

Civil Society Forum targets Wangchuk, accuses LAB-KDA of derailing Ladakh agenda



Thupstan Chhewang-led forum questions activist's influence, alleges constitutional safeguards sidelined; demands immediate elections and democratic overhaul of Leh Apex Body

EARTH NEWS SERVICE

LEH: Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk has come under sharp criticism from the Civil Society Forum of Ladakh, led by former MP Thupstan Chhewang, which has accused him and the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) of derailing the region's original agenda of constitutional safeguards through confrontational politics and prolonged negotiations with the Centre.

In a resolution adopted here today, the forum alleged that the movement for protecting Ladakh's land, employment, culture, environment and natural resources was increasingly being shaped by the positions and strategies of a limited group of leaders, rather than being driven by the immediate democratic and developmental needs of the people.

Taking particular exception to Wangchuk's influence in the ongoing movement, the forum argued that the pursuit of confrontation with the Union Government was undermining the possibility of securing practical protec-

tions and restoring elected institutions in Ladakh.

The forum's criticism comes amid renewed uncertainty over negotiations with the Ministry of Home Affairs following the cancellation of the proposed October 22 meeting in New Delhi. It alleged that rejection of a proposal from the Centre without adequately examining its implications had contributed to the setback, further prolonging the impasse over Ladakh's political future.

The allegations reflect the forum's position and have not been independently established. Wangchuk, LAB and KDA have advocated stronger constitutional safeguards, including Sixth Schedule protection and statehood, contending that Ladakh requires substantive guarantees to protect its distinctive identity and interests.

Challenging the prevailing approach to the movement, the forum maintained that the region's democratic and developmental interests should not remain hostage to an indefinite wait for a comprehensive political settlement.

It demanded immediate panchayat elections and the establishment of elected Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils (LAHDCs) in all eight districts identified in its resolution—Leh, Kargil, Nubra, Sham, Changthang, Zaskar, Dras and Sankoo.

The forum argued that elected institutions could provide a practical mechanism for safeguarding local interests, strengthening accountability and giving people a direct voice in decisions concerning land, jobs, tourism and natural resources, even as negotiations on broader constitutional guarantees continue.

Its intervention challenges the strategy of holding out for a comprehensive settlement on major demands before accepting any arrangement that falls short of them. The forum instead favours parallel progress on democratic representation and locally enforceable protections.

The resolution's criticism of Wangchuk highlights a growing debate over the direction, leadership and negotiating strategy of Ladakh's movement.

The forum alleged that the original objectives of protecting land, employment, culture and the environment were being overshadowed by a confrontational approach, raising concerns over whether the interests ►P11

PM Modi, Netanyahu discusses W Asia crisis

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday received a telephone call from his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu, during which the two leaders exchanged views on recent developments in West Asia and underscored the urgent need to restore peace and stability in the region.

Modi and Netanyahu also welcomed the sustained momentum in India-Israel relations and reaffirmed their shared commitment to further strengthening the Special Strategic Partnership between the two countries.

"The leaders also exchanged views on recent developments in West Asia and underscored the urgent need to restore peace and stability in the region. Prime Minister Modi reiterated India's call for ►P11

UT Admin defends cancellation of Sonam Wangchuk institute's land allotment

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LEH: The Ladakh administration has defended its decision to cancel the land allotted to activist Sonam Wangchuk's Himalayan Institute of Alternative Learning (HIAL), saying the allotment had automatically lapsed because mandatory payments were not made and a lease deed was not signed, news agency Press Trust of India reported.

In an affidavit filed before the High Court of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, the administration said the 40-year lease for 1,076 kanals and 1 marla of land at Phyang Thang had "lapsed by operation of law" on May 5, 2019. HIAL CEO Gitanjali Angmo denied the administration's claims when PTI approached her for comment.

THE LADAKH ADMINISTRATION DEFENDED CANCELLING LAND ALLOTTED TO SONAM WANGCHUK'S HIAL BEFORE THE HIGH COURT. THE DISPUTE TURNS ON ALLEGED LEASE DEFAULTS, UNPAID DUES AND CONTESTED OFFICIAL CLAIMS.

The 136-page affidavit was filed by Leh Deputy Commissioner and Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council CEO Romil Singh Donk in response to HIAL's petition challenging the August 21, 2025, order cancelling the land allotment.

The administration described the petition as "misconceived, devoid of merit, and barred by delay and laches". It said the original allotment order, issued on May 5, 2018, was conditional and clearly stated that

the lease would be deemed cancelled if the allottee failed to sign the deed within a year.

According to the affidavit, HIAL did not pay any land premium or ground rent and failed to obtain formal possession through the tehsildar as required. The administration also said the Union Territory's Higher Education Department certified in October 2026 that HIAL was not a recognised university and its courses were not affiliated with the University of Ladakh or any

other statutory body.

The affidavit also referred to the past conduct of Wangchuk and his organisation, the Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL). It alleged that SECMOL had occupied 124 kanals of state land at Phye for more than three decades without a formal allotment or payment of an assessed premium of Rs 80 lakh.

It cited the violent protests in Leh in September 2025, the Union Home Ministry's subsequent intervention, the cancellation of SECMOL's Foreign Contribution Regulation Act registration and Wangchuk's brief detention under the National Security Act before it was revoked in March 2026. The administration presented these events as part of what it ►P11

LG Saxena lays foundation for 'Open Exhibition Ground' at Melongthang

Facility to showcase Ladakh's culture, crafts and innovations; expected to boost tourism, local enterprise and opportunities for youth and artisans

EARTH NEWS SERVICE

LEH: Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh Vinai Kumar Saxena has laid the foundation stone for an Open Exhibition Ground at Melongthang in Leh, marking a significant step towards developing dedicated infrastructure for cultural show-



cases, trade fairs and national and international exhibitions in the Union Territory. The proposed facility is envisioned as a major plat-

form for promoting Ladakh's rich cultural heritage, traditional art, handicrafts and emerging innovations while providing local artisans, entrepreneurs and young people with greater opportunities to showcase their products, skills and ideas to wider audiences.

According to the LG, the project is aimed at strengthening Ladakh's cultural, social and economic fabric by creating a modern venue where traditional heritage and contemporary enterprise can come together. Besides exhibitions, the ground is expected to provide space for community events and activities that encourage cultural exchange, public participation ►P11

BrahMos-NG prototype likely by 2027-28

NEW DELHI: BrahMos Aerospace expects to develop the first prototype of its next-generation BrahMos-NG missile by 2027 or 2028, while a missile with a range of 1,500 km remains part of its future roadmap and is currently at the conceptual stage, the company's CEO and managing director Dr Jaiteerth Joshi said.

Dr Joshi on Thursday said the BrahMos-NG system was under development and would feature higher indigenous content, new technologies and advanced materials, requiring extensive research and development work.

He said some countries operating the Sukhoi-30 platform had ►P11

Indian killed as attacks hit Saudi airport

NEW DELHI: India on Thursday strongly condemned attacks on Saudi Arabia's civilian and energy infrastructure after an Indian national was killed and three others injured in separate incidents targeting King Fahd International Airport in Dammam and Saudi Aramco's Shaybah oil field, raising fresh concerns over the safety of Indians amid escalating regional hostilities.

The Ministry of External Affairs said one Indian national died and two were injured in the attack on Dammam airport ►P11

Ladakh Congress to appoint 'vote protectors' at every polling booth



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LEH: The Ladakh Congress on Thursday announced plans to appoint 'vote protectors' at every polling booth across the Union Territory as part of a two-month campaign to safeguard voters'

rights, amid allegations of large-scale voter deletions during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in the country.

Addressing a press conference organised by the District Congress Committee, Leh, Advocate Firoz Khan,

an All India Congress Committee (AICC) observer for Ladakh, said the party would mobilise its workers to ensure that no eligible voter was deprived of the right to vote during the revision of electoral rolls.

Khan demanded the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, alleging that the Election Commission's handling of the SIR exercise had raised serious questions about the credibility of the electoral process. He said the Congress and the INDIA bloc were jointly campaigning under the slogan 'Vote ►P11

Finalelectoral rolls published for Leh, Kargil

LEH: The Chief Electoral Officer, Union Territory of Ladakh, has announced the final publication of electoral rolls for Municipal Committee Leh and Municipal Committee Kargil, with October 1, 2026, fixed as the qualifying date.

According to an official notification, the final electoral rolls have been published by the respective Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and are available for inspection at the offices of the EROs and ►P11

British MP tables motion in Parl backing India's sovereignty over J-K

LONDON: A British member of parliament has tabled a parliamentary motion to reaffirm the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India over Jammu and Kashmir.

Conservative Party MP Bob Blackman tabled the Early Day Motion (EDM) last week to mark Jammu and Kashmir Accession Day, observed on October 26, in the House of Commons.

The EDM, a method used by British MPs to draw Parliament's attention to a particular issue, has been signed by three other cross-party MPs. "That this House notes the continued observance on 26 October of Jammu and Kashmir Acces-

sion Day by residents of the UK of Jammu and Kashmiri heritage," reads the EDM. It notes that on October 26, 1947, the Instrument of Accession was executed by Maharaja Hari Singh.

"[It] reaffirms the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of India over the State of Jammu and Kashmir; notes the importance of strong and constructive bilateral relations between the UK and the Republic of India," it states.

To be sure, Jammu and Kashmir lost its statehood in 2019, when it was reorganised as a Union Territory, while Ladakh was carved out as a separate Union Terri-

tory.

The motion goes on to express sympathy for all civilians killed and injured in acts of terror in Jammu and Kashmir, including those in "Pakistan-occupied regions". It also notes with concern the continued impact of terror incidents in Jammu and Kashmir, which have resulted in civilian and security personnel casualties.

"[It] notes with sadness the continued targeted killings of Kashmiri Pandits, who remain vulnerable to acts of terror and intimidation in parts of Jammu and Kashmir; recognises the significance of this date for communities who ►P11

Grand welcome to Imteaz Kacho as Sankoo's first Deputy Commissioner



HABEEL SAGAR

SANKOO: Imteaz Kacho, the first Deputy Commissioner appointed to Sankoo following the announcement of district status, received a grand welcome in Sankoo today. Offi-

cials from various departments of the district administration, along with local residents, warmly welcomed him and extended their best wishes.

The welcoming ceremony was attended by the Sub-Divi-

sional Magistrate (SDM), Tehsildar and officials from various government departments. The people of Sankoo also welcomed the newly appointed Deputy Commissioner with great respect and enthusiasm, expressing hope that the grant of district status would accelerate development in the region.

Speaking to the media on the occasion, Deputy Commissioner Kacho Imteaz described Sankoo as a beautiful place and said that the overall development of the region would remain among his key priorities.

He stated that efforts would be made to improve healthcare, ►P11

NHPC invites Ladakh students for 'School-Level Painting Contest' on energy conservation

Classes 5-10 eligible; school-level entries close October 31, winners to receive cash prizes, medals and digital devices

EARTH NEWS SERVICE

ALCHI: NHPC Limited's Nimoo Bazgo Power Station at Alchi in Ladakh's Sham region has announced the School-Level Painting Competition 2026 to encourage school students to adopt energy-efficient practices and



raise awareness about the importance of energy conservation.

The competition is being organised under the aegis of the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), Ministry of Power, Government of India, and is open to students of Classes 5 to 10 studying in government and government-aided schools.

The participants will be invited to showcase their creativity around two themes: "Save Energy at School and Home" and "Energy Conservation Is the Key for Energy Security." The initiative seeks to familiarise young students with the importance of responsible energy consumption and the role of conservation in

strengthening the country's energy security.

According to the announced schedule, the last date for submitting paintings at the school level is October 31, 2026. Entries must be submitted to the respective Nodal Officer at NHPC's Nimoo Bazgo Power Station on or before the deadline.

The State/UT-level competition will be conducted from November 14 to 21, 2026, followed by the national-level competition scheduled for December 11, 2026, in New Delhi.

The competition also offers incentives to encourage student participation, with winners set to receive attractive cash prizes, ►P11

7.0-magnitude earthquake hits Tibet

BEIJING: An earthquake of magnitude 7.0 struck China's Tibet Autonomous Region on Thursday, the China Earthquake Networks Centre (CENC) said.

There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage following the quake, which hit Baqen County of Nagqu City around 10.33 pm local time. The epicentre was monitored at 32.40 degrees north latitude and 93.79 degrees east longitude.

The quake struck at a depth of 10 km, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. The Tibetan Plateau is known to be prone to powerful earthquakes as it sits right over the place where the Eurasian and Indian ►P11