

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

Several Stanford students stage walk-out as Google CEO Sundar Pichai begins speech

NEW YORK, JUN 16: Several students at Stanford University, voicing their support for Palestine, staged a walkout during Google CEO Sundar Pichai's keynote commencement address at the institution.

Pichai, who had received a Master of Science (MS) in Materials Science and Engineering from Stanford University, returned to his alma mater on Sunday to deliver the commencement address to the class of 2026.

A report in the Stanford Report said that over 20,000 people, including 3,600 students, attended Stanford's 135th Commencement ceremony.

Another report in SFGate said that about 200 students walked out as Pichai addressed the students, faculty, parents and other attendees at the commencement ceremony.

The SFGate report further said that several small groups in the audience "waved banners, blew whistles and waved Palestinian flags before also leaving mid-speech."

"Pro-Palestinian protesters condemned the company's ties with the Israeli government, particularly its controversial USD 1.2 billion cloud-computing deal with the country in 2021, known as Project Nimbus. The walkouts follow other Stanford commencements over the last three years where students have demonstrated in response to Israel's war in Gaza and the university's crackdown on pro-Palestinian demonstrations on campus," the SFGate report said.



From the commencement ceremony on social media showed students walking out of the event, carrying Palestinian flags and banners, and shouting slogans like 'Free Palestine', as Pichai spoke. Reports said the protest was organised by groups including 'Students for Justice in Palestine' and 'No Tech for Apartheid'.

In his address, Pichai, an IIT Kharagpur and Wharton alumnus, spoke about his journey from Chennai to California and the life lessons he learned along the way.

"It's easy to look at the news of the day and think that we're living in uniquely challenging times. For me, it's helpful to remember that each generation has faced hardship in its own way. We don't get to choose the world we graduate into, but we do get to choose how we frame our circumstances," Pichai said. "This was something my parents instilled in me at a young age. I grew up in the vibrant city of Chennai, India. It was a comfortable life

ing my time at Stanford: I came here fully intending to get my PhD, and to move into academics. Life had other plans, and I needed to get a job sooner. So I left my doctoral program. Stanford was generous to offer me the chance to fulfil the requirements for a master's," he said.

Pichai spoke about gravitating towards working on hard things. "I'd love to tell you I was an immediate success after leaving Stanford...I wasn't. Even a decade later, I felt like I wasn't on the right path, and it took me a while to find my footing."

Indian-American venture capitalist and technology executive Vinod Khosla slammed the students for staging the walkout.

In a post on X, he said, "The stupidity of these @Stanford students to take the greatest opportunity for equality in humanity ever and to really free humanity and go walk out on @google and @sundarpichai that's pioneered that. Biased, idiotic, short-sighted and very selfish. Selfish because they ignored the bottom 3 billion people on this planet, vs the few million Palestinians, whom I also support. Get real!"

Responding to Khosla's post, Indian-American lawmaker Ro Khanna said, "Vinod, my understanding is these students walked out to protest Google's contract with IDF, given Israel's genocide in Gaza. Wherever one stands on those contracts, I believe you would support their right of free expression and challenging authority."

PM Modi must take up with Trump killing of Indian seafarers: Priyanka Gandhi

NEW DELHI, JUNE 16: Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Tuesday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to take up with US President Donald Trump the issue of the killing of three Indian seafarers in American attacks on ships when the two leaders meet on the sidelines of the G7 Summit in France.

Prime Minister Modi and Trump are set to meet on the sidelines of the G-7 meeting in France on Wednesday. This will be the first meeting between the two leaders since February last year in Washington and comes against the backdrop of concerns over the death of Indian mariners on commercial ships targeted by the US navy in the Strait of Hormuz.

Speaking with reporters, the Congress leader said, "Yes, I think definitely he should take it (the issue of three Indian sailors killed in US strikes) up."

"It is surprising that we are



not more outspoken about what is happening," the Congress general secretary said.

The meeting between Trump and Modi will also be the first face-to-face interaction since the India-US relationship hit a rough patch after Operation Sindoor and Washington's decision to impose heavy tariffs on New Delhi.

The two leaders have had a couple of phone calls and also agreed on a framework for an interim bilateral trade deal in February, which is be-

ing negotiated. Priyanka Gandhi's remarks come after the US said it conveyed to India that any violation of its blockade in the Strait of Hormuz and illicit transport of Iranian oil will not be tolerated.

Rubio conveyed this to Jaishankar, who spoke with him last Friday to lodge a strong protest against the death of Indian nationals in US attacks on ships off the coast of Oman.

According to State Department spokesman Tommy

Pigott, Secretary of State Rubio stressed that all commercial vessels should immediately comply with orders from US forces as they seek to uphold peace and security in the Strait.

Rubio had underscored that violations of the US blockade and the illicit transport of Iranian oil will not be tolerated, Pigott said in Washington.

Three vessels with Indian crew came under attack off the Oman coast last week. One of them resulted in the death of three Indian seafarers. Jaishankar then called Rubio to protest their death in the US military strike on a merchant vessel in the Gulf of Oman.

Last week, India had also summoned US Charge d'Affaires Jason Meeke in New Delhi and told him that the American military's lethal strikes on commercial vessels with Indian crew members off the coast of Oman are unacceptable. (PTI)

We will show how parties are split when our days will come: MP Sanjay Raut

NEW DELHI, JUNE 16: "Hamara din jab aayega, hum dikhayenge party kaise todi jati hai" (We will show how parties are split when our days will come)," Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut quipped amid reports of attempts to engineer a fresh split in his party.

Raut, a Rajya Sabha MP, dismissed speculation that some Shiv Sena (UBT) Lok Sabha MPs were contemplating switching over to the ruling BJP-led NDA.

"I have no information about it. There is no crisis. If any crisis comes, we will handle it," he told reporters here at the Parliament House complex.

Raut said his party has a 60-year legacy and has a history of waging agitations for different causes.

"We have seen many ups and downs in the past. But ours is a cadre-based party. "MLAs and MPs come and go but the party remains. 'Hamara din jab aayega,



hum dikhayenge party kaise todi jata hai" (We will show how parties are split when our days will come)," he said.

On reports of Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Deshmukh meeting Union minister Prataprao Jadhav of the rival Shiv Sena, Raut said a "wrong picture was being painted" of the meeting, and asserted that all parliamentarians remain firmly with the party.

Shiv Sena (UBT) Lok

Sabha MP Anil Desai also dismissed the suggestion that some of his colleagues may form a separate group.

"There is no such thing. A series of meetings have been conducted by Uddhav Thackeray ji in the last one-and-a-half years and everyone (MPs) attended.

"In the last meeting, four of us were there in person while five of them were on video conferencing. They could not come to Matoshree

in Mumbai because they had their individual engagements, which were fixed much earlier," Desai said, reiterating that all Shiv Sena (UBT) MPs were together.

The Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) has downplayed the speculation of an ongoing 'Operation Tiger' launched by ruling Shiv Sena led by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde to poach party MPs. Notably, the mascot of the undivided Shiv Sena was a tiger drawn by party founder Bal Thackeray.

Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday called a meeting of party MPs. Of the nine Lok Sabha members, only four - Arvind Sawant, Anil Desai, Rajabhau Waze and Sanjay Patil - attended the meeting in person, while Omprakash Rajee Nimbalkar, Bhausaheb Wakchaure, Nagesh Bapurao Patil Ashtikar and Sanjay Deshmukh attended online. (PTI)

Akal Takht declares Punjab CM Mann anti-Guru, directs Sikhs to 'shun ties' with him

CHANDIGARH, JUNE 16: The Sikh clergy at the Akal Takht on Monday declared Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann 'Guru Dokhi' (anti-Guru) and 'Khalsa Panth virodhi' (anti-Khalsa panth), directing the Sikh community to "shun ties" with him as he was accused of lying regarding a purported objectionable video that hurt Sikh sentiments.

The Akal Takht is the highest temporal seat of Sikhs.

The Sikh clergy also summoned all Sikh MLAs, regardless of party affiliation, from the state and the Punjab Cabinet before the Akal Takht on June 29 in connection with an anti-sacrilege law.

Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Kuldeep Singh Gargaji pronounced the edict from the 'faseel' (podium of the Akal Takht) after the 'five Singh Sahiban' (Sikh clergy) held a meeting in Amritsar.

The edict followed a meeting with various Sikh bodies, which was convened to discuss issues including the anti-sacrilege law - Jaagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar (Amendment) Act, 2026. During the meeting, serious deliberations were held regarding an "objectionable video" that was submitted as part of a complaint against Mann on January 4.

The matter stems from the summoning of Mann by the Akal Takht in January this year for allegedly making comments on 'Guru ki Golak' (a gurdwara donation box) and indulging in "objectionable activities" with the pictures of the "Sikh Gurus" and slain militant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale in a video clip. The person in the video purportedly resembles Mann.

Gargaji said when Mann was summoned to the Secretariat of the Akal Takht on January 15, he was questioned by the 'Singh Sahib' about the video and the CM stated that the video was fake and had been generated using Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Following this, the Singh Sahib directed him to suggest two forensic laboratories for the examination of the video.

A formal letter to this effect was also sent to the Chief Minister from the Secretariat of Akal Takht Sahib on January 27. However, no response was received from the Chief Minister or his office, he pointed out.

Thereafter, the Akal Takht secretariat got the video examined from two cen-



tral government-recognised labs, he said.

Gargaji claimed that the video circulating on social media was found to be "authentic" by the two forensic laboratories.

The video was neither tinkered nor AI-generated, Gargaji said.

"The Guru Khalsa Panth cannot tolerate such actions under any circumstances," asserted Gargaji while referring to the alleged objectionable act.

"The position of a chief minister is respectable. But chief minister Bhagwant Singh (Mann) lied before the Akal Takht (about the video)," claimed Gargaji as he raised concerns about his ability to make decisions in the interests of the Guru and the Sikh community while serving as the CM.

"Representing the sentiments of the Sikh Sangat, today's gathering of the five Singh Sahibs declares Mann as 'Guru Dokhi' and 'Khalsa Panth virodhi'. The Guru Khalsa Panth is directed not to associate with him," he said.

Shortly before the pronouncement by the 'Singh Sahiban' at the Akal Takht, AAP Punjab media in-charge Baltej Singh Pannu on Monday said the lab reports, as claimed by the Akal Takht Jathedar, did not make it clear who the person was seen in the video.

"Does the height of CM Mann match the height of the person visible in the footage? Which hotel room is it (where the video was shot)? The report has completely failed to establish who is actually visible in the video," said AAP leader Pannu.

He also indicated that Gargaji has become political, and asserted that the Akal Takht Sahib is the 'takht' of the entire Sikh community. "It neither belongs to SAD (Shiromani Akali Dal) chief

Sukhbir Badal nor SAD," Pannu said.

Following Akal Takht's declaration, the opposition criticised Mann and demanded his resignation.

"Out of respect for the sanctity of Sri Akal Takht Sahib and Sikh sentiments, Bhagwant Mann should resign immediately," Congress posted on X in Hindi.

"It is deeply shameful that the Chief Minister of the state harbours such malicious sentiments toward our Guru Sahibs and our martyrs," SAD wrote in Gurmukhi on X.

The Punjab BJP also said Mann must resign from the CM post immediately as "cabinet Ministers and Sikh bureaucrats who follow the path of Guru Nanak can neither hold meetings with him nor execute his orders" following Sri Akal Takht Sahib's declaration.

The Sikh clergy, in the meeting, also discussed the anti-sacrilege law, the Jaagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar (Amendment) Act, 2026.

Gargaji said Sikh MLAs, irrespective of their party, and the Punjab Cabinet must appear before the Akal Takht on June 29.

The Akal Takht and the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) had earlier raised objections to the anti-sacrilege law, saying it was enacted without consulting the Sikh Panth.

Gargaji said Punjab Legislative Assembly Speaker Kultar Singh Sandhwan had been summoned on May 8 and given 15 days to make amendments to the law in accordance with Sikh sentiments.

Through him, written objections from the Akal Takht were also formally conveyed to the Punjab government on May 11, he said. However, the state government adopted an obstinate and arrogant attitude, completely ignoring Sri Akal Takht Sahib and Sikh sentiments, Gargaji stated.

The Akal Takht had earlier asked the state government to remove provisions from the anti-sacrilege Act which are "against the Guru Granth Sahib, the Khalsa Panth and the sentiments of the 'Sangat' (Sikh community)."

Notably, the Jaagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar (Amendment) Bill, 2026, was unanimously passed by the Punjab Assembly on April 13. It includes a provision for stricter punishment, including life imprisonment for any act of sacrilege against the Guru Granth Sahib. (PTI)

Indigenous HPV test emerges as low cost tool for cervical cancer screening

NEW DELHI, JUN 16: An indigenous point-of-care HPV test has emerged as a promising low-cost tool for cervical cancer screening, with a multinational validation study finding that it meets international performance standards and could significantly expand access to early detection in resource-constrained settings.

The study, published in the International Journal of Cancer in June, found that Truenat HR-HPV-Plus satisfied all International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) reduced-valency and non-inferiority validation criteria, making it the first formally validated reduced-valency HPV assay targeting seven to eight high-risk HPV types.

Researchers reported that the test demonstrated 80.4 per cent sensitivity and 91.5 per cent specificity for detecting cervical intraepithelial neoplasia grade 2 or worse, a key precursor to cervical cancer.

The assay also showed high inter-laboratory agreement of 93.3 per cent.

"Cervical cancer is one of the few cancers where we know the cause, we have prevention tools, and we can detect risk early. Yet, thousands of women in India continue to be diagnosed late because screening does not reach them at the right time and in the right setting," Dr Neerja Bhatla, Professor Emeritus at the National Cancer Institute, AIIMS, Jhajjar, said.

Former head of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at AIIMS Delhi, Dr Bhatla, who is the lead author of the study, said for many women above 30 years of age screening is the most immediate strategy for reducing cervical cancer risk. "We need robust screening systems that can identify women at risk before cancer develops. HPV DNA testing is central to this strategy," she said.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends HPV DNA testing as the preferred method for cervical cancer screening because it is more sensitive than cytology (Pap smear) in identifying women at risk of developing cervical pre-cancer and cancer.

However, adoption has remained limited in many low and middle-income countries because of cost, laboratory infrastructure requirements, long turnaround times, and challenges in ensuring follow-up, Dr Bhatla pointed out.

According to the researchers, the higher specificity could reduce unnecessary referrals and follow-up procedures, making the test a reliable, cost-effective and scalable option for cervical cancer screening in India and other low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

The validation drew on cervical samples from the ESTAMPA study, a multi-centric cervical cancer screening programme conducted across Latin America that screened 44,135 women aged 30-64 years between 2012 and 2022.

Samples for the validation were sourced from the IARC biorepository and obtained from study centres in San Jose, Costa Rica, and Buenos Aires, Argentina.

The study involved a collaboration between AIIMS, Delhi, ICMR-National Institute of Cancer Prevention and Research (NICPR), Noida, ICMR-National Institute for Research on Women's Health (NIRWoH), Mumbai, DBT-BIRAC, IARC/WHO, the University of Antwerp, ANLIS Malbran in Argentina and Caja Costarricense de Seguro Social in Costa Rica.

Testing responsibilities were distributed across Indian institutions, including AIIMS, ICMR-NIRWoH and ICMR-NICPR.

Cervical cancer remains a major public

health challenge in India, accounting for an estimated 127,000 new cases and about 80,000 deaths annually.

While screening can identify precancerous lesions before they progress to cancer, coverage remains low despite the inclusion of cervical cancer screening under national programmes.

Persistent infection with carcinogenic HPV types is the necessary cause of cervical cancer. The WHO recommends HPV testing as the preferred strategy for cervical cancer elimination, with evidence suggesting that screening women twice -- at ages 35 and 45 years -- using validated HPV tests can substantially reduce disease burden.

However, most currently available HPV tests are expensive and require sophisticated laboratory infrastructure, limiting their use in many LMICs, Dr Bhatla said.

She said the study was among the first to evaluate Indian-developed reduced-valency HPV assays using WHO Target Product Profile and IARC validation criteria.

"The study demonstrates that indigenous platforms can achieve clinical validation, quality standards and accuracy comparable to global gold-standard tests. It has the potential to be a game-changer for cervical cancer prevention and early detection in India," she said.

ICMR-NICPR director Dr Shalini Singh said affordable indigenous HPV testing solutions were critical for expanding screening coverage and advancing WHO's cervical cancer elimination goals.

Dr Showket Hussain, one of the corresponding authors, said the validated platform could be readily integrated into screening programmes because healthcare personnel at district-level facilities were already familiar with the technology.