

CM orders closure of Zira liquor factory

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, JANUARY 17

In what comes as a shot in the arm for farmers agitating against the liquor factory in Punjab's Zira, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann Tuesday ordered the closure of the factory with immediate effect.

Announcing the decision in a video posted on Twitter, Mann wrote in Punjabi: "No one will be allowed to pollute the air of Punjab. Therefore, after consulting legal experts, a big decision has been taken in public interest. I have issued orders to close the Zira liquor factory."

The Chief Minister categorically said that no one, however affluent he may be, will not be allowed to take the environmental norms for granted.

He said that whoever will flout the stipulated norms framed by the state government will be dealt with sternly.

The Chief Minister said that keeping in view the castigating effects of this project on the environment and ecology of the state this project has been shelved.

He said that the decision has been taken after due deliberations with environmental experts and legal luminaries.

Mann said that the project could have



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BHAGWANT MANN
Chief Minister, Punjab

disturb the ecological balance of the area. He said that keeping in view the repercussions of this project on the environment and human life, the state government has decided to wind up with immediate effect

Farmers and residents of 44 villages surrounding the factory have been protesting since July 24 against the alleged contamination of groundwater by the ethanol plant that is owned by former Shiromani Akali Dal MLA and liquor baron Deep Malhotra.

The factory had started operations in 2006 and has been shut since July 26.

Protestors had been alleging violation of environmental norms by the unit. From time to time, the court ordered that the protest to be lifted. However, despite repeated efforts, the authorities failed to clear the site of protestors.

Welcoming the decision, Harinder Singh Lakhowal, general secretary of a faction of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), said it was "better late than never".

Lakhowal added that the farmers who raised the voice against pollution caused by the factory had to protest for months, facing the vagaries of the weather, action from the police and local administration before the decision finally came.

"Though late, we welcome Bhagwant Mann's decision," said Sandeep Dhillon, member of Sanjha Morcha Zira.

"It is a symbolic victory. The legal battle for permanent closure of the factory has started. We are meeting other farm unions who helped us in this struggle," said Baldev Singh Zira, farm leader, while addressing the protestors.



Yatra building counter narrative of love against hatred: Rahul

Says, have special affection for Punjab, Sikhs; Punjabis have strong self-belief; don't like to be dictated

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
DASUYA (HOSHIARPUR), JANUARY 17

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi today asserted that Bharat Jodo Yatra was building up a narrative of love and harmony against the narrative of hatred, fear and violence paddled by the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Addressing a press conference here today, as part of his Bharat Jodo Yatra, Rahul said, he had special affection for Punjab, Sikhs in particular. "India would not be India had it not been for Sikhs", he remarked.

Reiterating the agenda of the Bharat Jodo Yatra, the Congress leader said, it was against hatred, fear and violence and at the same time it was against unemployment, poverty, inequality and inflation. He also referred to recently revealed economic figures, saying, one percent people owned 40 percent of India's wealth. He said it was a tragedy for the country that the inequality had risen to such a level.

Replying to a question on the demand for an apology from the party over 1984 Operation Bluestar and anti-Sikh riots, Rahul Gandhi said the issue had been clarified by the then Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh on the floor of the house.

Besides, he added, the then Congress president Ms Sonia Gandhi had also clarified the party's position and he endorsed those views.

To a separate question, he added, he had special affection for the people of Punjab, particularly the Sikhs. He said, India would not have been India had it not been for Sikhs and they are the part of the backbone of the nation.

Asked why he commented to the Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann that he was being dictated from Delhi, Rahul said he had told Mann that Punjab cannot be governed or dictated from Delhi. He said, Punjabis are self-respecting and have strong self-belief and they will not allow anyone from outside to dictate terms to them.

About any possibility of his cousin Varun Gandhi joining the Congress, Rahul was categorically clear that he (Varun) had made a choice and chose an ideology that he (Rahul) can never accept or agree with. He said, he can never visit the office of the RSS. "For that you may need to chop off my head first", he asserted.

He said he had tried to explain to Varun long ago when he had praised the RSS, telling him that he (Varun) should read about the history and ideology of the family, which has been totally opposed to what the RSS preaches and does.

400 days to LS poll, reach out to all voters: PM Modi

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 17

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday appealed to party workers to get into active mode for Lok Sabha polls, due in 2024 and urged party leaders to increase their outreach to voters.

Modi was addressing the valedictorian's session of the two-day BJP national executive meeting today.

"We have 400 days (until the big Lok Sabha elections) and we have to do everything to service the people. We have to create history," senior BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis quoted Modi as saying.

"PM Modi said we must pay attention



to people in the 18-25 age group," Fadnavis added.

The Prime Minister asked the BJP members to reach out to every section of society, including minorities such as Bohras, Pasmandas and Sikhs, without electoral considerations.

"The BJP is no longer merely a politi-

cal movement but a social movement as well that is working to transform socio-economic conditions," PM told the 350-off ministers, leaders and workers attending the session.

He added that the nation's best era 'Sarvottam Kaal' is coming and "we should dedicate ourselves to its development."

NADDA'S TENURE AS BJP CHIEF EXTENDED

JP Nadda's tenure as BJP chief has been extended till June 2024. Union Home Minister Amit Shah made the announcement today at the party's national executive meeting.



Terror plot busted in Delhi ahead of Republic Day

The Delhi police have busted a terror plot in the national capital ahead of the Republic Day and are looking for four other terror suspects after receiving information from two terrorists arrested last week from Jahangirpuri.

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Punjab govt to hold talks with farmers on Feb 12

The first phase of talks between the farmers and the government is slated to be held on PAU campus on February 12 where CM Bhagwant Mann will listen to the problems being faced by the state's farmers.

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Rahul slams Congress' door on Varun Gandhi

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Terror plot busted in Delhi ahead of Republic Day

Police on hunt for four more suspects

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 17

The Delhi police have busted a terror plot in the national capital ahead of the Republic Day and are looking for four other terror suspects after receiving information from two terrorists arrested last week from Jahangirpuri area, said sources on Tuesday.

The terror suspects have reportedly received weapons from Pakistan through the drop-dead method and were in touch with their handlers on the other side of the border through a social media app.

"Delhi Police looking for 4 other suspects. They received weapons from Pakistan through the drop-dead method and were in contact with handlers in Pak on the Signal app. They got weapons at an unidentified location in Uttarakhand which is being verified," ANI said quoting sources.

Earlier this month, two terrorists were



arrested from the Jahangirpuri area in Delhi, according to the police, were tasked to carry out the targeted attacks in various states.

"Their handlers sitting at the border sent instructions on the Signal app, after which they shared the location of the bag full of weapons through Google Maps. About 8

people are involved in this module of terrorists out of which 4 can still be present in India only. 2 terrorists were used to provide weapons and 2 were used to send the Google location of the weapons to their bosses by keeping the weapons at a particular location," sources said.

Pak's Abdul Makki named global terrorist

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW YORK, JANUARY 17

Pakistan-based terrorist Abdul Rehman Makki was on Monday designated global terrorist by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) under its ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee.

This listing comes after China last year blocked India's attempt to name the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) leader a global terrorist. In June 2022, India slammed China after it blocked the proposal to list terrorist Abdul Rehman Makki under the Sanctions Committee, also known as the UNSC 1267 Committee.

"On 16 January 2023, the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida, and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities approved the addition of the entry specified below to its ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions List of individuals and entities subject to the assets freeze, travel ban and arms embargo set out in paragraph 1 of Security Council resolu-

tion 2610 (2021) and adopted under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations," the UN said in a statement.

Under the domestic laws of India and the US, Makki has already been listed as a terrorist. He has been involved in raising funds, recruiting and radicalizing youth to violence and planning attacks in India, especially in Jammu and Kashmir.

Makki is the brother-in-law of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) chief and 26/11 mastermind Hafiz Saeed. He has occupied various leadership roles within LeT, a US-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). He has also played a role in raising funds for LeT operations.

In 2020, a Pakistani anti-terrorism court convicted Makki on one count of terrorism financing and sentenced him to prison, according to the US State Department.

In the past, China has placed hurdles for the listing of known terrorists, particularly from Pakistan. It had repeatedly blocked proposals to designate Maulana Masood Azhar, chief of the Pakistan-based and UN-proscribed terrorist entity, Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM).



Two killed in firing incident in Sirsa

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
SIRSA, JANUARY 17

Two persons were allegedly shot dead and two others injured in a dispute in Kalanwali area of the district, police said.

The incident happened on Monday. However, the assailants are yet to be nabbed and the police are examining the CCTV footage to arrest them, a senior officer said.

"Two people were killed and two others were injured in a firing incident in Kalanwali area, Sirsa district. Police teams are conducting a probe. Efforts are on to nab the culprits. Prima facie it seems like a dispute case. CCTV footage is being analysed," Sirsa Superintendent of Police Arpit Jain said yesterday. A probe into the matter is underway.



Vrindavan Temple Corridor

Protestors send letters in blood to Yogi Adityanath

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
MATHURA, JANUARY 17

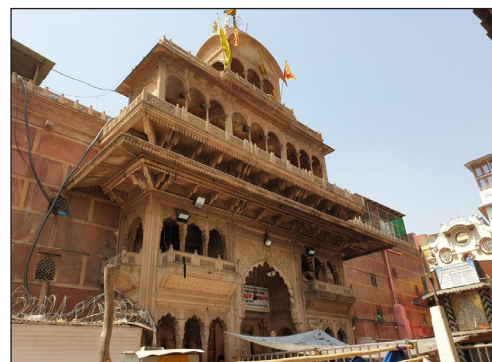
A proposal by the Yogi Adityanath-led Uttar Pradesh government to build a corridor around the famous Banke Bihari temple in Vrindavan, Mathura district - on the lines of Kashi Vishwanath Temple Corridor project in Varanasi - is facing a strong opposition from local residents who say they will lose their ancestral homes and livelihoods.

According to reports, priests and shopkeepers are writing letters to the Chief Minister with their blood, requesting him to drop the project.

Markets in the area have been shut for two days now, and temple priests have come out in support of local residents.

For the project, the state government will acquire five acres of land around the iconic temple, which houses around 300 temples and residential buildings, where people have lived for hundreds of years. These 300 buildings will reportedly be demolished if the corridor is built.

Protesting residents say that they have been worshipping the deity by building



temples in their homes for hundreds of years, and their faith will be hurt if those are demolished.

After the order of the High Court on the corridor, the District Magistrate of Mathura formed an eight-member committee and conducted a survey of more than 200 buildings around the temple, and marked them.

On December 20, 2022, the Allahabad High Court had ordered a survey for the corridor. The Uttar Pradesh government will present its survey report before the High Court today. The Supreme Court will also hear the matter later this month.

The Banke Bihari temple is the most famous temple in Vrindavan, which is 20 kms away from Mathura, a town believed by many to be home to the birthplace of Lord Krishna.

The government says the corridor is necessary so that more people can be accommodated at the temple, and would, in fact, make it easier for devotees to reach there. A proposal for the corridor and

the redevelopment of the surrounding area was discussed by the UP government in 2022, and a survey was conducted to identify houses and establishments that may need to be razed.

Lok Sabha MP from Mathura, BJP's Hema Malini, had on Sunday said that the corridor will open the gates for international tourism, facilitating pilgrims to pay their obeisance to the deity without hassle. Acknowledging the concerns of traders, priests, and residents, she had assured that all stakeholders' interests would be taken into account.

2 terrorists killed in encounter in J-K's Budgam

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
BUDGAM, JANUARY 17

Two Lashkar-e-Toiba terrorists were killed in a brief encounter with security forces near the court complex in Budgam district of Jammu and Kashmir on Tuesday.

Joint teams of Jammu and Kashmir Police and Army cordoned off the area after gunshots were heard to nab the terrorists.

"On specific input, the joint area domination party of Army & Police tried to stop one suspected vehicle, terrorists fired and in retaliation two terrorists were killed. Arms/ammunition recovered near Court Complex in District Budgam. Details shall follow," tweeted Kashmir Zone Police.

The killed terrorists were identified as Arbaaz Mir and Shahid Sheikh of Pulwama district. An AK rifle and a pistol were recovered from them.

Additional Director General of Police, Kashmir, Vijay Kumar said the slain terrorists were affiliated with proscribed outfit Lashkar-e-Toiba.

PUNJAB

Sarkar-Kisan Milni

Punjab govt to hold talks with farmers on Feb 12

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, JANUARY 17

In view of the recent spate in protests by farmers' unions of the state over the past few months, the Punjab government has finally decided to initiate talks with them through 'Sarkar-Kisan Milni' as a confidence building exercise.

The first phase of talks between the farmers and the government is slated to be held on Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) campus on February 12 where Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann will listen to the problems being faced by the state's farmers. The meeting will also be attended by other cabinet ministers.

Agriculture experts from across the state, including scientists from Punjab Agriculture University (PAU), Guru Angad Dev Veterinary and Animal Sciences University



(GADVASU), and officials from Power Department will also participate in the programme.

Punjab Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal said in a statement today that more than 2,500

progressive farmers from every corner of Punjab would participate in this meeting.

Apart from that, 150 farmers from every district will also attend the event.

The government had already held a meeting to discuss the issue on January 6.

PUNJAB AGRICULTURE AND FARMERS WELFARE MINISTER KULDEEP SINGH DHALIWAL SAID IN A STATEMENT TODAY THAT MORE THAN 2,500 PROGRESSIVE FARMERS FROM EVERY CORNER OF PUNJAB WOULD PARTICIPATE IN THIS MEETING.

The second meeting to finalise the details would be held on January 20.

According to sources, the state government has been having a hard time due to the farmers' protest and has decided to bring them together on a platform for an interaction with the CM.

An official, requesting anonymity, said: "The frequent protests by farmers is a cause of concern for the government as it creates an unrest and also sends a wrong message. The Opposition, too, keeps complaining about the issue."

He added that the government is looking to resolve the issue through talks.

Notably, following the farmers' protest against Centre's farm laws in 2020, there has been an unprecedented rise in protests by farm unions across the state.

In recent times, farm unions have held several protests, including the one outside the CM's ancestral home in Sangrur, dharnas at toll plazas across the state, sit-in protest against the liquor factory in Zira, Ferozepur, prompting a rebuke from Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann for frequently blocking roads and holding the entire state to ransom.

BJP's Anup Gupta wins Chandigarh mayor poll

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, JANUARY 17

BJP's Anup Gupta won the Chandigarh mayor election on Tuesday after defeating Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) candidate Jasbir Singh by just one vote.

"I thank my party leadership for their faith in me as they chose me as the candidate for this post. I will run the House with the same dignity that our previous mayor (BJP's Sarabjit Kaur) did," Gupta, who was elected deputy mayor in the previous poll, said in his address as he took the chair. Gupta was first elected as a councillor in 2021. The mayor's tenure is for a year.

Voting for the mayoral polls began at 11 am on Tuesday amid heavy police force and in the presence of Chandigarh Deputy Commissioner Vinay Pratap Singh.

A total of 29 votes were polled, out of which Gupta got 15 votes and AAP's Jasbir Singh got 14 votes.

A candidate needed at least 15 votes to be elected mayor. The AAP had 14 votes and the BJP 15 (14+1 vote from the Member of Parliament – the ex officio vote). The Congress had six votes and the SAD had one, but they abstained from voting.

The Congress, which has taken its councillors to Kasauli, had accused both the BJP and AAP of "opening money bags to

WHO IS ANUP GUPTA?

New Chandigarh Mayor Anup Gupta is a 38-year-old businessman. He was first elected as councillor in 2021 from ward 11 which covers sectors 18, 19 and 21. Known to be close to all top BJP leaders in Chandigarh including Sanjay Tandon, Union territory BJP chief Arun Sood and Chandigarh MP Kirron Kher, Gupta was elected deputy mayor in the previous poll, besides holding the post of BJP secretary. He is a BCom and law graduate.



lure them". Congress spokesperson Rajiv Sharma said "such corrupt practices adopted by rival parties have tarnished the fair name of the City Beautiful."

He said that "under the circumstances, the Congress has decided to keep away from the election and sit in the Opposition in order to expose the anti-people policies of the AAP and BJP".

Khaira supports demand for releasing all detenues having completed their sentence

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, JANUARY 17

Chairman All India Kisan Congress and Bholath MLA Sukhpal Singh Khaira today supported the demand for immediate release of all those Sikh detenues who have completed their sentence but are still languishing in various jails across the country.

In a statement, Khaira pointed out, if the killers of former Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi can be released prematurely, why should those convicts having completed their sentence be kept behind



bars? He was referring to the premature release from jail of Rajeev Gandhi's killers by the Supreme Court of India.

The Congress leader supported the ongoing 'morcha' in Mohali for the release of such detenues.

He said, not only the Sikh detenues, but all those people, belonging to any religion whether Hindus, Muslims, Christians or Sikhs, having completed their sentence should be released immediately.

Khaira questioned the logic and purpose of keeping these people, who have spent somewhere between 25 to 30 years in jail, behind bars.

He said, justice demands that they must be released immediately.

Punjab govt launches 'Beej' mobile app for farmers

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, JANUARY 17

In a major initiative for the state's farmers, the Punjab government on Tuesday launched a seed production portal and mobile app 'Beej' so that they can get important information about seeds. The application will provide crucial information about sale of seeds, pricing and veracity of seeds.

The app was launched by Punjab Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal.



Dhaliwal said that through this app, the farmers of the state will be able to get online information about the availability

and varieties of seeds.

He added that through this app, seed tracking, quality authentication, complete seed information regarding the production, certification and sampling will also be available.

Dhaliwal said that the purpose of this app is to make the Punjab State Seed Certification Organisation online and paperless and to implement the annual calendar for seed certification.

He said the need for this arose after cotton growers in the state suffered huge losses from buying unapproved seeds.

EDITORIAL

The Express India NEWS

Rahul's comment on Mann was avoidable

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday told the Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann that Punjabis will not accept the diktats from Delhi as it will hurt the pride and self belief. He obviously meant to say that Mann was being dictated and commanded from Delhi, as the opposition parties in Punjab have been claiming since the day the Aam Aadmi Party government was formed in Punjab. Whether Mann accepts Delhi diktats or not is debatable, but the Punjab Chief Minister hit back in his own style with his characteristic wit, saying, it was like pot calling kettle black. While Mann asserted that he was elected by the people of Punjab with a thumping mandate, he also mentioned how Capt Amarinder Singh, the duly elected Chief Minister was replaced by Charanjit Singh Channi by the Congress high command. What happened subsequently is history. It is widely believed that Rahul Gandhi and his sister Priyanka Gandhi were instrumental in getting Capt Amarinder removed.

Any Chief Minister belonging to a "national political party", AAP is now a national party, will naturally have to coordinate with the high command in Delhi and at times even follow the directions and guidelines. This is true of all the political parties whether the Congress, the Bharatiya Janata Party and now the AAP. This is an advantage or a disadvantage for the Chief Minister representing the national party. At times it is difficult to make out whether s/he (the CM) is the people's representative or that of the party high command. Any "insubordination" of the high command only leads to an accelerated exit. Opposition criticism aside, Mann has been acting on his own according to his own mind, particularly of late, with the government decisions marking his influence and impression.

That part aside, Rahul Gandhi, who has set a grand and lofty goal and has launched a grand mission of "uniting India" against "hatred, fear and violence", as he claims is prevalent in the country under the BJP rule, he should have avoided commenting on the functioning of a Chief Minister. More so when the Chief Minister belonged to one of the opposition political parties, which has been invited to participate in the concluding rally being planned at the end of the Bharat Jodo Yatra in Srinagar on January 30. May be Rahul did not make a deliberate comment and he made it casually, it has not sent the right message. Besides, when he or at least his party aspires him to be the prime challenger to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he must maintain the level of his rivals and not get into unnecessary slugfest with the Chief Ministers of states and that too from a party which can be a possible, if not a potential ally in your future scheme of things at the national level.

Rahul slams Congress' door on Varun Gandhi

BY VIMAL SUMBLY

When speculations were getting rife that the two-time Bharatiya Janata Party MP Varun Gandhi might quit his party and join the Congress, Rahul Gandhi came out with a clear and categorical message for his younger cousin that there was no possibility of his being inducted into the grand old party of his ancestors including his father, Sanjay Gandhi. Rahul gave a detailed explanation as to why he will not welcome his cousin into the Congress party, giving it a purely ideological interpretation. He said, Varun had chosen the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) much against the history and ideology of his family, a long time back. While clarifying that the family relationships are different, he said, these were ideological differences and Varun's ideology was totally different from the Congress.

It was believed that Varun enjoyed a good personal equation with his aunt Ms Sonia Gandhi and his cousin Priyanka Gandhi. He had personally gone to invite her to his wedding in 2011. But Ms Gandhi did not attend the function nor did Rahul or Priyanka. But that did not lead to any bitterness between the cousins. While Varun would often criticize the Congress party, he ensured that he never targeted his cousins or aunt personally. In fact once he

went on record to say that he would not speak against his own family (Ms Sonia Gandhi's). Over a period, however, the relationship between the cousins, at best, remained cold and indifferent.

In fact Ms Sonia Gandhi and Varun's mother Ms Maneka Gandhi never had a comfortable relationship. After Sanjay Gandhi's tragic death, Maneka had to leave Ms Indira Gandhi's house. She was then the Prime Minister. Maneka blamed Sonia for her eviction from the house. She believed that Sonia did not want her to inherit Sanjay's political legacy. She left the house, or she was thrown out of the house, with Varun, then a two-year toddler in her arms. This made international headlines that the Prime Minister of India did not get along well with her widowed daughter-in-law, who was barely in her twenties and had just lost her husband. Maneka never forgave Sonia for it. The feelings were reciprocal. It is believed that Ms Gandhi, using her position as the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, got her relieved of the portfolio of Minister for Culture in the Vajpayee government in 2001. Maneka would publicly blame her estranged sister-in-law for her being divested of the all important portfolio of culture.

Given such levels of intense bitterness between the two families, it was natural



for Varun to follow into the footsteps of his mother. He joined the BJP in 2004 but was not eligible to contest, as he was only 22 years old. But he made his presence felt with fiery speeches, which landed him in trouble. He was booked by Mayawati government for "hate-speech" and spent 19 days in jail before he got bail and the case against him was quashed by the court. Varun saw himself emerging as the face of the BJP in Uttar Pradesh. So much so, during the run up to the 2017 assembly elections, he was considered to be a potential Chief Ministerial candidate for Uttar Pradesh. But eventually it was another young and firebrand leader Adityanath Yogi who became the Chief Minister.

Since then Varun has been sulking. The alienation and disillusionment with the BJP intensified further after his mother was not re-inducted as minister in NDA's second term in 2019. To top it all, both the son and the mother were axed from the all important and all pow-

erful "national executive committee" (NEC) of the BJP in 2021. This was because Varun was seen to be quite critical of his own governments' policies at the centre and the state. The proverbial last straw on camel's back came when he said that the media was paddling "Hindu-Muslim divide", which was taken as an offence by many in his own party.

As late as the month of December, his statements mirrored those of Rahul in terms of uniting the country and fighting the forces of communal hatred. Varun Gandhi right now is at a stage where he has burnt all his bridges with the BJP. He is not sure of getting the party ticket in 2024. It was against this backdrop that he was thought to be planning to leave his party and join the Congress. However, there were no negotiations reported with the Congress leadership, although it was rumoured that he may join the Congress during the Bharat Jodo Yatra. All these speculations were put to rest by Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday when he said that Varun had chosen an ideology that was totally against his family's ideology and history, making it clear that the Congress doors were not open for him.

Rahul made a big statement saying, he cannot think of ever going to the RSS office and for that one may need to "chop off his head", which was obviously a clear message to Varun that he is not welcome in the party.

GUTS AND GLORY ON FOREIGN SOILS – XIII

Skinner's Horse (1st HORSE, the Yellow Boys)



BY MAJ GEN HARVIJAY SINGH (RETD, SM)

The Skinner's Horse is the fourth oldest and one of the senior cavalry regiments of the Armoured Corps of the Indian Army. It was the first regiment to combine oriental horsemanship with western cavalry drill. It was trained according to a manual of English cavalry manoeuvres, translated into Persian, with Colonel Skinner's own additions on musketry drill. James Skinners was born to an Indian Mother and a British father.

In Sep 1939, when World War II was declared, Skinner's Horse was still a mounted regiment. When mobilisation was ordered, one of the first orders was: Swords will be sharpened!

The first vehicles to be inducted into the Skinner's Horse, in Dec 1939, were 30 Morris 30-cwt lorries which were six

wheelers. The transformation from a sowar to a driver was tough for the Indian soldier who had only handled animal transport till then.

The regiment trained hard and achieved great success as a reconnaissance unit of a motorised brigade in East Africa within nine months and was in action as early as the autumn of 1940.

Skinner's Horse retained its reconnaissance role throughout the war mostly serving as a part of the Gazelle Force. The force was created originally for the task of harassing the Italians and at the same time acting as a flank guard and later as an advanced

guard of advancing column) of 4 Indian Division, 5 Indian Division, 10 Indian Division, 3 Indian Motor Brigade and 10 Armoured Division.

On 22 Sep, 1940, the Skinners Horse sailed from Karachi for the Port of Sudan to fight against Italians in Africa. For the next three years, the regiment stayed in Africa. At most of places, it was given



reconnaissance tasks, where it gained some valuable information for its formation headquarters; the skills achievements of the 'Yellow Boys' were well appreciated and the unit was decorated with many Battle Honours: Agordat, Keren, Amba-Alagi,

Abyssinia, Senio Flood Bank and Italy. While fighting the war in Iran in 1942, the regiment was handed over brand new T-16 Bren carriers. These were tracked armoured vehicles and had the Bren machine-gun as its main armament.

The Bren carriers were excellent fighting vehicles and they saw service with the regiment till the end of World War-II.

The regiment redeployed to Italy after seeing action in Iran. The Humber Mk IV armoured cars were given to the regiment there. The Humber had a 37 mm cannon as its main armament and a 7.62 mm MG mounted co-axially as its secondary armament. The regiment also received half-

tracked armoured cars which were used as personal carriers. A Sabre Squadron consisted of two troops of Humbers, two troops of T-16 tracked carriers, one infantry troop based on the half-tracks and a 3-inch mortar section. The HQ Squadron had a troop of Humbers with a 6-pounder gun mounted on each armoured car. The 6-pounder was later replaced with a 75 mm Howitzer.

It was in 1946 that the regiment received its first tank, Stuart. It had a 37 mm gun as its main armament. In 1947, while under the command of Lt Col RM Bilimoria, the first Indian Commandant, the regiment was stationed at Ahmednagar.

The senior Pakistani politician Sardar Shaukat Hayat Khan (1915-1998), who served with Skinner's Horse in Sudan/Africa during the Second World War, has written a brief but memorable account of the regiment's service there, in his memoirs, "The Nation that Lost its Soul"

Indian Armed Forces stand tall among their global peers because of their rich battle-hardened heritage, high motivation and tough training.

To be continued