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Lord Ram belongs to every Indian, wants everyone's welfare: Priyanka Nath holds Hanuman Chalisa recitation

Swati.Mathur@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: On the eve of the Ram temple bhoomi puja in Ayodhya on Wednesday, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said Lord Ram was a part of every Indian, and that she was hopeful that the ground-breaking ceremony would serve as a "marker" of national unity, brotherhood and cultural harmony.

Priyanka's message, coming at a time when the event is seen by some quarters as being "usurped" by the BJP-RSS to the exclusion of all other political parties, was seen as Congress's effort not only to show support for construction of the Ram temple but also claim its own part in it.

In her statement on Tuesday, the first by a Gandhi family member, Priyanka said that for ages, Lord Ram's charac-



Devotees light oil lamps forming the words 'Shri Ram' in Ayodhya on Tuesday

ter had served as a source of unity for the Indian subcontinent. "Lord Ram belongs to everyone. Lord Ram wants everyone's welfare. That is why he is called 'Maryada Purshottam'," she said.

Several Congress members had earlier come out in support of the Ram temple. Party veteran Kamal Nath had announced last week that

Madhya Pradesh Congress will contribute 11 silver bricks for the bhoomi puja. On Tuesday, Nath hosted a 'Hanuman Chalisa' recital at his residence in Bhopal.

Chhattisgarh CM Bhupesh Baghel announced his government's plan to construct a grand temple in the name of Lord Ram's mother, Kausalya, near Raipur, in addition to developing important locations on the 'Ram Van Gaman Path'.

Priyanka's message focused on Lord Ram's righteousness, sacrifice and his ability to unite people across caste and class barriers.

Her support for Ram temple construction, however, was not received well by the IUML, an ally of Congress in Kerala and a key partner in Rahul Gandhi's Wayanad constituency.

Nath holds Hanuman Chalisa recitation

Suchandana.Gupta
@timesgroup.com

Bhopal: Senior Congressman Digvijaya Singh's view that bhoomi puja for Ayodhya temple is being held on an inauspicious muhurat doesn't seem to find any takers in the rest of his party, as general secretary



Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has welcomed the day and Madhya Pradesh party chief Kamal Nath has sent 11 silver bricks for the event.

Nath, who changed his Twitter profile photo on the eve of bhoomi puja to one of him wearing saffron robes and praying to Lord Hanuman, held a Hanuman Chalisa and Sunder Kand recital at his residence in Bhopal on Tuesday.

Nath, after the Hanuman Chalisa recital, told reporters that party workers have donated funds and the PCC is sending 11 silver bricks to Ayodhya on behalf of the people of Madhya Pradesh. State Congress workers recited the Hanuman Chalisa in their homes under Nath's instructions on Tuesday morning.

"We worshipped Lord Hanuman for the prosperity, progress and happiness of the state. We welcome the construction of Ram temple. Our former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi initiated this in 1985. In 1989, he said there should be Ram Rajya in this country," Nath recalled. "It is because of Rajiv Gandhi that the dream of Ram Mandir is being realised. If he were alive, he would have seen it all today," he added.

Advani says dream close to his heart being fulfilled

Mohua.Chatterjee
@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: BJP veteran L K Advani has welcomed the foundation ceremony for a Ram temple in Ayodhya, saying a dream close to his heart was being fulfilled and it was a historic day for all Indians even though the leader will be absent at the function.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi is laying the foundation for construction of Shri Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, the birthplace of Shri Ram. It is indeed a historical and emotional day not only for me, but for all Indians. A grand mandir for Shri Ram at Ram Janmabhoomi has been a desire and mission for the Bharatiya Janata Party," Advani said in a statement.

Advani, a key architect of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement who led a rath yatra for its construction, will be absent from the stage in Ayod-



NOT INVITED: L K Advani is not on the list of invitees

hya as he is not on the list of invitees to the function. Sources told TOI on Tuesday that no invitation was extended to Advani. Murli Manohar Joshi, another prominent Ram Janmabhoomi activist, has also been left out.

On Monday Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Khshetra Trust general secretary Champat Rai said invitees were finalised only after being contacted on phone. "We have the Covid-19 situation, that's why we have kept social distancing in mind. We have called and ap-

poligised to many people. Age is a factor too. How will Advaniji (92 years) come at his age? So we have carefully prepared a list around these compulsions," he said.

Only five people will be on the stage on Wednesday — PM Modi, Uttar Pradesh governor Anandiben Patel, chief minister Yogi Adityanath, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat and Mahant Nriya Gopaldas.

In his statement, Advani said, "Sometimes significant dreams in one's life take a long time to fruition, but when they are finally realised, the wait becomes very worthwhile. I feel humbled that during the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, destiny made me perform a pivotal duty in the form of the Ram Rath Yatra 1990, which helped galvanise energies of several people. On this auspicious occasion, I want to express my gratitude to the scores of saints, leaders and people."