government on Wednesday formed a three-member judicial commission headed by a retired high court judge to probe the Hathras tragedy and to look into the possibility of whether there was a "conspiracy" behind the stampede.

Simultaneously, a Special Investigation Team (SIT) headed by Additional Director General of Police (Agra Zone) Anupam Kulshreshtha is also filing a detailed report on the episode, to be submitted to the UP government.

So far, nine people, including two women and three senior citizens, have been arrested in the case, in which "several unidentified sevadars (volunteers)" of the satsang are mentioned as accused. The 'godman' is not an accused in the case.

# Himanta visits relief camps, interacts with inmates

**STATE TIMES NEWS**  
GUWAHATI: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday visited relief camps in Kamrup district to take stock of the conditions of the inmates, as the state continued to reel under floods.

He met inmates at three relief camps, interacting with them and directing the district administration for all necessary assistance.

"Today, HCM Dr @himantabiswa visited the

relief camp at Amrit Chandra Thakuria Commerce College in Palashbari, where 28 flood-affected individuals are being sheltered," the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) posted on X.

Sarma took stock of all the essential supplies and facilities provided to them and directed the administration to ensure medical facilities, safe drinking water and other necessary relief materials.

The CM also met people taking shelter at a relief camp in LP School, Nahira, the CMO said in another post.

"HCM took stock of the facilities made available in the camp and directed DC (Kamrup) to ensure availability of daily necessities and provide special care to the needs of children and elderly," it added.

Sarma also visited the Nahira Guimara Regional High School, and interacted

with the inmates.

"HCM met with the 236 individuals temporarily housed there and instructed @district\_kamrup to ensure an adequate supply of all necessary items at the camp," the CMO said.

The CM assured that all anti-flood measures are being taken to manage the situation effectively.

Altogether 23,96,648 people in 107 revenue circles and 3,535 villages in 29 districts of the state remained affect-

ed by floods, as per official information. Among rivers flowing above the danger level are Brahmaputra at Neamatighat (Jorhat), Tezpur (Sonitpur) and Dhubri (Dhubri), Burhidihing at Chenimari (Dibrugarh), Dikhou at Sivasagar, Disang at Nanglamuraghat (Sivasagar), Dhansiri at Nimaligarh (Golaghat), Kopili at Dharmatul (Nagaon), Kushiyara at Karingnang, and Barak river at (B P Ghat) Cachar.