

**PANCHAYATI RAJ DIWAS**

PM reaches out to J&K via infra push, inaugurates projects worth Rs 20k cr

PM Narendra Modi with J&K LG Manoj Sinha and Panchayat Raj Minister Giriraj Singh at Palli village, Sunday. *PTI*

Tells Valley youth: 'You won't suffer way your parents did'

ARUN SHARMA
PALLI (SAMBA), APRIL 24

INAUGURATING A string of projects in Jammu and Kashmir as part of a strong infrastructure push, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday assured the youth of Kashmir Valley that they "will never face the kind of sufferings" their parents and grandparents faced in the past.

The newly launched projects worth Rs 20,000 crore—which

PM Modi inaugurated from village Palli in Samba district of Jammu and Kashmir — include the Banihal-Qazigund road tunnel that is expected to reduce travel time between Jammu and Srinagar by two hours, and a 500 KV solar power plant at Palli. Foundation stones were laid for the Rattle and Kwarhydel projects on river Chenab, and the Delhi-Amritsar-Katra Expressway, among others.

Referring to a change in work culture in the Union Territory,

the PM, speaking on the occasion of Panchayati Raj Diwas, said that there was a time when a government file from Delhi used to take two to three weeks to reach Jammu and Kashmir. "Today, I feel happy that a 500 KV

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**THE EDITORIAL PAGE****CAPITAL OUTREACH**
PAGE 8

Privatised airports: Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand back TN on revenue share

Gogoi in Vadodara on Sunday. *Bhupendra Rana***SOUMYARENDRA BARIK & PRANAV MUKUL**
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

AMID THE intensifying Centre-state tussle over economic issues, a move by the DMK government in Tamil Nadu to seek revenue share from privatised airports and equity against land provided by the state for building new airports is finding resonance in other Opposition-ruled states. Congress-ruled Chhattisgarh and the JMM-led government in Jharkhand have now come out in support of Tamil Nadu's proposal.

The Centre has not officially commented on the plans being drawn by states but Central officials have signalled an unwillingness to accede to the states' demand, stating that it could potentially hamper the "sentiments of privatisation".

Tamil Nadu's proposal is stated in its new industrial policy. "This is very logical. When you give it (land) to a Government of India enterprise, you are becoming a partner and that is your asset. When that asset is being transferred to another party, and especially when that party is a private party — only one

partner cannot get the share," T S Singh Deo, Chhattisgarh's Minister of Panchayat and Rural Development, Health and Family Welfare and Commercial Tax, told *The Indian Express*.

"The state government is also a stakeholder and should get its share depending on the capital that was put up at the time of constitution of this project. That is absolutely how things should be," he said.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Jharkhand's Finance Minister Rameshwar Oraon said: "The land belongs to the state and the activity also takes place in the state...so in such a situation, if we get the revenue share, our income will also rise. We will support such a demand. All land belongs to the government, it belongs to the state, we have given it to the government...they should share revenue with the state government in case it is privatised."

However, the Centre is of the view that whenever a new airport is built or an existing one upgraded, the state derives economic benefits from the infrastructure.

"One is the direct economic activity that benefits the entire

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

While Kishor meets Cong, his I-PAC seals deal with rival TRS

ANISHA DUTTA & MANOJ CG
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

AMID DISCUSSIONS with the Congress leadership and indications that election strategist Prashant Kishor could join the party, the Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC) has finalised its contract for the 2023 Assembly elections with K Chandrashekar Rao's Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), the Congress's opponent in Telangana.

Kishor was in Hyderabad Saturday and Sunday—a day after he had a one-to-one meeting with Congress president Sonia Gandhi — holding marathon meetings with Rao and the TRS leadership.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Demand up, govt procurement of Punjab wheat hits 15-yr low

ANJU AGNIHOTRI CHABA
JALANDHAR, APRIL 24

GOVERNMENT WHEAT procurement in Punjab is set to fall to a 15-year low, with private purchases likely to cross five lakh tonnes (lt) for the first time since 2007. This comes on the back of rising export and domestic market demand, fuelled by the Russia-Ukraine war, and lower crop yields due to the abnormal spike in temperatures from mid-March.

Government agencies, including the Food Corporation of India, had bought 83.49 lt of wheat in the current rabi marketing season (April-June) as of Sunday evening. "Going by the daily market arrivals, which have clearly slowed



Private purchases likely to cross five lakh tonnes for first time since 2007. *File*

down, total procurement may not even reach 100 lt this time," a senior Punjab Mandi Board official told *The Indian Express*.

Government wheat purchases from Punjab — which is also the largest contributor to the

EXPLAINED Why this may not be bad news

WHEAT PROCUREMENT from Punjab falling below 10 million tonnes for the first time since 2007 isn't a bad thing. It marks the re-entry of private players in the state's grain trade. But it may also put pressure on government stocks and derail large-scale export plans.

Central pool — hit a record 132.14 lt in the 2021 season. The last

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Only 3.8 lakh 3rd jabs, half of them in last 4 days

KAUNAIN SHERIFF M
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

ONLY 3.87 lakh people in the 18-59 age group have taken the "precautionary" third dose of the Covid vaccine since it was rolled out for this category on April 10, according to Union Health Ministry data. But significantly, the data show that over 51 per cent of these doses were administered in the last four days, coinciding with an uptick in cases and re-introduction of mask mandates in key cities such as Delhi.



At a Delhi vaccination centre. Over half of vaccines for 18-59 group were given in states with metros. *File*

According to the data, 3,87,719 third doses were administered across the country in the 18-59 age group over the last 14 days — including 1.98 lakh from April 20 to April 24.

Apart from Delhi, UP and Haryana re-introduced the mask mandate last week following a slight uptick in cases. This apart, the Ministry's data

show that over half of the total number of third doses for the 18-59 group were administered in states with large metro areas.

The data also show that the third-dose uptake has dipped for the priority group too, including frontline and healthcare workers, after having started on a high during the Omicron surge in January.

Health officials, who are part of the Centre's Covid immunisation monitoring team, attributed

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**BUSINESS AS USUAL**

By UNNY

**INSIDE****UKRAINE FOCUS AS 8 EUROPE LEADERS VISIT INDIA** **PAGE 6**

Hanuman Chalisa row: Lawmaker couple hit with sedition charge

VALLABH OZARKAR
MUMBAI, APRIL 24

A DAY after Independent lawmaker couple Navneet and Ravi Rana were arrested in connection with the Hanuman Chalisa controversy, the Maharashtra government Sunday invoked the sedition law against them.

The Bandra Metropolitan Magistrate Court in Mumbai Sunday sent Navneet, who is an MP, and Ravi, an MLA, to judicial custody for 14 days, rejecting the police's plea for custody.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

MP Navneet Rana and MLA Ravi Rana at a police station on Sunday. *Ganesh Shirsekar*

SEDITION CHARGE AND BOMBAY HC P 6

IDEA EXCHANGE

'Inflation will probably surprise us on the upside... could lead to higher interest rates'

PRASHANT JAIN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CIO, HDFC ASSET MANAGEMENT CO.

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THE WORLD**EMMANUEL MACRON IS RE-ELECTED FRANCE PRESIDENT****UKRAINE PRESIDENT PUSHES FOR MORE WEAPONS** **PAGE 12**

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As leadership face, posturings put Bihar BJP in a cleft stick, Nitish plays it cool

SANTOSH SINGH
PATNA, APRIL 24

EVEN THOUGH the Janata Dal (United) has made it clear that Chief Minister Nitish Kumar will not be shifting to the national capital for a top constitutional post, several senior BJP leaders in Bihar have continued to indulge in political posturings, albeit quietly.

The state political circles have been abuzz for some time about Union minister of state for home affairs and Ujjayarpur MP Nityanand Rai being the BJP's potential chief ministerial face in the event of Nitish moving out of Bihar before the 2025 Assembly elections.

Rai was instrumental in organising the April 23 event to commemorate 1857 Rebellion hero Veer Kunwar Singh at Jagdishpur as part of the Centre's "Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav", which displayed a grand show of nationalism with record-breaking feat of collective waving of over 78,000 national flags. While attending the event, Union home minister Amit Shah also mentioned Rai for inviting him there.

Rajya Sabha MP and former Bihar deputy CM Sushil Kumar Modi has also sent out strong political signals in recent days, expressing concerns over the BJP's defeat in the Bochahan by-poll for which he flagged factors like the split in EBC votes and the distancing of a section of upper caste voters from the party. A series of his tweets in this regard indicated that he was still not giving up on his claim over the state party leadership.

Firebrand Begusarai MP and Union minister Giriraj Singh, a Bhumihar leader, has been overtly displaying his Hindutva credentials by regularly issuing aggressive statements on population control and the need for a National Register of Citizens (NRC) in the country.

The BJP leaders have been engaged in such posturings ahead of an expected state Cabinet expansion. If the BJP replaces one of its two deputy CMs or both, it would throw light on how the saffron party's politics would play out in the near future.

Nityanand Rai, a Yadav leader, has been positioning



Bihar CM Nitish Kumar

himself as a high-profile BJP player for a possible leadership role in Bihar, but the party has been in a bind over projecting a Yadav as its possible CM face, given its upper castes-centred support base in the state.

Ever since the BJP became the single largest party in the Bihar Legislative Assembly last month, with all three MLAs of its erstwhile ally Vikassheel Insaan Party (VIP) joining its fold, the party has stepped up its pressure on junior ally, the Nitish Kumar-led JD(U). The BJP now has 77 MLAs as against the principal Opposition RJD's 76, while the JD(U) has 45 MLAs.

Although state BJP president Sanjay Jaiswal recently asserted that Nitish will remain the CM till the 2025 polls, it has not put an end to the raging race among BJP leaders for emerging as the party's Bihar face.

The state BJP is caught between its core constituency, comprising of upper castes and segments of EBCs, Dalits and non-Yadav OBCs, and the question of projecting a Yadav as its leader. Though Rai is said to be close to Shah, a large chunk of the BJP's OBC and upper caste leaders do not seem to be comfortable with the idea of projecting him as the party's face.

On his part, Nitish has been keeping everyone guessing by not reacting to comments of leaders from the BJP and to counter-comments from his own party leaders. Recently, soon after JD(U) national president Rajiv Ranjan Singh aka Lalan Singh said that Nitish had been the CM because of "people's strength and not because of anyone's blessings", party spokesperson Arvind Singh said, "Everyone knows the truth".

Medical college in Haryana village to be named after Guru Tegh Bahadur: Khattar

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, APRIL 24

HARYANA CHIEF Minister Manohar Lal Khattar announced Sunday that a government medical college being built in Panjpur village of Yamunanagar district will be named after Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh Guru. The foundation of the college — which is being built in 60 acres — will be laid within three months.

Khattar made the announcement while addressing a state-level function organised in Panipat to mark 400th birth anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur. The CM also said that the ground where this state-level function was held will be named after Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur. Besides this, the path via which the palanquin carrying the Sikh holy book Sri



Manohar Lal Khattar

The CM said that Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji always shared a special bond with Haryana as during his lifetime he had travelled six times through Haryana and Punjab.

The CM said that the Haryana is celebrating the Birth Anniversary and Prakash Purbas of all the saints and great men so as to ensure maximum reach of their teachings among the society as through these messages a spirit of sacrifice and dedication is imbibed among the society.

FROM PAGE ONE

Revenue share

state. Even within the region where the airport is being developed, there are catchment areas that reap benefits, which the state gets. The land value gets enhanced and it translates into better collections of stamp duties, etc," a senior official, who closely works on the Centre's privatisation plans, told The Indian Express.

"For private companies, if such demands result in an additional outgo being created in addition to what they share with the AAI, then it does affect the attractiveness of the project," the official said.

The AAI, Ministry of Civil Aviation and Niti Aayog did not respond to queries from The Indian Express.

According to the National Monetization Pipeline, 25 airports run by Airports Authority of India (AAI) have been earmarked for asset monetisation by 2025: Bhubaneswar, Varanasi, Amritsar, Trichy, Indore, Raipur, Kozhikode, Coimbatore, Nagpur, Patna, Madurai, Surat, Ranchi, Jodhpur, Chennai, Vijayawada, Vadodara, Bhopal, Tirupati, Hubli, Imphal, Agartala, Udaipur, Dehradun and Rajahmundry.

The Centre has so far privatised six airports, with Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Guwahati, Thiruvananthapuram, Jaipur and Mangaluru being leased out to Adani Enterprises for 50 years.

Typically, state governments acquire land parcels and transfer them to AAI on a 99-year lease for a sum of Re 1, when a new airport is being built or an existing airport is expanded by AAI. The land is acquired, vacated and then transferred to AAI.

In its new industrial policy released last week, the Tamil Nadu government stated: "In the present projects, the land cost forms the major share of the overall project cost. The Airports Authority of India (AAI) is actively pursuing the policy of privatization of Airports. Therefore, a decision has been taken that in the event, the State Government acquires and transfers the lands to AAI free of cost and the AAI or Government of India transfer the assets to a third party, the value realized/revenue accrued thereby, must be proportionately shared with the State Government reflecting the huge investment in land being made by the State Government".

The policy stated: "It has also been decided that at the appropriate stage, it has to be ensured that the value of the lands should be converted as equity of the State Government in the Airport Project Special Purpose Vehicle or an appropriate revenue sharing arrangement proportionate to investment is arrived at before any asset transfer takes place to a private party."

Covid third dose

the low third-dose numbers overall to the "relatively stable situation" and availability of these doses only on payment in private facilities.

They said precautionary doses in the 18-59 category are "mainly being taken only by those who require it for travelling abroad and those who are suffering from comorbidities".

According to Ministry's data, 54 per cent of third doses administered in the 18-59 age group over the past 14 days were in Delhi, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Karnataka.

This is mainly due to private vaccination centres being concentrated in metro areas such as Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Kolkata. On Sunday, according to data on CoWin, only 893 private vaccination sites were operational as compared to 19,494 government vaccination sites.

Significantly, the data also show that large to mid-sized states, which have a relatively low presence of private vaccination centres, have administered less than 5,500 third doses to those in the 18-59 age group: Rajasthan (3,918), Madhya Pradesh (4,303) and Jharkhand (5,290). Chhattisgarh has administered just 532 precautionary doses in the 18-59 age group so far.

Even a densely populated state such as Bihar has administered only 22,141 precautionary doses to the 18-59 group. At the same time, the data show, a smaller state such as Haryana, which includes the metro area of Gurgaon in the national capital region, has administered 19,918 precautionary doses to those in this category.

Even in the priority category -- frontline and healthcare workers, and those 60 years old and above -- for whom the third dose is freely available at government vaccination centres since January 10, the uptake continues to be low: only 45 per cent of 1.04 crore healthcare workers and 38 per cent of 1.84 crore frontline workers.

So far, only 2,62 crore precautionary doses have been administered to this high-risk group, including 46.94 lakh doses to healthcare workers, 73.40 lakh to frontline workers and 1.42 crore to those 60 years old and above.

The data show that almost 63 per cent of these 2.62 crore doses were administered in the first month of rollout, from January 10 to February 10, including 38 lakh doses to healthcare workers, 51 lakh to frontline workers and 75.31 lakh to the 60 years and above group.

This was the period when the country was witnessing a surge in cases triggered by the infectious Omicron variant.

The next 30 days saw a nearly 28 per cent decline: 4.8 lakh doses for healthcare workers, 13.48 lakh for frontline workers and 27.35 lakh for the 60 years and above group.

Between March 10 and April 10, there was a further dip: 2.59 lakh doses for healthcare workers, 5.15 lakh for frontline workers and 25.14 lakh for the 60 years and above group.

Between April 10 and April 23, 1.57 lakh precautionary doses were administered to healthcare workers, 3.26 lakh to

frontline workers and 14.35 lakh to the 60 years and above group.

Punjab wheat

time that procurement fell below 100 It was back in 2007 and 2006, when these totaled 70.99 It and 69.07 It, respectively.

In 2006 and 2007 — which also saw soaring international prices leading to a global food crisis — private purchases from Punjab's mandis amounted to 13.12 It and 9.18 It, respectively. This year, cumulative private wheat purchases were at 4.61 It as on Sunday, compared to a mere 1.14 It for the whole of the last season, 1.93 It in 2020, 2.80 It in 2019 and 2.06 It in 2018.

"We expect the 5 It-mark to be crossed in the next 3-4 days. That will be the first time since 2007," informed the earlier-quoted official. Private traders and flour millers are also said to be sourcing grain from outside government-regulated APMC (agricultural produce market committee) mandis. These purchases, including directly from farmers, aren't officially recorded.

Kulwinder Singh, a farmer from Gadaya village in Nabha tehsil of Patiala district, is yet to sell any of his 115 quintals of wheat grain from seven acres. The 55-year-old sold 130 out of his entire 140 quintals crop last year to government agencies at the minimum support price (MSP), while retaining the rest for the family's self-consumption.

"I will not sell this time to the government or even private traders now. I expect to realise better prices later on. The MSP (of Rs 2,015/quintal) is anyway too low, when my yields have dropped to below 16.5 quintals per acre, from 20 quintals last year," he said.

Swaran Singh (43) has harvested 120 quintals — some 34 quintals less than last year's — from his 6-acre holding in Poothi village of Bathinda district's Nathana tehsil. He has already sold 88 quintals to the government at the MSP, while holding on to the remaining 32 quintals: "Some traders are offering Rs 2,100/quintal through my arhatiya (commission agent). I don't mind waiting for some more time". He, too, is hoping for higher prices to compensate for yield losses from the early onset of summer, which led to premature ripening and drying of the

crop.

Both farmers, interestingly, participated in the agitation against the Centre's three farm laws that were passed in September 2020 and repealed in November 2021. "We are happy that the vyapaari (private trader) is buying more wheat from us. But if the sarkari (government) MSP and APMC mandi go tomorrow, the Vyapaari will loot us," claimed Kulwinder, who was a regular at the protest site in Singhu on the Haryana-Delhi border.

Punjab accounted for 132.14 It out of the country's total government procurement of 433.44 It in 2021, followed by Madhya Pradesh (128.16 It), Haryana (84.93 It), Uttar Pradesh (56.41 It) and Rajasthan (23.40 It). With all these states also reporting much lower purchases, the all-India figure could even dip to below 250 It this year, according to some estimates.

I-PAC seals deal

The move has not gone down well with the Congress. AICC-in-charge of the state, Manickam Tagore, put out a cryptic image that read: "Never trust someone who is friends with your enemy", along with a tweet: "Is it correct?". Tagore could not be contacted despite repeated attempts.

After extensive discussions with Kishor, TRS working president KT Rama Rao on Sunday announced that his party has formally signed a contract with I-PAC but added it has nothing to do with Kishor.

The I-PAC was founded by Kishor, but he has in the recent past maintained that he holds no official position in the firm and claims it to be an independent entity. IPAC, in fact, is at present headed by three directors.

On its website, I-PAC lists its nine projects under the headline "our work", featuring Narendra Modi in 2014 to Mamata Banerjee and MK Stalin in 2021, among others.

Sources in I-PAC maintained that the contract with TRS was the first to be formalised without Kishor's involvement and added that in future, I-PAC is likely to seek more contracts "with or without Prashant Kishor's blessings".

The deal with TRS comes at a time when the Congress is engaged in discussions with Kishor over his proposals to revive the

party. Kishor has had a series of meetings with the leadership, including Sonia Gandhi, over the last week.

Kishor's entry into the party also remains in the realm of possibility, with sources saying the Congress is ready to induct him and he is also open to the idea. There are, however, reservations within the Congress over I-PAC continuing to work with other parties.

Apart from the TRS, I-PAC also has potential projects in the pipeline with Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy in Andhra Pradesh.

In May 2021, Kishor had his first serious set of talks with the Congress. He met Sonia Gandhi even while he and the I-PAC were working with the Trinamool Congress, the Congress's rival, for the West Bengal Assembly polls. He gave her a presentation a month later with ideas for the party's revival. The Gandhis engaged with him and both Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi met him in July.

Sedition charge

At the court, Special Public Prosecutor Pradeep Charat said: "Section 124A (sedition) has been invoked against them for the hate and dislike that they invoked against the government and the Chief Minister and the way they have challenged the writ of the state machinery."

The couple was arrested Saturday night after they announced they would recite the Hanuman Chalisa outside Uddhav Thackeray's residence, triggering protests in the city — and outside their residence — by Shiv Sainiks. It was MNS chief Raj Thackeray who had initially called for Hanuman Chalisa recitals in public if mosques used loudspeakers for azaan.

Police said an FIR under multiple Sections of the IPC — including 124A and 153A (promoting enmity) — and the Bombay Police Act was filed against the lawmaker couple. They also face another FIR under IPC Section 353 (assault or criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of his duty).

The Khar Police has booked unknown persons for gathering in front of the Rana house and breaking police barricades on Saturday. Sixteen people have been held in this regard, said a police officer.

Meanwhile, Rizwan Merchant, the lawyer of the

Ranas, filed a bail application in the Bandra court Sunday. The court scheduled the hearing for April 29, giving time to the Mumbai police to respond by April 27.

Navneet was sent to Byculla women's jail. Ravi was sent to Talaja prison.

Police, in their remand application, cited Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the city while asking for maximum custody. They said it has to be investigated whether there was "any big plot or conspiracy of the couple or others to create any major law and order situation in Kalanagar area, Mumbai or all over Maharashtra".

They also said the couple had created a communal rift and destabilised law and order amid the demand by political parties for removal of loudspeakers from mosques.

The Ranas' lawyer opposed the custody, calling the arrest illegal and questioned the basis on which Section 124A (sedition) was invoked.

Meanwhile, BJP leader Kirit Somaiya who was allegedly attacked by Shiv Sena workers at the Khar Road police station on Saturday night filed a police complaint. But he claimed that police did not invoke the proper sections in the FIR and had also booked his driver.

Somaiya said he would go to New Delhi along with a delegation of BJP MLAs on Monday to complain to the Union Home Secretary on the matter.

The alleged attack took place when Somaiya visited the Khar Police Station after the couple's arrest.

On Friday, another BJP leader, Mohit Kamboj, was allegedly attacked.

The police Sunday booked one Rupesh Kadam and other Shiv Sainiks for the alleged attack near the CM's residence, Matoshree. The FIR has been registered under the relevant sections of Indian Penal Code for attempted murder, rioting, unlawful assembly, criminal intimidation and sections of Maharashtra police act.

Earlier, Navneet, the MP from Badnera in Amravati district and her MLA husband Ravi had announced in Amravati that they would come to the CM's residence, to recite Hanuman Chalisa on Saturday morning. They then arrived in Mumbai on April 22.

Ex-CJI Gogoi

critical part of healthy democracy, so long as it does not cross the 'lakshman rekha' of public order and morality, be it against an individual or an institution. If the opinion is within the line (of public order), it should not be restrained."

The former CJI, who was in Vadodara to address the 5th Gujarat Chhatra Sansad on Sunday, however, said such an opinion should be based on facts and bonafide information. "If it is not a bonafide opinion and is instead based on misinformation or malafide, it is wrong. If it is an opinion not based on facts and disturbs public order and transgresses morality or creates distrust among the public for the institution, posing a threat to national interest, action needs to be taken. Nothing can be bigger than national interest," he said.

Gogoi also said that the present generation youth in the country are fortunate to have the power of social media. "It is a powerful tool, but it can be misused, which is unfortunate... Youth today, who wish to enter public life or politics must be aware that they cannot be successful unless they work hard and base their journey on facts. This is because it is very easy for misinformation to be spread because misinformation is very attractive. But in the end, truth always prevails," he said.



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5 THE CITY



VACCINATIONS IN
LAST 24 HOURS
78,383



PATIENTS IN HOSPITAL: **107**
OXYGEN SUPPORT **23**
VENTILATOR SUPPORT **5**

DELHI TOTAL
CASES
18,74,876

April 23
April 24
Total

	Total	Vacant
HOSPITAL BEDS	9,379	9,271
ICU BEDS	2,158	2,123
Recoveries	Deaths	Tests
640	2	22,714
812	1	24,177
18,44,734	26,167	3,76,90,047

*Total active cases in Delhi

Noida	Apr 23	Apr 24
Cases	126	98
Deaths	0	0
Gurgaon		
Cases	291	331
Deaths	0	0

BRIEFLY

Woman killed in front of kids: Accused held

New Delhi: A 29-year-old man has been arrested for allegedly stabbing a woman to death in front of her children, said police Sunday. The incident took place in Southwest Delhi on April 21 when the woman was walking with her two minor sons near her home. Police said that the accused ran after her and allegedly stabbed her multiple times, which lead to her death. "We sent our teams to conduct raids in Delhi but the accused had fled. The teams then found he had fled to Haridwar. He was arrested, and the knife that was used to commit the murder has been recovered. He confessed to his crime...", said an officer.

As cases spike, some teachers back on Covid duty

New Delhi: As Covid cases once again rise in Delhi, some teachers have been put on pandemic duty despite schools operating in full swing now. For instance, 30 teachers, including five PGT teachers who teach senior secondary classes, have been requisitioned for Covid duties in the Shahdara district, according to officials. The city reported 1,083 cases and one death Sunday.

Govt to meet stakeholders on cloud kitchen policy

New Delhi: To expand the F&B industry, the Delhi government had announced a 'Cloud Kitchen' policy in its budget this year. In a step towards this, the Dialogue and Development Commission, along with the industries department, will hold a consultation with stakeholders on April 26 to discuss easing land and licence regulations. DDC vice-chairperson Jasmine Shah said, "We are committed to further facilitating the growth of this segment by encouraging setting up of shared commercial kitchen spaces." **ENS**

WILL HELP CUT CO₂ EMISSIONS: SISODIA

Ashram underpass finally opens to public



The 410-metre-long four-lane underpass will connect Bhogal on Mathura Road to New Friends Colony. *Abhinav Saha*

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, APRIL 26

THE FOUR-LANE Ashram underpass was finally thrown open to the public on Sunday. At the inauguration, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said the structure is expected to help reduce 3.6 tonnes of CO₂ emissions and cut fuel usage by 1,550 litres a day.

Construction of the 410-metre-long underpass began in 2019 and was scheduled to be completed by the end of December 2020, but was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and other reasons. It will connect Bhogal on Mathura Road to New Friends Colony and is expected to decongest the stretch between Faridabad and South Delhi and ease traffic in adjoining areas such as Jangpura, Nizamuddin, Maharani Bagh and Lajpat Nagar. Sisodia, who also holds the PWD portfolio, said, "Now, the commute between Delhi-NCR, Faridabad, Badarpur will be smooth and residents of Jangpura and Kalkaji will benefit a lot. Engineers told me that commuters burn 1,550 litres of petrol daily just by waiting at the signal and getting caught in traffic. The congestion also produces 3.6 tonnes of carbon dioxide in the form of vehicular pollution which impacts the health of residents. With the opening of the underpass, residents will benefit a lot and will save money, time and energy."

Ashram Chowk sees about 2.5

THE PROJECT



Deputy CM Sisodia at the inauguration. *PTI*

■ 2.5 lakh-3 lakh vehicles go via Ashram Chowk daily during peak hours

Length: 410 metres
Cost: ₹ 77 crore
Lanes: 4
Mathura Road
Ring Road
Project started in December 2019; missed 8 deadlines

lakh-3 lakh vehicles a day during peak hours. The underpass was built at a cost of Rs 77 crore.

"I visited this underpass to review and inspect its progress two months ago. I saw that only finishing work, like roof-laying and painting, was left. So, I asked the engineers to open the underpass for commuters during the day and complete remaining work at night. Considering the issues faced by commuters, engineers informally inaugurated the underpass on March 22," Sisodia said.

The underpass, which has missed at least eight deadlines, was opened partially on a trial basis from 6 am to 10 am from March 22.

Sisodia also praised engineers and other staff behind the project: "It faced several obstacles — Covid, labour crunch, ban on construction activities — but

despite it all, they finished the work." He added that the Kejriwal government is similarly working to beautify all stretches in the city.

Sisodia also said he was told by the engineers that constructing the underpass in a high-volume area was tough but "it was completed on time and opened to commuters on March 22".

The PWD has installed two tanks, with a capacity of 1.5 litres, on both sides of the carriageway to prevent waterlogging inside the underpass. It has also installed roof sheds and pipes for release of rainwater on roads.

Sisodia further added that work on the corridor development project at Pragati Maidan is nearing completion and will be inaugurated soon. Under this project, a 1.2-km tunnel and six underpasses are being constructed on Mathura Road.

‘Things should go back to normal’: Chorus at Jahangirpuri tiranga yatra

JIGNASA SINHA

NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

A WEEK after communal clashes broke out in Northwest Delhi's Jahangirpuri, residents held a 'Tiranga Yatra' on Sunday evening in a show of solidarity between communities. While personnel remained deployed in the area, police removed many of the barricades and scaled down security arrangements during the day.

On April 16, violence broke out following a Hanuman Jayanti procession and several persons, including eight police personnel, were injured during stone pelting and firing. Three days later, the North MCD razed several structures, including the exterior gate of a mosque, in an anti-encroachment demolition drive.

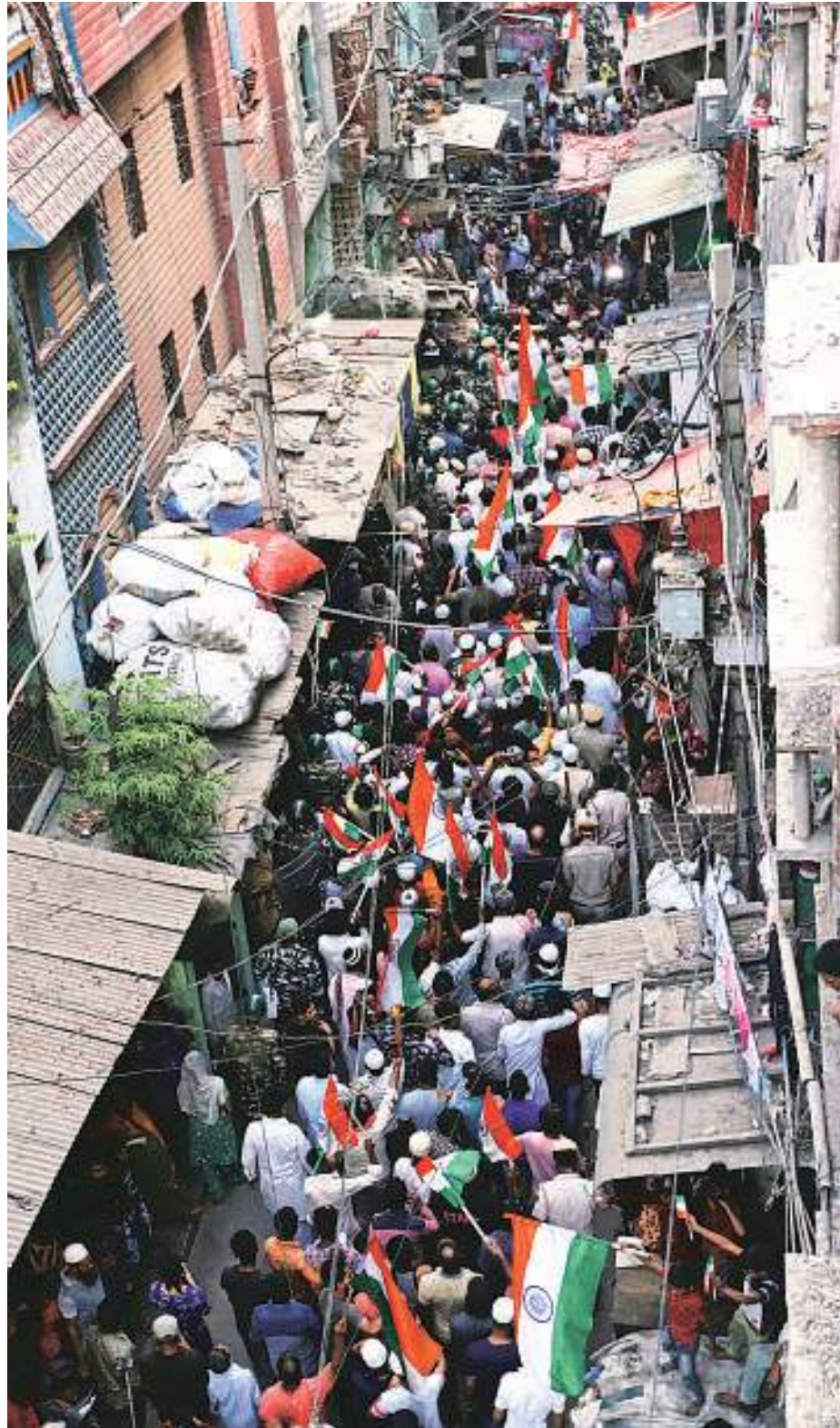
The 'yatra' was planned three days ago by RWA members and social workers in the area. On Sunday, Tricolour in hand, residents shouted slogans such as 'Hindu Musalman Bhai Bhai', 'Hindustan Zindabad', 'Vande Mataram' and 'Bhaichara Zinda Rahe' as they walked from Kushal Cinema towards C block where parts of nearly a dozen shops were torn down on Wednesday. They appealed for peace and harmony and said this was the first step towards "normalcy" in the area.

Ishrar Khan, who sells mobile phones and accessories, said "Part of my shop was razed during the drive. I was hurt as many people were calling us Bangladeshis and my neighbours called me *pattharbaaz*. Today is different, I stepped out and everyone hugged me. We may not talk everyday but we marched together. I feel we are all brothers and should make amends. I went home after the yatra for *Koza*. I hope the situation gets better and we celebrate Eid."

Walking near Ishrar, businessman Indramani Tiwari (40) said, "We want our lives to go back to normal. We never thought this would happen. I spoke to my Muslim brothers, I will help them and support them. We feel this won't happen in the future. This is a call for *aman* and *shanti* in the area."

As the group marched below, locals showered rose petals from their terraces.

Kader Khan (60), who sells chicken in the area, put flags on his shop and sent his grandchildren to the 'yatra'. "We are not on talking terms with them (Hindu neighbours) at present but that doesn't mean we hate each other. We are ready to move on. Things will get better soon. My children and grandchildren stepped out of the house after



Tricolour in hand, residents walked from Kushal Cinema towards C block in Jahangirpuri on Sunday. The yatra comes a week after clashes in the area. *Gajendra Yadav*

days. We feel better already. There's peace in the area."

Advocate Avat Naryan (45), another local, said he witnessed the riots and now hopes for peace: "We saw many of our friends get injured during the clashes. When our pandit told us about the 'yatra', we were sceptical but agreed to be a part of it. Everyone joined today. I hope everything gets back to normal and the police remove

all barricades soon."

Raman Jha, whose *paan* shop was demolished during the encroachment drive, said, "I wish this march was done earlier. I lost my shop and have no work now. It's difficult. We should now work on maintaining peace in the area and helping the victims."

On Sunday, many locals reopened their shops and started business again. The 'yatra'

started around 6 pm and ended after 30-40 minutes. Police, along with religious leaders, then made announcements asking people to return home.

DCP (Northwest) Usha Rangani said, "Locals from both communities had planned this yatra. We supported them and deployed adequate staff who marched along with them. It was successful."

Gurgaon cash van loot: Ex-employee among six arrested

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

GURGAON, APRIL 24

DAYS AFTER a group of men allegedly robbed Rs 96.32 lakh at gunpoint after throwing chilli powder at two employees of a private cash transportation company in Gurgaon, police said they have arrested six of the accused. Police recovered Rs 70.5 lakh cash, one revolver and four cartridges from their possession.

Police Commissioner Kala Ramachandran said one of the accused was a former employee of the cash transportation company and was aware of the route of the van and had helped in conducting a recce. "The accused planned the loot on a Monday as they were aware that collection is highest that day. After the loot, three among the accused had gone to the Vaishno Devi shrine in Katra to offer prayers for successfully decamping with the cash," said Ramachandran.

Police said analysis of CCTV footage outside the showroom near the crime scene showed that the accused had escaped in an Alto car, which had a fake number plate. "Four crime teams were deputed and after investigation, the car's original number plate was traced to Delhi," said the commissioner.

Police said on the night of Thursday and Friday, a team arrested car owner and recovered

Police Commissioner Kala Ramachandran said one of the accused was a former employee of the cash transportation firm and was aware of the route of the van

the vehicle and fake plate. During questioning, police said he revealed the names of four accomplices. Police said one of them went to UP and three men went to Vaishno Devi.

On Friday, three teams of the crime branch were formed — one left for Katra while two were stationed at Pathankot and at Shambhu border in Ambala.

Police said the team at Katra tracked the culprits to a hotel but they had checked out. The team there alerted those at Shambhu and Pathankot. SP Ambala was also requested for assistance at the toll plaza. The three men were arrested from Ambala toll plaza Saturday night, said police.

Police said raids were conducted on the night of Saturday and Sunday and two more accomplices were arrested.

"One of them had worked as a driver of the cash van in the same company last year and was aware of the route," said the commissioner.

Kerala edu minister, Atishi spar over govt school visit

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

KERALA STATE Education Minister V Sivankutty Sunday responded to a tweet by AAP MLA Atishi stating that "officials from Kerala" visited a government school in Delhi, asserting that his state's Department of Education never sent any officials for the purpose. Atishi, the MLA from Kalkaji, responded saying that she never mentioned they were officials from the Kerala government.

On Saturday, Atishi met Victor T.I., the regional secretary of CBSE School Management Association Kerala, and M Dinesh Babu, the treasurer of the Confederation of Kerala Sahodaya Complexes, and they visited a school in her constituency in Kalkaji.

She had posted about their visit on her Twitter handle on Saturday stating, "It was wonderful to host officials from Kerala at one of our schools in Kalkaji. They were keen to understand and implement our education model in their state. This is @Arvind Kejriwal Govt's idea of nation building. Development through collaboration."

On Sunday afternoon, Sivankutty responded to her tweet. "Kerala's Dept of Education has not sent anyone to learn about the 'Delhi Model'. At the same time, all assistance was provided to officials who had visited from Delhi to study the 'Kerala Model' last month. We would like to know which



(Left) Kerala govt didn't send officials to Delhi schools, said state education minister V Sivankutty; AAP MLA Atishi responded that she didn't mention they were from govt

'officials' were welcomed by the AAP MLA," he said.

Atishi told *The Indian Express* that the response "seems to be politically motivated". "The press release we had issued on Saturday evening very clearly mentions the designations of the guests and all the reporting on the visit clearly says that these are people from CBSE school associations. Even in my tweet, I have not stated that they are from the Kerala government. There is no clarification to be issued," she said.

The press release issued by the Delhi government on Saturday had referred to the guests as "dignitaries" and "educationists".

M Dinesh Babu, who is also principal of CSM Central School in Thrissur, said he had visited the school in his individual capacity. "There is no role of the government in this. We were especially attracted by the Happiness and Deshbhakti curriculums and Mr



Victor, who is also the manager of a CBSE school, had written that he would like to meet madam and know about the modus operandi from her. Our intention was nothing but to implement some good things for our children. We both visited in our individual capacity but will be sharing our experience with other CBSE schools," he said.

After Sivankutty's remark, Atishi put up another tweet stating: "Dr B.R. Ambedkar School of Specialised Excellence, Kalkaji, was visited yesterday by Mr. Victor T.I, Regional Secy of CBSE School Management Association and Dr. M. Dinesh Babu, Confederation of Kerala Sahodaya Complexes."

In another tweet on Saturday evening, she said: "Dear Sivankutty ji, it would have been good if you had done a fact check before tweeting on this issue. You might want to have a look at our press release to see what we actually said!"

Punjab CM to visit Delhi govt schools and hospitals

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

PUNJAB CHIEF Minister Bhagwant Mann, along with state ministers and officers, will tour Delhi government schools and hospitals with Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal on Monday and Tuesday to learn about the models and replicate them in Punjab.

"... CM Mann will see Delhi government's schools, hospitals and mohalla clinics and understand details about the changes made by the Kejriwal government. He will also visit mohalla clinics and polyclinics developed at different places in Delhi and understand how they provide health facilities to the general public near their homes and how it benefits locals," a statement issued by the government said.

The visit comes days after opposition parties in Punjab alleged the AAP government was being run through "remote control" from the Capital.

Earlier this month, Kejriwal met the Punjab chief secretary, Punjab State Power Corporation Limited chief along with other power department officials in Delhi. Mann was not in attendance. Officials said the meeting was called to discuss AAP's promise to provide 300 units of free power in Punjab. This led to a controversy, with opposition parties in Punjab hitting out at the ruling AAP for sending state government officials to meet the Delhi CM.

752 snatching cases in past month: Data

MAHENDER SINGH MANRAL

NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

AROUND 752 snatching incidents have been reported in the last one month in Delhi — 24 per day on an average — as compared to 597 last year in the same period, police data shows. 1,746 persons have been arrested in the last four months of whom 1,237 are "first-time" offenders, as per data.

This was discussed during a crime review meeting at the Delhi Police HQ Saturday by the Police Commissioner with Special CPs, Joint CPs and 15 district DCPs, along with preventive strategies by the district police to curb such incidents, an officer said.

As per police data this year, till April 20, a total of 3,063 cases of snatching were reported as compared to 2,899 in the same period last year; 890 robbery incidents took place this year as compared to 735 last year; and 4,749 cases of house theft/burglary were reported this year as compared to 1,578 last year.

"This year, 1,746 persons have been arrested till April 20 — 1,237 were first-time offenders while 509 have a criminal record. In robbery cases, 1,526 persons have been arrested of whom 1,032 are first timers while 494 have a record. In house theft/burglary cases, of 1,234 persons arrested, 897 are first-time offenders and 337 of them have a criminal record," a senior police officer said.

An officer said a one-month review between March 24 to April

20 shows that several districts that reported fewer snatching cases last year have seen a spike this year. "In Northeast district, 102 incidents have been reported this year as compared to 75 last year; 60 incidents were seen in Northwest district as compared to 35 last year; 50 in Southeast district as compared to 28 last year; 37 in Outer-north district as compared to 15 last year; and 55 incidents in Dwarka this year as compared to 32 last year," data shows.

In other districts, such as East, Central and North, data shows that snatching incidents are fewer this year as compared to last year.

The police chief also analysed solved and recovery percentage of cases. "Solved percentage of snatching cases is 52%, recovery is 17%; solved percentage in robbery cases is 91% and recovery is 53%. When it comes to thefts, recovery is 10%," an officer said.

When contacted, Delhi Police PRO Anesh Roy said "there has been a drop of 60% (59.8%) in PCR calls related to snatching in 2022 compared to the same period in 2021. As PCR calls are made by citizens, the 60% fall reflects a massive actual drop in instances of snatching in the city. This is a result of multi-pronged efforts, including prompt registration of cases followed by efforts to identify and arrest the criminals involved. This is reflected from the fact that though 60% fewer PCR calls were reported, the number of snatchers arrested in 2022 (1,746) is 80 more compared to 2021."



New Delhi



6 GOVT & POLITICS



DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



THE MASTERSTROKE

DAYS AFTER Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai announced that the airport at Shivamogga would be named after his predecessor B S Yediyurappa, the latter on Sunday played a political masterstroke. Yediyurappa, a BJP veteran known for his shrewd moves, wrote to the Chief Minister, advising him not to name the airport after him. The airport should be named after someone who has contributed to the betterment of the nation, he wrote. By doing so, Yediyurappa not only silenced critics and earned praises from the ordinary Kannadigas but the move is also expected to be appreciated by the BJP's top leadership, said those close to him. They said the PM has always asked party men to hold the nation and the party above themselves.

PARTY FORTRESS

BJP NATIONAL president J P Nadda on Sunday made a short trip to Ghaziabad where he along with his party workers listened to the Prime Minister's monthly radio programme *Mann Ki Baat*. The event was organised at booth no 327 in Sahibabad Assembly constituency, which the BJP won in 2017 and 2022 with the highest margin in UP. At the venue, a life-size cut-out of Prime Minister Narendra Modi was placed, where people could click selfies. On the occasion, Nadda made a brief speech and said that through this programme, the Prime Minister has connected himself with the public. BJP Rajya Sabha MP and national media in-charge Anil Baluni and BJP's West UP president Mohit Beniwal were also present.

REVIVAL MODE

IN THE run-up to the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls earlier this year, the RLD led by Jayant Chaudhary was betting big on its alliance with the SP. The results were not too impressive with the party managing to win eight out of 33 seats it contested. But for a party that had no representation in the Assembly, with its lone MLA switching to the BJP in 2018, the performance appears to have boosted its confidence levels. On Sunday, the party held a meeting of its national executive at the Constitution Club of India in Delhi. The party has decided to launch a fund-raising and membership drive on May 1. It also plans to launch a mobile app to establish direct connect with people, who will be able to flag their grievances on governance and civic issues through it.

Former Governor of Maharashtra Sankaranarayanan passes away at 90

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
APRIL 24

SENIOR CONGRESS leader K Sankaranarayanan, who had served as governor of several states, died in Palakkad on Sunday. He was 90.

Sankaranarayanan had served as governor of Maharashtra from 2010 to 2014. Prior to that, he had been governor in Nagaland and Jharkhand. While serving as the governor in Nagaland, Sankaranarayanan had held the additional charge of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

In Kerala, the senior Congress leader had served as the convener of Congress-led United Democratic Front from 1985 to 2001. Elected to Kerala Assembly from various constituencies in his home district Palakkad, Sankaranarayanan had served as minister in cabinets led by K Karunakaran and A K Antony.

How the sedition charge has held up in court in Maharashtra

SADAF MODAK
MUMBAI, APRIL 24

AMONG THOSE booked for sedition in the last decade in Maharashtra are a cartoonist, a student who allegedly raised a slogan at a queer march, actor Kangana Ranaut and the accused in the Elgaar Parishad case. In all except the Elgaar Parishad case, the invocation of the sedition charge has led to criticism of investigating authorities by courts. On Sunday, the charge was invoked against MP Navneet Rana and her MLA husband Ravi Rana by the Mumbai police.

Section 124A of the IPC, which deals with sedition, reads like this: Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite dissatisfaction towards the government established by law. The maximum punishment under the Section is life

PM Modi receives first Lata Mangeshkar Award

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, APRIL 24

ON SUNDAY evening, Prime Minister Narendra Modi received the first Lata Deenanath Mangeshkar Award at an event in Mumbai. "What can be a greater privilege than to have received the love of a sister from Lata Didi, who has given the gift of love and emotion to generations," he said in his acceptance speech.

Renowned singer Lata Mangeshkar passed away in February at the age of 92. The award is instituted in her memory and will be given annually on April 24.

Master Deenanath Mangeshkar Smruti Pratishthan, Pune, a registered public charitable trust established by the Mangeshkar Family, felicitated achievements in arts, culture, medicine and social work, among which Modi was the recipient of the "special individual award".

"He is indeed one of the greatest leaders our great nation has seen in its glorious history of thousands of years," read a statement from the trust.

The award ceremony was in honour of the 80th Memorial Day of the late Marathi theatre actor and classical singer, Deenanath Mangeshkar.

"When it comes to receiving honours, I stay away from them. I can't adjust to them but when the award comes in Lata Didi's name and the family's claim over me, it is my responsibility to come here," Modi said. He also said that after many years, Lata Didi won't be there for rakhi. He praised her achievement in music.

Mangeshkar family members, Meena Khadikar, Asha Bhosle and Adinath Mangeshkar, presented the award to Modi.

Other recipients included actors Jackie Shroff and Asha Parekh, who were awarded the Master Deenanath Puraskar for cinema, classical singer Rahul Deshpande for Indian music, and Mumbai's dabbawallas for social service.



PM Narendra Modi receives the award from Mangeshkar sisters Asha Bhosle, Usha Mangeshkar and Meena Khadikar, during a ceremony in Mumbai. *PTI*

CM skips event with PM, second time in 2 months

YOGESH NAIK,
VISHWAS WAGHMODE
& MANOJ MORE
MUMBAI, PUNE, APRIL 24

AMID RISING tensions between the Shiv Sena and BJP, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday stayed away from the first Lata Dinanath Mangeshkar Award in Mumbai where Prime Minister Narendra Modi was honoured by the Mangeshkar family. Sources in the Sena said the party is upset with the Mangeshkar family for not putting the CM's name on the invitation card for the event.

Thackeray, though, visited the home of 80-year-old Chandrabhaga Shinde who was seen protesting outside Matoshree, his residence, against independent MLA Ravi Rana and MP Navneet Rana on Saturday.

According to a government official, Industries Minister Subhash Desai was assigned to attend the award function on behalf of the state government. Desai along with the Minister of State for Protocol Aditi Tatkare was to receive the PM; later, Environment

Minister Aaditya Thackeray also joined them at the airport.

This is not the first time the CM has skipped a programme with the PM. On March 6, when the PM visited Pune to inaugurate the Pune Metro rail project, he had stayed away from the function. The Sena had said the CM was recovering from a surgery.

When asked whether the CM deliberately avoided sharing platform with the PM as his government was, as repeatedly alleged by MVA leaders, targeting them through central agencies, Shiv Sena's chief spokesperson Sanjay Raut replied in the affirmative. However, he refused to elaborate.

Sources said two members of the Mangeshkar family had visited 'Varsha', the CM's official residence, to invite him to the event on Saturday.

"It is a fact that Thackeray's name wasn't there on the invitation card despite him being the CM. It is an insult to the Marathi people of Maharashtra. Hence, the CM did not go for the function," a Sena leader told *The Indian Express*.

FULL REPORT ON
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RANA KAPOOR's M F HUSAIN PAINTING ALLEGATION

Cong questions credibility, accuses central govt of political vendetta

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

THE CONGRESS on Sunday hit out at the BJP government, accusing it of indulging in "political vendetta", and questioned the credibility of Yes Bank co-founder Rana Kapoor after he told the Enforcement Directorate that he was "forced" to buy an MF Husain painting from Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and the sale proceeds were utilised by the Gandhi family for the medical treatment of Sonia Gandhi in New York.

Kapoor's statement is part of the chargesheet filed by the ED in a special court in Mumbai.

The Congress did not deny the transaction between Rana and Priyanka but said it took place 12 years ago. Besides, it argued that Rana is called a "crook" and a "fraudster" and whether the statement by such a person who is yearning for freedom from jail has any credibility. It said he may have given the state-

Ukraine focus as 8 leaders from Europe visit India

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

DAYS AFTER British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's visit to India at least eight leaders and ministers from Europe are scheduled to be in the country over the next couple of days, including Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission.

Von der Leyen, who was Germany's defence minister under Chancellor Angela Merkel until 2019, will meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday, where the crisis arising out of the Russia-Ukraine conflict is expected to come up for discussion.

The foreign ministers of Poland, Lithuania, Slovenia, Portugal, the Netherlands, Norway, and Luxembourg are also expected to be in India.

While they are all coming for the Raisina Dialogue, the flagship conference on geo-politics and geo-economics organised by the Ministry of External Affairs and the Observer Research Foundation on April 25-27, the war in Ukraine is likely to dominate their conversations with

Indian interlocutors. Prime Minister Johnson too discussed the war with the Indian leadership.

The foreign ministers of Argentina, Armenia, Guyana, Nigeria, Madagascar, and Philippines too are expected to attend the conference. Also likely to be present are the former PM of Sweden Carl Bildt, the former PM of Canada Stephen Harper, the former President of the Maldives Mohamed Nasheed, and the former Australian PM Anthony Abbott.

The conference beginning Monday comes a week before PM Narendra Modi leaves for Germany and Denmark on his first overseas visit this year. He may also go to France, depending on the outcome of Sunday's French presidential election.

In Berlin, the PM will meet with Chancellor Olaf Scholz on May 2, before heading to Copenhagen where he will meet the PMs of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and Norway for the India-Nordic summit. There too, the Ukraine-Russia crisis is expected to top the agenda.

Earlier this month, President Von der Leyen became the first

EU chief calls for reducing dependency on Russian fuel amid Ukraine conflict

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

EUROPEAN COMMISSION president Ursula von der Leyen has said that the war in Ukraine has been a "stark reminder for Europe" that "dependency on Russian fuel is not sustainable", emphasising on transition towards home-grown renewable energy.

In her speech at the International Solar Alliance in New Delhi, the EU chief said, "I am thinking about the war that Russia has unleashed against Ukraine. For us, Europeans, it is a stark reminder that our dependency on



EU chief Ursula von der Leyen plants a sapling at TERI in Gurugram. *PTI*

Russian fossil fuels is not sustainable. So, our transition to home-grown renewable energy is not only good for the environment, but it also becomes a strategic investment in security. Energy policy is also security policy..."

Pointing out that "India and the EU are on the same paths", the EU chief said that PM Modi has already announced that India should be energy independent before it celebrates 100 years of independence. "This will be in 2047. So it is in our common interest that this independence of fossil fuel that comes from abroad is a transformation into renewable and clean energy."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Chinese Foreign minister Wang Yi too visited India in March.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met with his counterparts from the Philippines, Argentina, and Nigeria on Sunday.

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Cong, Gandhis extortionists, were selling Padma Bhushan, alleges BJP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

THE CONGRESS and the Gandhis are "extortionists" and were also selling the Padma Bhushan, the BJP alleged on Sunday, attacking its rival over Yes Bank co-founder Rana Kapoor's allegation that he was forced to buy an M F Husain painting from Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, refusing which would prevent him from getting the award.

Referring to the Congress election symbol 'hand', BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said, "The Congress hand is with corruption... while common people were suffering, the Congress and the Gandhi family were enjoying."

Kapoor has told the Enforcement Directorate that he was "forced" to buy the M F Husain painting from Priyanka Gandhi and the sale proceeds were utilised by the Gandhi family for the medical treatment of Congress president Sonia Gandhi in New York, according to the charge sheet filed by the federal anti-money laundering agency in a special court in Mumbai.

He also said that he was told by the then petroleum minister Murli Deora that refusal to buy the painting will not only prevent him from building a relationship with the Gandhi family but also prevent him from getting the 'Padma Bhushan' award, it stated.

Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters, Bhatia said that "...when the Congress was in power, members of the Gandhi family used to put pressure on party leaders to ensure the painting is bought".

Stating that he had paid a cheque of Rs 2 crore, Kapoor claimed that "Milind Deora (son of the late Murli Deora and former Congress MP) later conveyed to him confidentially that the sale proceeds were utilised by the Gandhi family for the medical treatment of Sonia Gandhi in New York", according to the charge sheet.

Vets just a call away for dairy farmers, even in remote areas

PARTHA SARATHI
BISWAS
PUNE, APRIL 24

AS SOON as Biplav Das realised that his 4-year-old Holstein Fraser was to have a difficult birth, he reached out for his phone. Das, a 40-year-old dairy farmer from Etapalli taluka in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra, called the toll-free number of 1962 to connect to the Maha Pashudhan Sanjeevani helpline.

"It was around 9.30 am when I called the helpline and by 10 a veterinarian was at my doorstep," said Das whose herd has 15 animals who produce 75 litres every day.

Dr Dyaneshwar Gavanhe, the veterinarian, had to spend around an hour to assist the animal in labour and successfully helped in the delivery of a calf. Without this timely intervention, Das admits,

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he would have lost the animal that he bought for Rs 80,000 and one that yields around 18 litres of milk per day. Das has five acres of land in the village of Murwada. He leases out the land and dairy is his main source of income. "In our remote area, access to animal healthcare is difficult, but this helpline is like a blessing for us."

Animal husbandry, which was once thought to be a secondary income source for farmers has over time become the primary source of income for many farmers.

Like Das, there are many farmers for whom access to good quality animal healthcare is must to ensure they do not lose their cat-



The call centre in Pune attends calls and maps the doctors for best utilisation of resources. *Express*

tle to diseases. Without access to proper healthcare for their animals, farmers are often at the mercy of untrained quacks.

Maha Pashudhan Sanjeevani, under the Mukhyamantri Pashu Swasthya Yojana, aims to address this by leveraging technology and making best usage of the available

resources. The toll-free number 1962 is the front face of an integrated system, which uses artificial intelligence to map available healthcare professionals in the best possible way.

Housed within the office of the Commissionerate of Animal Husbandry, the project is a col-

laboration between the Bharat Financial Inclusion Limited (a wholly owned subsidiary of IndusInd Bank) and the state's animal husbandry department. A formal MoU was signed in November 2020 and the project kicked off in May 2021. Under the project, the software, the hardware and manpower needed to run the call centre is provided by the former while the office and field staff is from the state government.

Dr Premnath Singh, senior lead manager of the project, said they aim to ensure that every farmer gets veterinary services right at his doorstep. The 15-seater call centres are managed by trained para-veterinarians. The software, developed by Singh and his team, has mapped 908 villages in 72 talukas in the state. Further, 3,566 doctors and paravets are also mapped under the scheme.

"The objective is simple:

Instead of the farmer travelling to the veterinarians, we want it the other way round. Our role is to get the nearest available professional to attend the case. In this way, both save time and resources," he said.

Once the farmer calls, the software immediately locates the nearest animal healthcare professional. The attending Customer Response Office (CRO) makes the initial inquiries and notes down the symptoms of the animals. "Our CROs are trained paravets so they can understand what is wrong with the animal and login the details. An SMS is generated for the farmer and it contains the mobile number of the professional who is going to attend to the animal," he said.

At the doctor's end, the details collated by the CRO are shared along with the phone number and location of the farmer. Depending on the severity of the case, the doctor either travels on

his bike or an ambulance.

The system also has a mechanism to collect feedback from the farmers at the end of the service.

Farmers make calls not only for emergencies but also to ask for artificial insemination and vaccination needs. Sachindra Pratap Singh, Commissioner (Animal Husbandry), said that till date, around 24,000 calls have been received and the CROs have been 18,000 outbound calls. More than half the inbound calls were for curative treatment, while over 8,000 calls were from farmers who wanted details about government schemes.

Dr Singh said 5 per cent of the inbound calls were of the "super critical" category and required attention within 5 hours as per the set protocols. "Thanks to the correct mapping of the doctors to the farmer there was not a single time when the set protocol was missed."

MANN KI BAAT

Celebrate festivals with harmony, but guard against Covid, says PM

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

WITH A string of festivals coming up, Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday urged people not to lower their guard against Covid. “Celebrate these festivals with great gaiety and harmony,” Modi said as he greeted people in advance for Eid, Akshaya Tritiya, Vaishakh Budh Purnima and the birth anniversary of Bhagwan Parshuram. “In the midst of all this, you also have to be alert against corona. Wearing a mask, washing hands at regular intervals, whatever are the necessary measures for prevention, keep following them.” The PM’s caution comes amidst a sudden rise in Covid cases in parts of the country, including Delhi, with authorities re-imposing mask restrictions in the National Capital Region. Delivering his 88th Mann Ki Baat address, the PM also spoke on how India is galloping towards being a cashless economy with digital transactions worth Rs 20,000 crore taking place each day. “In the last few years, BHIM UPI has rapidly become a part of our economy and habits.

Church priest held for raping minor girl in UP

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MEERUT, APRIL 24

A 67-YEAR-OLD church priest was arrested on Saturday afternoon for allegedly raping a minor Dalit girl in a village in Baghpat district, police said. Police said the minor was sent for a medical examination. The DNA samples of both the girl and the accused have been collected, they said. “The girl’s mother told the police that the priest had been molesting the minor for nearly a month and had been giving the girl money to keep quiet. On Friday evening, the girl told her mother that she had been raped by the priest. She also told her mother that the accused used to touch her private parts and show her obscene films on his mobile phone,” police said.

AAP, BJP WIN 1 SEAT EACH

BJP, ally sweep Guwahati civic polls

TORA AGARWALA
GUWAHATI, APRIL 24

THE BHARATIYA Janata Party (BJP) and ally Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) Sunday won a comfortable 58 out of 60 wards in the Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC) elections, while the Congress drew a blank. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the regional Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) won one seat each. The GMC polls were held on April 21, after 9 years. The State Election Commission said the BJP won 52 seats (including

three uncontested winners), AGP 6, BJP and AAP one each. Following the results, Prime Minister Narendra Modi thanked the people of Guwahati for the “resounding mandate.” “Thank you Guwahati! The people of this lovely city have given a resounding mandate to @BJP4Assam to build on the agenda of development. They have also blessed the hardwork of the state government under CM @himantabiswa. My gratitude to every BJP Karyakarta for the hardwork” he tweeted. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said that the victory was a result of PM

Need to amend anti-defection law: Venkaiah

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BENGALURU, APRIL 24

VICE-PRESIDENT Venkaiah Naidu on Sunday expressed concern over the loopholes in the anti-defection law and pitched for amendments to the legislation to make it effective. Delivering a lecture on ‘Media’s role in New India’ at the Press Club here, Naidu said there are certain loopholes in the anti-defection law which need to be plugged in order to curb defection of legislators from one party to another. “It allows wholesale defection but not retail defection. So people try to mobilise number,” he said. He also expressed unhappiness over the Speakers, Chairpersons and the courts dragging the anti-defection cases for years. According to him, sometimes the decision is made



Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu during an event at Press Club of Bangalore on Sunday. PTI

The Vice-President asked the elected representatives to resign and get re-elected than defecting to any other party.

He also expressed unhappiness over the Speakers, Chairpersons and the courts dragging the anti-defection cases for years. According to him, sometimes the decision is made

even by the courts after the tenure is over. As April 24 happened to be the Panchayat Raj Day, Naidu underlined the need to strengthen the local bodies, which are part of the three-tier administration of Indian democracy. Referring to the role of media, he said it is important for the nation’s progress, in reaching out to the aspirations of the people and developmental goals of the government. “You are not dealing with a person, you are dealing with a chief minister, leader of the opposition, Prime Minister, Governor... If they go wrong, then you have got every right to criticise but you should not undermine the institution,” he said.

Heat wave to return over northwest India, says IMD

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
PUNE, APRIL 24

AFTER A brief break, heat wave conditions are set to return over northwest and central India regions this week, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has said. The day temperatures over Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Maharashtra, and Odisha are set to gradually rise by 2 to 3 degrees Celsius and prevail till April 28. Heat wave has already set in

over Kutch-Saurashtra, where the maximum temperatures ranged between 40-42 degrees Celsius during the weekend. “Heat wave shall prevail over Gujarat state for the next five days,” the weather department’s bulletin issued on Sunday said. On Sunday, some of the country’s hottest areas were in northwest India regions. The highest maximum temperatures (in degrees Celsius) were recorded at Banda in Uttar Pradesh (44), Barmer in Rajasthan (42.7) and Kanpur in UP (42.6). Delhi and Gurgaon recorded 41.4 degrees Celsius each.



Ashish Mishra being taken into custody in Uttar Pradesh’s Lakhimpur Kheri district on Sunday. PTI

Lakhimpur Kheri case: Ashish Mishra surrenders, sent to jail

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
LUCKNOW, APRIL 25

SIX DAYS after the Supreme Court set aside the Allahabad High Court order granting him bail, Lakhimpur Kheri violence case accused and Union minister Ajay Kumar Mishra Teni’s son Ashish Mishra on Sunday surrendered in a local court that sent him back to jail. A bench of Chief Justice of India NV Ramana, Justice Surya Kant and Justice Hima Kohli had asked him to surrender within a week. Lakhimpur Kheri Senior Jail Superintendent PP Singh confirmed that Ashish was brought back to the prison. Ashish surrendered in the court of the Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM) Lakhimpur Kheri from where he was taken to the district jail, a senior police officer said. The apex court had also referred the matter back to the high court to consider afresh whether or not Ashish should be given bail after hearing the victims’ families. On October 3 last year, a convoy of three SUVs, including a Mahindra

Thar owned by Ashish’s father Ajay Mishra, allegedly ran over a group of protesting farmers in Lakhimpur Kheri. Four farmers and a journalist were killed and several others were injured. In the ensuing violence, two BJP workers and the Mahindra Thar driver were killed. On November 17, the SC had appointed former Punjab and Haryana High Court judge Rakesh Kumar Jain to monitor the probe by a special investigation team (SIT) constituted by Uttar Pradesh government. Following an investigation and chargesheet, the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court granted Ashish bail on February 10, saying the driver might have speeded up the vehicle to save himself given there were thousands of protesters. The killing of the driver and the co-passengers could not be overlooked, it added. The families of some of the victims then approached the Supreme Court contending that they were not heard when Ashish’s bail application was taken up by the HC. The petitioners added that they were denied the opportunity to present their case even as they had applied again.

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IMPORTANT DATES	SCB	KVPPY	JEE (Advanced)
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Last date for online applications	May 29, 2022	September 15, 2022	September 15, 2022
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All inquiries must be addressed to:
Chairperson, Joint Admission Committee 2022
Email: ask-jac2022@iiserpune.ac.in, Website: <http://www.iiseradmission.in>
Phone: 020 25908222 (2 PM to 5 PM, Monday to Friday)

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PUBLIC NOTICE

PUBLIC HEARING AND EXTENSION OF LAST DATE FOR SUBMISSION OF COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS

1. The Commission vide its Public Notice published on 31/03/2022 in leading newspapers had invited suggestions/comments from Stakeholders on Tariff Petitions filed by Generation Companies (IPGCL & PPCL), Transmission Licensee (DTL) and Distribution Licensees (NDMC, BRPL, BYPL & TPDDL) of Delhi for True-up of expenses of FY 2020-21 and Aggregate Revenue Requirement (ARR) & Tariff for FY 2022-23. The last date for receipt of comments/suggestions on the Tariff Petitions was 25/04/2022 or date of Public Hearing, whichever is later.

2. Considering the current COVID-19 situation, it has been decided that Public Hearing will be conducted virtually for issuance of Tariff Orders related to True-up of FY 2020 21 and ARR for FY 2022-23. The Virtual Public Hearing will be held on 12/05/2022 and 13/05/2022 as follows:

Dates	12/05/2022 and 13/05/2022
Timings	11:00 AM to 1:00 PM and 2:00 PM to 5:00 PM
Last Date for Registration	9/05/2022 at 3:00 PM
Platform	Google Meet
Email ID for Registration	dercpublichearing@gmail.com

3. The procedure for registration for attending the Virtual Public Hearing is uploaded on the website of the Commission and time slots to stakeholders will be intimated accordingly.

4. Further, considering the request from various Stakeholders, the last date of submission of comments/suggestions on the said Tariff Petitions which was earlier till 25/04/2022 has been extended till 13/05/2022. The comments may be submitted personally or by post Or through e-mail to the Commission. The comments can also be e-mailed to the Secretary, DERC at the email address secyderc@nic.in

Sd/-
Secretary
Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission

DIP/SHABDARTH/0054/22-23

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION (SPORTS) DIRECTORATE OF EDUCATION SPORTS BRANCH, GOVT. OF NCT OF DELHI CHHATRASAL STADIUM, MODEL TOWN, DELHI

No. DE. 42/PE & NI/2020-21/225 Dated: 18.04.2022

Walk-in Inerview

Name of Post	1. Band Teachers/ Instructors (29 posts) 2. Orchestra Teachers/Instructors (15 posts)
Description	The Directorate of Education intends to conduct walk-in interview to engage twenty-nine band Teachers/Instructors and fifteen Orchestra Teachers/Instructors on a fixed consolidated salary Rs. 38,100/- per month through SSA for one year on contract basis. The person interested can appear for interview as per schedule given below.
Date of Interview	For Band Teachers/ Instructors: 05.05.2022 and 06.05.2022 from 11.00 AM to 05.00 PM For Orchestra Teachers/Instructors: 07.05.2022 from 11.00 AM to 05.00 PM
Venue	Sports Branch, Chhatrasal Stadium, Model Town Delhi-09

Entire details can be seen at edudel.nic.in

Sd/-
(SANJAY KUMAR AMBASTA)
Deputy Director of Education (Sports Branch)
DIP/Shabdarth/0046/22-23

New Delhi



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

CAPITAL OUTREACH

In his first J&K visit since August 2019, PM frames an economic push; his message of hope needs a political one as well

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA Modi's first visit to Jammu and Kashmir after its August 5, 2019 bifurcation and the end of its special status appeared to have two purposes. One, on a day officially observed as Panchayati Raj day, he projected the thousands of people's representatives elected through the panchayat system — freshers, as it were, in politics — as the “real” engines of governance at the “grass-roots” of the former state. “Empowerment” of the people has been a pet theme of the Modi government after the BJP pulled out of the ruling coalition led by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in 2018, setting the stage for the events of the following year. The Modi government, since May 2019, has done its best to marginalise the established political parties in Kashmir. It is no secret that the most empowered section in J&K is the bureaucracy, accountable only to itself. The panchayats are a small cog in the wheel of the administration, and their members, elected in a process marred by violence and living under the threat of militants, know it. It is widely understood that only an Assembly election can truly empower the people through their chosen legislators, just like it does in the rest of the country. The delay in holding these elections was justified in the name of a delimitation process. Putting it off any more can only confirm the government's continuing contempt for the will of the people and the democratic process in J&K.

The second objective, to announce investments by some of the biggest companies in the United Arab Emirates, is possibly far more significant and consequential, from a strategic point of view. The UAE is an important member of the Organisation of Islamic Conference and as such, is an influencer in the Islamic world. Two years ago, it took the radical step of shaking hands with Israel. Now, the government claims, the Arab country's most important business houses appear ready to invest in the Modi government's “naya” Kashmir. There is a message in this for the people of Kashmir, including the diaspora, a significant number have made the UAE their home. As well, it is a message to Pakistan, which describes the UAE as a “brother country”. The secret India-Pakistan backchannel talks were reportedly held in that country. It is to be seen what, if any, impact this might have on the positioning over Kashmir by the new government in Islamabad.

In his outreach to the youth in the Valley, the prime minister said, “You will never suffer the way your parents, grandparents did in the past.” This welcome message of hope can be realised on the ground only if the youth become stakeholders in the building of the state. The investment push, infrastructure development and the flow of tourists into the Valley need, for their fruition, a genuine political process, an essential aspect of a democracy.

A COST TO PAY

Current inflation is driven by supply shortages caused by Covid, Ukraine-Russia war. RBI has few options to reverse course

SLAYING THE INFLATION monster is relatively easy when the underlying causes have primarily to do with demand. If an economy grows too fast on the back of rising aggregate demand, firms tend to initially respond by employing more workers, pushing up wages and costs of other inputs. As capacity utilisation rises to levels reducing the amount of unused productive resources, firms will next start increasing prices. The standard tool of central banks to address “demand-pull” inflation has been to raise interest rates. By making it costlier for firms and households to borrow, demand for investment and consumption goods along with workers comes down, thereby cooling an overheated economy.

The problem, however, comes when inflation isn't demand-led. Data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy shows the unemployment rate in March at 7.6 per cent. That's rather high, given a simultaneous fall in the labour participation rate (LPR) to 39.5 per cent. If even a shrunken labour force is struggling to find employment, it's hardly indicative of a tightening job market. The RBI's latest survey of the manufacturing sector shows the overall capacity utilisation by reporting companies at 72.4 per cent for October-December. Although the highest in 10 quarters, it is below the long-term average of 75 per cent from 2008-09 to 2018-19. If anything, it points to recovery from a deep slowdown that began in 2019-20. And the recovery isn't strong enough to induce overheating — unlike in the US, which had a 3.6 per cent unemployment rate on an LPR of 62.4 per cent in March. Also, the fact that annual wholesale inflation in March, at 14.55 per cent, was more than double the 6.95 per cent rate at retail level suggests limited pricing power with firms: Current demand conditions aren't allowing them to fully pass on the higher costs at producer level to consumers.

What most countries, including India, are experiencing today is “supply-shock” inflation. There have been too many supply chain disruptions over the last two years, caused first by the Covid-triggered lockdowns and now the Russia-Ukraine war. Coming one after another, they have proved to be persistent than transitory, resulting in what economists term as a leftward shift in the aggregate supply curve and driving up prices for the same or even lower levels of demand. Those critical of the RBI, for being “behind the curve”, should know there's little that central banks can do about inflation caused by supply-side factors. If interest rates are a cost themselves, wouldn't hiking risk worsen inflation by impeding supply? And how does cooling something that isn't hot help really? Policymakers can, perhaps, draw more lessons from the stagflation decade of the 1970s. Then too, it was supply shocks from geopolitics that defied simple technocratic solutions. Simply put, there are limits to how much interest rates can be increased.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



MANISH SABHARWAL AND RITUPARNA CHAKRABORTY

MOST PEOPLE WON'T buy a plane ticket from Bengaluru to Delhi for 2032 because common sense suggests many things will change, the relationship between things will change, and an airline silly enough to sell tickets so far in advance will probably be dead. Yet, it's impossible to have a meeting about skill development without a well-meaning soul suggesting commissioning a report predicting where jobs will be in 2032. Nobody can know what jobs will be created in the long run. A poor country with five million people writing software for the world was impossible to predict for India in 1947, 1991 or 2001. But the inability to predict hardly means an inability to prepare. We make the case that enabling degree apprentices — a tripartite contract between an employer, university, and the youth — will make our skill system self-healing, enrol 10 million young people, and make us the world's largest apprenticeship system.

Framers by Cukier, Mayer-Schonberger, and Vericourt suggests humans think in mental models because these representations of reality allow us to see patterns, make sense of our circumstances, and think about the future. But successful mental models need thinking about causality, counterfactuals and constraints. A policy mental model that replaces this difficult work with certainty is not only inefficient but dangerous. *Planning Democracy* by Nikhil Menon skillfully sketches the mental model of P C Mahalanobis — our economy as a machine with fixed goals, levers, relationships and players. This model is why it took 72 years for 1.3 billion Indians to cross the GDP of 66 million Brits. Our labour was handicapped without capital and our capital was handicapped without labour. Our skill mental model must shift from classical physics (simplicity and linearity) to quantum physics (reflexivity and complexity). Degree apprentices are an important pillar of this new mental model. They embrace five design principles:

Learning while earning: Skill development faces a market failure in financing. Employers are not willing to pay for training or candidates

Enabling degree apprentices will make India's skill system self-healing

Apprentices became an Indian policy priority many years ago — expanding their numbers was the 20th point in the 20-point programme of 1975. But the execution was timid. We have many willing employers, universities, and kids but degree apprentice numbers are low because of regulatory cholesterol in tripartite apprenticeship contracts, online university licencing, legislative definitions, NSQF pathway to degrees, process complexities, quota simplifications, etc.

but pay a premium for trained candidates; candidates are not willing to pay for training but for jobs; financiers are unwilling to lend unless a job is guaranteed, and training institutions can't fill their classrooms. Most young Indians can't pay for building employability out-of-pocket. The income support of learning while earning is crucial to raising enrollment and making it more inclusive. Degree apprentices attract money — stipends and scholarships payments — from employers because of the high return on investment arising from these graduates having better productivity, lower attrition, and lower time needed to fill open jobs.

Learning by doing: Our skill system has largely been driven by supply — curriculum and faculty — rather than demand. The wage premium in the job market's fastest-growing part — engineering, sales, customer service, and logistics — is moving from the hard skills of quantity to quality (soft skills) that are not taught but caught. The guaranteed workplace and theory immersion of degree apprenticeships ensures kids develop the current, soft, and theoretical skills required because employers integrate a practical and theoretical curriculum with actual doing.

Learning with flexible delivery: Skills can be learnt in four classrooms: On-the-job (apprenticeships), online, on-campus, and onsite (faculty coming to workplaces). Each of these has very different price points. One of us paid Rs 18,000 per hour for an American business school campus degree while an online degree apprenticeship over five years costs about Rs 20 per hour. Massifying India's higher education — our goal of 50 per cent GER — requires equal treatment for all classrooms. Institutions offering degree apprenticeships will deliver employability and inclusiveness by combining the four classrooms in varying proportions depending on the needs, abilities, and means of different employers and young job seekers.

Learning with qualification modularity: Gandhiji imagined Nai Talim around holistic and experiential education but the policy caste system between vocational and degree edu-

cation grew larger — and stronger — with the Radhakrishnan Report (1948), Kothari Commission (1968), and New National Policy on Education (1986). Students mostly can't use a three-month certificate as an opening balance for a one-year diploma, a two-year advanced diploma, or a three-year degree. NEP 2020 proposes to remove partitions between schools, skills, and college. Degree apprenticeships offer academic credit for prior skills and for on-the-job learning, and full qualification modularity via multiple on and off-ramps between certificates, diplomas, and degrees.

Learning with signalling value: IIMs and IITs are good places to be “at” but better places to be “from”. But this signalling has created considerable supply — the world produced more graduates in the last 40 years than in the 800 years prior. Degree holders make up 60 per cent of taxi drivers in Korea, 31 per cent of US large format retail checkout clerks, and 15 per cent of high-end Indian security guards. Traditionally, institutions created signalling value by enforcing tight entry gates (IIMs/IITs) or tight exit gates (chartered accountants). But massifying higher education — with equality, excellence and employability — needs a different balance of entry and exit gates. Degree apprentices have higher capacity and employability than many pure campus degrees because the tripartite contract is a financing, signalling value and delivery innovation. Apprentices became Indian policy priority many years ago — expanding their numbers was the 20th point in the 20-point programme of 1975. But the execution was timid. We have willing employers, universities, and kids but degree apprentice numbers are low because of regulatory cholesterol in tripartite apprenticeship contracts, online university licencing, legislative definitions, NSQF pathway to degrees, process complexities, quota simplifications, etc. Regulations must change. There are 10 million good — and young — reasons that degree apprentices are an idea whose time has come.

The writers are with TeamLease Services

A SWISS PROMISE

Switzerland remains neutral, but committed to ending Russia-Ukraine conflict



RALF HECKNER

SERVING IN THE Swiss Foreign Service imposes a certain informal obligation. This is that you will often have to explain to your friends in foreign countries the rationale, and the essence of Switzerland's unique history of neutrality. I have had many conversations on this over the years, in many different countries. But never once did it occur to me that a day would come when I would be discussing this matter in the dark shadow of a potential nuclear confrontation in Europe, arising from the military aggression of one sovereign state against another.

Yet, such is the tragic reality of our times. Predictably enough, over the past weeks, I have been asked by a number of Indian friends about Switzerland's stance on Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. In particular, I have been asked whether Switzerland has abandoned its tradition of neutrality.

This week's Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi is an important forum for discussing the new security environment and its implications for the world. I am grateful for this opportunity to share my views on this matter.

Switzerland's foreign policy goals are peace, security, and the rule of law. These are the foundations of Swiss prosperity and sustainable development. The Federal Constitution requires the Swiss Government to take measures to safeguard our neutrality.

The rights and obligations of a neutral state were defined in The Hague Conventions of 1907. Of interest is that it was Tsar Nicolas II, Emperor of All the Russias, who convened this historic meeting.

The most important of these rights is the inviolability of a neutral state's territory. The main obligations of a neutral state are to refrain from acts such as engaging in war, sup-

When it comes to Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, Switzerland is in full compliance with the international obligations that come with being a neutral state. Switzerland has not abandoned her neutrality at all. But what about the fact that Switzerland is implementing the same sanctions against Russia as the European Union? Well, as an important international financial centre, Switzerland had to take action to prevent the misuse of its banking system for the financing of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. Adopting economic sanctions is compatible with the obligations of a neutral state.

plying mercenary troops to belligerent states, or allowing belligerent states to use its territory. Also, ensuring its own defence and treating belligerent states equally in terms of the exportation of war material.

So, I can categorically state that when it comes to Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, Switzerland is in full compliance with the international obligations that come with being a neutral state. Switzerland has not abandoned her neutrality at all.

But what about the fact that Switzerland is implementing the same sanctions against Russia as the European Union? Well, as an important international financial centre, Switzerland had to take action to prevent the misuse of its banking system for the financing of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. Adopting economic sanctions is compatible with the obligations of a neutral state. Switzerland's adoption of the European Union sanctions does not alter its neutrality in any way.

Switzerland has also been investing substantial diplomatic capital into solving the Ukraine conflict. Following the beginning of the Ukraine crisis in 2014, Switzerland was heavily involved in trying to bring about an end to the fighting. Switzerland presided over the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 2015. Didier Burkhalter, President of the Swiss Confederation at that time, personally lead mediation efforts. The Swiss diplomat, Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini, represented the OSCE in the 2015 negotiations about the Minsk II agreement concerning the conflict in Donbass. Another Swiss diplomat, Ambassador Thomas Greminger, served as the secretary general of the Organisation for

Security and Co-operation in Europe from 2017 to 2022. Switzerland's consistent policy explains why my country was chosen to host the 5th Ukraine Reform Conference, which should take place on July 4 and 5, in Lugano.

What next? The President of the Swiss Confederation Ignazio Cassis has made it clear that Switzerland stands ready upon request to mediate and to host peace talks on Swiss soil. The Swiss Government, like the Government of India, continues to provide humanitarian assistance to the people in Ukraine and to the Ukrainian refugees in the neighbouring countries. As in 1956 for Hungarian refugees and in 1968 for refugees from Czechoslovakia, the Swiss people have opened their arms to tens of thousands of refugees. In March alone, the Swiss people pledged 30 million CHF in private donations to Ukraine.

Everything I know and believe convinces me that even for this current crisis which dominates global fears at this time, a resolution will be found. And when that time comes, Switzerland will be part of the reconstruction and reconciliation efforts. Switzerland has a critical interest in a functioning multilateral system in Geneva and in New York. The impasse at the United Nations is the result of permanent Security Council members exercising their veto power. Switzerland, like India, is in favour of Security Council reforms.

My country is running for a seat on the United Nations Security Council for the period of 2023-24. If elected, Switzerland will always be on the side of peace, international security, and the rule of law.

The writer is Ambassador of Switzerland to India and Bhutan

APRIL 25, 1982, FORTY YEARS AGO

BELLICOSE BRITAIN

HOPES FOR A peaceful solution to the Falkland dispute sank to a new low with negotiations apparently deadlocked and British warships cruising just off South Georgia, occupied by Argentine forces. The official Argentine news agency Telam said that British ships had penetrated Argentina's naval security in South Georgia. British battle-ready warships moved within 87 km of the Falkland dependency Britain has urged its nationals in Argentina to evacuate. Argentine military sources said an attack on South Georgia was “imminent”.



LOK DAL-BJP TIE-UP

THE LOK DAL and BJP will campaign jointly in the coming elections in Haryana and Himachal Pradesh and will not put up candidates against each other, according to the Lok Dal leader, Devi Lal. The two parties have reached an understanding on seat adjustments. They have also finalised 39 constituencies where the BJP will put up its candidate.

PM PULLS UP DARBARA

A CRYPTIC REMARK by the Prime Minister to the Punjab Chief Minister, Darbara Singh,

at the meeting of the Congress (I) parliamentary board has created a stir, among Punjab politicians. The board was considering the name of the party candidate for the Faridkot assembly by-election in Punjab. Darbara Singh wanted Jagmit Singh, a Youth Congress (I) leader, to be given the ticket. Gurbinder Kaur Brar, member of the Lok Sabha from the area opposed Jagmit Singh's nomination. Mrs. Gandhi asked Darbara Singh whether Trilochan Singh Riyasti would be all right. But Darbara Singh suggested the name of Harchand Singh, a relative of his. This provoked Mr Gandhi to remark: “I notice you always do things contrary to what we say and then make excuses”.

9 THE IDEAS PAGE

Poverty and politics of freebies

In reforming the system of free food, government should take a clue from Vajpayee government's measures to use scarce resources wisely



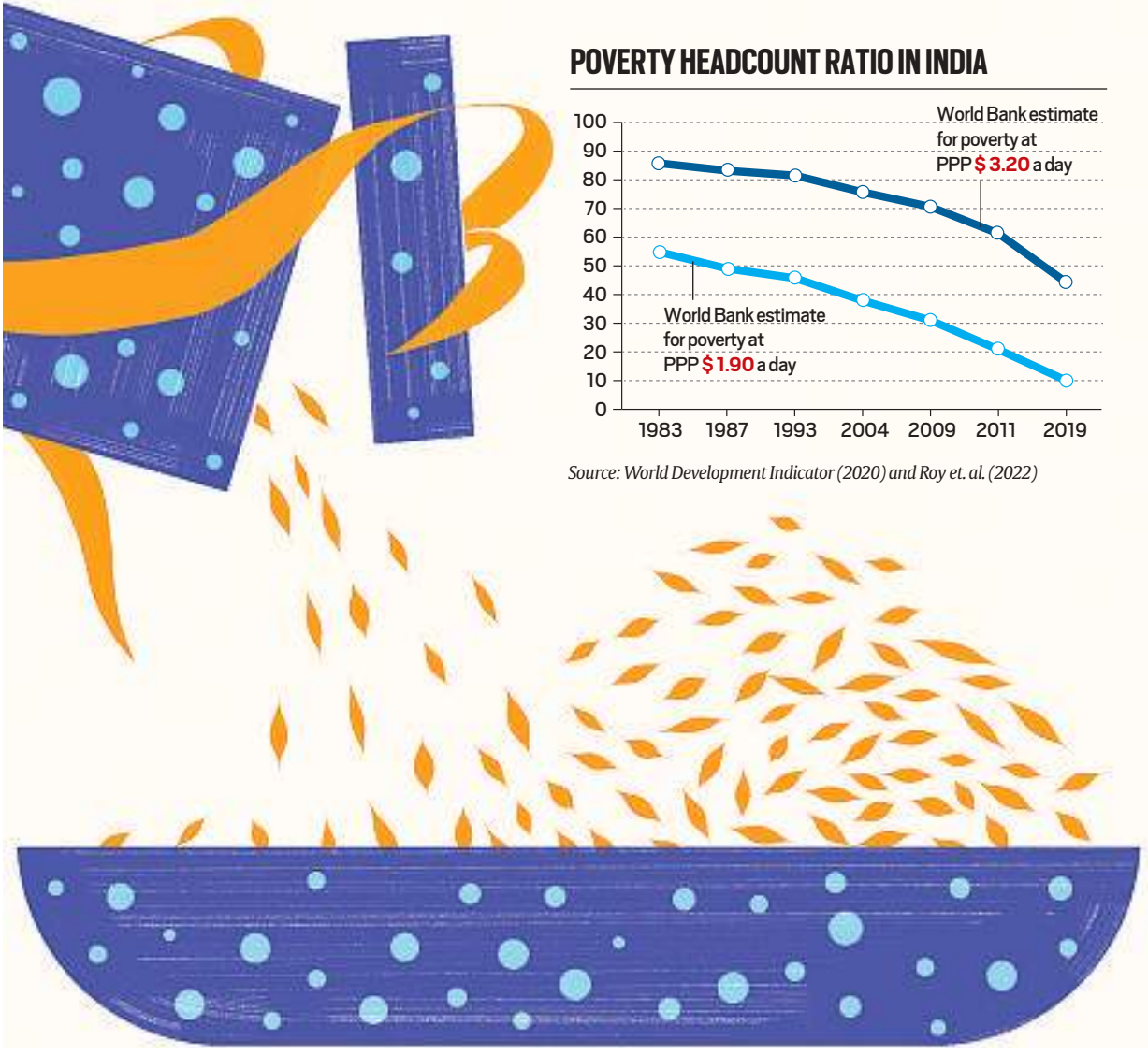
THE RELEASE OF two new working papers, one from the World Bank and the other from the IMF, has led to a renewed debate on poverty in India. Both papers claim that extreme poverty in the country, based on the international definition of \$1.90 per capita per day (in purchasing power parity (PPP)), has declined substantially (figure 1). The World Bank paper uses the Consumer Pyramid Household Surveys (CPHS) data to conclude that 10.2 per cent of the country's population was at extreme poverty levels in 2019.

The IMF paper calculates poverty by using the NSO Consumer Expenditure Survey as the base and adjusts it for the direct effect of the massive food grain subsidy given under the National Food Security Act (NFSA, 2013) and PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) during the pandemic period. It claims that extreme poverty has almost vanished – it was 0.77 per cent in 2019 and 0.86 per cent in 2020.

Another estimate of poverty by the NITI Aayog, the multi-dimensional poverty index (MPI), has put Indian poverty at 25 per cent in 2015 based on NFHS data. This MPI is calculated using twelve key components from areas such as health and nutrition, education and standard of living. By 2019-20, it is expected that MPI would have further declined as the access to health, education and other basic facilities has significantly improved amongst the poor, especially after 2015.

One may debate whether the poverty line at \$1.9 PPP is too low and needs to be scaled up to \$3.2 PPP. The IMF paper estimates that poverty based on \$ 3.2 PPP – this includes food transfers – to be at 14.8 per cent of the country's population in 2019. The World Bank paper estimates it to be 44.9 per cent. Irrespective of whether extreme poverty is below 1 per cent, or 10 per cent or 25 per cent, and whether food transfers played a positive role in reducing poverty, a critical question remains: Why is there still a need to distribute nearly free food to 800 million people in the name of food security? Does the politics of freebies for votes make for prudent policy?

The offtake of grains under NFSA in FY20 was 56.1 million metric tonnes (MMT). Following the outbreak of Covid-19, the government launched the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) as a special relief scheme in April 2020 to distribute 25 kg cereals per family per month in addition to food transfers under the NFSA. The scheme was justified to help migrant workers. That catapulted the offtake to 87.5 MMT (under PMGKAY and NFSA) in FY21. The scheme continued in FY22, and the grain offtake touched 93.2 MMT. In FY23, after the pandemic has ebbed and the economy has, by and large, bounced back, a further extension of free food on top of the NFSA allocations was uncalled for. This will strain the fisc, reduce public investments and hamper potential job creation. The pub-



POVERTY HEADCOUNT RATIO IN INDIA

Source: World Development Indicator (2020) and Roy et. al. (2022)

lic grain management system is crying out for reforms, and this is the right time for the Narendra Modi government to fix it.

A look at the size of food freebies will help understand the gravity of this problem. As of April 1, the Food Corporation of India's wheat and rice stocks stood at 74 MMT against a buffer stock norm of 21 MMT – there is, therefore, an "excess stock" of 53 MMT. The economic cost of rice, as given by FCI, is Rs 3,7267/tonne and that of wheat is Rs 2,6838.4/tonne (2020/21). The value of "excess stocks", beyond the buffer norm, is, therefore, Rs 1.85 lakh crore – this, despite a total of 72.2 MMT grains distributed for free under the PMGKAY in FY21 and FY22. This only speaks of a highly inefficient grain management system.

All this results in a ballooning food subsidy – in FY21, it spiked to more than Rs 5.41 lakh crore because FCI arrears were cleared. In FY22, it came down to Rs 2.86 lakh crore and now in the Union budget for FY 23, it is provisioned at Rs 2.06 lakh crore. But this amount is likely to go beyond Rs 2.8 lakh crore with the continuing distribution of free food under the PMGKAY. This would amount to more than 10 per cent of the Centre's net tax revenue (after deducting the states' share).

Given the level of freebies on just one item, the important question that arises is: Can this be a sustainable path towards poverty alleviation? Strategic thinking on economic policies tells us that it is better to teach a person how to catch a fish than to give him/her a free fish every day. Giving out crumbs cannot inspire a society to grow. It is all the more important to change the

In reforming this system of free food, wisdom lies in going back to former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee's vision. Vajpayee introduced the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY), wherein, the 'antyodaya' households (the most poor category) get more rations (35 kg per household) at a higher subsidy (rice, for instance, at Rs 3/kg and wheat at Rs2/kg). For the remaining below poverty line (BPL) families, the price charged was 50 per cent of the procurement price and for above poverty line families (APL), it was 90 per cent of the procurement price. There could be some problems in identifying the poor. However, technology can help overcome this difficulty.

current policy of free food given the massive leakages in the PDS. As per the High-Level Committee on restructuring FCI, leakages were more than 40 per cent based on the NSSO data of 2011. Ground reports suggest that these leakages hover around 30 per cent or so today.

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Gulati is Infosys Chair Professor and Juneja is Consultant at ICRIER

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Sanctions historically have not been particularly effective in changing regimes, and their record at changing dictators' behavior is mixed at best." – THE NEW YORK TIMES

Misreading Bhagat Singh

In appropriating the revolutionary without understanding him, AAP has shown that it is driven by electoral expediency, not ideology



ASHUTOSH

THE AAP'S REACTION during and after the Jahangirpuri riots exposes the fact that a party devoid of any ideological framework to guide its thought process and functioning will plunge into any political abyss to save its regime. There is no doubt that the AAP has transformed beyond recognition, but to blame only "stone pelters" for the riots, while not uttering a word about the Shobha Yatra in which men carried swords, knives and pistols and raised provocative slogans against Muslims, is a new low.

In 1928, while analysing the cause of riots, Bhagat Singh wrote in *Kirti* magazine, "The leader in India has become politically bankrupt... there is no dearth of leaders hiding their heads." After winning elections in Punjab, although the AAP has adopted Bhagat Singh with a lot of fanfare, I'm sure it has not read his scathing criticism of communal riots and communal leaders. Bhagat Singh spared no one. He wrote, "Being a Sikh or Hindu was sufficient reason for a Muslim to kill him. Similarly, it seemed enough for a Hindu or a Sikh to kill a Muslim for being a Muslim alone."

The AAP borrows ideas without reading the content. There was a time when Mahatma Gandhi was the icon of the party. But Gandhi was replaced by Bhagat Singh and Babasaheb Ambedkar. It seems the AAP has realised that Gandhi no longer fetches votes. Today masculinity is the defining creed; non-violence and tolerance towards other religions are effeminate virtues which the father of masculine nationalism, V D Savarkar, described as "perverted" and the cause of the "slavery" of Hindus in the past.

Due to its lack of a deeper understanding of Bhagat Singh, AAP has only identified him with masculine nationalism, as someone who fearlessly threw bombs at the British and was not scared when going to the gallows. At a time when Gandhi as an idea has become unattractive and the practice of non-violence unfashionable, there is an attempt to build a myth around Bhagat Singh that he advocated violence to get freedom from the British and behind that facade any kind of violence is justified.

It is true that Bhagat Singh prescribed violence, but for virtuous deeds. He wrote, "... when force is used for some good purpose or for the welfare of some people, then it is good and can't be called violence." But he also cautioned, "Use of violence is justifiable when resorted to as a matter of terrible necessity." In the subsequent sentence, his thought process merges with that of Gandhi for whom non-violence was essential: "Non-violence as policy is indispensable for all mass movements." Thus, Gandhi and Bhagat Singh were on the same page. If they had been alive today, they would have condemned the use of random violence in the name of religion to subjugate

the minority. The AAP started as a party of romantic revolutionaries who claimed to have found solace in Gandhian thought. If Anna Hazare was the face of the India Against Corruption movement then Arvind Kejriwal was the architect of the agitation. When Anna sat on a hunger strike, Gandhi's picture was the overpowering backdrop and when the movement metamorphosed into a political party, minus Anna, Gandhi remained the icon of the leadership. But the sudden appearance of Bhagat Singh and Babasaheb Ambedkar on the walls of the AAP leaders' offices, instead of Gandhi, indicates their loss of faith in Gandhian philosophy. Do they realise that Bhagat Singh's thought process was antithetical to the AAP's use of religion for electoral purposes?

In the beginning, AAP did not use religion to gather votes. In the 2013 and 2015 Delhi assembly elections, it chose candidates with clean images, irrespective of their religious beliefs. The focus was more on welfare measures. But in 2020, AAP changed its track. Kejriwal was seen reciting the Hanuman Chalisa and visiting a Hanuman temple with TV cameras following him. He ensured that his Diwali puja was live-streamed on different TV channels. He promised free rides to Ayodhya for senior citizens. It was a blatant use of religion to project himself as a Hindu leader and the AAP as a Hindu party.

The AAP leadership does not know that Bhagat Singh did not believe in God. Six years before he was hanged, he had become an atheist. He did not spare the Hindu religion either and mocked the theory of karma. He wrote, "What about the punishment of those who were deliberately kept ignorant by the haughty and egotistical Brahmins and who had to pay the penalty of lead being poured in their ears for having heard a few sentences of your sacred books of learning, the Vedas? ... my dear friends, these theories are the inventions of the privileged ones; they justify their usurped power, riches and superiority by the help of these theories." This shows that Bhagat Singh, unlike Gandhi who was religious to the core and was proud of his Sanatan Hindu identity, had scant regard for religion and found it "tyrannical and exploitative".

In today's world when religion, or its perverted form, dominates the socio-political discourse, AAP would have been more comfortable in the company of Gandhi but it has moved towards Bhagat Singh. In this context will it not be pertinent to ask if AAP really believes in Bhagat Singh? If yes, then how come Hanuman and Bhagat Singh are walking together? Or perhaps AAP, in its imagined political laboratory, has created a strange, ideological cocktail which is led more by electoral expediency than ideological purity. In this quest, if calling Muslims Bangladeshis and Rohingyas fetches them more votes, it's better. Anyway, who is worried about ideology when winning elections? Let's not forget that opportunism is also an ideology.

The writer is editor, SatyaHindi.com and author of Hindu Rashttra



NARAYANI GUPTA

IN MY YOUNGER days, if we wanted to comment on any article in a newspaper, we rattled off a short letter to the editor on our typewriter. Now there are journalists whose comments are in the form of an article as long as the one under discussion. Many of them can only be described as clones of Humpty Dumpty, confident that "When I use a word, it means exactly what I want it to mean, no more, no less".

A recent example is that of an article by SY Quraishi ('Calling out hate', April 15) and the comment that followed. Noting the alarming reports of hate speeches in the social media, Quraishi wrote, "It is at the root of many forms of violence that are being perpetrated and has become one of the biggest challenges to the rule of law and to our democratic conscience." He lists those who can act firmly and swiftly – during elections it is the Election Commission that must act, and in the "non-election" months the state has the power to act by using provisions of the Indian Penal Code, and the Representation of the People Act. The sense of urgency in his article was palpable.

There was a rejoinder to Quraishi in *The Indian Express* ('Ignorance isn't bliss', April 21). Balbir Punj, the writer, says in the second paragraph that Quraishi's "arguments are dreadfully familiar, facts dodgy, and conclusions

History as mischief

Selective reading of historical events produces half-truths, tailored narratives

delusional". Punj adds: "Quraishi's article has little to do with the anatomy of hate or its ongoing malignancy". Quraishi was not dissecting the emotion of hate, he was criticising the inaction of the Election Commission and the courts, in the context of hate-speeches made by individuals over the last year.

Punj begins his piece on a breathless note: "Hate and bigotry feed on each other. They germinate and flourish on a toxic diet of divisive and schismatic ideologies and polarising creeds that discriminate against human beings on the basis of colour, region, gender, faith – and divide them between believers and non-believers – ranging the chosen ones against the idolatrous". The strapline was "Understanding trail of hate in India requires honest examination of its origins". Eleven of the 15 paragraphs in the essay deal with this trail.

History as a discipline is about time, place and people. Teachers of history compartmentalise themselves into sections of time and of place/region. Not so the non-historian. Punj writes, "For aeons, India has had synthetic traditions, inspired by the Vedic aphorism "ekam sad [sic] vipra bahudha vadanti" (there is only one truth and learned persons call it by many names). In September 2020, a 16-member committee was set up by the Ministry of Culture to

study the origin and evolution of Indian culture, "dating back to around 12,000 years ago". It held two meetings and vanished from the scene. That's a cautionary tale.

Bhakti and Sufi cults have been for long described as "syncretic". Punj does not associate Sindh with its great Sufi tradition, but with bin Qasim's conquest in 712 CE and the coming of Islam – "...as *Chach Nama*, a contemporary Arab chronicle states, [he] introduced the practice of treating local Hindus as zimmi, forcing them to pay jizya... 'Hate' and 'bigotry' thus made their debut in India, which was hitherto free from this virus".

It is worth locating and browsing through translations of the *Chach Nama*, for its accounts of the attitude of the Arab rulers of Sindh towards the Hindu population and their places of worship. A natural outcome of this beginning was the enduring presence of Sufi orders in Sindh.

The simplest – but not wholly ethical – way to substantiate an argument is by cherry-picking. From 8th-century Sindh the author moves to 11th-century north India. He writes of Mahmud of Ghazni who "took a vow to wage jihad every year against Indian idolators". (I tried to locate a source for this, and came up only with one – an earlier article by Punj, on July 12, 2019).

Ghaznavi's exact contemporary, Rajendra Chola, was in the same period raiding Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. In Indian school textbooks Ghaznavi has always been an "invader", the Cholas were "conquerors".

The next eight centuries are omitted, and the trail moves down to Malabar (the Moplah Rebellion of 1921), then north and east India (the Partition tragedies of 1946-8), the "decimation" of Hindus in neighbouring countries (no dates) and people in Spain and Sweden.

He proceeds to ask a rhetorical question "Can laws or police fight hate?"

And this article was published a day after the BJP-run civic body let the bulldozers raze homes in Jahangirpuri "in the face of the Supreme Court order" as the Indian Express headline stated on the same day as Punj's article!

Punj's narrative could be described in his own words – "charged reactions, punctuated with half-truths, deliberate omissions and tailored narratives, offer no real solution" [to what?]. This is followed by a line which I find extremely difficult to decipher – "pusillanimity to face facts will only exacerbate the situation and give egregious results."

The writer is a Delhi-based historian

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NO DUE PROCESS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Bulldozing to instill terror' (IE, April 24). There is a core issue in this entire matter. Can the government turn judge, jury and executioner when there are courts, laws and rules? It is dangerous to allow a "bulldozer" to become the method to bully a community, or for that matter act against those who are critical of a government. What is needed the most is the intervention of the judiciary to prevent political power from going beyond its remit and polarising the electorate.

SS Paul, Nadia

ABANDONED

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The difference this time' (IE, April 24). It is indeed a different situation that even religious processions leading to riots have now become a common feature of Indian society. The blame for this lies with the majoritarian politics in vogue, which is now calling the shots in the country. As a result, such festival marches are no more messengers of peace and love but conveyor belts of violence and hatred. But such things have not come to such a pass suddenly. This happened because the so-called left-of-the-centre parties are cutting the ground from under one another's feet instead of fighting unitedly the divisive forces. On the other hand, the more confident BJP has now started following a take-no-prisoner policy in its bid to saffronise the country. What is even worse is that even the par-

ties claiming to be above the caste and the religious politics are not calling a spade a spade because of their electoral considerations. As a result, the minorities in India are now feeling left in the lurch which is a stigma on our largest democracy in the world.

Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur

SUBSTANTIVE TIES

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Living bridges' (IE, April 23). Amidst the ongoing Ukrainian crisis, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's visit and the show of camaraderie with Narendra Modi go beyond optics. That both leaders did not allow the Russia-Ukraine conflict to subsume Indo-British dialogue, a welcome divergence from America's childish and churlish noises, shows maturity on their part. Breaking new ground on cooperation with weapons' technology transfer would assist India's "atmanirbhar" push. More people-to-people interaction, as the concept of "living bridges" promises, will help to respect and accommodate each other's interests.

Vijai Pant, Hempur

HOLISTIC CARE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Fuller cure' (IE, April 22). WHO's change in its position on traditional medicines is welcome. However, it must ensure that this endeavour must not be confined to medicines from South Asia

Kreeti Pani, Cuttack

Wanted Babbar Khalsa terrorist arrested in Punjab

EXPRESSNEWSSERVICE
CHANDIGARH, APRIL 24

ANTI-GANGSTER Task Force (AGTF) of the Punjab police on Sunday arrested Charanjit Singh alias Patialavi, a most wanted terrorist and an active member of terrorist module Babbar Khalsa International (BKI). Patialavi had been evading arrest for the past 12 years by using different identities and hideouts.

Confirming the arrest, Gurpreet Singh Bhullar, deputy inspector general of police (DIG) of AGTF, said that AGTF teams led by AIG AGTF Gurmeet Singh Chauhan and DSP AGTF Bikramjit Singh Brar have arrested Patialavi from near Gurudwara Sahib at Lali village in Dera Bassi.

“Patialavi, disguising himself as a granthi was presently staying in a gurdwara sahib at Khargpur in West Bengal and was not using any communication device,” Bhullar said, adding that “different identification cards on West Bengal address have been recovered from him.”

An official in Punjab police said Patialavi had come to Punjab “over a week ago” to hold meetings with “some people” to “revive Babbar Khalsa International” in Punjab. He originally hails



BOMB DEFUSED: NSG personnel defuse a bomb outside Burail jail on Sunday. The explosive was found by police while patrolling on Saturday night. *Kamleshwar Singh*

from Butta Singh Wala village in Patiala district. Police were also learnt to be investigating whether Patialavi could be involved in a case where a bag of explosives was found along the wall of Model Burail Jail in Chandigarh on Saturday night and another case where a hand grenade was hurled at CIA Office Nawanshahr with the intention to kill the police officials.

Last week, police had arrested three operatives of a terror module being run by Harvinder Singh Rinda, who is wanted by the police but has managed to reach Pakistan. Police said that they are investigating any linkage between Rinda and Patialavi, and there could be more arrests in the coming days.

Bhullar said that Patialavi, a resident of Butta Singh Wala vil-

lage in Patiala district, was declared proclaimed offender in a case registered under Section 4/5 of the Explosive Act and Section 17/18/20 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act with the Machhiwara police station in Ludhiana district in 2010. However, Patialavi's other associate — deceased terrorist Gurmair Singh Boba of Butta Singh Wala village — was arrested in this case along with recovery of detonators and RDX, he said.

Patialavi was an active member of BKI terrorist module busted by the Punjab Police in 2010 for its involvement in Shingar Cinema Ludhiana bomb blasts in 2007, which had left six dead and over 40 injured. The module was also allegedly involved in the 2010 blasts in Ambala and at Kali Mata Mandir in Patiala.

MP High Court grants protection to interfaith couple who eloped

Bulldozers razed the man's home, 3 shops after woman's kin lodged complaint

IRAM SIDDIQUI
BHOPAL, APRIL 24

A FORTNIGHT after the Dindori district administration in Madhya Pradesh demolished a house and three shops belonging to a man who eloped with his Hindu neighbour, the Madhya Pradesh High Court has restrained police from taking action against him on a kidnapping case lodged by the woman's family.

Hearing the petition filed by the woman, Sakshi Sahu, 22, at the Jabalpur bench of the Madhya Pradesh High Court, a single bench headed by Justice Nandita Dubey pointed out that the petitioner is a major who married Asif Khan, 22, willingly.

“The petitioners have further stated that they were wrongly advised to get married in the temple... nobody informed them that they should get their marriage registered under the Special Marriage Act. They submitted that they will get their marriage registered under the Special Marriage Act, as both of them are living together since 07.04.2022. It is further stated that being a citizen of India, they

have a right to choose the life partner of their choice.”

On April 4, based on an FIR lodged by the woman's brother, Dindori tehsildar BS Thakur said he is on leave for 20 days.

G R Salave, who holds charge in Thakur's absence, said, “The details under which action has been taken is mentioned in the tehsildar's order. Please apply for a copy to the Lok Seva Kendra and it can be given in three working days.”

Collector Ratnakar Jha did not respond to calls and messages by *The Indian Express*.

A day after the house was demolished, a video of Sakshi emerged in which she is heard saying that she willingly went with Khan. Addressing Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and the Dindori SP, she said, “I am Sakshi Sahu, resident of Shahpura in Dindori. I married Asif Khan despite opposition from my family. My husband's family is being falsely implicated. I married him of my own will but my family is misusing facts and foisting false cases on Asif's family. They are beating, torturing, their house and shops have been demolished. I urge the Chief Minister to help me

have a right to choose the life partner of their choice.”

Hours later, former BJP minister Om Prakash Dhurve and party district president Narendra Singh Rajput blocked National Highway-45 demanding that Khan's house be demolished too. A team of district officials, including Collector Ratnakar Jha and Sub Divisional Magistrate Balbir Raman, met the protesters.

The following day, with over 500 police personnel watching, the single-storey house, registered in the name of Khan's father Haleem Khan, was razed.

When contacted about the allegedly illegal construction, Dindori tehsildar BS Thakur said he is on leave for 20 days.

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or else both my husband and I will commit suicide.”

Khan's father Haleem Khan, a small farmer, has lived in the village for over two decades with his wife and three sons. The family has moved out of the village since the demolition.

Noushad Malik, a distant relative of Khan's, said, “They are a lower-middle-class family. Asif worked as a driver in the village panchayat. Haleem toiled a lot to build the house... it took him five years. But all it took the administration was a few minutes to raze it to the ground.”

Ramkumar Dhurve, a farmer and resident of Shahpur village, said, “No one from the village approved of the elopement, but the house did not belong to Asif Khan; it was built by his father Haleem. How is demolishing the father's house justified? Does the law make it mandatory for an adult to seek permission from his parents before marrying? Then how can the parents be punished?”

Irfan Malik, a member of the Jama Masjid committee, and a few other villagers had submitted a memorandum to the district collector, urging them not to demolish Khan's house.

102 kg heroin seized at Attari check post

EXPRESSNEWSSERVICE
AMRITSAR, APRIL 24

CUSTOMS OFFICIALS have seized nearly 102 kg of heroin seized in liquorice roots (mulethi) consignment apprehended at the Integrated Check Post, Attari. The consignment from Afghanistan was imported by a Delhi-based trader.

While Indian trade with Pakistan remains suspended, trade with Afghanistan through Pakistan has been continuing.

The heroin was detected during an X-ray scan. The bags were then opened in presence of witnesses and it was found that between mulethi there were some cylindrical wooden logs sealed on both ends by saw dust mixed in adhesive material.

These wooden logs were broken and heroin powder was found hidden in their cavities.

The total seized heroin, after tests by both customs and BSF, turned out to be 102 kg and it worth Rs 700 crore in the international market.

So far no arrest has been made in the latest case.



Sakshi Maharaj. *File*

Keep bows and arrows at home to deal with 'jihadis', says Sakshi Maharaj

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LUCKNOW/UNNAO, APRIL 24

CONTROVERSIAL BHARATIYA Janata Party MP Sakshi Maharaj on Sunday asked Hindus to keep bows and arrows at their home, saying police will not come to their rescue when a crowd arrives to carry out “jihad”.

He also posted a picture of a crowd wearing skull caps and holding sticks on his Facebook page with the comment:

“If this crowd suddenly comes to your street or house, then do you have any way to save yourself? If not then make some arrangements. Police will not come to your rescue, they will hide somewhere to save themselves,” he said in his Facebook post.

“Police will come only when these people return after carrying out jihad. The matter will go to an inquiry committee and it will end there after some time. For such guests, keep a couple of boxes of cold drink and some original bows and arrows in every house. Jai Shri Ram,” he added.

When asked about the post, Sakshi Maharaj said he completely agrees with its content.

The BJP MP did not give any direct reply as to why the post was needed but said, “Are Hindus only to take a beating,”

Court to take call on Mevani bail plea today

TORA AGARWALA
GUWAHATI, APRIL 24

GUJARAT MLA Jignesh Mevani, arrested in connection with an allegedly defamatory tweet against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was produced at the Chief Judicial Magistrate court in Assam's Kokrajhar district on Sunday. The court, however, reserved the judgment on his bail petition for Monday, and sent Mevani to judicial custody for a day.

“Considering the nature of the matter the court needs sufficient time to go through the materials on record to decide the bail petition. The bail petition will be decided tomorrow,” said the court.

An Independent MLA who had in September last pledged support to the Congress, Mevani was arrested in Gujarat by the Assam Police on Thursday and



Jignesh Mevani

flown to Assam where a court remanded him in three-day police custody. The arrest followed an Assam BJP leader's complaint over an allegedly defamatory tweet by Mevani against Modi.

During Sunday's hearing, the Assam Police had sought 10 days' custody, a senior police official said.

Angshuman Bora, Mevani's counsel, said there was no “prima facie evidence for the charges” against the MLA.

“...there is no prima facie evidence for the charges against him. All these sections he has been booked for... these are not applicable to the facts of this case,” Bora told *The Indian Express*.

Azam Khan ‘refuses’ to meet SP MLA in jail

EXPRESSNEWSSERVICE
LUCKNOW, APRIL 24

SENIOR SAMAJWADI Party (SP) leader and Rampur MLA Azam Khan on Sunday “refused to meet anyone” when party legislator Ravidas Mehrotra went to meet him in the Sitapur jail.

“It has been 26 months since Azam Khan has been in jail. It seems the BJP government has murdered democracy in UP. We have apprehensions that he will be murdered in jail. We will continue to fight for him in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly,” Mehrotra told reporters outside the jail. He said he had been sent by party president Akhilesh Yadav.

Two days ago, Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party (Lohia) chief Shivalp Yadav met Khan in the jail for more than an hour. Shivalp had said the SP should have led “a



SP leader Azam Khan

struggle in support of one of its tallest leaders”.

A senior jail official said that Azam Khan “refused to meet anyone”, saying he was unwell. “When MLA Mehrotra came to the jail, we informed him that Khan was sleeping. The MLA asked us not to disturb Khan and left without meeting him,” said the official.

Meanwhile, speaking to reporters in Lucknow on Sunday, Akhilesh said the SP will give all “possible legal support” to Azam. “An injustice has been done to him by the BJP. They sent officials (to Rampur) who could lodge false cases against Khan,” said Akhilesh.

Recordings to route maps: Chhattisgarh tightens rules for public protests, rallies

GARGI VERMA
RAIPUR, APRIL 24

THE CHHATTISGARH government has asked officials to ensure protest demonstrations and rallies in their areas are held only after “prior permission”, as it laid down fresh norms for allowing public events that are political, religious, or even social, in nature.

In a letter issued on April 22, the Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Subrat Sahoo has directed all District Collectors and Superintendents of Police to keep a thorough record of those organising and attending such events.

EXPLAINED
Tough stance

THE NEW norms come as several protests rocked Raipur in the past three months. Last week, two protests — one by contractual staff of the electricity board and another by displaced farmers — in Raipur were called off after the police broke their pandals saying they had not sought permission.

Organisers will now have to apply for permission in a prescribed format that requires details such as the number of people expected to attend, route maps for rallies, and information on the vehicles used.

Fresh norms fixing accountability have been included, which will have to be complied with for events to be green-lighted.

Besides “ensuring peace” and hiring volunteers, rules that already exist, organisers will have to submit “10 names and (phone) numbers” to the police and the civil administration in the district. “It should be made mandatory

for various institutions/organisations to obtain prior permission of the district administration before organising the event, so that the administration takes measures to change the route, (and on) traffic... and security of common citizens and (also) makes administrative arrangements smoothly...,” the letter reads.

It will also be mandatory for organisers to video and audio record the entire event and submit two copies of the recordings to the Sub Divisional Magistrate within two days. They will also have to carry the “permission slip” issued by the Collector's office and are present it during inspection.

A Manipur film tackles sexual identity for first time

ESHA ROY
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

PRIYAKANTA LAISHRAM was just 11 when he made his first short film on his Nokia phone. Now 24, with several docu-features and short films under his belt, Laishram's latest venture will be Manipur's first same-sex movie. The trailer was released last week and the full-length feature film, “Oneness”, will be released later this year.

Laishram, who himself came out as gay in 2019, says the movie is based on the alleged honour killing of a gay youth in Manipur in 2013. He says he came to know of the incident through the YouTube talk show he began in 2020 amid the first pandemic lockdown when he returned to Imphal from college in Chandigarh.

The talk show, “Up Close with Priyakanta Laishram”, raises various social issues, including those pertaining to gender and the LGBTQ community.

“After having listened to my show, the victim's cousin got in touch with me. She told me that her brother, who belongs to a



A still from Priyakanta Laishram's 'Oneness'. *Express*

tribal community, was in a relationship with a Meitei boy. He was 18 years old while his Meitei boyfriend was 21 at the time. The victim's family got to know about his sexuality when the pair were caught in a hotel room during a police raid. While he had support from his mother and sister, his father and older brother were very religious,” said Laishram, who is pursuing a degree in Sociology.

According to Laishram, the two boys were subjected to conversion therapy by their families. The victim's cousin told Laishram that the boy was sub-

jected to exorcisms and submerged in water in an attempt to re-baptise him. Laishram says the victim kept a detailed account of what had happened in a journal, which forms the basis of the film.

According to Laishram, the two lovers got in touch with each other after several months. “The victim's older brother, who was keeping a close watch, followed him to a rendezvous. That night, after the victim had come home, the brother mixed bleaching powder and ammonia in his milk. The boy died that night. A case was never registered and it

was deemed a suicide,” he said. “In any case, in tribal areas, it is tribal law that holds prevalence, so there is little that the police can do in such situations,” Laishram said.

When Laishram first announced the movie, he says he received threats from the community to which the victim belonged. “I changed the name of the character, and chose Martin as his surname... very carefully, after research, so as to not hurt the sentiments of any community. Martin is not a name that is commonly used,” he says.

This was not the first time that Laishram has received threats for his work. In 2018, the independent filmmaker released a short film on male sexuality and child sexual abuse. “I received threatening calls from four different insurgent groups,” he said.

Manipuri cinema is circumscribed by dictats of insurgent groups that act as moral police. In 2002, Meitei-centric valley groups banned Hindi movies in the state. Movie theatres shut down in Imphal city. Restrictions were imposed on Manipuri cinema: lead characters would have to wear traditional clothing, storylines would have to be tradi-

tional, and dream sequences and fantasies were banned.

“It's not just films, but even music videos. Whether it is a rock or classical or pop music video, the women have to mandatorily wear phaneks (Manipuri traditional clothing), and no other clothing is permitted,” said Meena Longiam who won a national award for her film “Autodriver” in 2015.

Laishram says it was “exceedingly” difficult. “I spent eight months just looking for an actor to play the lead role. Every actor said no because it was the role of a gay man. While I got an actor to play the boyfriend, I had to play the victim's character in the movie myself,” said Laishram, who has also written, produced and directed the film.

Having struggled with bullying and discrimination in school and college in his home state as well as other cities for his sexuality and his penchant for wearing make-up, Laishram says it was through making movies that he began the process of accepting himself. “Manipuri society doesn't understand homosexuality. That's why this movie is so important,” he said.

IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

PRASHANT JAIN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CIO, HDFC ASSET MANAGEMENT COMPANY

‘Inflation will probably surprise us on the upside... could lead to higher interest rates’

Prashant Jain, ED and CIO, HDFC AMC — the longest-serving fund manager in the country — on the impact of global events on Indian economy and markets, surge in the number of new retail investors, new-age companies and the way ahead for investors. The session was moderated by SANDEEP SINGH, Resident Editor, Mumbai

Sandeep Singh: Over the last few months, markets have been impacted by several events — Fed tapering followed by rate hike, inflation, FPI outflows, Russia-Ukraine war, and now the RBI moving to tackle inflation. How should one see the markets and what should investors expect?

Probably no one has a good answer to this. The nature of markets is that in the short to medium term, they're extremely hard to forecast. You may spend as much time in markets, but the short term is very uncertain. Markets in India are reasonably valued, but I think they will deliver reasonable returns in line with nominal GDP growth over three to five years. The economic outlook has improved post-COVID compared to what it was pre-COVID. The profit growth cycle has clearly reversed and there has been a fairly broad-based recovery in profitability across all manufacturing sectors.

What are the worries? I think retail is a very big participant in these markets. Whenever retail participation is very high, it is not a good sign. In stock markets, the majority is seldom right over long periods. If you look at the retail flow of savings into equities, roughly \$40 billion a year is coming to mutual funds. Maybe, \$15 billion net flows into the insurance industry and another \$10-15 billion is coming through the EPFO and the NPS. If you assume direct participation in stocks to be another \$10-15 billion, it adds up to \$80-100 billion per year. India's pool of household financial savings is about \$300-350 billion; 10 per cent of the GDP. This suggests that almost 30 per cent of household financial savings is now getting into equities. Easy money conditions in the world and spike in household savings rates during COVID has also contributed to this. I think all that is set to reverse, more outside India than in India.

Sandeep Singh: A lot of new investors come with the hope of making quick money. Is that a challenge for the mutual fund industry?

For mutual funds, I don't think it should be too much of a challenge. These are markets that are reasonably valued. While there are pockets of excesses, there are also pockets where value is reasonable. The profit growth outlook is quite robust. Unlike 2018-19 and 2020, which was a very narrow market, where just five-odd stocks delivered more than 100 per cent of NIFTY returns, these are very broad-based markets. As a mutual fund manager, I feel okay to generate reasonable returns for unitholders over long periods. What worries me is the shift in trading volumes in India — all of these are coming from options. This suggests that the entire retail participation is speculative. Futures and options is a zero-sum game. In derivatives, you make money only if someone loses money. When I travel to very small towns, I'm surprised to see that earlier it used to be men, now it is youngsters and women. Everyone feels very comfortable trading in futures and options. And that is a bit worrisome. I don't think it will end nicely.

George Mathew: Despite the huge volatility in the markets, SIP investment is at an all-time high. What is driving retail investors into stock markets?

In 1992, we were in a similar situation. Everyone was investing in equities. Even in 2000 and 2007, it was similar. What is happening is not new. Of course, technology has made this possible along with few other factors. One, post-COVID, the markets fell sharply. Combine that with good savings in households, because COVID did not impact the upper-income mid-income households in India. Their savings simply went up. Also, digital adoption was accelerated and interest rates collapsed. They also probably had a lot of time at home. Combine all of this with the fact that whatever little investments anyone made then, turned out to be extremely profitable because markets were so low. The good experience has been reinforced, and it has spread by word of mouth. Demat accounts that were about four crore pre-Covid, have risen to about nine crore. But many people are likely to be disappointed because they are looking at making money on equity as a monthly income.

Anil Sasi: Typically, rising interest rates mean a good time for equity investors while the bond investors



WHY
PRASHANT JAIN

Prashant Jain, executive director and CIO of HDFC AMC, has been in the fund management business for 31 years and currently oversees assets under management of over Rs 4.3 lakh crore. He has navigated the capital markets through several challenging periods since India's economic liberalisation began in 1991. When the equity markets have been riled by inflation, war, liquidity withdrawal, rate hike and fund outflow, and investors are looking for some clarity on how to navigate the markets, Jain provides answers to some pertinent questions on markets and economy

will perhaps worry. Does that hold in the slightly abnormal situation that we are in now? With a number of global events — the US rate hike, the geopolitical situation, and the inversion of the yield curve that probably is a pointer to inflation, or at least it's been a pointer to a recession in the past — how do you see everything put together?

The impact of global developments on India's economy is quite limited despite the fact that India has opened up quite a bit. Given the demographics, the consumption-led economy, other than oil, we are reasonably self-sufficient, and our pool of savings roughly matches our investments. Our exports to GDP and imports to GDP are quite small. So the variability of India's economy to developments outside India is quite limited. The best example of that is that even in the Lehman year (2008), India's economy grew by more than five per cent. The underlying drivers of the economy,

whether it is demographics, increasing working age, population, low penetration or consumer durables, all of that hold us in very good stead. When it comes to capital markets, however, there is an impact that global capital markets have on Indian markets. Not over the long term, but over the short term. I think inflation will probably surprise us on the upside. We should be prepared for meaningfully higher rates in the US. I don't think that should have a material impact on India's economy or even capital markets. Equities are a hedge against inflation. Inflation means companies increase selling price of goods and services and it shows up in higher earnings. To that extent, equity investors need to be less worried about inflation.

Harish Damodaran: In terms of stock markets, India has been a consumption-driven economy, more than an investment-driven economy. Is that story over?

India was and continues to be a consumption-driven economy. Of course, the patterns of consumption are changing. For certain categories, as income levels have improved, the penetration has increased and growth rates have come down. But, consumption baskets are changing. The mobile handset market is as large as the car market and mobiles take priority over cars. If Ola and Uber have come in as an alternative to owning a car, the fact that white-collar wage inflation in India has seen negative real growth, could also be impacting the car industry.

I think consumption in India should continue to grow. But we should not link this to stock markets. Today, commodity prices are going up sharply, which will put pressure on the margins of these companies. There are no tailwinds or further tax rate cuts. So whether it is paper, sugar, textiles, chemicals, metals, capital goods, banks, everything is growing now. The premium of the scarcity of profit growth is missing. Finally, the cost of capital is also going up. So it is quite natural for these companies to derate. And I don't find that surprising.

Post Lehman, investments in the world have gone down, especially driven by ESG concerns. CapEx and capital formation have been low in traditional industries for a variety of reasons and that is beginning to show up. We have under invested and the renewable space has not been able to take up the entire space at the speed that was desired. There have also been some supply bottlenecks due to the situation in China and Ukraine. I think the balance will shift slightly, because if basic commodities experience inflation, clearly, it will mean more profits to those groups of companies and better market caps. It will mean higher interest rates and could also impact consumption a bit. This could end up adversely impacting other businesses.

P Vaidyanathan Iyer: The pricing power has shifted more towards the larger corporations who are generating higher profits. While it positively impacts stock markets, what about the MSMEs — the backbone of the industry, many of whom are facing stress, and some getting wiped out? How do you look at its impact on the economy in the midterm?

SMEs are absolutely critical because they provide employment to very large

numbers. A number of factors have come together to create this. One, of course, was the lockdown. One is the formalisation of the economy; GST, which clearly has hurt them. The flow of credit to the new entrepreneurs in traditional businesses and even to the existing SMEs has clearly been challenged. Even the DFIs funding is missing in India. Lack of proper credit has created a challenging situation. E-commerce also has an adverse impact on some of these businesses as India is a land of shopkeepers. However, there are a few things that could improve. Make in India is a very big theme. We have genuinely gained competitiveness over China. Chinese manufacturing wages are now two to three times of Indian wages and their per capita income is five times ours, which was not the case 20 years back. Their subsidies are being reduced and they are themselves discouraging export of energy-intensive products. So, it's a conducive environment for India to improve its share of manufacturing. PLI is a great initiative, so is defence indigenisation. A Rs 2 lakh crore subsidy, at the rate of five per cent means Rs 40 lakh crore over five years or Rs 8 lakh crore per year. These are fairly meaningful numbers.

When Maruti was set up, it led to the development of ecosystem of ancillaries. So, over time as we come up with these large initiatives across verticals, it will lead to flourishing of ancillaries. They are badly needed because they enhance the competitiveness of our country and provide employment. I think there will be some churn but eventually a large number of SMEs will come up in the manufacturing area.

P Vaidyanathan Iyer: Kiran Mazumdar Shaw in Bangalore said that the hijab incident will hurt investments in Karnataka. Or the Ram Navmi processions, views on azaan or the Shobha Yatra on Hanuman Jayanti — all this may be brushed aside as politics, but do you think it augurs well for the Indian economy?

These could be isolated incidents, these could be irritants, but there are far bigger forces that are at work here... I personally don't think that incidents like these would have any material impact on the economic progress of the country.

Shyamal Majumdar: You followed the value investment style that went through a rough patch in the last five-

six years. Did you go through sleepless nights during those phases and what has been the learning from that?

I'm used to this. I moved out of infra stocks and bought into consumer pharma. This time the pain period was a little longer. But unless you are able to withstand these periods, you will not come back. I feel blessed that I was able to handle that. Coming to this whole debate around value and growth, I think it is misunderstood. All sensible investing is value investing. There are companies that are growing faster because they are less penetrated or there is a new business model and they will deliver higher returns. People get attracted to it, and they drive up the prices much more than the growth. People also extrapolate the last three-five years growth into very long periods of high growth sustainability, which is seldom the case. But markets being markets, they make these companies extremely expensive.

PLI is a great initiative, over time it will lead to flourishing of ancillaries... there will be some churn but eventually a large number of SMEs will come up in the manufacturing area

Ukraine is a fairly small economy. So, that way, I don't think there is an impact. But these two countries are large exporters of energy, grains, vegetables oils, and many metals. So that would add to inflation. Energy inflation is very critical, because energy inflation impacts us in many ways — wages, service sector, higher transportation costs, cost of production for agriculture and manufacturing. It means higher costs for all plastics. Higher energy also means you will divert some agricultural products to ethanol. So it will lead to higher inflation in other agricultural products. Inflation will probably surprise us on the upside and it could lead to higher interest rates.

Rahul Sabharwal: The IT industry has seen about a 10 per cent downfall in the last month. Do you think that industry per se is overvalued? What sectors do you think offer growth at a reasonable valuation right now?

A lot of the prosperity, economic success that we are seeing in India today, in reasonable measure, we owe it to the IT industry. It employs probably five million people, gives us foreign exchange of more than US \$100 billion, which gives us the purchasing power to even import oil. This is one industry where India is uniquely placed, it is very competitive and sustainable. While that 100 per cent growth became 50 per cent, then 30 per cent and now is growing at 10 per cent, it will continue to grow because COVID has accelerated the shift to the adoption of digital. But we cannot ignore that it is a large industry, and therefore, its growth rate should naturally be moderate. I do feel that the consumer sector and IT sector are two businesses which are overvalued.

This market is 90-95 per cent market cap to GDP. So most of the sectors are offering us reasonable value. Businesses where multiples are still below longer-term averages, are basically power companies now and nothing else. This time when credit growth takes place, it should lead to good margins because banks are sitting on low credit deposit ratios. The shift towards digital banking will lead to faster consolidation and large banks that have good platforms will gain market share faster.

Sandeep Singh: What would be your advice for investors in the market?

The long-term returns of any portfolio of an individual is driven to the extent of 90 per cent or more by asset allocation. How much money you make over 10 years is a function of whether you invested 5 per cent, 10 per cent or 50 per cent of your wealth in equities, 10, 15, 20 years back and not of the funds you bought, or at which exact index you bought. The right asset allocation for any investor towards equities is that portion of wealth, which they don't need for five to 10 years, and on which they can tolerate volatility, both emotionally and financially. Second is the issue of small, mid-large caps, an issue that is misunderstood. If you look at long-term returns, the small cap index, the mid cap index, the large cap index, they've all delivered similar returns.

Therefore, the key issue is how much to equities. In any industry, large or small, it is leaders who tend to outperform. So my approach to investing has been that don't focus on the size of the business, focus on the strong players in the respective industries, large or small.

Pranav Mukul: You mentioned that you've been managing this fund for 28 years. That's just about the average age of a crypto investor in India. What has been your experience with such alternative investment mechanisms?

Something like crypto has happened for the first time in my career. I am not a believer because it is too volatile to be a currency. It is not widely accepted and is probably not legal either. One cardinal principle is that don't invest where you don't understand. I made many mistakes of omission but very few mistakes of commission. I don't understand or believe in crypto, so I have simply stayed away.

Something like crypto has happened for the first time in my career. One cardinal principle is that don't invest where you don't understand... I don't understand or believe in crypto, so I have simply stayed away

Shyamal Majumdar: Some of the new-age companies, which are now getting listed, have hugely disappointed investors. How do investors make an assessment of companies where no conventional metric applies?

These companies have not disappointed all investors. They have exceeded the expectations by a huge margin of the early investors — the private equity funds. We need to distinguish between a good business and a good investment. We need to put them into buckets, one where at least the business model is reasonably well established and the route to profits, route to profitability, is well charted. There are businesses where even the visibility of profits is not well established and it is made on optimistic assumptions. I'd like to ignore the second set of businesses because I am not a venture fund. I'll suggest something similar to equity investors, unless, of course, they understand these things extremely well.

Shubhajit Roy: Geopolitically speaking, many analysts have equated the Russia-Ukraine crisis to past events. On the economic front, where will you place the current crisis?

I don't think anyone would support the invasion of a sovereign, democratically elected government. But these are small economies. Russia is less than \$2 trillion,

Illustration: Suvajit Dey

Orrin G Hatch, the longest-serving Republican senator in US history and a fixture in Utah politics for more than four decades, has died at age 88. A staunch conservative on most economic and social issues, he also teamed with Democrats several times during his career on issues ranging from stem cell research to rights for people with disabilities to expanding children's health insurance.



TOPOF THE WORLD



Colonel Haitham Dinnawi, commander of the Lebanese Navy, at a press conference. AP

LEBANON

At least 7 dead as migrant boat sinks off Tripoli

THE LEBANESE military Sunday recovered the bodies of six migrants whose boat carrying nearly 60 people sank the night before, raising the death toll to seven, state media reported. The National News Agency said the bodies were found near a small island off the coast of Tripoli. Several survivors told local TV stations that the Lebanese Navy is to blame for the incident. They said a military ship rammed their boat twice, in an effort to force it to return to the coast. Lebanese Navy commander Col Haitham Dinnawi blamed the captain of the boat for maneuvering to avoid being forced to return back to shore and blamed him for ramming into a Navy vessel. AP

POLAND

4 dead, 6 trapped after tremor shakes coal mine

FOUR MINERS were killed after a tremor at a coal mine in southern Poland on Saturday and rescuers were still trying to reach six others trapped underground, the mine's owner JSW said. "The doctor confirmed the death of two more miners... The tragic balance sheet of yesterday's high-energy tremor at the mine increased to four people," JSW said Sunday. The tremor shook the Borynia-Zofiówka mine on Saturday. There were 52 workers in the area, 42 got out on their own, and 10 remained underground. REUTERS

TURKEY

17 French WWI soldiers' remains buried at Gallipoli

THE REMAINS of 17 missing French soldiers who fought in the World War I Battle of Gallipoli were on Sunday handed over to French military officials and put to rest alongside other fallen comrades more than a century after their deaths. The remains were found during restoration work on a castle and surrounding areas on Turkey's northwestern Canakkale Peninsula, where Allied forces fought against Ottoman Turks in the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign that started with landings on the peninsula on April 25, 1915. AP

MARINE LE PEN CONCEDES DEFEAT

Macron wins 2nd term as French President

MIMOSA SPENCER, JULIETTE JABKHIRO & LAYLI FOROUDI
PARIS, APRIL 24

FRENCH PRESIDENT Emmanuel Macron defeated his far-right rival Marine Le Pen on Sunday by a comfortable margin, securing a second term and heading off what would have been a political earthquake.

Cheers of joy erupted as the results appeared on a giant screen at the Champ de Mars park at the foot of the Eiffel tower, where Macron supporters waved French and EU flags. People hugged each other and chanted "Macron".

In contrast, a gathering of dejected Le Pen supporters erupted in boos and whistles at a sprawling reception hall on the outskirts of Paris.

Le Pen admitted defeat but vowed to keep up the fight, with the June parliamentary elections in mind.

"I will never abandon the French," she said to supporters chanting "Marine! Marine!"

The first pollsters' projections



showed Macron securing around 57-58% of the vote. Such estimates are normally accurate but may be fine-tuned as official results come in from around the country throughout the evening. But Macron can expect little

to no grace period after many, especially on the left only voted for him reluctantly to block the far-right from winning. Protests that marred part of his first mandate could erupt again quite quickly, as he tries to press on with pro-

business reforms.

"We will not spoil the victory ... but (Le Pen's) National Rally has its highest score ever," Health Minister Olivier Veran told BFM TV.

"There will be continuity in



French President Emmanuel Macron (left) casts his ballot at a polling station in Le Touquet; his far-right rival Marine Le Pen (above) votes in Henin-Beaumont, both in northern France, Sunday. AP

government policy because the president has been reelected. But we have also heard the French people's message," he added, pledging change.

A first major challenge will be the parliamentary elections in

June and opposition parties on the left and right will immediately start a major push to try to vote in a parliament and government opposed to Macron.

Victory for the centrist, pro-European Union Macron was immediately hailed by allies as a reprieve for mainstream politics that have been rocked in recent years by Britain's exit from the EU, the 2016 election of Donald Trump and the rise of a new generation of nationalist leaders.

"Bravo Emmanuel," European Council President Charles Michel, wrote on Twitter. "In this turbulent period, we need a solid Europe and a France totally committed to a more sovereign and more strategic European Union."

But Macron's margin of victory looks to be tighter than when he first beat Le Pen in 2017, underlining how many French remain unimpressed with him and his domestic record.

That disillusion was reflected in turnout figures, with France's main polling institutes saying the abstention rate would likely settle around 28%, the highest since 1969. REUTERS

World Bank readies Sri Lanka aid package; IMF talks 'fruitful'

DAVID LAWDER
WASHINGTON, APRIL 24

THE INTERNATIONAL Monetary Fund said on Saturday it held "fruitful technical discussions" with Sri Lanka on its loan request, while the World Bank said it was preparing an emergency aid package for the crisis-stricken country.

Sri Lanka, an island country of 22 million people, is struggling to pay for imports amid a crushing debt crisis and sharp drop in foreign exchange reserves that has fuelled soaring inflation. Prolonged power cuts and shortages of fuel, food and medicines have sparked nationwide protests.

Sri Lankan Finance Minister Ali Sabry has been in Washington this week talking to the IMF, the World Bank, India and others about financing help for his country, which has suspended payments on portions of its \$51 billion in external debt.

The World Bank's emergency response package includes \$10 million to be made immediately available for the purchase of essential medicines, funds shifted from its ongoing Covid-19 health preparedness project, a World



PROTESTS CONTINUE: Protesters near Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa's residence in Colombo on Sunday. Students surrounded the PM's residence as the anti-government Galle Face protest reached its 16th day and the clamour for the President and PM to resign grew louder. Reuters

Bank spokesperson said.

The global lender, which along with the IMF held its spring meetings this week, did not provide a total value for its package, but Sabry said on Friday that about \$500 million in aid was being considered.

The IMF said in a statement on Saturday that talks between its staff focused on the need for Sri Lanka to implement "a credible and coherent strategy" to re-

store macroeconomic stability, and to strengthen its social safety net and protect the poor and vulnerable during the current crisis.

"The IMF team welcomed the authorities' plan to engage in a collaborative dialogue with their creditors," IMF Sri Lanka mission chief Masahiro Nozaki said in a statement after the country took steps to explore a restructuring of some \$12 billion in sovereign bonds. REUTERS

10 dead, several missing after tour boat sinks in north Japan

MARI YAMAGUCHI
TOKYO, APRIL 24

RESCUERS SAID 10 people who were retrieved Sunday from the frigid sea and the rocky coast of a northern Japanese national park had died, a day after a tour boat with 26 aboard apparently sank in rough waters, triggering questions why it was allowed to sail.

The search for the others is still ongoing after the boat sent a distress call on Saturday afternoon saying it was sinking. The location, near the Kashuni Waterfall, is known as a difficult place to maneuver boats because of its rocky coastline and strong tide.

There were two crew and 24 passengers, including two children, on the *Kazu 1* when it ran into troubles while travelling off the western coast of the Shiretoko Peninsula. The coast guard said the 10 victims — seven men and three women — were adults.

The Transport Ministry launched an investigation into the boat's operator, which had two accidents last year.

The operator, Shiretoko Pleasure Cruise, had been instructed to take steps to improve its safety following earlier accidents in which it ran aground in June without causing injuries, and another in May, when three passengers were injured as the boat collided with an object. AP



A diver and a helicopter conduct a search operation near Shiretoko Peninsula in Japan on Sunday. AP

Pak minister says President must free himself from Imran's 'slavery'

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
ISLAMABAD, APRIL 24

PAKISTAN'S INTERIOR Minister Rana Sanaullah on Saturday tore into President Arif Alvi for showing reluctance in administering oaths to Cabinet members and not falling in line with the new dispensation, saying he should unshackle himself from former PM Imran Khan's "slavery".

The minister's statement comes in response to the delay in

administering the oath to the chief minister of Punjab by the governor of the province and also by the failure of Alvi to appoint a representative for the purpose.

Sanaullah asserted that Alvi was bound by the Constitution to perform his duty as the President, rather than act upon the dictates of Khan, *The Express Tribune* reported.

He asked Alvi to stop using the pretext of falling ill and to either discharge his duties or resign from his post.

PM out of no-fly list

Meanwhile, Pakistan's new government has removed names of several high-profile personalities, including Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, from the no-fly list, it emerged on Sunday.

The names removed from the Exit Control List include Shehbaz Sharif, his wife Nusrat, his niece Maryam Nawaz, former premier Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, his son Abdullah Khaqan and Finance Minister Miftah Ismail.

DAVID KEYTON
KYIV, APRIL 24

UKRAINE'S LEADER petitioned for more powerful Western weapons as he prepared to meet with top US officials in the war-torn country's capital Sunday and Russian forces concentrated their attacks on the east, including trying to dislodge the last Ukrainian troops holding out in the battered port city of Mariupol.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced the planned visit by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin during a lengthy Saturday night news conference held in a Kyiv subway station. The White House has not commented.

Zelenskyy said he was looking for the Americans to produce results, both in terms of arms and security guarantees. "You can't come to us empty-handed today, and we are expecting not just presents or some kind of cakes, we are expecting specific things and specific weapons," he said.

The visit would be the first by senior US officials since Russia in-

Shehbaz, Putin exchange letters

Islamabad: Pakistan's new Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Russian President Vladimir Putin exchanged letters to strengthen bilateral relations, a media report said Sunday, amid allegations by Imran Khan that his visit to Moscow, which came on the day Russia began its invasion of Ukraine, led to his ouster.

The letters were exchanged soon after Shehbaz became PM, but both the sides kept the development away from the public, *The Express Tribune* newspaper reported.

A senior Pakistan foreign office official confirmed to the newspaper that Putin wrote a letter to the PM, congratulating him on his election. The official said Putin expressed his desire to deepen cooperation between the two countries. Shehbaz wrote back to Putin thanking and expressed similar sentiments on ties, the report said. PTI

vaded Ukraine 60 days ago. Blinken stepped briefly onto Ukrainian soil in March to meet with the country's foreign minister during a visit to Poland. Zelenskyy's last face-to-face meeting with a US leader was Feb 19 in Munich with Vice President Kamala Harris.

While Ukraine's Western supporters have funneled military equipment to Ukraine, Zelenskyy has stressed repeatedly that the country needs more

heavy weapons, including long-range air defence systems, as well as warplanes to fend off Russia.

His meeting with Austin and Blinken was set to take place as Ukrainians and Russians observed Orthodox Easter, when the faithful celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Speaking from Kyiv's ancient St Sophia Cathedral, Zelenskyy, who is Jewish, highlighted the allegorical significance of the occasion to a nation wracked by war. AP

DISNEY WORLD, ONE OF FLORIDA'S BIGGEST PRIVATE EMPLOYERS, IS SET TO BE STRIPPED OF ITS SELF-GOVERNING STATUS

In fight with Disney, Florida Governor tests limits of his combative style

STEVE PEOPLES & BRENDAN FARRINGTON
TALLAHASSEE (FLORIDA), APRIL 24

FLORIDA GOVERNOR Ron DeSantis's deepening feud with Walt Disney World is testing the limits of his combative leadership style while sending an unmistakable message to his rivals that virtually nothing is off limits as he plots his political future.

The 43-year-old Republican has repeatedly demonstrated an acute willingness to fight over the course of his decade-long political career. He has turned against former aides and rejected the GOP

Legislature's rewrite of congressional maps, forcing lawmakers to accept a version more to his liking, though voting rights group have sued. And he's leaned into simmering tensions with Donald Trump, which is notable for someone seeking to lead a party where loyalty to the former president is a requirement.

But DeSantis's decision to punish Disney World, one of the world's most popular tourist destinations and one of Florida's biggest private employers, took his fighter mentality to a new level. In retribution for Disney's criticism of a new state law condemned by critics as "Don't Say Gay", DeSantis signed legislation

on Friday stripping the theme park of a decades-old special agreement that allowed it to govern itself.

To critics, including some in his own party, such a raw exercise of power suggests DeSantis is operating with a sense of invincibility that could come back to haunt him. Others see an ambitious politician emboldened by strong support in his state and a mountain of campaign cash grabbing an opportunity to further stoke the nation's culture wars, turning himself into a hero among Republican voters in the process.

"When you listen to Ron DeSantis, it's righteous indignation: 'Here's why you're wrong



Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida. AP

and here's why I'm right," said Florida Rep Blaise Ingoglia, a former state GOP chairman. "And it is that righteous indignation and that willingness to fight back that

endears people to Ron DeSantis's message. As long as he keeps on showing that he's willing to fight, people are going to continue to keep flocking to him."

DeSantis is up for reelection in November. But in the wake of his scrap with Disney, he will introduce himself to a key group of presidential primary voters this coming week when he campaigns for Nevada Senate candidate Adam Laxalt. The appearance marks his first of the year in a state featured prominently on the presidential calendar, although DeSantis aides insist it is simply a trip to help out a longtime friend.

Disney drew DeSantis's wrath for opposing a new state law that bars instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity in kindergarten through third grade. The DeSantis-backed Bill has been condemned by LGBTQ activists

nationwide as homophobic, although the measure, like others dealing with transgender athletes and racial history in schools, has emerged as a core piece of the GOP's political strategy.

The Disney Legislation, which does not take effect until June 2023, could cause massive economic fallout for the company, the surrounding communities and the millions who visit the Orlando amusement park every year.

There are risks to DeSantis's embrace of the legislation, particularly if his antagonism towards Disney threatens the GOP's standing with independents and women, who could

play crucial roles in the fall campaign. Jenna Ellis, a former Trump administration attorney, called the DeSantis-backed legislation "vengeful."

Democrats, facing a tough election year, are eager to highlight DeSantis's moves as a way to portray the GOP as a party of extremists.

However, those close to the Florida governor say there is one message above all to take away from the Disney fight: that DeSantis, one of the few high-profile Republicans who has not ruled out running against Trump in a 2024 presidential primary, is not afraid of anybody, anything or any fight. AP



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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

Why are EV makers recalling some of their electric scooters?

OLA ELECTRIC has said it is recalling more than 1,400 of its electric scooters in the wake of dozens of incidents of electric two-wheelers catching fire, in which at least four people have been killed so far. The move came after Union Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari asked EV makers to take “advance action” to recall all defective batches of their vehicles immediately.

The recall

Ola Electric is recalling 1,441 scooters of a specific batch, one of which had burst in flames while parked on the roadside in a busy area in Pune last month. The company said the incident was likely “isolated”.

“Our internal investigation into the March 26 vehicle fire incident in Pune is ongoing and the preliminary assessment reveals that the thermal incident was likely an isolated one. As a pre-emptive measure, we will be conducting a detailed diagnostics and health check of the scooters in that specific batch and therefore are issuing a voluntary recall of 1,441 vehicles,” it said.

Ola Electric said the scooters being recalled will be inspected by its service engineers and will go through a diagnostics check across all battery, thermal and safety systems. The firm said its battery pack already complies with and is tested for AIS 156, the latest proposed standard for India, in addition to being compliant with the European standard ECE 136.

Recent EV fires

In the last few weeks, over a dozen electric scooters have caught fire including those manufactured by Ola Electric, Okinawa, Pure EV and Jitendra EV. Last month, an Okinawa scooter erupted into flames in Vellore, claiming the lives of a man and his 13-year-old daughter.



A number of electric scooters have burst into flames in recent weeks. *File*

Earlier this month, more than 20 electric scooters made by Jitendra EV caught fire while being transported from the factory in Nashik. On Wednesday, an electric scooter made by Pure EV caught fire in Telangana’s Nizamabad after its battery exploded, killing an 80-year-old man.

The other companies have said they are investigating the possible reasons behind the fires. Pure EV has initiated a recall of 2,000 electric scooters; Okinawa has announced it is recalling more than 3,000 EVs to check them for potential safety issues.

Government’s response

Earlier this week, Gadkari said that if EV makers are found “negligent in their process”, the government will impose a heavy penalty and order a recall of all their defective EVs. Quality-centric guidelines for EVs would be issued soon, he said. The Road Transport Ministry has ordered an investigation into the fire incidents by the Centre for Fire Explosive and Environment Safety.

SOUMYARENDRA BARIK

EVERYDAY EXPLAINERS

WORLD BOOK DAY

UNESCO INITIATIVE TO PROMOTE THE ENJOYMENT OF BOOKS AND READING

APRIL 23 has been designated by UNESCO as World Book and Copyright Day, a date the United Nations agency says “marks the departure of three great authors of universal literature, Miguel de Cervantes, William Shakespeare, and Inca Garcilaso de la Vega”. On World Book and Copyright Day, it says, “we celebrate their captivating power to spark innovation, generate knowledge and change minds”.

UNESCO’S general conference at its 28th session in 1995 proclaimed the World Book Day “to promote the enjoyment of books and reading”. Every year, UNESCO and international organisations representing the three major sectors of the book industry—publishers, booksellers and libraries—select a city as the World Book Capital “to maintain, through its own initiatives, the impetus of the Day’s celebrations until 23 April of the following year”.

GUADALAJARA in Mexico took up the role of World Book Capital on April 23 “with a year-long programme that focuses on the role of books and reading in triggering social change, combating violence, and building a culture of peace”, UNESCO said.

Guadalajara’s proposed programme focuses on three strategic axes: regaining public spaces through reading activities in parks and other accessible places; social bonding and cohesion through reading and writing workshops for children; and strengthening of neighbourhood identity using intergenerational connections, storytelling and street poetry, the agency said.

MADRID was the first UNESCO World Book Capital in 2001, followed by Alexandria in 2002 and New Delhi in 2003. The National Book Trust (NBT) was designated the nodal agency for the activities planned to celebrate New Delhi as the World Book Capital for 2003. Then Union Human Resource Development Minister Murli Manohar Joshi had underlined that the international honour must be used to showcase Indian writing and publishing abroad, a government release said then. Among the programmes planned for the year were the opening of book kiosks at various places, establishment of libraries and setting up of a permanent book pavilion at Pragati Maidan, the release said.

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SHRUTI DHAPOLA
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

THE EUROPEAN Parliament and European Union (EU) Member States announced on Saturday that they had reached a political agreement on the Digital Services Act (DSA), a landmark legislation to force big Internet companies to act against disinformation and illegal and harmful content, and to “provide better protection for Internet users and their fundamental rights”.

The Act, which is yet to become law, was proposed by the EU Commission (anti-trust) in December 2020. As defined by the EU Commission, the DSA is “a set of common rules on intermediaries’ obligations and accountability across the single market”, and ensures higher protection to all EU users, irrespective of their country.

The proposed Act will work in conjunction with the EU’s Digital Markets Act (DMA), which was approved last month.

The DSA is likely to be adopted by the EU Parliament in the next few months. Once adopted, “it will apply from fifteen months or from January 1, 2024, whichever is later”.

What is the DSA, and to whom will it apply?

The DSA will tightly regulate the way intermediaries, especially large platforms such as Google, Facebook, and YouTube, function when it comes to moderating user content. Instead of letting platforms decide how to deal with abusive or illegal content, the DSA will lay down specific rules and obligations for these companies to follow.

According to the EU, DSA will apply to a “large category of online services, from simple websites to Internet infrastructure services and online platforms.” The obligations for each of these will differ according to their size and role.

The legislation brings in its ambit platforms that provide Internet access, domain name registrars, hosting services such as cloud computing and web-hosting services. But more importantly, very large online platforms (VLOPs) and very large online search engines (VLOSEs) will face “more stringent requirements”.

Any service with more than 45 million monthly active users in the EU will fall into this category. Those with under 45 million monthly active users in the EU will be exempt from certain new obligations.

Once the DSA becomes law, each EU Member State will have the primary role in en-

ROUNAK BAGCHI
KOLKATA, APRIL 24

A LONDON court last week ordered the extradition of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to the United States, where he has been charged under the Espionage Act of 1917. The order has to be signed by British Home Secretary Priti Patel. Assange has four weeks to appeal to her directly, and to subsequently take his case to the High Court in England.

Why US wants Assange

Assange has been wanted by the US since 2010, when WikiLeaks released 4,00,000 documents called the Iraq War Logs from the US Department of Defense databases provided by intelligence analyst Bradley Manning (who later referred to herself as Chelsea). Manning had copied these files into a CD-ROM and uploaded them onto a WikiLeaks dropbox.

WikiLeaks released the war logs, which were published by several media organisations and exposed human rights abuses by US forces



Platforms should be transparent about their content moderation decisions, prevent dangerous disinformation from going viral and avoid unsafe products being offered on marketplaces... With [this] agreement we ensure that platforms are held accountable for the risks their services can pose to society and citizens.’

MARGRETHE VESTAGER

EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT, ‘EUROPE FIT FOR THE DIGITAL AGE’ AND EU COMMISSIONER FOR COMPETITION

forcing these, along with a new “European Board for Digital Services.” The EU Commission will carry out “enhanced supervision and enforcement” for the VLOPs and VLOSEs. Penalties for breaching these rules could be huge — as high as 6% of the company’s global annual turnover.

What do the new rules state?

A wide range of proposals seeks to ensure that the negative social impact arising from many of the practices followed by the Internet giants is minimised or removed.

Online platforms and intermediaries such as Facebook, Google, YouTube, etc will have to add “new procedures for faster removal” of content deemed illegal or harmful. This can vary according to the laws of each EU Member State.

Further, these platforms will have to clearly explain their policy on taking down content; users will be able to challenge these takedowns as well. Platforms will need to have a clear mechanism to help users flag content that is illegal. Platforms will have to cooperate with

in Iraq. On April 5, 2010, wikileaks.org released a 39-minute video shot in 2007, showing the crew of two US AH-64 Apache helicopters firing indiscriminately and killing civilians and two Reuters war correspondents. In December 2018, the website published a searchable database of more than 16,000 procurement requests by US embassies around the world.

While the WikiLeaks portal was maintained by hundreds of volunteers, the site was represented publicly by its founder director Assange. WikiLeaks used cryptographic tools to protect sources, allowing for publication of anonymous “leaks” of sensitive information.

The charges

The Barack Obama Administration started investigation of the Manning leaks, and Manning was convicted by court martial in July 2013 for violating the Espionage Act and underwent rigorous imprisonment before her sentence was commuted in January 2017. The US had decided it would not pursue criminal charges against Assange and WikiLeaks.

The Donald Trump Administration, how-

LAW COULD BE EASIER WRITTEN THAN ENFORCED

THE EU has a reputation as the world’s toughest regulator of the tech industry, but its actions have sometimes appeared tougher on paper than in practice.

THE 230 new workers likely to be hired to enforce the new laws is insufficient compared with the resources available to Meta, Google and others, experts say.

THE GDPR, the EU’s data privacy law, which like the Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act, was hailed as landmark legislation when it was passed in 2018, has failed to ensure significant action against Facebook, Google, etc. over their data-collection practices.

TECH COMPANIES and industry trade groups have warned that the laws could have unintended consequences, such as harming smaller businesses and undercutting Europe’s digital economy.

THE NYT

“trusted flaggers”.

Marketplaces such as Amazon will have to “impose a duty of care” on sellers who are using their platform to sell products online. They will have to “collect and display information on the products and services sold in order to ensure that consumers are properly informed.”

The DSA adds “an obligation for very large digital platforms and services to analyse systemic risks they create and to carry out risk-reduction analysis”. This audit for platforms like Google and Facebook will need to take place every year.

Companies will have to look at the risk of “dissemination of illegal content”, “adverse effects on fundamental rights”, “manipulation of services having an impact on democratic processes and public security”, “adverse effects on gender-based violence, and on minors and serious consequences for the physical or mental health of users”.

The Act proposes to allow independent vetted researchers to have access to public data from these platforms to carry out studies to

understand these risks better.

The DSA proposes to ban “Dark Patterns” or “misleading interfaces” that are designed to trick users into doing something that they would not agree to otherwise.

This includes forcible pop-up pages, giving greater prominence to a particular choice, etc. The proposed law requires that customers be offered a choice of a system which does not “recommend content based on their profiling”.

The DSA incorporates a new crisis mechanism clause — it refers to the Russia-Ukraine conflict — which will be “activated by the Commission on the recommendation of the board of national Digital Services Coordinators”. However, these special measures will only be in place for three months.

This clause will make it “possible to analyse the impact of the activities of these platforms” on the crisis, and the Commission will decide the appropriate steps to be taken to ensure the fundamental rights of users are not violated.

The law proposes stronger protection for minors, and aims to ban targeted advertising for them based on their personal data.

It also proposes “transparency measures for online platforms on a variety of issues, including on the algorithms used for recommending content or products to users”.

Finally, it says that cancelling a subscription should be as easy as subscribing.

Does this mean that social media platforms will now be liable for any unlawful content?

It has been clarified that the platforms and other intermediaries will not be liable for the unlawful behaviour of users. So, they still have ‘safe harbour’ in some sense.

However, if the platforms are “aware of illegal acts and fail to remove them”, they will be liable for this user behaviour. Small platforms, which remove any illegal content they detect, will not be liable.

India’s IT Rules announced last year make the social media intermediary and its executives liable if the company fails to carry out due diligence. Rule 4(a) states that significant social media intermediaries — such as Facebook or Google — must appoint a chief compliance officer (CCO), who could be booked if a tweet or post that violates local laws is not removed within the stipulated period.

India’s Rules also introduce the need to publish a monthly compliance report. They include a clause on the need to trace the originator of a message — this provision has been challenged by WhatsApp in Delhi High Court.

The trial in UK

Assange fought a legal battle against his extradition following his arrest in London in 2019, after spending seven years inside the Ecuadorian Embassy to avoid detention. After then Ecuador President Lenin Moreno revoked his asylum and his citizenship on April 11, 2019, following Assange’s disputes with Ecuador authorities, he underwent imprisonment for 50 weeks for bail violations.

A district judge ruled in January 2021 that he could not be extradited to the US because of concerns about his mental health and the possibility of suicide. Bail was denied.

On December 10, 2021, the High Court ruled in favour of the US following the Joe Biden Administration’s assurances on the terms of Assange’s possible incarceration — that it would not hold him at the highest security prison and that if convicted, he could serve his sentence in his native Australia if he requested it.

Assange appealed against the verdict in the British Supreme Court. On March 14, the court refused permission to appeal. Finally, a London court ordered the extradition.



Assange supporters hold placards outside the court in London. AP

ever, in April 2017 charged Assange with a conspiracy with Manning to crack the password of a Defence Department network to publish classified documents and communications on WikiLeaks. Later, the Trump Administration charged Assange with violating the Espionage Act, and indicted him on 17 new charges related to the Act at the US District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia. These charges carry a maximum sentence of 170 years in prison.

Most Indians with diabetes don’t have sugar, BP under control: study

ANONNA DUTT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

A DECADE-LONG survey of 1.1 lakh adults in all 30 states and Union Territories of India, published in *The Lancet*, has found that a large proportion of people with diabetes have not been able to keep their sugar levels, blood pressure, and bad cholesterol under control.

Of those who know they have diabetes, only one in three had their sugar levels under control, and less than half each had their blood pressure and blood cholesterol in check. Only 7.7% had all three under control.

The study

The India Diabetes (INDIAB) survey was conducted by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) between October 2008 and December 2020. Around 70% of the participants were from rural India.

“Our sampling method is very robust and represents the population of the country extremely well. If overlaid on our census data, it would replicate it to the tee,” said Dr V

Mohan, chairman of Dr Mohan’s Diabetes Specialities Centre and one of the authors.

The study looked at around 4,000-5,000 individuals from each state. For the analysis, those who self-reported having diabetes were included. “Around 10% people were self-reported diabetics — there were of course variations from state to state — and were included for the analysis. Many more did not even know that they had diabetes — around 50% of diabetics in India are unaware of their status — so how can we check whether it was under control,” said Dr Mohan.

The findings

Only 36.3% of known diabetics across the country were found to have kept their A1c — or blood glucose levels — over the previous three months in check. Although a higher proportion were able to control their blood pressure and bad cholesterol (LDL), it was still less than half at 48.8% and 41.5% respectively.

The parameters remained uncontrolled despite 83.3% of the people saying they were taking medications to manage it. What this suggests, the researchers said, is that people

are not taking their medicines regularly, taking sub-optimal doses, or are not monitoring their levels and adjusting doses regularly. Only 16.7% of the known diabetics actually self-monitored their blood glucose levels.

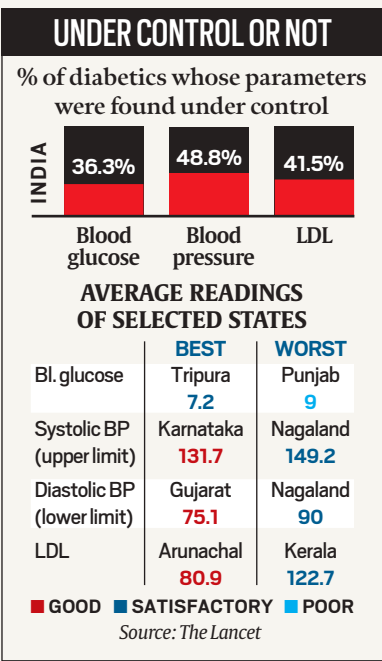
State-wise variations

The mean blood sugar level was not well-controlled in any of the states, the study found. Punjab had the highest A1c levels with a mean of 9, and Tripura had the lowest with 7.2. Ideally, diabetics have to manage their levels at 7.

The mean systolic or the upper limit of the blood pressure (pressure when the heart beats) was the lowest in Karnataka with 131.7, and the highest in Nagaland with 149.2. Less than 140 is considered controlled, with the normal being 120.

The diastolic or lower limit of blood pressure (pressure when the heart rests between the beats) was the highest in Nagaland with a mean of 90, and the lowest in Gujarat with 75.1. Less than 90 is considered controlled, with the normal being 80.

In 11 states, the mean LDL cholesterol level



was controlled, with the highest mean level recorded in Kerala with 122.7, and the lowest in Arunachal Pradesh with 80.9 (less than 100 is considered well controlled).

The implications

Controlling these three parameters is key to preventing complication such as cardiac conditions, stroke, kidney disease, diabetic retinopathy (damage to the blood vessels of the retina), and damage to nerves.

“We cannot have a diabetes-free India, but we should aim to have a complication-free India. Most people just look at their glucose, but beyond glucose, controlling the blood pressure and cholesterol is as important,” said Dr Shashank Joshi, chairman of the Southeast Asia chapter of the International Diabetes Federation, and an author of the paper.

Dr Mohan said, “We have shown repeatedly through earlier studies that unless you get all three parameters under control, the risk of developing eye, kidney, heart, feet, nerve and other complications will go up. With a couple of million new diabetics each year, we will not be able to handle the num-

bers of transplants, dialysis, etc needed.”

He added, “If you look at the Covid-19 deaths, you will see that most of them happened in people with uncontrolled diabetes... So, we need to manage diabetes not only for its sake, but also to ensure that people aren’t at risk of severe complications of other diseases. Diabetes kills many more people each year than Covid has so far in India.”

The road ahead

The authors have stressed the need to increase awareness about the fact that diabetics need to control not only their sugar levels but the other two parameters as well. There has to be an increased access to healthcare, especially in the government system. The study found that 62% of the people used private health facilities.

They also stressed the importance of reducing stress. Dr Joshi said many city dwellers maintained all other factors but were still unable to control their ABCs because of stress.

PAPER: [thelancet.com/journals/landia/article/PIIS2213-8587\(22\)00072-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/landia/article/PIIS2213-8587(22)00072-9/fulltext)

14 ECONOMY

SECTOR WATCH ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Why has Ola Electric recalled 1,441 scooters?

SOUMYARENDRA BARIK
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

OLA ELECTRIC has said that it is voluntarily recalling more than 1,400 of its electric scooters in the wake of dozens of incidents of electric two-wheelers catching fire, claiming at least four lives so far.

The firm's response comes just days after Union Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari cautioned EV makers to take "advance action" in recalling all defective batches of their vehicles immediately.

Why has Ola Electric initiated the recall?

Ola Electric has said that it is recalling 1,441 vehicles from a specific batch of its scooters, one of which had burst in flames while parked on the roadside of a busy commercial area in Pune last month.

However, the firm downplayed the incident of the fire in its scooter and said, "Our internal investigation into the March 26th vehicle fire incident in Pune is ongoing and the preliminary assessment reveals that the thermal incident was likely an isolated one," "As a pre-emptive measure, we will be conducting a detailed diagnostics and health check of the scooters in that specific batch and therefore are issuing a voluntary recall of 1,441 vehicles," it added.

Ola Electric said that the scooters that are being recalled will be inspected by its service engineers and will go through a thorough diagnostics across all battery systems, thermal systems as well as the safety systems. The firm claimed that its battery pack already complies with and is tested for AIS 156, the latest proposed standard for India, in addition to being compliant with the European standard ECE 136.

How many instances of EV fires have there been?

In the last few weeks, over a dozen electric scooters have caught fire including those manufactured by Ola Electric, Okinawa, Pure EV and Jitendra EV. Aside from the Ola scooter incident, last month, an Okinawa scooter erupted into flames claiming the lives of a man and his 13-year-old daughter.

Earlier this month, more than 20 electric scooters made by Jitendra EV caught fire while they were being transported from the company's factory in Nashik, in what was potentially the biggest such incident

3 KEY POINTS

1 Ola Electric has said that it is recalling 1,441 vehicles from a specific batch of its scooters, one of which had burst in flames while parked on the roadside of a busy commercial area in Pune last month.

2 Ola Electric said that the scooters that are being recalled will be inspected by its service engineers and will go through a thorough diagnostics across all battery systems, thermal systems as well as the safety systems.

3 This comes just days after Union Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari cautioned EV makers to take "advance action" in recalling all defective batches of their vehicles immediately.

EXPLAINED

Of fire yet. On Wednesday, an electric scooter made by Pure EV caught fire in Telangana's Nizamabad after its battery exploded, claiming the life of an 80-year-old man.

Have others EV makers issued a recall?

The companies have said they are investigating the reasons behind the possible causes of the fires. Pure EV has initiated a recall of 2,000 of its electric scooters while Okinawa has announced it is recalling more than 3,000 of its EVs to check them for potential safety issues.

What has been the government's response?

Earlier this week, Gadkari said that if EV makers are found "negligent in their process", the government will impose a heavy penalty and a recall of all of their defective EVs will be ordered. The government is also working on quality-centric guidelines for EVs which would be issued soon, he said.

Before that, the Road Transport Ministry had ordered a probe into the incidents and roped in the Centre for Fire Explosive and Environment Safety (CFEES) to investigate the incidents and suggest remedial measures.

SECOND ROUND OF BIDDING AFTER THE FIRST FAILED

BharatNet PPP: As incentive, DoT to assume revenue risk

AASHISH ARYAN & SOUMYARENDRA BARIK
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

HAVING FAILED to get any bids in the first round of request for proposal (RFP) for the implementation of BharatNet in public-private-partnership (PPP) mode, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has now decided to assume the revenue risk for the second round of bidding, sources in know of the development said.

"Most of the companies had expressed apprehension that the newer connections may not fetch as much revenue in semi-urban and rural areas since there is ample proliferation of mobile internet. We have assured them that they do not have to worry about the revenue and expect good bids in this round," a senior DoT official said.

Officials said that the companies bidding for the second round will only have to bring in the capital expenditure and operational expenses for the project without worrying about the fluctuations

COS TO FOCUS ON CAPEX

■ Officials said that the companies bidding for the second round will only have to bring in the capital expenditure and operational expenses for the project without worrying about the fluctuations associated with the revenue.

associated with the revenue.

As part of the revised plan, the government is likely to either provide a minimum revenue per month per state to the bidders who successfully complete their project or subsidise some of their operational expenditure.

"We hope to complete the bidding process soon. Depending on the inputs from the bidders, the details of how revenue will be given will be finalised," another official said.

As of February 2022, only about 1.72 lakh of the initially targeted 2.5 lakh gram panchayats

■ As a part of the revised plan, the government is likely to either provide a minimum revenue per month per state to the bidders who successfully complete their project or subsidise some of their operational expenditure

had been connected to the central grid under BharatNet. Official sources also said on average, only about 20,000 gram panchayats are being connected to the BharatNet grid every year.

The government's flagship rural internet connectivity project BharatNet, which has been delayed by over 10 years now, aims to connect all six lakh villages in the country with high speed broadband internet. The scope of the project was to initially connect only the 2.5 lakh gram panchayats.

On August 15, 2020, Prime

Minister Narendra Modi announced that the scope of the project has now been expanded to connect all the villages, in addition to the gram panchayats and the blocks within the next 1,000 days. Later in June 2021, the Union Cabinet approved a plan to rope in private players as well for the implementation of the internet connectivity scheme in the PPP mode.

Under the PPP mode implementation of BharatNet approved by the Union Cabinet in June last year, a concessionaire selected through a competitive international bidding process will be responsible for creation, upgradation, operation, maintenance and utilisation of BharatNet.

As per the proposal approved then, the total cost of the project was estimated at Rs 29,432 crore, of which the government had to spend Rs 19,041 crore as viability gap funding. An RFP was floated in July 2021 but it failed to get any response from any company as most bidders cited the high cost of the project and the uncertainty of revenues.

'Pvt sector to drive growth of PFRDA pension schemes'

The private sector is expected to drive growth of the National Pension System (NPS), which has witnessed exponential rise over the last five years, in terms of number of subscribers as well as assets under management, a study paper of PFRDA said



Total number of subscribers have increased over three-fold from 1.5 crore in March 2017, to over 5.2 crore by March 2022, which is dominated by APY. Total number of APY subscribers has risen by over four-times

Source: PFRDA/PTI

Led by the Atal Pension Yojana (APY), the number of subscribers between 2017-18 and 2021-22 have multiplied over three-fold, while the assets under management rose by over four-fold led by NPS, said the paper written by PFRDA member Deepak Mohanty

The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) regulates the flagship Atal Pension Yojana (APY) and the National Pension System (NPS)

Oil import bill doubles to \$119 bn in FY22 as energy prices surge

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

CRUDE OIL import bill nearly doubled to \$119 billion in the fiscal year that ended on March 31, as energy prices soared globally following the return of demand and war in Ukraine.

India, the world's third biggest oil consuming and importing nation, spent \$119.2 billion in 2021-22 (April 2021 to March 2022), up from \$62.2 billion in the previous fiscal year, according to data from the oil ministry's Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell (PPAC).

It spent \$13.7 billion in March alone, when oil prices surged to 14-year high. This compared with

\$8.4 billion spending in the same month last year.

Oil prices started to surge from January and rates crossed \$100 per barrel in the following month before touching \$140 per barrel in early March. Prices have since receded and are now around \$106 per barrel. According to PPAC, India imported 212.2 million tonnes of crude oil in 2021-22, up from 196.5 million tonnes in the previous year. This was, however, lower than pre-pandemic imports of 227 million tonnes in 2019-20. The spending on oil imports in 2019-20 was \$101.4 billion.

The imported crude oil is turned into value-added products like petrol and diesel at oil refineries, before being sold to automo-

biles and other users.

India, which is 85.5 per cent dependent on imports to meet crude oil needs, has a surplus refining capacity and it exports some petroleum products but is short on production of cooking gas LPG, which is imported from nations like Saudi Arabia.

The nation consumed 202.7 million tonnes of petroleum products in 2021-22, up from 194.3 million tonnes in the previous fiscal, but lower than pre-pandemic 214.1 million tonnes demand in 2019-20. Import of petroleum products in 2021-22 fiscal was 40.2 million tonnes worth \$24.2 billion. On the other hand, 61.8 million tonnes of petroleum products were also exported for \$42.3 billion. **WITH PTI**

BRIEFLY FM in US



PTI

New Delhi: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has urged the Indian diaspora to become partners in growth of the country during the next 25 years as it attains 100 years of independence.

Maruti SUV

New Delhi: Maruti Suzuki will keep consolidating its existing product line-up while bolstering presence in the SUV segment to power its way back to 50 per cent market share, said a senior official.

Religare, Sebi

New Delhi: Religare Enterprises on Sunday said it has paid Rs 5.41 crore to market regulator Sebi to settle its past cases. **PTI**

MARKET WATCH

M-CAP OF 8 OF TOP-10 MOST VALUED COS FALLS

New Delhi: Eight of the top-10 most valued firms together lost Rs 2,21,555.61 crore from their market valuation last week in-line with the weak trend in the broader market, with Infosys and HDFC Bank suffering the biggest hit. **PTI**

FRL shareholders to be hit if banks opt for IBC resolution

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI, APRIL 24

EQUITY SHAREHOLDERS of Future Retail Ltd are likely to see the value of their shareholding being wiped out if the company is taken to the bankruptcy court for resolution.

This is because once a company is taken to the IBC route, equity shareholders have the last claim over any assets of a company after dues to the government, financial institutions, banks and other creditors and bondholders are paid off. Banks are likely to take Future Retail to the NCLT after they rejected the company's plan to sell its assets to Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL). According to analysts, Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) puts banks and financial institutions at the top of the list before statutory dues. Equity shareholders stay at the bottom and they get whatever is left after banks and bondholders are paid up. In most cases, shareholders don't get anything, said an analyst.

Future Retail shares closed at Rs 29.24, down 3.94 per cent, on the BSE on Friday. The company has a market capitalisation of Rs

RIL has said the takeover proposal can't be implemented as secured creditors rejected the plan

1,586 crore. Promoters hold only 14.31 per cent stake in the company. Reliance Industries Ltd on Saturday said the takeover proposal can't be implemented as secured creditors rejected the RIL plan. On Friday, secured lenders rejected Future Retail's Rs 24,713 crore deal to sell its assets to Reliance Retail Ventures Ltd, a subsidiary of RIL. "The shareholders and unsecured creditors of FRL have voted in favour of the scheme. But the secured creditors of FRL have voted against the scheme. In view thereof, the subject scheme of arrangement cannot be implemented," RIL said in a filing.

As per an exchange filing, in the secured creditors e-voting, 69.29 per cent of votes of 11 lenders were against the proposal to sell the assets to the RIL subsidiary. However, 30.71 per cent of the votes of 34 lenders favoured the sale of assets.

FPIs pull out ₹12,300 cr in Apr so far on US Fed rate hike fears



The BSE, Mumbai. File

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) remained net sellers for six months to March 2022, withdrawing a massive net amount of Rs 1.48 lakh crore from equities. These

were largely on the back of anticipation of a rate hike by the US Federal Reserve and due to the deteriorating geopolitical environment following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. After six months of selling spree, FPIs turned net investors in the first week of April and invested Rs 7,707 crore in equities. After a short breather, once again they turned net sellers to the tune of over Rs 4,500 crore during the holiday-shortened April 11-13 week and the sell-off continued in the succeeding week too. This makes foreign investors net sellers to the tune of Rs 12,286 crore in this month so far (April 1-22), data with depositories showed. **WITH PTI**

Coal Secy: Not crisis; power demand-supply mismatch

SIMRAN ARORA
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

THE CURRENT power crisis is mainly on account of sharp decline in electricity generation from different fuel sources and not due to non-availability of domestic coal, a top official said on Sunday.

In an interview to PTI, Coal Secretary A K Jain attributed the low coal stocks at power plants to several factors such as heightened power demand due to the boom in the economy post COVID-19, early arrival of summer, rise in the price of gas and imported coal and sharp fall in electricity generation by coastal



A thermal plant in Patiala district. File

thermal power plants.

"It is not a coal crisis but a power demand-supply mismatch.. The power demand has registered an upswing as the

economy has bounced back, summers have arrived early and the price of gas and imported coal have shot up sharply," Jain explained.

He added that a slew of measures are already under way to enhance total power supply in the country. The gas-based power generation which has fallen drastically in the country has aggravated the crisis. "Some of the thermal power plants in India were built along the coast so that imported coal could be used, brought from nearby countries like Indonesia... But with the sharp rise in the price of imported coal they have reduced the imports," Jain said. **PTI**

'India suspends tourist visas to Chinese nationals'

New Delhi: India has suspended tourist visas issued to Chinese nationals, global airlines body IATA told its member carriers on April 20.

In a circular issued on April 20 regarding India, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) said, "Tourist visas issued to nationals of China (People's Republic) are no longer valid."

It said the following passengers are allowed to enter India: nationals of Bhutan, India, Maldives and

Nepal; passengers with a residence permit issued by India; passengers with visa or an e-visa issued by India; passengers with an overseas citizen of India (OCI) card or booklet; passengers with a persons of Indian origin (PIO) card; and passengers with a diplomatic passport.

The IATA also said that tourist visas with a validity of 10 years are no longer valid.

The IATA is a global airlines body with around 290 members

that comprise more than 80 per cent of global air traffic.

India has urged Beijing to adopt a "congenial stance" in the matter as the continuation of the strict restrictions is putting the academic careers of thousands of Indian students in jeopardy, MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi had said on March 17.

Bagchi said a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson had stated on February 8 that China was looking into the matter in a coordi-

nated manner and that arrangements for allowing foreign students to return to China were being examined.

"But let me clarify that till date, the Chinese side has not given any categorical response about the return of Indian students. We will continue to urge the Chinese side to adopt a congenial stance in the interest of our students and that they facilitate an early return to China so that our students can pursue their studies," Bagchi said. **PTI**

'ECB policymakers keen for early rate hike'

REUTERS
WASHINGTON, APRIL 24

EUROPEAN CENTRAL Bank policymakers are keen to end their bond purchase scheme at the earliest possible moment and raise interest rates as soon as July but certainly no later than September, nine sources familiar with ECB thinking told Reuters.

The ECB has been removing stimulus at the slowest possible pace this year but a surge in inflation is now putting pressure on



CHRISTINE LAGARDE
President, ECB

Reuters file

policymakers to end their nearly decade-long experiment with unconventional support.

An ECB spokesperson declined to comment.

The big obstacle so far has been that longer-term forecasts still showed inflation falling back below the ECB's 2 per cent target but fresh estimates shared with policymakers at their April 14 meeting showed even 2024 inflation over target, several of the sources said. "It was just over 2 per cent so in my interpretation all the criteria to raise interest rates have now

been met," one of the sources, who asked not to be named said.

Governing Council members have long criticised the ECB for underestimating inflation, which hit 7.5 per cent last month, and they consider the new projection as a step in acknowledging the reality.

"When (chief economist) Philip (Lane) presented the numbers, people actually clapped," another source said.

No policy proposals have been tabled yet and the ECB's next meeting is still over a month away, on June 9.

Fury retains WBC crown, walks away undefeated

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LONDON, APRIL 24

SITTING IN nothing but some tight-fitting shorts, Tyson Fury grabbed the flabby part of his belly and started shaking it. "I'm a normal-looking man," he said, "an average Joe."

No one quite mixes self-deprecation with self-promotion quite like this world heavyweight champion.

After all, moments earlier, Fury had reeled off all the titles he had won in a turbulent and headline-making boxing career that he might just have brought to an end with a brutal sixth-round stoppage of fellow Briton Dillian Whyte in front of 94,000 fans at London's Wembley Stadium. "I'm very proud I've won two English titles, two British titles, two Commonwealth titles, the Irish title, the European title, WBO intercontinental, WBO international, WBO super, WBA super, IBF, IBO, Ring Magazine, lineal, WBC — I've won every belt there is to win. There isn't more to do," he said in the bowels of England's national soccer stadium.

Not quite, though. There is one final level that might, in the coming days, start to nag away at the man who says he is retiring as "the best heavyweight there has ever been."

Could Fury really turn down the chance of holding all the heavyweight titles and becoming undisputed champion of the world? He has held each of the belts at some stage of his 14-year pro career — either side of a 3½-year break when he dealt with issues of mental health, drug use and depression during which he tried to kill himself — but never at the same time. Beating the winner of the rematch between Oleksandr Usyk, the reigning WBA, IBF and WBO title-holder, and Anthony Joshua in a highly lucrative, legacy-defining fight would surely be the ultimate way to bow out. Not according to Fury.

"I've fulfilled everything I've ever wanted to fulfil," he said. "I'm going to retire as only the second heavyweight in history, after Rocky Marciano, to retire undefeated."



Tyson Fury's record stands at 32 wins and a draw, with 23 knockouts. Reuters

CROSSWORD 4723

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ACROSS

1 A blow against socialism? (5)

4 He tries wild rarebit (7)

8 In favour of some return of profit (3)

9 One needs it for toast (9)

10 Try this cocktail when parched (7)

11 One wants to be so described (5)

13 Trader who gives one a hand (6)

15 Blue European flower? (6)

18 It could be a bit of a shock at harvest time (5)

19 Bank has a way to avoid a row (7)

21 Vote of a man in continental country (9)

23 It is charged for a portion without wine (3)

24 A verbal thrust? (7)

25 It may be perfect (5)

DOWN

1 Freud upset about note being proved false (7)

2 Men involved with a tiger shoot (9)

3 Urban areas to the West, North and South (5)

4 Troubles any son may produce (6)

5 A bloomer - could be a big one (7)

6 Drink and possibly eat (3)

7 Out of practice and lacking polish (5)

12 Cautioned about children's instruction (9)

14 Radio makes sound use of them (7)

16 There are two points he can possibly raise? (7)

17 Military band? (6)

18 Comparatively secure from strange fears (5)

20 Strain with others after a point (5)

22 Sap may come from this tree (3)

Solutions Crossword 4722: Across: 1 Television, 8 Built, 9 Tremolo, 10 Net gain, 11 Agent, 12 Fleece, 14 Edison, 17 Crane, 19 Bacilli, 21 Octavia, 22 Rodin, 23 Rod and line. Down: 2 Epistle, 3 Extra, 4 Intend, 5 Ireland, 6 Noose, 7 Contentment, 8 Benefactor, 13 Cleaved, 15 Saladin, 16 Obtain, 18 Outer, 20 Carol.

JUMBLE

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

The foot feels the foot when it feels the _____. - Buddha (6)

KPYOR

IILQUD

LUNGS

PENGOS

SOLUTION: KPYOR: SLUNG; IILQUD: LIQUID; LUNGS: LUNG; PENGOS: SONG

The foot feels the foot when it feels the foot. - Buddha

JUMBLE WORDS

KPYOR

IILQUD

LUNGS

PENGOS

SOLUTION: KPYOR: SLUNG; IILQUD: LIQUID; LUNGS: LUNG; PENGOS: SONG

The foot feels the foot when it feels the foot. - Buddha

Sportline: Dinesh Karthik has excelled in the finisher's role for RCB, but his poor record in big tournaments and vagaries of team combination stand in the way of his return to the national side for T20 World Cup later this year

DK's spot (SWOT) analysis



Dinesh Karthik's 210 runs have come at a strike rate of 200 with six not out innings. Sportspics/IPL

World Cup round the corner. I want to be part of that World Cup desperately and help India cross the line," he told Kohli.

"It's been a long time since India won a multi-nation tournament. I want to be that person who is helping India do that. For that, you need to prepare differently, you need to be aware of so many things and try and be that player where people stand up and notice you and say, 'hey, this guy is doing something special,' and I want to be that guy."

Planning for perfection

There is no doubt that in this IPL, Karthik has brought an almost eerie calm to what is, by its very nature, a nerve-wracking job. Under pressure situations, he's successfully taken apart some of the finest T20 international bowlers, such as Ravichandran Ashwin and Mustafizur Rahman.

He's worked on hitting a boundary in the first three or four balls he faces, regardless of who's bowling and whether his side is batting first or second.

While batting first against Punjab Kings, he hit his fifth ball for a boundary, and came up with a sequence of six boundaries in nine balls in his 32 not out off 14. Against DC, he was also setting a target but had walked in at 92 for 5 in the 12th over. So, he took a while longer, scor-

ing his first boundary on his 14th delivery, but then arrived a flood of seven boundaries in eight balls, as he zoomed to 66 off 34.

In chases, the first boundary came off the very first ball against Chennai Super Kings and four came off five, before he was caught right on the edge of the substantial DY Patil Stadium boundary for 34 off 14. Against Rajasthan Royals, the first boundary took five balls to come; six would be taken in seven balls in an unbeaten 44 off 23. So, he's worked to a clear pattern.

Innovation is the nature of T20, with both batsmen and bowlers constantly seeking marginal advantages over each other. And Karthik is anything if not innovative; for instance, he's spent time polishing the reverse-scoop he plays against pacers.

"This is one shot I practised in the off season - the reverse-scoop over short third man. These days a lot of bowlers try and bowl wide yorkers, so if you have that option, you can try and hit that over the infield there. And more often than not, if you connect, you get a boundary. It is a slightly hard shot, you need to be aware of what the bowler is trying to do and then try and be one up on him."

Not just the reverse-scoop, the entire undertaking of finishing is hard business, of course. In one of RCB's team videos, after their

game against Lucknow Super Giants, Karthik is seen telling skipper Faf du Plessis about one such instance in the DY Patil dressing room. "It is too hard to hit at the end... I promise you I hit with all this power and he caught it 10 yards inside," Karthik says, first playing a mock pull with effort and then taking a simple mock catch.

The judgment call for the selectors is whether this bundle of highly-specialised skills can be executed when the stakes are highest on the biggest stage. To that end, perhaps the knockout stage of the IPL will be a helpful pointer.

Ordinary track record

As far as World Cups go across formats, Karthik averages 10.14 in seven innings. In T20 World Cups, he averages 11.40 at a strike rate of 112. But he played the last of those back in 2010, and is a vastly evolved batsman now.

The 2019 disappointment is much more recent, but that was a middle-order role in the 50-over format. He is in the running for something completely different at the moment.

Finally, there remains the big question: where does he fit in, or rather who do you leave out to get him in? Since the 2021 T20 World Cup, India have given Venkatesh Iyer the most opportunities (six innings) at positions 5-7, fol-

lowed by Ravindra Jadeja and Rishabh Pant (four innings each). There have been two chances each to Suryakumar Yadav, Shreyas Iyer and Axar Patel.

"You don't want to go to a World Cup with people who have batted in the top four consistently and throw them in at five, six, seven and expect them to do well," Karthik had told ESPNcricinfo before the 2021 T20 World Cup. "You definitely expect a Hardik (Pandya) or a Jadeja to do well. Who else is there who bats at those numbers for their franchises? So, when push comes to shove, and the game is on the line, they know there is a middle-order batter who has been in that situation."

Karthik's argument has obvious merit, and also leaves room for one seam bowling all-rounder and a spin all-rounder in two of those three slots from Nos 5-7.

However, if Karthik were to take the remaining one, it would leave just one spot available at No. 4 to squeeze in one out of Pant, Suryakumar and Shreyas, assuming the top three are Rohit Sharma, KL Rahul and Kohli. It seems highly unlikely at the moment that India would go into the T20 World Cup without Pant and at least one out of Suryakumar and Shreyas.

If neither of the latter two makes the XI, Karthik comes in their place. But assuming either Suryakumar or Shreyas plays, India would need to take one among three somewhat radical calls to get Karthik in.

He either plays as the specialist wicket-keeper and Pant sits out.

Or India sacrifice one of the two all-rounders they prefer to play (seam or spin). That means the remaining all-rounder has to send down four overs, and none of the four specialist bowlers can afford to have an off day.

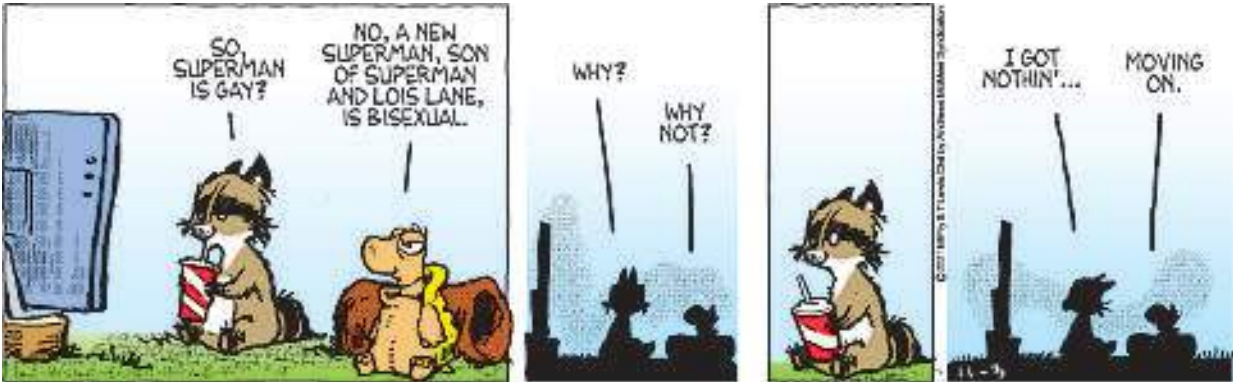
Or one of the top three batsmen sits out. The captain can't, and it is unlikely his opening partner Rahul will be made to, so that leaves India with no choice but to leave Kohli out.

That possibility might not have been on the former India captain's mind when he told Karthik, "I can surely tell you that you have presented a very strong case for yourself. . . I am sure a lot of people are taking notice at the highest level of us well."

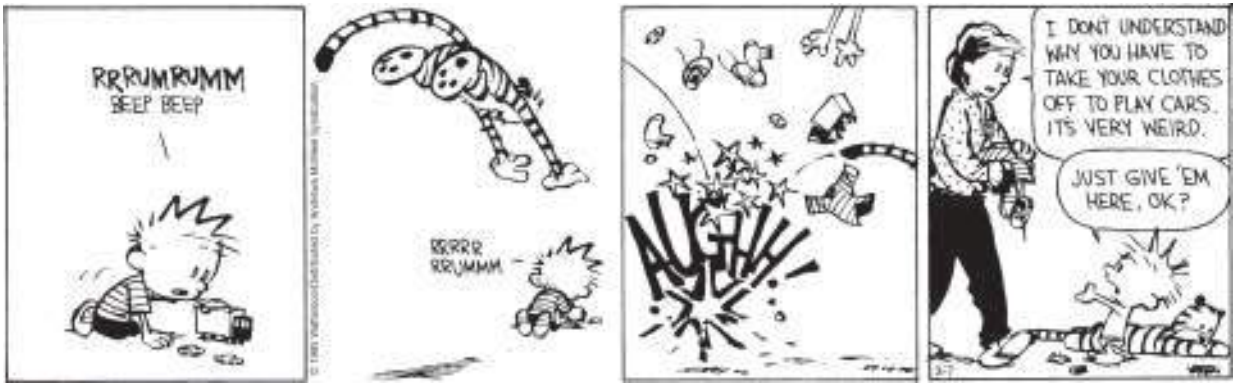
It is going to cause headaches galore to the team management, but it is in keeping with the current reality of Indian cricket; there are too many deserving a look-in and only 11 spots to fit them all in.

But there is no denying that Karthik has once again gone to work and this time, chiselled for himself the hardest batting skill in T20; regardless of whether he travels to Australia in October or not, he is certainly making a pretty strong case for himself in the IPL.

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



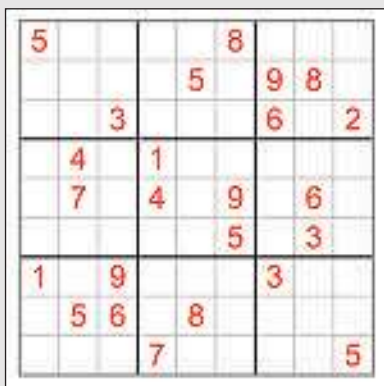
MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



SUDOKU 4815

Difficulty Level 4s
Instructions
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Difficulty Level
1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy; 3s = Medium; 4s = Hard; 5s = Very Hard; 6s = Genius



SOLUTION SUDOKU 4814



DAY TODAY

BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)
The dominant planetary alignments right now concern those two helpful planets, Venus and Jupiter. You may do your bit to turn potentially explosive situations into happy and joyful encounters by being a little less demanding; you'll be the winner in the long run.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)
There's an interesting tie-up between planets in those sectors of your solar chart controlling your decision-making powers and working arrangements. You may therefore both anticipate important meetings, discussions and interviews before long, and be confident that you'll do extremely well.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)
Play your cards with perfect timing and you might just be in for a boom period financially. What you must realise is that, at such times, it may be necessary to take a major risk, but that the greater the gamble the more uncertain the consequences. You're about to see an old friend in a new light as well.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)
This is an excellent period for domestic entertainment as long as you're prepared for some friends to go right over the top, as the saying goes. This is not the moment for self-discipline. It's time to let go and experiment with new relationships and lifestyles.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)
The next few days seem more likely to be dominated by fantasy and rumours than by objective facts and truth. This is all quite harmless as long as you don't go in for too much exaggeration. On the other hand, if you manage to take some time off, you'll discover a whole new angle to an old occupation.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)
The general attitude of the moment is optimistic. Like many people, you will be inclined to expect the best. Unlike them, you are in an ideal position to secure advances in two areas: spiritual understanding and financial prosperity. They're more closely linked than you might have thought.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)
One of the most important cycles for your affairs results from the apparent orbit of the planet Venus around the earth. This is now at a crucial phase and we may happily offer you a forecast of emotional success. You will soon make up for a recent blunder, so don't worry.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)
Partners and associates may condemn you as selfish or self-interested today or tomorrow. Yet nobody can conceal the truth, which is that it is they who are pursuing their ambitions at other people's expense. A commercial venture looks best if you're after an instant gain.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)
Sometimes it is astrology's task to point out the upside of celestial alignments, even when they are not too promising at first sight. Right now it seems that your expectations will be so high that you are laying yourself open to disappointment later, and that would never do. Be realistic and you will achieve a wish.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)
The critical factor this week, or over the next two or three days, is the need to maintain a spirit of agreement, channelling an undoubted wish to succeed via a spirit of co-operation. A legal dilemma will be solved if you consider unusual solutions.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)
It is because of the superficial nature and expectations of our society that you so often experience turbulence in the unconscious as vaguely disturbing; we are just unfitted to deal with such profound astrophysical influences. Make a start now by facing up to your deeper motivations.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)
According to the astrological tradition of the ages, you don't like dealing with money. Ironically this is why you are continually obliged to sort out financial problems, it is here that you have most to learn. Your social plans are about to change because there'll be serious arrangements to make.

BRIEFLY

Asian C’ship: Deepak settles for silver

Ulaanbaatar: Deepak Punia could do nothing against the solid defence of Kazakhstan’s Azmat Dauletbekov and settled for a silver medal while Viky Chahar grabbed a bronze in the 92kg competition on the concluding day of the Asian Championship, here on Sunday. Eyeing his maiden gold medal at the continental event, Deepak reached the final without conceding a single point as he first blanked Iran’s Mohsen Miryousef Mostafavi Alanjagh (6-0) and then humbled Korea’s Gwanuk Kim (5-0). **PTI**

Verstappen, Red Bull star at Imola

Imola: Formula One champion Max Verstappen dominated Sunday in a Red Bull rout of Ferrari at the Emilia-Romagna Grand Prix. Verstappen won from the pole, logged the fastest lap and picked up his second win of the season while leading teammate Sergio Perez to the first one-two Red Bull finish since Malaysia in 2016. The Dutchman also won the sprint qualifying race on Saturday and earned maximum points on the weekend. **AP**

Jehan finishes second in sprint race

Imola: India’s Jehan Daruvala finished a creditable second in the sprint race of the Formula 2 championships here. The 23-year-old, who started third, rocketed off the line to slot into second behind Marcus Armstrong, who took the lead after sprint race pole-sitter Logan Sargeant made a tardy getaway and dropped to fifth on Saturday. Jehan kept the position through an early safety car and then a subsequent Virtual Safety Car period before unleashing his pace. **PTI**

Bayern seal 10th straight domestic title

Berlin: Bayern Munich completed a decade of domestic dominance by beating main rival Borussia Dortmund 3-1 to seal a record-extending 10th consecutive Bundesliga title. Goals from Serge Gnabry, Robert Lewandowski and Jamal Musiala sent Bayern an unsailable 12 points clear of second-placed Dortmund with three games of the season remaining. It was Bayern’s eighth consecutive league win over Dortmund, which hasn’t won a game in Munich since 2014. **AP**

PSG win league amid muted celebrations

Paris: Achieving a milestone title wasn’t enough for some Paris Saint-Germain fans. Even as their team was clinching a record-tying 10th French league crown late Saturday, disgruntled supporters preferred to express themselves by leaving before the end of the 1-1 draw with Lens so as to celebrate the title outside the Parc des Princes without the players. Since the takeover by Qatar Sports Investments in 2011, PSG has been the most dominant club in France, winning eight of the last 10 titles. Only Monaco in 2017 and Lille in 2021 were able to disrupt PSG’s triumphal march. **AP**

Rahul ton flattens Mumbai

LSG skipper hits second century vs MI this season as 5-time champions’ horror run continues



Lucknow Super Giants captain KL Rahul hit 12 fours and four sixes en route his unbeaten 103.

All pics: Sportzpics for IPL

SYNOPSIS: KL Rahul’s second unbeaten 103 against Mumbai Indians this season handed Rohit Sharma’s side their eighth successive loss

ABHISHEK PUROHIT

MUMBAI, APRIL 24

KL RAHUL hit his second century of the season against Mumbai Indians even as almost every other batsman struggled on a difficult Wankhede Stadium pitch. Rahul dragged Lucknow Super Giants to 168, and Mumbai Indians could not even come close in their first match at their home ground in three years as they went down by 36 runs.

Slow and steady

In both his previous games this season at the Wankhede, Rahul had gone first ball to seriously good deliveries from Mohammed Shami (against Gujarat Titans) and Trent Boult (against Rajasthan Royals). And in both those games, LSG went three down by the fourth over.

On Sunday night, their primary aim early on seemed to be not to lose too many wickets in the Powerplay. The pitches at the Wankhede have been tricky to predict; in his pitch report before the game, Matthew Hayden said, “I’m a little confused with this surface. Every time it looks wonderful with a nice covering of grass, but the scores have been up and down.”

This time, the ball would hold up big time; it was hard to hit through the line, even the straight shots were proving difficult to line up. MI read their home conditions quickly, and kept denying LSG pace.

Not that Rahul and Manish Pandey tried to force it too much. The Powerplay score was 32 for the loss of Quinton de Kock to a full toss from Jasprit Bumrah. It was as if LSG were set on giving the Test-match cliched first hour to the bowlers. After de Kock was dropped at deep square-leg and parried over the rope instead in the fourth over, LSG went five overs without hitting a

IPL TABLE

TEAM	M	W	L	PT	NRR
GT	7	6	1	12	0.396
SRH	7	5	2	10	0.691
RR	7	5	2	10	0.432
LSG	8	5	3	10	0.334
RCB	8	5	3	10	-0.472
DC	7	3	4	6	0.715
KKR	8	3	5	6	0.080
PBKS	7	3	4	6	-0.562
CSK	7	2	5	4	-0.534
MI	8	0	8	0	-1.000

boundary. Almost nine overs in, they had yet to reach 50, and Rahul was on 29 off 30.

KL shifts gears

Off his next 32, though, Rahul would take 74. He broke the shackles by heaving Jaydev Unadkat over the shorter deep-midwicket boundary. MI had been digging it in short of a length, with fine leg and third man up, and deep fielders protecting the square boundaries. But Rahul had found a way out by now. With almost nothing to work with, he’d wait and place his pull or cut wide of the boundary riders.

MI tried making him work harder; they placed two midwickets to force Rahul to play straight and miss out on runs. He’d score just 15 of his runs in the straight ‘V’; most came square of the wicket.

Rahul has a good record against Bumrah, and showed why. He welcomed the star pacer back into the attack on the first ball of the 17th over by slicing a slower wide yorker for four to the left of deep point. The calm manner in which he played that shot, Rahul seemed to have read what Bumrah was going to bowl.

And he easily beat the deep fielder to the longer boundary.

The field changed immediately; to deep point was added a square third man and

short third man was moved finer. The last ball of the over arrived as a low full toss on off; Rahul went to the right of deep point this time, creaming it to the cover rope.

Bumrah would come back with a four-run 19th over, getting his yorkers on target, but Rahul brought up a 62-ball hundred at the start of the 20th, as he heaved Riley Meredith 83 metres over the longer deep-midwicket boundary.

He loves batting against MI, and loves batting at the Wankhede; at no other ground in the country has he scored more runs in the IPL - 502 at an average of 62.75 and a strike rate of 149.

The story was different at the other end, though. Rahul remained off strike for the latter half of the last over, and LSG ended on 168 for 6 with three dots; their other batsmen managed 57 off 58.

MI stuck in second gear

Rohit Sharma was animated in the field and came out for the chase all charged up. Pulling and charging the seamers, he moved to 31 off 19 by the end of the Powerplay, which brought 43. However, Ishan Kishan endured another horror knock, scraping 8 off 20; Rohit slowed down massively, and top-edged a swipe off Krunal Pandya to short third man to depart for 39 off 31.

There was definitely some dew as the LSG fielders would wipe the ball now and then, but they still hit their hard lengths and bowled their slower ones well enough to have MI crawling to 67 for 4 by the 12th over.

From there on, it needed a minor miracle, and neither the promising spark of Tilak Varma nor the fading threat of Kieron Pollard was able to make a difference.

LSG had to bowl one over of spin from either Ravi Bishnoi or Krunal at the death but Rahul delayed it till the very end, and his pacers had the game well in the bag by then, with 39 required off the 20th.

Brief scores: Lucknow Super Giants 168 for 6 (Rahul 103*, Pollard 2-8, Meredith 2-40) beat Mumbai Indians 132 for 8 (Rohit 39, Tilak 38, Krunal 3-19) by 36 runs

PLAYING TONIGHT

Indian Premier League

DC vs PBKS, 730pm, Live on Star Sports Network

EMOTIONAL ROLLERCOASTER



Hot heads, calm minds and everything in between at the game

Kishan’s luck runs out

In his 20-ball ordeal, Ishan Kishan would have been out at least five times. He repeatedly played (played) and missed, his shoulder was battered by a Dushmanta Chameera bouncer, he survived lbw shouts, run outs and caught-behind appeals. It seemed one of those nights he would somehow survive and then suddenly rediscover the destructive touch. Instead, he perished fortuitously. Ravi Bishnoi’s googly was so wide that had he left the ball, it would have gone to the bucket-hands of Jason Holder at first slip. But Kishan reached for the ball, his feet crease-glued and his upper body



completely out of balance. It could go into the coaching manual of how not to play a cut shot. He eventually under-edged, and with a bit of luck, he could have survived. Wicket-

keeper Quinton de Kock, himself stretching to gather the ball, was in no position to pluck the edge that was dying onto his feet. But the feet came to his rescue. The edged ball plunged onto his boot and bounced into the palms of Holder. The Bajan almost made a meal of it, but somehow clung on. And thus Kishan’s luck ran out. Rather, his torment was over.

An emotional ride

Rohit Sharma

was a riot of emotions. He was over-jubilant when celebrating wickets, leaping and punching the air, a la Virat Kohli, screaming and scowling. He was agitated when bowlers erred in length. When Daniel Sams kept fluffing the line, conceding four wide balls in an over, he spoke animatedly at him. When the fielders erred in the deep, or missed narrow direct hits, he would wildly gesticulate at them and blow his cheeks in exasperation. Even wicket-keeper Ishan Kishan was not spared, when he could not stop a ball (a really wide ball at that, almost towards the vacant first slip). Sometimes, he would clap joyously. Sometimes, he would clap sarcastically. Often, when in dilemma, he would stroke his stubbled-chin like a philosopher. In short, Rohit showed he could make a career in acting too. The expressions were so natural, almost instinctive.



Chameera pins Pollard

The plan of Lucknow Super Giants’ seamers to keep Kieron Pollard quiet was simple—just bang it in short at his rib cage. The ball blindsides him and the burly Trinidadian gets himself into a knot. Hook was seldom his favourite stroke; the pull ain’t either. So whenever the ball is pinged short, he either sways away from it or nudges for a single. There is a caveat though—the short-balls have to be really quick. And Dushmantha Chameera was masterful—fast, aggressive and at-his-rib-cage, like the heyday Caribbean quicks. Pollard tried to shuffle across and dab it behind the keeper, but the ball was so quick (146kph) that he ended up taking evasive action. In 19th over, Chameera went around the wicket and slanted the ball across, alternating between short-of-length and good length. Pollard just kept swiping futilely, eking out just a couple of runs. The five-run over practically ended all hopes of Mumbai opening their account this season.



Shokeen, not stirred

Mumbai Indians off-spinner Hrithik Shokeen is 21. He looks 16, with not even a faint outline of a moustache and a high school boy’s quiff. He ambled in as early as the second over—even the batsman he bowled to, KL Rahul, seemed genuinely surprised by the tactic, and looked to gauge him before he began to line him up. Shokeen, though, was unfazed by the occasion, more so for someone playing his second competitive match ever. The first three balls were fast and full into his body, Rahul could only but defend. The fourth ball, Rahul tried to make room, but Shokeen smartly followed him and turned one back into his body. The next ball though, he changed his line of attack, going around the wicket. The move gave Rahul the freedom to swing down the pitch, which he did and struck a four.



Shokeen kept his nerves, he went more round arm and hurled the ball into Rahul’s pads. Another dot ball, the fifth of the over and Shokeen did a small fist pump. Not a bad start for Shokeen.

Pacer Choudhary is Super Kings’ rising star and neighbour’s pride

DEVENDRA PANDEY

MUMBAI, APRIL 24

MUKESH CHOUDHARY scarcely knew that a neighbour whom he had once refused to help out with shifting her home furniture, would end up playing a major role in his life. The incident happened when 17-year-old Choudhary moved into a rented apartment at Kothrud in Pune, where his neighbour Vaishali Sawant sought his help.

“I had called him, ‘oye Dhoni’,” Sawant remembers the young neighbour in cricketing whites. “I asked him can I keep my flat’s furniture in his flat for some time, so that I can get my interior work done at my home. He had refused then and he didn’t even help us to move the furniture.” Pune apartment complexes from Kothrud, where incidentally Kedar Jadhav and earlier Dheeraj Jadhav came from, still believe in close neighbourly relations, which extend to being bizarrely horrified if a next-door teen refuses to help with furniture.

“When he refused, I asked him, family *ne manners nahi diye hai hai kya?* (Your family didn’t teach you good manners?)” He might have realised his mistake and he agreed to help,” Sawant recalls with a laugh now.

On Saturday night, when Choudhary took three wickets against Mumbai Indian including the scalp of IPL’s most expensive player Ishan Kishan with a toe crushing yorker, he fulfilled the promise he had made to many, including his neighbour Vaishu’ who became a friend. His three wickets included Rohit Sharma, Kishan and Dewald Bravis which earned him his first man of the match in the IPL for CSK.

Back then Choudhary hadn’t realised that the bossy but caring neighbour would soon become his mentor, coach, sister, brother and father. Choudhary used to stay alone in Pune where he had completed his boarding school. He had moved into a rented apartment alone. Sawant says as a neighbour sometimes she got worried if the boy had eaten since he lived alone.

“There were days when he fell ill. He used to feel lonely. I used to ensure that my family takes care of him like our own child,” she adds.

Choudhary studied in his boarding school in Pune and took admission in the science stream. His family, who were from the cotton-growing city of Yavatmal, and had a small business, wanted their son to study. But studies were not his first choice, the left-handed pacer wanted to play cricket.



Neighbour Vaishali Sawant took care of fast bowler Mukesh Choudhary’s mental conditioning. She gave him inspirational books to read.

Sportzpics for IPL

“He was good in studies, he got 80 percent marks in standard XI but he wanted to play, Sawant recalls. “He came and told me Vaishu, I want to pursue my career in cricket. So I said, then try but be focussed. To achieve everything one has to make sacrifices, so be ready for that. I became his guardian since then. I took care of his diet, his cricket, and his off-field activities,” Sawant recalls.



Breaking into a top club

Choudhary was playing in small clubs, and it was then that he was told to go to join 22-yards Cricket Club where former national selector and Maharashtra team coach Surendra Bhavne used to coach. Bhavne was impressed at first sight.

“I saw this young lanky boy with a good action, good landing and ability to clock 125

kmph on consistent basis. We did some fine-tuning but he was getting wasted in my club. To play for Maharashtra he had to play in a big team who could give him the opportunity to play in invitational tournaments. It’s only then that he came on the selectors’ radar,” Bhavne explains.

Soon Bhavne spoke to the city’s foremost central club Deccan Gymkhana, who agreed to enroll Chaudhary in their team. Deccan have players like Rahul Tripathi, who ensured Chaudhary was groomed.

Choudhary soon made it to the under 23 team and then in the same year 2017 he made his Ranji Trophy debut. Bhavne knew that if he gained some height he would get more pace in the future.

“The best part of him is that he listens, will do his work quietly and will not throw any tantrum. It’s always nice to teach such bowlers,” Bhavne points out.

Back at his rented house, Sawant took care of the fast bowler’s mental conditioning. She gave him inspirational books to read, told him stories about how she had seen cricketers who lost their way despite being good to start with. And how they must have regretted later. Prepared his daily chart. Like a family member, he used to message the Sawants on reaching the ground and after reaching home. “One day he said, let me

find a job. I said, why do you want to work? How much money could he require to feed himself. I took care of the food and in return he promised he will continue to work hard and not lose focus or get distracted. At this age, youngster do get lost. I used to keep tabs on his off field activities and he is such a sweet boy that he never lost his plot. Soon he went on to play Ranji Trophy, so financial issue was sorted,” she asserted.

Sawant recalls how two seasons ago he had come and told her that he won’t be going as a net bowler anymore, and received an earful. “He was a net bowler with Hyderabad and later for CSK. He came and said, aage se mein net bowler banke nahi jaoonga. I gave it back to him, I said how the hell can you say you can’t go. It’s like a school, you will get to learn. Next year he got picked for CSK and look now. We all are happy. I had told him that the best thing that happened was that he failed in the first two games. Failure teaches a man a lot,” Sawant, who works in a construction company, said.

A shy boy, who didn’t really dream big, Chaudhary has tried to keep a low profile. His coaches feel the best thing going for him is he has Dhoni as a mentor. Post IPL, many things will change for Choudhary. But Vaishali happily declares one thing is sure, he will grow as a bowler.