

Former envoy P Stobdan passes away; tributes pour in from across strategic circles

■ EARTH NEWS SERVICE

LEH: Phunchok Stobdan, former Ambassador of India and a prominent voice on Himalayan geopolitics and Central Asian affairs, died here on Sunday, triggering an outpouring of tributes from diplomatic, academic and strategic communities.

Stobdan, who served as India's Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan from 2010 to 2012, was widely regarded as an incisive commentator on India-China relations, Eurasian security and the evolving dynamics of the Himalayan region. His sudden demise has left a palpable void in both Ladakh's intellectual circles and the wider national discourse on strategic affairs.

Condolence messages described him as a candid and erudite thinker who consistently articulated nuanced perspectives on complex



geopolitical issues. He was also remembered as a committed public intellectual who remained closely engaged with Ladakh's socio-political developments while contributing to national policy debates.

In his condolence message, LG Ladakh Vinai K Saxena said, "Deeply saddened by the passing of Professor P. Stobdan, distinguished for-

mer Ambassador and eminent intellectual from Ladakh. His contributions to diplomacy, scholarship, and public life will be remembered with respect."

Chief Secretary UT Ladakh, Ashish Kundra also posted a message on 'X', "Shocked to learn of the sudden passing of Ambassador P. Stobdan, whom I had met just a few days ago. A candid, forthright and erudite diplomat, he carried the wisdom of the world in his heart. May God give strength and fortitude to the bereaved family in this hour of grief."

Born on December 20, 1958, in Leh, Stobdan's career spanned diplomacy, academia and public engagement. He emerged as one of Ladakh's most respected scholars, combining rigorous research with a grounded understanding of the region's cultural and political realities.

As the founding president of the Ladakh International Centre in Leh, he created a forum for dialogue on strategic and cultural issues, encouraging informed debate among scholars, policymakers and the younger generation. His efforts were widely acknowledged for nurturing intellectual engagement in the region.

Stobdan's writings and commentaries covered a broad spectrum, including border issues, the geopolitics of the Buddhist Himalayas and India's engagement with Central Asia. His work was marked by clarity of thought and an ability to connect local concerns with broader global developments.

Colleagues and contemporaries recalled his readiness to engage in rigorous debate and his willingness to challenge prevailing assumptions. At the same ▶P11

23 workers killed in blast

CHENNAI: At least 23 people, including women workers at a private firecracker manufacturing unit, were killed and several were injured in an explosion in Kattanaripatti in Tamil Nadu's Virudhunagar district on Sunday, police said.

According to report, the blast occurred on the front veranda of the firecracker factory, 'Vanaja' fireworks. The impact of the blast was so severe that at least three rooms were reduced to rubble, and several adjacent structures were completely levelled. President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister MK Stalin were among those who condoled the deaths.

"The loss of lives in a tragic accident at a firecracker factory in Virudhunagar district, Tamil Nadu is deeply distressing. I extend my heartfelt ▶P11

US negotiators to head to Pak for Iran talks

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump has announced that United States negotiators will travel to the Pakistani capital, Islamabad, on Monday for talks aimed at ending the US-Israel war on Iran.

In a post on social media on Sunday, Trump didn't detail which officials the US would send to a second round of in-person talks with Iranian negotiators in Islamabad. Last weekend's talks, at which Vice President JD Vance led the US delegation, ended without a deal.

In his post, Trump accused Iran of violating a two-week ceasefire that is due to expire on Wednesday by opening fire on Saturday in the Strait of Hormuz. The US president threatened to destroy civilian infrastructure in Iran if it doesn't accept the terms of the deal being offered by the US.

"We're offering a very fair and reasonable deal, and I hope they take it because, if they don't, the United States is going to knock out every sin-

gle power plant, and every single bridge, in Iran," Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform.

There was no immediate comment from Tehran regarding Trump's claim of a new round of talks.

Iran's Tasnim News Agency reported that there is currently no decision by Iran to send a negotiating delegation to Pakistan "as long as there is a naval blockade" on Iranian ports.

Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the US naval blockade is a violation of the ceasefire as well as an "unlawful and criminal" act.

"The United States" so-called 'blockade' of Iran's ports or coastline is not only a violation of Pakistani-mediated ceasefire but also both unlawful and criminal," Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baghaei wrote in a post on X.

"Moreover, by deliberately inflicting collective punishment on the Iranian population, it amounts to war crime and crime against humanity," Baghaei added.

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) navy said on Saturday that the Strait of Hormuz had been closed again, less than 24 hours after it was reopened. It said it would remain so until the US lifts its naval blockade on Iranian vessels and ports. The US military said it has forced 23 ships to turn around near the strait since its blockade began. Its Central Command said forces were continuing to enforce the blockade "against ships entering or exiting Iranian ports and coastal areas".

The Strait of Hormuz and the future of Iran's nuclear programme remain key sticking points in the negotiations.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Saeed Khatibzadeh said that while there was "significant progress made" during talks last weekend, a framework of understanding has to be agreed before they continue. He also described US demands on Iran's nuclear programme as "maximalist".

The speaker of ▶P11

New assessment calendar will come into immediate effect for current session

Ladakh introduces 'Uniform Competency-Based Assessment System' for Classes 3-12

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LEH: In a major step towards transforming school education, the Directorate of School Education Ladakh has rolled out a comprehensive Competency-Based Assessment Calendar for students from Classes 3rd to 12th across the Union Territory.

The order aligns with the vision of the National Education Policy 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework. It aims to establish a uniform, continuous, and competency-focused evaluation system in all government schools of Ladakh.

According to the official directive, the new assessment

calendar will come into immediate effect for the current academic session. The move is expected to shift the focus from rote learning to skill-based education, ensuring that students develop practical understanding and critical thinking abilities.

The order outlines clear responsibilities for education authorities to ensure smooth implementation. Chief Education Officers (CEOs) have been tasked with overseeing coordination and execution at the district level. Meanwhile, the District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET) in Leh and Kargil will design standardised question papers across subjects, ensuring

alignment with curriculum timelines.

Further, Zonal Education Officers (ZEOs) and Heads of Institutions (HOIs) have been directed to strictly adhere to the prescribed assessment schedule and ensure that evaluations are conducted efficiently and on time.

The initiative marks a crucial reform in Ladakh's schooling system, bringing it in line with national education standards while addressing local academic needs. The competency-based model is expected to enhance learning outcomes, reduce exam stress, and promote holistic development among students.

The reform ▶P11

PIPFPD Convention: Sajjad Kargili raises Ladakh concerns, plight of divided families

NEW DELHI: Highlighting the human cost of unresolved borders, Ladakh-based activist Sajjad Kargili on Sunday drew attention to families divided between Ladakh and Gilgit-Baltistan, as he addressed the concluding session of the national convention of the Pakistan-India Peoples' Forum for Peace and Democracy in New Delhi.

Kargili, sharing his experience of engaging with participants from conflict-affected regions across India, underscored the urgency of addressing concerns of Ladakh's residents alongside broader questions of peace and democratic rights in Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. His remarks came as



the two-day convention ended with a call for renewed people-to-people engagement and demilitarisation in South Asia.

The gathering, held after an eight-year hiatus at Rajendra Bhawan, brought together activists, academics,

cultural figures and representatives of labour and farmers' groups. The forum collectively flagged Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh as a central democratic challenge, asserting that the region's future cannot be determined solely through

state-centric approaches.

In its concluding declaration, the forum rejected militarisation and nuclear brinkmanship, advocating instead for dialogue, restoration of civil liberties and the release of political detainees. It stressed that peace in South Asia remains contingent on justice, particularly in regions marked by prolonged conflict.

Deliberations during the convention linked geopolitical tensions with wider concerns, including economic inequality, climate stress and the erosion of democratic institutions. Speakers such as Achin Vanaik, John Dayal and Asha Hans examined the intersection of militarisation with social and ▶P11

2 Indian men shot dead in Italy

ROME: Two Indian men have been shot dead in Italy's Covo in Bergamo province just as they were leaving a warehouse used as a place of worship during a gathering for Baisakhi festival, local media reported on Sunday.

The attack occurred on Friday, a few minutes before midnight in the square in front of the Gurdwara Mata Sahib Kaur Ji in the industrial area of the town, according to local newspaper. The deceased were identified as Raginder Singh, 48, a resident of Covo; and Gurmit Singh, 48, from Agnadello. The assailant allegedly approached the men, opened fire and then fled in a car, the paper reported. ▶P11

Two US nationals detained at Sgr Airport

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SRINAGAR: Two US nationals were detained at Srinagar airport on Sunday after security officials found a satellite phone, a prohibited item, in their luggage during a routine check.

The individuals were questioned by airport security and later handed over to police for further investigation. One of the detained individuals was identified as Jeffrey Scott from Montana. Officials said the satellite phone, manufactured by Garmin, was recovered from his luggage.

The use of satellite phones is prohibited in India without prior government approval. Devices such as

Thuraya and Iridium phones fall under strict regulation, and unauthorised possession can lead to detention, arrest and seizure under the Indian Telegraph Act and other security rules.

According to official guidelines, travellers must obtain written permission from the Department of Telecommunications before carrying or using satellite communication devices in the country.

India enforces stringent telecom restrictions due to security concerns, and both foreign nationals and Indian citizens have faced action in the past for carrying satellite communicators.

Last May, a US-based ophthalmologist ▶P11

Pre-launch ceremony of "Exposition of Holy Relics of Tathagata" held

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LEH: The pre-launch ceremony of the "Exposition of the Holy Relics of the Tathagata" was held on Saturday at Hotel Grand Dragon, Leh, marking an important step toward the upcoming sacred exposition in Ladakh. The event coincided with the observance of World Heritage Day and brought together members of civil society, officials, and spiritual leaders.

Addressing the gathering, Chief Secretary of UT Ladakh, Ashish Kundra, highlighted that the teachings and philosophy of Lord Buddha are deeply embedded in the living



heritage of Ladakh. He stated that the forthcoming exposition of the sacred relics on the auspicious occasion of Buddha Purnima is a moment of immense spiritual and cul-

tural significance. Noting that the relics have been revered across Buddhist countries worldwide, he expressed confidence that they would be received with the same ▶P11

HIAL innovations find global recognition at London Museum

■ EARTH NEWS SERVICE

LEH: In a moment of pride for Ladakh and India, Gitanjali Angmo announced that the Himalayan Institute of Alternatives Ladakh (HIAL) will now be on permanent display at the prestigious Victoria and Albert Museum East in London.

Sharing the news on social media, Angmo expressed happiness and gratitude as the institute's pioneering work gains international recognition. The exhibition showcases innovations by renowned engineer and education reformer Sonam Wangchuk, including the globally acclaimed Ice Stupa technology, designed as a



sustainable water management solution for cold desert regions like Ladakh.

The display also features HIAL's passive solar-heated rammed earth buildings, which are highlighted as carbon-negative and energy-

positive architectural solutions suited for high-altitude climates. Additionally, the institute's futuristic master plan—envisioned as a "University of the Future"—forms a key part of the exhibition. A unique ▶P11

Women 'Backstabbed' by Oppn in Parl: RP Singh



■ EARTH NEWS SERVICE

LEH: Strongly criticising the Opposition over its stance on the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, BJP National Spokesperson R. P. Singh, today stated that the women of

India have been "backstabbed" by during recent parliamentary proceedings.

Singh was addressing a press conference here. He was flanked by former Chief Executive Councillor Adv. Tashi Gyalson, State General Secretary, P. T. Kunzang, Chief Spokesperson, Nawang Samstan, State Vice President, Gyal P. Wangyal, Former Minority Commission Member Rinchen Lamo, State Vice President Phuntsog Angmo, General Secretary Mahila Morcha Stanzin Norzom, Chuskit, and other senior party leaders.

He said he was here to discuss the ▶P11

A proud celebration of culture, learning and innovation at DPS Leh

■ EARTH NEWS SERVICE

LEH: Delhi Public School, Leh, successfully conducted its Parent-Teacher Meeting (PTM) alongside the vibrant celebration of Ladakh Day, creating a meaningful and enriching experience for students, parents and teachers alike.

The school campus came alive with enthusiasm as students showcased the rich cultural heritage of Ladakh through traditional attire, captivating performances and thoughtful presentations. The celebration aimed to instill a deep sense of pride and awareness among young learners about their roots, traditions and



values.

Adding a dynamic dimension to the event, an exhibition of models and proj-

ects was also organized, where students displayed their creativity, curiosity and hands-on learning. These

activities highlighted the school's commitment to fostering holistic education, where academic learning is seamlessly blended with practical exposure and cultural understanding.

The PTM provided a valuable platform for constructive interaction between parents and teachers, focusing on students' academic progress, overall development and well-being. Parents appreciated the school's continuous efforts in nurturing not only academic excellence but also cultural consciousness and critical thinking skills among students.

The integration of Ladakh Day ▶P11

Kargil plans panchayat-level green zones

■ EARTH NEWS SERVICE

KARGIL: A district-wide plantation initiative aimed at developing Panchayat-level green zones is set to be undertaken in Kargil under the Himalaya Green Mission, with authorities calling for community participation and land allocation to operationalise the programme.

The proposal was outlined on Sunday at a press conference addressed by the President of JUAIK, who said the initiative seeks to create designated "Green Zones" across all Panchayats in collaboration with the Union Territory administration and the Chief Conservator of

Forests. According to the plan, each Panchayat has been requested to commit at least 10 Kanals of land to facilitate the development of these green spaces. Officials indicated that decentralised implementation would form the core of the programme, with local bodies playing a central role in both execution and maintenance.

The administration has assured logistical support, including fencing and protective measures, to safeguard the plantation sites and ensure the survival of saplings. These interventions are intended to address challenges posed by grazing ▶P11