

My Math Memoir

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Email: anudeeprashantha@gmail.com

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Here are some of my recent solves from combinatorics which are majorly from olympiads.

Chapter 1

Combinatorics

§1 Processes

§1.1 Problems

Problem 1 (IMO Shortlist C1, 2022). A ± 1 -sequence is a sequence of 2022 numbers a_1, \dots, a_{2022} , each equal to either $+1$ or -1 . Determine the largest C so that, for any ± 1 -sequence, there exists an integer k and indices $1 \leq t_1 < \dots < t_k \leq 2022$ so that $t_{i+1} - t_i \leq 2$ for all i , and

$$\left| \sum_{i=1}^k a_{t_i} \right| \geq C.$$

Problem 2 (India P5, 2025). Greedy goblin Griphook has a regular 2000-gon, whose every vertex has a single coin. In a move, he chooses a vertex, removes one coin each from the two adjacent vertices, and adds one coin to the chosen vertex, keeping the remaining coin for himself. He can only make such a move if both adjacent vertices have at least one coin. Griphook stops only when he cannot make any more moves. What is the maximum and minimum number of coins he could have collected?

Problem 3 (IMO P1, 2022). The Bank of Oslo issues two types of coin: aluminum (denoted A) and bronze (denoted B). Marianne has n aluminum coins and n bronze coins arranged in a row in some arbitrary initial order. A chain is any subsequence of consecutive coins of the same type. Given a fixed positive integer $k \leq 2n$, Gilberty repeatedly performs the following operation: he identifies the longest chain containing the k^{th} coin from the left and moves all coins in that chain to the left end of the row. For example, if $n = 4$ and $k = 4$, the process starting from the ordering $AABBBABA$ would be $AABBBABA \rightarrow BBBAAABA \rightarrow AAABBBBA \rightarrow BBBBAAAA \rightarrow \dots$. Find all pairs (n, k) with $1 \leq k \leq 2n$ such that for every initial ordering, at some moment during the process, the leftmost n coins will all be of the same type.

Problem 4 (India P5, 2018). There are $n \geq 3$ girls in a class sitting around a circular table, each having some apples with her. Every time the teacher notices a girl having more apples than both of her neighbours combined, the teacher takes away one apple from that girl and gives one apple each to her neighbours. Prove that, this process stops after a finite number of steps. (Assume that, the teacher has an abundant supply of apples.)

§1.2 Solutions

Problem 1 (IMO Shortlist C1, 2022). A ± 1 -sequence is a sequence of 2022 numbers a_1, \dots, a_{2022} , each equal to either $+1$ or -1 . Determine the largest C so that, for any ± 1 -sequence, there exists an integer k and indices $1 \leq t_1 < \dots < t_k \leq 2022$ so that $t_{i+1} - t_i \leq 2$ for all i , and

$$\left| \sum_{i=1}^k a_{t_i} \right| \geq C.$$

Solution. We claim that the optimal value of C is 506.

Constructing a sequence that gives an upper bound of 506 on C is very natural. Consider the sequence,

$$1, 1, -1, -1, 1, 1, -1, -1, \dots, 1, 1, -1, -1, 1, -1.$$

There are 505 copies of $1, 1, -1, -1$ chunks with an anomaly at the end. Say we want to maximise the number of 1s in the list, then we must have at least 507 more 1s than -1 s and this is impossible as appending a 1 in our list comes at the cost of appending a -1 unless we are yet to start.

Establishing The Lower bound on C . We will show that no matter what $a_1, a_2, \dots, a_{2022}$ are, we can always achieve

$$\left| \sum_{1 \leq i \leq k} a_{t_i} \right| \geq 506 \quad \text{with } t_{i+1} - t_i \leq 2,$$

for some k . Say there are at least 1011 ones in the sequence and we want to include all of it in the list i.e. $a_{t_1}, a_{t_2}, \dots, a_{t_k}$. We do so according to the following algorithm,

- Begin from the smallest index that contains a 1 and append it to the list.
- If the next nearest 1 is at most two steps away, jump to that index and append it to the list.
- And if you don't find a 1, then always jump to the right by two steps until you find a 1 and of course appending the number you jumped on each time. Eventually if you encounter a 1 which is at most two steps away, follow the above procedure.

Aha! following these steps, the worst case is you would have collected at most 505 (a jump of length 2 is essentially avoiding a -1) number of -1 s in the list and we are done. \square

Problem 2 (India P5, 2025). Greedy goblin Griphook has a regular 2000-gon, whose every vertex has a single coin. In a move, he chooses a vertex, removes one coin each from the two adjacent vertices, and adds one coin to the chosen vertex, keeping the remaining coin for himself. He can only make such a move if both adjacent vertices have at least one coin. Griphook stops only when he cannot make any more moves. What is the maximum and minimum number of coins he could have collected?

Solution. We claim Griphook can pick a maximum of 1998 coins and a minimum of 668 coins. We prove a more general proposition: that given any n -gon for $n \geq 3$, Griphook

can pick at most $n - 2$ coins and the minimizing case is a bit tricky given by the following formula,

$$\text{Minimum number of coins Griphook must pick} = \begin{cases} \lceil n/3 \rceil + 1 & \text{if } n \equiv 2 \pmod{3}, \\ \lceil n/3 \rceil & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

(this proposition is simply motivated by checking for small cases). Firstly, we shall deal with the maximizing case and we shall do that by constructing an algorithm for collecting $n - 2$ coins and then arguing that it cannot get any better. For convenience we represent the number of coins on each vertex as a string with i^{th} number representing the number of coins on the i^{th} vertex. Consider picking the coins in the following manner, i.e, pick the next vertex each time starting from the second vertex,

$$\underline{111111} \dots \underline{111} \rightarrow \underline{020111} \dots \underline{111} \rightarrow \underline{011011} \dots \underline{111} \rightarrow \underline{010101} \dots \underline{111} \rightarrow \dots \rightarrow \underline{010000} \dots \underline{010}.$$

As you may see there will be exactly two coins left that are two vertices away from each other at the end. Suppose we could do better, clearly we cannot pick all the n coins, so we are left with the only possibility of picking $n - 1$ coins and assume we could. By backtracking we have,

$$\underline{010000} \dots \underline{000} \leftarrow \underline{101000} \dots \underline{000} \leftarrow \underline{110100} \dots \underline{000} \leftarrow \underline{111010} \dots \underline{000} \leftarrow \dots \leftarrow \underline{111111} \dots \underline{101}.$$

Note that the above sequence of moves is the only possibility (ahh ignore the cyclic permutations). But, the configuration we get at the end is never achievable hence $n - 2$ is the best upper bound.

Now we shall deal with the minimizing case. Divide the string into substrings each of length 3 and for Griphook to stop, it must be that each of them contain at least one 0 at the extremities. Notice, each move can generate only one substring with at least a single 0 at the extremity, hence the lower bound. When $n \equiv 2 \pmod{3}$ there will always be a $\underline{202}$ string at the end and we are done. \square

Problem 3 (IMO P1, 2022). The Bank of Oslo issues two types of coin: aluminum (denoted A) and bronze (denoted B). Marianne has n aluminum coins and n bronze coins arranged in a row in some arbitrary initial order. A chain is any subsequence of consecutive coins of the same type. Given a fixed positive integer $k \leq 2n$, Gilberty repeatedly performs the following operation: he identifies the longest chain containing the k^{th} coin from the left and moves all coins in that chain to the left end of the row. For example, if $n = 4$ and $k = 4$, the process starting from the ordering $AABBBABA$ would be $AABBBABA \rightarrow BBBA AABA \rightarrow AAABBBBA \rightarrow BBBBAAAA \rightarrow \dots$

Find all pairs (n, k) with $1 \leq k \leq 2n$ such that for every initial ordering, at some moment during the process, the leftmost n coins will all be of the same type.

Solution. We claim that (n, k) is such a pair if and only if it is contained in the following set defined as,

$$S = \left\{ (n, k) \in \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 1}^2 \mid n \leq k \leq n + \left\lceil \frac{n}{2} \right\rceil \right\}$$

Firstly note that for $k < n$ we can construct a counter sequence of coins which shows that the final state cannot be achieved;

$$\underbrace{A \dots A}_{n-1 \text{ A's}} \underbrace{C \dots C}_{n-1 \text{ C's}} AC.$$

Similarly we show that $k \leq n + \lceil n/2 \rceil$ by constructing the sequence which loops to itself every time it completes a cycle. Also, to keep things neat and clean denote the contiguous string of coins of the same metal M of size $\#$ as $M^\#$, consider the sequence;

$$A^{\lfloor \frac{n}{2} \rfloor} C^{\lceil \frac{n}{2} \rceil} A^{\lfloor \frac{n}{2} \rfloor} C^{\lceil \frac{n}{2} \rceil} \rightarrow C^{\lfloor \frac{n}{2} \rfloor} A^{\lfloor \frac{n}{2} \rfloor} C^{\lceil \frac{n}{2} \rceil} A^{\lceil \frac{n}{2} \rceil} \rightarrow \dots \rightarrow A^{\lfloor \frac{n}{2} \rfloor} C^{\lceil \frac{n}{2} \rceil} A^{\lceil \frac{n}{2} \rceil} C^{\lfloor \frac{n}{2} \rfloor} \rightarrow \dots$$

Now, we are only left with the case when $n \leq k \leq n + \lceil n/2 \rceil$ and as per our claim this range of values of k works. Assume that for some k in this range, some sequences do not attain the favourable end state. And for this to happen, there has to be a stagnant point after which the size of any contiguous string of coins of the same metal does not increase at all if not it has to reach the end state.

We would like to characterize the sequences that have reached the stagnant point. Note that the right-most contiguous string of the same metal has to have at least $2n + 1 - k$ coins at each iteration, else, it will contradict the stagnant point. With this argument, we assert that size of every contiguous string of coins of the same metal has to be at least $2n + 1 - k$ and as $n \leq k \leq n + \lceil n/2 \rceil$ we may certainly state that the stagnant point is the end state itself and we are done. \square

Problem 4 (India P5, 2018). There are $n \geq 3$ girls in a class sitting around a circular table, each having some apples with her. Every time the teacher notices a girl having more apples than both of her neighbours combined, the teacher takes away one apple from that girl and gives one apple each to her neighbours. Prove that, this process stops after a finite number of steps. (Assume that, the teacher has an abundant supply of apples.)

Solution. Let \mathcal{G} denote the set of girls g_i where $i = 1, 2, \dots, n$ and let $\alpha_j(g)$ denote the number of apples with g after j^{th} iteration for $j = 0, 1, \dots, n$.

Something cool pops up when we study the extremal object $\max_{g \in \mathcal{G}} \alpha_j(g)$.

Lemma 1. Monovariant Property $\max_{g \in \mathcal{G}} \alpha_j(g) \geq \max_{g \in \mathcal{G}} \alpha_{j+1}(g)$.

By the above result we have an upper bound for the total number of apples in the class i.e.,

$$\sum_{g \in \mathcal{G}} \alpha_j(g) \leq |\mathcal{G}| \max_{g \in \mathcal{G}} \alpha_0(g).$$

But the total number of apples after each iteration seems to be increasing by 1 which forces this process to terminate after a finite number of iterations. \square

§2 Constructions

§2.1 Problems

Problem 1 (India P3, 2020). Let S be a subset of $\{0, 1, 2, \dots, 9\}$. Suppose there is a positive integer N such that for any integer $n > N$, one can find positive integers a, b so that $n = a + b$ and all the digits in the decimal representations of a, b (expressed without leading zeros) are in S . Find the smallest possible value of $|S|$.

Problem 2 (Sleepy Students – OTIS). There are n sleepy students working on a morning constest. The contest has six problems, and the score on each problem is a non negative integer less than or equal to 10. Given that no two students got the same score on two or more problems, what is the greatest possible value of n ?

Problem 3 (RMM P1, 2015). Does there exist an infinite sequence of postivie integers a_1, a_2, \dots such that $\gcd(a_m, a_n) = 1$ if and only if $|m - n| = 1$?

Problem 4 (Junior Balkan Shortlist C2, 2021). Let n be a positive integer. We are given a $3n \times 3n$ board whose unit squares are colored in black and white in such way that starting with the top left square, every third diagonal is colored in black and the rest of the board is in white. In one move, one can take a 2×2 square and change the color of all its squares in such way that white squares become orange, orange ones become black and black ones become white. Find all n for which, using a finite number of moves, we can make all the squares which were initially black white, and all squares which were initially white black.

Problem 5 (India P4, 2025). Let $n \geq 3$ be a positive integer. Find the largest real number t_n as a function of n such that the inequality

$$\max(|a_1 + a_2|, |a_2 + a_3|, \dots, |a_{n-1} + a_n|, |a_n + a_1|) \geq t_n \cdot \max(|a_1|, |a_2|, \dots, |a_n|)$$

holds for all real numbers a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n .

Problem 6 (Coloring Numbers Efficiently-Kithun). What is the least number required to colour the integers $1, 2, \dots, 2^n - 1$ such that for any set of consecutive integers taken from the given set of integers, there will always be a colour colouring exactly one of them? That is, for all integers i, j such that $1 \leq i \leq j \leq 2^n - 1$, there will be a colour coloring exactly one integer from the set $i, i + 1, \dots, j - 1, j$.

Problem 7 (Ahan Chakraborty-Unknown). Let $n \in \mathbb{N}$. Let $X = \{1, 2, 3, \dots, n^2\}$. Let $A \subset X$ with $|A| = n$. Prove that $X \setminus A$ contains an arithmetic progression with n terms.

Problem 8 (IM0 P2, 2014). Let $n \geq 2$ be an integer. Consider an $n \times n$ chessboard consisting of n^2 unit squares. A configuration of n rooks is *peaceful* if every row and every column contains exactly one rook. Find the greatest positive integer k such that, for each peaceful configuration of n rooks, there is a $k \times k$ square which does not contain a rook on any its k^2 unit squares.

§2.2 Solutions

Problem 1 (India P3, 2020). Let S be a subset of $\{0, 1, 2, \dots, 9\}$. Suppose there is a positive integer N such that for any integer $n > N$, one can find positive integers a, b so that $n = a + b$ and all the digits in the decimal representations of a, b (expressed without leading zeros) are in S . Find the smallest possible value of $|S|$.

Solution. We claim $\min |S| = 5$, which can be achieved by taking $S = \{0, 1, 2, 3, 7\}$.

Why Does the Construction Work? Note that sum of pairs of elements (not necessarily distinct) of S generate the whole residue class modulo 10,

	0	1	2	3	7
0	0	1	2	3	7
1	.	2	3	4	8
2	.	.	4	5	9
3	.	.	.	6	0
7	4

The nice thing about the construction is that it makes sure there's no carrying-over stuff, so we may choose each digit of a and b independently. For example, say we want to generate the number 59078294316, we simply choose a, b according to the above table

$$\begin{array}{r}
 2 \ 2 \ 0 \ 0 \ 1 \ 0 \ 2 \ 2 \ 1 \ 0 \ 3 \\
 + \ 3 \ 7 \ 0 \ 7 \ 7 \ 2 \ 7 \ 2 \ 2 \ 1 \ 3 \\
 \hline
 5 \ 9 \ 0 \ 7 \ 8 \ 2 \ 9 \ 4 \ 3 \ 1 \ 6
 \end{array}$$

Note. In fact we get $N = 1$ which is cool.

Establishing the Lower Bound. We shall show that $|S| > 4$. Suppose there exists a single digit number d such that $s_1 + s_2 \not\equiv d \pmod{10}$ for each $(s_1, s_2) \in S \times S$ then we will not be able to generate

$$\underbrace{** \dots *d}_{\text{take sufficiently large number}}$$

as a sum of a, b . Hence it must be that,

$$\{s_1 + s_2 \pmod{10} \mid s_1, s_2 \in S\} = \mathbb{Z}_{10} \quad \text{meaning,} \quad \binom{|S|}{2} + |S| \geq 10.$$

From the above mentioned bound it is quite clear that $|S| \geq 4$, so we are left to show that $|S| \neq 4$. Suppose $S = \{s_1, s_2, s_3, s_4\}$, notice $2s_i \pmod{10}$ generates four distinct even numbers among \mathbb{Z}_{10} . So either exactly one element of S is even or all are odd, the latter implies $s_i + s_j$ is even for $i \neq j$ meaning the number of even numbers generated exceeds $10/2$ which is ridiculous. Similarly, we argue that the former case is also not possible, therefore $|S| > 4$ and we are done. \square

Problem 2 (Sleepy Students – OTIS). There are n sleepy students working on a morning contest. The contest has six problems, and the score on each problem is a non negative integer less than or equal to 10. Given that no two students got the same score on two or more problems, what is the greatest possible value of n ?

Solution. The answer is 121.

By pigeonhole principle it is evident that n is atmost 121. And fortunately by the virtue of this artificial setup, there exists a construction for $n = 121$ — consider the scores of each student to be an arithmetic progression of course under modulo 11. There are 11 choices each for the intial term and the common difference hence making $11 \times 11 = 121$ of them.

But how are we sure that no two of them have two or more coinciding terms?

Suppose some two different arithmetic progressions namely, $\{a, a + d, \dots, a + 5d\}$ and $\{a', a' + d', \dots, a' + 5d'\}$ have two coinciding terms say $a + nd = a' + nd'$ and $a + md = a' + md'$ with $0 \leq n \neq m \leq 5$. As 11 is prime, by cancellation law we have that $n \equiv m$ which is a contradiction and we are done. \square

Remark. I had to look up the ARCH for hints regarding the construction.

Problem 3 (RMM P1, 2015). Does there exist an infinite sequence of postivie integers a_1, a_2, \dots such that $\gcd(a_m, a_n) = 1$ if and only if $|m - n| = 1$?

Solution. The answer is yes.

Denote the n^{th} prime number as p_n . Consider the following construction —

	a_1	a_2	a_3	a_4	a_5	a_6	a_7	a_8	a_9	a_{10}
p_1	•		•		•		•		•	
p_2		•		•		•		•		•
p_3	•			•		•		•		•
p_4		•			•		•		•	
p_5			•			•		•		•
p_6				•			•		•	
p_7					•			•		•
p_8						•			•	
p_9							•			•
p_{10}								•		

proof with little to no words¹

Clearly each a_n is finite and satisfy the hypothesis. \square

Problem 4 (Junior Balkan Shortlist C2, 2021). Let n be a positive integer. We are given a $3n \times 3n$ board whose unit squares are colored in black and white in such way that starting with the top left square, every third diagonal is colored in black and the rest of the board is in white. In one move, one can take a 2×2 square and change the color of all its squares in such way that white squares become orange, orange ones become black and black ones become white. Find all n for which, using a finite number of moves, we can make all the squares which were initially black white, and all squares which were initially white black.

Solution. The desired end state can be acheived if and only if n is even.

¹Here a ‘•’ is at some position (i, j) if and only if $p_i | a_j$.

Proposition 1. A square which was initially black should be subjected to $1 \pmod{3}$ moves and $2 \pmod{3}$ moves if the concerning square was white initially in order to attain the end state.

Define score of a 2×2 square as the number of times it has been chosen throughout. Observe the top row closely, the rightmost 2×2 square must have a score which is $1 \pmod{3}$, so this forces the next square to the left to have a score that is $1 \pmod{3}$ and so on till we reach the left most square. Denote black squares as B , white square as W and orange squares as O . For example consider $n = 3$, the scores of squares in the top rows modulo 3 arranged in order must look like,

$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{—} & 1 & 1 & 0 & 2 & 0 & 1 & 1 & 1 \\ W & W & B & W & W & B & W & W & B \\ W & B & W & W & B & W & W & B & W \\ B & W & W & B & W & W & B & W & W \\ \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots \\ B & W & W & B & W & W & B & W & W \end{bmatrix}.$$

Case 1. When n is odd.

Considering the previous example, note the top-left most square cannot turn black at the end of the process no matter what. This is because the score of the only square it is a part of is $1 \pmod{3}$. By induction we can easily show this holds for all odd n . Which means the first row itself can never reach the end state. Not to mention, one can easily show the case $n = 1$ does not work.

Case 2. When n is even.

It would suffice to show that end state can be achieved for 6×6 grid as the successive grids $12 \times 12, 18 \times 18$ and so can be partitioned into 6×6 grids that repeat themselves. The algorithm is, flip the colours of a rows one at a time starting from the top then traversing till the bottom.

$$\begin{bmatrix} W & W & B & W & W & B \\ W & B & W & W & B & W \\ B & W & W & B & W & W \\ W & W & B & W & W & B \\ W & B & W & W & B & W \\ B & W & W & B & W & W \end{bmatrix} \rightarrow \begin{bmatrix} B & B & W & B & B & W \\ B & O & O & B & O & O \\ B & W & W & B & W & W \\ W & W & B & W & W & B \\ W & B & W & W & B & W \\ B & W & W & B & W & W \end{bmatrix} \rightarrow \begin{bmatrix} B & B & W & B & B & W \\ B & W & B & B & W & B \\ B & B & O & B & B & O \\ W & W & B & W & W & B \\ W & B & W & W & B & W \\ B & W & W & B & W & W \end{bmatrix} \\ \rightarrow \begin{bmatrix} B & B & W & B & B & W \\ B & W & B & B & W & B \\ W & B & B & W & B & B \\ O & W & W & O & W & W \\ W & B & W & W & B & W \\ B & W & W & B & W & W \end{bmatrix} \rightarrow \begin{bmatrix} B & B & W & B & B & W \\ B & W & B & B & W & B \\ W & B & B & W & B & B \\ B & B & W & B & B & W \\ O & O & W & O & O & W \\ B & W & W & B & W & W \end{bmatrix} \rightarrow \begin{bmatrix} B & B & W & B & B & W \\ B & W & B & B & W & B \\ W & B & B & W & B & B \\ B & B & W & B & B & W \\ B & W & B & B & W & B \\ W & B & B & W & B & B \end{bmatrix}.$$

Longing turned to having. □

Problem 5 (India P4, 2025). Let $n \geq 3$ be a positive integer. Find the largest real number t_n as a function of n such that the inequality

$$\max(|a_1 + a_2|, |a_2 + a_3|, \dots, |a_{n-1} + a_n|, |a_n + a_1|) \geq t_n \cdot \max(|a_1|, |a_2|, \dots, |a_n|)$$

holds for all real numbers a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n .

Solution. We claim $t_n = 0$ when n is even and $t = 2/n$ otherwise.

The case when n is even is trivial because of the following construction,

$$(a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n) = (1, -1, \dots, -1).$$

Which gives $t_n = 0$.

Now we deal with the case when n is odd. The central theme of the solution is to exploit the triangle inequality, by which we have

$$\begin{aligned} n \cdot \max_{1 \leq i < n} \{|a_i + a_{i+1}|, |a_n + a_1|\} &\geq |(a_n + a_1)| + \sum_{1 \leq i < n} |(a_i + a_{i+1})| \\ &\geq 2 \max_{1 \leq i \leq n} |a_i| \end{aligned}$$

So we have a nice lower bound for t_n which is $t \geq 2/n$, and fortunate enough this is the upper bound as well. Consider the construction that make sures $\max_{1 \leq i < n} \{|a_i + a_{i+1}|, |a_n + a_1|\} = 2$,

$$(a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n) = (1, -3, 5, \dots, (-1)^{\frac{n-1}{2}} n, \dots, 5, -3, 1).$$

□

Problem 6 (Coloring Numbers Efficiently-Kithun). What is the least number required to colour the integers $1, 2, \dots, 2^n - 1$ such that for any set of consecutive integers taken from the given set of integers, there will always be a colour colouring exactly one of them? That is, for all integers i, j such that $1 \leq i \leq j \leq 2^n - 1$, there will be a colour coloring exactly one integer from the set $i, i + 1, \dots, j - 1, j$.

Solution. Denote the minimum number of colours required to colour the integers $1, 2, \dots, 2^n - 1$ such that for any set of consecutive integers taken from the given set of integers, there will always be a colour colouring exactly one of them as χ_n . For convenience call a colouring *minimally-valid* if the colouring is “valid” and uses only χ_n different colours. The key idea is to come up with good enough non-trivial bounds on χ_n . If we are lucky, the lower bound might turn out to be the same as that of the upper bound and we win.

Before jumping into the details of χ_n , let us try colouring the numbers $1, 2, \dots, 2^4 - 1$ (base case being $n = 3$ is rather trivial giving us little to no insights), maybe we can come up with a nice construction that could be generalised easily.

$$1 \text{ } 2 \text{ } 3 \text{ } 4 \text{ } 5 \text{ } 6 \text{ } 7 \text{ } | \text{ } 8 \text{ } 9 \text{ } 10 \text{ } 11 \text{ } 12 \text{ } 13 \text{ } 14 \text{ } 15$$

Note that, the above colouring is valid and turns out it is minimally valid as well (proof simply follows by considering a colouring using three or less distinct colours and getting a contradiction). Cool, but how can we proceed for cases $n = 5, 6, 7$ and so on? For $n = 5$ just colour the numbers $1, 2, \dots, 15$ as shown above and colour 16 with a new colour which is not used to colour the numbers before it. Colour the remaining numbers $17, 18, \dots, 31$

in the same manner in which we coloured $1, 2, \dots, 15$. For instance 17 is orange, 18 is blue and so on. This means $\chi_5 \leq 5$. Aha!! we can continue this process indefinitely for bigger n introducing exactly one new colour each time giving us the upper bound $\chi_n \leq n$. We now ask the question, if this upper bound can be refined further and fortunately the answer is a clear no.

Claim 1. $\chi_n \geq n$.

Proof. Partition the given set of integers into three subsets as $A = \{1, 2, \dots, 2^{n-1} - 1\}$, $B = \{2^{n-1}\}$ and $C = \{2^{n-1} + 1, 2^{n-1} + 2, \dots, 2^n - 1\}$. Notice, the numbers in A must be coloured with at least χ_{n-1} distinct colours and similarly C must be coloured with at least χ_{n-1} distinct colours. Our goal isto show that $\chi_n = \chi_{n-1} + 1$. Suppose not, then we know that χ_n is at least χ_{n-1} . So the only case we have to deal with is when $\chi_n = \chi_{n-1}$. If you look closely, there must be a number among $1, 2, \dots, 2^n - 1$ with a unique colour, if not, consider the whole set as $2^n - 1$ consecutive integers giving us a contradiction. In order to minimize χ_n , it must be that numbers in A and C must be coloured with the same set of colours. But note that every colour is used at least two times, which means the number in B that is 2^{n-1} must be coloured with a unique colour and that is a contradiction as we had initially assumed $\chi_n = \chi_{n-1}$. Hence the lower bound. \square

It is evident that $n \leq \chi_n \leq n$, hence giving us the required result that is $\chi_n = n$. \square

Remark. A further question one may ask is, how many minimally-valid colourings are possible in total given a set of distinct colours $C_1, C_2, \dots, C_{\chi_n}$?

Problem 7 (Ahan Chakraborty-Unknown). Let $n \in \mathbb{N}$. Let $X = \{1, 2, 3, \dots, n^2\}$. Let $A \subset X$ with $|A| = n$. Prove that $X \setminus A$ contains an arithmetic progression with n terms.

Solution. Suppose I could construct a subset A such that $X \setminus A$ does not contain an arithmetic progression with n elements. We shall devise an algorithm for constructing it and then arrive at a conclusion that it is not possible. Arrange the elements on X on a $n \times n$ grid as follows,

$$\begin{array}{cccccc}
 1 & 2 & 3 & \cdots & n-1 & n \\
 n+1 & n+2 & n+3 & \cdots & 2n-1 & 2n \\
 2n+1 & 2n+2 & 2n+3 & \cdots & 3n-1 & 3n \\
 \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots & \vdots \\
 n^2-2n+1 & n^2-2n+2 & n^2-2n+3 & \cdots & n^2-n-1 & n^2-n \\
 n^2-n+1 & n^2-n+2 & n^2-n+3 & \cdots & n^2-1 & n^2
 \end{array}$$

The nice thing about this arrangement is that, several n -element arithmetic progressions are very easy to spot i.e, just walk along the rows, columns, main diagonals. Notice that we must pick exactly one element from each row and column and place it in A , or else the row/column which doesn't share an element with A will be a counter example. If we pick 1, then we cannot pick any other element from the first row and also we cannot pick $n+1$, which means $\{2, 3, \dots, n+1\} \subseteq X \setminus A$ and that does not sound good to us. Similarly we can argue that none of the elements in the first column can be picked except

for the last one (with value $= n^2 - n + 1$). Continuing this argument we can see that the ideal construction is to pick all the diagonal elements (the main diagonal that contains $n^2 - n + 1$). Note that $\{n-1, 2n-2, 3n-3, \dots, (n-1)^2\} \cup \{(n-1)^2 + n\} \subseteq X \setminus A$, hence contradicting the existence of such an A and we are done. \square

Remark. This way of constructing the algorithm resembles placing n non-attacking rooks on a $n \times n$ chessboard, which seem like two totally unrelated topics.

Problem 8 (IM0 P2, 2014). Let $n \geq 2$ be an integer. Consider an $n \times n$ chessboard consisting of n^2 unit squares. A configuration of n rooks is *peaceful* if every row and every column contains exactly one rook. Find the greatest positive integer k such that, for each peaceful configuration of n rooks, there is a $k \times k$ square which does not contain a rook on any its k^2 unit squares.

Solution. The answer is $\lfloor n-1 \rfloor$.

Let $f(n)$ denote the greatest such k for a given n .

§3 Graph Theory

§3.1 Problems

Problem 1 (MTRP). In the planet of MTRPia, one alien named Bob wants to build roads across all the cities all over the planet. The alien government has imposed the condition that this construction must be carried out in such a way so that one can go from one city to any other city through the network of roads thus constructed. To have consistency in the whole process, Bob decides to have an even number of roads originating from each city. Prove that starting from an arbitrary city one can traverse the whole network of roads without ever traversing the same road twice.

§3.2 Solutions

Problem 1 (MTRP). In the planet of MTRPia, one alien named Bob wants to build roads across all the cities all over the planet. The alien government has imposed the condition that this construction must be carried out in such a way so that one can go from one city to any other city through the network of roads thus constructed. To have consistency in the whole process, Bob decides to have an even number of roads originating from each city. Prove that starting from an arbitrary city one can traverse the whole network of roads without ever traversing the same road twice.

Solution. The key question to ask is, if the contrary were true why would one fail traversing the whole network of roads without ever returning to the same road twice? For convenience we shall talk in terms of graph theory terminologies, where the cities are an analogue to vertices and roads to that of edges. Let the graph be $\mathcal{G}(V, E)$ with $V = \{v_1, v_2, \dots, v_n\}$ for some natural n . Consider the process,

- Pick any vertex say v_{a_1} and then pick any of its neighbour v_{a_2} .
- Delete the edge (v_{a_1}, v_{a_2}) from E .
- Now repeat the above steps but starting from v_{a_2} .

Claim — The above process will do the job.

Proof. The virtue of the defined process is that it preserves $\deg(v_i) \pmod{2}$ for all $i = 1, 2, \dots, n$ throughout. Which means it will only stop when it encounters a vertex v when $\deg v = 0$, so ignoring v we get a new graph with $n - 1$ vertices, from here it follows from induction with base case being a 3-clique. And that my friend is easy to work with. \square

So yeah Bob's idea is pretty cool. \square

§4 Global Ideas and the Probabilistic Method

§4.1 Problem

Problem 1 (USAMO P4, 1985). There are n people at a party. Prove that there are two people such that, of the remaining $n - 2$ people, there are at least $\lfloor \frac{n}{2} \rfloor - 1$ of them, each of whom either knows both or else knows neither of the two. Assume that knowing is a symmetric relation, and that $\lfloor x \rfloor$ denotes the greatest integer less than or equal to x .

§4.2 Solutions

Problem 1 (USAMO P4, 1985). There are n people at a party. Prove that there are two people such that, of the remaining $n - 2$ people, there are at least $\lfloor \frac{n}{2} \rfloor - 1$ of them, each of whom either knows both or else knows neither of the two. Assume that knowing is a symmetric relation, and that $\lfloor x \rfloor$ denotes the greatest integer less than or equal to x .

Solution. Pick pairs of two people uniformly at random and define a random variable X such that

$$X \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \begin{cases} \# \text{ People among the re-} \\ \text{maining } n - 2 \text{ people who} \\ \text{are acquainted to both or} \\ \text{neither.} \end{cases}$$

Our goal is to show that $\mathbb{E}[X] \geq \lfloor \frac{n}{2} \rfloor - 1$, as it will automatically assure the existence of two such people. But computing $\mathbb{E}[X] = \sum_{v \in V} v \mathbb{P}[X = v]$ seems to be a pain in the as*, not a big deal as linearity of $\mathbb{E}[X]$ is a boon. We shall introduce auxiliary random variables X_i for $i = 1, 2, \dots, n - 2$ which will help in the computation, consider

$$X_i \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } i^{\text{th}} \text{ person among the re-} \\ & \text{maining is acquainted to} \\ & \text{exactly one of them,} \\ 1 & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

Notice $\mathbb{P}[X_i = v] = 1/2$. As $X = \sum_{1 \leq i \leq n-2} X_i$ and using the boon we mentioned earlier we have the following,

$$\mathbb{E}[X] = \mathbb{E} \left[\sum_{1 \leq i \leq n-2} X_i \right] = \sum_{1 \leq i \leq n-2} \mathbb{E}[X_i] = \sum_{v \in V} v \mathbb{P}[X_i = v] = \frac{n-2}{2} \geq \left\lfloor \frac{n}{2} \right\rfloor - 1.$$

And we are done. □

§5 Combinatorial Games

§5.1 Problems

Problem 1 (India P4, 2021). A Magician and a Detective play a game. The Magician lays down cards numbered from 1 to 52 face-down on a table. On each move, the Detective can point to two cards and inquire if the numbers on them are consecutive. The Magician replies truthfully. After a finite number of moves, the Detective points to two cards. She wins if the numbers on these two cards are consecutive, and loses otherwise. Prove that the Detective can guarantee a win if and only if she is allowed to ask at least 50 questions.

Problem 2 (IMO P4, 2018). A *site* is any point (x, y) in the plane such that x and y are both positive integers less than or equal to 20. Initially, each of the 400 sites is unoccupied. Amy and Ben take turns placing stones with Amy going first. On her turn, Amy places a new red stone on an unoccupied site such that the distance between any two sites occupied by red stones is not equal to $\sqrt{5}$. On his turn, Ben places a new blue stone on any unoccupied site. (A site occupied by a blue stone is allowed to be at any distance from any other occupied site.) They stop as soon as a player cannot place a stone. Find the greatest K such that Amy can ensure that she places at least K red stones, no matter how Ben places his blue stones.

§5.2 Solutions

Problem 1 (India P4, 2021). A Magician and a Detective play a game. The Magician lays down cards numbered from 1 to 52 face-down on a table. On each move, the Detective can point to two cards and inquire if the numbers on them are consecutive. The Magician replies truthfully. After a finite number of moves, the Detective points to two cards. She wins if the numbers on these two cards are consecutive, and loses otherwise. Prove that the Detective can guarantee a win if and only if she is allowed to ask at least 50 questions.

Solution. Consider a complete graph K_{52} where each vertex C_i denotes the i^{th} card. So each edge represents a potential win. Delete an edge $C_i C_j$ if the Detective has already inquired about the card C_i and C_j in a move.

Strategy for The Detective. It is easy to that she can guarantee a win with 50 or less questions as she may fix a card say C_1 throughout and inquire about every other card.

Strategy for The Magician. Suppose the Detective can guarantee a win with 49 questions then we shall show that she has a non zero probability of losing. Let us say she has a pre-planned strategy of picking pairs of cards from the positions $(a_1, b_1), (a_2, b_2), \dots, (a_{49}, b_{49})$ in that order with $1 \leq a_i, b_i \leq 52$ and $a_i \neq b_i$. But notice if there is a Hamiltonian path even after deleting 49 edges of K_{52} , the Magician could have simply placed the cards C_1, C_2, \dots, C_{52} in such a way, that these cards lie along the Hamiltonian path in that order. Which means none of the pairs of cards picked from the positions $(a_1, b_1), (a_2, b_2), \dots, (a_{49}, b_{49})$ contain cards with consecutive numberings and hence a non zero probability of the Detective losing. And yes, if you delete any 49 edges from the graph a Hamiltonian path

always exists due to **Ore's theorem**. Therefore we may conclude, 50 questions is the least number of questions required to guarantee a win. \square

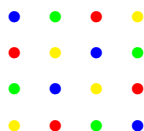
Problem 2 (IMO P4, 2018). A *site* is any point (x, y) in the plane such that x and y are both positive integers less than or equal to 20.

Initially, each of the 400 sites is unoccupied. Amy and Ben take turns placing stones with Amy going first. On her turn, Amy places a new red stone on an unoccupied site such that the distance between any two sites occupied by red stones is not equal to $\sqrt{5}$. On his turn, Ben places a new blue stone on any unoccupied site. (A site occupied by a blue stone is allowed to be at any distance from any other occupied site.) They stop as soon as a player cannot place a stone.

Find the greatest K such that Amy can ensure that she places at least K red stones, no matter how Ben places his blue stones.

Solution. The answer is 100.

Strategy for Ben. The key idea partition the 20×20 set of lattice points into 25 pieces of 4×4 lattice points which we'll call **units** as depicted below. And then colour each of the sites in one of four colours in this manner.



Suppose Amy places her stone on a site, then Ben can always place his stone in the same 4×4 unit and same coloured site in which Amy had placed her stone just before in such way that Amy can place no more stones in the same coloured site in that unit. And this strategy of Ben forces Amy to not place more than 4 stones in each unit. Hence the upper bound of 100.

Strategy for Amy. Our goal is to show that Amy can place at least 100 stones regardless of the wildest of strategies Ben designs. We simply colour the lattice points in checkered pattern with black and white. Then Amy can always choose to place her stones in white spots (non-attacking knights). Ben can best ruin this strategy by placing all his stones in white sites. But even then Amy would placed 100 of her stones.

And we are done. \square

§6 Miscellaneous

§6.1 Problems

Problem 1 (India P1, 2021). Suppose $r \geq 2$ is an integer, and let $m_1, n_1, m_2, n_2, \dots, m_r, n_r$ be $2r$ integers such that

$$|m_i n_j - m_j n_i| = 1$$

for any two integers i and j satisfying $1 \leq i < j \leq r$. Determine the maximum possible value of r .

§6.2 Solutions

Problem 1 (India P1, 2021). Suppose $r \geq 2$ is an integer, and let $m_1, n_1, m_2, n_2, \dots, m_r, n_r$ be $2r$ integers such that

$$|m_i n_j - m_j n_i| = 1$$

for any two integers i and j satisfying $1 \leq i < j \leq r$. Determine the maximum possible value of r .

Solution. We claim the maximum possible value of r is 3.

What does the subscripts of $m_i n_j$ and $m_j n_i$ remind us of - matrix elements that are reflections of each other in the main diagonal. So let us arrange the numbers as follows for better intuition,

$$\begin{array}{cccccc} m_1 n_1 & m_1 n_2 & m_1 n_3 & m_1 n_4 & \cdots & m_1 n_r \\ m_2 n_1 & m_2 n_2 & m_2 n_3 & m_2 n_4 & \cdots & m_2 n_r \\ m_3 n_1 & m_3 n_2 & m_3 n_3 & m_3 n_4 & \cdots & m_3 n_r \\ m_4 n_1 & m_4 n_2 & m_4 n_3 & m_4 n_4 & \cdots & m_4 n_r \\ \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ m_r n_1 & m_r n_2 & m_r n_3 & m_r n_4 & \cdots & m_r n_r \end{array}$$

Notice that entries which are reflections of each other (the subscripts) about the main diagonals are of different parity. Assume n_1 is even which means all the entries in the first row are odd (except the first entry of course). Say m_2 is even then we know both m_3 and n_2 are odd (as $m_2 n_3$ and $m_3 n_2$ are reflections of each other) also m_4 is odd. Here comes the catch if you look closely, both $m_4 n_3$ and $m_3 n_4$ are odd which is a contradiction. Hence $r \leq 3$ and for $r = 3$ a number of constructions are already given. \square

Chapter 2

Number Theory

§1 Divisibility

§1.1 Problems

Problem 1 (IMO Shortlist N2, 2022). Find all positive integers $n > 2$ such that

$$n! \mid \prod_{p < q \leq n, p, q \text{ primes}} (p + q).$$

Problem 2 (India P4, 2024). Let p be an odd prime and a, b, c be integers so that the integers

$$a^{2023} + b^{2023}, \quad b^{2024} + c^{2024}, \quad a^{2025} + c^{2025}$$

are divisible by p . Prove that p divides each of a, b, c .

Problem 3 (Simon Marais A2, 2021). Define the sequence of integers a_1, a_2, a_3, \dots by $a_1 = 1$, and

$$a_{n+1} = (n + 1 - \gcd(a_n, n)) \times a_n$$

for all integers $n \geq 1$. Prove that $\frac{a_{n+1}}{a_n} = n$ if and only if n is prime or $n = 1$. Here $\gcd(s, t)$ denotes the greatest common divisor of s and t .

Problem 4 (CRT-Evan Chen's Handout). Let n be a positive integer. Determine, in terms of n , the number of $x \in \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$ for which $x^2 \equiv x \pmod{n}$.

§1.2 Solutions

Problem 1 (IMO Shortlist N2, 2022). Find all positive integers $n > 2$ such that

$$n! \mid \prod_{p < q \leq n, p, q \text{ primes}} (p + q).$$

Solution. We claim that $n = 7$ is the only solution, easy to check why it works.

Now we will show that no other value works. Clearly any $n < 7$ and $7 < n \leq 11$ does not work and let us assume some $n > 11$ works. Let p_{\max} be the largest prime less than n . By the given condition, it is evident that distinct prime $p < q \leq n$ exist that satisfy,

$$p + q \equiv 0 \pmod{p_{\max}}.$$

But, note as $p < q \leq p_{\max}$ it must be that $p + q = p_{\max}$ and by parity constraint, it is necessary that $p = 2$. Similarly there exist primes $p' < q' \leq n$ such that $p' + q' \equiv 0 \pmod{p_{\max} - 2}$. By comparing sizes, it is clear that either

$$p' + q' = p_{\max} - 2 \quad \text{or} \quad p' + q' = 2p_{\max} - 4.$$

We shall deal with the latter case first. Both p' and q' cannot be less than p_{\max} else we have a contradiction, so this forces $p_{\max} - 4$ to also be a prime. Recall that there does not exist a prime p such that both $p + 2$ and $p + 4$ are primes unless $p = 3$ (as a hint consider modulo 3). So this case is ruled out and the former case is obvious as p must be 2 and $p_{\max} - 4$ is a prime which is a contradiction. \square

Remark. The problem does not justify its positioning in N2 by any means.

Problem 2 (India P4, 2024). Let p be an odd prime and a, b, c be integers so that the integers

$$a^{2023} + b^{2023}, \quad b^{2024} + c^{2024}, \quad a^{2025} + c^{2025}$$

are divisible by p . Prove that p divides each of a, b, c .

Solution. Showing that any one of a, b, c is divisible by p would suffice. Assume all of them are invertible on \mathbb{Z}_p . As $b^{2024} \equiv -ba^{2023}$ we may say,

$$c^{2024} + b^{2024} \equiv c^{2024} - ba^{2023} \quad \text{and} \quad c^{2025} \equiv cba^{2023}.$$

We then have $bca^{2023} + a^{2025} \equiv 0$. Since a is invertible we are left with the key result,

$$a^2 \equiv -bc.$$

Using the above fact, $a(-bc)^{1012} \equiv -c^{2025}$ which deduces to $ab^{1012} \equiv -c^{1013}$ and as $a^{2025} \equiv cb^{2024}$ we can easily show that $b^{1012} \equiv ac^{1011}$. Now we are left with,

$$ab^{1012} \equiv a^2 c^{1011} \equiv -c^{1013} \implies a^2 \equiv -c^2.$$

But we had already seen $a^2 \equiv -bc$ and is absurd, contradicting our assumption, hence none of them are invertible as desired. \square

Problem 3 (Simon Marais A2, 2021). Define the sequence of integers a_1, a_2, a_3, \dots by $a_1 = 1$, and

$$a_{n+1} = (n + 1 - \gcd(a_n, n)) \times a_n$$

for all integers $n \geq 1$. Prove that $\frac{a_{n+1}}{a_n} = n$ if and only if n is prime or $n = 1$. Here $\gcd(s, t)$ denotes the greatest common divisor of s and t .

Solution. Let us write down few terms just to build some intuition,

a_n	a_1	a_2	a_3	a_4	a_5	a_6	a_7	a_8	a_9
n	1	1	2	$2 \cdot 3$	$2 \cdot 3^2$	$2 \cdot 3^2 \cdot 5$	$2 \cdot 3^2 \cdot 5$	$2 \cdot 3^2 \cdot 5 \cdot 7$	$2 \cdot 3^2 \cdot 5 \cdot 7^2$

Notice that every prime less than n divides a_n for $n \leq 12$ at least and more precisely no prime bigger than $N - 1$ divides a_N as well. We ask the question, if this holds for any n .

Claim 1. A prime p divides a_n if and only if $p < n$.

Proof. This simply follows from an inductive argument (base case holds—refer the table). Suppose this property holds for some natural N then we have,

$$a_{N+1} = \underbrace{(N + 1 - \gcd(N, a_N))}_{\text{less than } N + 1} \times a_N$$

By hypothesis it is true that every prime less than N divides a_N and are the only ones. As $N + 1 - \gcd(N, a_N) < N + 1$, our claim holds! \square

To finish off we just need to observe that $\gcd(n, a_n) = 1$ if and only if n is a prime which is obvious from our claim and we are done. \square

Problem 4 (CRT-Evan Chen's Handout). Let n be a positive integer. Determine, in terms of n , the number of $x \in \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$ for which $x^2 \equiv x \pmod{n}$.

Solution. The answer is 2^k , where k corresponds to the number of distinct prime divisors of n .

Say $n = p_1^{e_1} p_2^{e_2} \dots p_k^{e_k}$. We then have,

$$\begin{aligned} x^2 &\equiv x \pmod{p_1^{e_1}} \\ x^2 &\equiv x \pmod{p_2^{e_2}} \\ &\vdots \\ x^2 &\equiv x \pmod{p_k^{e_k}}. \end{aligned}$$

As $\gcd(x, (x - 1)) = 1$, each time we either have $p_i^{e_i} | x$ or $p_i^{e_i} | x - 1$ (something like a binary tree). So, there are 2^k possible constructions for x and hence the answer. \square

§2 Number Theory Constructions

§2.1 Problems

Problem 1 (USAMO P1, 2017). Prove that there exists infinitely many pairs of relatively prime positive integers $a, b > 1$ for which $a + b \mid a^b + b^a$.

Problem 2 (USAJMO P3, 2024). Let $a(n)$ be the sequence defined by $a(1) = 2$ and $a(n+1) = (a(n))^{n+1} - 1$ for each integer $n \geq 1$. Suppose that $p > 2$ is a prime and k is a positive integer. Prove that some term of the sequence $a(n)$ is divisible by p^k .

Problem 3 (India P3, 2020). Let S be a subset of $\{0, 1, 2, \dots, 9\}$. Suppose there is a positive integer N such that for any integer $n > N$, one can find positive integers a, b so that $n = a + b$ and all the digits in the decimal representations of a, b (expressed without leading zeros) are in S . Find the smallest possible value of $|S|$.

Problem 4 (IMO P5, 1989). Prove that for every positive integer n , there exists n consecutive positive integers such that none of them is a power of a prime.

Problem 5 (USAMO P4, 2011). Consider the assertion that for each positive integer $n \geq 2$, the remainder upon dividing 2^{2^n} by $2^n - 1$ is a power of 4. Either prove the assertion or find (with proof) a counterexample.

§2.2 Solutions

Problem 1 (USAMO P1, 2017). Prove that there exists infinitely many pairs of relatively prime positive integers $a, b > 1$ for which $a + b \mid a^b + b^a$.

Solution 1. We claim $(a, b) = (4k^2 - 1, 4k^2 + 1)$ is a valid construction for any odd natural k .

Evidently, $\gcd(4k^2 - 1, 4k^2 + 1)$. So, we are only left to show

$$8k^2 \mid (4k^2 - 1)^{4k^2+1} + (4k^2 + 1)^{4k^2-1}.$$

As $\gcd(8, k^2) = 1$, we can separately work in mod k^2 and mod 8. We then have,

$$\begin{aligned} (4k^2 - 1)^{4k^2+1} + (4k^2 + 1)^{4k^2-1} &\equiv (-1)^{\text{odd}} + (1)^{\text{odd}} \pmod{k^2} \\ &\equiv 0. \end{aligned}$$

Note that $k^2 \equiv 1 \pmod{8}$, then,

$$\begin{aligned} (4k^2 - 1)^{4k^2+1} + (4k^2 + 1)^{4k^2-1} &\equiv 3^5 + 5^3 \pmod{8} \\ &\equiv 0. \end{aligned}$$

Indeed, the proposed construction is valid and we are done. \square

Solution 2. (Courtesy: @v_Enhance) My construction: let $d \equiv 1 \pmod{4}$, $d > 1$. Let $x = \frac{d^d + 2^d}{d+2}$. Then set

$$a = \frac{x+d}{2}, \quad b = \frac{x-d}{2}.$$

To see this works, first check that b is odd and a is even. Let $d = a - b$ be odd. Then:

$$\begin{aligned}
 a + b \mid a^b + b^a &\iff (-b)^b + b^a \equiv 0 \pmod{a + b} \\
 &\iff b^{a-b} \equiv 1 \pmod{a + b} \\
 &\iff b^d \equiv 1 \pmod{d + 2b} \\
 &\iff (-2)^d \equiv d^d \pmod{d + 2b} \\
 &\iff d + 2b \mid d^d + 2^d.
 \end{aligned}$$

So it would be enough that

$$d + 2b = \frac{d^d + 2^d}{d + 2} \implies b = \frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{d^d + 2^d}{d + 2} - d \right)$$

which is what we constructed. Also, since $\gcd(x, d) = 1$ it follows $\gcd(a, b) = \gcd(d, b) = 1$. \square

Remark. Bruhh after reading, Evan's comment that any consecutive odd pair works, I feel so stupid.

Problem 2 (USAJMO P3, 2024). Let $a(n)$ be the sequence defined by $a(1) = 2$ and $a(n + 1) = (a(n))^{n+1} - 1$ for each integer $n \geq 1$. Suppose that $p > 2$ is a prime and k is a positive integer. Prove that some term of the sequence $a(n)$ is divisible by p^k .

Solution. The structure of the recurrence somewhat reminds us of the famous Euler's Totient theorem, turns out there is a little more to that. Consider the terms with indices which are one less than multiples of $\varphi(p^k)$. If any of them say $a(m\varphi(p^k) - 1)$ is invertible over \mathbb{Z}_{p^k} for some natural m , then we are done as

$$a(m\varphi(p^k)) \equiv 0 \pmod{p^k}.$$

Suppose there isn't one then it is certain that

$$a(m(p-1) - 1) = (a(m(p-1) - 2))^{m(p-1)-1} - 1 \equiv 0 \pmod{p} \quad \text{for each } m,$$

From the above one might agree, $\gcd(p, a(m(p-1) - 2)) = 1$ and $a(m(p-1) - 2) \equiv 1 \pmod{p}$. Wait how does that help?! Lifting the Exponent lemma (LTE for short) to the rescue my friend! Recollect that given a prime $p \mid a - b$ with $\gcd(a, p) = \gcd(b, p) = 1$ we have

$$\nu_p(a^n - b^n) = \nu_p(a - b) + \nu_p(n),$$

where $\nu_p()$ denotes the p -adic valuation. We then have,

$$\nu_p((a(m(p-1) - 2))^{m(p-1)-1} - 1) = \nu_p(a(m(p-1) - 2) - 1) + \underbrace{\nu_p(m(p-1) - 1)}_{\text{can take arbitrarily large values}}.$$

Claim 1. The value of $\nu_p(m(p-1) - 1)$ can be made arbitrarily large with a right choice for m .

Proof. Easily follows from an elementary result. As $\gcd(p-1, p^k) = 1$, Bézout's lemma (or more precisely a corollary) assures the existence of two positive integers x, y such that $x(p-1) - 1 = yp^k$. And $\nu_p(x(p-1) - 1) \geq k$, hence the claim. \square

By claim 1 we have a valid construction for m with $p^k | a(m(p-1) - 1)$ and we are done. \square

Problem 3 (India P3, 2020). Let S be a subset of $\{0, 1, 2, \dots, 9\}$. Suppose there is a positive integer N such that for any integer $n > N$, one can find positive integers a, b so that $n = a + b$ and all the digits in the decimal representations of a, b (expressed without leading zeros) are in S . Find the smallest possible value of $|S|$.

Solution. We claim $\min |S| = 5$, which can be achieved by taking $S = \{0, 1, 2, 3, 7\}$.

Why Does the Construction Work? Note that sum of pairs of elements (not necessarily distinct) of S generate the whole residue class modulo 10,

	0	1	2	3	7
0	0	1	2	3	7
1	.	2	3	4	8
2	.	.	4	5	9
3	.	.	.	6	0
7	4

The nice thing about the construction is that it makes sure there's no carrying-over stuff, so we may choose each digit of a and b independently. For example, say we want to generate the number 59078294316, we simple choose a, b according to the above table

$$\begin{array}{r}
 2 \ 2 \ 0 \ 0 \ 1 \ 0 \ 2 \ 2 \ 1 \ 0 \ 3 \\
 + \ 3 \ 7 \ 0 \ 7 \ 7 \ 2 \ 7 \ 2 \ 2 \ 1 \ 3 \\
 \hline
 5 \ 9 \ 0 \ 7 \ 8 \ 2 \ 9 \ 4 \ 3 \ 1 \ 6
 \end{array}$$

Note. In fact we get $N = 1$ which is cool.

Establishing the Lower Bound. We shall show that $|S| > 4$. Suppose there exists a single digit number d such that $s_1 + s_2 \not\equiv d \pmod{10}$ for each $(s_1, s_2) \in S \times S$ then we will not be able to generate

$$\underbrace{** \dots *}_d$$

take sufficiently large number

as a sum of a, b . Hence it must be that,

$$\{s_1 + s_2 \pmod{10} \mid s_1, s_2 \in S\} = \mathbb{Z}_{10} \quad \text{meaning,} \quad \binom{|S|}{2} + |S| \geq 10.$$

From the above mentioned bound it is quite clear that $|S| \geq 4$, so we are left to show that $|S| \neq 4$. Suppose $S = \{s_1, s_2, s_3, s_4\}$, notice $2s_i \pmod{10}$ generates four distinct even numbers among \mathbb{Z}_{10} . So either exactly one element of S is even or all are odd, the latter implies $s_i + s_j$ is even for $i \neq j$ meaning the number of even numbers generated exceeds $10/2$ which is ridiculous. Similarly, we argue that the former case is also not possible, therefore $|S| > 4$ and we are done. \square

Problem 4 (IMO P5, 1989). Prove that for every positive integer n , theree exists n consecutive positive integers such that noe of them is a power of a prime.

Solution. Consider $2n$ parwise distinct primes p_i . Consider the system of equations such that,

$$\begin{aligned} a &\equiv -1 \pmod{p_1 p_2} \\ a &\equiv -2 \pmod{p_3 p_4} \\ &\vdots \\ a &\equiv -n \pmod{p_{2n-1} p_{2n}}. \end{aligned}$$

We are done is we are able to find a solution for the above system of equations. Voilà!! by **Chinese Remainder theorem** such an a exists. \square

Problem 5 (USAMO P4, 2011). Consider the assertion that for each positive integer $n \geq 2$, the remainder upon dividing 2^{2^n} by $2^n - 1$ is a power of 4. Either prove the assertion or find (with proof) a counterexample.

Solution.