

**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 2**

## 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.

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Gogoi in Vadodara on Sunday. *Bhupendra Rana*

## 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

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## MEVANI SENT TO JUDICIAL CUSTODY, JUDGMENT TODAY

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### BUSINESS AS USUAL

By UNNAY



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

the hate and dislike that they invoked against the government and the Chief Minister and the way they have challenged the writ of the state machinery."

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

## 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 2**

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

**ANJU AGNIHOTRI CHABA**  
JALANDHAR, APRIL 24

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

Government agencies, including the Food Corporation of India, had bought 83.49 lt of wheat in the current rabi marketing season (April-June) as of Sunday evening. "Going by the daily market arrivals, which have clearly slowed 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**  
**E** 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 2**

### UTTAR PRADESH



**LAKHIMPUR KHERI: AFTER SC ORDER, ASHISH MISHRA SURRENDERS IN COURT, SENT TO JAIL**  
**PAGE 3**

## 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

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## 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 2**

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**WEB EXCLUSIVE**



**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

## EXPRESS AUDIO

### Game Time: What the ODI format has meant for Indian cricket

From the archives: Indian Express' Sandip G joins former host Gaurav Bhatt to take a look back at India's ODI performances over the years, and discuss what the format has meant for Indian cricket

Wanted Babbar Khalsa terrorist held in Punjab

EXPRESSNEWSSERVICE  
CHANDIGARH, APRIL 24

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

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

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

An official in Punjab police said Patialavi had come to Punjab "over a week ago" to hold meetings with "some people" to "revive Babbar Khalsa International" in Punjab. He originally hails from Butta Singh Wala village in Patiala district. Police were also learnt to be investigating whether Patialavi could be involved in a case where a bag of explosives was found along the wall of Model Buraail Jail in Chandigarh on Saturday night and another case where a hand grenade was hurled at CIA Office Nawanshahr with the intention to kill the police officials.

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

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

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

Six arrested for assaulting cops, vandalising vehicle in Jaipur

Jaipur: Six people have been arrested for allegedly assaulting police personnel, including a Station House Officer, and vandalising their vehicle, officials said on Sunday. Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (East) Avnish Kumar Sharma said the accused have been booked on charges of disturbing the peace, assaulting police personnel and vandalizing their vehicle when they were patrolling in civil dress on Saturday night at the Kanota area here. **PTI**

FROM PAGE ONE

Privatised airports: Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand back TN on revenue share

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Manipur film tackles sexual identity for the first time

The talk show, "Up Close with Priyakanta Laishram", raises various social issues, including those pertaining to gender and the LGBTQ community. "After having listened to my show, the victim's cousin got in

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

youth of Kashmir Valley, PM Modi said, "Ghati ke nau-jawano, aap ke mata-pita ko, aap ke dada-dadi ko, aap ke nana-nani ko jin museebaton se zindgee jeeni padi... aap ko kabhi bi aisi museebaton se zindagi jeeni nahi padegi. Yeh mein kar ke dikhaunga. Yeh mein aap ko vishwas dilaney aya hoon (Youth of the Valley, you will never face the kind of sufferings that your parents and grandparents faced. I will accomplish this and I have come to assure you that)," he said.

While this is PM Modi's first outreach to the people of J&K since August 2019, when J&K was stripped of its special status and made Union Territory, he has twice visited Army troops to mark Diwali -- in Rajouri on October 27, 2019, and later, Nowshera on November 3, 2021.

Pointing out that his government has worked to achieve the vision of 'Ek Bharat

Shresht Bharat' in a bid to focus on connectivity and eliminate distances, he said, "Distances, whether of hearts, languages, customs or of resources, their elimination is our very big priority today."

The PM said the Banihal-Qazigund road tunnel is a step in that direction. The arch bridge linking Udhampur, Srinagar and Baramulla will be completed soon, and the Delhi-Amritsar-Katra Expressway too will considerably reduce the distance between Delhi and the Mata Vaishno Devi shrine, Modi said.

The day will not be far off, he added, when the Goddess of Kanyakumari and Mata Vaishno Devi will be connected by one road, saying efforts are on to ensure that most parts of J&K stay connected with rest of the country throughout the year.

Ground-breaking ceremonies for projects worth Rs 38,000 crore in the private sec-

tor were also held on the occasion.

Saying Jammu and Kashmir "will write a new script" in the next 25 years, the PM referred to his interaction with a delegation from the UAE, Abu Dhabi and Dubai, saying, "They are very enthusiastic about Jammu and Kashmir... After seven decades of Independence, only Rs 17,000 crore of private investment came to Jammu and Kashmir while this figure has reached Rs 38,000 crore in the last two years."

UAE firms are expected to propose investments worth over Rs 3,000 crore, a first for J&K's infrastructure development. The UAE has largely taken a neutral stand on the Kashmir dispute.

The Prime Minister described the Panchayat Diwas celebrations in Jammu and Kashmir as indicative of big change, adding that Central

government schemes are now getting implemented expeditiously and are directly benefiting people. Pointing out that it is a matter of great pride that democracy in Jammu and Kashmir has reached the grass-roots, he said the three-tier panchayati raj system got established in the Union Territory after people gave him an opportunity to serve at the Centre.

PM Modi also said that districts in J&K, through their elected panchayats, have been allocated funds worth Rs 22,000 crore this year, up from Rs 5,000 crore until three years ago.

Without naming Article 370 or its abrogation, Modi said that since August 2019, the government has been focused on bringing about wide-ranging reforms to substantially improve governance and enhance ease of living for the people of the region.

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

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

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

crisis — private purchases from Punjab's mandis amounted to 13.12 lt and 9.18 lt, respectively. This year, cumulative private wheat purchases were at 4.61 lt as on Sunday, compared to a mere 1.14 lt for the whole of the last season, 1.93 lt in 2020, 2.80 lt in 2019 and 2.06 lt in 2018.

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

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

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

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

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

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

some estimates.

Hanuman Chalisa row: Lawmaker couple hit with sedition charge

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

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

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

Meanwhile, Rizwan Merchant, the lawyer of the Ranass, filed a bail application in the Bandra court Sunday. The court scheduled the hearing for April 29, giving time to the Mumbai police to respond by April 27.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



# UTTAR PRADESH

## BRIEFLY

### Class XII paper leak: School manager held

**Balla:** A school manager has been arrested in connection with the Uttar Pradesh Board of Secondary Education's English paper leak case, police said on Sunday. Pandit Harihar Baba Inter College manager Awadhraj Pandey was arrested on Saturday in the case, SHO, Nagral, Devendra Dubey said. Police have so far arrested over 50 people, including three journalists, six school managers and five school principals, in connection with the paper leak of UP Board's class 12 English question paper. **PTI**

### Cops: 3 held for loot after shootout

**Sultanpur:** Three men allegedly involved in a loot case were arrested by the police after an encounter here in city area, police said on Sunday. Two country-made pistols and a knife were also recovered from them. On Saturday night, Rahul alias Ranjit, Sachin Jaiswal and Shubham were surrounded by police while they were going somewhere, SP, Vipin Kumar Mishra, said. In a bid to flee, the trio opened fire on the police and in the exchange of fire, all of them were arrested. **PTI**

### Three killed as autorickshaw rams truck

**Bahraich:** Three people were killed and as many injured on Sunday when the autorickshaw they were travelling in collided with a stationary truck on the Bahraich-Gonda highway, officials said. ASP (City) Kunwar Gyananjay Singh said the deceased were identified as Chandrika Prasad, Anuj Tiwari and Zafarulla, adding they were street hawkers. **PTI**

## LAKHIMPUR KHERI VIOLENCE

# After SC order, Ashish Mishra surrenders in court, sent to jail

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
LUCKNOW, APRIL 24

SIX DAYS after the Supreme Court set aside the Allahabad High Court order granting him bail, Lakhimpur Kheri violence case accused and Union minister Ajay Kumar Mishra Teni's son Ashish Mishra on Sunday surrendered in a local court that sent him back to jail.

A bench of Chief Justice of India NV Ramana, Justice Surya Kant and Justice Hima Kohli had asked him to surrender within a week.

Lakhimpur Kheri Senior Jail Superintendent PP Singh confirmed that Ashish was brought back to the prison.

Ashish surrendered in the court of the Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM) Lakhimpur Kheri from where he was taken to the district jail, a senior police officer said. The apex court had



Ashish Mishra in police custody at a court in Lakhimpur Kheri district on Sunday. **PTI**

also referred the matter back to the high court to consider afresh whether or not Ashish should be given bail after hearing the victims' families.

On October 3 last year, a convoy of three SUVs, including a Mahindra Thar owned by Ashish's father Ajay Mishra, al-

legedly ran over a group of protesting farmers in Lakhimpur Kheri. Four farmers and a journalist were killed and several others were injured. In the ensuing violence, two BJP workers and the Mahindra Thar driver were killed.

On November 17, the SC had

appointed former Punjab and Haryana High Court judge Rakesh Kumar Jain to monitor the probe by a special investigation team (SIT) constituted by Uttar Pradesh government.

Following an investigation and chargesheet, the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court granted Ashish bail on February 10, saying the driver might have speeded up the vehicle to save himself given there were thousands of protesters.

The killing of the driver and the co-passengers could not be overlooked, it added.

The families of some of the victims then approached the Supreme Court contending that they were not heard when Ashish's bail application was taken up by the HC. The petitioners added that they were denied the opportunity to present their case even as they had applied again.

## Have no guilt for what I said: Seer after getting bail in hate speech case

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

BAJRANG MUNI Das of Maharishi Shri Laxman Das Udasi Ashram, who allegedly made a hate speech and issued a "rape threat" in Uttar Pradesh's Sitapur, was granted bail by a local court.

District judge Sanjai Kumar granted bail to the seer on Saturday. He was released from the district jail Sunday morning.

Das was arrested on April 13 after one Ramnaresh filed a complaint against him.

After his release, the seer said he is ready to go to jail a thousand times and face many attacks, but will continue to safeguard his religion and women.

"I have no guilt for what I said...", he said.

Das, the mahant of Maharshi



Bajrang Muni Das was arrested on April 13

Shri Lakshman Das Udasi Ashram in Khairabad town of Sitapur, had allegedly made the hate speech against a community on April 2. A video of it later surfaced on social media platforms.

In the two-minute video of the speech made outside a mosque, he could be heard using the term "jihadi" to refer to a community and threatening them if any Hindu girl is harassed by any man of that community, their women would be raped.

Another video of him apologising for his statement had also surfaced, hours after police lodged an FIR against him.

## Keep bows and arrows at home to deal with 'jihadis': Sakshi Maharaj

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
LUCKNOW, UNNAO, APRIL 24

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

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

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

"Police will come only when these people return after carrying out jihad. The matter will go to an inquiry committee and it

will end there after some time. For such guests, keep a couple of boxes of cold drink and some original bows and arrows in every house. Jai Shri Ram," he added.

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

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

## Azam 'refuses' to meet SP MLA in jail

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
LUCKNOW, APRIL 24

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

Mehrotra, MLA from the Lucknow Central constituency, told mediapersons that he was in Sitapur to meet Khan on the directions of party president Akhilesh Yadav.

This comes two days after Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party (Lohia) chief Shivpal Yadav met Khan in the jail for more than an hour. Shivpal had said the SP should have led "a struggle in support of one of its tallest leaders".

Speaking to reporters outside the jail, Mehrotra said, "It has been 26 months since Azam Khan has been in jail. It seems the BJP government has murdered democracy in UP. We have apprehensions that he will be murdered in jail. We will continue to fight for him in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly."

On an earlier statement of an aide of Azam Khan that Akhilesh stayed away from Muslims, the SP MLA said, "This is wrong. It is Akhilesh Yadav who has sent us to meet Khan. Akhilesh has been speaking against the oppression of SP leaders by this government."



Senior Samajwadi Party leader Azam Khan

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

Of late, Khan has lent his weight to a growing disenchantment among Muslims with Akhilesh. Recently, his close aide Fasahat Ali Khan had accused Akhilesh of ignoring Azam since he was jailed and not raising Muslims' concerns despite having done well in the recent Assembly elections "due to the Muslim vote".

Also, Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) chief Jayant Chaudhary recently visited Azam's residence in Rampur and met his family members.

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

## Man stabbed to death by uncles in Meerut: Police

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
MEERUT, APRIL 24

A 20-YEAR-OLD man was allegedly stabbed to death on Sunday afternoon by his two uncles a day after a spat between the three over the consumption of liquor in Meerut's Lisadi Gate area.

Police said that the deceased, Saajid, lived in with his uncles - Naushad and Shehzas - in a joint family in Ghante Wali lane in Lisadi Gate area. "On Saturday afternoon, Saajid was consuming liquor and his uncles objected. The three got into an argument but the matter was resolved after the intervention of the family's elders who were present there," police said.

On Sunday morning, while Saajid was returning after offering namaz, he was stabbed to death by Naushad and Shehzas, they added. Saajid's father Yunus has lodged an FIR at Lisadi Gate police station and named his two younger brothers in the complaint.

Police have collected live CCTV footage of the incident. "We have raided the house of the accused but they managed to escape. We are hopeful of arresting them soon," Senior Superintendent of Police, Meerut, Prabhakar Chaudhary, told *The Indian Express* over the phone.

## Baghpat: Church priest held for 'raping' minor

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
MEERUT, APRIL 24

A 67-YEAR-OLD church priest was arrested on Saturday afternoon for allegedly raping a Dalit girl in a village in Baghpat district, police said.

The girl's mother lodged a complaint with the local police station claiming that her daughter

was raped by the local church priest, police added.

"The girl's mother told the police that the priest had been molesting the minor for nearly a month and had been giving the girl money to keep quiet. On Friday evening, the girl told her mother that she had been raped by the priest. She also told her mother that the accused used to touch her inappropriately and

show her obscene films on his mobile phone," police said.

"Following the complaint of the mother, we arrested the priest and the girl has been taken to the hospital for the medical examination. We also collected DNA samples of the two. The priest has been booked under the SC/ST Act and the POCSO Act. He was sent to jail on Sunday," said DSP, Baghpat, Vijay Chaudhary.

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IMPORTANT DATES	SCB	KVPPY	JEE (Advanced)
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Last date for online applications	May 29, 2022	September 15, 2022	September 15, 2022
IISER Aptitude test	July 03, 2022		

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Chairperson, Joint Admission Committee 2022  
Email: [ask-jac2022@iiserpune.ac.in](mailto:ask-jac2022@iiserpune.ac.in), Website: <http://www.iiseradmission.in>  
Phone: 020 25908222 (2 PM to 5 PM, Monday to Friday)

## विश्व मलेरिया दिवस

25 अप्रैल, 2022

### कंपन से यदि चढ़े बुखार पसीना आए बार-बार हो सकता है, यह मलेरिया का बुखार

मलेरिया होने पर कमजोरी आती है, जिसके कारण आपकी रोजमर्रा की जिन्दगी पर असर पड़ता है।

### कचरा कचरेदानी में सोएं मच्छरदानी में

### मलेरिया से बचने के उपाय

अपने घर के आस-पास एवं नालियों में पानी जमा न होने दें।		नालियों की नियमित सफाई करें।	
पानी से भरे गड्ढों में मिट्टी भर दें।		हैंडपंप के आस-पास सीमेंट से पक्का फर्श व नाली बनवाएं।	
पानी के बर्तनों, टंकियों आदि को ढक कर रखें।		कूलर, पशु-पक्षियों के बर्तन, हौदी इत्यादि को सप्ताह में एक बार अवश्य सुखाएं।	
सोते समय कीटनाशक से उपचारित मच्छरदानी का उपयोग करें।		अगर कंपकंपी के साथ बुखार एवं बार-बार पसीना आए तो यह मलेरिया का बुखार हो सकता है।	

ठहरे हुए पानी जैसे तालाब, कुएं आदि में गम्बूसिआ मछली डालें, यह मछली मलेरिया फैलाने वाले मच्छर के लार्वा को खा जाती है।

गर्भवती महिलाओं में यह बीमारी गर्भ में पल रहे शिशु को भी नुकसान पहुंचा सकती है। मलेरिया होने की अवस्था में पूरा इलाज कराएं।



# Ukraine focus as 8 leaders from Europe visit India





 Lucknow









# CAPITAL OUTREACH

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

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

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

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

# A COST TO PAY

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

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

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

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

# FREEZE FRAME

# E P UNNY



MANISH SABHARWAL AND RITUPARNA CHAKRABORTY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The writers are with TeamLease Services

# A SWISS PROMISE

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



RALF HECKNER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The writer is Ambassador of Switzerland to India and Bhutan

# APRIL 25, 1982, FORTY YEARS AGO

## BELLICOSE BRITAIN

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



## LOK DAL-BJP TIE-UP

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

## PM PULLS UP DARBARA

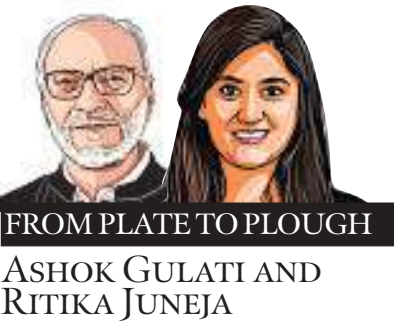
A CRYPTIC REMARK by the Prime Minister to the Punjab Chief Minister, Darbara Singh,

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



# Poverty and politics of freebies

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



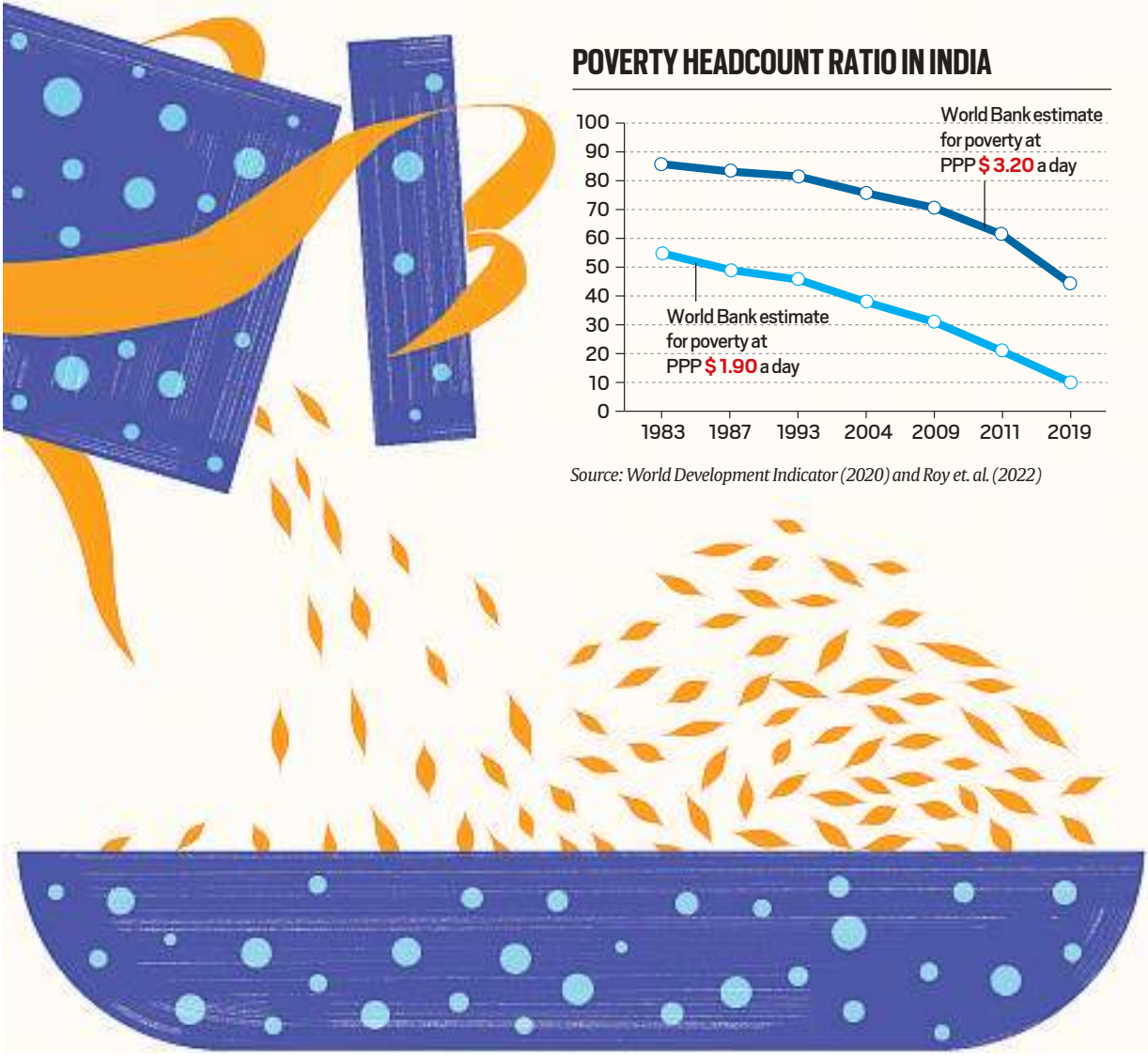
THE RELEASE OF two new working papers, one from the World Bank and the other from the IMF, has led to a renewed debate on poverty in India. Both papers claim that extreme poverty in the country, based on the international definition of \$1.90 per capita per day (in purchasing power parity (PPP)), has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

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

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

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

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



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 'antodaya' households (the most poor category) get more rations (35 kg per household) at a higher subsidy (rice, for instance, at Rs 3/kg and wheat at Rs2/kg). For the remaining below poverty line (BPL) families, the price charged was 50 per cent of the procurement price and for above poverty line families (APL), it was 90 per cent of the procurement price. There could be some problems in identifying the poor. However, technology can help overcome this difficulty.

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

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Gulati is Infosys Chair Professor and Juneja is Consultant at ICRIER

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

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

# Misreading Bhagat Singh

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



ASHUTOSH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



USA

LONG-SERVING SENATOR ORRIN HATCH DIES AT 88

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 unhappened 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."

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



# 9 ECONOMY

## SECTOR WATCH ELECTRIC VEHICLES

### Why has Ola Electric recalled 1,441 scooters?

**Soumyarendra Barik**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

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

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

#### Why has Ola Electric initiated the recall?

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 3 KEY POINTS

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

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

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

EXPLAINED

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

#### Have others EV makers issued a recall?

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

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

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

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

## SECOND ROUND OF BIDDING AFTER THE FIRST FAILED

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

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

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

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

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

### COS TO FOCUS ON CAPEX

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

associated with the revenue.

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

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

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

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

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

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

On August 15, 2020, Prime

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

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

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

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

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



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

Source: PFRDA/PTI

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

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

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

**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.

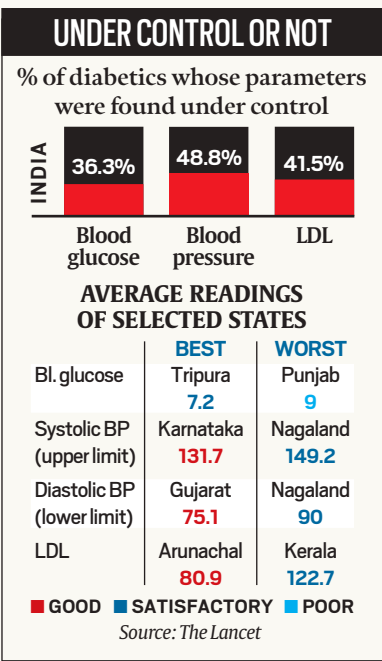
### State-wise variations

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



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

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

### The charges

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

The Donald Trump Administration, how-

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.

Assange supporters hold placards outside the court in London. *AP*



Assange supporters hold placards outside the court in London. *AP*

### 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-

understand these risks better.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### The trial in UK

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

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

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

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







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 triumphant 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, 7:30pm, 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 Dheeraj Jadhav came from, still believe in close neighbourly relations, which extend to being bizarrely horrified if a next-door teen refuses to help with furniture.

“When he refused, I asked him, family *ne manners nahi diye hai hai kya?* (Your family didn’t teach you good manners?)” He might have realised his mistake and he agreed to help,” Sawant recalls with a laugh now.

On Saturday night, when Choudhary took three wickets against Mumbai Indian including the scalp of IPL’s most expensive player Ishan Kishan with a toe crushing yorker, he fulfilled the promise he had made to many, including his neighbour Vaishu’ who became a friend. His three wickets included Rohit Sharma, Kishan and Dewald Bravis which earned him his first man of the match in the IPL for CSK.

Back then Choudhary hadn’t realised that the bossy but caring neighbour would soon become his mentor, coach, sister, brother and father. Choudhary used to stay alone in Pune where he had completed his boarding school. He had moved into a rented apartment alone. Sawant says as a neighbour sometimes she got worried if the boy had eaten since he lived alone.

“There were days when he fell ill. He used to feel lonely. I used to ensure that my family takes care of him like our own child,” she adds.

Choudhary studied in his boarding school in Pune and took admission in the science stream. His family, who were from the cotton-growing city of Yavatmal, and had a small business, wanted their son to study. But studies were not his first choice, the left-handed pacer wanted to play cricket.



Neighbour Vaishali Sawant took care of fast bowler Mukesh Choudhary’s mental conditioning. She gave him inspirational books to read.

Sportzpics for IPL

“He was good in studies, he got 80 percent marks in standard XI but he wanted to play, Sawant recalls. “He came and told me Vaishu, I want to pursue my career in cricket. So I said, then try but be focussed. To achieve everything one has to make sacrifices, so be ready for that. I became his guardian since then. I took care of his diet, his cricket, and his off-field activities,” Sawant recalls.



Breaking into a top club

Choudhary was playing in small clubs, and it was then that he was told to go to join 22-yards Cricket Club where former national selector and Maharashtra team coach Surendra Bhavne used to coach. Bhavne was impressed at first sight.

“I saw this young lanky boy with a good action, good landing and ability to clock 125

kmph on consistent basis. We did some fine-tuning but he was getting wasted in my club. To play for Maharashtra he had to play in a big team who could give him the opportunity to play in invitational tournaments. It’s only then that he came on the selectors’ radar,” Bhavne explains.

Soon Bhavne spoke to the city’s foremost central club Deccan Gymkhana, who agreed to enroll Chaudhary in their team. Deccan have players like Rahul Tripathi, who ensured Chaudhary was groomed.

Choudhary soon made it to the under 23 team and then in the same year 2017 he made his Ranji Trophy debut. Bhavne knew that if he gained some height he would get more pace in the future.

“The best part of him is that he listens, will do his work quietly and will not throw any tantrum. It’s always nice to teach such bowlers,” Bhavne points out.

Back at his rented house, Sawant took care of the fast bowler’s mental conditioning. She gave him inspirational books to read, told him stories about how she had seen cricketers who lost their way despite being good to start with. And how they must have regretted later. Prepared his daily chart. Like a family member, he used to message the Sawants on reaching the ground and after reaching home. “One day he said, let me

find a job. I said, why do you want to work? How much money could he require to feed himself. I took care of the food and in return he promised he will continue to work hard and not lose focus or get distracted. At this age, youngster do get lost. I used to keep tabs on his off field activities and he is such a sweet boy that he never lost his plot. Soon he went on to play Ranji Trophy, so financial issue was sorted,” she asserted.

Sawant recalls how two seasons ago he had come and told her that he won’t be going as a net bowler anymore, and received an earful. “He was a net bowler with Hyderabad and later for CSK. He came and said, aage se mein net bowler banke nahi jaoonga. I gave it back to him, I said how the hell can you say you can’t go. It’s like a school, you will get to learn. Next year he got picked for CSK and look now. We all are happy. I had told him that the best thing that happened was that he failed in the first two games. Failure teaches a man a lot,” Sawant, who works in a construction company, said.

A shy boy, who didn’t really dream big, Chaudhary has tried to keep a low profile. His coaches feel the best thing going for him is he has Dhoni as a mentor. Post IPL, many things will change for Choudhary. But Vaishali happily declares one thing is sure, he will grow as a bowler.

