

PM Modi seeks stronger mandate

NEW DELHI, Feb 18 (PTI)

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday asked the BJP cadre to work with renewed vigour and confidence for the next 100 days to reach out to new voters and win their confidence to ensure the party's return to power in the Lok Sabha elections with a stronger mandate.

Addressing the BJP national convention here, Modi said the nation will now have to dream big and make big resolutions to make India a developed country by 2047.

"The next five years are going

to be crucial. We have to take a big leap towards 'Viksit Bharat'. The first imperative is to ensure the return of the BJP to power in strong numbers," the Prime Minister said.

The two-day convention of the BJP was attended by nearly 10,000 members of the party from across the country.

In his 65-minute speech at the Bharat Mandapam, Modi slammed the Opposition, particularly the Congress, saying it lacked the courage to take on the BJP ideologically or on the basis of principles.

(Contd on page 5)

We will have to dream big and make big resolutions to make India a developed country by 2047:
PM Modi

RESOLUTION 'Ram Rajya' for next 1,000 yrs

NEW DELHI, Feb 18 (PTI)

THE BJP's national convention on Sunday passed a resolution on the Ram temple in Ayodhya, asserting that this heralds the establishment of "Ram Rajya" in India for the next 1,000 years.

The resolution noted that the temple where a grand consecration ceremony took place last month, has

(Contd on page 5)

WHITE PAPER on economy during UPA rule

NEW DELHI, Feb 18 (ANI)

ON THE second day of the Bharatiya Janata Party's National Convention, 'White Paper' on the Indian economy during the tenure of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government was released.

The White Paper was also brought by the BJP recently to Parliament against the Congress-led UPA

(Contd on page 5)

Army eyes ₹57,000cr project to make combat vehicles to replace T-72 tanks

'Focus On Enhanced Survivability, Especially Against Aerial Threats, & Connectivity'

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New Delhi: Dismissing reports about tank's death as "greatly exaggerated", 12-lakh strong Indian Army is going in for a major upgrade of its existing tanks, as well as gearing up to induct new-generation ones for battles of the future.

Senior officers contend the wide-scale destruction of Russian tanks by drones, man-portable anti-tank missiles, NLAWs (next-generation light anti-tank weapons) and artillery in the ongoing war with Ukraine, especially in the initial days, was more due to "poor tactics" rather than anything else.

For one, Russia deployed tanks without adequate logistics chains. For another, tanks were not adequately backed by infantry, artillery, electronic warfare and close-air support units.

"The critical 'combined-arms operations' were missing. Tanks remain relevant for both offensive and defensive operations. There is no



The Army will induct five of the 118 indigenous Arjun Mark-1A tanks, with 14 major and 57 minor upgrades to enhance firepower, mobility, endurance and protection, ordered for Rs 7,523 crore in Sept 2021

other platform that provides requisite mobility, firepower and armoured protection in large-scale ground battles," a senior officer said.

"Our future tank projects are being planned with enhanced survivability, especially against aerial threats, as well as connectivity. Requisite anti-drone safeguards will ensure both individual tank protection as well as area protection for force survivability," he added.

Consequently, Army plans to issue the RFP (request for proposal) this year

for the estimated Rs 57,000 crore mega project to produce 1,770 future ready combat vehicles (FRCVs) in India to replace the old Russian-origin T-72 tanks from 2030 onwards.

"The FRCVs will have niche technologies to include AI (artificial intelligence), drone integration, active protection system, high degree of situational awareness and manned-unmanned teaming capability. It will be able to synergise and integrate with all elements of land and air in a network-centric environment," an-

other officer said.

Along with a fleet of 2,400 T-72 tanks, Army has so far inducted 1,200 T-90S 'Bhishma' tanks of the 1,657 being produced by the Heavy Vehicles Factory at Avadi under licence from Russia.

The force will also this year induct the first five of the 118 indigenous Arjun Mark-1A tanks, with 14 major and 57 minor "upgrades" to enhance firepower, mobility, endurance and protection, ordered for Rs 7,523 crore in Sept 2021. These 118 "improved" tanks will add to the first 124 Arjun tanks inducted well over a decade ago.

Then, there are the 354 indigenous light tanks for high-altitude warfare to be inducted under Project Zorawar for around Rs 17,500 crore. The need for such tanks, each weighing less than 25 tonnes with a high power-to-weight ratio as well as superior firepower and protection, has been driven home by the continuing almost four-year-long military confrontation with China in eastern Ladakh.

While 59 of these light tanks are reserved for DRDO, the rest 295 are to be manufactured under the government-funded design and development 'Make-1' category, as was first reported by TOI.

"After DRDO completes its internal trials of the light tank prototypes, they will be offered to the Army for summer and winter trials, which will take a couple of years," an official said.

Several upgrade plans are also under way. The Army, for instance, has now got its pending proposal for inducting 1000-horsepower engines for its T-72 fleet, to replace the existing 780 hp ones, approved by the defence ministry. Under this Rs 2,300 crore plan, 200 engines will be directly imported, while 800 will be made in India.

"T-72s are also getting thermal sights, fire detection and suppression, and other systems. The T-90S tanks, in turn, are getting automatic target trackers, digital ballistic computers and commander thermal imagers," the officer said.

India's **POWER CONSUMPTION GROWS** 7.5 per cent in Apr-Jan this fiscal

NEW DELHI, Feb 18 (PTI)

INDIA'S power consumption increased 7.5 per cent on-year to 1354.97 billion units (BU) in the April-January period of this financial year, indicating an uptick in economic activities across the country.

Power consumption in the country has increased to 1354.97 billion units (BU) in the April-January period of this financial year, from 1259.49 BU in the April-January period of fiscal 2022-23, according to Government data.

It was 1505.91 BU in the entire fiscal year of 2022-23, the data showed. Experts believe the 7.5 per cent growth in power consumption in the country clearly shows a perk up in economic activities in the first 10 months of this fiscal year. They said power consumption grew in August, September and October, mainly due to humid weather conditions, and a pick-up in indus-

trial activities ahead of the festive season.

Experts are predicting a steady power consumption growth due to improvement in economic activities and cold wave conditions in February.

They are of the view that India will have a steady growth in power consumption as well as demand during the current fiscal year. The National Statistical Office has pegged Indian economic growth at 7.3 per cent in 2023-24.

over and above the provisional growth rate of 7.2 per cent during the last financial year in its first advance estimates released earlier in January.

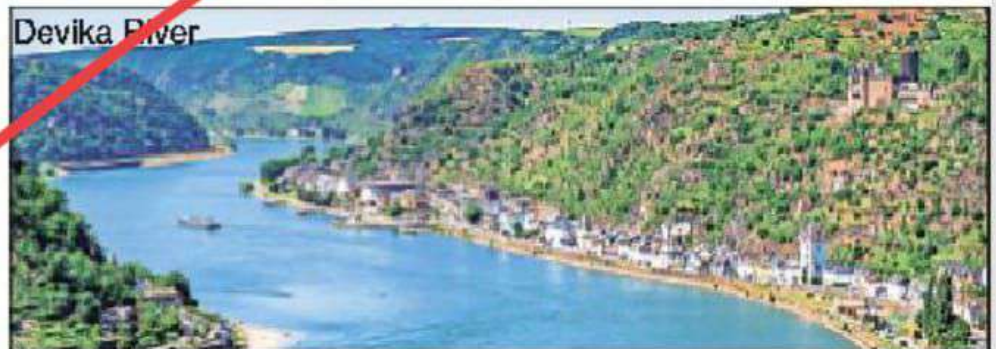
Power consumption in January rose 5.4 per cent to 133.18 BU, compared to 126.30 BU, the data showed. The peak power demand met -- the highest supply in a day -- rose to 222.32 GW in January 2024. The peak power supply stood at 210.72 GW in January 2023 and 192.18 GW in January 2022.

1st river rejuvenation project in J&K completed

UDHAMPUR, Feb 18 (ANI)

EXCITEMENT is brewing in Udhampur as North India's first river rejuvenation project "Devika" completed in Jammu and Kashmir's Udhampur on Sunday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of various projects in Jammu and Kashmir, scheduled for February 20. The Devika River considered the sister of the holy Ganga, holds immense religious importance for local communities.

Recognising this, the Government launched the Devika Rejuvenation Project in 2019, drawing inspiration from the successful "Namami



Gange" programme.

Residents of Udhampur are hailing the project as a "rebirth" for the Devika River. The project not only promises environmental rejuvenation but also potential economic benefits through sustainable tourism and local business opportunities.

Udhampur is also a well-known city for the Devika River, which is referred to as the sister of the Ganga.

According to the official website of district Udhampur, the details there say that the Nilmat Puran, written in the 7th century by Nela Muni, mentioned that the Devika River is a manifestation of Mother Goddess Parwati herself, benefiting the people of Mader Desha that covers areas between the rivers Ravi and Chenab. The Devika River is said to have appeared on Shivratri.

Pakistan increases telecom towers in PoK to help terror groups

■ By Sumir Kaul
JAMMU, Feb 18 (PTI)

THE number of telecom towers along LoC in Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir (PoK) has been increased in recent times with an aim to aid terrorists and their associates in infiltration activities, officials said here.

Terror groups have been using highly encrypted YSMS services, a technology that merges smart-phones and radio sets for covert communication purposes, the officials said after a study of the pattern of infiltration bids and recent terror attacks, particularly in the south of the Pir Panjal range in the Jammu region. With this



technology, a handler of a terror outfit in PoK is connected with the infiltrating group and its reception party in the Jammu region on a telecom network used across the LoC. This is done to avoid detection by the Army or the BSE, which guard

the borders with Pakistan.

The project for boosting telecom signals has been completely handed over to the Special Communication Organisation (SCO) led by Pakistani Army officer Maj General Umar Ahmad Shah, believed to be formerly working with Pakistan's spy agency ISI. The strategic placement of telecom towers near the LoC and the international border, generally used for aiding terrorists and their associates in infiltration activities, stands in violation of Article 45 of the constitution of International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a body under the United Nations.

Article 45 of the ITU's constitution requires all 193-member countries to take the steps required to prevent the transmission or circulation of identification signals, "and to collaborate in locating and identifying stations under their jurisdiction transmitting such signals".

The officials said, the Radiocommunication Bureau (BR) under the ITU has reiterated that all stations are "forbidden to carry out unnecessary transmissions, or the transmission of superfluous signals, or the transmission of false or misleading signals, or the transmission of signals without identification".

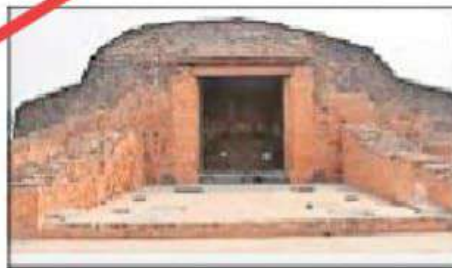
ASI starts excavation to unearth remnants of ancient varsity

PATNA/BHAGALPUR, Feb 18
(PTI)

THE Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has started excavation work to further unearth remnants of Vikramasila Mahavihara, the celebrated university founded by Pala King Dharmapala in late 8th or early 9th century AD, at Antichak village in Bihar's Bhagalpur district after a gap of almost 42 years.

The Vikramasila Mahavihara University prospered for about four centuries before it collapsed in the beginning of the 13th century AD.

"Earlier, the meticulous excavation at the site conducted by the ASI (1972-82) revealed a huge square monastery with a



Vikramasila Mahavihara University

cruciform stupa in its centre, a library building and cluster of votive stupas," said Superintending Archaeologist, ASI Patna Circle, Goutami Bhattacharya.

"Now, we have started our excavation from February 8 onwards. Right now, we are in the process of cleaning the earlier excavation trenches. We are removing the dumped soil and

trying to reach the undisturbed cultural horizons from where we can start systematic excavation," Bhattacharya told PTI.

The site was earlier excavated (before 1982) by Dr B S Verma under the Vikramshila excavation project, she added.

The excavation of the site in Bhagalpur has started under the supervision of Jalaj Kumar Tiwari, Assistant Superintending Archaeologist, ASI-Patna. It was one of the three most important Buddhist monasteries in India during the Pala empire along with Nalanda and Odantapuri.

Vikramasila was one of the largest Buddhist universities having more than a hundred teachers and about one thousand students.

As Israel strikes across Gaza, US vows to block ceasefire resolution

RAFAH, Feb 18 (AP)

ISRAELI strikes across Gaza killed at least 18 people overnight and into Sunday, according to medics and witnesses, as the United States said it would veto another draft UN cease-fire resolution.

The US, Israel's top ally, instead hopes to broker a cease-fire agreement and hostage release between Israel and Hamas, and envisions a wider resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has pushed back, calling Hamas' demands "delusional" and rejecting US and

international calls for a pathway to Palestinian statehood.

Netanyahu has vowed to continue the offensive until "total victory" over Hamas and to expand it to Gaza's southernmost town of Rafah, where more than half the enclave's population of 2.3 million Palestinians have sought refuge from fighting elsewhere.

An airstrike in Rafah overnight killed six people, including a woman and three children, and another strike killed five men in the southern city of Khan Younis, the main target of the offensive over the past two months. Associated Press journalists saw the bod-

ies arrive at a hospital in Rafah.

In Gaza City, which was isolated, largely evacuated and suffered widespread destruction in the initial weeks of the war, an airstrike flattened a family home, killing seven people, including three women, according to Sayed al-Afifi, a relative of the deceased.

The Israeli military rarely comments on individual strikes and blames civilian casualties on Hamas because the militants operate in dense residential areas. Nasser Hospital, the main medical centre serving Gaza, was no longer able to function after Israel raided the facility late last week.