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SALVE VS SIBAL, SINGHVI IN HIGH VOLTAGE BATTLE

Sena rebels challenge Dy Speaker's decisions in SC, to be heard today

One more minister flies to Guwahati, Shinde has 39 now

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MUMBAI, JUNE 26

THE MAHARASHTRA rebels camping in BJP-ruled Assam have moved their battle to the Supreme Court. The court will take up two petitions on Monday — one by rebel Shiv Sena leader Eknath Shinde; the other by 15 MLAs belonging to his camp.

The petitions challenge the decision by Deputy Speaker Narhari Zirwal to recognise Ajay

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Aaditya Thackeray arrives for a meeting at the Shiv Sena office in Mumbai, Sunday. *Amit Chakravarty*

REPORTS, PAGE 4

Keep Central forces ready, says Governor; 15 rebel MLAs get Y-plus security

YOGESH NAIK
MUMBAI, JUNE 26

FLAGGING REPORTS of rebel Shiv Sena MLAs' houses and offices being targeted in Maharashtra, Governor B S Koshiyari has asked the Centre to keep "adequate" central security forces "ready... to address the situation".

Meanwhile, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Sunday granted Y-plus security cover, comprising CRPF personnel, to at least 15 rebel Shiv Sena MLAs. While the MLAs are in a hotel in Assam, sources said security will be provided to their families in Maharashtra.

In his letter to Union Home
CONTINUED ON PAGE 2SAD (Amritsar) president Simranjit Singh Mann after winning the bypoll in Sangrur on Sunday. *Gurmeet Singh*

BJP wrests SP's strongholds in UP, AAP loses Sangrur in Punjab LS bypoll

MANOJ CG
NEW DELHI, JUNE 26

JUST MONTHS after it stormed to power in Punjab, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) suffered a setback on Sunday as it lost the Sangrur Lok Sabha seat, vacated by its Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, to Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) president Simranjit Singh Mann. The AAP now has no member in the Lok Sabha.

In Uttar Pradesh, the Samajwadi Party (SP) lost its strongholds of Azamgarh and Rampur to the BJP in the Lok Sabha bypolls. The two seats fell vacant after party chief Akhilesh Yadav and senior party leader Azam Khan were elected to the Assembly in March.

In Azamgarh, where the Muslim-Yadav dominance had helped Mulayam Singh Yadav win the seat in 2014 and Akhilesh in 2019, BJP nominee Dinesh Lal Yadav "Nirahua", a

EXPLAINED
Setback for Opp

THE DEFEAT in Sangrur, just months after its spectacular win in the Punjab Assembly elections, comes as a wake-up call for the AAP. In UP, by wresting two SP strongholds, the BJP has strengthened its already-dominant position ahead of the urban local body elections due later this year.

Bhojpuri actor, defeated SP's Dharmendra Yadav, a former MP and cousin of Akhilesh, by a margin of about 8,600 votes. In 2019, CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

MORE REPORTS
PAGES 6

New SIT to probe Sreekumar, Teesta, Bhatt for conspiracy

VAIBHAV JHA
AHMEDABAD, JUNE 26

THE GUJARAT government on Sunday formed a six-member Special Investigation Team (SIT) headed by the state's Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) DIG Deepan Bhadrani to investigate retired DGP R B Sreekumar, activist Teesta Setalvad and former IPS officer Sanjiv Bhatt for criminal conspiracy and forgery, and other charges, "as per directions of the Supreme Court", a top official told *The Indian Express*.

The move follows an FIR
CONTINUED ON PAGE 2Setalvad at an Ahmedabad court, Sunday. *Nirmal Harindran*

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

IN SC's NAME
PAGE 8

PM IN MUNICH

PM Narendra Modi addresses the Indian diaspora in Munich, Germany, where he arrived on Sunday to take part in the G7 summit. At the community event, the PM said the Emergency, announced on June 25, 1975, was a 'black spot' in India's history. *PTI*

REPORTS, PAGE 5



'We are no longer chess players from mythology; someone bespectacled who is slightly old. Now chess is seen as a fairly young sport'

VISWANATHAN ANAND
INDIA'S FIRST GRANDMASTER & FIVE-TIME WORLD CHAMPION
PAGE 9

EXPRESS NETWORK

YOUTUBE REMOVES NEW MOOSEWALA SONG AFTER GOVT COMPLAINT
PAGE 7

Congress-ruled Rajasthan gets biggest investment pledges from Adani, Ambani: Rs 1.68 lakh crore

DEEPA MUKHERJEE
JAIPUR, JUNE 26

THE BIGGEST investment pledges received by the Ashok Gehlot-led Congress government in Rajasthan under the 'Invest

YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW

AN EXPRESS RTI APPLICATION

Rajasthan' outreach programme include commitments by the Gautam Adani-led Adani Group and the Mukesh Ambani-chaired Reliance Industries Ltd, according to information obtained by *The Indian Express* under the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

Data furnished by the state's Bureau of Investment Promotion (BoIP) following the RTI application shows the two corporate houses together pledged over Rs 1.68 lakh crore between December 2021 and March 2022
CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

MP toasts its first Ranji title: 'Moment of a lifetime'

MP coach Chandrakant Pandit and captain Aditya Shrivastava on Sunday. *PTI*ABHISHEK PUROHIT
BENGALURU, JUNE 26

MADHYA PRADESH captain Aditya Shrivastava was waiting for his turn to speak after Mumbai skipper Prithvi Shaw at the post-match presentation of the Ranji Trophy final. But Shrivastava's team had walked over to the board reading "Champions", ready to pose for photographs.

Earlier, in another glimpse of what this maiden Ranji Trophy crown means to a state formed in 1956, Shrivastava was already in his official dark blue MP blazer as he stood a few metres from his impatient teammates just moments after the six-wicket victory over 41-time champions Mumbai.

"Completely ecstatic," the 28-year old captain began when it was his turn to talk to the presenter, Anjum Chopra, the former India captain.

"A generation...of time has gone by and MP has won the Ranji Trophy for the first time
CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

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EXPRESS **TECHNOLOGY**

Apple CEO Tim Cook defends billion dollar deal with Google

96 DIRECTOR ON VIJAY SETHUPATHI-TRISHA'S FATE IN THE FILM: 'I VERY BADLY WANT THEM TO MEET AGAIN BUT...'

In today's installment of Scene Stealer, we revisit the heart-wrenching climax of Vijay Sethupathi-Trisha film 96. The romantic drama released in 2018 and was directed by Prem Kumar

TECHNOLOGY



APPLE AIRPODS PRO 2

Apple's AirPods Pro are likely to get updated H1 chip, heart rate detection

LIFESTYLE



MS MARVEL'S UNIVERSE

A liberal sprinkling of the Subcontinent's music in Ms Marvel in their new offering

EXPRESS **AUDIO**

Pride Month Special: A lesbian couple about life and love in India

Even though the Pride Month is now embraced across India, its coverage mostly focuses on gay men and sometimes transgender women activists. But lesbians seem to be largely missing from this coverage and conversation

FROM PAGE ONE

Governor

Secretary Ajay Bhalla, dated June 25, Koshiyari said that although he had asked the state police to provide adequate protection to the rebel MLAs, the police remained a "mute spectator" while the offices and homes of these MLAs were vandalised.

"It is accordingly requested that adequate provision of central security forces be made and kept ready, in case required, to address the situation," he said in his letter.

Koshiyari, who had tested positive for Covid-19, was discharged from hospital on Sunday. When contacted, the Raj Bhavan spokesperson declined to comment on Koshiyari's letter.

Koshiyari also wrote to Maharashtra Director General of Police Rajnish Seth on June 25, calling for "immediate" protection of the rebel MLAs and their families. "I have received a representation dated 25th June 2022 from 38 MLAs of Shiv Sena, 2 MLAs of Prahar Jan Shakti party and 7 Independent MLAs stating that the security of their families 'has been illegally and unlawfully withdrawn'. They have also raised serious concerns about the safety of their homes and families in context of the provocative and threatening statements being made by certain political leaders. Already, offices and homes of some of the MLAs have been vandalised, with the police being a mute spectator," he wrote.

"I therefore direct you to provide police protection to the MLAs, their families and homes on an immediate basis... I may be apprised of the action taken in this regard," he said.

Copies of the letter were marked to Chief Secretary Manukumar Shrivastava, Additional Chief Secretary (Home) A M Limaye, and Mumbai Police Commissioner Sanjay Pandey.

In tweet posted Saturday, rebel leader Eknath Shinde had alleged that the security of rebel Shiv Sena MLAs had been withdrawn on the orders of Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and State Home Minister Dilip Walse-Patil.

On Sunday, Walse-Patil's office tweeted: "Adequate security has been provided at the office, residence of all MLAs who have gone to Guwahati. At no point was the security withdrawn..."

While Shinde has not been granted Y-plus security, among those in the list are Ramesh Bornare, Mangesh Kudalkar, Sanjay Shirsat, Latabai Sonawane and Prakash Surve.

"The decision has been taken after a threat assessment by the Intelligence Bureau. Only those MLAs who have a genuine threat have been provided protection," said a home ministry official.

On Friday, Kudalkar's office in Mumbai was vandalised. On Saturday, the office of Tanaji Sawant, another rebel ML, was ransacked in Pune.

Addressing Yuva Sena workers on Sunday, Yuva Sena president and minister Aaditya Thackeray criticised the central government for providing CRPF security to rebel MLAs. "We have been demanding CRPF security for Kashmiri Pandits, but it was not given... these rebel MLAs are being given security," he said.

Meanwhile, a senior IPS officer said the security cover provided by the state to the MLAs had not been removed.

— WITHEMS, NEW DELHI

Bypolls

Akhilesh had defeated Nirahua by

ferent sectors – in the Lok Sabha in February this year. He had earlier too taken similar jibes on the BJP-led government at the Centre.

According to the data furnished, investment pledges were made between December 2021 and March 2022 by Reliance New Energy Solar Limited (Rs 1,00,000 crore), Adani Green Energy Limited (Rs 60,000 crore), Adani Infra Limited (Rs 5,000 crore), Adani Total Gas Limited (Rs 3,000 crore) and Adani Wilmar Ltd (Rs 246.08 crore).

Among 4,016 institutions listed by the Rajasthan BoP are also JSW Future Energy Limited (Rs 40,000 crore), Sterlite Power Technologies Private Limited of the Vedanta Group (Rs 40,000 crore), Hindustan Zinc Cairn, also of Vedanta Group (Rs 33,350 crore), Axis Energy Ventures Private Limited (Rs 30,000 crore), Axis Energy (Rs 30,000 crore), Eden-Renewables (Rs 20,000 crore) and Tata Power (Rs 15,000 crore).

The BoP website describes the 'Invest Rajasthan' programme as the "State's active investor outreach program comprising domestic, national, and international investor meets, embassy connect programs and virtual seminars. The program aims at soliciting investment proposals, processing them on a mission mode and taking them to fruition."

The state had originally planned to hold an 'Invest Rajasthan Summit' in January, but it was postponed due to Covid-19. In the run-up to the proposed summit, Chief Minister Gehlot had even met several industrialists including Gautam Adani. The summit is now scheduled on October 7-8 in Jaipur.

In February this year, in the debate over the motion of thanks to the President's address Rahul Gandhi had spoken about what he called the decimation of the small and medium industry to the concentration of capital in the hands of "AA" (a reference to Ambani and Adani). A couple of months ago in December 2021, addressing a rally in Jaipur to protest against price rise, he had said, "Aagaye acche din. Kiske? Hum do, hamare do, unke. Airport dekho, port dekho, coal mine dekho, telephone dekho, supermarket dekho, jahan bhi dekho bhaiya do log dikhenge aapko, Adani ji, Ambani ji. Unki galti nahin hai. Dekho bhaiya aapko agar koi muft mein kuch de, aap kya wapase de doge? Nahin doge. Unki galti thodi hai. Galti Pradhan Mantri ki hai (Good times have arrived. For whom? It is for 'we two, our two'. Be it airport, port, coal mine, telephone, supermarket, wherever you see, you will see two people, Adani ji and Ambani ji. It is not their fault. If you get something for free, will you deny it? No, you will not. It is not their fault; it is the mistake of the Prime Minister)."

Ranji now. It is the moment of a lifetime for me. The emotions are really deep in the squad, we are trying to laugh it out loud, but we are extremely emotional from inside," Shrivastava said.

MP has produced India players such as Narendra Hirwani, Rajesh Chauhan, Amay Khurasiya, Jai Prakash Yadav, Naman Ojha and the third-highest run-getter in Ranji history Devendra Bundela. But the Ranji Trophy had proved elusive, unlike the golden period of the distant past when a part of the region, including the cricketing nerve centre Indore, was represented by the Holkar team. Comprising legends such as C K Nayudu, C S Nayudu, Syed Mushtaq Ali and Chandu Sarwate, Holkar reached the Ranji final ten

times in 11 seasons from 1944-45 to 1954-55, and won the trophy four times, the last of which came 69 years ago in 1952-53.

On Sunday, having managed to hold on to his feelings during the post-match speech, Shrivastava flung aside the mike, accepted the Ranji Trophy, walked over to his team and handed the cup to an overjoyed Akshat Raghuvanshi, the 18-year-old attacking batsman who began with a hundred on debut this season and made three crucial fifties, two of them in the knockouts.

Shrivastava and coach Chandrakant Pandit held up the trophy and kissed it. The heart-break of 1998-99 at the same Chinnaswamy Stadium was on then-captain Pandit's mind. That was the only previous occasion when MP had reached the final, and had one hand on the title, before squandering a safe position against hosts Karnataka deep into the last day. "Twenty-three years later, we are back here and we have done it," Pandit said.

The team walked with the trophy towards the stand next to their dressing room where about a thousand fans cheered from the upper tier. They had largely backed MP through the five days of the match, with their Royal Challengers Bangalore star and MP middle-order batsman Rajat Patidar receiving special adulation. Shouts of "RCB, RCB" and "Patidar, Patidar" had been constant.

Patidar, who had made a century in the IPL knockouts, did a repeat against Mumbai in the first innings of the final, and hit the winning runs in the second. The team proceeded to walk over to the middle of the ground, where they set the trophy down and soaked in the moment for a while. The ground staff and the main curators assembled nearby, and were soon joined by the MP players and support staff. Coach Pandit addressed the gathering, praising their efforts.

He told his players: "Not only have you achieved something historic, but it is also a historic occasion for this ground, as it has hosted its 100th Ranji match. So this day is doubly historic." Captain Shrivastava then walked over to the curators and handed over a bunch of currency notes as a token of the team's appreciation.

In the press conference that followed, Shrivastava spoke about the dedication of his unit during preparation and the personal "sacrifices" they had made under the coach, who is known as a hard taskmaster.

Pandit intervened: "I remember he was supposed to get married last year and asked me, 'sir, which date should I pick?' I told him only in June and that too only for two-three days, you will not get time to go on your honeymoon because we had started our preparations." Shrivastava responded: "It has been a year since I got married and I have still not gone on my honeymoon."

Pandit went on to call his combination with Shrivastava the best he had had in a long career — this was his sixth Ranji title as a coach.

"I have worked with many associations and have handled many captains," Pandit said. "But the rapport that Aditya and I have is entirely different. He is the only captain who has spent hours and hours in my room. None of the other captains were as interested in the other players and the team." Shrivastava said he wanted to build on what this group of players had achieved. Pandit has coached Mumbai and Vidarbha to back-to-back Ranji titles before, so who knows what further glory awaits MP next season.

Sena rebels challenge Dy Speaker's decisions in SC, to be heard today

Choudhary as leader of the Shiv Sena Legislature Party (SSLP) in place of Shinde, and the disqualification notices served on Shinde and the 15 MLAs.

The matter has been listed before a vacation bench of Justices Surya Kant and J B Pardiwala.

Former Solicitor General of India Harish Salve will represent the Shinde camp. Former Congress leader Kapil Sibal will appear for the Deputy Speaker, and Congress MP Abhishek Manu Singhvi for the Shiv Sena.

"Legal recourse is the only way forward," a spokesperson for the Shinde camp said on Sunday. "The Shiv Sena is trying to create hurdles even though the majority of party MLAs have abandoned them."

The Shinde camp has claimed it has 39 of the Sena's 55 MLAs, including Minister for Higher Education and Technical Education Uday Samant, who flew to Guwahati to join the rebels on Sunday. The rebels are now more than two-thirds (37) of the Sena legislature party.

Several Independent MLAs too are with Shinde. "We are 50-plus in all," Shinde said.

According to Shinde's petition, the Deputy Speaker recognised Choudhary as leader of the SSLP "despite the said request being admittedly made by a minority faction" of the Legislature Party, and the action was, therefore, "illegal and unconstitutional".

The notice issued to him on Saturday on a plea to disqualify him from the Assembly too "is grossly illegal, unconstitutional and in utter disregard" of the

previous rulings of the Supreme Court on this subject, Shinde has said.

"It is common knowledge that the current government in the State of Maharashtra, led by the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) alliance has lost the majority in the house as 38 of the members of the Shiv Sena Legislature Party have withdrawn their support thus bringing it below the majority in the house. However, the MVA government continues to misuse the office of the Deputy Speaker to ensure that they remain in power by whatever means necessary," the petition says.

"The disqualification notice is classic example of the Deputy Speaker acting hand in glove with the Government in an attempt to hastily disqualify" him "along with other supporters", and "the Disqualification Rules and the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly Rules are sought to be completely bypassed", Shinde has argued.

He has said that he was given "merely 48 hrs." to reply to the notice, whereas under the Rules, he is entitled to at least seven days, which can be extended further by the Speaker. The notice is "completely mala fide and arbitrary and therefore violative of Article 14 of the Constitution... and has been issued with a pre-meditated mindset to illegally disqualify" him, says the petition.

According to the plea, filed through Advocate on Record Abhinav Sharma, the position of Speaker of the Maharashtra Assembly has been vacant since Nana Patole resigned in

February 2021, and "thus, there is no authority who can adjudicate upon the disqualification petition under which the Impugned Notice has been issued..."

Shinde has told the court that a resolution for the removal of the Deputy Speaker is pending, and asked it to direct that no action should be taken on the disqualification petition until the resolution for removal of Deputy Speaker is decided.

The petition also mentions the alleged threat to the rebel MLAs and their families. "...Not only the security of our families and relatives have been compromised by removing the security personnel but also there is an ongoing agenda wherein various leaders of the MVA government are instigating the cadres of their respective parties to take up violence... (Sena MP) Mr Sanjay Raut (has) threatened the Petitioners and the other members by stating that he would make it difficult for the MLAs who have left to return to Maharashtra...", it says.

The second petition — filed by Bharat Gogavale, whom the rebels have chosen Chief Whip of the Sena legislature party replacing Sunil Prabhu, and 14 other MLAs — says that the SC had in a 2016 decision "clearly held" that Speaker or Deputy Speaker cannot disqualify a member while a resolution for their own removal is pending.

The petition argues that the rebel MLAs have not given up their Shiv Sena membership, and their actions would not fall within the meaning of the expression "voluntarily giving up membership" under Paragraph 2 of the Tenth

Schedule.

At a meeting of the constituent parties of the MVA convened by NCP president Sharad Pawar on Sunday, leaders of the Sena, NCP and Congress resolved to fight together the legal battle to save their coalition government.

Five of the Sena's nine Cabinet Ministers — Shinde, Samant, Dadaji Bhuse, Gulabrao Patil, and Sandipan Bhumre — have rebelled against Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray. There are two Ministers of State among the rebels — Abdul Sattar and Shambhuraaj Desai — as well as former Cabinet Minister Sanjay Rathod.

Left with the Chief Minister are his son Aaditya Thackeray, Subhash Desai, and Anil Parab.

Shiv Sena counsel Devdutt Kamat told reporters that disqualification rules are applicable to members even outside the House. He cited the precedent of Sharad Yadav of the JD(U), who had invited action because he had attended a rally by RJD chief Lalu Prasad.

"The Shiv Sena had convened several meetings at different places which the rebels did not attend. They are visiting BJP-ruled states, and are meeting BJP leaders. An attempt to topple the government amounts to an act of violation (of discipline) by the rebels," Kamat said.

On the anti-defection law, he said, "The concept of two-thirds (to escape punishment) applies only if there is a merger of the rebel group with another party. Since there is no merger, it will amount to their having voluntarily given up their membership (of the House)."

Former DGP R B Sreekumar outside a court in Ahmedabad on Sunday. Nirmal Harindran

woman inspector H V Raval. The terms of reference include collection of evidence to investigate the case "as per the directions of the Supreme Court".

On Friday, while dismissing a petition filed by Zakia Jafri against the clean chit given to Modi by the SIT that probed the 2002 riots, the Supreme Court had ruled that "no material was discovered pointing towards any meeting of minds/conspiracy in the higher echelons of the administration or the political establishment conspired with other persons to cause such riots or turned a Nelson's eye when the riots had triggered and continued".

It pointed to a "coalesced effort of the disgruntled officials of the state of Gujarat along with others... to create sensation by making revelations which were false to their own knowledge. The falsity of their claims had been fully ex-

posed by the SIT (in the Gujarat riots case) after a thorough investigation".

The court noted that "intriguingly, the present proceedings have been pursued for the last 16 years... to keep the pot boiling, obviously, for ulterior design... all those involved in such abuse of process, need to be in the dock and proceeded with in accordance with law".

DCP Mandalik said: "The charges are forging government records, submitting forged documents and abuse of power. The arrested accused have been uncooperative so far and we are investigating the case from all angles. Prima facie, the charges against two ex-IPS officers are their affidavits and documents submitted in the case."

Mandalik said the police "are also in the process of retrieving the documents they have submitted in front of commissions, courts and the SIT for further probe". The investiga-

tion is at an early stage but we believe that there could be other persons also behind the conspiracy," he said.

Asked why the time frame of the offence in the FIR was recorded as "January 1 2002 to June 15, 2022", Mandalik said: "The entire case began after the Godhra riots in February 2002, therefore we have kept a time period bracket of 2002 to 2022 to investigate all angles in it."

Setalvad was brought to the DCB office in Ahmedabad's Jamalpur early on Sunday after which she was taken to civil hospital for a RT PCR test. Later, while being presented in court, Setalvad told reporters that she is "not a criminal".

Setalvad, Sreekumar and Bhatt have been booked under IPC sections 120 B (criminal conspiracy), 468 (forgery), 471 (using as genuine a forged document or electronic record), 194 (giving or fabricating false evidence with intent to procure conviction of capital offence, 211 (false charge of offence made with intent to injure) and 218 (public servant framing incorrect record or writing with intent to save person from punishment or property from forfeiture).

Based on the Supreme Court verdict, the FIR states that the accused will be investigated for "finding out the behind the scene criminal conspiracy and financial and other benefits, inducements for commission of various serious offences in collusion with other individuals, entities and organisations". (WITH SOHINI GHOSH)

DCW sends notice to cops on video of man abusing minor

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JUNE 26

TAKING SUO motu cognizance of a video on social media that allegedly shows a man hurling abuses at a young girl over her

religion, the DCW sent a notice to police demanding action against the accused.

Police said that while a picture of the notice had been posted on social media, they were yet to receive a copy.

The video purportedly shows

a man using communal slurs and abusing the minor, while asking her to abuse her religion and god. It also appears to show him threatening to "hit her badly". DCW chairperson Swati Maliwal, in the notice to DCP (Cyber Crime), said: "The man is

clearly intimidating the girl who can be seen visibly frightened and shocked... It is a very serious matter."

KPS Malhotra, DCP (Cyber Crime), said, "We have not received any complaint in writing. We are looking into the matter."

3 THE CITY

DOUBLE WHAMMY

City sees spike in mosquito-borne diseases amid surge in Covid cases

RUPSA CHAKRABORTY
MUMBAI, JUNE 24

WITH MUMBAI already drenched in monsoon followed by early pre-monsoon showers, the mosquito-borne diseases have shot up in 15 days. As this surge has coincided with the sudden spike in Covid-19 cases, doctors have got a double whammy to handle the double health challenges.

On June 6, the city reported 57 malaria cases which rose to 189 on June 19. During the same period, the number of dengue

patients rose to 22 from 10. Along with this, the city also recorded its first case of chikungunya, a viral infection transmitted by mosquitoes, for this monsoon.

Dr Jinendra Jain, consultant physician, Wockhardt Hospitals, Mira Road said that he is seeing 7-8 patients with monsoon-related ailments every day. Of which, 1-2 patients are being detected with dengue and malaria.

Dr Mala Kaneria, Consultant Infectious Diseases, Jaslok Hospital said that she has seen 15-20 patients infected with malaria so far. "Since May end,

On June 6, the city reported 57 malaria cases which rose to 189 on June 19. In the same period, the number of dengue patients rose to 22 from 10

cases of malaria have increased, though not at alarming levels. Dengue is yet to make its presence felt," she said.

Generally, the hospitals start preparations in May to handle

monsoon-related patients. But an upsurge of Covid-19 cases is also being witnessed during this monsoon and as the healthcare workers are pressed to combat the pandemic along with monsoon ailments the health infrastructure is often overstretched.

As the mosquito-borne diseases have similar symptoms to Covid-19 like fever, cough, weakness and fatigue, doctors have to be extra cautious to avoid any misdiagnosis.

"It is a difficult task to distinguish between the two, especially when both cases are rising simultaneously. Having said

that, there are some signs and symptoms that can give us some information like high-grade fever, severe body ache, rash, and low platelet count, which are seen more prominently in case of malaria and dengue," said Dr Amit Gawnde, consultant pulmonologist.

Doctors have also observed that patients often confuse symptoms of Covid-19 and any other viral infection due to the overlapping symptoms. "Patients still refuse to test for Covid-19 even after a high awareness of the consequences," added Dr Gawnde.

RUPSA CHAKRABORTY
MUMBAI, JUNE 26

IN THE last 24 hours, a total of five patients infected with Covid-19 in Mumbai lost their lives. This is the highest single-day deaths reported since February 7, when the city witnessed five deaths out of 356 registered cases.

Of the five deceased, four were above the age of 70 years with comorbidities. According to the data provided by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), a 70-year-old male patient died, who had diabetes mellitus and hypertension. Another two male patients 91 years and 94 years were suffering from a heart ailment. Two other patients, a 43-year-old female and an 88-year-old male

had morbidities like hypertension and chronic kidney disease.

Five more patients were diagnosed with the new variant of Omicron in Mumbai. According to the latest report from the BJ Medical College Pune, three patients of BA.5 and two of BA.4 have been found in Mumbai. The samples for genome sequencing were collected between June 10 and 20.

Dr Sanjith Saseedharan, consultant and head of critical care, SL Raheja Hospital, Mahim said that though the symptoms are mild in healthy individuals, it might become a troublesome issue for the elderly and comorbid patients. "As they may require hospitalisation. The continuous circulation of this virus may also result in a new variant that may be different or even aggressive from the existing ones. Hence

being vaccinated, taking boosters and masking is the only prevention, especially for high-risk populations," he said.

Overall, the city registered 2,771 new Covid-19 cases on Sunday, the highest single-day count reported since January. This has pushed up the total Covid-19 tally to 11,07,371.

Meanwhile, the state reported a total of 6,493 Covid cases on Sunday, which also includes the backlog from Saturday. "On Saturday, due to a technical glitch in the ICMR portal, the daily data of Covid-19 cases cannot be downloaded. Today, those remaining cases have been added to the daily tally. So, the state recorded 6,493 cases on Sunday, higher than the actual," read the daily bulletin of the Public Health Department.

2 brothers held for 'blackmailing, molesting and raping' minor girl

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, JUNE 26

TWO BROTHERS in their early thirties have been arrested by the Mumbai police for allegedly blackmailing, molesting and raping a minor girl. The police said one of the siblings, who works in a security firm, was booked for raping the girl while the other, who runs a gymnasium, was arrested for blackmailing and molesting her claiming that he had her intimate videos. According to the police, at the time of the incident, the two arrested accused and the minor girl were staying in the same building in the central suburbs of Mumbai.

An officer said, "In December 2021, the girl and the younger brother, aged 31, started talking. The two eventually started seeing each other after which the accused promised to marry the girl." The girl was raped for the first time at his home while no one was there, said an investigating officer. "Despite knowing that the girl is a minor, the accused raped her two more times," an officer said.

Subsequently, his elder brother came to know about the incident after which he contacted the girl and started threatening her. The elder brother, who is a divorcee, allegedly told the girl that he had seen them inside the house and is in possession of her intimate pictures.

"He threatened to circulate the photos among locals and even post them on social media," an officer said. Subsequently, he called her and allegedly touched her inappropriately.

"She decided to keep her ordeal to herself", the officer said, adding, "The incident came to light when the girl's mother observed some behavioral changes in her and she eventually took her in confidence, narrating her traumatic experience." The mother did not report the matter to the police as she feared social stigma. However, on realising last week that her daughter could experience similar such incidents in future, she summoned the courage to inform the police.

The Mumbai police then sent her for medical examination after which a case was registered under relevant sections of the IPC and POCSO Act, 2012. The two were subsequently arrested.

Sagar Upvan, a seaside paradise in South Mumbai

ALISHA AMBRE
MUMBAI, JUNE 26

TUCKED AWAY in Mumbai's tony Cuffe Parade, away from the chaos of South Mumbai, lies the Bombay Port Trust Garden, also known as the Sagar Upvan. With an extensive area of 12 acres, visitors are surrounded by lush greenery and gentle sea breeze.

This botanical garden was converted from a dumping ground and houses at least 500 species of plants, with their botanical names being listed in both Hindi and English. There are a variety of trees and a cacti greenhouse, with over 20 species of cacti displayed for the public.

The garden has a dense green cover, large lawns, and sea-facing benches. An ample amount of seating is provided in the park,



An ample amount of seating is provided in the park, but the visitors' favourites are the sea-facing benches. *Deepak Joshi*

but the visitors' favourites are the sea-facing benches. Because of the cool sea breeze, for many, the

garden is a place to relax in Mumbai's humid, hot weather. "It's cool," said Asif, a new visitor,

"I am coming for the first time, it's a nice change in this hot season."

The garden is free from the unpleasant traffic sounds from the nearby business district and greets you with the sweet cries of cuckoos and sparrows. Guests can get their daily exercise – there is a small gym area – while enjoying the sounds of nature in Sagar Upvan. The long pathways are also ideal for joggers and runners.

There is a small area dedicated to children, however, some of the slides are unsafe as they have not been maintained well. A few years ago, there used to be a pond in the centre of the garden with ducks and swans. The pond though has now dried up and is an eyesore, with residents and visitors using it to litter waste.

Owned by the Mumbai Port Trust, Sagar Upvan charges an entry fee of Rs 5 from visitors. The park closes early at 6.30 pm as there are no lights in the garden. Despite that, the garden is a pleasant sight in the mornings. There are a few winding staircases in the garden from where visitors can enjoy the beautiful scenery and views of the Arabian Sea.

Facilities for fresh water and washrooms are provided, however, the water supply in the toilets is not consistent. Although there is a lack of maintenance, Sagar Upvan is still close to the hearts of its daily visitors. "This park is the pride of Mumbai," says Shaila Rajeev Samanth, who has been visiting this park for over 30 years.

MUMBAI GREENS

Ongoing political crisis casts shadow over appointment of new Mumbai police chief

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, JUNE 26

APART FROM its impact on various governance-related issues, the rebellion in the Shiv Sena that could lead to the collapse of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in the state will also have a bearing on the impending choice of the Mumbai Police Commissioner. The term of the incumbent Commissioner Sanjay Pandey ends on Thursday and the chances of an extension to him, which has to be given by the central government, are slim in the current circumstances.

Sources said that the government, which currently has its hands tied up with the prevailing political situation, may end up giving the additional charge for the post to a serving official if it cannot make up its mind about Pandey's replacement.

A government official said, "While there are frontrunners to the post, the change in the political situation has made the issue all the more complex. Powerful politicians like Eknath Shinde who would have had a say in pushing someone's name forward will no longer be in contention."

The official added, "In the

current climate, where law and order can be an issue especially when the rebel MLAs come to the city in case of a floor test, the MVA government will be all the more careful about whom it wants to give the reins of the police force. In the changed dynamics, they may also go in for giving another officer the additional charge in the meantime."

Sources said that in the past, when the Commissioner had been away, additional charge was given to the senior-most joint commissioner in the city. In the current scenario, Vishwas Nangre Patil, the Joint Commissioner (law & order),

and Rajwardhan, Joint Commissioner (traffic), both from the 1997 batch, are the senior-most officers in the city.

Prior to the rebellion, Thane Police Commissioner Jai Jeet Singh and Vivek Phansalkar, Director General-Police Housing, were seen as frontrunners for the post of the Mumbai Police Commissioner. Sources said that if the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government remains in power, it is Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief Sharad Pawar who will weigh in on the choice of the Mumbai Police Commissioner.

HATE APP CASE 'No fruitful purpose served by keeping them in jail': Court while granting bail to 3 accused

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, JUNE 26

IN ITS detailed order granting bail to three men booked for creating and posting objectionable comments against Muslim women on a hate app, a sessions court said that they have been in custody for more than six months and "no fruitful purpose would be served by keeping them in prolonged incarceration".

Last week, Niraj Singh (28), Niraj Bishnoi (20) and Aumkareshwar Thakur (26) were granted bail in the case by a sessions court. The three were arrested in January by the Mumbai police on charges including sexual harassment, defamation, spreading enmity between groups and criminal conspiracy of the IPC, as well as relevant sections of the Information Technology Act. The three were also booked in similar offences in Delhi in which the court had granted them bail earlier. However, they remained in custody in the Mumbai case.

The court took into consideration their age and the fact that other courts had granted them bail in similar offences.

"Whatever evidence relied on by the prosecution regarding alleged involvement of the applicant / accused has already been collected. Under such circumstances the investigating agency does not require his continuous custody," the court said, adding that the trial has commenced in the case and may take considerable time. The police had opposed their bail pleas stating that they had been booked for offences affecting harmony and national integration and their release may create serious law-and-order issues.

FULL REPORT ON
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RUPSA CHAKRABORTY
MUMBAI, JUNE 25

AFTER REPEATED incidents of fire outbreaks in hospitals across Maharashtra amid the pandemic, an audit has been conducted in over 500 government hospitals so far. For the work related to the fire safety compliance in hospitals, the state has, for the first time, approved a fund of Rs 200 crore.

Under the district planning and development committee (DPDC), 25 per cent of the funds have been reserved for the health sector. "A fund of Rs 200 crore has been sanctioned for the compliance of the fire safety measures in hospitals," said N Ramaswamy, commissioner, National Health Mission, Maharashtra.

So far, the state has already released Rs 19 crore for fire safety implementation.

Nearly 53 people lost their lives in fire outbreaks in the hospitals in Maharashtra amid the Covid pandemic in 2021. Most of them were Covid-19 patients. The incident started with a devastating fire at Bhandara District Hospital on January 9 that led to the death of ten infants.

This was followed by multi-

ple incidents in Mumbai. The worst incident was on last November 6 when a fire broke out at the ICU of Ahmednagar Civil Hospital, which claimed the lives of 14 Covid patients. Preliminary investigation showed that most of the Covid care centres and hospitals lacked adequate fire-fighting equipment.

In April, in order to gauge the violations of fire safety rules, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had instructed all the districts to audit the hospitals. Now, as the audit has been concluded, the state is aimed at cementing the gaps in the next six months.

In the past three months, the state has audited a total of 511 tertiary-care and peripheral hospitals other than primary health centres for implementation of fire safety rules. The inspection was done under the PWD department.

"The fire safety gaps have been analysed for total compliance. The work has been initiated for the implementation of the suggestions," said Ramaswamy. "Along with medical colleges and tertiary-level hospitals, we have also audited primary health care centres," he added.

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We will fight revolt collectively: Sharad Pawar to MVA ministers

In a meeting all three coalition partners, NCP president urges ministers to get back to work

EXPRESSNEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, JUNE 26

WITH THE Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in Maharashtra facing a political crisis following a rebellion in the Shiv Sena ranks, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) president Sharad Pawar on Sunday convened a meeting of all three coalition partners at his Silver Oak residence in Mumbai and reassured senior leaders that they could collectively weather the storm.

"Pawar stressed on collective efforts to fight the political battle against the rebel Eknath Shinde group," a Congress minister, requesting anonymity, said. With the Shiv Sena likely to get embroiled in legal and legislative challenges as the Shinde-led rebel faction digs its heels in, Pawar reportedly also assured his allies that whatever was required to legally contest (the rebel camp's



Deputy CM Ajit Pawar and Home Minister Dilip Walse Patil leave after the meeting on Sunday. Amit Chakravarty

claims), would be done. Senior Congress ministers Balasaheb Thorat and Ashok Chavan, Shiv Sena minister Anil Parab and senior Sena leader Anil Desai were present at the meeting. Later, deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar and home minister Dilip Walse Patil also met Pawar. Pawar reportedly also told the

ministers to return to work at Mantralaya. With political uncertainty, ministers have stayed away from their offices, adopting a wait-and-watch attitude. Sensing that the administration has come to a halt, Pawar reportedly "urged all ministers across Congress, NCP and Shiv Sena to get back to work". Congress ministers at the

meeting brought up the issue of farmers in the state. With the onset of the monsoon, farmers are preparing to start sowing seeds. An effective administration at this crucial time is a must, they pointed out. Another concern was farmers' unrest following a price rise in fertilizers and quality seeds. Congress ministers also raised the issue of farmers failing to access fresh crop loans from various financial institutions. Though Kharif sowing should end by July 15, to date, less than 20 per cent of sowing has been completed, they pointed out. Moreover, agriculture minister Dadaji Bhuse, who is part of the Shinde-led rebel camp, is himself in Guwahati.

Meanwhile, on Saturday, Shinde was appointed as a leader by his faction and given the right to take any decision on behalf of the rebels, who are currently staying at a Guwahati hotel. Apart from Shinde and Bhuse, other rebel ministers at Guwahati in-

clude Gulabrao Patil, Shambhu Desai, Sandipan Bhumre and Abdul Sattar. The Shinde faction, which has claimed support from 38 Sena MLAs out of 55 MLAs in total, is all set to take its battle to the Supreme Court. The rebel MLAs are planning to challenge the disqualification notices served on 16 MLAs by Deputy Speaker Narhari Zirwal. "The disqualification is applicable had they violated the whip on the floor of the House. Not attending a meeting convened by Uddhav Thackeray outside Vidhan Bhawan cannot justify disqualification," the camp has argued, pointing out that though it is mandatory to give members seven days' notice to explain their side, they have been given just two days to do so.

The rebels have also questioned the rights of the deputy speaker to initiate action against them when a no-confidence resolution seeking Zirwal's removal is pending before the House.



Aaditya Thackeray waves to supporters outside Shiv Sena Bhavan. Amit Chakravarty

Kashmiri Pandits should have got CRPF cover, not rebel MLAs: Aaditya

VALLABH OZARKAR
MUMBAI, JUNE 26

ADDRESSING YUVA Sena workers in Mumbai on Sunday, Yuva Sena president and minister Aaditya Thackeray criticised the Union government after it decided to provide CRPF security to rebel MLAs camping at a Guwahati hotel. Aaditya said that instead of providing security to these MLAs "provide security to our Kashmiri Pandits and secure them first", in a reference to the killings of Kashmiri Pandits recently. "We have been demanding the same CRPF security for the Kashmiri Pandits, but it was not given and these rebel MLAs are being given the security," he said. A few other Shiv Sena leaders also slammed the Centre over providing CRPF cover.

"I am challenging all those rebel MLAs who have been sold out for a price tag, if you have guts then resign from the post and face election. I will ensure that each of you loses," the Yuva Sena president said. Meanwhile, at a party workers' rally, Sanjay Raut alleged that the Union government is planning to split the state in three and since they know that the Shiv Sena will not let this happen hence a conspiracy has been hatched to finish the party. "They have a plan to split Maharashtra into three parts, North Maharashtra, Vidarbha and make Mumbai an unko territory. They know that Shiv Sena won't let this happen and hence they want to finish Shiv Sena," Raut said.

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MUMBAI CONFIDENTIAL

LAST MINUTE PACKING

A NUMBER of MLAs who flew to Guwahati to join the Eknath Shinde faction of the Shiv Sena had to pack their bags in great hurry. They were all taken to Surat via Palghar and then flown to Assam capital. In the rush, many of them forgot to carry along necessities such as night clothes, shaving kits and cellphone chargers. Sources in Shinde camp said that the local BJP unit in Guwahati was sent to the market to buy these items, including undergarments, for the MLAs.

NAMING IDEAS

WITH THE Shiv Sena alleging that agencies such as the Enforcement Directorate (ED) were being used to break the MVA government apart, and that rebel leader Eknath Shinde and leader of opposition Devendra Fadnis are likely to head a BJP government next, a leader of the Sena has started referring to it as "ED government" with E standing for Eknath and D for Devendra.

STAYING IN TOUCH

A NUMBER of rebel Shiv Sena MLAs have created their own WhatsApp groups of supporters and workers in their constituencies as a way to communicate with their support base. Post the rebellion when many MLAs went incommunicado after shifting to Guwahati, these WhatsApp groups have become their sounding boards with these leaders receiving brickbats as well as bouquet emojis for their act.

‘WHAT A HOTEL!’

REBEL SHIV Sena MLA Shahji Babu Patil's gushing description of the surroundings of the place in which he is presently putting up in Guwahati has led to a virtual meme fest on social media. In an audio clip of Patil's conversation with one of his supporters after the rebellion, the leader is heard exclaiming "Kay Jhadi, Kay Dongar, Kay Hotel!" (What trees, what mountains, what a hotel!). The utterances by the first-time MLA from Sangola has led to a number of memes, and a swipe from the Shiv Sena which remarked that Patil can see beautiful trees, mountains and hotels in Maharashtra as well.

COMPILED BY YOGESH NAIK & ZEESHAN SHAIKH

Have a comment or suggestion for Mumbai Confidential? Write to mumbai.newsline@expressindia.com with subject line: Mumbai Confidential

Man held for killing 18-yr-old woman

Pune: An 18-year-old woman was allegedly strangled to death by a 20-year-old man in Chakan Sunday as a fallout of his dispute with her mother over financial issues. The woman Priti Saha, was found dead at her house where she lived with her 47-year-old mother. ENS

IN THE HON'BLE COURT OF THE PRINCIPAL SENIOR CIVIL JUDGE, AT NELAMANGALA, O.S. No. 585/2017

BETWEEN: Smt. Maimunnissa and Others ...PLAINTIFFS

AND: Sri. Attaula Khan and Others, ...DEFENDANTS

Address of the Defendants No. 4 to 7, 4, MOHAMAD MUNAJAR KHAN, S/o late Ayub Khan, Aged about 62 years, 5 MOHAMAD RAFFEE KHAN S/o late Ayub Khan, Aged about 60 years, Defendants No. 4 and 5 are residing at No. 108, D.M.G. Tardoo Tulsiwadi, Approached Road, Mumbai-400034. 6. SYED AZGAR PASHA, S/o Syed Rasool Sab, Aged about 50 years, 7. A.N. SEEMA, W/o Syed Azgar Pasha Aged about 45 years, Defendants No. 6 and 7 are residing at No. 197/7, Old Masjid Road, 4th Kannada Kasturi Road, T. Dasarahalli, Bengaluru-57.

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Plaintiff Counsel: INAYATH ULLA KHAN Advocate Melkote Road, Tippu Nagar, Tumakuru.

Raut calls Sena rebels living corpses, buffaloes; Shinde camp, BJP hit back

VALLABH OZARKAR
MUMBAI, JUNE 26

SHIV SENA MP Sanjay Raut's fresh salvo at the rebel party MLAs camping at a Guwahati hotel, on Sunday, calling them living corpses who would be sent to a mortuary for post-mortem on their return from the Assam capital, received flak from the Opposition and the Eknath Shinde camp, which termed it as a death threat to the rebels.

"When they step out of Assam, they won't be alive at heart. The dead bodies of all these 40 MLAs will come to Mumbai (from Guwahati), we



Uday Sawant with Sena rebel faction leader Eknath Shinde in Guwahati on Sunday. PTI

will directly send them to the mortuary for post-mortem," Raut said at a rally of Shiv Sena

workers in Dahisar on Sunday. Calling the rebels buffaloes, the Sena MP said, "There is a

temple in Guwahati where buffaloes are sacrificed. These 40 buffaloes have gone there to be sacrificed."

Deepak Keskar, the spokesperson for the rebel Shinde Camp said, "He is on a mission to finish the party. He should remember that it was on our votes that he became an MP earlier this month. If we are animals and corpses then he should have some self-esteem and resign as MP."

The BJP, too, came down heavily on the Sena MP on social media, claiming that it was a threat to kill the rebel MLAs once they return to Mumbai.

"What I said is that those MLAs who are in Guwahati are like living corpses, their souls are dead. What is wrong in it?" Raut said.

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NOTICE INVITING BID

Development of balance 24m wide road in Sector - 6 along Kharghar Valley Golf Course at Kharghar, Navi Mumbai

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Bid Document along with Bidding Programme will be available on the website mahatenders.gov.in from 28/06/2022 at 17.01 Hrs.

Superintending Engineer (KHR & Vashi)

CIN - U99999 MH 1970 SGC-014574 www.cidco.maharashtra.gov.in CIDCO/PR/123/2022-23

Executive Engineer, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana Maharashtra Rural Roads Development Association Pune

Public e-tender Notice No.07/2022-2023

The Total Cost of 03 works in 02 Packages under Mukhya Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana in Pune District is Estimated Cost Rs. 1433.57 Lakhs, Tender Published on www.mahatenders.gov.in website Date 27/06/2022.

Sd/- Executive Engineer, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana Maharashtra Rural Roads Development Association Pune

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Sd/- Deputy Municipal Commissioner Vasai-Virar City Municipal Corporation

Date of EOI -27.06.2022 Last Date of submission of EOI -07/07/2022

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Tender Reference No.	BARC(T)/NRB/INRPO/AWTSF/2022/OPA-2210 , DATE : 20/06/2022
Name of work	Fabrication, inspection, testing , painting and delivery of Tetra Alpha Waste Drum Container for AWTSF at NRB, Tarapur.
Mode of tendering	Online e-tendering on https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app
Estimated Cost	Rs. 4,55,00,000/-(Rupees four crore Fifty Five lakh only)
Earnest Money Deposit	Rs.9,10,000/- (Rupees Nine Lakh Ten Hundred Only)
Cost of Tender Document	Nil
Tender processing fee	Nil
Period of Completion	Eight (8) Calendar months
Tender Sale Period a	From 30/06/2022 (10:00 hrs) to 22/07/2022 (15:00hrs.)
Download of Tender Document	22/07/2022 (11:00)
Date of Pre Bid-Meeting	22/07/2022 (15:00 Hrs.)
Last date & time of closing of on line submission of tenders	22/07/2022 (15:00 Hrs.)
Date & time of online opening of part -A	25/07/2022 (15:00Hrs.)

The detailed tender notice can be seen on the website <http://www.barc.gov.in/tenders> For clarification contact: (02525) 286282.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, MONDAY, JUNE 27, 2022

6 GOVT & POLITICS

100 days after Punjab sweep, a reality check for AAP in CM's bastion

MANRAJ GREWAL SHARMA
CHANDIGARH, JUNE 26

BARELY THREE days after the Bhagwant Mann-led AAP government in Punjab marked its 100 days, the Sangrur bypoll outcome has come as a sobering reminder that a record poll sweep can be followed by a humiliating electoral defeat.

Sangrur, the pocket borough of Chief Minister Mann, had catapulted him into the political stage by electing him with a record margin of over 2 lakh votes in the 2014 general elections. Mann had got re-elected from Sangrur in 2019 Lok Sabha polls by over 1 lakh votes. The bypoll was necessitated when he resigned from the seat after taking over as the CM on March 16.

The defeat of the AAP candidate Gurmil Singh at the hands of the Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) president, Simranjit Singh Mann, with a margin of 5,822 votes in a neck-and-neck contest — which comes at a time when the Mann government is seen to have acted against the corrupt — is a wake-up call for the AAP dispensation. The AAP's leaders have been facing the charge of being "inaccessible", which used to be the once Capt Amarinder Singh-led Congress government.

Evidently, the ruling party seems to have failed to neutralise the public anger against the killing of popular Punjabi rapper Sidhu Moosewala, even as it fielded a relatively unknown candidate in a fiercely-contested five-cornered battle in Sangrur.

The AAP was certainly not expecting to lose to the SAD(A),



Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann

which has not won an election since 1999, when Simranjit won from the Sangrur parliamentary seat. The AAP, on the other hand, had bagged all nine Assembly seats in this constituency four months ago. It also deployed its top brass for campaigning, with both Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal and CM Mann hitting the Sangrur trail ahead of the election.

A former IPS officer, the SAD(A) chief had resigned from his job in 1984 in protest against Operation Blue Star. A two-time MP, Simranjit was first elected to the Lok Sabha in 1989 when he was in jail. He has been seeking a UN-monitored inquiry into the killing of Moosewala, who was gunned down on May 29, days after his security was withdrawn by the Mann government. Although the singer had contested the Assembly poll from Mansa on the Congress ticket, it was no secret that he had decided to support Simranjit in the Sangrur bypoll — a point that the latter highlighted in his electioneering and campaign ads.

Mann, who has been in political wilderness for years and was often dismissed as a relic of militancy who continued to harp on "a separate State", sprang back into the spotlight when a "Sarbat Khalsa" meeting called by him

against the sacrilege of Guru Granth Sahib in 2015 got a significant public response. He gained further traction during the 2020-21 farmers' agitation when "influencers" like late Deep Sidhu aligned with him. The bids mounted by some ruling quarters to paint the farm stir as "anti-national" gave ammunition to leaders like Simranjit, who have spent a lifetime highlighting the alleged "excesses" of the central dispensation against the minorities.

In the run-up to the Sangrur bypoll, Mann said his win would be a "victory of the secular people and minorities against the ultra-right parties such as BJP, AAP, and Congress". The AAP candidate, Gurmil Singh, a sarpanch, could not deal with such growing rage or match the rhetoric of his rival.

EXPLAINED

As the AAP failed to address the anger among voters due to the inaccessibility of local leaders, its choice of nominees for the Rajya Sabha also led to some rumblings as it did not include anyone from the Malwa region that gave AAP 66 of its total 92-seat haul in Assembly elections.

With the Sangrur bypoll coming close on the heels of the AAP's Assembly poll landslide, it was contested hotly by other parties, including the BJP. While the Congress fielded Dalvir Goldy, who had contested against Bhagwant Mann from Dhuri in the Assembly poll, the BJP nominated Kewal Dhillon, an industrialist and former Congress legislator, in the fray, with the Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal) giving its ticket to Kamaldeep Kaur, sister of Balwant Singh Rajoana, a death row convict in the ex-CM Beant Singh assassination case. **FULL REPORT ON**

www.indianexpress.com



Simranjit Mann's supporters take out a victory rally to celebrate his win in Sangrur on Sunday. Gurmeet Singh

The comeback Mann: SAD(A) chief who had the last laugh on Punjab CM

KAMALDEEP SINGH BRAR
AMRITSAR, JUNE 26

DEALING A severe blow to the ruling AAP in Punjab, the Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) president, Simranjit Singh Mann, emerged as the victor Sunday in the crucial bypoll in the Sangrur Lok Sabha constituency, the bastion of Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, defeating AAP candidate Gurmil Singh in a neck-and-neck fight.

The bypoll was necessitated when the incumbent Sangrur MP Bhagwant Mann resigned from the seat after becoming the CM in March following the AAP's landslide victory in the state Assembly elections. It was considered to be the first test of the fledgling Mann-led AAP government's popularity.

Pushed to the margins of Punjab's mainstream politics for over two-and-half decades, the 77-year-old pro-Khalistan leader



Simranjit Singh Mann in Sangrur, Sunday. Gurmeet Singh

and ex-IPS officer Simranjit Singh Mann's stunning win is likely to boost the Panthic politics in the border state.

In its campaign for the Sangrur bypoll, the Sukhbir Badal-led Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal) had also played the Panthic card and fielded Kamaldeep Kaur, sister of Balwant Singh Rajoana, the ex-CM Beant Singh's assassination convict lodged in jail, while making the release of the Sikh pris-

oners its plank. The principal Opposition Congress also campaigned vigorously for its candidate in the Sangrur fray. However, it was Mann who eventually won the race.

Significantly, an effort was mounted in the run-up to the Sangrur bypoll to get various SAD factions united with Sukhbir even visiting Mann's house to persuade him to withdraw in favour of Kamaldeep's candidature, but the SAD (Amritsar) chief turned it down and went ahead with his campaign.

It used to be said in Punjab political circles that Mann would contest all parliamentary and Assembly polls only to get defeated. A two-time Lok Sabha MP, he had last won from the Sangrur parliamentary constituency in 1999.

According to the Lok Sabha website, "Mann remained in jail from 1984 to 1989 for the devolu-

tion of powers to the Sikhs and although elected to 9th Lok Sabha, did not take oath. He was elected to 13th Lok Sabha from 1999 to 2004 and remained Member, Consultative Committee, Ministry of External Affairs. He was committed to the protection of social, cultural, civil, economic, and political rights as enshrined in the UN charter. Protection of human rights and rights of minority were his special interests as MP."

Although he has been a pro-Khalistan leader, Mann had focused on constructing cow shelters during his term as an MP during 1999-2004. He was then also declared "outstanding parliamentarian" by the Lok Sabha Speaker. He is a relative of former CM Captain Amarinder Singh.

Mann had resigned from the IPS in 1984 in protest against the Operation Blue Star.

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

Tripura: Cong demands probe into attack on its Agartala office

DEBRAJ DEB
AGARTALA, JUNE 26

A CONGRESS supporter was stabbed in front of the party state headquarters in Agartala, leading to a clash between BJP and Congress workers after bypoll results were announced Sunday.

Police fired teargas shells to bring the situation under control. Around 20 people, including state Congress chief Birajit Sinha, were injured.

Sinha sustained head injuries when stones were pelted at him. A makeshift camp set up in front of the Congress Bhawan destroyed and several two-wheelers were damaged in the clash.

Soon after, the residence of a BJP corporator of Agartala municipality, Shilpi Sen, was allegedly targeted by Congress activists. Sen's daughter suffered minor injuries after being hit by an object hurled at the house. A BJP supporter, who came to Sen's rescue, was also injured when he was assaulted by the mob.

In Delhi, the Congress demanded an investigation into the attack on the party office and imposition of President's Rule if the "state government is unable to handle law and order".

The party decided to send a three-member delegation led by Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury to Tripura to take stock of the situation and "make a report on the heinous attack".

"The Indian National Congress strongly condemns the mindless attack on Congress Bhawan and brutal assault on Tripura PCC president Birajit Sinha and other Congress workers by BJP goons, after the thumping victory of Congress party candidate Sudip Roy Barman in the Agartala bypoll," AICC general secretary K C Venugopal said. "It is utterly shameful that the police stood as mute and complicit spectators while the goons stormed the office and attacked our office bearers... We demand an apology from BJP president J P Nadda and an investigation by Home Minister Amit Shah into why these attacks occurred."

WITH ENS, DELHI

And the winners are...

Results of bypolls held on June 23 for 3 LS seats and 7 Assembly seats



Ghanshyam Singh Lodhi (centre, left) after winning the Rampur Lok Sabha bypoll. PTI

LOK SABHA SEATS		
AZAMGARH, UTTAR PRADESH WINNER: DINESH LAL YADAV "NIRAHUA", BJP PREVIOUS WINNER: Akhilesh Yadav, Samajwadi Party WINNING MARGIN: 8679 votes over SP's Dharmendra Yadav	RAMPUR, UTTAR PRADESH WINNER: GHANSHYAM SINGH LODHI, BJP PREVIOUS WINNER: Azam Khan, Samajwadi Party WINNING MARGIN: 42,192 votes over SP's Mohd. Asim Raja	SANGRUR, PUNJAB WINNER: SIMRANJIT SINGH MANN, SHIROMANI AKALI DAL PREVIOUS WINNER: Bhagwant Mann, AAP WINNING MARGIN: 5,822 votes over AAP's Gurmil Singh

ASSEMBLY SEATS		
ATMAKUR, ANDHRA PRADESH WINNER: MEKAPATI VIKRAM REDDY, YSRCP DEFEATED BJP's Bharat Kumar Gundlapalli by 82,888 votes	AGARTALA WINNER: SUDIP ROY BARMAN, CONGRESS DEFEATED BJP's Ashok Sinha by 3163 votes JUBARAJNAGAR WINNER: MALINI DEBNATH, BJP DEFEATED CPM's Sailendra Chandra Nath by 4572 votes	SURMA WINNER: SWAPNA DAS (PAUL), BJP DEFEATED Independent candidate Baburam Satnami by 4583 votes TOWN BARDOWALI WINNER: MANIK SAHA, BJP DEFEATED Congress' Asish Kumar Saha by 6104 votes



BJP supporters celebrate in Agartala on Sunday. PTI

Source: Election Commission

Absent Akhilesh, strong BJP campaign & BSP: Why SP sank

LALMANI VERMA
LUCKNOW, JUNE 26

WITHOUT AKHILESH Yadav at the helm of its campaign and facing an aggressive campaign by the BJP, the Samajwadi Party (SP) lost the Lok Sabha by-elections in Rampur and Azamgarh in Uttar Pradesh that were once considered its strongholds. The Bahujan Samaj Party's (BSP) strong performance in Azamgarh heavily damaged the SP.

By winning both the bypolls, the BJP on Sunday strengthened its already dominant position in the state ahead of the urban local body elections that are due later this year and the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The elections are also likely to raise questions about Akhilesh Yadav's absence from campaigning in both Azamgarh, where his cousin Dharmendra Yadav was the contestant, and in Rampur the once bastion of senior SP leader Azam Khan now in the hands of the BJP. He leader is also likely to face questions about

his position in the party following this defeat as he had to negotiate hard with Akhilesh to give the candidature to his longtime associate Asim Raja.

Though the BSP could not win Azamgarh — it did not contest Rampur — its candidate Shah Alam, popularly known as Guddu Jamali, got 2.66 lakh votes and effectively ended Dharmendra Yadav's chances. Reacting to the results, BSP president Mayawati said they had "shown that only the BSP has theoretical and ground strength to defeat the BJP".

For the BJP, putting its entire might into the campaign paid off as Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and almost his entire Cabinet canvassed for the party's candidates.

Azamgarh

The SP won the constituency in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections despite a wave of support across the country for the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Even in the state elections earlier this year, it won all the five

Assembly segments in Azamgarh. But this time, the parliamentary constituency fell to the BJP as its candidate Dinesh Lal Yadav "Nirahua".

Nirahua managed to take advantage of the BSP eroding away the SP's support base. The SP's alleged silence on Muslim issues also seemed to not go down well with Muslim voters.

Rampur

Considered the citadel of Azam Khan, the SP left campaigning in Rampur to the veteran leader and his supporters. But the BJP did not throw in the towel and mobilised its entire top leadership to storm Azam's bastion.

Azam campaigned for Raja and tried to garner sympathy by narrating the hardships he and his family faced in prison. But the strategy failed in front of the BJP juggernaut and the SP leader could not benefit from the decision of the BSP and the Congress to not contest the election. Political observers said several Dalit voters also chose the BJP.

'Got lotus to bloom in Azam bastion': BJP's Rampur winner

JIGNASA SINHA
RAMPUR, JUNE 26

"Azam Khan ke gadh me kamal khilaye hain (we have got the lotus to bloom in Azam Khan's bastion)," says Ghanshyam Singh Lodhi. The BJP candidate from Rampur is celebrating his bypoll victory at his farmhouse, filled with party workers chanting his name.

The victory is doubly sweet for Lodhi — he recently left the Samajwadi Party for the BJP and has reaped the rewards. Though the voter turnout was less than 50 per cent, Lodhi won the Lok Sabha seat with over 40,000 votes more than SP's Asim Raja.

"This is an achievement for all the party workers who worked hard for months. I felt the Samajwadi Party didn't deserve the win because they have no vision and no ambition. I left the party because I wanted to

change things. Today, I have support from everyone" he says.

At the Samajwadi Party office, meanwhile, the disappointment of the loss is hard to shake off.

"I don't want to say much but it is sad to lose in Rampur. We had hopes and it's a bad loss. We did push for more votes but everything was hay-wire. The nomination was filed at the last moment and there wasn't much support from the leaders. We have the potential and will work towards the next elections," said an SP spokesperson at the office, one of the few people present there. The other workers alleged that BJP fought the elections with unfair means.

The most disappointed, understandably, was the veteran Azam Khan himself, who refused to accept the result. "Why would you call this an election? My workers were detained and beaten up. Our supporters were

threatened and abused by the police. Lodhi is lucky he has a party that can bend rules and be happy. I can't do all that. I have spent months in jail. I run schools here and am a chancellor of the university. My aim has always been to help people. But can one fight with police and the goondagardi against us? We were called names and people were stopped from voting. There were only 6 votes from a place where 900 votes could come. I refuse to believe this was a fair election," he said.

In the town itself, the streets were quiet after the results were announced and many refused to talk about the elections. Many local residents said they were happy with the results but didn't expect much. One resident said: "I saw the results on TV. We hope they do make some changes here. Power cuts and roads are a huge issue. This is a developing city and we want change."

U.P. RESULTS: LEADERS REACT



"The bypoll wins in Azamgarh and

Rampur are historic. It indicates wide-scale acceptance and support for the double engine governments at the Centre and in UP..."

NARENDRA MODI
PRIME MINISTER



"Today's victory has given this message

very clearly in front of everyone that in 2024, the Bharatiya Janata Party is going to win 80 out of 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh"

YOGI ADITYANATH
U.P. CHIEF MINISTER



"This victory of BJP is the victory of

dishonesty, disregard for democracy... the 'Dhritarashtra' vision of the Election Commission, and hijacking of public mandate... Democracy is bleeding and the public mandate lost"

AKHILESH YADAV
SP CHIEF



"The UP by-election results have once again proved that only BSP has the ideological and ground force to defeat the BJP here..."

MAYAWATI
BSP CHIEF

EXPRESS NETWORK

BRIEFLY

BIHAR

Maoist arrested in Gaya, arms recovered

Gaya: Police on Sunday claimed to have arrested a hardcore Maoist and, based on his tip-off, recovered a few assault rifles and a large quantity of ammunition. According to Harpreet Kaur, the Senior Superintendent of Police of Gaya, a raid was conducted at a forest in the Maoist-infested Imanganj police station area, following information about a gathering of Left-wing extremists. Ashok Kumar Bhokta, said to be a zonal commander of the outlawed CPI (Maoist), was caught at the spot even though his associates managed to flee. **PTI**

HIMACHAL PRADESH

8 arrested after raid at rave party in Kullu

Shimla: The Himachal Pradesh Police raided a rave party and arrested eight people for possession of drugs in Kullu district, an official said on Sunday. A little over Rs 4 lakh cash, over 200 bottles of liquor, 88 gm charas and other drugs were recovered from their possession late on Saturday, the official said. All the accused are in the age group of 23-29 years. Of these, five are from Karnataka, and one each from Delhi and Himachal Pradesh, Kullu Superintendent of Police Gurdev Sharma said. **ENS**

Sawant reviews SIT findings on illegal land grabbing in Goa

MAYURA JANWALKAR
PANAJI, JUNE 26

TEN DAYS after it was constituted, Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant reviewed a probe by a Special Investigation Team (SIT) into cases of illegal land grab in the state. According to the state government, several parcels of land with no stated legal heirs, and whose owners had either died or migrated elsewhere, had been usurped and illegally sold.

"Earlier the accused arrested by SIT had revealed that they had forged documents of close to 70 properties of which majority of them were of the similar nature," a government official said Sunday.

Sawant has convened a high-level meeting Monday to decide the course of action following the findings. At the meeting, the government will also determine the status of plots of land that are without registered owners, or whose owners had either passed away or migrated without succession proceedings.

The SIT has so far arrested four people in connection with forging documents to carry out illegal land deals. Of these, two were record attendants from the state government's Archives Department who had allegedly aided the other two accused in tampering with records.

The first to be arrested in the case, Vilkrant Shetty, was released on bail by a court in Mapusa Friday. The others arrested are Mohammed Sohail, described by the SIT as one of 'kingspins' in the illegal land grab cases, Dhires Naik and Shivanand Madkaikar, both employees in the Archives Department. The seven-member SIT led by Superintendent of Police Nidhin Valsan was constituted on June 15.

Will expose illegalities: Rane

At a time showcase notices have been issued to at least three properties in which Congress leader Micheal Lobo is a partner, the state's Town and Country Planning (TCP) minister Vishwajit Rane Sunday promised to expose "illegalities" of people in high positions.

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

Make Sanskrit compulsory from Class 1, RSS tells Gujarat govt

RITU SHARMA
AHMEDABAD, JUNE 26

THE RASHTRIYA Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in Gujarat has made a strong pitch for teaching Sanskrit compulsorily from Class 1, at a meeting with the state government, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

According to sources, senior representatives of the Sangh and its affiliates met with Education Minister Jitu Vaghani, senior officials of the department and the organisational general secretary of Gujarat BJP Ratnakar in April to discuss the implementation of the new National Education Policy (NEP).

Sanskrit teaching was the main thrust of nearly 20 representatives of the RSS affiliate organisations, including Vidya Bharati, Shaishik Mahasangh, Samskrita Bharati, Bhartiya Shikshan Mandal, in the meeting with Vaghani who was accompanied by nearly 25 senior government representatives. The Sangh also pitched for giving Bhagvad Gita, Ramayan and Mahabharat a place in the school curriculum, making Vedic maths compulsory, offering value education based on Upanishad and Vedas, and regulating private universities.

In its presentation during the meeting, the RSS is learnt to have

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- At all levels, Sanskrit to be taught in Sanskrit medium only.
- Steps to increase the number of open school students (at present 14 lakh are regular students and only 63,000 enrolled with open school)
- Class 10 students be given two options to attempt science subject on the lines of mathematics.

- Many schools have made separate classrooms for students who have taken admission under the RTE Act (Section 2 (1)c), which is encouraging social inequality. This should be controlled.



asked the state government to allocate at least six periods in a week for Sanskrit. The presentation on NEP implementation, a copy of which is with *The Indian Express*, speaks of giving "special preference" to Sanskrit in the NEP's three language formula and that schools should "teach best English but not at the cost of Indian languages" in primary classes.

Interestingly, the three-language formula in the NEP 2020 doesn't prescribe any specific language to be compulsorily taught in school. "The three languages learned by children will be the choices of states, regions, and of course the students them-

selves, so long as at least two of the three languages are native to India," the policy says.

Asked why the RSS is pushing Sanskrit under the three-language formula even though the NEP doesn't prescribe, Himanjay Paliwal of the RSS affiliate Samskrita Bharati told *The Indian Express*, "...the NEP speaks gol gol (unclear) about Sanskrit. It is not clear whether the NEP is in favour of the language or against it. Is par koi spashtata nahi hai (there is no clarity on this)," Paliwal is Samskrita Bharati's Gujarat sangathan mantri.

He added, "English is being taught compulsorily in schools

even though the NEP says no language will be forced on students. For teaching Sanskrit from Class 1, paramarsh (consultation) is being done at all levels with the state government... the NEP has laid down the formula. Now, how the formula will be explained and interpreted is up to the government."

However, the RSS' suggestion on the study of Sanskrit is not limited to school education. The Sangh has suggested that in secondary and higher secondary education, Gujarati should be taught as the first language, Sanskrit as second and the government can decide which should be offered as a third language option. Moreover, students who do not study Sanskrit in Classes 11 and 12 should be barred from taking admission in BAMS (Bachelor of Ayurvedic Medicine and Surgery) programmes, it has told the state government.

According to sources, a follow-up meeting between the RSS and the state government on the implementation of the NEP is expected in July.

On the implementation of the RSS' suggestions, Vaghani said, "We have been receiving several suggestions. The government will work on the feasibility and these will be implemented accordingly."

After govt complaint, YouTube removes new Moosewala song

KAMALDEEP SINGH BRAR
CHANDIGARH, JUNE 26

YOUTUBE HAS removed a new song by deceased Punjabi singer Shubhdeep Singh Sidhu, popularly known as Sidhu Moosewala, from its platform in India following a complaint from the Union government. The song, SYL, is available in other countries.

It raises multiple issues, including — as its name suggests — the under-construction Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal that has been a bone of contention between Punjab and Haryana for the past four decades.

It also brings up undivided Punjab, the 1984 riots, militancy, Sikh prisoners and the flag hoisting at the Red Fort during the farmer agitation.

SYL was released on the evening of June 23 and it got 2.7 crore views in less than three days. It also received 33 lakh likes on the video sharing and social media platform.

It is the first Moosewala song to be released after the murder of the singer on May 29 this year.

"The content is not available on this country domain due to legal complaint from the gov-



Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala was murdered on May 29.

ernment," reads the song's YouTube link in India.

A YouTube spokesperson said: "We have clear policies for removal requests from governments around the world. We review government removal requests when notified through the correct legal processes, and also review content for violations of our Community Guidelines. And, where appropriate, we restrict or remove content in keeping with local laws and our Terms of Service after a thorough review. All of these requests are tracked and included in our Transparency Report."

WITH INPUT FROM ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU

Sarabjit's sister Dalbir Kaur dies

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
AMRITSAR, JUNE 26

DALBIR KAUR, sister of Sarabjit Singh — the Indian prisoner who was fatally attacked by inmates in Pakistan jail in 2013 — died late on Saturday.

Dalbir Kaur, who was suffering from asthma, died in a private hospital where she was admitted due to shortness of breath. She was cremated at Bhikshivid on Sunday.

Bollywood actor Randeep Hooda, who had played the role of Sarabjit in the movie 'Sarabjit' in which actress Aishwarya Rai Bachchan had essayed the role of Dalbir Kaur, was seen at her cremation paying his last respects to Dalbir Kaur.

Randeep said that Dalbir Kaur was like his sister. He will always stand by her family.

Sarabjit was imprisoned in Pakistan jail on charges of espionage. In 1990, he had allegedly crossed the international border and reached Pakistan.

He was caught by Pakistan officials, who accused him of carrying out bomb blasts in their country. Terming Sarabjit an Indian spy, the Pakistan government claimed in court that he

Assam floods: 5 more die, toll 126; 22 lakh hit

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
GUWAHATI, JUNE 26

THE FLOOD situation in Assam improved on Sunday, although five more persons died and over 22 lakh people continued to reel under the deluge across 25 districts, an official report said.

According to the daily bulletin of the Assam State Disaster Management Authority, five persons, including four children, drowned at different places of Barpeta, Cachar, Darrang, Karimganj and Morigaon districts during the day.

Besides, two are missing in two districts, it said. The total number of people losing lives in this year's flood and landslides in the state has now gone up to 126. The bulletin said over 22.21.500 people were hit due to floods across the state, with Barpeta being the worst affected with nearly seven lakh people in distress.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday visited Silchar in Cachar and Hajo in Kamrup, and issued instructions to agencies involved in the relief and rescue operations to maximise their reach.

With Silchar submerged for a week, Sarma conceded that the administration has not been able to reach all the marooned people yet. The CM said: "We are not denying it... 50 per cent work of the administration" is being done by philanthropic organisations and people.



Kaur was suffering from asthma

had come to Pakistan in the guise of one Manjit Singh. He was convicted for his alleged role in a bomb blast and was sentenced to death in 1991.

Dalbir Kaur claimed that his brother was a victim of a mistaken identity and started a legal battle to bring his brother back to India.

Soon her efforts caught the attention of national and international media. Many in India and Pakistan came in support of her campaign.

Sarabjit was lodged in Pakistan's Kot Lakhpat Jail where the inmates brutally beat him up on April 26, 2013. He succumbed to his injuries on the night of May 2, 2013.

Dalbir Kaur lived in Bhikshivid with her sister-in-law Sukhpreet Kaur, nieces Swapandeep and Poonam. The then SAD-BJP coalition government of Punjab had made Sarabjit's eldest daughter Swapandeep Kaur as the Naib-Tehsildar.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

12 women from abroad move MP HC against Gundecha brothers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
JABALPUR, BHOPAL, JUNE 26

TWELVE WOMEN from abroad have filed an intervening application in the Madhya Pradesh High Court seeking action against the Gundecha brothers of Bhopal-based Dhrupad Sansthan over allegations of sexual harassment against them.

Those who have filed the intervening application (IA) in High Court's principal bench in Jabalpur were once students of the Dhrupad Sansthan, who are now in the United States, Sweden, Canada, Poland, Spain, Austria and Germany. These victims, too, have alleged that they were sexually harassed by the famous Gundecha siblings — late Ramakant Gundecha, Umakant Gundecha and Akhilesh Gundecha, who plays pakhawaj, the women's counsel Dhruv Varma told PTI.

The IA has been filed in support of an inquiry report of an Internal Complaints Committee



People queue up to vote in Darjeeling on Sunday. Partha Paul

GTA polls pass off peacefully in Bengal, 57% turnout recorded

SWEETY KUMARI
DARJEELING, JUNE 26

THE ELECTIONS to the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) in north Bengal's Darjeeling Hills were held peacefully with 57% voter turnout till 5pm on Sunday, officials said.

"The polls were overall peaceful, except for a few minor incidents," Darjeeling District Magistrate S Ponnambalam said.

The final voting figures may slightly vary as reports were yet to be received from some polling stations, officials said.

Polling for the GTA, the semi-autonomous council that governs the Darjeeling Hills, began on a slow note in the morning on Sunday, said election officials.

The voting, held after 10 years, began at 7am with 9.98% voters casting their franchise till 9 am, it is learnt. Till 11 am, a 24.4% turnout was reported, of-

ficials said.

"The voter turnout was lower than the previous elections. In fact, during the initial hours we could hardly spot queues at the polling stations," said an official.

Voting was held at 922 polling stations for 45 seats spread across three sub-divisions of Darjeeling, Kurseong, and Kalimpong. Out of 45, five polling stations were marked as 'critical' while 101 were identified as vulnerable.

Of the 277 candidates in the fray from 45 seats, 169 are Independents while 108 are from various political parties.

Kalpna Thapa, a young voter, said, "Proper supply of water and unemployment are the main issues here. We are voting for more job opportunities."

"We are peace lovers. We vote with a smile on our face and wish whoever forms the GTA board resolves basic issues of the people," said Manju Gurung who cast her vote at the 178

Municipal Girls High School in Darjeeling

The BJP and its allies Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) and the Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxists (CPRM) have boycotted the GTA polls. Bimal Gurung's Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM), which was in power in the GTA for several years, is also not taking part in the polls.

The battle is mainly between Ajoy Edwards' newly-formed Hamro Party and Anit Thapa-led Bharatiya Gorkha Prajatantrik Morcha (BGPM). The new entrant Hamro Party, which won 18 out of 32 seats in the recent civic body polls, is contesting from all 45 seats, the Bharatiya Gorkha Prajatantrik Morcha (BGPM) is fighting from 36, the CPIM from 12, the state's ruling party Trinamool Congress (TMC) on 10, the Congress on 5.

The BGPM has extended support to Independents on other seats.

J&K IPS officer quits, says he wants to join politics

BASHAARAT MASOOD
SRINAGAR, JUNE 26

SENIOR IPS officer Basant Kumar Rath on Sunday announced his resignation on social media, saying he wished to join electoral politics in Jammu and Kashmir.

A controversial police officer, who has several admirers in Kashmir Valley, posted his resignation letter on social media. "I wish to resign from the Indian Police Service in order to be able to participate in electoral politics. Please consider this letter as my request for resignation/voluntary retirement and process it accordingly," Rath said in a letter written to J&K Chief Secretary Arun Kumar Mehta.

Rath forwarded copy of the June 25 resignation letter to J&K

DGP Dilbagh Singh and Commandant General Home Guards and Civil Defence and State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) Hemant Kumar Lohia. Rath is currently posted in Home Guards and Civil Defence.

Although Rath made public his decision, Lohia told *The Indian Express* that he is yet to receive the resignation letter. "I too have seen it (Rath's resignation letter) on social media but I have not officially received any letter," he said.

While Rath said he wanted to join electoral politics, in the past he had shown aversion for political leaders. In a tweet posted some hours before he posted his resignation letter, he said: "If I ever join a political party, it WILL be BJP. If I ever contest an election, it WILL be from Kashmir. If I ever join politics, it



Posted his resignation letter on social media

WILL be before March 6, 2024".

In his columns and tweets in the past, the IPS officer of 2000 batch had many times shown his dislike for the BJP's "communal politics".

In July 2020, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) had initiated an inquiry against Rath and suspended him for "repeated instances of gross misconduct and misbehaviour that have been brought to the notice of the government".

It also asked Rath not to "leave the headquarters without permission of DGP".

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THE INDIAN EXPRESS, MONDAY, JUNE 27, 2022

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE

BECAUSE THE AUTHORITIES CANNOT LAUGH...
THEY'RE MADE TO DENOUNCE, INTERROGATE AND
CAPTURE. — MANLIO ARGUETA

The Indian **EXPRESS**

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

IN SC'S NAME

Had it not been for Court, justice would be elusive for Gujarat 2002. That's why its latest order, its use by police, is disturbing

IN THE LONG, tortuous and still unfolding process of justice after the communal violence in Gujarat 2002, the Supreme Court of India has played a commendable role. Its several interventions have ensured that the process stays on course, that it was insulated from pressure by the powerful, and that victims and survivors could hope for a fair and just closure. This is why the two arrests on Saturday, of activist Teesta Setalvad and former Gujarat DGP RB Sreekumar, are disquieting — the FIR is based on extensive quotes from the SC verdict and its annexures the day before. On Friday, the SC upheld the SIT's clean chit in the 2002 riots to the then Gujarat government led by Chief Minister Narendra Modi, discarding allegations of a larger conspiracy by high state functionaries. The collapse of that particular case was, arguably, foretold — connecting the dots right up to the chief minister's office was a tall order to begin with, and the case may have been propelled more by the anguish of those devastated by the violence, less by evidence that could hold up in a court of law. In the same order, however, the Court went a worrying step further. Its verdict said, and the FIR lodged the next day faithfully quoted: "At the end of the day, it appears to us that a coalesced effort of disgruntled officials of the state of Gujarat along with others was to create sensation... to keep the pot boiling, obviously for ulterior design... all those involved in such abuse of process, need to be in the dock and proceeded with in accordance with law". The day after, the question is: Surely the court would not countenance a witch-hunt that borrows its lines from the court?

The law must take its course on Sreekumar and Setalvad. But there is a problem with an FIR that draws so heavily upon what the court says, and a court verdict that lends itself to such immediate police action against those standing with the petitioners in cases of 2002. What the court said on Friday and the police taking its cue from it on Saturday also appears to turn on its head the story so far — after all, it was the same court that, down the years, took a number of unprecedented steps to ensure justice for 2002. The SC stayed the trials in certain cases in response to allegations that there had been serious lapses in investigation. It set up an SIT and supervised designated fast track courts for hearing sensitive cases. It ensured that cases were shifted outside Gujarat so that justice could be done. Its interventions resulted in the reopening of nearly 2,000 post-Godhra riots cases. The SC, in fact, became the centrepiece of a larger effort in which individual activists, NGOs and the NHRC, among others, contributed towards bringing justice closer to victims and survivors of the communal violence that took place in Gujarat a little over two decades ago.

The cases stemming from Gujarat 2002 raise serious questions about a range of abdications by institutions and actors. The collapse of one case should not become the pre-text for a sweeping indictment of the whole struggle for justice and accountability. The SC must also reflect on whether it behoves its status and role as the wise custodian of constitutional processes and values to be seen to be turning on those who were stricken by the violence and knocked on its doors, even if, as it turns out in this particular case, their plea failed to hold.

BALANCING ON BRICS

Its latest outing navigated tightrope on Ukraine. It is yet to live up to its promise of an alternative economic or trading bloc

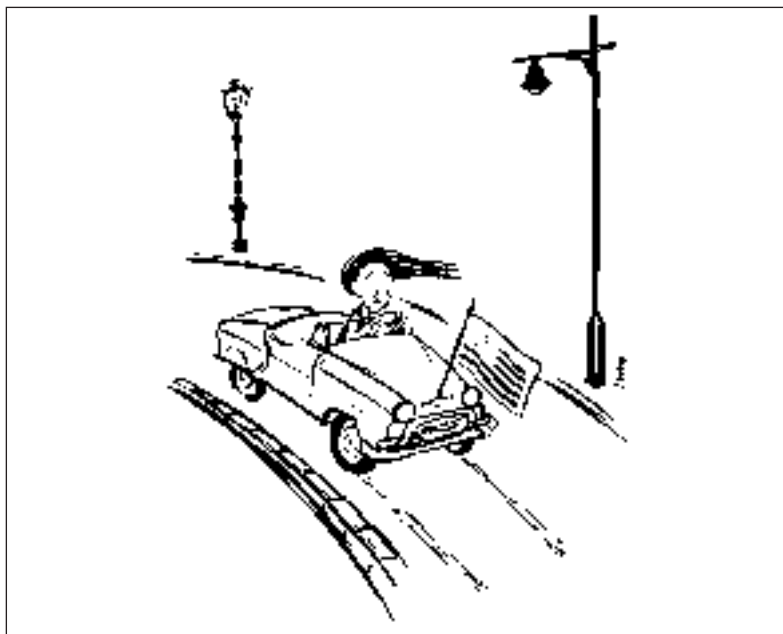
THE MOST REMARKABLE thing about the BRICS summit last week was that its five members managed to negotiate their way through the meeting in a way that sent no ripples of surprise through the post-February 24 world. This was the 14th summit of the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa grouping set up in 2009. It was hosted by China this year and was its opportunity to showcase multi-lateralism, Beijing's big foreign policy slogan, and to hit out once again at US "hegemony". Aside from the members, China had invited 13 nations from across continents, signalling its desire to expand the group. Getting Prime Minister Narendra Modi to attend despite the tensions owing to China's military incursions in Ladakh was a bonus. For India, BRICS was always about its commitment to building non-western alliances, but this time it was, more, an international balancing act. Ditto for Brazil. It voted for the UN Security Council resolution "deploring" the invasion of Ukraine and the General Assembly resolution condemning Russia, but President Jair Bolsonaro went to Moscow on a "solidarity trip" a week before the invasion and has insisted his country stands for "peace". South Africa too has been walking the neutrality tightrope on Ukraine. As for Russia, the summit gave President Vladimir Putin his first multilateral outing since February 24. The joint statement was able to find common ground on the invasion of Ukraine by asserting the sanctity of sovereignty and territorial integrity and the need to find a peaceful solution.

President Putin's proposal for an alternative reserve currency was received with caution. The Western sanctions on Russia have had a fall-out on economies around the world, but a post-dollar world is an idea whose time has not yet arrived. Barring Russia now, the other BRICS members are well-integrated members of the US currency-led, digitised global financial market. But in a nod to the concept, a BRICS Think Tank Network for Finance is to be set up, to "work independently and provide intellectual support, as and when tasked, for knowledge sharing, exchange of experiences and practices and cooperation on finance issues amongst BRICS countries, aiming at addressing global challenges and serving the interests of the EMDCs (Emerging Markets and Developing Countries)". The wording is suitably vague.

BRICS has yet to live up to its promise of an economic or trading bloc that can offer alternatives to developing countries. The New Development Bank, or the BRICS bank, is yet to catch speed as a multilateral lender of standing. China's push to dominate BRICS, and Russia's being in economic limbo, have set limits on what the grouping can hope to achieve.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



ASHUTOSH VARSHNEY

IN A DEMOCRACY, can a right once granted be taken away? In the current international debate, this question has become part of the rising intellectual and political concern over "democratic backsliding", a concept that depicts how democracies weaken and decline without collapsing fully.

As the world's oldest surviving democracy, the United States has figured prominently in this debate, especially since Donald Trump rose to the presidency in 2016, engaged in a lot of anti-minority politics, and finally sought to overturn his 2020 election defeat. But after all is said and done, the American debate thus far has been about whether it is legitimate to put some restrictions on the exercise of franchise by racial minorities, who vote markedly less for the Republican party and considerably more for the Democrats. Strictly speaking, the debate has not been about the right to vote per se.

With the US Supreme Court's decision on June 24 to overturn a half-century-old right to abortion, granted by a 1973 Supreme Court decision in the Roe vs Wade case, the debate has now become wider, as it moves from how to engineer voter suppression to the larger realm of rights. With a 5-4 majority, the court has said that American women have no nationwide right to abortion. Rather, state legislatures should decide whether women can have that right in their respective states. In several states, within hours of the court's decision, abortion was banned, for prior legislation existed. Though Democratic states would steadfastly protect the right to abortion, nearly half of the 50 states are likely to go the other way. In the new field of democratic backsliding, comprising the retraction of rights, the floodgates have opened up.

In poll after poll, a majority of Americans, bordering sometimes on three-fourths of the population, support women's right to abortion. So, what the court has done is against popular will. But that cannot be the principal criticism against the decision. Courts are not fundamentally governed by popular passion or will, which can fluctuate from election to election, but by constitutional propriety. The key question is whether the right to abortion was constitutionally justified.

The 1973 court decision allowing the

Arc of rights must broaden further, instead of retreating.
Overturning of Roe v Wade outlines democratic challenge

Men don't have to deal physically with pregnancy, whereas the foetus grows inside a woman's body for nine months. If men have the right over their bodies, which can't be taken away by the government, why can't women have autonomy over their bodies as well? Why should they be subjected to the government's authority and supervision any more than men's bodies? That men are free, but women must forcibly be chained to maternity, is an idea whose time surely has gone. Maternity must be a voluntary choice. There is no going back to the notion of rights as they were viewed in the 18th century — unequal, unneutral, unbalanced.

right to abortion was based on the 14th Constitutional Amendment (1868). This Amendment, the court said, allowed protection of liberty and privacy, something the state could not impinge upon. Thus, even though abortion was not mentioned in the 1787 US Constitution, abortion's defence was derived from the 1868 Amendment — via its protection of citizens' liberty about matters as intimate as a decision to have a child. The 1973 court also argued that this right was not absolute, limited as it would be by considerations of "protecting potential life". This line of reasoning led to a trimester-based court ruling, which more or less forbade the government from interfering in the first trimester of pregnancy but the state could ban abortions in the third trimester, when "the viability of the fetus" was beyond doubt.

This whole structure of judicial reasoning has now collapsed. In the court's opinion, the right to privacy stemming from the 14th Amendment is not relevant, for abortion concerns not only the pregnant woman but also the life of the unborn. Moreover, the court said, abortion is neither "enumerated" as a right in the original 1787 constitution nor is it consistent with American history and tradition. In short, it is a political and legislative, not a constitutional, matter. State legislatures should decide what is permissible.

How should a political analyst comment on this tussle? Hard as we might wish otherwise, constitutional decisions are inevitably tied up with politics. There is no escape from political reasoning.

First of all, no constitution can fully anticipate how the arc of rights would bend in the future. Abortion was not mentioned in the 1787 constitution, nor explicitly in the 1868 amendment. That is because women were not autonomous political agents at that time. Until they were given the right to vote in 1920, they were not a constitutional category in the US, as was true virtually everywhere in the world. Women are autonomous agents today. Norms change; rights evolve.

Second, as the court's dissent note puts it, how can this majority decision ignore rape and incest? Why should women carry the child of a rapist, a father or an uncle? If abortion as a right is dissolved, women can be

forced to give such unwanted births. The majority decision of the court is silent on this important matter.

Third, having a child is not simply a deeply moral obligation to the unborn. It is also a decision that affects "the ability of women to participate equally in (the nation's) economic and social life". These words are from a later decision, known as Casey (1992), when the US Supreme Court added the concept of "undue burdens" to support the idea of abortion. As more and more women become scientists, professors, journalists, lawyers, managers, executives, politicians and sportspersons, these considerations cannot simply be brushed aside. If a woman chooses to terminate a pregnancy now but has a child later, that may be more consistent with her dreams and desires, to which she has a rightful claim.

Finally, men don't have to deal physically with pregnancy, whereas the foetus grows inside a woman's body for nine months. If men have the right over their bodies, which can't be taken away by the government, why can't women have autonomy over their bodies as well? Why should they be subjected to the government's authority and supervision any more than men's bodies? That men are free, but women must forcibly be chained to maternity, is an idea whose time surely has gone. Maternity must be a voluntary choice. There is no going back to the notion of rights as they were viewed in the 18th century — unequal, unneutral, unbalanced.

With the Supreme Court's overturning of abortion as a constitutionally guaranteed right, America has taken another step towards democratic backsliding. Now, democratic renewal not only means fighting for more easily accessible voting procedures but also a push for a legislative codification of the right to abortion. Typically, as they evolve and deepen, democracies allow the arc of rights to broaden further, not retreat. After this judgment in the US, the stakes have become much higher and the democratic challenges bigger.

The writer is Sol Goldman Professor of International Studies and the Social Sciences at Brown University



RUCHI GUPTA

THE POLITICAL crisis in Maharashtra has brought the focus back to the anti-defection law. By all accounts, the law has failed to shore up the stability of elected governments. Many governments have fallen due to defections and the defectors have not suffered any cautionary consequences. To thwart the provisions of the law, the Speaker can keep defection pleas pending and the beneficiary party can use money and investigative agencies to engineer enough defections to hit the two-thirds threshold. Voters, too, don't penalise defections, with defectors routinely winning re-elections. Some have thus mooted amendments to the anti-defection law to mandate time-bound decisions by the Speaker and disqualify defectors from the next election.

The practice of politics is too wide for any institutional process to fully capture. Politicians are adept at subverting institutional processes and there are many possibilities for payoff for defectors outside of elected office alone. Moreover, politics has a history of the exercise of power by proxy and the disqualified representative can have a family member stand in their stead. It is thus unlikely that these amendments will stop defections in any substantive manner. The anti-defection law and proposed amendments approach the issue of defections from the prism of denying power to the defector, a framing which repeatedly comes up short in the face of a bigger and/or more punitive power.

It is obvious that if political parties want to resist defections, they must be able to project

A LESSON FROM MAHARASHTRA

Political crisis shows that anti-defection law is ineffective, even counterproductive

(imminent) power themselves. At the same time, out-of-power political parties must address organisational and ideological infirmities which have made them susceptible to mass defections. There are only about 4,000 MLAs in a country with a population of almost 1.4 billion people. However, political parties tasked with representing the aspirations of crores of people are unable to find candidates who take themselves seriously enough to not cross over to political opponents. The bar is so low that the MLAs have to be physically corralled and phones confiscated to ensure continuation with the party. This is not idealistic outrage but instead has pragmatic and organisational value. It is one thing for a few individuals to be susceptible to threats and inducement, another for the organisation to be vulnerable to mass defections. Individuals can be faulted in the former but the latter calls for urgent introspective and corrective measures at the level of the leadership.

Two measures with both short-term and long-term implications come to mind. First, political parties need ideological clarity and the ability to attract individuals with a sense of purpose and not the love of power alone. This ideological depth if reflected in the party organisation and its political programmes will give members the ability to withstand lean periods of power. Every party has committed individuals; internal party processes must be geared to identify and promote them into leadership positions. This ties into the second issue.

Multiple analyses have attributed the political crisis in Maharashtra in part to Shiv Sena's inability to accommodate the aspirations of its dissident MLAs. The rebel MLAs on their part have spoken of the chief minister's inaccessibility. The MLAs may be opportunistic but there is no question that political parties are failing to create intra-party forums where differences can be expressed and resolved on an ongoing basis. Internal mechanisms for inner-party democracy — from elections to deliberative forums — are ultimately at the discretion of the party leadership. Scrapping the anti-defection law would provide some institutional leverage to express intra-party dissidence and while it may be more chaotic in the short term, can lead to greater stability and political strength in the long term.

Finally, two fundamental questions. In trying to legislate political affiliation — a key freedom in democracy — political parties are ending up as supplicants in the court. This repeated ceding of political power to the judiciary is a deviation from the democratic paradigm and must be checked. Second, the anti-defection law has undermined not just the principle of representation but is also contributing to polarisation in our country by making it impossible to construct a majority on any issue outside of party affiliation. Instead of providing stability, the law is undermining our democracy. It is time to scrap the anti-defection law.

The writer is executive director of the Future of India Foundation

JUNE 27, 1982, FORTY YEARS AGO

ISRAEL'S INVASION

GUNS STAYED SILENT in Beirut while new diplomatic moves raised cautious hopes of a breakthrough in efforts to end the Lebanese conflict. The ceasefire proclaimed by Israel after three days of bombarding Beirut seemed to be holding. During the lull, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation studied new American proposals for neutralising the Palestinian military presence in Lebanon. No details were given but the former Lebanese Prime Minister Saeb Salam, who has played a go-between role in negotiations, told reporters, "There has been a new development. I believe things are looking better."

PM MEETS ABDULLAH

PRIME MINISTER Indira Gandhi, and J&K Chief Minister Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah met for the second time to remove "misunderstandings", if any, between them. Mrs Gandhi, accompanied by Governor B K Nehru, had a closed-door meeting for over 40 minutes with the ailing Kashmir leader at the latter's residence in Srinagar. Farooq Abdullah, the Sheikh's son and president of the ruling National Conference, said the two had a "cordial meeting". Asked if the misunderstanding between them was removed by this meeting, he replied, "There was, in fact, no misunderstanding" and added "but most

of the things were sorted out".

HAIG RESIGNS

US SECRETARY OF State Alexander Haig said he had resigned as he felt the Reagan administration's foreign policy had strayed from its goal of "consistency, clarity and steadiness of purpose." Haig, appearing in the State Department auditorium, read his letter of resignation, which said he and the President had agreed on the three aims at the start of the administration. "In recent months," he said, "it has become clear to me that the foreign policy on which we embarked together was shifting from that careful course."



THE IDEAS PAGE

West steps back, India shows way

While West curtails abortion rights, India empowers women through Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act, Surrogacy Regulation Act and Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021



SMRITI IRANI

AT A TIME of distressing furore on social media and the streets against the near-total bans on abortion in the West, India's generous stance on the termination of pregnancy is a comforting sanctum. Coupled with the moratorium on commercial surrogacy and the proposal to equalise men's and women's ages at marriage, India is positioned securely in the highest echelons of countries that safeguard reproductive autonomy.

India's constitutional ethos commits to the protection of personal liberty through Article 21. Abortion or termination of pregnancy is a woman's prerogative. While women are exclusively fated to withstand child-bearing — purely on account of their biological predisposition — sociocultural constructs also subject them to a disproportionate share of child-rearing.

The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act, 2021, is a step in the right direction. It ensures that expectant mothers exercise self-determination in welcoming new life to their homes. Under the aegis of the Act, abortions may be performed up to 24 gestational weeks on grounds of risk to the mother's life, mental anguish, rape, incest, contraception failure or the diagnosis of foetal abnormalities. The Act navigates the 20 weeks challenge posed by the MTP Act, 1971 and is a nod to advances in the field of health and reproductive science. It is a liberal achievement over countries where abortions are disallowed since conception, even in the most traumatising of circumstances of sexual abuse or incest.

The MTP Act, 2021, attests to the intuition and farsightedness of its crafters. Readiness for and desirability of children decisively shape the life trajectories of mothers, families and children alike. Unwanted pregnancies unexpectedly curtail the life choices of parents, especially mothers, and may limit their mental well-being and personal growth. Further, children born unwanted may suffer reduced opportunities. Illustratively, the WHO links the likelihood of children being born "wanted" to greater parental investments in their education.

Incumbent law and policy-makers have skillfully given reproductive choice a life-cycle twist. Since fertility, child-bearing and child-rearing are unmistakably associated with marriage, by proposing to raise the legal marriageable age for women, policymakers are heralding welcome changes that delay pregnancy. The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021 seeks to push the marriage age for women from 18 years to 21 years. The Bill is well-founded in the face of scholarship and evidence cited by the WHO, which holds that adolescent mothers aged 10 to 19 years are prone to higher risks of eclampsia, puerperal endometritis, and systemic infections in comparison to women aged 20 to 24 years. Children born to such mothers additionally face higher risks of low birth weight, preterm delivery and severe neonatal conditions.

It is noteworthy that the unmet need for family planning in terms of limiting or spacing child-bearing decreased from 12.9 per cent



C R Sasikumar

to 9.4 per cent between NFHS-4 (2014-15) to NFHS-5 (2019-21). However, on a standalone basis, nearly 7 per cent of females aged 15-19 years were already mothers or pregnant at the time of NFHS-5, a marginal decline over NFHS-4's 7.8 per cent. Such young mothers are poorly aware of feeding practices and baby care, making them more likely to have stunted or wasted children. Together the MTP Act, 2021 and the PCMA Bill, 2021 — if enacted — can axe the vicious cycle of early marriages, consequent early pregnancies and poor maternal and child health outcomes.

Another underrated policy innovation that the government curated was the decimation of surrogacy bazaars that allowed "renting a womb". Given global inequalities, India became a lucrative "biomarket" for surrogate mothers. The bodies of poor Indian women became "bioavailable" to the residents of the Global North, spurring commercialisation of motherhood, the commodification of women and their reduction to their reproductive capacity. In a country with a long-standing cultural lineage of revering mothers, careless commercial surrogacy appeared to be in stark contrast with the cultural ethos. Responding to this dissonance, the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021, replaced commercial surrogacy with ethical, altruistic surrogacy. The Act prohibits couples who are not of Indian origin from availing surrogacy in the country and allows only locals with certified, medical reasons necessitating gestational surrogacy to avail of it. The MTP Act, the Surrogacy Act and the PCM (Amendment) Bill, 2021, collectively give new meaning to nari shakti.

Within this enabling politico-legal apparatus, the government has framed policies that readily coalesce to respect the choices and decisions made by women. Under the aegis of Ayushman Bharat-Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), a health cover of Rs 5 lakh per family per annum is provided and a wide range of packages pertaining to obstetrics and gynaecology are offered. While the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) partially compensates wage loss before and after pregnancy, the Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyaan (PMSMA) provides free antenatal care to pregnant women on every 9th day of the month, easing the financial burden of pregnant women.

Not only is the government making a con-

The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act, 2021, is a step in the right direction. It ensures that expectant mothers exercise self-determination in welcoming new life to their homes. Under the aegis of the Act, abortions may be performed up to 24 gestational weeks on grounds of risk to the mother's life, mental anguish, rape, incest, contraception failure or the diagnosis of foetal abnormalities.

certed effort for reproductive choices to be easier on the pockets of women, it is also promoting safe motherhood through institutional deliveries under Janani Suraksha Yojana and quality, respectful care in labour rooms during deliveries under schemes like LaQshya. These efforts have culminated in a manifold increase in institutional deliveries from 79 per cent in NFHS-4 to nearly 89 per cent in NFHS-5. The ultimate reward to the nation is the greater longevity of mothers as evidenced by the declining Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) from 167 per lakh live births in 2011-13 to 103 per lakh live births as of 2019.

The present government evinces the highest regard for its *bahuroopi* daughters who act — at various points in their life — not only as loving mothers but as sincere students, valuable employees and valorous entrepreneurs. The Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao campaign's call to ensure that girls are born and nurtured bore fruit in the form of an improved sex ratio of 1,020 females per 1,000 males. Yojanas such as Ujjwala and Jal Jeevan Mission gave many women much needed respite from the drudgery of collecting fuelwood or water so they could partake in other gainful activities. The Mudra Yojana has provided aspiring women entrepreneurs with loans sans collateral and yet another scheme, the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme, has advocated for higher subsidies for women.

While the West is curtailing abortion rights, India is extending the ceiling of permissible abortions. While menstrual hygiene remains a conversation hushed in whispered tones in parts of the world, PM Modi addressed the issue from the ramps of the Red Fort with 1.3 billion Indians listening intently. By outlawing triple talaq, the government has addressed the constant state of insecurity faced by Muslim women. By proposing to revise the permissible marriageable age, the government has held men and women to the same, unbiased standards. The present government has instilled conscientiousness into the calculus of policymaking with a fervent hope that it will better the lives of the mothers and daughters of India for generations to come. Even as the West retrogresses, India shows the path to a progressive society.

The writer is Union Minister for Women and Child Development

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The Taliban are warming up to India faster than expected. Whether we like it or not, the Taliban are a reality now. To deal with them successfully, we have to re-evaluate our approach towards them.."

—DAWN

Using past to oppress future

Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid judgment makes it clear that revanchist claims to religious sites, post 1947, have no basis in law



CHANDER UDAY SINGH

NOVEMBER 9, 2019, was a historic day for the Supreme Court of India. On this day, five justices pronounced a unanimous verdict in *M. Siddiq v. Mahant Suresh Das*, better known as the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid judgment. In what was hailed by many as a masterful act of judicial statesmanship, the Bench speaking as one through a judgment ascribed to no individual judge, held that the Hindu parties had illegally planted idols in the central courtyard of the Babri mosque on the night between December 22-23, 1949, thereby desecrating it and that Hindu zealots committed a grave crime by demolishing the mosque on December 6, 1992. It also held that nevertheless, the title to the underlying land must be declared in favour of Ram Lalla Virajman, the deity of infant Lord Ram that had made out the best case of continuous possession and worship. The Sunni Central Waqf Board, as compensation for the illegal desecration and complete destruction of their structure, were to be given five acres of land elsewhere in Ayodhya.

Unprecedented too, even if not historic, was the celebration organised by then Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi, who constituted and headed the five-judge bench. This triumphalism would be worth it if the judgment succeeds in closing the door on revanchist claims upon other mosques that were already in the crosshairs of zealots long before it was pronounced: Gyanvapi and Shahi Idgah in Varanasi and Mathura, and as many as 3,000 others scattered around the nation.

Indeed, one of their strongest claims to judicial statesmanship lies in the manner in which the Bench explained The Places of Worship Act, 1991, and its effect. In para 97 the justices hold that this law "imposes two unwavering and mandatory norms": The first is an absolute bar on the conversion of a place of worship of one religious denomination to that of any other religion. Second, to preserve the religious character of every place of worship as it existed at Independence, on August 15, 1947. The only exceptions, carved out in the 1991 Act itself, were the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute that was pending in the courts, any cases that had become final by judicial verdict or concluded settlements prior to September 18, 1991, and any monuments governed by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958.

What is one to make then of the spate of suits being filed across the country, court orders directing entry into ancient mosques, videography by court commissioners, searches for religious artefacts or symbolism, and claims for the right of one denomination to worship in the place of worship of another? More importantly, what does one make of the timorousness of constitutional courts when faced with such claims? And what of the throwaway comments or remarks during hearings, which to the media and general public might suggest new av-

enues to use history and its wrongs to oppress the present and the future? And lastly, does the exclusion of ancient monuments and archaeological sites from the purview of Section 4 of the Places of Worship Act make a material difference to these suits?

The first question is easily answered, and not only because of The Places of Worship Act. Insofar as the Act is concerned, the Bench in *M. Siddiq* (supra) expressly quashed the findings of the Allahabad High Court to the effect that certain types of disputes could be kept alive, or subsequently raised. The five justices elevated non-retrogression to a basic feature of the Constitution. These findings were rendered after noting that many ancient places of worship were built upon the ruins of others, and sometimes even after destroying those that stood before, and that consequently religious artefacts, pillars, stones, carvings, and even idols might have been subsumed within the later place of worship.

Apart from the 1991 Act, it appears from the nature of these suits that they are barred by limitation and are untenable. Judging by press reports, the claims in these suits are based not on title, ownership and continuous possession, but on the right to worship at particular sites. The foundation of these claims is a belief that a sacred temple was destroyed centuries ago, and a mosque was built on the ruins. Such claims, as held by the Bench in *M. Siddiq*, are clearly time-barred under the Limitation Act, 1963.

My second question is clearly rhetorical, and the reader can fill in the answers.

As for the third, it must be said that queries and open-ended discussions during court hearings are par for the course. But when issues as fraught as this one are met with the Supreme Court musing on the possibility of discoveries by a court commissioner — and their significance — and hypothesising about a Parsi Agyari in which a Christian cross might be found, and the "hybrid" nature of such Agyari, some clarifications become necessary.

The Places of Worship Act, 1991, is concerned with one principal question: What was the religious character of a place of worship on August 15, 1947? The Act is not concerned with what existed before the construction of the place of worship, what materials were used to build it, or whether it stands upon religious symbols or icons or artefacts of any other religious denomination.

That brings me to the last question, on the Ancient Monuments Act, 1958. The mosques that are the subject matter of most of these suits are not covered by the 1958 Act, so this is essentially a red herring. However, other monuments like the Qutub Minar and Taj Mahal are certainly covered by the 1958 Act. Occasionally, there are places of worship within ancient monuments, and in such cases, section 16 of the 1958 Act grants them protection that is broadly on par with that which is available under The Places of Worship Act. This Act bars civil suits in respect of any matters falling within the purview of the National Monuments Authority, so it is unlikely that the 1958 Act will spring to the rescue of these revanchist actions.

The writer is a senior advocate. The full version of this article is available on the indianexpress.com



PRAVEEN CHAKRAVARTY

INDIA'S GOODS and services tax (GST) will be five years old on July 1. The GST Council, comprising minister representatives from all states and union territories, will be meeting over the next few days. There will likely be celebrations, commiserations and contestations.

Three significant issues — the breakdown of trust and cooperative federalism between states and the Union government, the expiry of the revenue guarantee that protected states' revenues and the recent Supreme Court's judgment highlighting that the GST Council's recommendations are not binding on the states — form the backdrop to this Council meeting.

Maharashtra, the highest contributor to GST revenues (20 per cent) may not be represented in today's meeting because its government is on the verge of collapse, aided in part by the BJP governments of the Union, Gujarat and Assam. Surely, these egregious political developments in Maharashtra will play in the minds of the non-BJP representatives in the GST Council meeting from Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Delhi, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Punjab, Jharkhand and Orissa, that together contribute 36 per cent of overall GST revenues.

Cooperation between states and the Union cannot just be an economic compact, but a broader political ethic. It is foolhardy to expect states to indulge in a harmonious spirit of economic cooperative federalism inside the GST Council when their governments, leaders and

institutions are being politically attacked and destroyed outside.

The SC recently observed that it is in the national interest to have both cooperative and competitive federalism, and hence, the GST Council's decisions are not binding on the states. This means that states had and continue to have the right to either comply fully with the Council's recommendations or modify them as they deem necessary. This has opened the window for states to override the fundamental GST premise of a "one nation one tax". If pushed to a corner, states may now use the SC ruling as a shield.

The other fulcrum of GST was the tangible mechanism of guaranteed revenues for states. When GST was mooted amid lofty promises in 2017, sceptical state governments extracted a five-year insurance from the Centre of a minimum revenue guarantee, without which GST may not have been possible. It turned out to be prescient as GST failed to live up to its economic promises and states' revenues were protected through this guarantee, despite Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's attempt to wriggle out of this commitment during the pandemic under the alibi of an "act of God". The Union government's proclivity to levy and appropriate cess revenues for itself without sharing them with the states has lent credence to the wisdom of guaranteed compensation for states. This guarantee is now set to expire.

GST is too precariously perched to yank away the compensation guarantee for states.

The ideal solution to salvage and fix GST is to extend the compensation guarantee. The tenure of extension and the guaranteed rate of revenue growth can be mutually agreed upon by states and the Union.

However, the Union government is not desirous of extending the compensation guarantee. Its apprehension and reluctance are understandable, given its deteriorating fiscal situation, foisted by high global crude oil prices, rising fertiliser imports and expanding welfare expenditure. But in the larger and longer term interest of GST, it is prudent to extend the compensation guarantee, which will assuage states' concerns and buy time to revive GST. It is no secret that nearly all states, irrespective of their political affiliations, want an extension of the compensation guarantee. At this juncture of the GST regime, it is perhaps wiser to extend the compensation guarantee and hope to obviate its need through buoyant GST revenues than to further erode states' confidence. Sacrificing a percentage point or half of the fiscal deficit next year by extending the compensation guarantee is worth the potential benefits of a well-functioning GST.

At the root of the current GST, imbroglgio is a deficit of trust and revenues. Technical fixes such as rationalisation of rates and ease of GST compliance are necessary but not sufficient to bridge the revenue deficit since GST revenues are a function of the performance of the larger economy, which in turn depends on

various other factors. The trust deficit can be bridged only through acts of good faith. The Union government should commit to the states that it will not resort to cesses and surcharges that are outside the shareable pool of revenues. It must resolve to honour the revenue guarantee commitment to the states. It must respect and uphold the true spirit of not just fiscal federalism but political and constitutional federalism too.

Democratically elected state governments in India do not have sole powers for both direct and indirect taxation, which is unheard of in any other federal democracy. GST centralised India's indirect taxation. It is time to start a national discussion on reversing the course, moving towards decentralisation by giving states powers for direct taxation. A commitment to initiate such discussions by the Union government will be a healthy signal for states' confidence and fiscal freedom.

After five years, it is now well established that GST has failed to deliver on its economic promises. Contrary to the technocratic rhetoric, it is not just the flawed implementation that is responsible for GST's economic failure. GST was always an economic square peg in India's federal round hole. Regardless, we are now far down the GST path and must strive to make it work, to avoid a "GSTexit", a la Brexit.

Chakravarty is chairman of the data analytics department of the Congress Party

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

INFORMATION AGE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Let there be data' (IE, 25 June). Managing a country as diverse as India calls for availability of good quality, reliable and regular data. In our age of information, data and facts are everything, and their absence, a recipe for failure. There must, therefore, be a constant stream of data forthcoming on important national objectives, for use by policymakers, researchers and analysts. The proposed resumption of the Consumer Expenditure Survey, after a long hiatus, is welcome news, and one which hopefully marks a new beginning in the availability of comprehensive and regular official data in the country.

Hemant Contractor, Pune

NATION FIRST?

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Penny wise, security foolish' (IE, June 26). The government seems to be aware that despite its ill-conceived "Agnipath" recruitment scheme, the youth of the country will come forward to join it, due to compelling unemployment. Faced by the question of bread and butter, the youngsters have no time and energy to resist and compel the Centre to roll back the scheme. The most insidious facet of "Agnipath" is that only one-fourth of

the soldiers would be absorbed into the force. This will create a deep rift amongst them at the cost of camaraderie and the principle of "nation first" as every "Agniveer" would like to overshadow the other in sycophancy for senior officers. Besides, a fancy name and a "mercenary" like arrangement cannot be an alternative for motivated, dedicated and fulfilled soldiers ready to die for the nation and each other.

Devendra Awasthi, Lucknow

FOOD SECURITY

THIS REFERS TO the article 'Preparing soil for the future' (IE, June 24). Soil is an essential natural resource that supports various ecosystem services. Proper management of soil health is crucial, as it involves the survival of any species that directly depend on soil for their existence, including humans. Improper agricultural practices have impacted the soil health in many regions of the world. Monoculture and plantation-based farming has changed the natural character of local ecosystems, resulting in the degradation of soil quality. Aggressive and unsustainable farming cannot be justified on grounds of ensuring food security, as these practices, in the long run, will lead to a food-insecure world for future generations.

Sudip Kumar Dey, via email



DEEPEST WRECK DISCOVERED EXPLORERS FIND WWII NAVY DESTROYER

The USS Samuel B Roberts, popularly known as the “Sammy B,” was identified on Wednesday broken into two pieces at a depth of 6,985 metres. “We have the chance to retell her story of heroism and duty...” said American explorer Victor Vescovo.

TOP OF THE WORLD



Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi shakes hands with Iraqi PM Mustafa al-Kadhimi in Tehran, Sunday. Reuters

IRAN

Iraqi PM in Tehran after Saudi visit

IRAQI PM Mustafa al-Kadhimi arrived in Iran on Sunday, Iranian state TV reported, a day after he travelled to Saudi Arabia in a bid to revive talks between the regional rivals to ease years of hostility. An Iranian official said that “the resumption of talks between Tehran and Riyadh will be discussed during Khadimi’s trip to Iran”. On Saturday, Kadhimi held talks with Saudi de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Jeddah and discusses bilateral relations and “boosting security and stability in the region”. **REUTERS**

ECUADOR

Emergency lifted amid protests

ECUADOR PRESIDENT Guillermo Lasso on Saturday lifted a state of emergency he had imposed in six provinces amid an Indigenous-led strike, a surprise move that came as lawmakers in the National Assembly heard an opposition petition to remove him from office. The decision followed an initial meeting between officials and Ecuador’s largest Indigenous organisation, which began the strike two weeks ago to demand gasoline prices be cut, price controls on agricultural products and a larger budget be set for education. **AP**

MEXICO

8 bodies found, likely to be of missing workers

EIGHT BODIES were found Saturday on Mexico’s Yucatan peninsula, and they appear to be those of eight men apparently kidnapped from a resort on the Caribbean coast. At least seven men, and possibly eight, had been reported abducted Friday from the beach town of Xcalak. The bodies were found by a farmer in a field just over the border. Prosecutors said the men do not appear to have been killed where they were found, and were probably dumped there. **AP**

Roe v. Wade overturned, White House seeks to take on states over abortion pill

LAWRENCE HURLEY
WASHINGTON, JUNE 26

PRESIDENT JOE Biden’s administration indicated it will seek to prevent states from banning a pill used for medication abortion in light of the Supreme Court ruling overturning the landmark Roe v. Wade ruling, signaling a major new legal fight.

The administration could argue in court that the US Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) approval of mifepristone, one of the pills used for medication abortions, pre-empted state restrictions, meaning federal authority outweighs any state action.

Over a dozen states plan to almost totally ban abortion with the Roe precedent upended. The conservative majority Supreme Court overturned Roe on Friday, saying there is no right to abortion in the US Constitution.

Mifepristone was approved for abortions by FDA in 2000. The pill, also known as RU 486, blocks the pregnancy-sustaining hormone progesterone. **REUTERS**



Abortion rights protesters demonstrate after the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, in Boston. Reuters

No smooth passage

WHILE REPRODUCTIVE rights experts have lauded the Biden administration’s stance on the pill, Mifepristone, legal experts say the law on pre-emption is murky. The Congress has never said ex-

EXPLAINED

PLICITLY that FDA approval trumps state law as it has done in the context of medical devices.

Therefore it would be left to courts to decide the question under a theory known as “implied preemption”.

Vatican: Activists can’t be selective on pro-life issues

ANTI-ABORTION activists should be concerned with other issues that can threaten life, such as easy access to guns, poverty and rising maternity mortality rates, said the Vatican’s editorial director said on Saturday.

In a media editorial on the US Supreme Court’s ruling to end the right to abortion, Andrea Tomielli said those who oppose abortion could not pick and choose pro-life issues. “Being for life, always, for example, means being concerned if the mortality rates of women due to motherhood increase,” he wrote. “Being for life, always, also means defending it against the threat of firearms, which unfortunately have become a leading cause of death of children and adolescents in the US”.

The Roman Catholic church teaches that abortion is murder because life begins at the moment of conception. **REUTERS**

BARBARISM, SAYS JOE BIDEN

Russian missiles pound Kyiv as G7 leaders meet

Homes, kindergarten hit in first such attack since early June

TOM BALMFORTH & MARKO DJURICA

KYIV, POKROVSK (UKRAINE), JUNE 26

RUSSIAN MISSILES hit an apartment block and kindergarten in the Ukrainian capital Kyiv on Sunday, in strikes US President Joe Biden condemned as “barbarism” as world leaders gathered in Europe to discuss further sanctions against Moscow.

Up to four explosions shook central Kyiv in the early hours, in the first such attack on the city in weeks. Two more blasts were heard on the southern outskirts of the city later in the day, a Reuters reporter said.

“The Russians hit Kyiv again. Missiles damaged an apartment building and a kindergarten,” said Andriy Yermak, head of the president’s administration.

Ukraine’s police chief, Ihor Klymenko, said on national television that five people had been wounded, and police later said one person was killed.

Russia has stepped up air strikes on Ukraine this weekend, which has also seen the fall of a strategic eastern city to pro-Russian forces.

“It’s more of their barbarism,” said Biden, referring to the mis-



A damaged residential building in Kyiv. Reuters

sile strikes on Kyiv, as leaders from the Group of Seven (G7) rich democracies gathered for a summit in Germany.

Gold sanctions

During the summit, Biden told allies “we have to stay together” against Russia. At the start of the meeting, four members of the Group of Seven rich nations moved to ban imports of

Russian gold as part of efforts to tighten the sanctions squeeze on Moscow and cut off its means of financing the invasion of Ukraine.

However, it was not immediately clear whether there was consensus on the move, with European Council President Charles Michel saying the issue would need to be handled carefully or risk backfiring. **REUTERS**

G7 plan to counter China influence

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ELMAU (GERMANY), JUNE 26

THE GROUP of Seven leading democratic economies or G7 Sunday formally launched a global infrastructure and investment partnership aimed at pushing back China’s influence in the developing world. The G7 programme responds to China’s so-called Belt and Road Initiative, which Western officials have long argued traps receiving

countries in debt and with investments that benefit China more than their hosts.

The White House says the initiative seeks to leverage USD 200 billion in US investment over the next five years, along with a similar amount from G7 allies, to boost infrastructure development in lower- and middle-income nations.

It adds that most of the funding will come from the private sector, sovereign wealth and global development funds, rather

that direct taxpayer dollars.

Among the first initiatives are a USD 2 billion solar farm investment in Angola in Southwest Africa, USD 320 million for hospital construction in Ivory Coast, in West Africa, and USD 40 million to promote regional energy trade in Southeast Asia.

In a jab at China, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the G-7 is offering “sustainable, quality infrastructure” and will be “listening closely to the recipient countries.”

No, NATO, No

Demonstrators take part in an anti-NATO protest ahead of the NATO summit on June 28 and June 30, in Madrid, Spain, on Sunday. The protesters said an increase in defence spending in Europe urged by NATO is ‘a threat to peace’. **Reuters**

Prince Charles got suitcase of cash from Qatar, says report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

LONDON, JUNE 26

PRINCE CHARLES, the heir to Britain’s throne, allegedly accepted a suitcase full of cash as a charitable donation from the former PM of Qatar, according to a UK media report on Sunday.

The Sunday Times says the suitcase was one of three bundles of cash given as charitable donations which the 73-year-old received from Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber Al Thani. The three lots, which reportedly totalled Euro 3 million, were handed to the prince personally between 2011 and 2015. “Charitable donations received from Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim were passed immediately to one of the Prince’s charities who carried out the appropriate governance and have assured us that all the correct processes were followed,” Prince Charles’ office said in a statement.

AHEAD OF NUCLEAR TALKS

Tehran launches rocket into space as US fumes

ASSOCIATED PRESS

TEHRAN, JUNE 26

IRANIAN STATE television said Sunday that Tehran had launched a solid-fueled rocket into space, drawing a rebuke from Washington ahead of the expected resumption of stalled talks over Tehran’s tattered nuclear deal with world powers.

It’s unclear when or where the rocket, christened Zuljanah, was launched, but the announcement came after satellite photos showed preparations at Imam Khomeini Spaceport in Iran’s rural Semnan province, the site of Iran’s frequent failed attempts to put a satellite into orbit.

The White House said it was aware of Iran’s announcement and criticised the move as “unhelpful and destabilising.” It said it was committed to using sanctions and other measures to prevent further advances in Iran’s



Footage released by Iran’s state TV, IRINN, shows the rocket blasting off. AP

ballistic missile program.

The launch comes just a day after the EU’s foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, traveled to Tehran to resuscitate negotiations over Iran’s nuclear program that have stalled for months. Borrell said on Saturday talks over the nuclear deal would resume in an unnamed Persian Gulf country in coming days, with Iranian media reporting that Qatar would likely host the negotiations.

Lanka struggling to secure fresh fuel supplies, energy minister says

UDITHA JAYASINGHE

COLOMBO, JUNE 26

SRI LANKA is struggling to secure fresh fuel supplies, a top government minister said on Sunday, as the crisis-hit country of 22 million people is down to just 15,000 tons of petrol and diesel to keep essential services running in the coming days.

“We are struggling to find suppliers. They are reluctant to accept letters of credit from our banks. There are over \$700 million in overdue payments so now suppliers want advance payments,” Power and Energy Minister Kanchana Wijesekera told reporters.

In the past two months Sri Lanka largely received fuel via a \$500 million Indian credit line, which ran out in mid-June. A petrol shipment due last Thursday failed to arrive and no fresh shipments are yet scheduled, Wijesekera said. “We have about 9,000 metric tons of diesel



A daily wage labourer waits for work in Colombo, Sunday. AP

and 6,000 metric tons of petrol left. We are doing everything we can to get new stocks but we don’t know when that will be.”

The government on Sunday asked public employees to work from home until further notice.

US delegation visits

A top delegation from the US Treasury and State Departments arrived in Colombo on Sunday

for a three-day visit to assess the situation. The US delegation will hold talks with the country’s top leadership and explore the “most effective ways” to help the island nation resolve its unprecedented economic crisis.

A team from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is already in Sri Lanka for talks on a possible \$3 billion bailout package. **REUTERS**

SOUTH AFRICA

22 youths found dead in tavern, cause not yet known: police

AGENCIES

JOHANNESBURG, JUNE 26

SOUTH AFRICAN police are investigating the deaths of at least 22 people at a nightclub in the coastal town of East London early Sunday morning.

It is unclear what led to the deaths of the young people, who were reportedly attending a party to celebrate the end of winter school exams.

Local newspaper Daily Dispatch reported that bodies were strewn across tables and chairs without any visible signs of injuries.

“At this point we cannot confirm the cause of death,” said health department spokesperson Siyanda Manana.

“We are going to conduct autopsies as soon as possible to establish the probable cause of death,” Manana said.

“We are talking 22 bodies right now,” Manana added.

Police Minister Bheki Cele was on Sunday morning expected to visit the scene.

The owner of the club, Siyakhanga Ndevu, told local broadcaster eNCA that he had been called to the scene early Sunday morning.

“I am still uncertain about what really happened, but when I was called in the morning I was told the place was too full and that some people were trying to force their way into the tavern,” he said.

Earlier Brigadier Tembinkosi Kinana said police were alerted by members of the public to the incident at Scenery Park, about three kms from the city centre. “The circumstances under which they died are under investigation,” Kinana said.

Brigadier Kinana added it was too early to determine the cause of death of the youngsters aged between 18-20 years.

POPULARISED KATHAK, BHARATANATYAM AND ODISSI IN THE COUNTRY

New fans pay tribute to China’s legendary Indian classical dancer

K J M VARMA

BEIJING, JUNE 26

THE INDIA-CHINA frictions took a backseat for a while here as a large number of Chinese flocked to a scintillating show of Indian classical dance performances to pay emotional tribute to Zhang Jun, China’s legendary dancer of Bharatanatyam, Kathak and Odissi.

Over 300 Chinese fans of Zhang thronged the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) auditorium on Friday night to watch sterling performances from young Chinese children as well as highly talented profession-

als who devoted their lives practicing and performing Indian classical dance forms in this country. It was a dream come true for Jin Shan Shan, Zhang’s ardent student and widely acclaimed Bharatanatyam dancer both in India and China who took to her Guru’s footsteps and devoted her life in popularising the Indian classical art form.

The audience included India’s Ambassador to China Pradeep Kumar Rawat and former Vice Minister of Finance of China and President of AIIB Jin Liqun who cheered the meticulous dances to classical Tamil and Hindi music.

Zhang Jun (1933-2012) has inspired generations of Chinese



India’s ambassador to China Pradeep Kumar Rawat with performers at the show to pay tribute to Zhang Jun (right) in Beijing on Friday. PTI

and Indians with her relentless passion to learn Bharatanatyam, Kathak and Odissi and make

them popular in China. Encouraged by the then Chinese premier Zhu Enlai at the



height of India-China bonhomie, she first visited India in the early 1950s during which she was

captivated by the Indian dance and art forms.

Barring Mao Zedong’s Cultural Revolution (1966-76) during which millions of intellectuals were persecuted, she travelled to India seven more times mastering the dance forms studying under maestros like Birju Maharaj, Uday Shankar and later at the Kalakshetra, a revered institution of Bharatanatyam in then Madras, now Chennai.

She later helped to form China’s famous dance troupes, the Oriental Song and Dance Ensemble. “She wanted to bring the beauty of the Indian dance to more people. I hope that she will continue to enjoy, on the other side

of heaven, the joy and beauty that Indian dance has brought to her,” Zhang’s son Han Xiao Xia said.

Rawat, who during her earlier stints here met Zhang, said she was one of the greatest teachers of Indian classical dances in China. “I always wondered what attracted her towards Indian dance forms as the attraction was very deep, almost like soul touching. To us it appeared that probably in her earlier birth she was born in India and carried that bond to this birth in China. “The energy radiated out of her devotion attracted many students even during a phase when our bilateral relations were undergoing some turbulence,” Rawat said. **PTI**



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EVERYDAY ECONOMY

WHO ARE THE G7, WHOSE SUMMIT IN GERMANY INDIA HAS BEEN INVITED TO?

EXPRESSNEWSSERVICE
NEW DELHI, JUNE 26

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi is in Germany to attend the Group of Seven (G7) Summit at Schloss Elmau, a century-old retreat in a nature reserve in the Bavarian Alps. He is expected to speak in two sessions that include Environment, Energy, Climate, Food Security, Health, Gender Equality, and Democracy, the Ministry of External Affairs said earlier this week. He will also hold bilateral meetings with leaders of some of the participating countries.

Group of 7

The G7 is an informal forum of leading industrialised nations: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. Representatives of the European Union are always present at the annual meeting of G7 heads of state and government. Germany holds the G7 presidency in 2022. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has invited India, along with Argentina, Indonesia, Senegal, and South Africa to the 2022 Summit as partner countries. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, will take part virtually on June 27. The United Nations, the WHO, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the IMF and the World Bank, are also participating in the Summit.

G6, G8, G7

The G7 Germany website says the first "World Economic Summit", which later became the G7, was launched in 1975 by former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and then Federal Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. The heads of state and government of Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy, Japan and the US — a Group of Six — met for a fireside chat at Rambouillet Castle in France.

The participants exchanged ideas on the economic problems of the 1970s — the first oil crisis and the collapse of the system of fixed exchange rates (Bretton Woods) — and agreed on international economic policy and



PM Narendra Modi addresses an event in Munich on Sunday. PTI

initial measures to fight the global downturn.

In 1976, Canada was added to the group, and the first G7 met in Puerto Rico. The first talks between the then European Community and the G7 took place in London in 1977, and since the Ottawa Summit of 1981, the European Community (now European Union) has been part of all working sessions.

In the 1980s, the interest of the G7 expanded to include foreign and security policy issues. In 1998, the Group of Eight was constituted as Russia became a member. Russia was thrown out of the group after its violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity in 2014.

G7 numbers

As of 2022, G7 countries make up 10% of the world's population, 31% of global GDP, and 21% of global carbon dioxide emissions, according to the Summit website. China and India, the two most populous countries with among the largest GDP figures in the world, are not part of the grouping.

In all G7 countries, annual public sector expenditure exceeded revenue in 2021. Most G7 countries also had a high level of gross debt, especially Japan (263% of GDP), Italy (151%) and the US (133%).

Medicine's Tetsuya Honda, formerly of Kyoto University, as saying.

The team tested conditional knockout mice (cko mice), which means mice with specific genes removed or inactivated. Here, the mice had their ovaries removed, which were supplemented with estradiol pellets. In contrast to wild-type mice, the cko mice without the natural ovarian hormones estradiol showed symptoms of severe skin inflammation.

Once these mice were given estradiol, the production of cytokines in immune cells was reversed, reducing the inflammation. This effect was also observed in human cells *in vitro*.

"These results indicate that estradiol suppresses psoriatic inflammation by regulating neutrophil and macrophage cells," the author was quoted as saying.

Source: Kyoto University



"Our results have not only revealed the molecular mechanisms of sex differences in psoriasis but also shed new light on our understanding of the physiological role of estradiol," the release quoted Hamamatsu University School of



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Why sanctions are flagging

Western sanctions were predicted to inflict pain on Putin's govt. The EU's dependence on Russian energy has prevented that from happening so far, and Russia's export outlook continues to look good in the near term.

HARISH DAMODARAN

NEW DELHI, JUNE 26

SINCE FEBRUARY 23, the day before Russia invaded Ukraine, the European Union's Council has adopted six rounds of sanctions to "impose clear economic and political costs" on the Vladimir Putin government, and to "cripple the Kremlin's ability to finance the war".

Western governments, including the United States and United Kingdom, have cut off major Russian banks from SWIFT, the interbank messaging system to enable cross-border payments. They have frozen some \$315 billion out of the \$550 billion of the Central Bank of the Russian Federation's (CBR) foreign exchange reserves held in currencies and gold within their jurisdictions, as on January 1.

On April 6, the White House issued a statement that the "most impactful, coordinated and wide-ranging economic restrictions in history" would cause Russia's GDP to "contract up to 15 per cent this year, wiping out the last 15 years of economic gains".

Has this intent been borne out by reality?

More than four months into the war, the story hasn't quite followed the West's predicted script. To begin with, the latest median forecast of GDP decline for 2022 — based on a survey of 27 economists from various organisations (including the likes of Credit Suisse, Goldman Sachs and J.P. Morgan) conducted by the CBR between May 25 and 31 — is at 7.5%. This is better than the -9.2% average growth forecast in a previous survey from April 13-19.

The median forecast of consumer price inflation for the year too, has fallen from 22% to 17% between the two surveys.

The sanctions initially led to a free fall of the Russian ruble, from about 76 to the US dollar in mid-February to a low of 158.3 on March 7. The CBR was forced to raise its key interest rate from 9.5% to 20% on February 28, which was aimed as much at bolstering the currency — which US President Joe Biden had mocked as "rubble" — as at reining in inflation risks.

But as the ruble bounced back to 75-76 levels towards the second week of April — and is currently trading at over seven-year-high levels of 53.4. And the central bank slashed its key rate to 17% on April 8, to 14% on April 29, 11% on May 26, and to 9.5% on June 10.

With the ruble appreciating, inflation trending downwards (rather than upwards as

RUSSIA'S GOODS EXPORTS: OIL & GAS VERSUS OTHERS

	TOTAL EXPORTS	CRUDE OIL	OIL PRODUCTS	NATURAL GAS*	OTHERS	OTHERS (% SHARE)
2001	96.55	24.99	9.37	17.77	44.42	46.00
2011	515.41	181.81	95.71	68.14	169.74	32.93
2012	527.43	180.93	103.62	66.93	175.95	33.36
2013	521.84	173.67	109.41	71.48	167.27	32.05
2014	496.81	153.90	115.81	59.93	167.17	33.65
2015	341.42	89.59	67.45	46.32	138.05	40.43
2016	281.71	73.71	46.19	34.09	127.72	45.34
2017	352.94	93.38	58.25	41.83	159.48	45.19
2018	443.92	129.20	78.24	55.04	181.44	40.87
2019	419.72	122.20	66.97	49.38	181.17	43.16
2020	333.38	72.56	45.37	32.43	183.01	54.90
2021	493.82	110.97	69.98	62.85	250.02	50.63

*Includes liquefied natural gas.

Source: Central Bank of Russia

predicted by the White House) and GDP unlikely to shrink quite as much as predicted, the sanctions have not had their intended effect.

Nor has Russia's external trade really suffered. The country's surplus of goods and services exports over imports has widened, from \$44.5 billion in January-May 2021 to \$124.3 billion in January-May 2022. So has its overall current account surplus — from \$32.1 billion to \$110.3 billion — for the comparable periods.

Why do the sanctions appear not to have had the desired effect?

The main reason is the dependence, especially of EU countries, on energy imports from Russia. In 2021, Russia accounted for 25.7% of the petroleum oil, 44.5% of natural gas, and 52.3% of coal imported by the 27-nation bloc.

During the first 100 days of the war, from February 24 to June 3, Russia's revenues from fossil fuel exports totalled 93 billion euros (\$98 billion), according to the Finland-based Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA).

That included 46 billion euros from crude oil, 13 billion euros from refined oil products, 24 billion euros from pipeline gas, 5.1 billion euros from liquefied natural gas, and 4.8 billion euros from coal. Out of the 93 billion euros, the EU's share alone was 57 billion euros or 61%.

In its sixth "package" of sanctions on June 3, the EU decided to phase out imports of

crude oil and refined products from Russia over six and eight months respectively. Temporary exemption was granted to countries such as Hungary and Slovakia, which import crude oil by pipeline and "have no viable alternative options".

This was preceded by an outright prohibition on Russian coal imports from August, as part of a fifth round of sanctions on April 8.

It remains to be seen how successful these import phase-out plans will be, in terms of implementation on the ground. The test will be in the winter, when energy demand peaks.

Fatih Birol, executive director of the International Energy Agency, recently warned that Europe is at risk of energy rationing, particularly "if we have a harsh and long winter", and if the cold weather coincides with resurgent demand in China post the lifting of Covid lockdowns there.

The EU for now has not announced any ban on natural gas imports from Russia. This, even as the Russian state-owned energy giant Gazprom has cut gas supplies to nearly a dozen EU countries, including Germany, France and Italy, over the past few weeks.

Have China and India had a role to play in this situation?

It is significant that China and India have emerged as major buyers of Russian fossil fu-

els, CREA's latest tracker shows Russia's cumulative exports of oil, gas, and coal to the EU since February 24 at around 64.4 billion euros.

But among individual countries, China (16.6 billion euros) has surpassed Germany as the largest importer from Russia. At No. 8 is India. Its imports during this period are valued at 3.7 billion euros, comprising 3.2 billion euros of oil, and the balance coal.

While the EU is trying hard to wean itself off Russian energy, Moscow has aggressively diversified its exports towards China and India. China was the world's top importer of crude oil in 2021, with India ranked third behind the US.

In May, Russia overtook Saudi Arabia to be China's leading crude supplier. In 2021-22, Russia was the ninth biggest crude exporter to India. However, by May, it had jumped seven positions to displace Saudi Arabia and become No. 2 after only Iraq.

By continuing to sell to the EU, and at the same time ramping up exports to China and India by offering steep discounts on international prices, Russia has effectively blunted Western sanctions.

Does this mean sanctions targeting Russia have ended up hurting the West?

The table shows the share of oil and gas in Russia's merchandise exports at close to 50% in 2021. It was roughly 66% during the 2011-14 period, when crude prices averaged over \$100 per barrel. High prices are again benefiting Russia, although its average oil production has fallen to 10-10.1 million barrels per day (mbd) in April-May, from 11-11.1 mbd in February-March.

As Russia has increased efforts to find alternative markets and the world is figuring out ways to trade with it, the country's exports may not drastically drop from the \$494 billion of 2021.

Moreover, it isn't just fossil fuels. In the coming months, one can expect Russia to step up exports of wheat and fertilisers. Being also the world's biggest supplier of palladium and nickel — which are central inputs in emission control systems and electric vehicle batteries respectively — besides ferro-alloys, chromium and vanadium (required for steel production), makes it easier for Russia to cope with sanctions than it is for Cuba, Iran, or North Korea.

Europe and the West might be discovering that sanctions are perhaps hurting them more than they are hurting Russia.

The coat hanger as a symbol for abortion rights



A protester makes a statement with a coat hanger earring in Roanoke, Virginia on Friday. The Roanoke Times via AP

risk to women's health and bodies.

Use as a protest tool

It was notably used in April 1969, a few years before the *Roe v Wade* verdict in 1973, in which 3 lakh protesters in Washington marched with coat hangers around their necks. They also held up signs that read: "Never Again".

In 2016, protesters in Ohio decorated the

Statehouse fencing with coat hangers to oppose the Heartbeat Bill, which would outlaw abortion once a foetal heartbeat could be heard — at six weeks, before most people even discover they are pregnant — even though, at that point, *Roe v Wade* allowed abortion until viability (roughly 24 weeks).

In May this year, a college student bought a pack of six wire hangers on Amazon and shipped them to the Supreme Court. In a viral Tik Tok post, she encouraged others to do the same.

IMAGERY: Very often, pro-choice protest imagery shows Lady Liberty with the coat hanger in her hand instead of the scales — something that the late Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonist Paul Conrad, a devout Catholic, drew back in 1988 while critiquing anti-abortionists with a cartoon captioned "Alternative to Roe vs. Wade". Conrad had previously criticised then US President George H W Bush by depicting him holding a gun in one hand and a coat hanger in the other, meant to show his pro-gun and anti-abortion stance.

Some pro-choice activists and doctors advocate using less sensational imagery. They believe the coat hanger makes abortions

seem unsafe and violent, which bolsters anti-abortion arguments and dissuades women from seeking abortions.

JEWELLERY: The DC Abortion Fund, a US-based non-profit group that helps low-income women afford abortion care, used to give out silver coat hanger pendants to its monthly donors. "The coat hanger is a reminder of patient's suffering when abortion is placed out of reach," according to its website. The coat hanger has been turned into pro-choice jewellery or accessories, such as pendants or badges, often. Some even get it tattooed as a reminder of protests for legal abortion rights.

ART: Abortion has also been an important theme in feminist and political art. For some, the coat hanger comes as a loaded metaphor.

"The Right to Choose" (2021), a print by Laia Abril and Carmen Winant, shows the coat hanger on one side and newspaper obituaries of feminists on the other. It was created in response to a Texas law banning most abortions after six weeks of pregnancy.

In 2019, a Los Angeles-based guerrilla street artist, who goes by the name Plastic Jesus, placed a set of wire coat hangers in pharmacies calling them "at-home abortion kits".

Nepal's abandoned partnership with US troops, and how its Army weighed in

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE

KATHMANDU, JUNE 26

NEPAL RECENTLY had to abandon at the last minute a plan to sign a State Partnership Programme (SPP) with the United States. Amid political outrage against the programme, the Nepal Army stepped in on June 15, asserting it will not accept a deal that goes against Nepal's non-aligned foreign policy. The Sher Bahadur Deuba government relented, deciding three days later that the Foreign Ministry would communicate with the US government.

The SPP would have brought the Utah State National Guard and the Nepal Army working together on "humanitarian and disaster management". It was to be signed during Deuba's proposed visit to the US in July. It is now shelved for the foreseeable future.

The widely expressed fear was that giving legitimate entry to US forces would have dangerous security implications for Nepal.

The criticism has been on three concerns: that it would mean Nepal aligning militarily with the US; that India, which has close links with the Nepal Army, would not like a US presence of this nature; and that it would provoke China to retaliate in some way or the other.

These concerns are based on series of developments: Nepal and US signing the \$500-million grant of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (Nepal compact) after a US threat to review relations with Nepal in February; Nepal voting against Russia in the United Nations; US Deputy Secretary of State Zeya Ujira visiting a Tibetan refugee camp in Nepal; and Kathmandu recently rolling out the red carpet for Charles A Flynn, commanding general of United States Army Pacific.

Political storm

Last week, the House of Representatives debated the consequences of the SPP once signed. A "draft agreement" purported to have been exchanged had found its way to the media, the opposition and Army gener-

als. Three ministers made different statements: Foreign Minister Narayan Khadka said the SPP was not a "military pact" and the US troops would go back on completion of the term; Law Minister Gobinda Bhandi denied any letters having been exchanged; and Home Minister Balkrishna Khand said the government would not sign such a deal.

At a Cabinet meeting on June 20, ministers asked the Foreign Ministry to write to the US. A day earlier, the State Affairs Committee of Parliament had forced the Foreign Minister to backtrack from his earlier statement.

Deuba has so far been avoiding a response to the full House as well as the Committee. There is pressure on him to call off his US visit.

The Army

Literally disowned by political parties and the government since the 2005-06 political changes, the Army has been largely quiet all these years — until this assertive reaction against the programme.

In April 2006, after the Maoists decided

to give up insurgency against the state, their leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda denounced the Nepal Army at the Prime Minister's residence as "an institution of rapists and the corrupt". Later that year, Prachanda signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement with Prime Minister G P Koirala. While the Maoists became part of the government, the Nepal Army was projected as the 'Private Army' of the King.

International agencies involved in the peace process, including United Nations Mission to Nepal (UNMIN), began holding seminars for downsizing the 100,000-strong Army as part of "security sector reforms". Nepal Army Generals were denied leadership roles in the peace process in view of the Army's human rights record. UNMIN was later packed off prematurely for its alleged bias towards Maoists.

The Army, which never confronted political leaders during this period, has chosen to speak up at a time when it is being seen as regaining its esteem amid political instability

and allegations of corruption in government.

The latest move

President Bidhya Bhandari, in her capacity as Supreme Commander of the National Army, conveyed her concern to the PM about the impact of the SPP, a source said.

A letter by then Army Chief Rajendra Chhetri to US Ambassador Aliana B Tepliz on October 27, 2015, leaked to the media recently, said: "As authorised by the government of Nepal, it is my honour to formally request the establishment of a National Guard State Partnership program for Nepal in the near future." While the Army has said Gen Chhetri's letter was in the context of the devastation caused by an earthquake that year, which led to aid from US and other countries, his letter has come to the rescue of Deuba, who can use it as a shield to claim that the Nepal Army was seeking a partnership with the US before his time — when his rival K P Oli, now a critic of the SSP, has just taken charge as Prime Minister.

Also leaked was a purported "draft" of an agreement (declared fake by US authorities) said the US State National Guard and the Nepal Army shall cooperate in areas like joint training exercises in the high-altitude terrain in Nepal, besides counter-intelligence and against cybercrime. Geographically, "high-altitude areas" mean areas along the border with China.

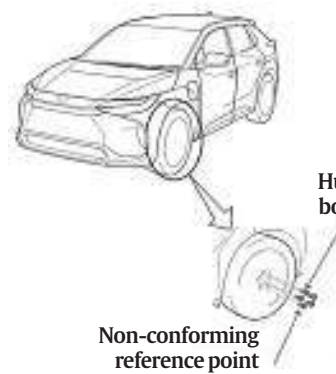
The 2019 US Indo-Pacific Strategy Report and website mention Nepal and Sri Lanka as considering the MCC grant (Sri Lanka has since declined it) as parties to the SPP.

China and India

China has not yet responded to the government's decision. A Defence Ministry official said: "China has taken up the issue several times, but it should be happy now as domestic politics forced Deuba to call it off."

India's acting Ambassador Namgya C Khampa met Nepal Army Chief Gen Prabhuram Sharma the same day the Army Headquarters issued the statement.

12 ECONOMY

SECTOR WATCH
ELECTRIC VEHICLES‘Loose wheels’
behind EV recall:
What next in
Toyota’s journeyWHERE THE
PROBLEM LIES

2,700 CARS:
Recall of new
electric vehicle,
bZ4X

**BETWEEN
MAR-JUNE:**
Period of
production

SRIDHAR V
NEW DELHI, JUNE 26

LESS THAN three months after it launched the bZ4X SUV globally, Toyota Motor Corporation has issued a recall of nearly 2,700 units of the new electric vehicle (EV) following concerns that its “loose wheels” may fall off. The Japanese auto manufacturer, in a recall notice issued to owners of the bZ4X on Friday through various channels, said the action is for all vehicles “in North America, Europe and Asia Pacific”.

What is the issue?

According to a spokesperson for Toyota, the hub bolts on the wheels of the concerned bZ4X battery EVs run the risk of loosening “to the point where the wheel can detach from the vehicle” after “low-mileage use”. In case one of the wheels detaches from the car while driving, it could result in the vehicle veering off, increasing the risk of a crash.

Even though the cause of the defect is “still under investigation”, Toyota said it had alerted Japanese safety regulators about the issue. “No one should drive these vehicles until the remedy is performed,” the company added. The recalled vehicles include nearly 2,200 in Europe, about 270 in North America, over 110 in Japan and 60-odd in the rest of Asia, Toyota said Thursday. All these vehicles were produced between March and June. Moreover, nearly 400 units of the Solterra all-electric SUV by Subaru, developed in collaboration with Toyota, have been recalled for the same issue.

How will it affect Toyota?

Despite being a long-standing giant in the automotive game, Toyota is a rather late entrant in the EV arena. Announced in early 2021, the bZ4X — the first in Toyota’s ‘bZ’ (beyond Zero) series of battery EVs — is touted to be its flagship EV offering in the crossover SUV segment. Starting at ₹42,000 (over ₹32,86,000) and available in

limited markets, the bZ4X has not really set the roads on fire. Following its launch in Japan earlier this year, Toyota had said the model was only available on lease as concerns remained over maintenance, residual battery performance and residual value.

According to experts, the bZ4X recall comes early in its lifecycle, and as the defect pertains to a mechanical component rather than the vehicle’s electric drivetrain, Toyota is likely to resolve it quickly. However, the fact that the recall affected its first mass-market electric car may pull Toyota back a bit in the global EV race — a competition where Tesla has a significant lead.

The US EV maker made a name for itself back in 2012 with the market-topping Model S sedan. Tesla cemented its status in 2015 with the launch of the mid-size crossover SUV Model X, now among the world’s best plug-in cars. Adding to Toyota’s roadblocks is the global semiconductor shortage, which forced it to significantly curtail production across models and markets.

Road ahead for Toyota

Vehicle recall is not a new trend; in one of the biggest recalls in recent times, Toyota and other automakers had flagged several millions of car models manufactured since 2013 due to faulty airbags manufactured by Japan’s Takata Corporation, which subsequently went bankrupt. The bZ4X recall may turn out to be just a minor setback for Toyota, given its large plans across the globe.

In India, Toyota and Suzuki Motor Corporation signed a memorandum of understanding in 2017, to bring together their strengths and promote mutual supply of vehicles. On Friday, the Japanese majors announced that work will start on production of a new SUV developed by Suzuki at Toyota Kirloskar Motor — Toyota’s India arm — in August. The companies plan to export the upcoming model to markets beyond India, including Africa.

ON THE TABLE: 28% GST ON ONLINE GAMING, CASINOS, HORSE RACING

GST Council to vet verification plan for high-risk taxpayers

AANCHAL MAGAZINE
NEW DELHI, JUNE 26

VERIFICATION AFTER registration for high-risk taxpayers under Goods and Services Tax (GST), along with use of geo-tagging and physical verification, are some of the measures suggested by a Group of Ministers (GoM) on system reforms. These steps, along with another ministerial panel’s recommendation to levy 28 per cent GST on online gaming, casinos and horse racing, are expected to be discussed in the upcoming GST Council meeting on June 28-29.

The GoM on system reforms, chaired by Maharashtra Finance Minister Ajit Pawar, has also recommended mandatory biometric authentication for high-risk taxpayers along with use of artificial intelligence to prepare reports detailing risky behaviour of such taxpayers. Verification of electricity bill details and bank accounts will also be used as a source for identifying these high-risk taxpayers, sources said.

The other ministerial panel on gaming and casinos, headed by Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma, has recommended that no distinction should be made in these activities merely on the

SOME SUGGESTIONS BY GoMs

■ The GoM on system reforms, chaired by Maharashtra FM Ajit Pawar, has also recommended mandatory biometric authentication for high-risk taxpayers along with use of artificial intelligence to prepare reports detailing risky behaviour

■ The other ministerial panel on gaming and casinos, headed by Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma, has recommended that no distinction should be made in these activities merely on the ground that an activity is a game of skill or of chance or both

ground that an activity is a game of skill or of chance or both. As per the estimates shared by Federation of Indian Fantasy Sports to the GoM, the online gaming sector’s market size is around ₹34,600 crore. It has also suggested that online gaming should be taxed at full value of the consideration, including contest entry fee paid by the player on participating in the game. In case of race courses, the GoM has suggested that GST be levied on the full value of bets pooled in the totalisators and placed with the bookmakers.

For casinos, the GoM is learnt to have recommended that the tax would be levied on the full face value of the chips/coins purchased from the casino by a player. No further GST would apply on the value

of bets placed in each round of betting, including those placed with winnings in previous rounds, sources said.

The GoM is also learnt to have suggested that 28 per cent GST be levied on entry/access fees into casinos, which compulsorily includes foods/beverages etc. But, optional supplies, made independently of the entry tickets, would be taxed at the rate applicable on such supplies, sources said. At present, online gaming (without betting) attracts 18 per cent GST. Now, all categories are likely to attract a higher levy of 28 per cent. The Council will also discuss rate hike suggestions from the fitment committee for items such as cut and polished diamonds and tetra packs; and rate cut for rope-

way cable and ostomy appliances, including waterproof pouch for collecting waste from the body. Also, a clarification would be issued on GST rates on electric vehicles, to state that EVs, whether fitted with batteries or not, would attract 5 per cent tax. The fitment committee had also clarified that Nicotine Polacrilex Gum, which is commonly used to aid in smoking cessation in adults, attracts 18 per cent GST. On the issue of taxation of virtual digital assets including cryptocurrency, the fitment committee has recommended deferring the decision and suggested that states of Haryana and Karnataka shall study all aspects and submit a paper in due course.

The committee, which includes officials from both states and Centre, gives its recommendation regarding tax rates, after receiving demands from stakeholders, in almost every meeting of the Council. This time around it has suggested the status quo for over 215 goods and services.

Rate rationalisation measures under GST are being considered as the compensation regime — under which states were offered compensation for revenue loss below the guaranteed compounded 14 per cent rate — comes to an end in June after five years of the rollout of the indirect tax regime.

423 infra projects show cost overruns of ₹4.95 lakh cr

As many as 423 infrastructure projects, each entailing an investment of Rs 150 crore or more, have been hit by cost overruns of more than Rs 4.95 lakh crore, as per a Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation report



563: Number of delayed projects decreased if delay is calculated on the basis of the latest schedule of completion

OF 1,568 PROJECTS, 423 reported cost overruns and as many as 721 projects were delayed

TOTAL ORIGINAL COST OF IMPLEMENTATION of the 1,568 projects was Rs 21,59,802.67 crore and their anticipated completion cost is ...Rs 26,54,818.05 crore, which reflects overall cost overruns of Rs 4,95,015.38 crore (22.92 per cent of original cost)

EXPENDITURE incurred on these projects till May 2022 is Rs 13,42,535.22 crore, which is 50.57 per cent of the anticipated cost of the projects

43.34 MONTHS: The average time overrun in these 721 delayed projects

OF THE 721 DELAYED PROJECTS

NO. OF PROJECTS	DELAY SPAN
113	1-12 months
121	13-24 months
350	25-60 months
137	61 months

REASONS

- Delay in land acquisition
- Delay in obtaining forest and environment clearances
- Lack of infrastructure support and linkages

Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation/PTI

For 569 projects, neither the year of commissioning nor the tentative gestation period has been reported

‘Should ensure no intolerable growth sacrifice to tame inflation’

New Delhi: The economy has barely recovered from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and it should be ensured that there is no “intolerable growth sacrifice” in attempts to tame inflation “too abruptly”, according to RBI’s Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) member Jayanth R Varma. With a cautiously optimistic outlook for the country’s economy, Varma on Sunday said growth prospects for 2022-23 and 2023-24 financial years are “reasonable” even after taking into consideration the possibility of a long-drawn-out period of geopolitical tensions and elevated commodity prices.

In an interview with *PTI*,



‘Inflation will be brought down ... in medium term’

JAYANTH R VARMA

Member, MPC via IIM-A

Varma, an external member of the MPC, said the pandemic was

the biggest test to the system so far. “The inflationary episode has lasted longer than we would have liked and will continue to last longer than we would like, but, I have no doubt in my mind that inflation will be brought down to the target level in the medium term. “The Indian economy has barely recovered from the pandemic, and we have to be careful not to impose an intolerable growth sacrifice in our attempt to tame inflation too abruptly,” Varma said.

Amid inflationary pressures remaining high in recent times, the Reserve Bank of India’s MPC is moving towards a hawkish stance. *PTI*

SBI, other PSBs commit ₹6,071 crore to Adani Group for copper biz

New Delhi: Adani Group has forayed into copper manufacturing with tying up of finances from public sector lenders for a 1 million tonnes a year unit at Mundra in Gujarat.

“Kutch Copper Ltd (KCL), a subsidiary of Adani Enterprises Ltd (AEL), is setting up a greenfield copper refinery project for production of refined copper with 1 million tonnes per annum in two phases,” the company said in a statement.

For the phase-1 capacity of 0.5 million tonnes, KCL has achieved financial closure through a syn-

Volatility no bar: DIIs cushion FPI exit impact over last 8 months

ENSE ECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI, JUNE 26

UNDAUNTED BY the massive sell-off by foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) from the Indian stock markets, domestic institutional investors (DIIs), led by mutual funds and insurance companies, have invested Rs 2,88,167 crore in the stock market (excluding debt and IPOs) since November 2021.

According to stock exchange data, FPIs have pulled out Rs 3,54,285 crore in the last eight months. The FPI sell-off has been absorbed by DIIs to a great extent, preventing a major crash in the markets. While DIIs made net investments of Rs 41,983 crore in June so far, FPIs withdrew Rs 53,600 crore from Indian stocks during the month. “A global risk-off sentiment amidst increased risks to global growth have contributed to the decline in global equities including India. There are domestic factors at play as well, including high inflation and rising interest rates. Inflows into mutual funds have however remained robust, as investors turn risk-averse,” said Aditi Gupta, Economist, Bank of Baroda.

Despite huge volatility in stock markets and sustained selling by FPIs, equity mutual funds have been attracting inflows. MFs attracted net inflows of Rs 18,529 crore in May as against Rs 15,890 crore inflow in April.

Significantly, inflow through SIP (systematic investment plan) rose to Rs 12,286 crore in May from Rs 11,863 crore in April, indicating that retail investors continue to hold confidence on equity investments. This is the ninth consecutive month of SIP inflow being greater than Rs 10,000 crore, a trend which started in September 2021 with Rs 10,351 crore inflow.

MF equity schemes have been witnessing net inflow since March 2021, highlighting the positive sentiment among investors. Prior to this, such schemes had consistently witnessed outflows for eight months from July 2020 to February 2021 losing Rs 46,791 crore.

The RBI’s tightening of the monetary policy and inflated global commodity prices have pri-



The BSE, Mumbai. File

marily led the domestic markets to bleed in terms of substantial cash outflows from the equity markets during the last few months. The pace of such withdrawals was last seen when the pandemic spurred in the first quarter of 2020. Globally, the ongoing military conflict between Ukraine and Russia, rising fed rates and the return of the pandemic outbreak have further added fuel to the fire, according to Manoj Purohit, partner & leader—Financial Services Tax, BDO India.

This short-term pace of negative volatility is likely to slow down in the coming weeks if not reversed completely. “India is still on a better footing as compared to other global markets primarily on account of sustained growth patterns, better GDP numbers, recovering forex reserves, consistent demand from consumers and good financial numbers by large corporates, Purohit said.

The FPI sell-off has been on the back of a global risk-off sentiment amidst increased expectations of a slowdown in global growth and surging inflation globally. This has prompted central banks across the world to hike rates. Fed has been at the forefront, hiking policy rate to 150-175 bps this year and expectations are that this can go up to 300-350 bps. This has further exacerbated FPI outflows from EMs, including India.

Meanwhile, foreign investors pulled out close to Rs 43,837 crore (including stocks, debt and hybrid) so far this month following monetary policy tightening by the Reserve Bank and US Federal Reserve, high oil prices and volatile rupee.

Govt to invite power bids from 8K MW thermal capacities without PPAs



RK SINGH

Power Minister

New Delhi: The government will invite bids from states to sell electricity generated from 8,000 megawatt (MW) thermal capacities without PPAs, Power Minister RK Singh has said.

A total of 8,000 MW of thermal capacities in India are without any power purchase agreements, Singh, who is also the Minister for New and Renewable Energy, told *PTI*. Replying to a question related to capacities without PPAs in India, the minister said, “There are 8,000 MW of capacities which don’t have PPAs in the plan”. Sharing the government’s theme to resolve the issue, the minister informed that states have been asked to send their electricity requirement, and accordingly bids will be invited.

“We will aggregate (their demand) and call on for bids and based on the bids, whoever puts in the lowest bids, PPAs will be signed. Once PPAs are signed, they (states) will get the power,” he said.

Speaking further, the minister said there are also some thermal capacities undergoing the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) proceedings, and the government has already taken several steps to resolve the issue at the earliest. *PTI*

BRIEFLY

SAIL ex-Chairman

New Delhi: V Krishnamurthy, a former chairman of steel PSU SAIL and Maruti Udyog Ltd (now Maruti Suzuki), passed away Sunday at age of 97 in Chennai.

Goyal, economy

New Delhi: India is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world and it is expected to reach \$30 trillion in the coming 30 years, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said on Sunday.

TKAP, e-parts

New Delhi: Toyota Kirloskar auto parts unit TKAP announced inauguration of its new electrified components line, E-Drive. *PTI*

McLaughlin breaks own 400m hurdles world record

REUTERS
EUGENE, JUNE 26

FOCUS, SKILL and a little bit of “Track Town, USA” magic propelled Sydney McLaughlin to break her own world record - again - in the 400 meters hurdles on Saturday.

The Olympic gold medalist won the U.S. championships final in 51.41 seconds at Hayward Field, improving upon her own benchmark time at the American track haven of Eugene, Oregon.

The 22-year-old wrestled the lead early and never gave the rest of the field a fighting chance, clinching her spot in the world championships in front of an adoring crowd.

“It’s Track Town, USA, what can you expect?” said McLaughlin. “Any time I come here I can just feel something amazing is going to happen.”

She previously set the record with a 51.90-second performance at the U.S. Olympic trials in Eugene almost a year ago to the day, only to shatter that figure in Tokyo, collecting gold in 51.46.

“I don’t anything compares to the first time you do it, just crossing that line in awe,” she told reporters, when asked to compare which of her record-breaking efforts meant the most.

“This is just a great indicator of where we are and hopefully (we’re) going to go home and work on some things.”

Running out of lane five, McLaughlin put on a flawless performance with her opponents offering little in the way of pressure to push her toward the finish line.

McLaughlin, who also collected a relay gold in Tokyo, offered a subdued smile and double thumbs up as her accomplishment became clear. Britton Wilson finished 1.67 seconds behind with Shamier Little taking third in 53.92.

“Zoning in on what I have to focus on puts me in a headspace to really not worry about anyone else and focus on 10 my hurdles,” she said after the race, adding that she planned to celebrate by eating some “real food - beside vegetables.”

McLaughlin faces a potential showdown at the world championships with chief rival and reigning champion Dalilah Muhammad, who was absent from the national championships due to injury.

She finished second to Muhammad by seven hundredths of a second at the 2019 Doha world championships.

The top three finishers in Eugene, Oregon, who meet certain qualifying standards, and reigning global title-holders will compete at the world championships, which will be held in the United States for the first time from July 15 at the same track.

Ashwin stakes claim with restrained but probing spell

Decision on spinner’s spot would hinge on extent of off-spinner’s recovery, right/left handedness of England squad and how Jadeja and him bowl in the nets

SANDIP G
JUNE 26

THREE DAYS after he landed in Leicestershire, his arrival delayed due to COVID-19 infection and subsequent isolation at home, he produced a spell that allayed fears on both his fitness and readiness. In an unchanged 11-over-spell, where he was restrained yet menacing, he looked the most potent of India’s bowlers on a sun-baked placid surface, where most batters found run-scoring a less challenging exercise than it was on the first three days.

The swing on the surface had dissipated, but it had yet deteriorated to encourage spin. In the morning, the seamers, Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami bowled with venom and vim, pounding the deck hard, but a breakthrough eluded.

So strolled in Ashwin to bowl the 20th over of the final day. From the outset, his intentions were obvious, he was not looking to marvel batsmen with outrageous turn or twinkling variations. In fact, he hardly unpacked his full bag of variations. He wanted to work his rhythm into the game, stifle the batsmen, get a measure of the conditions and then spread his wings.

The lengths thus were fuller, trajectory a fraction flatter and line on off-and-middle stump. He seemed in no mood for a battle of wits with batsmen. Sam Evans, the Leicestershire batsman who averages a shade under 30, bestowed him with respect, studiously blocking every ball. But his partner Shubman Gill, conversely, decided to draw Ashwin into a challenge. So in the next over, he dragged Ashwin from a country mile outside the off stump—a rare instance he bowled wide in the early part of the spell—and swept him powerfully through square-leg.

On cue, Ashwin corrected his line and went around the stumps to angle the ball across him. But Gill would still not spare him. He stepped out and powered him through mid-wicket, picking the ball, slower through the air but harmlessly, from the off-stump.

The stroke roused Ashwin. The contest intensified. He reverted to bowl from over the stumps, alternating between a good-length on off-stump and middle-stump, mixing up his pace. He couldn’t harness a dangerous degree of drift, the wind blowing into him worked against him as well, but now he was making the ball drop. So many variegated skills has he that he could sum-



It was R Ashwin's first appearance following his recovery from COVID-19.

mon whatever he wants whenever he wants. He gradually pulled the length back, bringing Gill, who prefers the back-foot perch, forward. Gill probably read too much into Ashwin’s ploys. Ashwin, sometimes, tends to over-complicate himself, but these days, batsmen over-complicate themselves when tussling him.

Anyway, Gill was brought out of his comforts. He chalked out an escape route—to sweep himself out of misery and reclaim the early ascendancy. This is what Ashwin does at his best—to sow self-doubts in batsmen’s mind. Until then, Gill was batting with an air of authority. Now, though, he felt both insecure and inadequate. He unfurled the sweep. But Ashwin, ever a psychoanalyst of batsmen, floated one on the leg-stump. Gill failed to control the shot and holed out in the deep.

Thereafter, he began to work over Evans. As tempting as it might have been to bamboozle him with a deceptive variation of his, he was in no mood for quick kill. Rather, he induced a suicide. Evans was keen to use his feet, but Ashwin’s pace and trajectory kept him crease-tied. He knew it was only a matter of time before the restless Evans would step out. The batsmen’s feet telegraphed his plan and Ashwin bowled a shortish ball outside the leg-stump. Evans was beaten and stumped. One more over, and Ashwin walked back gingerly into the pavilion, wearing a content smile.

Shortly, Ravindra Jadeja replaced him. Louis Kimber welcomed him with a four before Hanuma Vihari, hitherto in wretched

form, walloped him for a six and four off successive balls. Jadeja bounced back, suffocated the batsmen with tight lengths and grabbed a brace of wickets to the three he had snaffled in the first innings. That would lay another layer to the Jadeja-Ashwin debate for the Edgbaston Test.

A stray warm-up game, though, would not have the final word on the debate. The decision would hinge on several factors—the extent of Ashwin’s recovery, the nature of the surface (Edgbaston has a spin-friendly reputation), the combination that India would seek, the right/left handedness of the England squad, and how they bowl in the nets in the days preceding to the Test that begins on July 1. But Ashwin, to his credit, has emphasised that he is in fine fettle, having been benched for the first four Tests of this series last year.

Overall, the visitors would leave East Midland satisfied with their bowlers’ rhythm, but dissatisfied with most of their batsmen’s touch. Only Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, Rishabh Pant and KS Bharat were fluent. Both Shreyas Iyer and Hanuma Vihari spent considerable time in the middle, without exuding any assurance. Cheteshwar Pujara was scratchy rather than steady in the second innings, after the first-innings duck. The brightest spark of the sleepy day, though, was Ashwin.

Brief scores: Indians 246 for 8 dec (Bharat 70, Walker 5-24) and 364 for 9 (Kohli 67, Jadeja 56*) drew Leicestershire 244 (Pant 76, Jadeja 3-28, Shami 3-42) and 219 for 4 (Gill 62, Kimber 56, Ashwin 2-31).

England 113 runs away from series sweep against New Zealand

REUTERS
LEEDS, JUNE 26

ENGLAND ARE 113 runs away from completing a series whitewash against New Zealand after the hosts put themselves in a commanding position with eight wickets in hand in the final innings of the third test on Sunday.

Chasing 296 for victory, Ollie Pope and Joe Root were at the crease at stumps after the pair made light work of a competitive target as England finished day four on 183-2.

The pair set up what promises to be an intriguing final day, with Headingley hopeful of having a packed house as they look to replicate the Trent Bridge test’s atmosphere by offering free tickets.

England lost Alex Lees to a run-out after a mix-up in the fifth over while his opening partner Zak Crawley (25) was caught in the covers off Michael Bracewell, with skipper Kane Williamson involved in both dismissals.

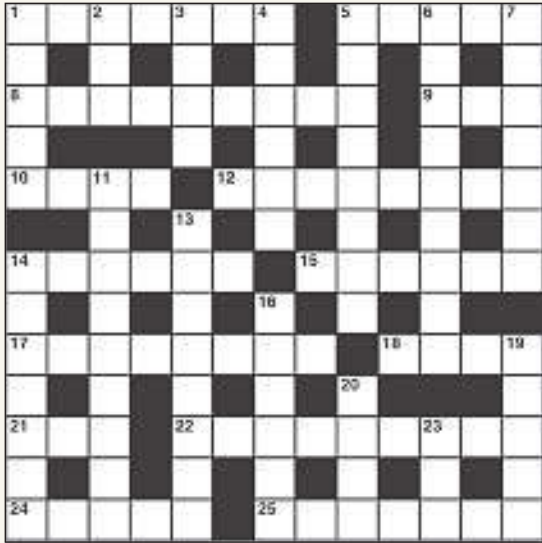
But Pope (81) and Root (55) steadied the ship with an unbeaten 132-run partnership as they saw off the fast bowlers and targeted spinner Bracewell, who went for over six per over. New Zealand also lost two reviews in successive balls when Root was rapped on the pads. The former England skipper survived on both occasions, giving Williamson a lot to ponder every time there was a shout for leg-before wicket.

Earlier, New Zealand were dismissed for 326 after the in-form Daryl Mitchell and Tom Blundell had again frustrated the hosts.



Pope (81) and Root (55) steadied the ship with an unbroken 132-run partnership.

CROSSWORD 4778



ACROSS

- 1 Has second thoughts about a hundred workers (7)
- 5 Approaches a listener in two directions (5)
- 8 Dead Roman exchanged for wife of Perseus (9)
- 9 Left with a thousand to beat (3)
- 10 They take turns on and off (4)
- 12 Plant it in haste (8)
- 14 Display by top-class band (6)
- 15 Published and is prosecuted (6)
- 17 Sticking together he said no changes are needed (8)
- 18 Ring maker (4)
- 21 A religious palindrome (3)
- 22 It may help to rescue a country from mad policy (9)
- 24 Cask Edward put into good order (5)
- 25 He has something to say on the radio (7)

DOWN

- 1 Respond - to an encore call? (5)
- 2 Fish paid for at the door (3)
- 3 Either way it’s high time (4)
- 4 Embarrassing moments in parts of the play (6)
- 5 Possibly ten areas mostly in southwest Asia (4,4)
- 6 Not occupied? There’s no hurry (2,7)
- 7 Breed of dog that will change some day (7)
- 11 Separate layer on ruined temple (9)
- 13 It could be indeed so unfair (3-5)
- 14 Opposed to making a profit. Good man! (7)
- 16 Manages adequately round a bend in two-door cars (6)
- 19 A better bed (5)
- 20 Knows the sound of an organ (4)
- 23 Put a question like ‘the capital of Kenya?’ (3)

Solutions Crossword 4777: Across: 1 Tenement, 5 Ford, 9 Arras, 10 Tension, 11 Supernatural, 13 Hyenas, 14 Turban, 17 Installation, 20 Minimum, 21 Orate, 22 Nice, 23 Ministers. Down: 1 Trap, 2 Nurture, 3 Master-at-arms, 4 Noting, 6 Oiler, 7 Dangling, 8 Instructions, 12 Chairman, 15 Brocade, 16 Alumni, 18 Sonic, 19 Mess.

JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip. There are 350 varieties of shark, not counting __ and __ - L M Boyd (4,-4)

LNZAO



EPUYLL



DNSOO



NAPPED

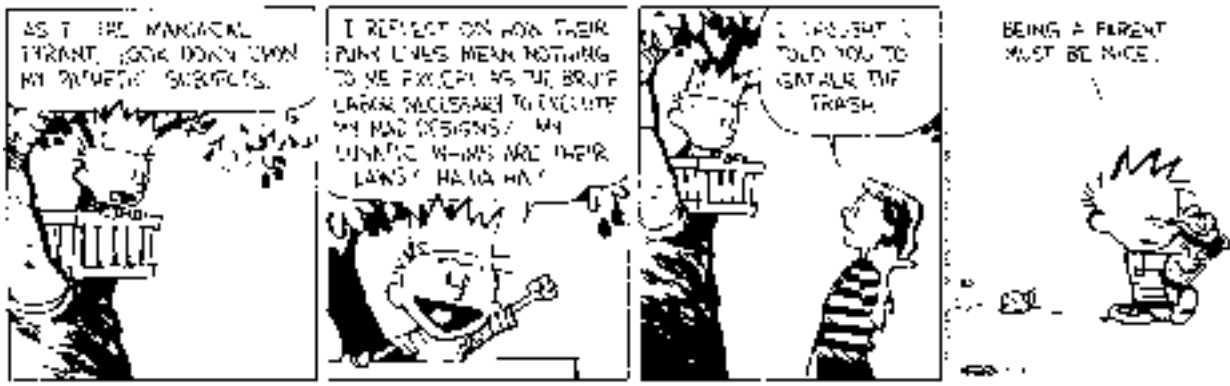


SOLUTION: ZONAL, SNOOD, PULLEY, APPEND Answer: There are 350 varieties of shark, not counting __ and __ - L M Boyd

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



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

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

SUDOKU 4878

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

SOLUTION SUDOKU 4877

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

DAY TODAY

BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)

Lunar alignments are very much to your taste today, but will only confer their promised benefits if you are happy to go along with all adventurous suggestions and invitations. Remember to check up on your rights, lest someone takes advantage of you.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)

As the days pass, it will become much easier for you to relax and enjoy yourself. On the other hand, if you imagine domestic responsibilities are becoming lighter, you might be in for a shock! If people you live with begin to think that you're slacking, then they may soon play a trick on you.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)

Good communication is of the essence. Over the next few days you must say what needs to be said. You should have got something important off your chest by now, but there are still one or two hidden resentments. These can be left until later.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)

The Sun is now preparing to reduce its romantic presence, a poetic indication that you must draw the veil over several difficult situations, and make sure that a number of promising opportunities are of lasting value. Hang on to the past by all means, but not on to people and places that are no good for you.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)

Sometimes planetary cycles just refuse to be convenient. Your stars are out of tune with the working week, and ideally you should extend your personal activities until Wednesday, at least. If there is serious business to conduct today, make sure you concentrate on the financial aspects.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)

Secrets are all very well, but the fact that you're still not letting on about something important could eventually cause a spot of aggravation. You must pick your time carefully - next week might bring the best moment to reveal all. Can you wait? I think so.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)

Like many other people, your mood will change on Wednesday and Thursday. So, if you have social arrangements to confirm, do so as soon as possible, because by the end of the week partners will be showing an increasing tendency to misunderstand the simplest instruction.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)

There's still a lot to happen at work, and you are by no means at the end of a period of professional adjustment. A complete change of direction is likely for many Scorpios, and even if you're not in paid employment, a long-term ambition is about to crystallize.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)

The Moon is in an intense relationship with your sign, an indication that while you may be a little more emotional than usual, you have the advantage in most dealings with other people, both at work and at home. You must use your talents and energy wisely.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)

If financial decisions are pending, don't mess around or prevaricate. There is a great deal to be gained from exerting your monetary muscle to get your own way. Dazzle people with the facts, and you may just find that they come round to your way of thinking.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)

You'll have to clarify the issues in all personal relationships now. Although you are about to enter a phase in which the emotional situation should be generally satisfying, you'll be guided by your instincts and hence liable to make one or two false moves.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)

If conditions at work need to be improved, or if your daily burden must be lightened, then talk to the people who can help. You have everything to gain by opting for dialogue and debate, everything to lose by keeping yourself to yourself. Stay close to the folk who matter.

BRIEFLY

Will compete with myself at CWG: Mirabai Chanu

Patiala: It won't be surprising if diminutive Mirabai Chanu, stands atop the podium, flashing her radiant smile, after winning a gold medal at the Commonwealth Games on July 30. After all, she will enter Birmingham, as title favourite. Chanu's personal best is 207kg (88kg+119kg) which is far better than the best effort of Nigeria's Stella Kingsley, who will be her nearest rival and has managed only 168kg (72kg+96kg) till date. "CWG will be easy for me. I will be fighting with myself," Chanu said. She then added, "There is not much competition in CWG, but that doesn't mean there is no competition. I have to give my best performance keeping in mind the future tournaments." The former world champion also wants to breach the much-anticipated 90kg mark in the snatch section, which she confesses has become somewhat of a mental block. "Yes (it has become a mental block). We have planned to lift 91kg or 92kg at the CWG. Hopefully, it will happen." **PTI**

Deepika & Co. bag silver at Archery WC

Paris: The Indian women's recurve team of Deepika Kumari, Ankita Bhakat and Simranjeet Kaur settled for a silver medal after the trio's fairytale run was halted by Chinese Taipei in a one-sided final at the World Cup Stage 3 here on Sunday. India concluded their campaign with one gold and two silver medals -- two of them coming in the compound section. The tournament was all about compound archer Jyothi Surekha Vennam's dream comeback, who led India's medal tally with one gold (mixed team event with Abhishek Verma) and one silver (individual) on Saturday. **PTI**

Dhanalakshmi wins 200m gold

Almaty: Ace sprinter Sekar Dhanalakshmi ran her personal best time to win 200m gold at the Qosanov Memorial Athletics Meet while the likes of shot putter Tajinderpal Singh Toor and javelin thrower Rohit Yadav returned to India without competing in the event here on Sunday. Dhanalakshmi ran a creditable sub-23 second, clocking 22.89s to better her earlier personal best of 23.14s she had come up last year. She had won a 200m gold in the national Inter-Sate Championships in Chennai earlier this month with a time of 23.27s. She missed the automatic qualification mark of 22.80s for World Championships. **PTI**

Indian U-17 women suffer 0-2 defeat

New Delhi: The Indian women's team suffered a 0-2 defeat against Mexico in their last match of the 6th Torneo Female U-17 Football Tournament in Vilesse, Italy on Sunday. Mexico netted one in each half to wrap up the match, with Katherin Sillas and Alice Gallegos getting on the scoresheet. The Indian girls had earlier gone down to USA 0-7 and Chile 1-3. India is set to host the FIFA 2022 U-17 Women's World Cup later this year. **PTI**

Madhya Pradesh end long Ranji wait

Coach Chandrakant Pandit guides them to six-wicket win over 41-time champions Mumbai

ABHISHEK PUROHIT
BENGALURU, JUNE 26

MADHYA PRADESH, which last won the Ranji Trophy 69 years ago – back then known as Holkar state – finally returned to glory days, thumping powerhouse Mumbai by six wickets on Sunday. Holkar dominated the domestic scene around the time of Indian independence, and in times when cricket relied on benevolence of the antiquated princely states. But the 2021-22 crown counts as the first for the state of MP and for the region since modern-day federalism took firm root in India, and it's taken a long time coming for the cricket-loving central plateau.

There was the last-afternoon disappointment of the 1998-99 final at the same Chinnaswamy stadium, 23 years ago when Madhya Pradesh had gone down in the final. This time they beat the 41-time champions Mumbai outright by six wickets. The team was coached by former India wicketkeeper-batsman Chandrakant Pandit – hoisted on his players' shoulders after victory. Pandit has now won his fourth Ranji title in five final appearances in six seasons, after Mumbai in 2015-16, and Vidarbha in 2017-18 and 2018-19.

MP boasts of a rich ancient past and in the 11 seasons from 1944-45 to 1954-55, the erstwhile Holkar team made the Ranji final ten times, and won the title on four occasions, including against Bombay in 1947-48. Boasting greats such as CK Nayudu, CS Nayudu, Syed Mushtaq Ali and Chandu Sarwate, the Holkar era was one of the most dominant for any side in Indian domestic cricket, before the states' reorganisation led to the formation of Madhya Pradesh in 1956.

For a cricketing culture that has subsequently produced players such as Narendra Hirwani, Rajesh Chauhan, Amay Khurasiya, Jai Prakash Yadav, Naman Ojha and Devendra Bundela, and boasts the proud heritage of the Holkar decade, the 1998-99 final was the only one MP had had to remember with longing all these years. Led by Pandit, MP had taken a 75-run first-innings lead against Karnataka and had one hand on the trophy.

Set a target of 247, they were 108 for 3 and in sight of a draw before collapsing to 150 all out late on the final day.

To this day, Bundela, who would become the third-highest run-getter in Ranji history, rues what could have been – for his team as well as for his then dream of playing at the



The 2021-22 Ranji Trophy counts as a first for MP, even though as Holkar, the state was a force in domestic cricket.

PTI

For a cricketing culture that has produced players such as Narendra Hirwani, Rajesh Chauhan, Amay Khurasiya, Jai Prakash Yadav, Naman Ojha and Devendra Bundela, and boasts the heritage of the Holkar decade, the 1998-99 final was the only one MP had had to remember with longing all these years.

highest level – had he not fallen to Vijay Bharadwaj around tea to spark the MP collapse. 2021-22 looked poised to be different and this team has achieved the ultimate goal despite not having the services of players like

Venkatesh Iyer, Avesh Khan, Ishwar Pandey and Kuldeep Sen. They played only four front-line bowlers, leaving out seam regular Puneet Datey and playing a debutant batting all-rounder in Parth Sahani instead.

"Missing out on this trophy when I was captain and to win this trophy (on Sunday) on the same ground is indeed special. Some say father could not do it but son has done it so Aditya Shrivastava has done this tremendously," Pandit said.

How Mumbai was outgunned

Gaurav Yadav made his debut back in 2012 but bowled the spell of his life on the first morning of the match, going past Prithvi Shaw's edge five times in a single over alone. His new-ball partner Anubhav Agarwal made his debut this season, and displayed similar commitment and control, as the pair bowled nearly 65 overs in

the first innings. They made the ball do a lot more than the three Mumbai seamers, although they also had a much longer stretch of overcast skies to exploit.

Off-spinner Saransh Jain, playing only his 11th first-class game in eight years, tossed up the ball beautifully and got it to climb. He also played his part in flattening Mumbai with the bat, making a maiden half-century at No 8. Young left-arm spinner Kumar Kartikeya posed questions on an unhelpful surface with his accuracy and ability to drift and cut the quicker ball into the right-handers.

Promising Yash Dubey and veteran Shubham Sharma sucked the fight out of Mumbai with contrasting centuries in a 222-run second-wicket partnership. And Rajat Patidar arrived to bat Mumbai out of the match with a hundred that will be remembered for its disdainful dominance.

Bumrah likely to be a rare fast bowling captain for India

There is still a slim chance for Rohit to play, and lead India, in Birmingham as the five-day isolation period mandated for Covid-positive persons finishes just before the game begins

room for a significant duration.

Bumrah was named vice-captain for the ODI series in South Africa at the beginning of the year, when Sharma was out with injury and Rahul had to lead the side. Fellow fast bowler Pat Cummins has had an impressive start to his Australian Test captaincy stint, winning the Ashes and a series in Pakistan. But India has been reluctant to trust pace bowlers with the added responsibility.

The fact that there was hardly anyone of Kapil's overall stature over the last 35 years could be a factor. Also, fast bowling is back-breaking business, especially on pitches traditionally associated with India, and there may



Jasprit Bumrah was named vice-captain when India faced South Africa in an ODI series at the beginning of the year.

AP

be a line of thought that after sending down their share of overs, pacers would be left with little physical and mental reserves to focus on bowling changes, field placements, team build-

ing and motivating other players.

But there's a chance Bumrah may be cut from a different cloth.

"If given an opportunity (to lead India), it would be an honour. I don't think any player would say no. There's no bigger feeling than that," Bumrah had said earlier this year when he was named vice-captain for the ODI series in South Africa.

"I don't like to chase things because I don't want to. I am a person who believes that God has a plan and everything will find its own way, so I don't like to hamper the plan that is there. I try to never change anything. Whatever role is asked of me I would do it with the best ability that I can. I don't want to change the whole organisation, you are always a leader when you are a senior member of the team so it's just a post that comes with you. Basically, you try to help all the people in whatever capacity you can."

With England a transformed lot lately under Ben Stokes and Brendon McCullum, it remains to be seen how Bumrah deals with the challenge – both as a bowler and captain – if he is elevated to the top job.

Ben Foakes tests positive for Covid

Headingley: England Wicketkeeper-batter Ben Foakes has tested positive for Covid-19 and is replaced in England XI by Sam Billings as a like-for-like replacement.

Foakes will miss the rest of the third Test against New Zealand at Headingley.

On a further medical assessment yesterday evening, he subsequently tested positive after administering an LFT COVID-19 test.

Foakes was unable to keep wicket on day three due to a stiff back – Jonny Bairstow took the gloves at that point – and he subsequently tested positive for coronavirus after further medical assessment. **ENS**

Can unique Wimbledon without ranking points throw up a surprise champ?

NAMIT KUMAR
JUNE 26

The sun shines brightly on the pristine grass at SW19 as Wimbledon, devoid of ranking points but full of intrigue, is set to kick off on Monday. Two of the main draw's biggest personalities – Rafael Nadal and Serena Williams – were confirmed at the last moment, and the men's World No. 1, and three of the women's Top 20 are barred from participating in light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Top seeds Novak Djokovic and Iga Swiatek, both coming into the Championships in polar opposite form, are the overwhelming favourites. The pressure of expectation weighs heavily on both as they open the play on Centre Court on Monday and Tuesday respectively, though questions on their form leave the door slightly open for fans to see a first-time winner lift the trophy this year.

The Big 4 monopoly

The men's singles title at SW19 has been won by one of Djokovic, Nadal, Roger Federer, or Andy Murray every single year since 2002. That streak is showing no signs of letting up either, with Djokovic and

Nadal the top two seeds, and Murray a big dark horse, floating unseeded in the main draw this year.

Djokovic is the bookmakers' favourite: the three-time defending champion, chasing a seventh London crown, having been more dominant on grass than any other player. But it has been a muted run-up to the third Major of the year.

Djokovic's 2022 season has been a mess, due to his contentious anti-vaccination stance and the unwelcome distraction it brought. He has played only 21 matches, and as things stand, will not be travelling to New York for the US Open.

Handed a relatively easier draw, the 35-year-old has avoided any dangerous floaters in the early rounds; Nadal, Matteo Berrettini, Stefanos Tsitsipas, and Felix Auger-Aliassime are all in the other half, and Hubert Hurkacz is in the other quarter.

Nadal, halfway to the Calendar Slam for the first time in his career making him customary favourite.

But the chronic foot injury, is a cause for concern and the 36-year-old has said the new radio frequency treatment has alleviated the pain, but only the first week will indicate whether he is moving with power and freedom. With a fourth-round against



Novak Djokovic plays a return as he practices ahead of the Wimbledon.

AP

2017 finalist Marin Cilic looming, he will need to find as much match-sharpness as he can find early on.

With Daniil Medvedev and Alexander Zverev out, the one likely to lead the charge

to break the Big 4's hegemony is last year's finalist Berrettini. The Italian, whose massive serve and forehand combination seem tailor-made for grass, would have been an outside-favourite a few months ago, after he

missed the clay season for an operation in his right hand. He's unbeaten ever since his return though, with titles in Stuttgart and the Queen's Club making him one of the tournament favourites.

The big-serving Hurkacz, who beat Federer in straight sets in the quarterfinal last year, and the well-rounded and powerful Auger-Aliassime are both threats. Even Tsitsipas, usually out of touch on grass, picked up form by winning the title in Mallorca this week.

Can Swiatek keep her run going?

The 21-year-old from Poland has been on a 35-match winning streak that started in Doha back in February and lasted all the way through to the recent French Open. Her powerful game and aggressive tactics are yet to find a match, and her overwhelming dominance on the women's tour is reminiscent of a certain American making her comeback over the next fortnight.

Swiatek is yet to prove herself on grass though. She could not go past the fourth round at SW19 last year, the only times she has ever won a main draw match there. Her power is an asset, and she has crucial and versatile return of serve in her armour.

Primarily among her challengers, is third seed Ons Jabeur. The Tunisian became the first Arab to break into the top 10 this year and with a title at the Berlin tune-up, will be hoping for a more impressive showing this time around.

A trio of former Wimbledon champions – Simona Halep, Angelique Kerber, and Petra Kvitova – have been handed confidence-boosting draws. Serena Williams too makes her long-awaited return to the tour, no matches in exactly one year barring a few rounds of doubles at Eastbourne last week, but self-belief intact. The American has a new coach and looks calm and fit.

Emma Raducanu, whose fairytale story to the US Open title last year began at Wimbledon, will have the partisan British crowd willing her on but has a tough first-round encounter against Alison van Uytvanck and injury and fitness issues plaguing her first full year on tour though.

Chief among the dark horses is Beatriz Haddad Maia, a relative unknown on the tour whose 12-match winning streak resulted in back-to-back titles in Nottingham and Birmingham, and becoming the 23rd seed in the main draw at SW19. While still untested on the big stage, she is one to watch to go deep in the draw.