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**PANCHAYATI RAJ DIWAS**

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

To youth of Valley, he says, 'You will never suffer the way your parents, grandparents did in past'

PM Narendra Modi with J&K LG Manoj Sinha and Panchayat Raj Minister Giriraj Singh at Palli village, Sunday. *PTI***ARUN SHARMA**  
PALLI (SAMBHA), APRIL 24

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

The newly launched projects worth Rs 20,000 crore — which PM Modi inaugurated from village Palli in Sambha district of Jammu and Kashmir — include the

Banihal-Qazigund road tunnel that is expected to reduce travel time between Jammu and Srinagar by two hours, and a 500 KV solar power plant at Palli. Foundation stones were laid for the Rattle and Kwar hydel projects on river Chenab, and the Delhi-Amritsar-Katra Expressway, among others.

Referring to a change in work culture in the Union Territory, the PM, speaking on the occasion of Panchayati Raj Diwas, said that there was a time when a government file from Delhi used to take two to three weeks to reach Jammu and Kashmir.

"Today, I feel happy that a 500 KV solar power plant gets commissioned within three weeks and also starts generating power," he said, adding that all the houses in Palli village will now get solar power, making it carbon-neutral and self-reliant in energy.

Promising to take J&K to new heights, the PM said, "*Mein Jammu Kashmir ke naujawan ko kehna chahta hoon, sathiyon, mere shabdon pe barosa kariye* (I want to tell the youth of Jammu & Kashmir, please trust my words)."

Specifically addressing the

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 4**

## Privatised airports: Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand back TN on revenue share

**SOUMYARENDRA BARIK & PRANAV MUKUL**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 4**Gogoi in Vadodara on Sunday. *Bhupendra Rama*

## Expression of views on social media vital to democracy: Ex-CJI Gogoi

**ADITI RAJA**  
VADODARA, APRIL 24

FORMER CHIEF Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi Sunday said freedom of expression "is a vital part of democracy" so long as it does not cross the 'lakshman rekha' of public order and morality. He was expressing his views on police action on social media posts by individuals, in the wake of the arrest of Vadgam MLA Jignesh Mevani. Mevani was arrested by the Assam police on Thursday in connection with an allegedly defamatory tweet against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

When asked if police action against individuals for social media posts was a sign of intolerance, Gogoi told *The Indian Express*, "I am not aware about the specific case of the Gujarat MLA but expression of views — now on social media — is a critical part of healthy democracy, so

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 4**

## MEVANI SENT TO JUDICIAL CUSTODY, JUDGMENT TODAY

**PAGE 8**

## Covid 3rd dose picks up pace, over half of 3.87 lakh in last 4 days

**KAUNAIN SHERIFF M**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

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

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

Apart from Delhi, UP and Haryana re-introduced the mask mandate last week following a slight uptick in cases.

This apart, the Ministry's data show that over half of the total number of third doses for the 18-59 group were administered in states with large metro areas.

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

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

Health officials, who are part of the Centre's Covid immunisation monitoring team, attributed the low third-dose numbers overall to the "relatively stable situation" and availability of these doses only on payment in private facilities.

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

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

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 4**

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

**ANJU AGNIHOTRI CHABA**  
JALANDHAR, APRIL 24

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

Government agencies, including the Food Corporation of India, had bought 83.49 lt of wheat in the current rabi marketing season (April-June) as of Sunday evening. "Going by the daily market arrivals, which have clearly slowed down, total procurement may not even reach 100 lt this time," a senior Punjab

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

Mandi Board official told *The Indian Express*.

Government wheat purchases from Punjab — which is also the largest contributor to the Central pool — hit a record 132.14 lt in the 2021 season. The last time that procurement fell below 100 lt was back in 2007 and

**EXPLAINED** Why this may not be bad news

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

2006, when these totaled 70.99 lt and 69.07 lt, respectively.

In 2006 and 2007 — which also saw soaring international prices leading to a global food

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 4****THE WORLD****MACRON WINS FRANCE ELECTION AS LE PEN CONCEDES****UKRAINE PRESIDENT PUSHES FOR MORE WEAPONS** **PAGE 12**

## While Kishor meets Congress, I-PAC seals deal with rival TRS

**ANISHA DUTTA & MANOJ CG**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

AMID DISCUSSIONS with the Congress leadership and indications that election strategist Prashant Kishor could join the party, the Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC) has finalised its contract for the 2023 Assembly elections with K

Chandrashekar Rao's Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), the Congress's opponent in Telangana.

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

The move has not gone down well with the Congress. AICC-in-

charge of the state, Manickam Tagore, put out a cryptic image that read: "Never trust someone who is friends with your enemy", along with a tweet: "Is it correct?". Tagore could not be contacted despite repeated attempts.

After extensive discussions with Kishor, TRS working president KT Rama Rao on Sunday announced that his party has formally signed a contract with

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 4**

## For the first time, a Manipuri film addresses sexual identity

**PAGE 1 ANCHOR****ESHA ROY**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

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

Laishram, who himself came out as gay in 2019, says the movie is based on the alleged honour killing of a gay youth in

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

Manipur in 2013. He says he came to know of the incident through the YouTube talk show he began in 2020 amid the first

pandemic lockdown when he returned to Imphal from college in Chandigarh.

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 4**

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## EXPRESSBASICS: HOW TO SETUP AND USE DIGILOCKER

The made-in-India application available on Android and iPhones is basically a fool-proof way to digitally reproduce your documents in a secure, personal safe. Here's how you can setup the DigiLocker app and fetch important documents when needed.

ENTERTAINMENT



### NAWAZUDDIN SIDDIQUI INTERVIEW

The actor talks about his desire to try different genres

TECH



### SAMSUNG GALAXY M33 5G REVIEW

This phone comes with Samsung's own Exynos 1280 chipset

# FROM PAGE ONE

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



# NSG neutralises explosive found near Burail jail, collects sample

Will share report with UT Police after forensic analysis



An NSG commando at the spot where suspected explosive was found, in Chandigarh on Sunday. *Express*

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
CHANDIGARH, APRIL 24

A TEAM from the National Security Guard (NSG) in Delhi Sunday neutralised the explosive substance, including detonator, codex wire and explosive powder, weighing around 250 gm found in the shape of 'tiffin bomb' near Model Burail Jail.

The NSG team seized a certain sample of the explosive substance to ascertain the nature and type of the explosive. A report will be shared with the Chandigarh Police after a forensic analysis. The NSG team takes around one hour to neutralise the substance. A sound of minor blast was heard in the vicinity. The entire area was already cordoned off. Before the beginning of defusing work, mediapersons were sent around 300 metres from the boundary wall of Model Burail

Jail where the substance was found on Saturday night.

"An NSG team seized the sample of explosives. They will share a report with us after a detailed examination. We have registered an FIR in this connection. The investigation is on to find out the origin, source of the explosive and motive to place it near Model Burail Jail," said SP (UT) Ketan Bansal.

The explosive substance was found when a police patrolling party of the Operations Cell had noticed a burning codex wire at the rear of Model Burail jail on Saturday night. As the police team doused the fire, the team members saw a bag containing the 'tiffin bomb' type object. They alerted senior police officers. At the same time, a team of District Crime Cell returning from Mohali also spotted the burning codex wire and stopped. Later, the Army authorities were

informed. Model Burail Jail is a high-security jail which had witnessed the escape of four convicts, including three Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) terrorists, convicted in the assassination of former Punjab chief minister Beant Singh in January 2004.

"There are multiple layers of boundary walls, the first of which is located right near the barracks where the jail inmates are lodged. The explosive substances were found outside the last boundary wall of the jail. From the rear, where the explosive device was found, there are three more boundary walls before one can access the barracks in which inmates are lodged. As per our assessment, the recovered explosive was not powerful enough to reach the barracks. We have beefed up the security cover of the jail," a senior jail officer said. A case was registered at Sector 49 police station.

## Commuters suffer as vehicular movement restricted for 19 hours

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
CHANDIGARH, APRIL 24

RESIDENTS OF southern sectors commuting to Mohali from Sector 51 and vice versa suffered as vehicular movement had been restricted for more than 19 hours since Saturday night after the discovery of explosive device.

The restrictions were withdrawn and roads were opened around 2.30 pm on Sunday. The commuters were advised to take alternative routes. Model Burail Jail is situated in Sector 51. The substance was found near the rear boundary wall of the jail across the main road facing Sector 52. All the four main roads leading to the jail were barricaded and vehicular movement was restricted.

People coming to Chandigarh from Mohali came from Dolphin roundabout in Mohali and commuters going towards phase 8 in Mohali from Chandigarh used to take the route of Mattaur barrier.

"We have been seeing heavy presence of police in the area since last night. Once we were advised to stay indoors. Later, the roads were out of bounds. This afternoon, the barricades were removed," said Surjit Singh, a resident of Sargodha Housing Society, Sector 50.

"Everything happened all of a sudden. There was no time to issue any advisory in ad-

### SEARCH OP IN BURAIL JAIL

A four-hour search operation was conducted in Model Burail jail checking all the barracks, their luggage and other premises Sunday. The search was conducted in the wake of recovery of explosive device near the boundary wall of Model Burail Jail. The search was started around 12 in the noon and ended at 4 pm. Sources said reliable inputs were being received by the UT Police about the suspected activities in the nearby areas of Model Burail jail. Meanwhile, the jail administration has decided to install CCTV cameras covering the outer view of Model Burail jail from the rear boundary wall.

vance. The entire area was cordoned off. As the explosive was neutralised, we removed the barricades. Commuters were allowed to use the roads," a police officer said. More than 150 police personnel of the UT Police were deployed for maintaining the law and order situation around the Model Burail Jail.

### GHAZIPUR VILLAGE

## Dozens fall ill, residents allege drinking water mixed with sewage

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
MOHALI, APRIL 24

SEVERAL PEOPLE in Ghazipur village in Zirakpur have fallen ill in the past few days, resulting from alleged consumption of sewerage water mixed with drinking water.

Ghazipur residents alleged that the waters were mixed due to the on-going digging, being done to lay internet wires by a private company. Pardeep Kumar, one of the protesting residents said that around a dozen people, including infants have fallen ill, and were admitted in various hospitals in Panchkula and Chandigarh. They also accused the officials of Zirakpur Municipal Council (MC) of negligence and staged a protest on Sunday.

**The residents say they have been taking up the issue with the Zirakpur MC but the officials have not been listening, adding that it could be dangerous for the children**

Abhishek Saini, another protestor said that children between the age group of 2 to 6 years fell ill. He alleged that digging work punctured the drinking water supply pipe and the sewerage water was mixed the drinking water. "We have been taking up the issue with the Zirakpur MC but the officials are not listening to us. It could be dangerous as

most of the children have fallen ill," he said.

The MC officials, however, said that the work of water supply comes under the purview of the water supply and sanitation department.

The Sub-Divisional Officer of the department, Karamjeet Singh, said that they will check on Monday and if anything happened to the supply line, it will be repaired.

Dera Bassi Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM), Swati Tiwana also assured the villagers about fixing the issue.

Two people had died due to suspected diarrhoea last year after sewerage water mixed with drinking water in Baltana area last year. The district administration at the time had assured that such a problem would not arise.

## RWA fined Rs 31,000 for hoarding congratulating Kejriwal and CM Mann

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
CHANDIGARH, APRIL 24

THE CHANDIGARH Municipal Corporation on Sunday imposed a fine of Rs 31,000 on Joint Action Committee of a residents welfare association, for putting up a hoarding congratulating Aam Aadmi Party supremo Arvind Kejriwal and Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann.

After getting a tip off that the boards were installed, the anti encroachment wing was sent to remove them. The officer on special duty then calculated the penalty that came out to be Rs 31,294. A statement released by the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation said, "Continuing the efforts to eliminate unauthorised hoardings, banners and posters from the city of Chandigarh, the Municipal Corporation Chandigarh removed more hoardings today and a penalty of [Rs] 31294/- imposed against JAC as per the violation of Advertisement Control Order 1954."

On the day of the oath taking



After getting a tip-off that the boards were installed, the anti-encroachment wing was sent to remove them. *Express*

ceremony of Punjab Congress Chief Amrinder Singh Raja Warring, which was Friday, a fine of Rs 29,390 was slapped by the MC on the PPC chief for putting up posters and banners in the city illegally, without permission. The oath taking ceremony was taking place at the party office in Sector 15, when the notice was issued. According to the MC, 13 posters and banners including three big ones were found by the civic body. They were removed by the anti encroachment wing. At the chowks between Sector 16 towards PGI, several

banners and posters had been put up welcoming Warring.

Putting up posters is regulated in Chandigarh under the Advertisement Control act. No one is allowed to put up banners and posters under the said Act. Interestingly, this was the first time that the civic body had slapped a fine on a leader of a political party for putting up posters, banners without its permission. There have been instances in the past when notices have been sent by the corporation to such erring leaders, but a fine has never been issued.

### BRIEFLY

#### UT boy secures 2nd rank in military college merit list

*Chandigarh:* A student of UT's Government Model Senior Secondary School Sector 19C, Ish Phogat secured second place in the all-India merit list for admission to Rashtriya Indian Military College, Dehradun. The exam was held in August 2021. According to the family, a teacher from Government Model Senior Secondary School Sector-35, Samir Sharma guided Ish.

#### Pet owner booked as dog bites woman

*Chandigarh:* A woman resident of Sector 16 was bitten by a pet dog when she was walking on Saturday. She received four injuries on her left hand. The victim was identified as Samita Satyarthi. Police registered a case against the owner of the dog. The woman reported that despite repeated requests, the owner did not leash it. Police said the pet owner is a retired person.

#### Market body president booked

*Chandigarh:* The president of Shastri Market shopkeepers' body Jaswinder Singh Nagpal, was booked for obstructing a woman Sub-Inspector, Bhupinder Kaur, of the anti-encroachment wing of the municipal corporation on Saturday. Nagpal, snatched seized goods from them, and reportedly mistreated the S-I. A case was registered at Sector 17 police station.

ENS

### COLONY NO. 4 EVICTION

## Give us vacant EWS flats on rent: Residents

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
CHANDIGARH, APRIL 24

WITH THE Chandigarh Administration giving a 48-hour ultimatum to the residents of colony number 4 at Industrial Area, residents have now requested to be relocated to the vacant EWS flats in Maloya and housing colony.

Residents of colony 4 stated that they will try to meet the Chandigarh Deputy Commissioner Vinay Pratap Singh on Monday, and request that the flats be given to them on rent.

Rajinder, a resident, said, "I had sought information under Right to Information Act (RTI) and have got to know that 203 small flats and 55 flats under 240 ORT scheme are lying vacant. Not just this, 43 small flats are lying vacant in Sector 53 scheme and 4 EWS flats under EWS scheme Dadu Majra are lying vacant."

He added, "We are just requesting if these vacant flats can be given to us on rental basis. Several families can be adjusted there. They can manage to give Rs 3,000 rent somehow."

Residents of colony number



Residents of Khuda Lahora protest against the UT Administration's demolition drive on Sunday. *Express*

4 along with members of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) had protested on Friday against the ultimatum given by UT Administration.

It was demanded that the colony should not be demolished till the residents get pucca houses or alternative arrangement are made.

The AAP demanded that hundreds of EWS flats which are lying vacant and getting dilapidated at many localities in

Chandigarh for years should be allotted to the residents of these colonies, so that they can be properly utilised.

The demolition drive is being conducted by the Chandigarh Administration to end all of the illegal constructions and encroachment outside the lal dora.

Lal dora is the village land that can be used for non-agricultural purpose only or for support systems like livestock.

### Demolition postponed after protests

After massive protests by residents of Khuda Jassu and Khuda Lahora, the demolition drive was postponed on Sunday by the estate office. The residents had parked their tractors and raised slogans against the administration. They blocked the main road as well. The administration had planned to demolish illegal structures outside the lal dora in these belts.

## Mohali builders to pay property tax for unsold commercial, residential buildings

**JAGDEEP SINGH DEEP**  
MOHALI, APRIL 24

IN A major relief to the property buyers, all the civic bodies in the district have asked the builders to pay property tax of commercial as well as residential buildings until the buildings are sold to the buyers. The civic bodies decided to increase the revenue to carry out the developmental works.

The Zirakpur Municipal Council (MC) has also issued a notice in this regard saying that the builders will be liable to pay the property tax of the buildings until they sell their properties.

"There has been a big issue of pending property tax. The builders would sell their properties and buyers have to pay the tax. Sometimes the buyers

even do not know about their pending taxes. In that case, the civic body has to face the financial losses due to delay in the payment of the property tax," said an officer of Zirakpur MC.

The officer said that there are hundreds of builders in the district who have been developing residential as well as commercial projects.

The officer added that there are several projects where the builders have completed the buildings but do not pay the taxes.

In Mohali district, Kharar, Nayagaon, Zirakpur, Derabassi and Lalru have the MCs where several projects are undergoing. The MCs are also facing a financial crunch.

In Mohali, the Municipal Corporation has a target of collecting property tax of around Rs 24 crore. The MC had col-

lected the property tax in the city due to which the tax collection had gone up in the last few years.

In Zirakpur and Kharar, many builders had many pending projects from where the civic bodies can earn a good amount of property tax to sustain the developmental works in their respective areas.

If the officials are to be believed, both the Zirakpur and Kharar MCs could generate a revenue of around Rs 20 to 25 crore annually from the projects where the builders have not paid the taxes.

At Zirakpur, the MC had already initiated the work to collect the pending property tax. The MC officials had also advised the property buyers to check the status of the property tax before buying any properties.

## Corruption case: VB arrests Assistant Sub-Inspector, other accused on run

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
MOHALI, APRIL 24

THE VIGILANCE Bureau (VB) on Sunday arrested Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) Major Singh one of the accused in a corruption case. The other accused, Gurpreet Lali, is absconding.

The VB officials probing the case said that ASI Major Singh, who was posted at Sirhind police station, was arrested in connection with an FIR registered against the police officer

and a private typist for allegedly taking bribe from a farmer of Bhalhmajra village in Fatehgarh Sahib district.

The case was registered on April 22 on the complaint of Harbans Singh, a farmer who allegedly paid a bribe of Rs 50,000 to Major Singh after he was threatened to have a murder case registered against him.

Harbans Singh had taken an injured person to the hospital but the man had succumbed to the injuries. The other accused, a private typist named

Gurpreet Singh Lali, was also involved in the crime. Lali was allegedly hand in glove with ASI Major Singh and also demanded Rs 10,000 from Harbans Singh.

Pressurised by the accused Harbans Singh sent the video and audio clips of the two accused taking the money from him to the anti-corruption helpline number launched by Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann last month, following which the action was taken.

## Covid: Over 200 jabbed at Bhavan Vidyalaya camp

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
CHANDIGARH, APRIL 24

BHAVAN'S OLD Students' Society (BOSS), the official alumni network of Bhavan Vidyalaya, Chandigarh, organised a Covid vaccination camp for children below 18 years of age on Saturday.

More than 200 doses were administered during the camp organised at Bhavan Vidyalaya, Sector 27, Chandigarh. Dose 1 and dose 2 of Corbevax and Covaxin were made available at the camp. This vaccination drive was made possible with the support of the UT Administration. Senior principal Vineeta Arora appreciated the efforts of the BOSS team and applauded their proactive approach. She appealed to all present to follow Covid safety protocols in view of the increasing number of cases



During the inauguration of the vaccination camp. *Express*

in neighbouring cities.

The camp was the fourth successful one organised by BOSS in two years. BOSS has actively participated in supporting the needy since the pandemic broke out in 2020, and has vaccinated over 1,500 people in the Tricity. Its multiple donation drives and outreach programmes have been appreciated by the Chandigarh Administration and people at large.



## 6 REGION



Smoke billows from a forest fire in Shimla, Saturday night. PTI

# CM Mann, senior officers to see 'Delhi model' of education, healthcare today

ENS & PTI  
CHANDIGARH/DELHI, APRIL 24

PUNJAB CHIEF Minister Bhagwant Mann and his senior officers will visit health institutes and schools in the national capital on Monday to learn the "Delhi model" and replicate it in the state, an official said. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), before coming to power, had promised to improve the condition of schools and hospitals in Punjab. "In a bid to revamp the existing health and education infrastructure across the state, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann will undertake a whirlwind tour of the premier health institutes

**Mann will be accompanied by senior officers from both school education, and health and family welfare departments, to take inputs in the two crucial sectors directly attributable to human development, a spokesperson said**

and schools in the national capital on Monday," a spokesperson of the Chief Minister's Office said here on Sunday.

He will be accompanied by a battery of senior officers from both school education, and health and family welfare departments, to take inputs in the two crucial sectors directly attributable to human development, the spokesperson said.

A statement issued by the Delhi government said Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Mann would visit government schools, hospitals and mohalla clinics, along with their teams, to understand how the "Delhi Model" can be adapted in Punjab. "Kejriwal will be personally present to explain to the Punjab chief minister how Delhi's transformation has taken place under

him. He will be accompanied by ministers and officials concerned of Delhi," the statement said.

The spokesperson of the Punjab Chief Minister's Office said Mann will visit Dr Ambedkar Institute of Excellence at Kalkaji, followed by Mohalla clinics at Greater Kailash, Chirag Enclave and Kautilya Government Sarvodaya Bal Vidyalaya. The Punjab chief minister and his Delhi counterpart Arvind Kejriwal will jointly inaugurate a new swimming pool in the school, he added.

Mann will then visit Rajiv Gandhi Hospital at Dilshad Garden and inspect the health facilities there. A few memorandums of understanding (MoUs)

with the government of Delhi on imparting quality health and education facilities in Punjab are likely to be inked, the spokesperson mentioned.

The AAP-led government in Punjab had earlier faced flak from the opposition after Kejriwal had held a meeting with senior officers from Punjab. While Mann had said that he had sent the officers to the capital for "training", the opposition parties had charged that his government was being run through "remote control" from Delhi.

Earlier this month, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin had visited schools and mohalla clinics of the Kejriwal government in Delhi.

## Bombay Sappers & Sikh Light Infantry — A unique bond

MAN AMAN SINGH CHHINA  
CHANDIGARH, APRIL 24

IT IS a pleasant coincidence that the outgoing Chief of Army Staff, General MM Naravane, who belongs to the Sikh Light Infantry, is being replaced by Lt Gen Manoj Pande of Bombay Sappers. The Sikh Light Infantry and Bombay Sappers have a unique brotherhood and General Naravane is the honorary Colonel Commandant of the Bombay Sappers.

The Army Chief prominently displays the banner of Colonel Commandant of Bombay Sappers in his office along with that of the Colonel of Regiment of the Sikh LI. The common lineage of troops of Bombay Sappers and Sikh LI dates back to the time when the Ramdasia and Mazhabi Sikh troops of the Sikh Pioneers (precursors to the Sikh LI) were amalgamated into the Bombay Sappers in 1933 upon the disbandment of the Sikh Pioneers. It was during the World War II that the Sikh Pioneers were re-raised as Mazhabi and Ramdasia Sikh Regiment, later renamed as Sikh Light Infantry.

The bond between the Bombay Sappers and the Sikh LI was strengthened when Lt Gen PS Bhagat assumed the Colonely of the Sikh LI in 1966. He remains the only officer from the Corps of Engineers to have been the Colonel of an Infantry Regiment. Lt Gen Bhagat was the third Colonel of the Sikh LI Regiment and the second Indian. He succeeded Brigadier Gurkirpal Singh and remained the Colonel of the Regiment till his death in 1975. It is Lt Gen Bhagat who took special pains to infuse a new spirit in the Sikh LI and made efforts to give the regiment a special elan and identity and raised its profile.

Lt Gen Bhagat was no stranger to commanding Mazhabi and Ramdasia troops as he commanded 21 Field Company comprising these



Army troops take part in a joint exercise at Air Force Station in Chandigarh. Western Command



Lt Gen PS Bhagat

troops when he received the Victoria Cross in 1941. Lt Gen Bhagat did a turn around of the Sikh LI's image and gave it much needed elan.

Lt Gen Bhagat ensured that some of the best cadets from the training academies were commissioned into Sikh LI. He brought a change in the colour of the accoutrements of the regiment and introduced the bright yellow and Flame of the Forest colour for the badges and

## MILITARY DIGEST

turbans replacing the chocolate and scarlet colour. He also introduced a new shoulder title for the regiment, a military bugle against the flame of the forest background. He also changed the regimental lanyard and belt buckle. He also ensured that the Sikh LI officers' command potential was realised so that officers from outside the regiment were not inducted to command battalions. The fact that a Engineers Officer took so much effort to improve the lot of an infantry regiment shows the

connection which Bhagat felt with the troops if the Sikh LI.

It is no wonder that the ties between Bombay Sappers and Sikh LI, which existed before Lt Gen Bhagat, became stronger after his tenure as the Colonel of the Regiment of Sikh LI. The regiment till today honours his memory through the regimental slow march tune, The Prem Bhagat March. A constant reminder of a man who infused a new spirit into the Sikh LI.

**Western Command troops train with Chinook helicopter**

Troops of an Infantry Division falling under Western Command undertook joint tactical training exercise in special heliborne operations on April 20 with Chinook helicopters at Air Force Station Chandigarh. According to HQs Western Command, the training showcased synergy and jointmanship between the two services.

**New GOC 9 Corps**

Lt Gen Pushpendra Singh has taken over as the new GOC of 9 Corps in Yol, Himachal Pradesh. He has replaced Lt Gen PN Ananthanarayanan who has been posted as Commandant Infantry School, an appointment he held before coming to Yol as GOC.

## Punjab govt transfers 24 IAS, 9 PCS officers

**Chandigarh:** In an administrative reshuffle, the Punjab government on Sunday issued transfer and new posting orders of 24 IAS and nine PCS officers. IAS officer Arun Sekhri has been posted as labour commissioner while Jaswinder Kaur Sidhu has been appointed as secretary, home affairs and justice, according to the official order.

DPS Kharbada has been made the the director of technical education, replacing Kumar Saurabh Raj who has been given the posting of special secretary, excise and taxation. Rajiv Prashar has been posted as special secretary, forest and wildlife, while Vipul Ujwal has been deputed to the post special secretary, water supply and sanitation.

Gurpreet Singh Khaira has been deputed to the post of director, rural development, while IAS officer Babita has been appointed as the executive director of the scheduled caste land development and finance corporation under the department of social justice. Madhvi Kataria has been posted as special secretary, higher education and languages, while B

Srinivasan goes as director, mines and geology. IAS officer Poonamdeep Kaur has been appointed as the managing director, Pepsu Road Transport Corporation, Patiala, under the department of transport, while Komal Mittal has been posted as additional secretary, food, civil supplies and consumer affairs.

Abhijeet Kaplish is the new additional excise and taxation commissioner while Sandeep Kumar has been given the charge of additional department commissioner, Hoshiarpur. Upkar Singh has been posted as additional deputy commissioner, Mansa, while Himanshu Jain, who is the additional principal secretary to the chief minister, has been given an additional charge of additional chief executive officer of Punjab bureau of investment promotion.

Among the officers of the Punjab Civil Services, Dalwinderjit Singh has been posted as additional secretary, state agriculture marketing board, and Kuljit Paul Singh has been given the charge of additional secretary, defence services welfare. PTI

## Back from Canada, NRI shot dead in Tarn Taran

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
AMRITSAR, APRIL 24

A 25-YEAR-OLD non-resident of India (NRI) was allegedly shot dead by two men on a bike in Tarn Taran on Saturday night. Jatinderpal Singh of Suhawa village, who had come back from Canada last week, was shot dead in his car at around 12 am when he was on his way to Amritsar with his friends.

Police officials said, "The reason behind the murder is not clear. We are investigating and searching for unidentified bikers."

In a statement to the police, Jatinderpal's brother Amritpal

said, "My brother was a citizen of Canada and had returned after four years."

"After having dinner at Tarn Taran, they were going to Amritsar and were near the Char Khamba Chowk in Tarn Taran city when two persons came on a bike and opened fire at the car. My brother was hit and taken to Guru Nanak Dev Multi Super Specialty Hospital in Tarn Taran where he was declared dead," Amritpal said.

A case under sections 302 (murder) and 34 (acts done with common intention) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Section 25 of the Arms Act against two unidentified persons was filed at Tarn Taran city police station.

AFTER REVOKING BAN ON JUGAAD CARTS

## Bhagwant Mann summons top transport department officials, demands report

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
CHANDIGARH, APRIL 24

PUNJAB CHIEF Minister Bhagwant Mann Sunday called a meeting of top transport department officials and warned them of stern action if any ban on jugaad rehrihs is imposed again. Transport Minister Laljit Singh Bhullar also attended the meeting, where Mann sought a detailed report on the matter.

The CM, according to a government statement, unequivocally said during the meeting that his government has been formed for giving employment

to the poor sections of society and not for snatching it from them.

Apart from the Transport minister, the meeting called by the CM was attended by the DGP, ADGP (Traffic) and Secretary, Transport Department.

Later, Mann tweeted: "Thousands of people in Punjab work hard day and night to earn their bread from makeshift vehicles. During the meeting with the Transport Minister and officers, I have directed them that no such vehicle would be banned. The aim of our government is to provide employment to all and not to snatch it."

**Apart from the opposition, those who run 'jugaad rehrihs' had also condemned the government's decision and questioned how they would earn their livelihood**

On Saturday, after Opposition turned the heat on Mann, he had expressed his displeasure at the orders and immediately asked the officials to put them on hold. Later, a com-

munication by ADGP (Traffic) Amardeep Rai was sent to all SSPs and commissioners in the district not to ban jugaad rehrihs till further orders.

Earlier on April 18, an order issued by Rai had said that "makeshift vehicles are made by using engines of old two-wheelers, which are neither registered nor have any number plates on them. These vehicles are usually used for carrying goods and the drivers of these vehicles do not even have valid driving licence. These vehicles have been causing major accidents on the roads".

Apart from the opposition, those who run 'jugaad rehrihs'

had also condemned the state government's decision and questioned how they would earn their livelihood.

Several people across the state run 'jugaad rehrihs' for selling fruit and vegetables, transporting materials such as cement, sand, electronic goods and sometimes and often passengers too. Punjab Congress chief Amrinder Singh Raja Warring had taken a swipe at Mann in a tweet, saying, "If the government is run from Delhi, then such wrong decisions will be made."

However, he thanked the Punjab CM for rolling back the ban decision.

## To seek withdrawal of challans, jugaad cart owners protest in Punjab Speaker's village

RAAKHI JAGGA  
LUDHIANA, APRIL 24

A DAY after Punjab government rolled back its orders banning jugaad vehicles, several owners of such make-shift carts protested in Faridkot's Sandhwan village outside the house of Speaker Kultar Singh Sandhwan. The protesters were demanding cancellation of challans issued to them for playing their jugaad carts.

Several protesters reached the protest site in their 'jugaadu rehndas' carrying copies of their challans. The protest was led by Bharti Kisan Union Ekta (Fateh). Harjinder Singh, president of the union, said, "We request Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann to seriously decide which order they want to issue. They issue one order in the morning and then withdraw it in the evening saying that CM wasn't aware of it. It is hard to believe that officers are issuing orders without even consulting him. Now that they have withdrawn their orders, they need to clarify on the



Protesters with their jugaadu carts in Sandhwan village of Faridkot district on Sunday. Express

challans issued as well."

Mohinder Pal, a rehda driver from Sandhwan village said, "I use it to bring vegetables from sabzi mandi so as to sell them in

the market. I am doing hard work to run my family, if the government is not keen to run these rehndas, they must provide us with an alternative. We are self-

employed...if you can't provide jobs, you have no right to snatch them."

Bhola Singh, another motorcycle cart driver, said, "Now after

facing protest they have withdrawn the orders but what if they issue them again after 3-4 months. We are the aam aadmi who voted for this government and they are trying to harm us soon after coming to power. Now they need to clarify what will happen to our challans which have been issued in the past few weeks."

Sharanjit Singh, another protester, said, "If people will have no means to earn, they will indulge in anti-social activities. The government needs to have a plan before issuing any order, otherwise they will only be embarrassing themselves again and again."

Several cart owners said that they earned Rs 400-500 per day by transporting material on their jugaad vehicles.

Orders banning these jugaad carts were issued in the past as well, but never implemented seriously. Sandhwan, meanwhile, was not at his village house on Sunday and the protesters left lodging their protest for about an hour.

## 102 kg of heroin seized at Attari check post

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
AMRITSAR, APRIL 24

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

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

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

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

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

"Regular imports of Afghanistan origin items such as dry fruits, fresh fruits and herbs take place via Integrated Check Post (ICP) Attari, under Amritsar Customs (P) Commissionerate. In view of the changed political situation in Afghanistan since August, 2021 and the sensitive nature of trade, strict examination is being carried out of all import cargo. Amritsar Customs has booked many cases of concealment of gold and drugs at Airports as well as at Land Customs Station, ICP Attari and is waging a relentless battle against such imports of contrabands. In this process, in one of the biggest cases in India, nearly 532.630 kg of drugs was seized at ICP, Attari from imports of Afghanistan in June, 2019 (earlier)," read a press note by customs department.

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



Chandigarh



# 7 REGION

## Mann appeals to Centre to relax norms for dry grains

Says his AAP government committed to buying every grain from farmers

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
CHANDIGARH, APRIL 24

PUNJAB CHIEF Minister Bhagwant Mann on Sunday appealed to the Union government to relax the specifications for shriveled grains for procurement of wheat without imposition of any value cut, thereby protecting the incomes of the farmers who are already impacted by low yield and severe farm debt.

In a statement released on Sunday, Mann said that he had personally talked to Amit Shah, Union Home Minister, and Piyush Goyal, Union Minister for Food & Public Distribution Thursday and requested them to allow the relaxations based on the field data collected by the teams deputed by the Government of India. Subsequently, he had also written to the Union Minister requesting him for the same.

The CM further said that he is concerned that despite the passage of one week since the central teams, deputed by the Ministry of Food and Public Distribution, completed their task and submitted their report to the Ministry highlighting the extent of shriveling of the grain, no decision has been taken by the Union Government. The Chief Minister emphasized that farming issues are required to be resolved on high priority and the delay is impacting the procure-

ment operations.

The CM said that the AAP government is committed to buy every grain from the farmer. He added that it is completely unfair to blame the farmer and penalize them for shriveling of the grain, as this is in Nature's hands and beyond the control of the farmer. Consequently, his government had expeditiously purchased the grain coming in the mandis, he said, while taking up the matter parallelly with the government.

Referring to the glut in certain mandis, the CM said that it is primarily on account of FCI's inability to accept shriveled wheat from these Mandis on account of non-finalization of relaxation in norms, thereby choking the Mandis and putting farmers and Arhtiyas to inconvenience.

The CM added that he is hopeful of an early positive outcome from the Centre and thereafter lifting will improve drastically. It may be recalled that due to an extreme heatwave, the wheat grain had become shriveled and the state government had sought relaxation in norms so that wheat could be purchased and contributed to the central pool. The shriveling of the grain was a natural phenomenon beyond the control of the farmer and, therefore, the State Government decided that the farmers should not be penalized for something beyond their control.



Stubble burns in a field near Hambran Road in Ludhiana on Sunday. *Gurmeet Singh*

## Hooda, BJP MP object to state govt's fodder transport ban

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
CHANDIGARH, APRIL 24

FORMER CHIEF Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda and BJP MP from Haryana's Bhiwani-Mahendragarh constituency, Dharambir Singh, have strongly objected to the 'restrictions' imposed on transportation of wheat fodder by the state authorities. Dharambir Singh has objected to the ban on the inter-district transportation of fodder, while Hooda is against restriction on inter-state movement of fodder.

The government, meanwhile, has denied any inter-district transport ban.

The southern parts of the state mainly Bhiwani,

Mahendragarh and Dadri are facing a shortage of wheat fodder this season because a large number of farmers from these areas had cultivated mustard in place of wheat.

In a letter to the Chief Minister Saturday, Dharambir Singh said that the administration of some districts has banned transportation of fodder out of their jurisdiction.

Sources too said that authorities in some districts have banned inter-district sale of dry fodder made from straw of wheat, paddy, mustard and gur, while some districts have banned transportation of fodder out of the state.

There were reports that at some places, the local authorities even stopped tractors carry-

ing fodder as they moved out of the district. There have been allegations that those transporting the fodder out of the district were directed to upload the fodder to local gaushalas at much lower prices.

Hooda said: "The officials have forcibly stopped the tractor-trolleys...Farmers should be free to sell their fodder at any place. This year, there is already less production of wheat by 5-10 quintal per acre because of unseasonal rains and arrival of summer season early. In these circumstances, the farmers were trying to meet their expenditure by selling the wheat fodder but the government is snatching this right too."

Echoing similar sentiments, local farmer leaders have also

objected to the ban on transportation of fodder demanding the farmers should be free to sell their produce anywhere to earn profit alleging the authorities were trying to cut their profits.

Haryana Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister J P Dalal insists that a ban on only inter-state transportation of fodder has been enforced to meet local requirements first. The minister claims that there is no ban on inter-district transportation of fodder and if such instances are brought to government's notice, "they will ensure that the transportation of fodder is allowed within the state".

"We will lift the ban on inter-state transportation of fodder too after meeting the local requirements," said the minister.

## Punjab govt orders probe against 720 private schools over fee hike

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
CHANDIGARH, APRIL 24

THE AAP-LED dispensation in Punjab on Sunday ordered an inquiry against 720 private schools for allegedly raising fee despite government's directions.

The move comes after complaints from parents who claimed these schools disregarded the government directions.

The order for inquiry against schools was shared by Education Minister Gurmeet Singh Meht Hayer on his Twitter handle.

"Inquiry has been ordered against 720 private schools against whom parents lodged complaints. Strict action will be taken if found guilty," said Hayer in his tweet.

Last month, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann had directed all private schools in the state against increasing fee or compelling children to buy books, uniforms or stationery items

**The move comes after complaints from parents who claimed these schools disregarded the government directions**

from select shops.

Addressing the media here on Sunday, Aam Aadmi Party's Punjab unit spokesperson Malwinder Singh Kang said that the Mann-led government was committed to ensure quality and affordable basic education in the state.

He further said that the education minister had ordered an inquiry after parents claimed that these private schools were not following the government's directions regarding fee and purchase of books and uniforms.

Kang said if any school is found guilty during inquiry, strict action will be taken against it.

## Police arrest six for armed robbery, one yet to be caught

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
GURGAON, APRIL 24

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

Police Commissioner Kala Ramachandran said one of the accused was a former employee of the cash transportation company and was aware of the route of the van and had helped in conducting a reece. "The accused

planned the loot on a Monday as they were aware that collection is highest that day. After the loot, three among the accused had gone to Vaishno Devi shrine in Katra to offer prayers for successfully decamping with cash," said Ramachandran.

The police tracked the owner of the vehicle used in the escape, who revealed the names of the four of his accomplices.

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

### MANSa

Health Minister inaugurates new water park

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
LUDHIANA, APRIL 24

PUNJAB HEALTH minister Dr Vijay Singla Sunday inaugurated water park in village Khokhar Kalan located in Sardulgarh constituency of Mansa district. It has been built at a cost of Rs 30 lakh and within the campus of government gaushala.

Dr Singla stated that the water park will be a tourist attraction and is the first of its kind in Mansa. He stated that the income generated from the park will be used in gaushala. The existing park has been renovated, he said.

Dr Singla announced that he would donate his first salary to the gaushala. He asked Mansa residents to come in large numbers to see this water park. DC Jaspreet Singh stated that authorities will take care of the park. Sardulgarh MLA Gurpreet Singh Bannawali was also present on the occasion.

## Covid: 21 fresh cases in Punjab

*Chandigarh:* Punjab reported 21 fresh Covid cases that took the infection tally to 7,59,422, according to a medical bulletin issued here on Sunday.

No Covid-related fatality was reported in the past 24-hours. The death toll stands at 17,744, according to the bulletin.

Punjab has recorded 329 new Covid cases and two deaths in April so far, it said.

The number of active cases in the state stands at 165, the bulletin said. Of the fresh cases, Mohali reported seven followed by four in Patiala and three in Pathankot.

Chandigarh reported nine new COVID-19 cases, taking the total count to 91,998, the bulletin said, adding that there are 35 active cases in the city.

No Covid-related fatality was reported in the city and the death toll figure stands at 1,165.

PTI

## 'AAP must look into upkeep of Udham Singh Museum'



Members of Gadri Shaheed Udham Singh Vichar Manch in Sunam on Sunday. *Express*

**RAAKHI JAGGA**  
LUDHIANA, APRIL 24

ALMOST A year after a museum dedicated to Shaheed Udham Singh was inaugurated by then CM Amarinder Singh, a society dedicated to the martyr's memory, Udham Singh Vichar Manch, has urged CM Bhagwant Mann pay more attention to the site.

The Manch held a meeting in Sunam on Sunday and expressed its concerns over the state of affairs. Manch member Rakesh Kumar, who has written books on Udham Singh, said, "Udham Singh's memorial has come up on 4 acres in Sunam. It took nearly 5 years for two governments (SAD launched it and Congress declared it open) to inaugurate the project which is still incomplete as the museum has few pictures of Udham Singh's life and many

other important things related to him are in different parts of the country and abroad. So much so, his ashes are still lying in Sunam college and they have not been shifted to this museum. They were brought only for a day for inaugural and later sent back. We had met AAP's local MLA Aman Arora in this context. However, they are indifferent towards this museum which falls in CM's home district."

Balbir Chand Longowal, another member of Manch, said, "At least the things which are within Punjab or in India should be brought to the museum or the process should start. Why is there a delay in shifting the ashes to this museum?"

Kumar pointed out that Udham Singh's statue at the site was not up to the mark and the matter has been brought to the notice of the culture department.

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
CHANDIGARH, APRIL 24

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

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

The officials claimed a massive gathering attended the state-level function adding long queues of vehicles carrying devotees were heading towards Panipat from every corner of Haryana since the morning. By 10 am, the entire pandal was occupied by the sangat. "There was a heavy rush of devotees in the huge pandal set up over an area of 25 acres. "The devotees thronged the pan-



Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar during the state-level function organised in Panipat to mark the 400th birth anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur. *Express*

dal to pay obeisance and took blessings of Guru on the 400th Prakash Purab of Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur ji and had langar. The news of preparations for organizing the event had reached far and wide for the last several days, resulting in people from different corners of the country visiting

Panipat," say the officials.

Rising above the political ideology, the leaders of all political parties, paid obeisance in front of Sri Guru Maharaj. Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, Governor of Uttarakhand Lieutenant General Gurmit Singh, Deputy Chief

Minister Dushyant Chautala and Leader of Opposition Bhupinder Singh Hooda, MLAs and former MLAs of all parties reached and paid obeisance to Tegh Bahadur. Khattar sat among the sangat for more than two hours.

"Haryana shares a special bond with Guru Tegh Bahadur"

## How Amritsar's Batala town uses special buses to keep its heritage alive

**KAMALDEEP SINGH BRAR**  
AMRITSAR, APRIL 24

BATALA TOWN stands out as an exception due to the efforts of local civil society by establishing heritage tours and transport lines to make the town's history available for all to explore.

Its weekly heritage bus service, which started in January 2021, has started getting a good response after a dry spell during the Covid-19 lockdown.

"Service has been started to

highlight the religious and historical heritage of the city. Batala city was established in the year 1465 and it is one of the old cities of Punjab. The city has been witness to great historical events and has a rich history. Today's young generation knows little about it," said District Public Relations Officer Batala Inderjit Singh, who has a keen interest in the heritage sites and is a member of the district Heritage Society. The society, with the support of the district administration, has been working to save and create awareness about the her-

itage of Batala and district Gurdaspur.

The Heritage Society had initially come up with the idea of starting a 'Batala Heritage Walk' to connect the locals with many of its heritage sites, such as the palace of Maharaja Sher Singh, historical churches, Jalmahal and Shamsher Khan's tomb, Old Haveli, Gurdwara Sri Kandh Sahib, Gurdwara Sri Dera Sahib and Sri Kali Mandir, famous Shera Wala Darwaza and old buildings near Hansli Bridge.

But they went ahead with the idea of the bus service in-

stead, which now routes through the historical destinations across the district. The special bus travels to Mojpur, an island village near the Beas river

"Mojpur village is very close to the Beas river and there is an archipelago in the middle of the Beas river which has been developed by the district administration as a tourist destination. We expect that tourists from Amritsar will soon start coming to Gurdaspur for its heritage attractions," the district deputy commissioner said.



On the Batala Heritage tour on Sunday. *Express*



# 8 EXPRESS NETWORK

## MP High Court grants protection to interfaith couple who eloped

**IRAM SIDDIQUI**  
BHOPAL, APRIL 24

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

Hearing the petition filed by the woman, Sakshi Sahu, 22, at the Jabalpur bench of the Madhya Pradesh High Court, a single bench headed by Justice Nandita Dubey pointed out that the petitioner is a major who married Asif Khan, 22, willingly. "The petitioners have further stated that they were wrongly advised to get married in the temple... nobody informed them that they should get their marriage registered under the Special Marriage Act. They submitted that they will get their marriage registered under the Special Marriage Act, as both of them are living together since 07.04.2022. It is further stated that being a citizen of India, they have a right to

choose the life partner of their choice." On April 4, based on an FIR lodged by the woman's brother, police booked Khan under IPC sections related to 'kidnapping to compel the woman into marriage'.

Three days later, on April 7, the administration demolished three shops belonging to the family — a tiny space out of which Khan's younger brother operated an online service centre, a tea stall and their chicken shop — claiming they were illegally constructed.

Hours later, former BJP minister Om Prakash Dhurve and party district president Narendra Singh Rajput blocked National Highway-45 demanding that Khan's house be demolished too. A team of district officials, including Collector Ratnakar Jha and Sub Divisional Magistrate Balbir Raman, met the protesters. The following day, with over 500 police personnel watching, the single-storey house, registered in the name of Khan's father Haleem Khan, was razed. Confirming the demolition, SDM Raman said, "The house was demolished as it was found to be illegal by the tehsildar. There was also communal tension in the village. People wanted the house to be razed."

## PM Modi receives first Lata Mangeshkar Award

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
MUMBAI, APRIL 24

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

Renowned singer Lata Mangeshkar passed away in February at the age of 92. The award is instituted in her memory and will be given annually on April 24. Master Deenanath Mangeshkar Smruti Pratishthan, Pune, a registered public charitable trust established by the Mangeshkar Family, felicitated achievements in arts, culture, medicine and social work, among which Modi was the recipient of the "special individual award". "He is indeed one of the greatest leaders our great nation has seen in its glorious history of thousands of years," read a statement from the trust.

The award ceremony was in honour of the 80th Memorial Day



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

of the late Marathi theatre actor and classical singer, Deenanath Mangeshkar.

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

achievement in music.

Mangeshkar family members, Meena Khadikar, Asha Bhosle and Adinath Mangeshkar, presented the award to Modi. Other recipients included actors Jackie Shroff and Asha Parekh, who were awarded the Master Deenanath Puraskar for cinema, classical singer Rahul Deshpande for Indian music, and Mumbai's dabbawallas for social service.

## Ukraine focus as 8 leaders from Europe visit India

**SHUBHAJIT ROY**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Earlier this month, President Von der Leyen became the first

European leader to visit Bucha, the suburb of Kyiv where evidence of possible war crimes was found after the Russian soldiers retreated. She told Ukraine that the EU would continue to support the country and would make Russia's President Vladimir Putin pay a "heavy price" for his war. Ukrainian officials say more than 300 people were killed by Russian forces in Bucha, and around 50 of them were executed. Moscow denies the accusations.

India has condemned the civilian killings in Bucha, but has not named Russia, and has called for an independent probe.

New Delhi has been engaged by European countries over the last two months on its position on the war, which is seen to be neutral.

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

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

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## There is a need to amend anti-defection law: Naidu

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
BENGALURU, APRIL 24

VICE-PRESIDENT Venkaiah Naidu on Sunday expressed concern over the loopholes in the anti-defection law and pitched for amendments to the legislation to make it effective.

Delivering a lecture on 'Media's role in New India' at the Press Club here, Naidu said there are certain loopholes in the anti-defection law which need to be plugged in order to curb defection of legislators from one party

to another. "It allows wholesale defection but not retail defection. So people try to mobilise number," he said.

The Vice-President asked the elected representatives to resign and get re-elected than defecting to any other party. He also expressed unhappiness over the Speakers, Chairpersons and the courts dragging the anti-defection cases for years. According to him, sometimes the decision is made even by the courts after the tenure is over.

As April 24 happened to be the Panchayat Raj Day, Naidu under-

lined the need to strengthen the local bodies, which are part of the three-tier administration of Indian democracy.

Referring to the role of media, he said it is important for the nation's progress, in reaching out to the aspirations of the people and developmental goals of the government. "You are not dealing with a person, you are dealing with a chief minister, leader of the opposition, Prime Minister, Governor... If they go wrong, then you have got every right to criticise but you should not undermine the institution," he said.

## Court to take call on Mevani bail plea today

**TORA AGARWALA**  
GUWAHATI, APRIL 24

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

"Considering the nature of the matter the court needs sufficient time to go through the materials

on record to decide the bail petition. The bail petition will be decided tomorrow," said the court.

An Independent MLA who had in September last pledged support to the Congress, Mevani was arrested in Gujarat by the Assam Police on Thursday and flown to Assam where a court remanded him in three-day police custody. The arrest followed an Assam BJP leader's complaint over an allegedly defamatory tweet by Mevani against Modi.

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

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

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

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



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

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

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

## Cong leader, Maharashtra ex-governor dies at 90 in Kerala

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 24

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

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

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

## How sedition charge has held up in court in Maharashtra

**SADAF MODAK**  
MUMBAI, APRIL 24

WHAT'S COMMON to a cartoonist, a student who allegedly raised a slogan at a queer march, actor Kangana Ranaut, and the accused in the Elgaar Parishad case?

They are all among those who have been booked for sedition in Maharashtra over the last decade.

In all except the Elgaar Parishad case, the invocation of the sedition charge has led to criticism of investigating authorities by courts. On Sunday, the charge was invoked against MP Navneet Rana and her MLA husband Ravi Rana by the Mumbai police.

Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, which deals with sedition, reads like this: Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite dissatisfaction towards the government established by

law. The maximum punishment under the Section is life imprisonment.

Officials said the Section was added against the couple as their alleged act of announcing that they will recite Hanuman Chalisa outside the residence of Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray challenges "the writ of the state machinery and invokes hate and dislike against the government". Officials said their actions raised apprehension of causing public disorder.

Last year, the Mumbai police invoked the charge against actor Ranaut and her sister Rangoli Chandel for her tweets. They also faced other charges including 124A, 153 A (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race), 295A (deliberate acts hurting religious sentiments) of IPC.

The sisters had approached the Bombay High Court seeking quashing of the FIR against her. The High Court had said while it understood other sections being

invoked, it asked if it had become routine to add the charge of sedition. It asked if citizens can be treated like this for not falling in line with the government. It also asked the government to conduct workshops for police officers.

In 2020, the then BJP-Shiv Sena government had invoked sedition against a 22-year-old student and others who were part of a LGBTQI solidarity march where participants also voiced their opposition to the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act and National Register of Citizens.

The police claimed the student had raised a slogan in support of Sharjeel Imam, himself arrested for sedition for a speech. The High Court had then, too, cautioned against the use of sedition merely for raising a slogan showing solidarity with a person or a group of persons, who are exercising their opposition to the CAA and the NRC. It said it cannot be said prima facie to have caused or attempted to cause disaffection against the government.

### MANN KI BAAT

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

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

WITH A string of festivals coming up, Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday urged people not to lower their guard against Covid. "Celebrate these festivals with great gaiety and harmony," Modi said as he greeted people in advance for Eid, Akshaya Tritiya, Vaishakh Budh Purnima and the birth anniversary of Bhagwan Parshuram.

"In the midst of all this, you also have to be alert against corona. Wearing a mask, washing hands at regular intervals, whatever are the necessary measures for prevention, keep following them." The PM's caution comes amidst a sudden rise in Covid cases in parts of the country, including Delhi, with authorities re-imposing mask restrictions in the National Capital Region.

Delivering his 88th Mann Ki

Baat address to the nation, the PM also spoke on how India is galloping towards being a cashless economy with digital transactions worth Rs 20,000 crore taking place each day. "In the last few years, BHIM UPI has rapidly become a part of our economy and habits. Now, even in small towns and most villages, people do transactions through UPI," Modi said. "A culture of digital economy is also evolving in the country. In small street shops, digital payment has made it easy to serve more customers. Now they don't even have the problem of loose change."

Modi said UPI transactions reached around Rs 10 lakh crore in March last and were, besides increasing convenience, enabling "an atmosphere of honesty" in the country. "Now several fin-tech start-ups are also coming up," he said.

Dedicating this month's Mann Ki Baat to all former prime

ministers of the country, he spoke about the inauguration of the Pradhanmantri Sangrahalaya or the Prime Ministers' Museum in Delhi. He mentioned the spinning wheel gifted to Lal Bahadur Shastri by his in-laws and his bank passbook which has been exhibited at the museum.

Modi also talked of Morarji Desai's long administrative career and his position as a deputy collector in Gujarat before he joined the freedom struggle, besides Chaudhary Charan Singh's contribution to abolishing zamindari, PV Narasimha Rao's keen interest in land reforms, Chandra Shekhar's historic 4,000-km Bharat Yatra and Atal Behari Vajpayee's speeches.

The museum also has interesting information about Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel, Dr BR Ambedkar, Jai Prakash Narayan and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Modi added.

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

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**PARTHA SARATHI BISWAS**  
PUNE, APRIL 24

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

his bike or an ambulance.

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

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

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



9

IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



WHY  
PRASHANT JAIN

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

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

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

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

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



Illustration: Suvajit Dey

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

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

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

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

SMEs are absolutely critical because they provide employment to very large

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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





## CAPITAL OUTREACH

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

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

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

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

## A COST TO PAY

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

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

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

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

## FREEZE FRAME

## E P UNNY



MANISH SABHARWAL AND RITUPARNA CHAKRABORTY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The writers are with TeamLease Services

## A SWISS PROMISE

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



RALF HECKNER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But what about the fact that Switzerland is implementing the same sanctions against Russia as the European Union? Well, as an important international financial centre, Switzerland had to take action to prevent the misuse of its banking system for the financing of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. Adopting economic sanctions is compatible with the obligations of a neutral state. Switzerland has also been investing substantial diplomatic capital into solving the Ukraine conflict. Following the beginning of the Ukraine crisis in 2014, Switzerland was heavily involved in trying to bring about an end to the fighting. Switzerland presided over the Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) in 2015. Didier Burkhalter, President of the Swiss Confederation at that time, personally lead mediation efforts. The Swiss diplomat, Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini, represented the OSCE in the 2015 negotiations about the Minsk II agreement concerning the conflict in Donbass. Another Swiss diplomat, Ambassador Thomas Greminger, served as the secretary general of the Organisation for

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

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

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

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

The writer is Ambassador of Switzerland to India and Bhutan

## APRIL 25, 1982, FORTY YEARS AGO

### BELLICOSE BRITAIN

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



### LOK DAL-BJP TIE-UP

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

### PM PULLS UP DARBARA

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

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



# Poverty and politics of freebies

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



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH

ASHOK GULATI AND RITIKA JUNEJA

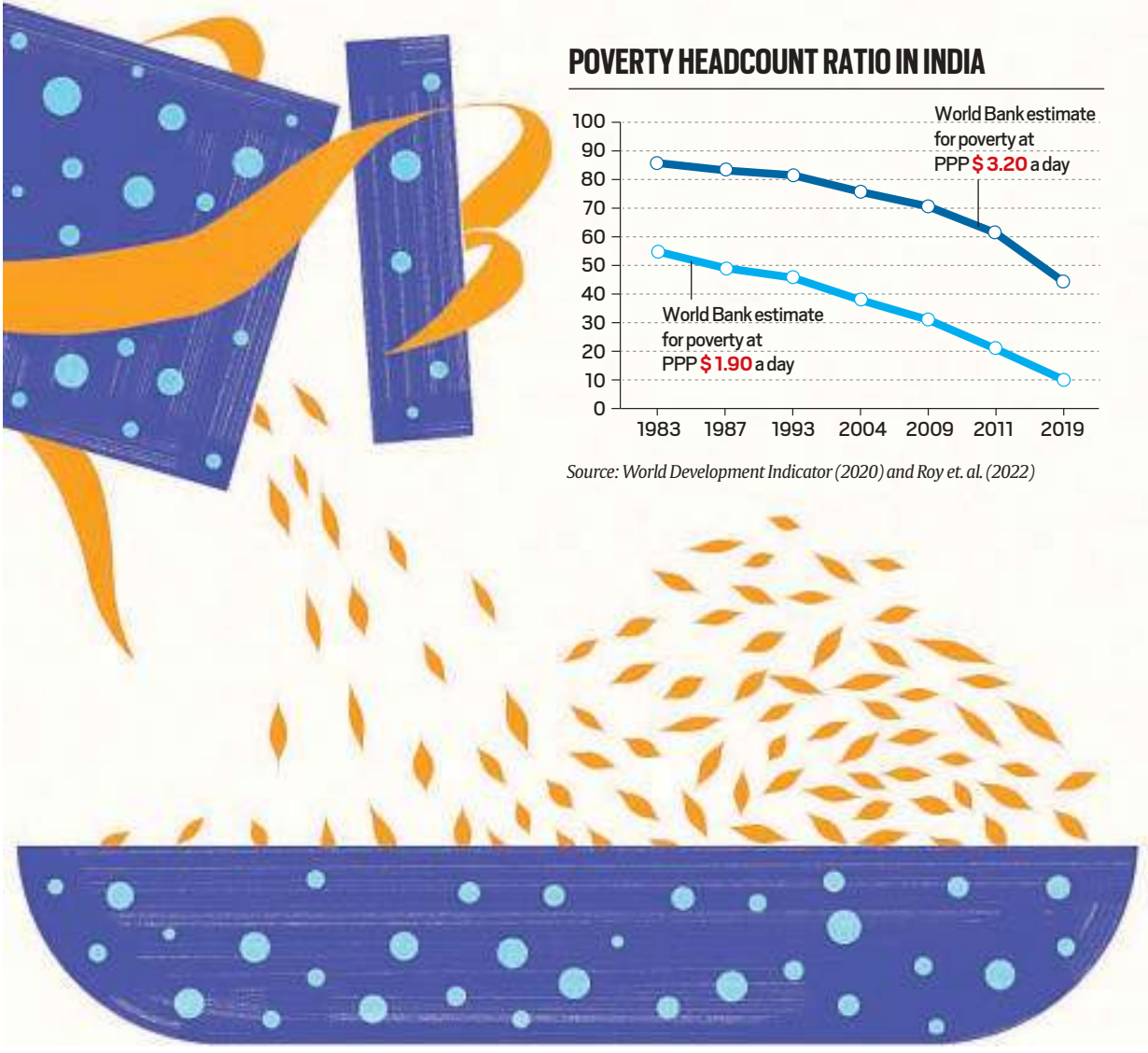
THE RELEASE OF two new working papers, one from the World Bank and the other from the IMF, has led to a renewed debate on poverty in India. Both papers claim that extreme poverty in the country, based on the international definition of \$1.90 per capita per day (in purchasing power parity (PPP)), has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

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

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

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

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



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

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

A look at the size of food freebies will help understand the gravity of this problem. As of April 1, the Food Corporation of India's wheat and rice stocks stood at 74 MMT against a buffer stock norm of 21 MMT – there is, therefore, an "excess stock" of 53 MMT. The economic cost of rice, as given by FCI, is Rs 3,7267/tonne and that of wheat is Rs 2,6838/4/tonne (2020/21). The value of "excess stocks", beyond the buffer norm, is, therefore, Rs 1.85 lakh crore – this, despite a total of 72.2 MMT grains distributed for free under the PMGKAY in FY21 and FY22. This only speaks of a highly inefficient grain management system.

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

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

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

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

In reforming this system of free food, wisdom lies in going back to former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee's vision. Vajpayee introduced the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY), wherein, the "antyodaya" households (the most poor category) get more rations (35 kg per household) at a higher subsidy (rice, for instance, at Rs 3/kg and wheat at Rs2/kg). For the remaining below poverty line (BPL) families, the price charged was 50 per cent of the procurement price and for above poverty line families (APL), it was 90 per cent of the procurement price. There could be some problems in identifying the poor. However, technology can help overcome this difficulty. This will make PDS more targeted and lead to cost savings. This measure should be combined with giving people the option of receiving cash instead of providing grains to targeted beneficiaries. The savings so generated from this reform can be ploughed back as investments in agri-R&D, rural infrastructure (irrigation, roads, markets) and innovations that will help create more jobs and reduce poverty on a sustainable basis. Can the Modi government bite the bullet and emulate the Vajpayee government in using scarce resources more wisely? Only time will tell.

Gulati is Infosys Chair Professor and Juneja is Consultant at ICRIER

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“Sanctions historically have not been particularly effective in changing regimes, and their record at changing dictators’ behavior is mixed at best.”  
— THE NEW YORK TIMES

## Misreading Bhagat Singh

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



ASHUTOSH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



NARAYANI GUPTA

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

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

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

## History as mischief

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The writer is a Delhi-based historian

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### NO DUE PROCESS

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

SS Paul, Nadia

### ABANDONED

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

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

Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur

### SUBSTANTIVE TIES

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

Vijai Pant, Hempur

### HOLISTIC CARE

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

Kreeti Pani, Cuttack



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



## TOPOF THE WORLD



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

### LEBANON

#### At least 7 dead as migrant boat sinks off Tripoli

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

### POLAND

#### 4 dead, 6 trapped after tremor shakes coal mine

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

### TURKEY

#### 17 French WWI soldiers' remains buried at Gallipoli

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

## MARINE LE PEN CONCEDES DEFEAT

# Macron wins 2nd term as French President

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

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

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

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

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

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

The first pollsters' projections



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

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

business reforms.

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

"There will be continuity in



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

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

A first major challenge will be the parliamentary elections in

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

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

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

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

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

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

DAVID LAWDER  
WASHINGTON, APRIL 24

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

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

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

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



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

Bank spokesperson said.

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

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

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

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

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

SAJJAD HUSSAIN  
ISLAMABAD, APRIL 24

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

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

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

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

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

### PM out of no-fly list

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

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

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

MARI YAMAGUCHI  
TOKYO, APRIL 24

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

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

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

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

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



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



A man meets his wife and son at a train station in Kyiv on Saturday, after having been separated from them for more than two months due to the war. AP

## Ukraine pushes for more arms ahead of top US officials' visit

DAVID KEYTON  
KYIV, APRIL 24

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

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

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

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

### Shehbaz, Putin exchange letters

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida. AP

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



# 13 ECONOMY

## SECTOR WATCH ELECTRIC VEHICLES

# Why has Ola Electric recalled 1,441 scooters?

**Soumyarendra Barik**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

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

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

### Why has Ola Electric initiated the recall?

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

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

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

### How many instances of EV fires have there been?

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

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

## 3 KEY POINTS

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

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

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

EXPLAINED

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

### Have others EV makers issued a recall?

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

### What has been the government's response?

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

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

## SECOND ROUND OF BIDDING AFTER THE FIRST FAILED

# BharatNet PPP: As incentive, DoT to assume revenue risk

**Aashish Aryan & Soumyarendra Barik**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

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

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

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

## COS TO FOCUS ON CAPEX

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

associated with the revenue.

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

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

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

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

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

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

On August 15, 2020, Prime

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

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

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

## 'Pvt sector to drive growth of PFRDA pension schemes'

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



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

Source: PFRDA/PTI

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

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

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

**ENSECONOMICBUREAU**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

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

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

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

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

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

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

biles and other users.

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

The nation consumed 202.7 million tonnes of petroleum products in 2021-22, up from 194.3 million tonnes in the previous fiscal, but lower than pre-pandemic 214.1 million tonnes demand in 2019-20. Import of petroleum products in 2021-22 fiscal was 40.2 million tonnes worth \$242 billion. On the other hand, 61.8 million tonnes of petroleum products were also exported for \$42.3 billion. **WITH PTI**

## BRIEFLY FM in US



PTI

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

### Maruti SUV

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

### Religare, Sebi

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

## MARKET WATCH

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

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

# FRL shareholders to be hit if banks opt for IBC resolution

**ENSECONOMICBUREAU**  
MUMBAI, APRIL 24

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



The BSE, Mumbai. File

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

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

# Coal Secy: Not crisis; power demand-supply mismatch

**SIMRAN ARORA**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

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

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



A thermal plant in Patiala district. File

thermal power plants.

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

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

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

# 'India suspends tourist visas to Chinese nationals'

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

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

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

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

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

The IATA is a global airlines body with around 290 members

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

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

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

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

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

# 'ECB policymakers keen for early rate hike'

**REUTERS**  
WASHINGTON, APRIL 24

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

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



CHRISTINE LAGARDE  
President, ECB

Reuters file

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

An ECB spokesperson declined to comment.

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

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

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

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

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





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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to [explained@indianexpress.com](mailto:explained@indianexpress.com)

## Why are EV makers recalling some of their electric scooters?

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

### The recall

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

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

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

### Recent EV fires

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



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

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

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

### Government’s response

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

SOUMYARENDRA BARIK

## EVERYDAY EXPLAINERS

### WORLD BOOK DAY

# UNESCO INITIATIVE TO PROMOTE THE ENJOYMENT OF BOOKS AND READING

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

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

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

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

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

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

ANONNA DUTT  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

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

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

### The study

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

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

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

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

### The findings

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

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

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

### State-wise variations

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

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

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

In 11 states, the mean LDL cholesterol level

## SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

# EU ground rules for Web

Europe’s proposed Digital Services Act seeks to end the era of self-regulation by tech companies, and give ‘practical effect to the principle that what is illegal offline, should be illegal online’.

SHRUTI DHAPOLA  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

MARGRETHE VESTAGER

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

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

### What do the new rules state?

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

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

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

### LAW COULD BE EASIER WRITTEN THAN ENFORCED

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

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

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

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

THE NYT

“trusted flaggers”.

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

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

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

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

understand these risks better.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Assange supporters hold placards outside the court in London. AP

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

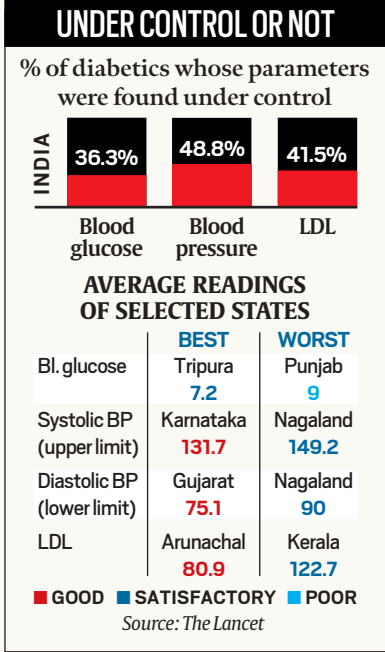
### The trial in UK

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

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

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

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



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

### The implications

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

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

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

bers of transplants, dialysis, etc needed.”

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

### The road ahead

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

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

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



Fury retains WBC crown, walks away undefeated

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
LONDON, APRIL 24

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

CROSSWORD 4723

1234567

89101112

13141516

17181920

2122232425

ACROSS

1 A blow against socialism? (5)

4 He tries wild rarebit (7)

8 In favour of some return of profit (3)

9 One needs it for toast (9)

10 Try this cocktail when parched (7)

11 One wants to be so described (5)

13 Trader who gives one a hand (6)

15 Blue European flower? (6)

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

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

21 Vote of a man in continental country (9)

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

24 A verbal thrust? (7)

25 It may be perfect (5)

DOWN

1 Freud upset about note being proved false (7)

2 Men involved with a tiger shoot (9)

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

4 Troubles any son may produce (6)

5 A bloomer – could be a big one (7)

6 Drink and possibly eat (3)

7 Out of practice and lacking polish (5)

12 Cautioned about children's instruction (9)

14 Radio makes sound use of them (7)

16 There are two points he can possibly raise? (6)

17 Military band? (7)

18 Comparatively secure from strange fears (5)

20 Strain with others after a point (5)

22 Sap may come from this tree (3)

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

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.

KPYOR

IILQUD

LUNGS

PENGOS

SOLUTION: KOPYOR; SLUNG; LIQUID; SPONGE. The foot feels the foot when it feels the foot. - Buddha

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

DK's spot (SWOT) analysis



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

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

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

Planning for perfection

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ordinary track record

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

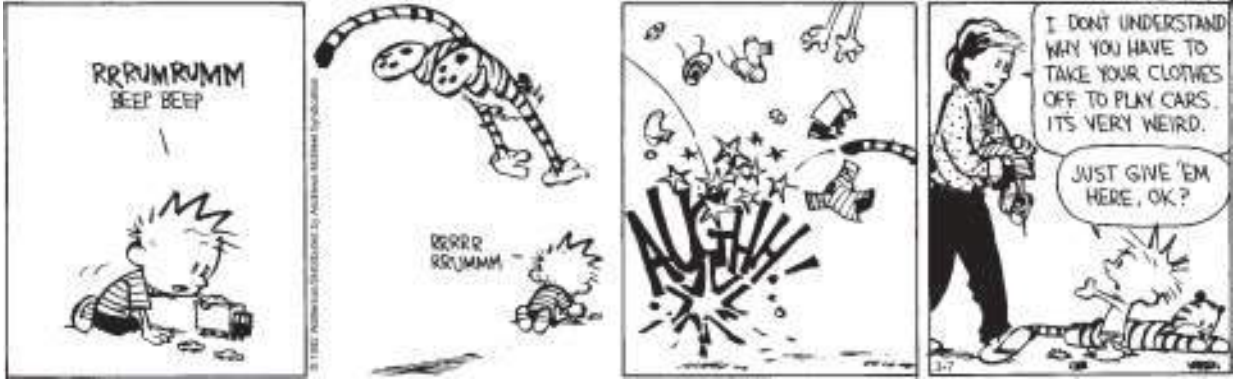
It is going to cause headaches galore to the team management, but it is in keeping with the current reality of Indian cricket; there are too many deserving a look-in and only 11 spots to fit them all in.

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

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



SUDOKU 4815

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

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

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

SOLUTION SUDOKU 4814

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

DAY TODAY

BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)

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

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)

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

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)

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

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)

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

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)

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

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)

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

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)

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

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)

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

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)

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

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)

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

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)

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

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)

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



BRIEFLY

Asian C’ship: Deepak settles for silver

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

Verstappen, Red Bull star at Imola

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

Jehan finishes second in sprint race

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

Bayern seal 10th straight domestic title

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

PSG win league amid muted celebrations

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

Rahul ton flattens Mumbai

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



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

All pics: Sportzpics for IPL

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

ABHISHEK PUROHIT

MUMBAI, APRIL 24

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

Slow and steady

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

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

This time, the ball would hold up big time; it was hard to hit through the line, even the straight shots were proving difficult to line up. MI read their home conditions quickly, and kept denying LSG pace.

Not that Rahul and Manish Pandey tried to force it too much. The Powerplay score was 32 for the loss of Quinton de Kock to a full toss from Jasprit Bumrah. It was as if LSG were set on giving the Test-match cliched first hour to the bowlers. After de Kock was dropped at deep square-leg and parried over the rope instead in the fourth over, LSG went five overs without hitting a

IPL TABLE

TEAM	M	W	L	PT	NRR
GT	7	6	1	12	0.396
SRH	7	5	2	10	0.691
RR	7	5	2	10	0.432
LSG	8	5	3	10	0.334
RCB	8	5	3	10	-0.472
DC	7	3	4	6	0.715
KKR	8	3	5	6	0.080
PBKS	7	3	4	6	-0.562
CSK	7	2	5	4	-0.534
MI	8	0	8	0	-1.000

boundary. Almost nine overs in, they had yet to reach 50, and Rahul was on 29 off 30.

KL shifts gears

Off his next 32, though, Rahul would take 74. He broke the shackles by heaving Jaydev Unadkat over the shorter deep-midwicket boundary. MI had been digging it in short of a length, with fine leg and third man up, and deep fielders protecting the square boundaries. But Rahul had found a way out by now. With almost nothing to work with, he’d wait and place his pull or cut wide of the boundary riders.

MI tried making him work harder; they placed two midwickets to force Rahul to play straight and miss out on runs. He’d score just 15 of his runs in the straight ‘V’; most came square of the wicket.

Rahul has a good record against Bumrah, and showed why. He welcomed the star pacer back into the attack on the first ball of the 17th over by slicing a slower wide yorker for four to the left of deep point. The calm manner in which he played that shot, Rahul seemed to have read what Bumrah was going to bowl.

And he easily beat the deep fielder to the longer boundary.

The field changed immediately; to deep point was added a square third man and

short third man was moved finer. The last ball of the over arrived as a low full toss on off; Rahul went to the right of deep point this time, creaming it to the cover rope.

Bumrah would come back with a four-run 19th over, getting his yorkers on target, but Rahul brought up a 62-ball hundred at the start of the 20th, as he heaved Riley Meredith 83 metres over the longer deep-midwicket boundary.

He loves batting against MI, and loves batting at the Wankhede; at no other ground in the country has he scored more runs in the IPL - 502 at an average of 62.75 and a strike rate of 149.

The story was different at the other end, though. Rahul remained off strike for the latter half of the last over, and LSG ended on 168 for 6 with three dots; their other batsmen managed 57 off 58.

MI stuck in second gear

Rohit Sharma was animated in the field and came out for the chase all charged up. Pulling and charging the seamers, he moved to 31 off 19 by the end of the Powerplay, which brought 43. However, Ishan Kishan endured another horror knock, scraping 8 off 20; Rohit slowed down massively, and top-edged a swipe off Krunal Pandya to short third man to depart for 39 off 31.

There was definitely some dew as the LSG fielders would wipe the ball now and then, but they still hit their hard lengths and bowled their slower ones well enough to have MI crawling to 67 for 4 by the 12th over.

From there on, it needed a minor miracle, and neither the promising spark of Tilak Varma nor the fading threat of Kieron Pollard was able to make a difference.

LSG had to bowl one over of spin from either Ravi Bishnoi or Krunal at the death but Rahul delayed it till the very end, and his pacers had the game well in the bag by then, with 39 required off the 20th.

**Brief scores: Lucknow Super Giants 168 for 6 (Rahul 103\*, Pollard 2-8, Meredith 2-40) beat Mumbai Indians 132 for 8 (Rohit 39, Tilak 38, Krunal 3-19) by 36 runs**

PLAYING TONIGHT

Indian Premier League

DC vs PBKS, 730pm, Live on Star Sports Network

EMOTIONAL ROLLERCOASTER



Hot heads, calm minds and everything in between at the game

Kishan’s luck runs out

In his 20-ball ordeal, Ishan Kishan would have been out at least five times. He repeatedly played (played) and missed, his shoulder was battered by a Dushmanta Chameera bouncer, he survived lbw shouts, run outs and caught-behind appeals. It seemed one of those nights he would somehow survive and then suddenly rediscover the destructive touch. Instead, he perished fortuitously. Ravi Bishnoi’s googly was so wide that had he left the ball, it would have gone to the bucket-hands of Jason Holder at first slip. But Kishan reached for the ball, his feet crease-glued and his upper body



completely out of balance. It could go into the coaching manual of how not to play a cut shot. He eventually under-edged, and with a bit of luck, he could have survived. Wicket-

keeper Quinton de Kock, himself stretching to gather the ball, was in no position to pluck the edge that was dying onto his feet. But the feat came to his rescue. The edged ball plunged onto his boot and bounced into the palms of Holder. The Bajan almost made a meal of it, but somehow clung on. And thus Kishan’s luck ran out. Rather, his torment was over.

An emotional ride

Rohit Sharma



was a riot of emotions. He was over-jubilant when celebrating wickets, leaping and punching the air, a la Virat Kohli, screaming and scowling. He was agitated when bowlers erred in length. When Daniel Sams kept fluffing the line, conceding four wide balls in an over, he spoke animatedly at him. When the fielders erred in the deep, or missed narrow direct hits, he would wildly gesticulate at them and blow his cheeks in exasperation. Even wicket-keeper Ishan Kishan was not spared, when he could not stop a ball (a really wide ball at that, almost towards the vacant first slip). Sometimes, he would clap joyously. Sometimes, he would clap sarcastically. Often, when in dilemma, he would stroke his stubbled-chin like a philosopher. In short, Rohit showed he could make a career in acting too. The expressions were so natural, almost instinctive.

Chameera pins Pollard

The plan of Lucknow Super Giants’ seamers to keep Kieron Pollard quiet was simple—just bang it in short at his rib cage. The ball blindsides him and the burly Trinidadian gets himself into a knot. Hook was seldom his favourite stroke; the pull ain’t either. So whenever the ball is pinged short, he either sways away from it or nudges for a single. There is a caveat though—the short-balls have to be really quick. And Dushmantha Chameera was masterful—fast, aggressive and at-his-rib-cage, like the heyday Caribbean quacks. Pollard tried to shuffle across and dab it behind the keeper, but the ball was so quick (146kph) that he ended up taking evasive action. In 19th over, Chameera went around the wicket and slanted the ball across, alternating between short-of-length and good length. Pollard just kept swiping futilely, eking out just a couple of runs. The five-run over practically ended all hopes of Mumbai opening their account this season.



Shokeen, not stirred

Mumbai Indians off-spinner Hrithik Shokeen is 21. He looks 16, with not even a faint outline of a moustache and a high school boy’s quiff. He ambled in as early as the second over—even the batsman he bowled to, KL Rahul, seemed genuinely surprised by the tactic, and looked to gauge him before he began to line him up. Shokeen, though, was unfazed by the occasion, more so for someone playing his second competitive match ever. The first three balls were fast and full into his body, Rahul could only but defend. The fourth ball, Rahul tried to make room, but Shokeen smartly followed him and turned one back into his body. The next ball though, he changed his line of attack, going around the wicket. The move gave Rahul the freedom to swing down the pitch, which he did and struck a four.



Shokeen kept his nerves, he went more round arm and hurled the ball into Rahul’s pads. Another dot ball, the fifth of the over and Shokeen did a small fist pump. Not a bad start for Shokeen.

Pacer Choudhary is Super Kings’ rising star and neighbour’s pride

DEVENDRA PANDEY

MUMBAI, APRIL 24

MUKESH CHOUDHARY scarcely knew that a neighbour whom he had once refused to help out with shifting her home furniture, would end up playing a major role in his life. The incident happened when 17-year-old Choudhary moved into a rented apartment at Kothrud in Pune, where his neighbour Vaishali Sawant sought his help.

“I had called him, ‘oye Dhoni’,” Sawant remembers the young neighbour in cricketing whites. “I asked him can I keep my flat’s furniture in his flat for some time, so that I can get my interior work done at my home. He had refused then and he didn’t even help us to move the furniture.” Pune apartment complexes from Kothrud, where incidentally Kedar Jadhav and earlier Dheera Jadhav came from, still believe in close neighbourly relations, which extend to being bizarrely horrified if a next-door teen refuses to help with furniture.

“When he refused, I asked him, family *ne manners nahi diye hai hai kya?* (Your family didn’t teach you good manners?)” He might have realised his mistake and he agreed to help,” Sawant recalls with a laugh now.

On Saturday night, when Choudhary took three wickets against Mumbai Indian including the scalp of IPL’s most expensive player Ishan Kishan with a toe crushing yorker, he fulfilled the promise he had made to many, including his neighbour Vaishu’ who became a friend. His three wickets included Rohit Sharma, Kishan and Dewald Bravis which earned him his first man of the match in the IPL for CSK.

Back then Choudhary hadn’t realised that the bossy but caring neighbour would soon become his mentor, coach, sister, brother and father. Choudhary used to stay alone in Pune where he had completed his boarding school. He had moved into a rented apartment alone. Sawant says as a neighbour sometimes she got worried if the boy had eaten since he lived alone.

“There were days when he fell ill. He used to feel lonely. I used to ensure that my family takes care of him like our own child,” she adds.

Choudhary studied in his boarding school in Pune and took admission in the science stream. His family, who were from the cotton-growing city of Yavatmal, and had a small business, wanted their son to study. But studies were not his first choice, the left-handed pacer wanted to play cricket.



Neighbour Vaishali Sawant took care of fast bowler Mukesh Choudhary’s mental conditioning. She gave him inspirational books to read.

Sportzpics for IPL



“He was good in studies, he got 80 percent marks in standard XI but he wanted to play, Sawant recalls.

“He came and told me Vaishu, I want to pursue my career in cricket. So I said, then try but be focussed. To achieve everything one has to make sacrifices, so be ready for that. I became his guardian since then. I took care of his diet, his cricket, and his off-field activities,” Sawant recalls.

Breaking into a top club

Choudhary was playing in small clubs, and it was then that he was told to go to join 22-years Cricket Club where former national selector and Maharashtra team coach Surendra Bhavne used to coach. Bhavne was impressed at first sight.

“I saw this young lanky boy with a good action, good landing and ability to clock 125

kmph on consistent basis. We did some fine-tuning but he was getting wasted in my club. To play for Maharashtra he had to play in a big team who could give him the opportunity to play in invitational tournaments. It’s only then that he came on the selectors’ radar,” Bhavne explains.

Soon Bhavne spoke to the city’s foremost central club Deccan Gymkhana, who agreed to enroll Chaudhary in their team. Deccan have players like Rahul Tripathi, who ensured Chaudhary was groomed.

Choudhary soon made it to the under 23 team and then in the same year 2017 he made his Ranji Trophy debut. Bhavne knew that if he gained some height he would get more pace in the future.

“The best part of him is that he listens, will do his work quietly and will not throw any tantrum. It’s always nice to teach such bowlers,” Bhavne points out.

Back at his rented house, Sawant took care of the fast bowler’s mental conditioning. She gave him inspirational books to read, told him stories about how she had seen cricketers who lost their way despite being good to start with. And how they must have regretted later. Prepared his daily chart. Like a family member, he used to message the Sawants on reaching the ground and after reaching home. “One day he said, let me

find a job. I said, why do you want to work? How much money could he require to feed himself. I took care of the food and in return he promised he will continue to work hard and not lose focus or get distracted. At this age, youngster do get lost. I used to keep tabs on his off field activities and he is such a sweet boy that he never lost his plot. Soon he went on to play Ranji Trophy, so financial issue was sorted,” she asserted.

Sawant recalls how two seasons ago he had come and told her that he won’t be going as a net bowler anymore, and received an earful. “He was a net bowler with Hyderabad and later for CSK. He came and said, aage se mein net bowler banke nahi jaoonga. I gave it back to him, I said how the hell can you say you can’t go. It’s like a school, you will get to learn. Next year he got picked for CSK and look now. We all are happy. I had told him that the best thing that happened was that he failed in the first two games. Failure teaches a man a lot,” Sawant, who works in a construction company, said.

A shy boy, who didn’t really dream big, Chaudhary has tried to keep a low profile. His coaches feel the best thing going for him is he has Dhoni as a mentor. Post IPL, many things will change for Choudhary. But Vaishali happily declares one thing is sure, he will grow as a bowler.