

The top diplomats from Japan, China and South Korea met in Tokyo on Saturday, seeking common ground on East Asian security and economic issues amid escalating global uncertainty. Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul also agreed to accelerate preparations for a trilateral summit in Japan this year.

REUTERS

CUBANS, HAITIANS, NICARAGUANS, VENEZUELANS FACE DEPORTATION

US revokes temporary status of over five lakh migrants from four countries

GISELA SALOMON
MIAMI, MARCH 22

THE DEPARTMENT of Homeland Security has said that it will revoke legal protections for hundreds of thousands of Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans, setting them up for potential deportation in about a month.

The order applies to about 5,32,000 people from the four countries who came to the United States since October 2022. They arrived with financial sponsors and were given two-year permits to live and work in the US. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said they will lose their legal status on April 24, or 30 days after the publication of the notice in the Federal Register.

The new policy impacts people who are already in the US and who came under the humanitarian parole programme. It follows an earlier Trump administration decision to end what it called the "broad abuse" of a legal tool President Trump have used to allow people from countries where there's war or political instability to temporarily live in the US.

During his campaign President Donald Trump promised to deport millions of people



Venezuelan migrants arriving from Mexico deplaned at Simon Bolivar International Airport in Maiquetia on Thursday. AP

who are in the US illegally, and as president he has been also ending legal pathways for immigrants to come to the US and to stay. Before the new order, the beneficiaries of the program could stay in the US until their parole expires, although the administration had stopped processing their applications for asylum, visas and other requests that allow them to remain longer.

A group of American citizens and immigrants sued the Trump administration for ending humanitarian parole and seeks to

reinstate the programs for the four nationalities.

Venezuela announced it reached an agreement on Saturday with the United States to resume repatriation flights of migrants, according to a statement from the country's Parliament President Jorge Rodriguez. Rodriguez said the flights would start on Sunday.

"Migrating isn't a crime, and we won't rest until everyone who wants to return is back and we rescue our kidnapped brothers in El Salvador," the statement said.

AP WITH REUTERS INPUTS

Legal help for migrant children travelling alone also cancelled

Washington: The Trump administration has ended a contract that provides legal help to migrant children entering the country without a parent or guardian, raising concerns that children will be forced to navigate the complex legal system alone.

The Acacia Center for Justice contracts with the government to provide legal services through its network of providers around the country to unaccompanied migrant children under 18, both by providing direct legal representation as well as conducting legal orientations — "know your rights" clinics — to migrant children who cross the border alone.

Acacia said they were informed Friday that the US Department of Health and Human Services was terminating nearly all the legal work that the centre does, including paying for lawyers for roughly 26,000 children when they go to immigration court. They're still contracted to hold the legal orientation clinics.

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FROM PAGE ONE

SC makes report on Delhi HC judge public

FULL REPORTSON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

in a letter dated March 21, asked Justice Varma to “account for the presence of money/cash” in the room located in his official bungalow.

The SC also uploaded videos and photographs which Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora purportedly shared with the Chief Justice Upadhyaya.

The images and video show a fireman pulling out half-burnt wads of cash in plastic bags. “Mahatma Gandhi mein aag lag gayi (Mahatma Gandhi is on fire),” a person is heard saying in the video, referring to the Gandhi image on the notes that caught fire.

Before making the HC report public, the CJJ is learnt to have communicated the decision to a senior member of the Supreme Court Collegium.

Justice Varma, in his official response to Chief Justice Upadhyaya, has denied the allegations. “I

would beseech you to bear in consideration that no currency was recovered from the premises that we actually occupy and use as a family,” he said.

The report was released hours after Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna constituted a three-member committee to probe the allegations against the HC judge.

A release from the SC said the Delhi HC Chief Justice “for the time being has been asked not to assign any judicial work” to Justice Varma. “The Chief Justice of India has constituted a three member Committee consisting of Mr. Justice Sheel Nagu, Chief Justice of the High Court of Punjab & Haryana, Mr. Justice G.S. Sandhawalia, Chief Justice of the High Court of Himachal Pradesh, and Ms. Anu Sivaraman, Judge of the High Court of Karnataka, for conducting an inquiry into the allegations against Mr. Justice

Yashwant Varma, a sitting Judge of the High Court of Delhi,” the release stated. It said the report submitted by the Chief Justice of the HC as well as the response of Justice Varma “and other documents” would be uploaded on the court website — and was done subsequently.

The decision to appoint the committee followed the submission Friday of a fact-finding report to the CJJ by Chief Justice Upadhyaya.

On Thursday, the SC Collegium had proposed Justice Varma’s transfer to the Allahabad HC, his parent HC, following a report about the discovery of cash at his residence when a fire broke out there on March 14.

Highly-placed sources said the five-member Collegium unanimously resolved to recommend Justice Varma’s transfer after the judges were apprised about a

video of the incident.

In a statement Friday, the SC Registry said the Collegium’s “proposal for the transfer of Mr Justice Yashwant Varma, who is the second senior most Judge in the Delhi High Court and a member of the Collegium, to his parent High Court i.e. the High Court of Judicature at Allahabad, where he will be ninth in seniority” was “independent and separate from the in-house enquiry procedure” initiated by the Chief Justice of Delhi High Court upon receiving information about the incident.

While noting the “misinformation and rumours being spread” regarding the incident at the residence of Justice Varma, the statement said the report by the HC Chief Justice “will be examined and processed for further and necessary action”. Subsequently, the report was submitted to the CJJ late Friday.

● Judge’s security staff details

Varma’s home over the last six months. The letter also requested information pertaining to Varma’s Call Detail Record (CDR) and Internet Protocol Detail Record (IPDR) for the same period.

The request was made by Naresh Chand Garg, Registrar and Secretary to the Delhi HC Chief Justice. This was done at the behest of CJJ Khanna.

When contacted, Garg said: “I do not want to comment on this matter.”

Following the receipt of Garg’s missive, an internal communication was circulated by the security division to the DCP (police control room) and DCP (1st battalion) at around 12:22 pm. According to sources, while Varma’s CDR for the last six months has been shared with Upadhyaya’s office, the police are still collating information pertaining to his IPDR for the same period. “Kindly provide details name, rank, belt no and mobile no of staff static armed guard and commander of CRPF, who are deployed at 30, Tughlak Road, in respect of PP Mr Yashwant Varma, Justice DHC from September 1, 2024 to till date, immediately through reserve inspector, security lines, Babu Dham. A compliance report may also be sent to this office,” the internal communication circulated by the security division reads.

Even as this information was being gathered by the security division, the Delhi Police headquar-

ters Saturday also asked the New Delhi district police to share information on the first responders who arrived at the judge’s house following a fire-related call on March 14 and the sequence of events that followed.

Another source said the New Delhi district police have been asked to prepare a basic initial report — mentioning the names of all the first responders who went to the official residence of Justice Varma after receiving a call at the PCR from Justice Varma’s personal secretary RS Karki, who also informed the officials of Fire department, NDMC, CPWD. “After receiving the call, police rushed to the spot and found a room locked and fire teams, along with the local police, went in after breaking the lock,” a source said.

It was during dousing the fire that, it is alleged, that the first responders found cash although Delhi Fire Service report on the incident stated that the fire was in “stationery and domestic articles”.

Delhi Fire Service chief Atul Garg had said Friday that his personnel extinguished the fire within a few minutes. Asked about reports of cash at the judge’s residence, he said, “We do not have any information on this.”

Justice Varma was appointed as a judge of the Delhi High Court on October 11, 2021, nearly seven years after he was elevated as judge at his parent court, Allahabad High Court.

● Opp states

states including Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, raised a unified voice against the proposed delimitation process, arguing it would disproportionately benefit the northern, Hindi-speaking states at the expense of the south and some other regions.

“This is not just about numbers; this is about our power, our rights, and our future,” Stalin said as he opened the meeting, setting the tone for the day’s deliberations. He warned that the proposed population-based delimitation would punish states that have implemented successful welfare and population control policies, stripping them of parliamentary representation and weakening their political voice at the Centre.

Notably absent at the meeting were representatives from the TMC and Telugu Desam Party (TDP) which is in power in Andhra Pradesh and the YSR Congress, though the latter later wrote a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday backing the committee’s concerns.

The current representation in the Lok Sabha, frozen since 1971,

maintains a balance of representation, but a new census-based delimitation could shift political power to northern states with higher birth rates, altering the balance in favour of those which have not achieved population control goals.

Based on the Census of 1971, the number of Lok Sabha seats was fixed at 543, which meant that each MP represented roughly 10 lakh Indians. (The number of Lok Sabha seats was earlier fixed at 494 and 522 after the censuses of 1951 and 1961, respectively.) The Constitution (42nd Amendment) Act, 1976 — passed by the government of the Emergency focused on efforts to control India’s population — froze the number of Lok Sabha seats until after the first Census taken after 2000. And in 2002, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government extended the freeze until at least 2026.

Framing the issue in stark political terms, Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann said, “BJP wants to reduce the seats of states where they are losing and increase the seats in states where they are winning. Only Hindi-speaking states will benefit from this exercise.”

Former CM of Odisha,

Naveen Patnaik, who addressed the meeting virtually, reinforced the argument that states should not be penalised for successfully implementing national population control policies. He called for a national discussion on the issue before any delimitation is carried out.

Throughout the meeting, speakers, one after the other, framed the delimitation issue as an assault on federalism. Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan warned that the BJP-led Centre was deliberately pushing ahead with delimitation even before conducting the Census, suggesting the process was being engineered to benefit its political prospects. “Federalism is not a gift from the Centre. It is the right of our states,” Vijayan said. He accused the BJP of carrying out the delimitation process with a narrow political mindset, warning that such centralisation of power would marginalise cultural and linguistic diversity in India.

While the gathering largely focused on opposing the impending delimitation, several leaders also proposed alternative solutions. Telangana CM Revanth Reddy argued that if the Centre was insistent on delimitation, the

share of parliamentary seats allocated to the five southern states should be increased to 33% from the current 24%. He vowed to introduce a resolution in the Telangana Legislature demanding fair representation.

KT Rama Rao (KTR), leader of the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), backed this and put forth an even bolder idea: “If the South contributes 36% of India’s GDP, why not give it 36% of voice in Parliament?” He suggested freezing the current Lok Sabha seat distribution permanently, or at the very least, ensuring that the existing representation balance remained intact.

Karnataka Deputy CM D K Shivakumar (DKS) took the discussion a step further, advocating for a strengthened Rajya Sabha as a counterbalance to the Lok Sabha, ensuring that states continue to have a voice even if their representation in the lower house is reduced. He warned that the BJP’s delimitation push was not a mere technical adjustment but a political assault designed to shift power away from the southern states.

At the end of the meeting, besides demanding a 25-year freeze

on the number parliamentary constituencies, the JAC resolution also called for greater transparency in the delimitation process, mandatory consultation with state governments, and constitutional amendments to protect states with declining population shares.

Additionally, the JAC announced that a Core Committee of Members of Parliament would be formed to coordinate legislative strategies against the Union Government’s delimitation efforts. The committee will also submit a joint representation to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to reconsider the proposal.

The JAC’s decision to hold its next round of discussions in Hyderabad, as proposed by Telangana CM Reddy, signals that the opposition to delimitation is gaining momentum. Punjab CM Mann has also extended an invitation to host a meeting in Punjab.

While the BJP has yet to formally respond to the JAC’s demands, Union Home Minister Amit Shah’s recent statement in Tamil Nadu that southern states will not lose representation on a “pro-rata basis” has done little to reassure critics as Tamil Nadu and

its allies in JAC see ‘pro-rata’ as a vague term. “What is this pro-rata basis that Shah is talking about,” Vijayan asked. DMK MP Kanimozhi who briefed the media about the resolution of JAC also said Shah’s statement that Tamil Nadu will not be affected on a pro rata basis “confirms their plan to enforce it soon” without giving “any official clarity.”

Stalin, in his speech, pointed out that Shah’s vague assurances only confirmed fears the BJP was unwilling to give a formal commitment against the plan. “This move is going to punish such (progressive) states. By reducing the number of people’s representatives, our voice will be muffled. For two years, Manipur has been burning. But their voices for justice are being ignored—because they do not have the political strength to attract the attention of the country,” Stalin said.

However, on the sidelines of the meeting, top DMK sources also shared their thoughts about JAC’s ability to sustain momentum amid challenges in building a truly national coalition against delimitation — they cited the absence of the TMC and the YSR Congress.

● SC, HC judges visits relief camps

Churachandpur and Bishnupur on Saturday.

Even in their visit, the deep fault lines persisting in the state were evident, with Justice N Kotiswar Singh — a judge from the Supreme Court delegation from the Meitei community — and two Meitei Manipur High Court judges, A Bimol Singh and A Guneshwar Sharma, skipping the visit to Kuki-Zo majority Churachandpur.

The judges visited a relief camp in Churachandpur and Meitei-majority Bishnupur as part of a delegation from the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) and distributed relief materials such as mattresses and health cards. They also virtually inaugurated medical camps and 265 legal clinics in 109 locations across the state.

“One of the most vulnerable sections of the society comprises internally displaced persons due to various circumstances beyond their control. Many individuals and families have found themselves uprooted from their houses, struggling to rebuild their lives. It is our moral and constitutional duty to ensure that they are not left behind... the legal aid will also play a crucial role in ensuring that displaced individuals receive their rightful entitlements, be it in matters of identity documentation, property rights or compensation claims,” said Justice Gai, who is the executive chairman of NALSA, in Churachandpur on Saturday.

The relief camp in Churachandpur’s Tuibong, which they visited, has around 400 displaced persons, of whom 208 are children. Most of these people have been living in this camp for almost two years now, carving out rooms of sorts for their families in a large hall with curtains serving as partitions.

For Kimneihling (54), who fled her village in Kangpokpi district in October 2023, the conditions are only getting more challenging.

Along with the difficulties of living in cramped conditions without private space, she says that access to water is a daily struggle. “A water tanker comes three times a week... we collect water in buckets. We use that water for cleaning, washing clothes and bathing, but we can’t drink it. We buy drinking water at Rs 50 for a 20-litre jar every few days,” she said.

As the months pass by, running the relief camps is also getting more difficult, especially since donations — one of the key sources of relief materials — are drying up. “At the beginning of the conflict, donations were pouring in as an emotional reaction. But has been a long time now. The most difficult outcome of this is access to medicine since everything we have is donation-based. There is a pressing need for a structural way to provide medicines to people here; the way that the government provides dal, rice, oil and onions every week to the relief camps,” said Kennedy Haokip, who works with the Kuki Khanglai Lawmpi (KKL), which is running this relief camp along with 48 others in the district.

This was echoed by inmates at the relief camp in Moirang College in Bishnupur.

From Nandini (54), who has been residing there after being displaced from Churachandpur in May 2023, and some other women from the camp have found ways to put together some money, especially for their children and grandchildren’s education. “An NGO from Imphal provides us materials, and we make candles and soaps, which we try to sell in nearby villages. Trying to earn something has become even more important because there are hardly any more donations, and our needs are not just rice and dal. That’s the most difficult part.

Trying to look after the children’s education,” said from, who has two grandchildren, one in class III and the other in kindergarten.

● Hindi belt Opp parties

decision to skip the conclave convened by DMK chief and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin signal that Opposition parties are not on the same page on the issue.

The states in the South, barring NDA constituent TDP-ruled Andhra Pradesh, have already voiced their concern that they may lose out on seats if population is retained as the sole criterion in redrawing and redistribution of Lok Sabha seats.

Delimitation of Lok Sabha seats is to happen post the Census after 2026. While Opposition parties in states in the South fear loss of seats, and in the process heft and influence, parties in the North have every reason to be happy.

The DMK, which convened the conclave, chose not to invite INDIA bloc parties from the northern belt — such as SP, RJD — and those from Maharashtra like the Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP. The reason was obvious. Most of these parties are not opposed to delimitation but would not say so now. Simply put, they are not on the same page as the DMK on this issue.

Sources in these parties say they are waiting for the BJP-led Centre to open its delimitation cards before taking a view. The TMC, which was invited to the meeting by the DMK, believes issues like duplicate EPIC numbers are more important to it now given the fact that West Bengal is going to Assembly elections next year.

In the 1977 Lok Sabha, every MP in India represented an average about 10.11 lakh people. While this number is not etched in stone, states in the North and West Bengal stand to gain in the delimitation exercise. For instance, Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal will go up from 42 to 66 even if 15 lakh is considered the baseline population. At 20 lakh, seats in West Bengal will go up to 50. The TMC is yet to announce its stand on the issue and sources in the party said the conclave is largely a “gathering of southern parties”.

When contacted, leaders of the SP too said the party is yet to discuss the issue. “Our focus is on the 2027 Assembly elections,” a senior leader said. But behind the reluctance to take a position is the fact that the SP cannot be seen as opposing the move since UP stands to gain the most in terms of increase in seats in delimitation.

If the 10.11 lakh average population formula is repeated, UP (including Uttarakhand) will end up having 250 seats compared to its present share of 85 in Parliament. Seats in Bihar and Jharkhand would increase from 54 to 169 — a three-time increase. Similarly, Rajasthan’s would increase from 25 to 82.

Tamil Nadu’s share would increase too but from 39 to only 76, less than double. So would Kerala’s, from 20 to 36. However, since the new Parliament has only

888 seats, this formula is unlikely to be retained. If the population in each constituency is doubled at 20 lakh to give the Parliament 707 seats as compared to 543 now, the southern states would be at severe disadvantage. Under this formula, Tamil Nadu’s seats would remain the same, 39. But Kerala would lose two seats and end up with 18.

Conversely, UP (including Uttarakhand) would still register an increase at 126 seats as would Bihar and Jharkhand at 85 seats. Even at an average population of 15 lakh per constituency, which would take Parliamentary seats to 942, southern states would be at disadvantage as compared to northern states. This formula will give Tamil Nadu 52 seats and Kerala 24 seats. But UP (along with Uttarakhand) will get 168 seats and Bihar and Jharkhand will get 114 seats.

The Congress, with a pan-Indian footprint, too is cautious. Of the three states that the Congress is in government now, two are in the South. And it hopes to stage a comeback in Kerala in Assembly elections next year. In Tamil Nadu, it is firmly with the DMK-led alliance. Of its 99 Lok Sabha seats, 40 are from four southern states.

The Congress high command had echoed the concerns of the states in the South some days ago saying that states which showed early success in family planning and reducing total fertility rates stand to be “penalised”. The RJD said it was not in favour of kicking the delimitation can down the road but believes population should not be the sole criterion.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, RJD Rajya Sabha MP Manoj K Jha said he would not speak as a typical north Indian politician who is happy that the North will have 100 more seats.

“That will not be in the interest of the nation. Rather than pushing delimitation for 30 years, I believe that... after the Census is held... there should be a committed session of Parliament to discuss what should be the standard of the proposed delimitation which should include not only just population but other performance also... After the Census, the delimitation should take place... but we should first have a session of Parliament dedicated to discussing the modalities,” he said.

And it is not just the INDIA bloc. The TDP, a key constituent of the NDA, too has been silent on the issue of delimitation. Sources in the TDP said the state too has concerns but would not like to air it openly now.

The TDP was invited by the DMK to the meeting but it chose to stay away and so did Pawan Kalyan’s JSP, another member of the NDA. The BJD, on the other hand, attended. Sources in the party said the party, which was ousted by the BJP from power in Odisha, takes independent positions depending on issues.

6 GOVT & POLITICS

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM MEETING; OPP CMs, LEADERS RESOLVE TO SUBMIT JOINT REPRESENTATION TO PM DURING BUDGET SESSION

Pitch for 25-yr freeze, federalism panels, Assembly resolutions

ARUN JANARDHANAN
CHENNAI, MARCH 22

IN A show of unity, Opposition leaders from six states attended the first Joint Action Committee (JAC) meeting on "Fair Delimitation" hosted by Tamil Nadu CM M K Stalin in Chennai Saturday, warning that the proposed reallocation of parliamentary seats on the basis of population could "dis-empower" southern and other "progressive" states.

Stalin described the looming delimitation exercise as "a test of Indian democracy".

The meeting, attended by four CMs, one Deputy CM, and senior leaders from Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Telangana, Karnataka, Odisha, and Punjab, culminated in a resolution demanding greater transparency in the delimitation process and an extension of the freeze on the exercise for another 25 years.

In his opening address, Stalin framed the issue as a fight for survival of these states, not just political arithmetic. He said a state like Tamil Nadu, which had effectively controlled its population through social welfare programmes, stood

to lose at least 8 LS seats if the current formula was implemented. Drawing a parallel with the strife-torn Manipur, he said, "Manipur has been burning for two years, and their voices for justice are unheard because they lack parliamentary strength."

Rejection of Centre's 'vague' assurance

While Union Home Minister Amit Shah recently claimed that southern states would not lose any seats "on a pro-rata basis," Stalin dismissed such an assurance as "politically ambiguous" and lacking formal commitment. He also pointed to PM Narendra Modi's 2023 Assembly poll campaign speech in Telangana, where the latter had noted that southern states could lose up to 100 seats if delimitation was done purely on a population basis.

The Chennai meet marks the first large-scale political coordination among the Opposition states on an issue in years. While the BJP maintains that delimitation will not hurt southern states, the lack of the Centre's "formal guarantees" has fuelled

their suspicion of redrawing of constituencies favouring the Hindi heartland, where BJP is the dominant party.

With key players in Tamil Nadu across party lines uniting against delimitation, the fight over the exercise is set to become a major flashpoint ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections and the 2029 Lok Sabha elections.

Resolutions, proposed reforms

The JAC meeting's final resolution reflected this urgency. It called on the Centre to halt any delimitation exercise that punishes states for good governance, arguing that those who have implemented population control measures should not be penalised.

It also proposed the formation of a core committee of MPs to counter any moves that would weaken the federal structure.

Speaking to the media after the meeting, DMK deputy general secretary Kanimozhi emphasised that the JAC was not about dividing India but ensuring fairness. "We are not against the rights of others, but this is unfair — to let some suffer while

others benefit," she said.

Kanimozhi said even YSRCP chief Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy, who did not attend the JAC meeting, had written to Modi on Saturday, "supporting" Tamil Nadu's stance. She also linked the issue to the Women's Reservation law, which the BJP-led government has proposed to implement only after delimitation. "If the government has already tied the Women's Reservation Bill to delimitation, it means the process is imminent. But there is no clarity, no transparency," she said, adding that Stalin's demand for a formal commitment from the Centre is necessary.

Beyond opposing the current delimitation approach, leaders from Telangana, Karnataka, Punjab, Odisha, and Kerala proposed structural reforms to ensure equitable representation.

United front for 'fair representation'

Telangana CM Revanth Reddy urged the Centre to increase South India's representation to 33% in the Lok Sabha (up from the current 24%), arguing

that states contributing more to the GDP should have a stronger voice in Parliament.

Karnataka Deputy CM D K Shivakumar warned that delimitation was "not a technical adjustment, but a political assault" on southern states. He suggested strengthening the RS as a counterbalance to the North's numerical dominance in the Lok Sabha.

Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann accused the BJP of "manipulating" seat allocation to benefit Hindi-speaking states, where the party performs well, arguing that Punjab's representation would be cut primarily because the BJP is "weak" there.

BJD chief Naveen Patnaik, addressing the meeting virtually, called delimitation "unfair" and insisted that states that followed population control policies must be protected.

BRS leader K T Rama Rao called for a permanent freeze on seat reallocation and suggested that if South India contributes 36% of India's GDP, it should get 36% representation in Parliament.

Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan said if the southern states' parliamentary representation is further reduced and their share in taxes continue to decline, "we will face an unprecedented situation, in which both our rightful share of funds and our political voice to demand them diminish simultaneously".

To pile pressure on the Centre, the JAC resolved to submit a joint representation to PM Modi during the ongoing Budget session. Pushing for resolutions in Assemblies to formally oppose the population-based delimitation, mobilising public opinion through awareness campaigns on the historical consequences of past delimitation exercises, and setting up legal panels to explore constitutional safeguards against unfair seat reallocation were among the major points in the JAC's resolution passed at the meeting.

The momentum from the first meeting is expected to continue with the next meet likely to be in Hyderabad, as proposed by Reddy. Mann also offered to host a subsequent meeting, signalling broader regional alignment beyond the South.



FIVE YEARS AFTER COVID-19 PANDEMIC

SARS-CoV2 virus still circulating, but very weak: Experts

AMITABH SINHA & ANURADHA MASCARENHAS
NEW DELHI, PUNE, MARCH 22

FIVE YEARS after it precipitated the worst global healthcare crisis in over a century, the Covid-19 virus is still in circulation, infecting people, though its ability to cause a serious disease is severely weakened.

This week, five years ago, India entered into a 21-day national lockdown, the strictest phase of restrictions.

It all appears to be a bad memory now, but for three years, the SARS-CoV2 virus paralysed the entire world and resulted in the death of at least seven million people. More than 5.25 lakh of these deaths were recorded in India. In May 2023, the WHO declared that Covid-19 was no longer a global health emergency.

But the virus has not disappeared. It is still very much in circulation, in India as well.

"This is how viruses evolve. It is not surprising that SARS-CoV2 has become very weak now. It would probably still not be considered as benign as the flu virus, which has been around for very long, but it is more or less in the same category," said Shahid

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Jameel, a virologist and Fellow at Green Templeton College, University of Oxford in UK.

"Maybe, it still has the ability to cause complications in people with respiratory diseases, but for the general public, the virus is no longer a cause for concern. I don't think there is any danger of this virus coming back in a stronger form," he said.

The WHO, in its latest bulletin, has reported 1,47,000 new cases and 4,500 deaths across the world during the 28-day period between January 6 and February 2 this year. The cases were reported from 83 countries, while deaths happened in 23 countries.

Rajesh Karyakarte, a member of Maharashtra Covid task force, said SARS-CoV-2 had transitioned into a more endemic state, similar to influenza, and was circulating regularly at lower and more predictable levels compared to the initial pandemic phase.

"While routine testing for SARS-CoV-2 has significantly declined, ongoing surveillance projects continue to monitor its presence," he said. In one such ongoing exercise, health authorities are screening patients with Severe Acute Respiratory Infection (SARI), and some of them have tested positive for SARS-COV2.

History
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Centuries ago, when the Indians arrived in Mauritius

ON MARCH 11, Prime Minister Narendra Modi became the first Indian to receive the highest civilian honour in Mauritius — the Grand Commander of the Order of the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean — from the island nation's Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam.

While India's connection with Mauritius dates back nearly 300 years, its link with the island nation's incumbent Prime Minister — and his father, who was the country's first Prime Minister — is over 100 years old.

Long before Mahatma Gandhi made a pit stop in Mauritius in 1901, while on his way to India from South Africa, his countrymen had landed on the shores of the island nation in the 1700s itself. During his visit, from October 29, 1901, to November 15, 1901, the Mahatma had three messages for the Indian labourers, mostly from Bihar, residing in the island nation: the importance of education, political empowerment and staying connected with India.

The first documented arrival of Indians in Mauritius dates back to 1729 — while it was under French occupation — when Indians artisans and masons were sent off to the nation from Puducherry, then a French colony in India.

Between 1834 and the early 1900s, Mauritius was under British occupation. During that time, nearly half a million indentured Indians were shipped there. The first batch of 36 workers arrived there on November 2, 1834, on a ship named *Atlas*. To this day, November 2 is observed as 'Aapravasi Diwas' in Mauritius. About two-thirds of these workers would settle in Mauritius permanently.

But it was the arrival of a teenage Indian immigrant from a family of coolies from Bihar's Harigaon that would forever change the island's fortunes. Lured by his elder brother Ramlochun Ramgoolam's tales about the rosy life in Mauritius — how one could snatch handfuls of gold by just lifting stones — 18-year-old Moheeth Ramgoolam was deposited on the nation's shores in 1896 by a ship named *Hindustan*.

Having started out as an indentured labourer on the sugar estate of Queen Victoria, Moheeth would rise to the position of a *sirdar* (overseer). Two years after his arrival, in 1898, Moheeth married Basmati Ramchurn, a young Mauritius-born widow who had two sons with her first husband.

The couple, Moheeth and Basmati, had two daughters, but both did not survive past infancy. Then, on September 18, 1900, Basmati gave birth to Seewoosagur

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A life-size bronze statue of Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, the first Prime Minister of Mauritius, at Patna's historic Gandhi Maidan. Himanshu Harsh

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Ramgoolam in Belle Rive. Fondly called Kewal as a child, Seewoosagur, the father of the incumbent Prime Minister, would become the first Prime Minister of Mauritius.

Often referred to as 'Chacha', Seewoosagur would remain Prime Minister for years. His years in power included overseeing the country's emergence as a successful, democratic welfare state. Years later, Moheeth's grandson Navinchandra, by then the Mauritius Prime Minister, would return to Harigaon in Bihar to trace his roots.

An invitation from then Chief Minister Nitish Kumar saw Navinchandra arrive on a three-day visit to Bihar in February 2008. During this trip, Navinchandra visited Patna, Siwan, Nalanda, Bodh Gaya and Harigaon.

On February 18, 2008, he unveiled a life-size bronze statue of his father in Patna's Gandhi Maidan, a historic site near the Ganga, besides inaugurating a street in his name. In Harigaon, he laid the foundation for three projects — a lake, a high school and a hospital, named after his grandfather, father and himself, respectively. On behalf of the Government of Mauritius, he pledged a donation of \$2,50,000 for Harigaon's development.

At present, Mauritius has 22,188 Indian nationals and 13,198 Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) card holders. During President Droupadi Murmu's state visit to Mauritius in March 2024, in a special gesture, an OCI card for Mauritians with Indian lineage traceable up to the 7th generation was announced.

In 2024, Mauritius introduced a visa-free regime for Indian tourists visiting their country for up to a month. Before Covid, around 80,000 Indian tourists visited Mauritius annually. Mauritians are entitled to a gratis visa (issued without consular fees) during their India visit. Before the pandemic, 30,000 Mauritians visited India each year.

On how he felt about his Bihar visit, Navinchandra had said, "It feels great. It feels even though I have been away from Bihar, it's like coming home."

The writer is a Senior Assistant Editor

13 ECONOMY

‘No point unsettling a system, FPIs should live with current taxation’

PRESSTRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, MARCH 22

SEBI CHAIRMAN Tuhin Kanta Pandey on Saturday said there is no point unsettling the current taxation, and the foreign portfolio investors need to “live with” the system.

Pandey, who took over as the SEBI chief three weeks ago, also said some companies are making “blatantly false disclosures” and the capital markets regulator does not “hesitate” to act against such malpractices.

On the issue of taxation, Pandey listed out a slew of advantages which India — the fastest growing large economy in the world — offers, including delivering superior returns, stable policy environment and inflation being under control.

“If some certainties have already come in terms of taxation, let us not unsettle it,” he said, list-



SEBI Chairman Tuhin Kanta Pandey.
Express File

ing out positives with India like delivering over 11 per cent per annum returns on the MSCI over the last five years, fastest growing large economy, stable inflation, and fiscal consolidation.

Consumption is picking up, and there is an upswing in capital formation both by the government and private companies, he said, while speaking at the ‘Business Today Mindrush 2025’

event here. Pandey said the tax system has actually responded to the problems of these investors and facilitated moves even in the latest Budget.

There were concerns of FPI pullouts after a government clarification declaring that FPIs will have to pay long-term capital gains tax at 12.5 per cent from April 1 as against the earlier rate of 10 per cent.

The FPI segment has seen outflows in 2024, a trend that is being attributed to global events.

The career bureaucrat-turned-regulator said materiality should decide the level of disclosures, and added that the Industry Standards Forum (ISF) constituted by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has defined the same and frequency of making the disclosures.

“There are corporate disclosures (where) there are malpractices... there are blatantly false

disclosures being made. We will not hesitate in taking actions against such disclosures,” he said. SEBI’s surveillance system is throwing out details of the entities indulging in such wrongful disclosures, he said.

On the issue of taxation and the regime’s impact on the FPI interest in the Indian markets, Pandey seemed to suggest that the investor community should not expect any change.

There is a need to look at volumes in the derivatives segment in a nuanced way, Pandey said, adding that notional interest can sometimes be misleading.

The metrics of measurement have to change, and SEBI will be addressing the same in a new regulation, which it will come out with.

“We also need to change from a system where only the large, organised investors are making money and the retailers are losing,” he added.

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