



Centre, states have to align more to boost investments: CII chief

AANCHAL MAGAZINE & PRANAV MUKUL
NEW DELHI, APRIL 25

CONFEDERATION OF Indian Industry (CII) president and Tata Steel CEO & MD, T V Narendran, told *The Indian Express* on Monday that “greater alignment” between the Centre and states, and policy stability, are “very important” to encourage investments in the country.

Narendran’s remarks come at a time when Centre-state relations have been strained over revenue and economic issues — the latest point of contention being the demand for the Centre to share revenue from the privatisation of airports with states.

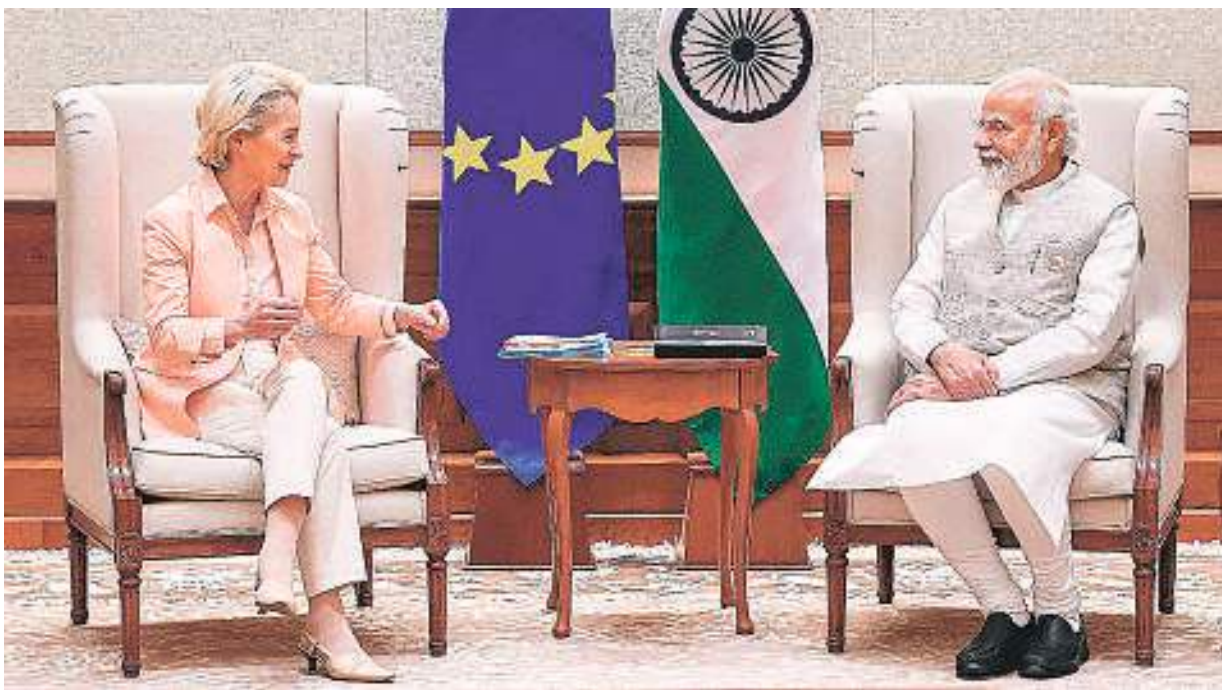
The CII chief also said that the Russia-Ukraine war has presented Indian steel exporters with an opportunity in the light of “space vacated by Russia and Ukraine” in the sector. Russia and Ukraine are the fifth and 12th largest steelmakers in the world, respectively, and cumulatively account for around 10 per cent of the global steel trade.

Speaking about the scenario in India, Narendran said:

**T V NARENDRAN**
CII PRESIDENT

“Obviously for the industry, greater alignment between Centre and states and policy stability are very important. Particularly when you look at foreign investors, they struggle even more to understand these complexities. At a very broad level, if you want to encourage investments, alignment is very important. But as CII, we operate with 65 offices across the country and engage with the states and the Centre. If there is something that is impacting investments or the industry sentiments, then we work with both the states and the Centre to find a solution.”

On the airports issue, the Tamil Nadu government’s new

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**PM Narendra Modi with President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen in New Delhi on Monday. PTI**

DEFINING MOMENT, SHE SAYS AT RAISINA DIALOGUE

War in Ukraine will deeply affect Indo-Pacific region, says EU chief

Modi listening, von der Leyen urges global community to ‘support our efforts’

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, APRIL 25

WITH PRIME Minister Narendra Modi listening, visiting European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on Monday described the killings in Bucha as “severe violations of international law” and said what is happening in Ukraine will impact the Indo-Pacific region.

She said the outcome of the war will not only determine the future of Europe, but also “deeply affect the Indo-Pacific

region and the rest of the world”.

“For the Indo-Pacific region, it is as important as for Europe, that borders are respected, and that spheres of influence are rejected,” she said, while addressing the Raisina Dialogue. The core principles that underpin peace and security across the world, she said, are at stake in Asia as well as in Europe.

The Prime Minister attended the event, but did not speak. Foreign Ministers of Poland, Argentina and several other countries too attended the event. “This is a defining moment.

Our decisions these days will shape decades to come. Our response today will decide the future of both the international system and the global economy. Will the rights of might dominate, or the rule of law? Will there be constant conflict and struggle or will there be a future of common prosperity and lasting peace?” she said.

“This is why we are doing all we can to help Ukraine fight for freedom. This is why we need to impose massive, sharp and effective sanctions. Sanctions are never a standalone solution...

This is why we have designed the sanctions in a way to sustain them over a longer period of time, because this gives us leverage to achieve a diplomatic solution that will bring lasting peace. And we urge all members of the international community to support our efforts for lasting peace,” she said, in an oblique reference to soliciting Delhi’s support.

A former Defence Minister of Germany, President von der Leyen said, “We all see the rising challenges to our open and free

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Tamil Nadu passes Bills to empower state govt to appoint V-Cs in 13 universities

ARUN JANARDHANAN
CHENNAI, APRIL 25

IN WHAT’s likely to open a new front amid escalating tensions between Governor RN Ravi and the DMK-led state government, the Tamil Nadu Assembly on Monday passed two Bills empowering the government to appoint Vice-Chancellors (V-Cs) to 13 state universities. While the Opposition AIADMK and the BJP opposed the Bills, BJP MLAs walked out of the House.

The Tamil Nadu Universities Laws (Amendment) Act, 2022, which covers 12 universities in the state, substitutes the expression “Chancellor” in the original Act with “government” with regard to both appointment and removal of V-Cs. A separate Bill to amend the Chennai University Act, 1923 [Chennai University (Amend-

EXPLAINED
E Opens up new front

THE BILLS, an apparent bid to curtail Governor’s role in V-C appointments, are set to escalate tensions with the Governor. Earlier, the state boycotted events organised by the Governor to protest against alleged delay in clearing Bills.

ment) Act, 2022], with similar intent, was tabled and passed by the House.

The Governor is the Chancellor of 13 universities in the state, with the Higher Education Minister being the Pro-Chancellor.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Elon Musk reaches agreement to acquire Twitter for \$44 bn

ASSOCIATED PRESS
SAN FRANCISCO, APRIL 25

BILLIONAIRE ELON Musk has reached an agreement to acquire Twitter for approximately \$44 billion, the company said.

The outspoken Tesla CEO, the world’s wealthiest person, has said he wants to buy Twitter be-

**Musk calls himself a ‘free-speech absolutist’**

cause he thinks it’s not living up to its potential as a platform for “free speech.” He says it needs to

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BUSINESS AS USUAL

By UNNY



THE WORLD

**RUSSIA HITS RAIL, FUEL FACILITIES; U.S. SAYS MOSCOW FAILING IN WAR AIMS**
PAGE 10

Kishor roadmap report in hand, Sonia sets up action group for revival of Cong

MANOJCGC
NEW DELHI, APRIL 25

WITH THE report by an internal panel on the roadmap presented by election strategist Prashant Kishor and various other suggestions from party leaders in hand, Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Monday moved to set up an empowered action group for overseeing the rollout of organisational decisions for the party’s revival in the run-up to the 2024 general elections.

The party also announced that it will hold a brainstorming session — Nav Sankalp Chintan Shivir — on May 13-15 at Udaipur in Congress-ruled Rajasthan, with about 400 leaders expected to attend.

The decision to set up an empowered group is being seen as a classic Sonia Gandhi move, sending many signals.

According to party sources, all the “actionable points” that will flow from Kishor’s presentation

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CHEATING CHARGE DROPPED

Not enough proof, journalists get bail in Ballia paper leak case

ASAD REHMAN
LUCKNOW, APRIL 25

THE THREE journalists arrested in Ballia in connection with the leak of Class XII English examination paper have been granted bail after police failed to find adequate evidence of their alleged involvement in the crime.

Police have also withdrawn IPC Section 420 (cheating) that

the trio had been booked under due to lack of evidence.

While Ajit Ojha was granted bail by the district court on Monday in the last of the three cases he had been booked, a lower court had granted bail to Digvijay Singh and Manoj Gupta on Friday in the two cases against them.

Ojha and Singh are employed with ‘Amar Ujala’, and Gupta with ‘Rashtriya Sahara’ newspa-

per. Ballia District Inspector Of Schools (DIOS) Brijesh Mishra is among 52 people arrested so far in the case.

The three had told the media that they were arrested for reporting on the paper leak.

Advocate Akhilendra Kumar, who represented the journalists, told *The Indian Express*, “Police had to withdraw the section related to cheating (IPC 420)

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Granted bail, Mevani re-arrested for ‘assaulting’ woman police officer

TORA AGARWALA
GUWAHATI, APRIL 25

EVEN AS a court in Kokrajhar granted him bail in the case related to a purported tweet against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Gujarat MLA Jignesh Mevani was rearrested on Monday in a fresh case filed in Barpeta district on the basis of a complaint by a woman police of-

**Being targeted, says Jignesh Mevani**

ficer who accused him of “assaulting” her and “outraging her modesty”.

Confirming the arrest, Barpeta Superintendent of Police (SP)

Amitava Sinha said a case (81/2022) was registered on the basis of a complaint filed at the Barpeta Road police station by a woman police inspector from Kokrajhar on April 21 — the morning after Mevani was arrested from Gujarat’s Banaskantha district. “He is currently in police custody in Barpeta Road and will be produced in court within 24 hours,” he said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

No farmers or dealers at Mamata govt’s flagship mandis, dept rents out space

PAGE 1 ANCHOR**RAVIK BHATTACHARYA, ATRI MITRA & JOY PRAKASH DAS**
PURBA BARDHAMAN, HOWRAH, HOOGHLY, APRIL 25

IT WAS a flagship scheme of the Mamata Banerjee government, a year after it came to power in West Bengal in 2011 on the strength of its anti-land acquisition agitation. The Krishak Bazars or farm mandis announced across the state were meant to burnish the Trinamool Congress government’s pro-farmer credentials.

**At the Krishak Bazar in Howrah district. Partha Paul**

Ten years later, the spaces with modern amenities meant to provide a platform for farmers to deal directly with buyers, with

the hope of getting them the proper price for their commodities, house — according to where you visit — a local MLA’s office, an

office of an alleged syndicate in soil supply, automobile repair shops, garment stalls, a dentist’s chamber etc. Rust covers machines such as weigh bridges meant for agricultural produce, and the toilets are broken.

Only twice a year, when the state government procures paddy at these establishments, do the mandis come alive. At many places, officials admit that space has been rented out to shops by the Regulatory Market Committee of the Agriculture Marketing Department.

In most Krishak Bazars, farmers and dealers complain of wrong location. The sites were mostly decided by the Agriculture Marketing Department.

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FROM PAGE ONE

Ballia

against Ojha since they didn't have any evidence to prove that he was involved in the paper leak (case). Police had invoked that section in a wrongful manner...and to save themselves."

Government counsel (criminal), Ballia district, Sanjiv Singh confirmed that all three journalists have been granted bail. "Ajit Ojha was granted bail on Monday in the case lodged at Kotwali, while he was already granted bail by a lower court on Friday (in the other cases). The other two were granted bail by a lower court on Friday," he told The Indian Express.

Three cases were lodged at Kotwali, Nagra and Ubhaon police stations. While Ojha was booked in all three cases, the other two were booked in the cases lodged at Nagra and Ubhaon police stations.

Superintendent of Police, Ballia, Raj Karan Nayyar said the section for cheating was dropped since there was no evidence to back it.

Nayyar said: "We dropped the section for cheating against Ojha on Monday, as we could not link the school where he was an invigilator to the paper leak. Initially, DIOS (Brijesh Mishra) had indicated that the school where Ojha was an invigilator was involved in the leak, and so was Ojha. We had the school under scanner, but so far we have not got any evidence to link the school to the paper leak."

He said police are still waiting for forensic data on the mobile phone of the other accused persons, and will proceed further once the details are in. "We had earlier withdrawn the section for cheating against the other two journalists."

On March 30, the Class XII English paper of Uttar Pradesh Board examination was cancelled in 24 districts after news of the paper leak emerged in Ballia district.

The three journalists were arrested on March 31.

While journalists in Ballia began protests against the arrests on April 4 and formed the Sanyukt Patrakar Sangharsh Morcha (united journalists' front) to lead the protest against the administration and police, a journalist, who is part of the Morcha, on Monday said that their agitation will continue until cases against the three are dropped and the DM and SP are removed.

On April 15, local journalists started a relay hunger strike outside the DM office, which entered the 11th day on Monday.

"Our struggle and hunger strike will continue. The way are colleagues were humiliated and arrested shows badly on the whole fraternity," the journalist quoted above said. "We will only end the protest once the three are cleared of all charges."

The Morcha seeks removal of District Magistrate Indra Vikram Singh and SP Raj Karan Nayyar for "framing the journalists in the paper leak case".

After his arrest, Ojha had alleged that he was "framed" after the DM and DIOS had requested him to send the leaked question paper; he was ar-

rested subsequently.

On April 16, the Morcha called for a "bandh" in the district, which received support from the traders, teachers and students' associations, opposition parties and lawyer's associations, among others. The administration had denied that the district was shut down after the call, and tweeted that shops were open across the district.

Musk

be transformed as a private company in order to build trust with users and do better at serving what he calls the "societal imperative" of free speech.

Twitter said it will become a privately held company after the sale is closed.

"Twitter has a purpose and relevance that impacts the entire world," its CEO Parag Agrawal said in a tweet. "Deeply proud of our teams and inspired by the work that has never been more important."

Musk describes himself as a "free-speech absolutist," although he hasn't been exactly clear what he means by that. In a recent TED interview, the billionaire said he'd like to see Twitter err on the side of allowing speech instead of moderating it. He said he'd be "very reluctant" to delete tweets and would generally be cautious about permanent bans. He also acknowledged that Twitter would have to abide by national laws governing speech in markets around the world.

Musk himself, though, regularly blocks social media users who have criticized him or his company and has used the platform to bully reporters who have written critical articles about him or his company.

Twitter's board at first enacted an anti-takeover measure known as a poison pill that could have made a takeover attempt prohibitively expensive. But when Musk outlined the financial commitments he'd lined up to back his offer of \$46.5 billion -- and no other bidders emerged -- the board opened negotiations with him.

While Twitter's user base of more than 200 million remains much smaller than those of rivals such as Facebook and TikTok, the service is popular with celebrities, world leaders, journalists and intellectuals. Musk himself is a prolific tweeter with a following that rivals several pop stars in the ranks of the most popular accounts.

Musk is the world's wealthiest person, according to Forbes, with a nearly \$279 billion fortune. But much of his money is tied up in Tesla stock -- he owns about 17% of the electric car company, according to FactSet, which is valued at more than \$1 trillion -- and SpaceX, his privately held space company. It's unclear how much cash Musk has.

Musk began making his fortune in 1999 when he sold Zip2, an online mapping and business directory, to Compaq for \$307 million. He used his share to create what would become PayPal, an internet service that bypassed banks and allowed consumers to pay businesses directly. It was sold to eBay for \$1.5 billion in 2002.

That same year, Musk

founded Space Exploration Technologies, or SpaceX, after finding that cost constraints were limiting NASA's interplanetary travel. The company eventually developed cost-effective reusable rockets.

In 2004, Musk was courted to invest in Tesla, then a startup trying to build an electric car. Eventually, he became CEO and led the company to astronomical success as the world's most valuable automaker and largest seller of electric vehicles.

EU chief

society. This is true for the technological and the economic domain. But it is also true for security... The core principles that underpin peace and security across the world are at stake in Asia as well as in Europe."

She said "Russia and China have forged a seemingly unrestrained pact".

"They have declared that the friendship between them has no limits. That there are no forbidden areas of cooperation. This was in February this year. And then the invasion of Ukraine followed. What can we expect from the new international relations?" she said.

She said the images coming from Russia's attack on Ukraine have shocked and are shocking the whole world.

Recalling her visit to Bucha earlier this month, she said, "I saw with my own eyes the bodies lined up on the ground. I saw the mass graves. I listened to survivors of an atrocious crime Kremlin's soldiers committed. These are severe violations of international law -- killing innocent civilians, redrawing borders by force, subjugating the will of a free people. This goes against core principles enshrined in the UN Charter. In Europe, we see Russia's aggression as a direct threat to our security."

"We will make sure that the unprovoked and unjustified aggression against Ukraine will be a strategic failure," she said.

Earlier in the day, India and the European Union decided to establish a "Trade and Technology Council" (TTC), a "strategic coordination mechanism" that is aimed to "tackle challenges at the nexus of trade, trusted technology and security".

This was the key outcome after von der Leyen and Modi held their bilateral meeting.

Sources told The Indian Express that with Beijing's increased use of trade and technology as a coercive tool, there is growing agreement with partners to cooperate on trade and technology.

The TTC is an important format in EU's calculus, and the only other country with which the grouping has a TTC is the US. It was announced in June '2021, and has started functioning through "working groups".

"Today, our relationship is more important than ever. We have so much in common. We are vibrant democracies, we both support wholeheartedly the rules-based international order and we have both large economies, and we are both facing a challenging global landscape. For the European Union, the partnership with India is one of our most important relationships for the com-

ing decade and strengthening this partnership is a priority," she said.

"I am thinking of three main topics -- trade, technology and security. That is why I am pleased that today Prime Minister Modi and I have agreed to establish an EU-India Trade and Technology Council. The EU has only one TTC so far -- with the US, and I think it is telling that we now establish the second one with India. Also, because India is technologically a powerhouse, and in the trade sector we need to unleash an enormous amount of untapped potential," she said.

A joint statement said, "Both sides agreed that rapid changes in the geopolitical environment highlight the need for joint in-depth strategic engagement. The Trade and Technology Council will provide the political steer and the necessary structure to operationalise political decisions, coordinate technical work, and report to the political level to ensure implementation and follow-up in areas that are important for the sustainable progress of European and Indian economies."

CII chief

industrial policy states that if an airport run by Airports Authority of India (AAI) is privatised, states should get a share in revenues earned by the company. *The Indian Express* reported on Monday that Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand have supported this move.

Earlier this year, several states had also flagged concerns over the capital expenditure push directed at them in the Budget 2022-23, suggesting that this could end up mortgaging their fiscal independence and sovereignty to the Centre for an extended period.

According to Narendran, India also has "great potential to be a big steel exporter because most of the big steel exporting countries don't have the strength" that the country has in the form of "raw materials and a large market".

"Now the opportunities are more in Europe, Middle-East, Africa because that's a space vacated by Russia and Ukraine who export about 45 million tonnes of steel. So, India's exporting there. Of course, Europe has quotas so it's not like unrestricted exports but that also continues to trigger the interest in investing in India to add capacity...that's a great opportunity for Indian exporters, we will continue to be there," Tata Steel's top executive said.

Responding to a question on the incremental opportunities for India as a result of the conflict, Narendran said that the country has grown to export 20 million tonnes of steel from 10 million tonnes earlier.

"That is only 15-20 per cent of what India produces. If you look at Japan or Korea, they export 30-40 per cent of what they produce. That to me is the potential. The current exports are also limited by the fact that demand in India is quite strong, so we need to keep building capacity faster than the demand growth in India so that we can export," he said.

Around 45 per cent of the steel produced in Russia and around 75 per cent in Ukraine are exported to other nations.

Kishor roadmap

and the report of the eight-member panel will be flagged for implementation by the empowered group. The composition of the group has not been announced but sources said if Kishor joins the party, he could be one of the members.

Party leaders say the decision to set up such a group indicates Kishor will not have a free hand. It also means that all the suggestions made by Kishor may have not been accepted. The eight-member panel has also given its own set of recommendations, and the empowered group will now find a middle path.

The setting up of the group also seeks to address the main demand of the G 23 leaders who have been arguing that key party decisions were being made in a unilateral manner, in an indirect reference to the Rahul Gandhi-Priyanka Gandhi Vadra duo.

Soon after the Assembly election rout in March, a section of the G 23 had officially told the leadership that the "only way forward" is to adopt a model of "collective and inclusive" command and deci-

sion making at all levels. It is to be seen how many members of the G 23 will find a place in the empowered group.

On Monday, before announcing the setting up of the "empowered action group-2024," Sonia Gandhi met members of the committee that studied Kishor's presentation, including P Chidambaram, Ambika Soni, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Digvijaya Singh, Jairam Ramesh, Mukul Wasnik, K C Venugopal and Randeep Surjewala.

The group had met several times to discuss the roadmap before its report was submitted to the party chief last week. Kishor was also called in during their deliberations.

The contents of Kishor's presentation have not been made public. But last Thursday, an 85-page "presentation" did the rounds on social media, which suggested that Kishor had reportedly proposed to the Congress leadership last year that a non-Gandhi as party chief would have a "high" impact. Kishor dismissed the document as "an old/fake presentation" that has "nothing to do with the ongoing discussion".

Speaking to reporters on Monday, Congress communications chief Surjewala said that based on discussions between Sonia Gandhi and the committee's members, she "has decided to constitute an empowered action group 2024 in order to address the political challenges ahead".

The meeting took place a day after the Indian Political Action Committee or I-PAC, which was founded by Kishor, signed a contract with the Telangana Rashtira Samithi (TRS) for the 2023 Assembly elections. Sources said senior Congress leaders are upset over I-PAC entering into a contract with a political opponent at a time when Kishor was in talks with their own party. Kishor has maintained that he currently has no links with I-PAC.

Speaking about the brainstorming session in Rajasthan, Surjewala said the focus will be on the political and economic situation, and the challenges they pose to society.

"Issues relating to the welfare and well-being of kisans (farmers) and khet mazdoors (farm labourers), Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, religious and linguistic minorities and women, social justice and empowerment and youth will also be discussed in detail. In addition, matters relating to organisational restructuring and strengthening will be examined. The Chintan Shivir will also deliberate on the broad strategy of the Congress for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections," he said.

Significantly, Sonia Gandhi has given representation to several G 23 leaders in six other groups that the party has set up for drafting resolutions that will be discussed and passed at the brainstorming session.

Bhupinder Singh Hooda and Mukul Wasnik will be convenors of two committees, while leaders like Ghulam Nabi Azad, Anand Sharma, Shashi Tharoor, Manish Tewari and Akhilesh Prasad Singh are members of different groups.

The committee to draft the political resolution will be headed by Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge, and will have as its members Azad, Tharoor, Ashok Chavan, N Uttam Kumar Reddy, Gaurav Gogoi, Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka, Pawan Khara and Ragini Nayak.

The economic resolution would be drafted by a committee chaired by former finance minister Chidambaram. This panel will include Siddaramaiah, Anand Sharma, Sachin Pilot, Manish Tewari, Rajeev Gowda, Praniti Shinde, Gaurav Vallabh and Supriya Shrinate.

Another committee to lead discussions on issues related to farmers and agriculture would be headed by Hooda. This committee includes Chhattisgarh minister T S Singh Deo, Shaktisinh Gohil, Nana Patole, Partap Singh Bajwa, Arun Yadav, Akhilesh Prasad Singh, Geeta Kora and Ajay Kumar Lallu.

A committee to draft a resolution on issues related to "social and empowerment" will be headed by Salman Khurshid. Its members are Meira Kumar, Digvijaya Singh, Kumari Selja, Nabam Tuki, Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa, Naranbhai Rathwa, Anto

Antony and K Raju.

The committee on organisational matters is being headed by Wasnik, with Ajay Maken, Tariq Anwar, Ramesh Chennithala, Randeep Singh Surjewala, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, Netta D'souza, and Meenakshi Natarajan as members.

A committee on youth and empowerment will be headed by newly appointed Punjab Congress president Amarinder Singh Raja Warring. Its members are Youth Congress president B V Srinivas, NSUI president Neeraj Kundan, Krishna Byre Gowda, Krishna Allavar, Alka Lamba, Roji M John, Abhishek Dutt, Karishma Thakur and Angika Dutta.

Tamil Nadu Bills

Appointing V-Cs to state universities used to be the prerogative of the Governor. The practice is for the Governor to pick the V-C from among three names selected by a search panel. Once the amendment is implemented, the government will give its assent for the V-C pick, leaving the Governor with no role. Also, while earlier the Governor appointed the V-C search panel, the government will do so once the new law comes into force.

The 'Statement of Objects and Reasons' of the Bills also says that the secretary in charge of finance will be among the syndicate members in all the universities.

The Bills come at a time when ties between the DMK government and Governor Ravi appear frayed -- earlier this month, the DMK-led state government boycotted events organised by the Governor to protest against the alleged delay in clearing several Bills passed by the state Assembly. The two Bills passed on Monday, too, will need the Governor's nod.

The amendments will empower the government to appoint V-Cs in 13 state universities -- Chennai University, Madurai Kamaraj University, Anna University, Bharathiar University, Bharathidasan University, Mother Teresa Women's University, Alagappa University, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Periyar University, Tamil Nadu Open University, Thiruvalluvar University, Tamil Nadu Teachers Education University and Annamalai University.

While appealing to the House to support the Bills, Chief Minister M K Stalin said that even in Gujarat, the home state of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, V-Cs are not appointed by the Governor, but by the state.

The Bills cited the Gujarat University Act, 1949, and the Telangana Universities Act, 1991, as laws that allow state governments to appoint V-Cs. It also referred to the Karnataka State Universities Act, 2000, where the V-Cs are appointed by the Chancellor with the state government's concurrence.

In December last year, the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi government had passed a Bill curtailing the powers of the Governor in the appointment of V-Cs in state universities.

In his speech on the floor of the House, Stalin said there was a need to empower the state government to select V-Cs and not doing so would create a "big impact" on higher education.

Responding to opposition by AIADMK MLAs, both CM Stalin and Higher Education Minister K Ponnudiy said even the late AIADMK chief J Jayalalithaa was in favour of the state government appointing V-Cs in state-run universities.

He said that while earlier, the practice was for the Governor to consult the state government before selecting V-Cs, "there has been a change in this over the past few years... A government elected by the people being unable to appoint the Vice-Chancellor to a university run by it creates a lot of issues in the overall varsity administration. This is against the democratic principles".

WITH PTI INPUTS

Jignesh Mevani

Mevani has been booked under IPC Sections 294 (obscene acts and songs in public place), 354 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty), 353 (assault or criminal force to detain public servant from discharge of his duty), and 323 (voluntarily causing hurt).

Mevani allegedly "misbehaved, used slang words and touched her inappropriately," Assam Special DGP (Law and

Order) G P Singh told The Indian Express. "The case is now under investigation," said Singh.

In her complaint, the woman police officer has said that Mevani "uttered slang words" at her when she was escorting him, in a government vehicle, from Guwahati airport to Kokrajhar on April 21. When she asked him to "behave properly", he got "agitated and used most slang words," she has said.

"He pointed a finger towards me, tried to frighten me, and pushed me on my seat with force. He thus assaulted me during the execution of my legal duty of being a public servant and outraged my modesty by touching me inappropriately while pushing," she has said in her complaint. According to the FIR, two other police officers, including Surjeet Singh Panesar, Additional SP (HQ) Kokrajhar, were present in the vehicle.

The alleged assault took place when the vehicle was crossing Simlaguri, in Barpeta district. "We carried out a proper investigation after receiving the complaint," said Sinha.

Mevani's lawyer and senior advocate, Angshuman Bora, said it was a "completely false and fabricated" case. "There was no mention of this during the arguments in court yesterday... that he has allegedly misbehaved a lady police officer. Where has this come up from suddenly?" asked Bora, adding that Mevani would be produced before the Barpeta Chief Judicial Magistrate on Tuesday. "We will now move for bail there," he said.

Bora said the Barpeta police personnel had arrived with a warrant on Monday morning, but did not divulge further details. "We were not told the context of his re-arrest, we just knew the sections because it was mentioned in the warrant," he said.

While being taken away in a van from Kokrajhar to Barpeta district, Mevani told reporters that the BJP and RSS were trying to "tarnish his image" and "target" him to "systematically destroy" him. "They did it with Rohit Vemula, Chandrasekhar Azad and now they are targeting me. They have serious problems with Dalits. We believe in the Indian Constitution. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar was targeted by Savarkar, and Modi is targeting Jignesh Mevani," he told reporters.

Mevani, an Independent MLA who had pledged support to the Congress last September, was arrested by the Assam Police from Gujarat on April 20 following a complaint filed against him by a local BJP leader in Kokrajhar regarding a purported tweet from his account against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In Kokrajhar, he was sent to police custody for three days. On Sunday, he was produced in the chief judicial magistrate's court in Kokrajhar, which reserved judgment on his bail petition. While the Assam Police had sought 10 days' custody, Mevani's lawyers had argued that there was no "prima facie evidence for the charges" against the MLA and the whole case was "concocted."

On Monday, the court granted him bail on furnishing a bond of Rs 30,000, saying that the statement (Mevani's tweet) "prima facie does not represent any class, community, religious group of people, race, language".

"I do not find reasonable ground to hold the accused in detention for the offence under Section 120 B/153 A of IPC R/W Section 66 of the IT Act only for the sentence that Mr Narendra Modi worships and considers 'Godse as God'," the order said. "The IO (investigating officer) can proceed with this investigation even if the accused is released on bail," it said.

Flagship mandis

On February 3, during an administrative meeting, the CM acknowledged problems with the Krishak Bazars, saying these were "not being utilised properly". Minister of Agriculture Marketing Department Biplab Mitra told The Indian Express, "It is true that identification of spots for the mandis was not proper in some cases. But in each of these mandis, huge land and money are involved, so we are trying to make them viable."

In total, 186 Krishak Bazars have been constructed across the state, each over an average

3 acres of land, at a cost of Rs 1,080 crore. The amenities created include rest houses for farmers, godowns, weigh bridges, help centres, parking and other facilities.

The Indian Express visited six such Kisan Mandis in Howrah, Hooghly and Purba Bardhaman districts -- the agricultural hubs of Bengal -- as well as the nearest private markets for farm products.

Purba Bardhaman district

The Krishak Bazar in Raina block houses a two-storey white-and-blue (the TMC colours) building with a poster marking it out as the 'People's Welfare Office' of TMC Raina MLA Shampa Dhara. The concrete auction platform is desolate, but like the TMC MLA's office, a tea shop, some automobile repair shops and a garage, a jewellery shop and a dentist's chamber are bustling.

A senior official in the District Agricultural Marketing Department says with "no takers" among the farmers or dealers, "Those who approach us, be it for non-agricultural purposes, we rent out the space to them. It is better than nothing."

The owner of one of the automobile repair shops, Maidul Haque Malik (40), says the complex houses 22 shops. "We pay rent of Rs 3 per sq ft monthly, apart from Rs 1,000 per sq ft paid in advance," he says, adding they don't have any papers for it.

Malik adds that the MLA's office has been there since he opened shop at the complex. "We have never seen farmers or wholesalers come here. But we have seen the MLA and her followers here."

MLA Dhara, who is also the 'Sabbadhipati' of the zila parishad in Purba Bardhaman which runs the mandis, says she no longer uses the building as her office. "I had an office there to serve people," she says.

On the mandis lying unused, Dhara says: "It is not right to say that Krishak Bazars are not being used. Twice a year, the state government procures paddy."

A senior official of the district agricultural marketing department says the problem is the communication gap. "Farmers and dealers are unwilling (to come) to a majority of the Krishak Bazars in the district. We should make them more aware of the benefits."

Hooghly district

At the deserted Adisaptagram Krishak Bazar, only two shops are open, with some trucks and mini-vans parked outside. One is an air-conditioned shop with sofas, in the other a group of youths are playing carrom.

One of the youths says he and his friends run a business renting out trucks and mini-vans. "This place has never been used as a mandi. The godowns are also empty, but sometimes the administration keeps EVMs here when there are polls."

Locals claim a syndicate runs its operations, supplying soil from the Krishak Bazar. Tapan Dasgupta, TMC MLA from Adisaptagram and former agricultural marketing minister, denies this. "I have cleared all those things. Before 2021 (the Assembly polls), I removed the syndicate offices from Krishak Bazar with the help of police."

About the mandi, Dasgupta says: "We tried to set up a market for bananas, but the farmers found no buyers and left. It is true that the location is not helpful."

Manoj Chakraborty, 'Krishi Karmadhakshya' of Hooghly zila parishad, says this problem is widespread. "In 18 blocks, 16 farm mandis have been set up, but in a majority, the markets are not functional. That is because their locations are wrong."

Hooghly district/ Singur

The Krishak Bazar here is a different story. It is named after Tapasi Malik, who was allegedly raped, murdered and set on fire during the anti-land acquisition agitations in 2006 against the Tata Nano project.

This Krishak Bazar works as a store and procurement centre for "Sufal Bangla", a state government initiative to provide subsidised vegetables and fruits to localities through stalls, trucks and mini-vans. Staff member Shankar Kotal says, "Farmers from areas like Nalikul, Singur, Gopalnagar, Bilyetpur sell their produce here. We package it and send to the 66 stalls of Sufal Bangla in different parts of the state."

WRITEBACK

RESPONDING TO *The Indian Express* April 23 report 'To ease supply strain on coal stocks, Railways to boost rakes', Rajiv Jain, Additional Director General (Public Relations), Ministry of Railways, said it did not present the correct perspective about the efforts to transport coal taken by Indian Railways.

"Indian Railways has taken proactive steps to ensure continuous supply of coal to power houses," Jain said in a statement, noting that the railways "has been a prime supplier of coal to all power houses and has taken substantive measures in year 2021-22 and the current month of April to augment the coal supply to power houses."

"During the year 2021-22, Indian Railways has augmented the transportation of coal through Railways by a record 111 million tonnes and loaded a record 653 million tonnes of coal as compared to 542 million tonnes in the previous year i.e. a growth of 20.4 per cent. Further, during the period September 2021 to March 2022, loading of coal to power sector was augmented

by 32 per cent in just two quarters. In April 2022, Indian Railways has taken many steps to prioritise the loading of coal to the power sector which has led to increase in supply of coal of more than 10 per cent within one week time," the statement said.

It said that the railway had prioritised movement of coal trains and was conducting intensive monitoring of all trains during the entire cycle from loading to movement and finally unloading leading to a reduction in transit time of coal trains to long distance power houses by 12-36 per cent. The statement also said the railways had prioritised the movement of coal to long distance power houses which was reflected in a 7 per cent increase in average lead (distance travelled) of coal trains during April 18 and April 22 compared to the first 10 days of the month.

"Indian Railways is fully geared up and has mobilised all resources to ensure that sustained high level of coal supply is maintained to powerhouses and is committed to lift all domestic coal that is

brought to the sidings/ good sheds by the coal companies and imported coal brought to the ports by the power generating companies," the statement said.

Our Correspondent replies:

The Indian Railways has not disputed the contents of the April 23 report, including the fact that the average number of railway rakes transporting coal to powerhouses had decreased from about 409 per day in March to about 380 in the first two weeks of April, despite the ongoing issue of low coal stocks at thermal power plants.

The railways also said it was planning to boost the number of rakes used to transport coal from current levels. "To ensure swift supply of coal across power plants, additional trains and rakes by Indian Railways have been initiated to augment transportation of coal through its network," the Ministry of Railways said in a press release last Monday confirming it was increasing rakes to boost supply of coal to power houses as mentioned in the report.



3UTTAR PRADESH

GORAKHPUR

Proposal for wedding turned down, man kills girl, her parents

EXPRESSNEWSSERVICE
LUCKNOW, APRIL 25

A MAN allegedly hacked a 17-year-old girl and her parents to death in Gorakhpur district on Monday night after his marriage proposal was turned down by the family, police said.

The accused was arrested hours after the killings, said additional director general of police (ADGP), Gorakhpur Zone, Akhil Kumar.

The incident took place when the girl along with her parents was returning from her uncle's house after attending a marriage ceremony at Raiganj Bajrihwa Tola village around 9pm, the additional director general of police said.

When on their way, Alok Paswan, 22, of Khalilabad area in adjacent Sant Kabir Nagar district attacked the three with a sharp-edged weapon and hacked them to death, he added.

The assailant escaped after the killings, but the police caught him within two hours of the incident on a tip-off, Kumar said. Further investigation was on, added a senior police officer.

NOTHING WRONG WITH MEETING AZAM: BJP

BJP now joins in, Azam Khan's prison guest list grows longer

LALMANI VERMA
LUCKNOW, APRIL 25

A LITTLE OVER a month after the BJP made targeted attacks on him, making any party including his own wary of association with him, Azam Khan is fast turning out to be the most coveted leader in Uttar Pradesh.

After RLD leader Jayant Chaudhary and Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party leader Shivpal Singh Yadav visited him in prison, Azam has now received a Congress guest, and, the biggest surprise of all, praise from the BJP. Azam, who has been in prison for over two years now in connection with 81 cases, has only turned away one visitor so far: the Samajwadi Party's Ravidas Mehrotra, the MLA who was reportedly carrying an olive branch from SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, who is facing the full blast of the old SP warhorse's anger.

While Mehrotra admitted he went to meet Azam on Akhilesh's directive, the SP chief appeared to distance himself from the move following the snub.

Earlier, Jayant's visit was seen as a mediatory gesture on



Congress leader Acharya Pramod Krishnam (left); SP leader Azam Khan

Akhilesh's behalf. That all was not well between Akhilesh and Azam spilled into the open when Azam's media in-charge Fasahat Ali Khan accused the SP president of maintaining silence on issues concerning the Muslim community and alleged that he did not make efforts to get Azam out of jail, or to visit him.

Akhilesh, who has largely sidelined his father Mulayam Singh Yadav's contemporaries in the party like Azam, realises Azam is one leader he can't afford to lose, particularly with other voices of discontent against the SP among the Muslim community.

A couple of days later, Azam sent another warning when Shivpal, who has shared an uneasy relationship with nephew

Akhilesh, turned up to meet the Rampur MLA in jail for more than an hour and accused the SP of not standing up for Azam. Shivpal said the SP should have led "a struggle in support of one of its tallest leaders".

After Azam turned away the SP MLA from jail saying he was "unwell" and couldn't meet him, came the biggest surprise.

BJP leader from Kaiserganj (Bahraich district) Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh referred to Azam as a "mass leader" and said he too would like to meet him in jail if given a chance. There was nothing wrong with meeting Azam, Singh said.

On Monday, Congress leader Acharya Pramod Krishnam met the SP MLA in jail. He claimed to have gifted Azam a Gita while the legislator offered him *khajoor* (dates).

Speaking to the media, Krishnam said Azam had faced atrocities. "I came to enquire about his health. When he comes out of jail, I will meet him again and talk politics," Krishnam told reporters.

Meanwhile, Fasahat Ali told *The Indian Express* Monday that no SP leader approached him even after his critical comments

about the party leadership.

Cases against Azam have not progressed in the last one-and-half years and he has received bail in all the criminal cases, barring one.

BJP state spokesperson Rakesh Tripathi denied that Singh's statement indicated the party was going soft on Azam. Asked about Singh's remarks, Tripathi said, "It could be his remark in a personal capacity."

In the recent Assembly election campaign, the BJP had repeatedly attacked Azam, linking the SP government's tenure from 2012 to 2017 with the rule of the land mafia.

At a rally in Moradabad on December 30, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said, "If the SP returns to power, Azam will come out of jail. If land mafiosi like Azam have to be kept inside the jail, the Adityanath government will have to be formed with a grand majority in the state once again."

Azam being one of the state's most prominent Muslim leaders, sources in the SP and other parties such as the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and Congress admitted they were following the developments closely.

Death penalty for 5 in murder case, life term for one

Aligarh: A court in Uttar Pradesh's Aligarh district on Monday convicted five people to death and sentenced one person to life imprisonment in a 2015 murder case, officials said. Additional Director General of Police (Law and Order) Prashant Kumar said the Additional District Judge-3 Rajesh Bharadwaj gave the judgement.

The incident took place on July 24, 2015, when Chanda and Nause -- both history sheeters -- had gone to attend a marriage function in Mamood Nagar.

According to the family members, the duo was called by Asif, and as they were dancing, they were attacked. Subsequently, Nause's son Raja registered a case, in which he accused advocate Gyasuddin of giving money for the murder over a property dispute. He also named Asif, Ahsan, Vakeel, Kafeel and Bhura in his complaint.

Police attributed supremacy along with property dispute as a reason behind the murder. Additional district government counsel Krishna Murari Jauhari said that Gyasuddin has been given life imprisonment, while the five have been sentenced to death.

ENS



FLORAL TRIBUTE

CM Yogi Adityanath and BJP MP Rita Bahuguna Joshi pay tribute to former UP CM Hemwatinandan Bahuguna on his birth anniversary in Lucknow on Monday. Vishal Srivastav

Academy to help OBC youths prepare for competitive exams

EXPRESSNEWSSERVICE
LUCKNOW, APRIL 25

AIMING TO provide more employment opportunities to OBC youths of the state, the Uttar Pradesh government will open two academies for OBC students -- one to provide free of cost coaching for competitive examinations and the other to offer computer-based training. They would be named "Training Academy" and "Digital Academy" respectively.

"The academies would have subject specialists to provide subject-specific help to students for different competitive exam-

inations," said a government spokesperson said.

The spokesperson added that the idea behind the initiative is to uplift students from the weaker sections of society, both educationally as well as economically.

As per officials, the academies figure in the two-year agenda of the Uttar Pradesh government. "In the meantime, the government has decided to offer free coaching to OBC students preparing for different competitive exams at private coaching centres for the next six months. The target is to open the academies over the next two years," an official said.

The training academy would

train youths and help them in appearing for competitive examinations, while the digital academy would provide free 'O-level' and 'CCC' courses for OBC youths.

In its manifesto for the 2022 Assembly elections, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party had promised to open training academies that would provide free of cost training to OBC youths.

Officials said that Intermediate pass-outs and unemployed OBC students would be eligible for admission in these academies, while a committee headed by District Magistrates in each district would shortlist candidates. The application process would be online.

HUDCO felicitates UPEIDA for infra push

Lucknow: As the 52nd Foundation Day celebrations of HUDCO ended in New Delhi, Uttar Pradesh Expressways Industrial Development Authority was felicitated for giving a boost to the infrastructure in the state through expressways.

The award was conferred by Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri and was received by UPEIDA CEO Awanish Kumar Awasthi. Official sources said that 92 per cent of the work for the upcoming expressway in Bundelkhand region has been completed.

The work on the Gorakhpur Link Expressway is also going on at a fast pace.

The state government is in the process of starting construction of one of the biggest expressway projects in the country -- the Ganga Expressway.

ENS



Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri with UPEIDA CEO Awanish Kumar Awasthi in New Delhi. Express

‘Good listener’: Mayawati’s likely heir hits ground for Rajasthan election prep

The BSP chief tasked Akash with collecting ‘truthful progress reports’ on party

LALMANI VERMA
LUCKNOW, APRIL 25

SEEN AS someone who may succeed Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) president Mayawati as the party's leader, her nephew Akash Anand is now on a tour of Rajasthan to gain an understanding of the party's organisational strength.

Earlier this month, the 31-year-old participated in a 13-km "Swabhiman Sankalp Yatra" in Alwar on the birth anniversary of BR Ambedkar. Anand, according to party insiders, is supervising the BSP's preparations for the Assembly elections scheduled for next year. The party won six seats in Rajasthan in 2018.

Last month, after a rout in the Uttar Pradesh elections, the BSP chief had tasked Akash with visiting different parts of the state to collect "truthful progress reports on the activities of the party" and encourage youth workers.

"He is a good listener," said a BSP leader who did not wish to be identified. "He interacts with



Akash Anand is the son of Mayawati's younger brother and BSP number two Anand Kumar. Twitter/ @AnandAkash_BSP

workers too, apart from office-bearers. During the recent UP Assembly polls, he held some meetings with youths. In other states, he has been meeting senior leaders. Behen ji (Mayawati) is grooming him for the long term. Whenever he visits any district for a party meeting, he is accompanied by at least two coordinators from the respective state who brief him about the local political scenario and introduce him to the local cadre."

Other insiders said Akash was

active in the party's decision-making on issues related to the youth and social media. He was given the responsibility of the BSP campaign in Punjab and Uttarakhand during the Uttarake elections and addressed several rallies.

"Under the guidance of Behen ji, Akash is now focusing on Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Recently, he visited Rajasthan thrice and MP once. He is regularly having closed-door meetings and online meetings with youth from across India," said a BSP functionary.

Akash is the son of Mayawati's younger brother and BSP number two Anand Kumar. He completed his schooling in Delhi and his MBA degree in London. He returned to India in 2017 and in May that year accompanied Mayawati to Saharanpur where a Thakur-Dalit clash had occurred. Four months later, Anand and Akash were officially introduced to BSP workers. It came a few months after the BJP won the state elections and the BSP ended third

with 19 seats. A BSP leader recalled that the party president introduced Akash to him and his colleagues, saying, "This is Akash, he has completed his MBA from London and now will look after the party's activities."

In the run-up to the 2019 general elections, Akash received media attention after Mayawati announced that her nephew would join the BSP movement to learn the ropes of politics. He became more active as the BSP inked an alliance with the Samajwadi Party (SP) for the polls and was seen attending the alliance's political rallies. At the time, Akash was also credited with getting his aunt to Twitter. When the Election Commission banned Mayawati from campaigning for 48 hours, he addressed his first rally in Agra. Akash was joined by SP president Akhilesh Yadav and Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) president Ajit Singh, both BSP allies at the time. He was appointed BSP national coordinator in June 2019, officially marking his rise in the party hierarchy.

ENS

Three Kashmiri students finally walk out of Agra jail in sedition case

EXPRESSNEWSSERVICE
NEW DELHI, APRIL 25

THREE KASHMIRI students, who were languishing in a Agra prison for want of guarantors even after being granted bail by the Allahabad High Court in a sedition case about a month ago, finally walked out of the jail on Monday evening.

The students -- Arsheed Yusuf, Inayat Altaf Sheikh and Showkat Ahmed Ganai -- were arrested on October 26 last year allegedly for raising pro-Pakistan slogans after Indian team's T20 cricket match.

Nasir Khuehami, spokesperson of the J&K Students' Association that has been assisting the students in their legal battle, said: "They have suffered a great deal, from being roughed up at the Agra Sessions Court to facing recurrent delays in hearings. Finally, the students were released on Monday evening. There was delay in their release for want of guarantors. They now return home."

Noting that it was entertaining the bail application directly, which was an "exceptional circumstance", Judge Ajay Bhanot, in his court order had said: "The unity of India is not made of bamboo reeds which will bend to the passing winds of empty slogans. The foundations of our nation are more en-

during. Eternal ideals bind the indestructible unity of India. Constitutional values create an indissoluble Union of India. Every citizen of the country is the custodian, and the State is the sentinel of the unity of India and the constitutional values of the nation."

The fact that people were travelling long distances within the country for education was something to celebrate, the court had said. "Students travelling freely to different parts of the country in quest of knowledge is the true celebration of India's diversity and a vivid manifestation of India's unity. It is the duty of the people of the hoisting state to create enabling conditions for visiting scholars to learn and live the constitutional values of our nation. It is also the obligation of young scholars to imbibe and adhere to such values."

The students had been booked under IPC sections 124A (sedition), 153-A (promoting enmity between different groups) and 505 (1)(B) (with intent to cause, or which is likely to cause, fear or alarm to the public, or to any section of the public), and 66-F of the Information Technology Act, for allegedly sending WhatsApp messages "against the country" after the cricket match.

The chargesheet had also been filed under the same IPC sections.

Ex-Home Secy who resigned over Babri demolition dies at 85

MANOJ MORE & SUSHANT KULKARNI
PUNE, APRIL 25

DR MADHAV Godbole, the Union Home Secretary who took an early retirement in protest against the Babri Masjid demolition, died of cardiac arrest at his home in Pune on Monday. He was 85.

Godbole breathed his last around 10 am and his last rites were performed at 2 pm, his family said in a statement. The former bureaucrat is survived by his wife Sujata, son Rahul, daughter Meera, and their families.

Posted as Secretary of the Home and Justice departments, Godbole quit in March, 1993, barely months after the Babri demolition, ending his service 18 months earlier than scheduled.

"The reason was quite clear," he had told *The Indian Express* after a special CBI court acquitted all 32 surviving accused in the demolition case. "My recommendation to dismiss the then Kalyan Singh-led UP government was not accepted (by then PM Narsimha Rao)."

The acquittals had taken Godbole



DR. MADHAV GODBOLE
1936-2022

we were updating the court regarding what was happening on the ground. The reports of the Intelligence Bureau... placed before the Supreme Court... had said there was a conspiracy to demolish Babri Masjid. Yet, the Special court says there was no conspiracy... This is surprising."

He had recalled how even the Liberhan Commission, set up in 1992 to probe the mosque demolition, had pointed to a conspiracy. "[The Commission] had submitted its report after a strenuous exercise... in 2009. It described how the conspiracy was hatched and named the parties and leaders involved in it. The speeches and TV footage were also made available by the commission. But it seems the court has not taken cognisance of the report." Retired IAS officer Mahesh Zagade described Godbole as "one of the most dis-

ciplined and upright IAS officers."

"I had an opportunity to work closely with him... In the 1990s, he was in the state Finance Ministry and I was in Home Ministry. He was strictly against unnecessary government expenditure and pressed hard for using public money judiciously for development projects," Zagade said.

Godbole, Zagade added, was a "no-nonsense officer" who never buckled under pressure from politicians. "He backed good things and stood all that was in the public interest," the former IAS officer added.

Retired IPS officer N Ramachandran, the president and founder of the Indian Police Foundation, with which Godbole was closely associated, said, "Dr Godbole was a tall administrator, a prolific writer, an erudite speaker, a government official of high integrity and pro-activity. [The Commission] had submitted its report after a strenuous exercise... in 2009. It described how the conspiracy was hatched and named the parties and leaders involved in it. The speeches and TV footage were also made available by the commission. But it seems the court has not taken cognisance of the report." Retired IAS officer Mahesh Zagade described Godbole as "one of the most dis-

"He was a fierce advocate of the rule of law and his strong and fearless views on matters relating to constitutional governance, public policy and reform will continue to guide us for a long time to come."

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SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

States vs Centre on VC selection: rules, friction

Tamil Nadu has passed two Bills proposing to take away the Governor's powers to appoint VCs of state universities. Which other states have done this, and why?

SOURAV ROY BARMAN
NEW DELHI, APRIL 25

THE TAMIL Nadu Assembly passed two Bills on Monday that seek to transfer the Governor's power in appointing Vice-Chancellors of 13 state universities to the state government, currently led by the DMK. Chief Minister MK Stalin said the Bills were required as the Governor was disregarding the state government's opinion on the appointments of VCs, an argument also made by states such as Maharashtra and West Bengal in the past.

A look at the rules guiding the appointments of VCs across states reveal wide variations, leaving the field open for dispute, particularly in cases where there are sharp political differences between the state and the Centre, which appoints the Governors.

What are the highlights of the two Bills?

The Bills passed in Tamil Nadu stress that "every appointment of the Vice-Chancellor

shall be made by the Government from out of a panel of three names" recommended by a search-cum-selection committee. Currently, the Governor, in his capacity as the Chancellor of state universities, has the power to pick a VC from the shortlisted names. The Bills also seek to empower the state government to have the final word on the removal of VCs, if needed. Removal will be carried out based on inquiries by a retired High Court judge or a bureaucrat who has served at least as a Chief Secretary, according to one of the Bills.

Are other states trying to curtail the Governor's role in appointing VCs?

Yes. In December, the Maharashtra Assembly passed a Bill amending the Maharashtra Public Universities Act, 2016. Under the original Act, the Maharashtra government had no say in appointment of VCs. If the changes take effect, the Governor will be given two names to choose from by the state government, currently ruled by the Shiv Sena-NCP Congress, following a panel's suggestions.

In 2019, the West Bengal government, led by the Trinamool Congress, took away the Governor's authority in appointing VCs to state universities. It has also hinted at removing the Governor as the Chancellor of the universities.

In Left-ruled Kerala, the Governor alleged that the appointment of the Vice-Chancellor of Kannur University was done against his wishes. The BJD government in Odisha has also tried to bring appointments to state universities under its control. But it has been challenged by the University Grants Commission (UGC).

What is at the root of the differences?

In West Bengal, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, the elected governments have repeatedly accused the Governors of acting at the behest of the Centre on various subjects, including education. The regulations, which differ from state to state, are often open to interpretation and disputes are routine.

In fact, the Tamil Nadu Bills make a case for giving the state government the upper hand in the VC appointment process by citing the

examples of Gujarat and Telangana. "It is considered that in line with the aforesaid (Gujarat, Telangana) State University Laws, the Government of Tamil Nadu should be empowered to appoint the Vice-Chancellors of the State Universities," both Bills state.

In Karnataka, Jharkhand and Rajasthan, state laws underline the need for concurrence between the state and the Governor. The terms "concurrence" or "consultation" are absent from state legislation in most cases.

What is the UGC's role in this?

Education comes under the Concurrent List, but entry 66 of the Union List — "coordination and determination of standards in institutions for higher education or research and scientific and technical institutions" — gives the Centre substantial authority over higher education. The UGC plays that standard-setting role, even in the case of appointments in universities and colleges. According to the UGC (Minimum Qualifications for Appointment of Teachers and other Academic Staff in

Universities and Colleges and other Measures for the Maintenance of Standards in Higher Education) Regulations, 2018, the "Visitor/Chancellor" — mostly the Governor in states — shall appoint the VC out of the panel of names recommended by search-cum-selection committees. Higher educational institutions, particularly those that get UGC funds, are mandated to follow its regulations. These are usually followed without friction in the case of central universities, but are sometimes resisted by the states in the case of state universities.

What are the rules in Gujarat and Telangana?

The Gujarat University Act, 1949 states that "the Vice-Chancellor shall be appointed by the State Government from amongst three persons recommended by a (search-cum-selection) committee". The Telangana Universities Act, 1991 states that the search committee shall "submit a panel of three persons to the Government in alphabetical order and the Government shall appoint the Vice-Chancellor

from out of the said panel".

Last month, setting aside the appointment of the Vice-Chancellor of Gujarat's SP University by the state government, the Supreme Court made some key observations.

What were these observations?

A Bench of Justices M R Shah and B V Nagarathna said "any appointment as a Vice Chancellor contrary to the provisions of the UGC Regulations can be said to be in violation of the statutory provisions, warranting a writ of quo warranto". It said every subordinate legislation of the UGC, in this case the one on minimum standards on appointments, flows from the parent UGC Act, 1956. "Therefore, being a subordinate legislation, UGC Regulations become part of the Act. In case of any conflict between state legislation and central legislation, central legislation shall prevail by applying the rule/principle of repugnancy as enunciated in Article 254 of the Constitution as the subject 'education' is in the Concurrent List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution," it ruled.

How self-replicating mRNA Covid-19 vaccines work, and what trial results show

A SELF-AMPLIFYING mRNA vaccine — one in which the delivered RNA multiplies inside the body — has shown promising results against Covid-19 in ongoing phase 1/2/3 trials. The vaccine, ARCT-154, has been developed by Arcturus Therapeutics Holdings, based in San Diego, California, and its trials are in progress in Vietnam. It offered 95% protection against severe Covid-19 and death, and 55% against Covid infection, Arcturus said in a press release.

WHAT IT MEANS: An mRNA vaccine, such as those from Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna, use messenger RNA that encodes the spike protein of the coronavirus. In other words, the mRNA directs the cell to produce copies of the spike protein, so that the immune system will recognise the spike if and when actual infection takes place, and mount a response.

A self-amplifying mRNA vaccine is an improvement on the traditional RNA platform. It encodes four extra proteins in addition to the vaccine antigen, and these enable amplification of the original strand of RNA once inside the cell. The basic advantage is that it requires a smaller dose.

THE TRIAL: It enrolled over 19,000 adult subjects in Vietnam, including individuals at higher risk of severe complications of Covid-19 disease. The Phase 3 placebo-controlled vaccine efficacy portion of this study enrolled over 16,000 participants. An analysis between 7 days and 56 days after completion of a two-dose vaccination series demonstrated 55% vaccine efficacy for protection against Covid-19, the release said. These cases were detected during an outbreak in Vietnam when the Delta and Omicron variants were dominant.



The analysis of severe Covid-19 disease (including deaths) included 43 severe cases. Forty-one cases occurred in the placebo group and two in the vaccinated group, demonstrating vaccine efficacy of 95%, the release said. Nine deaths were reported in the placebo group, and one in the vaccinated group, whom the company described as an older age group participant who was also at increased risk of severe Covid-19.

ADVERSE EVENTS: The incidence of unsolicited adverse events in the two groups are comparable, the release said. No cases of myocarditis or pericarditis were reported; however, the company conceded that the study is not large enough to reliably observe these events given their extremely rare frequency of occurrence.

Adverse events collected in diaries of study participants (solicited adverse events) for seven days following each vaccination demonstrate that the majority of these events were mild or moderate in severity, it said. The majority of solicited adverse events resolved within the 7-day window of observation.

IMPLICATIONS: The Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines against Covid-19 are the only two mRNA vaccines available so far. "The new vaccine may come with significant advantages: easier storage, along with lower cost because its 'self-amplifying' design allows for smaller doses", *Science* magazine said.

However, the magazine noted, much of the world has already been vaccinated, and the Arcturus vaccine may be making its debut too late, at least for primary vaccination.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

UDIT MISRA

NEW DELHI, APRIL 25

LAST WEEK, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) released its latest World Economic Outlook (WEO) report. The IMF has rolled back the economic growth prospects for the global economy as well as for India.

What is the WEO? Why is it significant?

The IMF was established in 1944 in the wake of the Great Depression of the 1930s. Today its membership covers 190 countries. As an organisation, it provides loans — around \$ 1 trillion is available for lending — to its member countries apart from providing expert guidance and surveillance to ensure economic and financial stability in the world economy. Twice each year — in April and October — the IMF releases the WEO in which it details the state of the global economy and its forecast for the near future; it also provides "updates" to these two WEOs in July and January. The WEO reports are a good way to assess the current state of the global economy as well as to help countries prepare for the threats and opportunities before them. It is for this reason that they are keenly studied across the world.

What does the latest WEO say about global growth?

The IMF projects a sharp fall in the global economic growth rate.

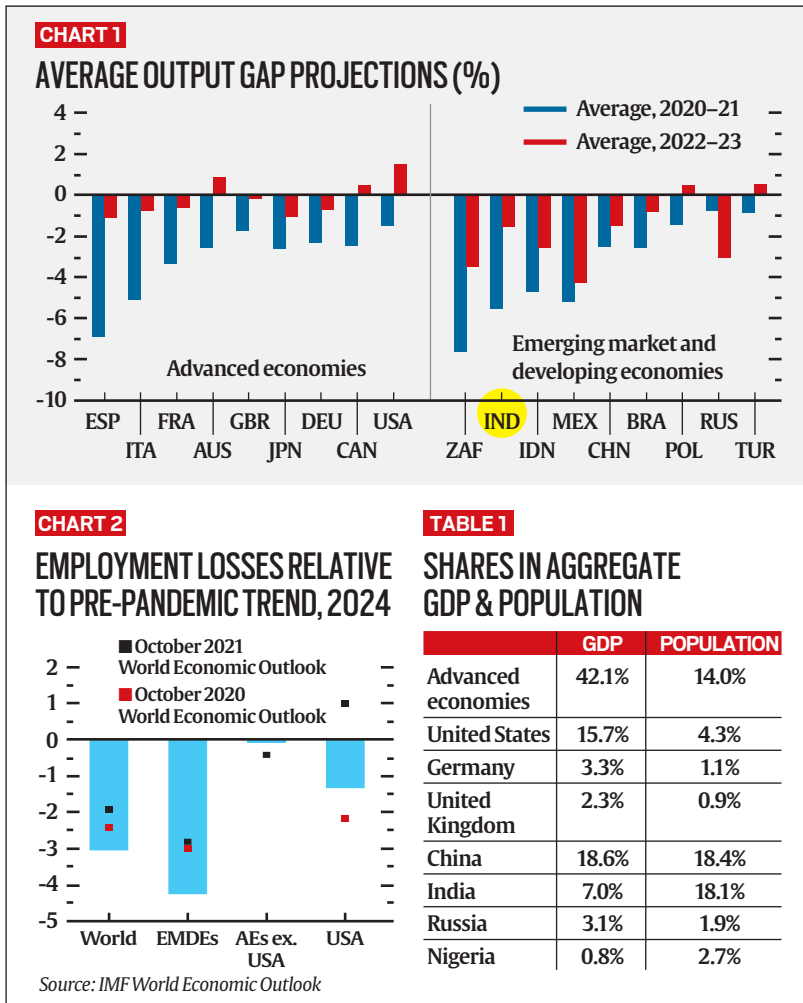
"Global growth is projected to slow from an estimated 6.1 per cent in 2021 to 3.6 per cent in 2022 and 2023. This is 0.8 and 0.2 percentage points lower for 2022 and 2023 than in the January World Economic Outlook Update," it states. Beyond 2023, global growth is forecast to decelerate even more, to about 3.3 per cent.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is the key reason for this gloomy outlook.

Apart from the fact that growth is decelerating, the IMF has yet again underscored that this "drag on output is expected to be more salient in emerging market and developing economies".

For instance, the US is expected to reach its pre-pandemic trend output path by 2022. In other advanced economies, the shortfall relative to the pre-pandemic trend will narrow.

To be sure, in the October WEO too, the IMF had pointed to the "dangerous divergence in economic prospects" between advanced economies such as the US and



emerging economies such as India. In particular, it had highlighted that employment growth was likely to lag the output recovery.

The April WEO states that thanks to the Ukraine conflict and its wide-ranging ramifications, this divergence could be reinforced.

Charts 1 and 2 (above) from the latest WEO bring this out. Chart 1 shows the output gap — that is the difference between the actual and potential GDP. As can be seen, on average this gap is higher for emerging economies such as India and especially for 2022-23. The same holds true for employment losses (*Chart 2*) as of 2024 when compared to the pre-pandemic "trend". These, too, underscore how emerging economies are more badly affected. It is important to

note that the comparison here is with the pre-pandemic "trend" and not the pre-pandemic "level" of the total GDP of a country.

What about inflation?

Because of the disruptive impact of the war in Ukraine, prices of several commodities have skyrocketed, creating a massive surge in inflation across the world.

"Inflation is expected to remain elevated for longer than in the previous forecast, driven by war-induced commodity price increases and broadening price pressures," states the WEO.

Here too, the emerging economies are worse off. "For 2022, inflation is projected at 5.7 per cent in advanced economies and 8.7

per cent in emerging market and developing economies — 1.8 and 2.8 percentage points higher than projected in January".

The IMF has been less than sanguine about the risks. The report states that "risks are large and to the downside". These include a worsening of the war, a worsening of geopolitical tensions, a resurgence of the pandemic, increased social tensions, a worsening slowdown in China, higher inflation expectations, higher interest rates etc.

What does the IMF say about India's growth prospects?

When compared to its January update, the IMF has dialled down India's GDP growth by 0.8 percentage points. This is the second sharpest revision in Asia, and one of the sharpest anywhere in the world. However, despite this revision, IMF expects India to grow at 8.2% in 2022-23, making it the fastest growth rate across all the major economies in the world. It is more than twice the average growth rate of both the advanced economies (3.3%) and the emerging economies (3.8%).

Does that mean there's nothing to worry about for India on the growth front?

When it comes to economic growth, each country faces — to borrow a term from cricket — a different "required run rate". The pace at which a country must grow depends largely on how well-off an average citizen of that country is. As such, while it appears that different countries are competing with one another, more often than not, each country is competing with its past self.

Table 1 brings out this point more clearly. The columns detail a country's share of the global GDP and its share of the global population.

Countries that have a much higher share in the global GDP than their share in the global population — for example, all the advanced economies — are the prosperous ones.

Countries whose share of the global population far outstrips their share in global GDP — such as India and Nigeria — are the ones that face the highest required rate of GDP growth.

While India has over 18% of the global population, its share of the global GDP is just 7%. In the real world, this reflects as low levels of per capita income and consumption as well as high levels of unemployment and social unrest. In other words, India not only has to grow at a much faster clip than the rest of the world but also has to do it sustainably for decades.

Against 91st Amendment: PIL targets Cabinet status for Goa's Rane

MAYURA JANWALKAR
PANAJI, APRIL 25

THE HIGH Court of Bombay at Goa on Monday said "arguable issues have been raised" in a PIL challenging the "lifetime status of the rank of Cabinet minister" accorded to Pratapsingh Rane, a six-time Chief Minister of Goa and a legislator for 50 years.

The unprecedented status was conferred on the octogenarian Congress leader this January by the state's earlier BJP government. Days after the announcement, Rane backed out of the Legislative Assembly election, even though he had already been declared the Congress candidate from his bastion of Poriem. His daughter-in-law Deviya Rane debuted from the seat on a BJP ticket and won by the highest margin in the state.

According to lawyer Aires Rodrigues, who has filed the PIL, this is the first time that any state government has taken such a step. The PIL was admitted on Monday,

and a division bench of Justices M S Sonak and RN Laddha will hear the case on May 2.

What is the "lifetime status of the rank of Cabinet minister" granted to Rane?

On January 6, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant announced that the Cabinet had decided to accord this special status to Rane. "Mr Pratapsingh Raoji Rane, former Chief Minister and former Speaker (of the Goa Legislative Assembly) has completed 50 years as a legislator. The Cabinet has decided that in future also, those who complete 50 years and hold posts like CM and Speaker, like Pratapsingh Rane, will be given the Cabinet status even after their retirement," Sawant said.

The decision was taken a little more than a month before the February 14 Assembly elections. Earlier, a congratulatory motion had been passed in the Assembly for Rane, who first won the Sattari seat in 1972 and never lost an election thereafter.

What is the basis of the legal challenge?

Rodrigues has asked the High Court to quash the January 7 notification regarding "lifetime status of the rank of Cabinet minister" to Rane. He has contended that Goa has a 12-member Cabinet, and the Cabinet status on Rane raises the number of Cabinet ranks to 13, which is more than the ceiling mandated by the Constitution.

Stating that the very purpose of the 91st Amendment was to prevent jumbo Cabinets and the resultant drain of public money, Rodrigues has contended that the lifetime status granted to Rane was a "back door entry in wilful disobedience of the mandate of law".

The Constitution (91st Amendment) Act, 2003 inserted clause 1A in Article 164, which says "the total number of Ministers, including the Chief Minister, in the Council of Ministers in a State shall not exceed fifteen per cent of the total number of members of the Legislative Assembly of that State... provided that the number of Ministers, including the Chief Minister in a State shall not be less than twelve". There



CM Pramod Sawant felicitates Pratapsingh Rane on completing 50 years as MLA in the Goa House in March 2021. *Twitter/@DrPramodPSawant*

are 40 seats in the Goa Assembly.

Rodrigues told the court on Monday that as a Cabinet minister for life, Rane would be entitled to a staff of 12 (including OSDs, support staff, peons, and driver) which would

cost the exchequer Rs 90 lakh a year. The Cabinet rank would also entitle him to government accommodation, vehicle and unlimited free travel for him and his spouse, Rodrigues told *The Indian Express*.

The PIL stated: "Before granting the lifetime Cabinet status, the Cabinet did not obtain financial sanction from the Finance Ministry as required... The resolution was also tailor made to benefit only the Respondent no. 3 (Rane) for obvious reasons."

So why did the BJP take this decision?

In December 2021, the Congress had declared Rane as its candidate from the Poriem seat. Soon afterward, Rane's son and then state Health Minister Vishwajit Rane (who retains the portfolio in the current government), said that he would contest against his father on the BJP ticket. Vishwajit, an undefeated five-time lawmaker from the neighbouring Valpoi seat, had left the Congress in 2017 to join the BJP.

At a public rally that same month, the

BJP's Goa election incharge Devendra Fadnavis said that his party would soon receive "blessings" from the senior Rane. Fadnavis had earlier met Rane and sought the "blessing" that he should leave the Poriem seat for Vishwajit and the BJP.

The Ranes, who are among the politically most influential families in Goa, hold sway in the Sattari *taluka*, of which both the seats of Valpoi and Poriem are part.

There was some speculation initially about a possible father-son poll duel in Poriem. Eventually, Rane's decision to back out was seen as Vishwajit having prevailed over his father. While Vishwajit himself remained in Valpoi, his wife Deviya made a sensational debut in Poriem, bringing the seat to the BJP for the first time.

The PIL states that Rane, a Congress candidate at the time, was granted lifetime Cabinet status because he "was capable of toppling the ruling party's apple cart in Poriem, a *mala fide* strategy was adopted... to offer him a carrot not to contest elections"



The IndianEXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

CUT AND PASTE BJP

Sedition FIR to police visits, Opposition parties in government are using BJP toolkit to target critics. That’s a big self-goal

REWIND, FORA moment, to this: A few days ago, in a spectacular show of over-reach, Assam Police flew to another state to arrest a legislator over a tweet. The arrest of Gujarat MLA Jignesh Mevani — he has been rearrested since, after a Kokrajhar court gave him bail on Monday — for a tweet critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi under severe sections of the IPC and the IT Act is theatre of the absurd at its best, or worst. It raises, yet again, serious questions of police excess, and its abject servility to political bosses. It reiterates that BJP governments, at the Centre and in the states, are not above weaponising the harsh law against dissenters and political opponents. It underlines that at risk are constitutionally protected fundamental freedoms, and that playing fast and loose with due process to target some potentially affects everyone. The continuing drama over Mevani is chilling for another reason as well — it shows how supine the Opposition has become.

It may be necessary to cast a wider look to see why the non-BJP parties are looking so effete in the face of transgressions of citizens’ rights and freedoms by the state. When these parties are in power, they are complicit in the very acts they accuse the BJP of. Or, they simply lack the conviction to take a principled stand. The response of the AAP, after the bulldozers rolled into Northwest Delhi’s Jahangirpuri, affected by communal violence only days ago, is illustrative. Senior leaders sought to lay the blame on two groups — Bangladeshi nationals and Rohingya — that the BJP had also sought to target. They were being settled across India by the BJP to stage riots, they said, mouthing bizarre nonsense with a straight face. It is not just in Delhi, however, that the AAP plays by the BJP’s book. Last heard, its newly elected government in Punjab had sent the Punjab Police to the doorsteps of at least three critics of AAP convenor and Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal — former AAP leader Kumar Vishwas, Congress leader (also formerly AAP) Alka Lamba, and Delhi BJP’s Naveen Jindal.

It’s not just the AAP. In Maharashtra, ruled by the Shiv Sena-led Maha Vikas Aghadi government, Mumbai Police has arrested and slapped a sedition charge on Ravi and Navneet Rana, MLA and MP respectively, for apparently nothing more than raising the ante against CM Uddhav Thackeray on the Hanuman Chalisa-Azaan row. And in Chhattisgarh, the Supreme Court had to step in last year to reprimand the Congress government for its alleged misuse of the sedition law — it pointed to the “disturbing trend” of sedition cases against officials seen to be loyal to preceding regimes after a change of government. The non-BJP parties may or may not pay an electoral price for this politics. But their many concessions and abdications are taking a wider toll — they are shrinking the space for an alternative politics, they are constricting its possibilities. Framing a counter to intolerance or communalism that also touches a popular nerve needs imagination and courage. By cutting and pasting from the BJP’s toolkit, Opposition parties undermine themselves — and are accused in lowering the bar on individual freedoms.

PARIS REPRIEVE

Macron’s victory has held off the xenophobic, insular right-wing in France. Going ahead, he has large challenges to address

ACROSS EUROPEAN CAPITALS, there is understandable jubilation at Emmanuel Macron’s victory in the French presidential election. Internationally, he has cultivated the image of being a pro-market, pro-Europe centrist under whose leadership the French economy and Paris’s role in geopolitical affairs have become more salient. He has played a prominent role in the Ukraine crisis, and managed the economic fallout of the pandemic — growth returned to France quickly and unemployment is at its lowest in the last few years. The spectre of a Marine Le Pen presidency — with her anti-EU, anti-globalisation, xenophobic politics — no doubt helped Macron consolidate the centre as well as gain votes from the left. Yet, at best, Macron’s victory may be temporary. By all accounts, disillusionment with the government and market economy, and cleavages within the country, have only deepened in this election.

The far-right has made its largest-ever showing and Macron’s voteshare has declined considerably since 2017. In the first round before the run-off between the president and Le Pen, Jean-Luc Melenchon, the primary left candidate, won an impressive 22 per cent of the vote. Between them, Le Pen and Melenchon have captured the disenchanted French vote — framed by the “gilet jaunes” protests that rocked the country in 2018 and 2019. Macron’s retooling of France’s labour laws, the increasing divide between the countryside, working classes and the rest of the population and the steady rise in cost-of-living have taken the sheen off the liberal project he represents, as well as the form of globalisation he has championed.

However, the French president’s victory has, in a time of great flux in Europe and the Indo-Pacific, provided a measure of temporary stability. The Ukraine crisis and China’s rise will require a concerted response from liberal democracies in the region. For Delhi, too, Paris’s outward orientation has been beneficial — France has been a supporter of its position regarding a rules-based order in Asia and strategic and economic ties between the two countries have deepened. The French far-right has risen on a squarely anti-globalisation platform, funneling the anxieties of the disenfranchised outward as well as against the migrants within. And Le Pen and others have expressed admiration and support for authoritarian rulers. For much of his first term, Macron ignored the issues raised by those who have felt victimised by globalisation and pro-market economic policies. For a liberal France and a stable Europe, he must build bridges with those people in his second term.

THE STORYTELLER

John Paul was an important voice of middle-of-the-road Malayalam cinema in the 1980s

THE 1980S AND 90s were a fertile period for the Malayalam film industry. A new crop of directors and scriptwriters who were willing to experiment with new narrative styles and a middle-class audience had emerged. John Paul, 72, who passed away last week in Kochi, was an important voice of this school of cinema.

Paul wrote close to a hundred screenplays in a four-decade long career, which were directed by a new generation of directors who made their mark in the 1980s and thereafter — Bharathan, Mohan, IV Sasi, Balu Mahendra, Satyan Anthikad, Sibi Malayil, Kamal. A majority of these — among them Chamaram, Marmaram, Ormmakkayi, Palangal, Athiratham, Revathikkoru Pavakkutty, Yatra, Oru Minnaminunginte Nurunguvettam, Unnikale Oru Kathaparayam and Chamayam — were both critical successes and box-office hits. Along with MT Vasudevan Nair and Padmarajan, script writer-directors, Paul wrote some of the best remembered roles in Malayalam cinema in the 1980s — Gopi in Revathikkoru Pavakkutty and Sandhya Mayangum Neram, Nedumudi Venu in Oru Minnaminunginte Nurunguvettam and Vidaparyayum Munpe, Murali in Chamayam, Mammooty in Yatra, Zarina Wahab in Chamaram, Mohan Lal in Unnikale Oru Kathaparayam.

Paul had become a scriptwriter in 1980 by accident. Most of his scripts had a tender love story as their core. They resonated with the moral world of middle-class Malayalis, who embraced these films. In the last few years, Paul had few films and he had turned to writing and TV talks. The world of 1980s Malayalam cinema comes alive in the dozen or so books he wrote. Like most of the heroes he created, Paul was a much loved person in the industry who walked into the sunset with few complaints.



C RAJA MOHAN

THE RE-ELECTION OF Emmanuel Macron as the president of France on Sunday has sent a sigh of relief across Europe and North America. Delhi too is pleased with the return of Macron, who laid a strong foundation for India’s strategic partnership with France.

Victory for Marine Le Pen, Macron’s opponent, would have dramatically complicated the geopolitics of Europe. If the Russian aggression against Ukraine challenges the existing European regional order, Le Pen’s challenge to Macron underlined Moscow’s expansive influence in the internal politics of European nations. Le Pen, like so many other right-wing leaders in Europe, has close ties to Vladimir Putin. Many of them are deeply hostile to the European Union. Le Pen’s victory would have not only altered France’s international trajectory, but also shaken the EU to its political core.

Unlike the Soviet Union, which sought to shape European politics through left-wing parties, Russia today influences European politics through right-wing parties. That Le Pen got nearly 42 per cent of the popular vote reflects the growing challenge to mainstream politics. European establishments now have no choice but to double down on confronting Putin.

Russia’s threat to the regional and domestic order in Europe is among multiple factors shaping Delhi’s intensifying engagement with Brussels. Although India and the EU have talked of a strategic partnership for two decades, they have struggled to realise it. Three major external factors are facilitating the transformation of India’s ties with Europe.

The first is the Russian question. As the war in Ukraine dominates Delhi’s conversations with visiting European leaders this week, India’s reluctance to condemn Putin’s aggression might suggest nothing has really changed — that Delhi is tied inseparably to Moscow and is at best “neutral” in Russia’s conflicts with the West. During the last few weeks, Delhi has insisted that its silence is not an endorsement of Russian aggression. India’s position has continued to evolve. Delhi’s repeated emphasis on respecting the territorial integrity of states is a repudiation of Russia’s unacceptable aggression.

There is no question that the Ukraine invasion has put Delhi in acute strategic discomfort amidst the escalating conflict with China. For India, a normal relationship between Russia and the West would have been ideal.



AYOADE ALAKIJA

THIS WEEK, I will be joining several leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, at the Raisina Dialogue in India to discuss the challenges of our time and how inequity is an exacerbating force. From the ongoing pandemic to the climate catastrophe to the rising conflict that is transforming geopolitics, humanity is locked in a downward spiral, reversing which requires a sense of purpose from leaders. If we don’t tackle inequity and the dangers of greedy nationalism, we’ll be failing to draw lessons from what happened in the last few years.

The greatest wrong of the pandemic is the inequity in the rollout of health tools. In many lower-income countries, a combination of blatant greed, a runaway pandemic and disinformation that undermined a number of excellent vaccines led to more than a million preventable deaths. Waves of the virus have taken a huge toll on our health workers and led to backsliding on virtually every other health challenge.

With more than 80 per cent of adults in India vaccinated, the country is close to meeting WHO’s target of vaccinating 70 per cent of the entire population by summer. Future waves of the virus cannot be ruled out. At the Raisina Dialogue, I will argue that this is the moment to double down on sharing health tools fairly.

In lower-income countries, where the vast

Delhi & Brussels

After Ukraine, India is recalibrating its great power relations. Europe is ending its long geopolitical holiday

But Russia’s confrontation with the West comes during India’s rapidly expanding economic and political ties to Europe and America. Delhi might be sentimental about India’s historic Russian connection but it is not going to sacrifice its growing ties to the West on that altar. Russia’s declining economic weight and growing international isolation begins to simplify India’s choices.

Meanwhile, geographic proximity and economic complementarity have tied Europe even more deeply to Russia. The EU’s annual trade with Russia at around \$260 billion is massive in comparison to India’s \$10 billion. Unlike India, Europe’s societal connections with Russia are deep-rooted. A range of leaders in Europe, including Macron, have been advocating a historic reconciliation with Russia and Moscow’s integration into the regional security order.

Putin’s reckless invasion of Ukraine has compelled Europe to embark on a costly effort to disconnect from Russia. This is particularly true for Germany, which has cultivated strong commercial ties with Russia. With Putin locked in a long and unwinnable war in Ukraine, Russia is condemned to pay a heavy price for his folly and is bound to emerge as a terribly weakened power.

The war in Ukraine has certainly presented a major near-term problem that needs to be managed by Delhi and Brussels. Yet, they also find themselves in the same policy boat — of trying to reduce reliance on Russia. And over the longer term, a diminished Russia is bound to become less of a complicating factor in India’s engagement with Europe.

For nearly a century, India’s Russian connection had complicated Delhi’s ties to Europe. If the Russian revolution of 1917 inspired large sections of the Indian national movement, the partnership with Moscow dominated India’s international relations during the Cold War. That phase is drawing to a close.

Second is the China question that adds a new imperative to India’s partnership with Europe. Contrary to the mythology in Delhi that Russia has been pushed into China’s arms, Moscow has been deepening ties with Beijing for more than two decades triggering many anxieties in Delhi. In June 2021, Joe Biden had met Putin in Geneva with an offer to explore a productive relationship with Russia. Putin,

however, made a conscious choice to turn to China instead. In February, Putin traveled to Beijing to announce a partnership “without limits”. Whether Russia was pushed or jumped into Chinese arms makes no difference to India. India has no option but to manage the consequences of the Russian decision. In the last two decades, China has emerged as a great power and now presents a generational challenge for Indian policymakers. That challenge has been made harder by Putin’s alliance with Xi Jinping.

As Delhi strives to retain a reasonable relationship with Moscow, Europe emerges as an important partner in letting India cope with the China challenge. This is reinforced by Europe’s own rethinking on China.

For more than two decades, Europe pursued relentless economic engagement with China, without a reference to Beijing’s long-term political ambitions. Thanks to the growing problems of doing business with Xi’s China, Beijing’s geopolitical alliance with Moscow, and the rapid deterioration of Sino-US relations, Brussels is ready to invest serious political capital in building purposeful strategic ties with India. Delhi is ready to reciprocate.

Finally, there is the American question. Until recently it appeared that Europe’s calls for “strategic autonomy” from the US were in sync with India’s own worldview. But the Ukraine crisis has underlined the US’s centrality in securing Europe against Russia. In Asia, Chinese assertiveness has brought back the US as a critical factor in shaping peace and security. The US, however, is not looking for weak allies in Europe and Asia. Washington wants a strong Europe taking greater responsibility for its own security; it would like Delhi to play a larger role in Asia and become a credible provider of regional security. Above all, America wants India and Europe to build stronger ties with each other.

The Ukraine war has persuaded Delhi to recalibrate its great power relations and has compelled Europe to end its long geopolitical holiday. For the first time since independence, India’s interests are now aligning with those of Europe. Together, Delhi and Brussels can help reshape Eurasia as well as the Indo-Pacific.

The writer is senior fellow, Asia Society Policy Institute, New Delhi and contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express

MINDING THE GAP IN PANDEMIC

Inequity in access to vaccines and treatment can compromise fight against Covid

majority of people are still unvaccinated, there’s a real risk of a surge that could knock out health systems and push back efforts to tackle malaria, measles and polio. The push on Covid should now be on vaccinating the vulnerable and wider population to build the wall of immunity that has allowed rich countries to open up their economies and societies. Using India as a model to strengthen manufacturing in lower-income countries is also key to ensuring a more even distribution of health resources and mitigating the risk of rich countries hoarding supplies.

The most effective time to increase vaccine-based immunity is before an outbreak. Therefore, huge effort should go into raising the immunity of the general population starting with vaccination — and boosting — of the most vulnerable. It’s unfair that breakthrough treatments — including antivirals like Paxlovid that was endorsed last week by WHO — are still only available in a handful of countries.

Treatment equity is as important as vaccine equity. It’s also critical that people are allowed access to tests so that their treatment begins early. Some will say it’s not possible to overcome the barriers to access in low-income countries in Africa. But I can assert that it is being done and it’s the only way to protect health systems in the medium- to long-term.

We must also look at the root causes of the challenges we faced in the first place. Manufacturing vaccines and treatments in re-

gional hubs would make a big difference and help get these game-changing health tools to all countries quickly. It’s positive to see WHO’s mRNA hub in South Africa producing its own mRNA vaccine prototype for Covid, but we can’t settle for this.

With pharmaceutical groups unwilling to share technology, it’s clear that new rules are needed to ensure that profit is not prioritised. It is critical that the World Trade Organisation’s discussions on waiving intellectual property rules progress quickly and the outcome actually improves access to Covid-19 tools.

The crisis in sharing health tools that led to millions of preventable deaths is an important background for any new pandemic accord. We need to set in place systems to ensure that life-saving health tools are shared fairly and effectively. If a fourth dose is good enough for people in rich countries, then there shouldn’t even be a debate about vaccinating people in low-income countries with their primary doses. The pandemic is not over and our future response must be based on the principle that a life in New Delhi has equal worth to a life in New York.

The world faces its greatest challenge since the founding of the UN after the Second World War. Historic challenges need historic leadership and time is not on our side.

The writer is co-chair of Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT)-Accelerator



APRIL 26, 1982, FORTY YEARS AGO

ISRAEL-EGYPT PARLEYS

ISRAEL HAS WITHDRAWN from the Sinai peninsula, which it captured after the 1967 war, after 15 years of occupation. The Israeli flag was lowered at Sharm-al-Sheikh after a brief ceremony. A multinational peacekeeping force has begun monitoring the border area. A detailed agreement on the demarcation of the border in the Taba area in the Gulf of Aqaba in the south has been reached, according to Israeli sources, but its details have not yet been disclosed. Israeli Defence Minister Ariel Sharon, said his country would make no more concessions to Egypt and it would increase the number of its settlements

in the occupied territories. Meanwhile Palestinians in several parts of the occupied West Bank staged demonstrations in protest against the continued negotiations between Israel and Egypt on Palestinian autonomy.

PUNJAB TALKS

THE TALKS BETWEEN the Centre and the Akali Dal (Longowal) are likely to be resumed following the latter’s decision to defer its agitation against the digging of the Satluj-Yamuna link canal and the Ravi-Beas water accord. Sources indicate that the talks are likely to begin in the third week of May. Intermediaries who were actively associated with bringing the Akalis to the negotiating

table are reported to be optimistic about the response from the leadership.

UK IN SOUTH GEORGIA

BRITISH MARINES LANDED in South Georgia and recaptured the Falkland dependency from Argentina who ran up the white flag of surrender. Defence Secretary John Nott announced. Flanked by a beaming prime minister Margaret Thatcher outside her 10 Downing Residence, Nott said British forces “have successfully taken control Grytviken” the island’s main port on its northeast coast. He said no British casualty had been reported. “At present, we have no information on Argentine casualties,” he said.

7 THE IDEAS PAGE

Justice for the silenced

Supreme Court order cancelling bail of prime accused in Lakhimpur Kheri deaths upholds right of victim to be heard



REKHA SHARMA

THE SUPREME COURT order cancelling the bail of Ashish Mishra and his consequent surrender before a local court have not only served the cause of justice but also given confidence to the victims that their voices will not be silenced as was done by the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court. During the hearing of the bail application, the counsel for the victims got disconnected from the online proceedings, and he moved an application for a rehearing which was not considered. Holding that a victim has an unbridled participatory right, from the stage of investigation till the culmination of the proceedings, and that such a right is substantive, enforceable and another facet of human rights, the apex court expressed its disquiet over the manner in which the high court failed to acknowledge the right of the victims to be heard.

It may be recalled that Ashish Mishra is the son of Ajay Mishra Teni, a minister of state for home affairs in the Union cabinet. He allegedly, along with his aides, drove an SUV, with two others vehicles in tow, into a group of farmers in Lakhimpur Kheri district in UP, as they were walking back after protesting against the three farm laws, and allegedly also opened gunfire from inside his vehicle. This resulted in the death of four farmers and one journalist, with the driver of the SUV and two more killed in the clash that followed and several others injured.

It also needs to be recalled that notwithstanding the ruthless manner in which the farmers were mowed down, and despite the fact that the incident caused widespread outrage and clamour for the arrest of Ashish Mishra, who was named in the FIR as the prime accused, the UP police made no effort to arrest him. The police treated him with kid gloves, and during the so-called investigation summoned him not as an accused, but as a witness. He was arrested only after the matter reached the Supreme Court on a letter written by two advocates, and after the court had made scathing observations about the manner in which the investigation was conducted, compelling it to appoint an SIT headed by a retired judge from another high court to carry out further investigation.

None of these facts was found grave enough to merit consideration by the learned high court judge. He instead laid undue emphasis on only one fact, namely, that no fire injury was found on any of the deceased. Castigating the high court, the Supreme Court in its order said that “instead of looking into aspects such as the nature and gravity of the offence; severity of punishment in the event of conviction; circumstances which are peculiar to the accused or victims; likelihood of the accused fleeing; likelihood of tampering with the evidence and witnesses, and the impact that his release may have on the trial and society at large, the High Court had adopted a myopic view of the evidence and proceeded to decide the case on merits.” The Supreme Court has remitted the case to the high court for considering the bail application afresh, but



C R Sasikumar

it has fallen short of giving a further direction that it will not be heard by the same judge. Given that the judge virtually ignored all the principles that a court needs to keep in mind in the matter of bail, it could have been just and fair if the Supreme Court had also given a specific direction that the matter would not be heard by the same judge. In view of this ambiguity, let us hope and trust that the chief justice of the concerned high court would entrust the case to a different judge.

The Supreme Court while cancelling the bail gave one week’s time to the accused to surrender. This long period of freedom to a person with powerful links, and the backing of the State machinery, is disconcerting.

The order also throws light on another disturbing fact. It observed that the high court demonstrated tearing hurry in entertaining or granting bail to the accused. The reasons are obvious, and need not be stated explicitly. But then, this has not happened for the first time. Often, the cases of the high and mighty are taken up for hearing out of turn, sometimes in a matter of a day, while others with little or no means languish in jails for years. Is it not time that the Supreme Court issued directions to the high courts, and also to its own registry, to collate, and furnish information about how

Often, the cases of the high and mighty are taken up for hearing out of turn, sometimes in a matter of a day, while others with little or no means languish in jails for years, waiting for their turn to be heard. Is it not time that the Supreme Court issued directions to the high courts, and also to its own registry, to collate, and furnish information about how many bail applications or habeas corpus petitions concerning civil liberties and constitutional rights of the people to life and liberty are pending and since when?

many bail applications or habeas corpus petitions concerning the civil liberties and constitutional rights of the people to life and liberty are pending and since when? The information must also explain why some cases received precedence over others. We are living at a time when the state and its instruments, and those enjoying their patronage, are trampling with impunity over the fundamental rights of the people to life and liberty. In these trying times, the beleaguered citizens turn to the courts for relief. Let no one feel that they are the children of a lesser god.

The Chief Justice of India recently visited Jallianwala Bagh and wrote in the visitor’s book, “Jallianwala Bagh manifests the strength and resilience of the people of this country. This serene garden is symbolic of the great sacrifice made in the face of tyranny. It serves as a reminder of the heavy price paid for freedom, which we must always cherish and protect.” These are poignant words. The Chief Justice is the first citizen of the judicial fraternity, and people look towards him and his worthy colleagues when their freedom is in danger at the hands of the s tate. Hopefully, the courts will not disappoint.

The writer is a former judge of the Delhi High Court

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Even while accounting for rhetorical flourishes that are part and parcel of politics, former prime minister Imran Khan has often shown a muddled understanding of militancy in Pakistan." — DAWN, PAKISTAN

A continuing exclusion

Reservations accorded to Dalits from Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist communities should be extended to their counterparts from Muslim, Christian groups



CHRISTOPHE JAFFRELOT AND PHILLIP VARGHESE

AN INTER-MINISTERIAL DIALOGUE has recently taken place to reassess the possibility of setting up a national panel to look into the merit of the demand to extend Scheduled Caste (SC) status to Muslim and Christian Dalits. After Independence, the Constitutional Order of 1950 listed SCs and STs using the list mentioned in the Government of India (Scheduled Castes) Order of 1936. The order specified that no person professing a religion other than Hinduism could be deemed as a member of a Scheduled Caste community. The idea was that religions other than Hinduism did not have a caste system.

This argument can no longer be defended for two reasons.

First, the order was amended in 1956 to include Sikh Dalits and again in 1990 to include Buddhist Dalits, notwithstanding the fact that these religions were supposed to not observe caste discrimination.

Second, Muslim and Christian Dalits are as affected by caste discrimination as Hindu Dalits. They are primarily Dalits and their Muslim and Christian identity is secondary, as evident in several cases of atrocities against Dalits. The majority of the victims in the Kandhamal, Karamchedu, and Tsundur massacres and in the recent incidents of violence reported from Tumakuru, Belagavi, Mandya, and Bagalkot in Karnataka were Dalit Christians. These victims were attacked not because they were Christians but because they were “untouchables” who had converted to Christianity. Despite converting to Christianity, their socioeconomic status had not improved. In fact, it had worsened because, in the process, they lost access to positive discrimination.

This is also evident from the few available surveys.

In 2008, a study commissioned by the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) and co-authored by Satish Deshpande and Geetika Bapna — “Dalits in the Muslim and Christian Communities — A Status Report on Current Social Scientific Knowledge” — showed that Dalit Muslims, who represent 8 per cent of their community and Dalit Christians, who constitute 23.5 per cent of their community, were over-represented among the poor of India. In rural India, 39.6 per cent of the Dalit Muslims live below the poverty line and 46.8 per cent of the Dalit Muslims in urban parts of the country are below the poverty line. The corresponding figures for Dalit Christians are 30.1 and 32.3 per cent. By contrast, 29.2 per cent of Muslims in rural India and 41.4 per cent of Muslims in urban parts of the country are BPL. Rural and Urban Dalit Christians below the poverty line were 16.2 and 12.5 per cent respectively.

Dalit Muslims and Christians have sometimes been forced to bury their dead in separate cemeteries. Churches have segregated against Dalit Christians in the past. The Sachar Commission Report ob-

served in 2006 that the social and economic situation of Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians did not improve after conversion. In 2007, the Justice Ranganath Mishra Commission Report recommended that the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, should be revised to delink SC status with religion, and religion-neutral status should be given to all Dalits and Scheduled Tribes. It also suggested a sub-quota of 8.4 per cent for minorities within the OBC quota of 27 per cent, as well as a reservation for Dalit minorities within the Scheduled Caste quota of 15 per cent.

The Mishra Commission report and the National Commission for Minorities report were tabled in Parliament in December 2009. Both were in favour of extending constitutional protection and safeguards to Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims that are available to their counterparts who profess Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism. Governments have, however, not acted on these recommendations.

They have argued against these reports — despite the empirical evidence they have collected — citing the paucity of disaggregated data on Dalit Muslims and Christians and contesting the validity of conversion records across generations. This contradicts the fact that 20 states have extended benefits to Dalit Muslims and Christians under the OBC category, following the Mandal Commission’s recommendations. The continued exclusion of Muslim and Christian Dalits from the benefits of reservation, solely on the basis of religion, violates the equality provisions of Articles 14, 15 and 16 of the Constitution. Reservation, according to the Constitution, relies on criteria such as social status, standing in the community, marginalisation, discrimination, violence and social exclusion.

How can one explain the government’s obstinacy? It’s something that dates back to 1950. Among the few things that keep Hindu Dalits from converting is that they retain the benefits of reservation. If reservation becomes universal, they would be less hesitant to accept the materialistic offers given by missionaries for converting. This could lead to a fall in the numbers of the country’s Hindu population — something that worries a lot of Hindu organisations.

While the Constitutional Order of 1950 could be amended regarding Indian religions like Sikhism and Buddhism, the same relaxation of the rule cannot apply to “foreign religions” — this is a clear indication that communalism is now influencing this important issue. Besides, giving Dalit Christians and Muslims access to reservation would make the competition tougher for Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist Dalits. Therefore, these groups do not lobby in favour of their brothers from Dalit Christian and Dalit Muslim communities.

In January 2020, the Supreme Court accepted a petition filed by the National Council of Dalit Christians on the matter. But the judiciary has not yet given its ruling on the contentious issue of reservation for Dalit Christians and Muslims.

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VAMSEE JULURI

IT IS IRONIC that Pratap Bhanu Mehta’s recent article is titled “With eyes wide open” (IE, April 22). The real nature of the abyss may be obvious to everyone else, but what he presents is the view of a small class of people who have made it their sole virtue to keep their eyes firmly shut.

This descent into the abyss did not begin with Ram Navami or Hanuman Jayanti. Nor with some attack on the idea of India a few years ago.

The fall that Mehta tries to pin on Hanuman and Ram is an old, colossal and, worst of all, unnatural one.

The Hindu revivalist writer Ram Swarup’s phrase — one god, two humanities or many gods, one humanity — describes the dilemma succinctly. Two thousand years of monotheistic cultural imperialism have left only India and a few other nations with their old gods still standing. That is the big picture. Not “democratic backsliding”. Or even “clash of civilisations”.

One might say it’s in the past. But is it?

When I search for “Ram Navami” or “Hanuman Jayanti”, I see a spate of images that seem to have escaped Mehta’s sight altogether. I see a 16-year-old boy named Shivam Shukla with his head smashed in by a rock, struggling to breathe through a tube in a hospital bed. I see a woman crying for her home which has been set on fire. I see news of Hindu processions being attacked in Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, West Bengal and New Delhi.

Leave it to Hanuman

The problem isn’t communalism, but refusal to see another reality

I see unnecessary pain and suffering. And lies.

I do not see a “new Hinduism” as Mehta says. Instead, I see a world where the divergence between reality and truth is so deep that no one cares to reach across the epistemic or digital divide any more.

For someone who has decided that the problem is Hinduism, no number of Hindu boys in hospitals, temples destroyed or prayer songs silenced will change their understanding.

For someone who has decided the problem is Islam, no amount of condemnation of Hinduism or charges of communalism will change their assumption either.

We have two parallel reality industries now — an older one which works in the denial of Hindu pain, and a newer one which prospers in the selective stoking of it for political gains. If we pretend only one matters — or worse, that the other doesn’t exist — we are no better than those we critique.

I do not see the need for Hindu youth to celebrate outside mosques with flags and swords. Yet, I cannot say they are the only ones doing it when video clips appear of Muslim youth apparently having done the same.

Tit-for-tat turf battles? A warped form of the American “Take Back the Night” sort of civic campaign? What is this public negotiation really about? And what happened to the spirit of Ishwar-Allah (or Ram-Rahim, as we used to sing in Prasanthi Nilayam)?

But I see a different trajectory than Mehta does, perhaps. For him, that spirit is gone, shredded by “communalism”, which is synonymous for him not with “Hindu Nationalism” or “Hindutva”, but just “Hinduism”. That fig leaf of a distinction is now gone.

This unintentionally honest admission reveals much about how “communalism” is understood in India. As Sufiya Pathan, a researcher with Ahmedabad-based Centre for Indic Studies, has written, the term began to be used about India only in the 1920s. It presented itself not as a European idea, but as an innate condition of India — of religion in India, to be precise. And not just any religion, but the religion that happens to be that of the “majority”, naturally, which has the burden of demonstrating “tolerance” at all costs.

And how exactly is Hinduism to do that? “The West,” writes Pathan, “did not see religious reform or the eradication of religion as a solution to its own inter-religious strife,” but saw reform as a return to a purer form of the church, always. But in India, “reform” meant the opposite, and it still does.

It means Hindu eradication. Destroy the “idols”. Raze the temples. Silence the festivals. Reduce Rama and Krishna to guilt-professing memes. An elephant is abused somewhere? Just make a weeping Ganesha meme refusing puja from his worshippers, as if they were the ones who abused it. A woman is assaulted? Blame the inadequacy of goddess-worship in preventing it, as if lands that de-

stroyed their own age-old goddess images have somehow smashed patriarchy.

And where the misappropriation of images of the gods doesn’t suffice, simply make up new stories about them that no devout Hindu has before, and then demand, on the basis of these new legends, a ban on this or that “Aryan invader” festival.

Mehta and others see only the 75-year-long history of a secular republic being broken down. Others see the 2,000-year-long history of survival against the odds.

For Hindus who keep their eyes open, every day now is like *The Darkening Age*, Catherine Nixey’s study of the destruction of the indigenous traditions, temples and libraries of the old “pagan” world by Christianity. The only change is that in the old days it was in the name of one god, and now it’s in the name of progress or development.

And yet, for Hindus who follow Hanuman and Rama there remains a sense of hope. Politicians and ideologues may make spectacles or targets of Hanuman. But in the end, Hanuman is still what every Hindu wants to be in relation to the feet of Sita and Rama, not to some passing political episode.

Just say, “Jai Hanuman”, Mr Mehta, and leave it to him. You can’t surely believe in his beautiful and elegant spirit from the Sundara Kanda, and also believe he’s just a hateful trope now, can you?

The writer is professor of media studies at the University of San Francisco

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

END DIVISIONS

THE GROWING POLARISATION that has been witnessed between our two main communities recently is deeply disturbing. We saw what havoc this polarisation created decades ago, resulting in the division of India. Under no circumstances can we afford for polarisation to grow again, as that can only bring death and destruction in its wake. Any outstanding problems such as hijab, azaan and loud-speakers must be sorted out peacefully between the two communities. Provocative speeches, mostly from fringe elements on both sides only add to the atmosphere of confrontation and should be avoided. As chairman of the Temple of Understanding India Foundation, which is dedicated to promoting inter-religious harmony, and on my own behalf, I appeal to all concerned to step back for a moment and reorient their activities in a non-confrontational manner.

Karan Singh, Delhi

RULE BOUND

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘Reskilling society’ (IE, April 25). The writers have meticulously laid out a pragmatic solution to the unemployment crisis. The introduction of degree apprenticeship will

undoubtedly boost a university’s efficacy. Quite a noteworthy common denominator serving as an impediment to the successful implementation of similar proposals for bringing reforms in diverse domains is the government’s web of anachronistic regulations and policies. These are incongruous to the demands and the atmosphere of the 21st century. India is indeed a bird whose freshness of life lay in its freedom to fly and not in the constraints of a cage.

Abhinandan Bhatia, Amritsar

STILL IN TROUBLE

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘Poverty and politics of freebies’ (IE, April 25). It is somewhat premature to speak about reducing food security based on the poverty reduction estimates of the World Bank and IMF, which are based on pre-Covid data and have been contested by several experts. It is again too early to talk of a bounce-back of the economy in the current environment of rising inflation and global insecurity. Food subsidies must be persisted with till there is real improvement in poverty levels. In the absence of any other social security, this is the least that should be done for the poor.

Hemant Contractor, Pune

EXPRESS NETWORK

Tejasvi Surya asked to join probe in attack on CM house

New Delhi: Days after eight members of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) were arrested for allegedly barging through police barricades and banging on the main gate of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence, the Delhi Police has issued a notice to Lok Sabha MP Tejasvi Surya to join the investigation, it is learnt. An officer from the Delhi Police Headquarters said the investigation officer, after discussing the matter with senior officials, sent the notice under CrPC Section 41A to Surya on WhatsApp. "The IO informed him about the case... (and) asked him to join the investigation on April 28 at Civil Lines police station," a police officer said. **ENS**



SEEKING FAIR PROBE

BJP leader Kirit Somaiya outside the Home Ministry on Monday. He was part of a BJP delegation from Maharashtra that met MoS (Home) Nityanand Rai, urging him to form an SIT to probe the alleged assault on him in Maharashtra. Praveen Khanna

No infringement on CUET, Centre tells Tamil Nadu

New Delhi: Days after the Tamil Nadu Assembly adopted a resolution against the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) for admission to undergraduate courses taught in central universities, the Centre has tried to allay the state's concerns saying there is "no case for infringing upon the rights of the states and Union Territories" through the test. The resolution moved by Tamil Nadu CM M K Stalin said the state Assembly felt that any entrance exam based on the NCERT syllabus would not provide an equal opportunity to all students who had studied in varied state board syllabus across the country. The Centre's stand was conveyed by Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan through a letter to his Tamil Nadu counterpart K Ponmudiy on Sunday. **ENS**

Maharashtra urges Central govt for law on loudspeakers

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, APRIL 25

ASSERTING THAT it cannot remove loudspeakers installed at religious places, the Maharashtra government on Monday asked the Centre to come up with rules regarding the use of loudspeakers across the country.

The government stance was conveyed by Home Minister Dilip Walse Patil after an all-party meeting over the issue. BJP leader Devendra Fadnis and MNS chief gave a skip to the meeting which was attended by deputy CM Ajit Pawar, and Aaditya Thackeray. Addressing the media after the meeting, Walse Patil said, "We request the Centre to come up with a law that will be applicable across the country. It will ensure that situations like these do not arise anywhere in the country."

Thackeray said, "It was also decided at the meeting that a delegation from the state will meet the Centre and hold discussions on the issue."

Walse said loudspeakers have been operating in the state on the basis of the Supreme Court's circulars, "he said.

Walse Patil added that if they decided to restrict the use of loudspeakers at mosques, they would also have to look at their use during bhajans, kirtans, Ganapati processions, and Navratri. "There cannot be separate rules for people belonging to different communities," he said.

He added, "Maintaining law and order is the responsibility of the state. If anyone tries to disrupt the law and order, we will have to take necessary action. Based on our discussion in the meeting, it was agreed that the priority was to maintain peace and harmony in society."

Fadnis told the media: "The MVA government's political arrogance has left no room for communication. As a result, the BJP has to take the route of struggle to combat the high-handedness of the arrogant government."

Outages cripple normal life in Valley

BASHAARAT MASOOD
SRINAGAR, APRIL 25

KASHMIRIS reeling under one of the worst summer power crises in decades reportedly owing to lower-than-capacity generation by the local hydel plants and "no availability" of electricity to buy from the market. Against a demand of 1,700 MW, the Valley is receiving only about 900 MW (from all sources), leaving people so perturbed with the frequent and prolonged unscheduled power cuts that they are out on the street protesting.

Over the past fortnight, most parts of the Valley have received electricity supply only for about four hours daily that too in intervals ranging between 15 minutes and half

an hour. Sources say that the depleted generation capacity of coal-based power plants across the country worsened the situation in the Valley. Union 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 thermal power plants.

"I don't remember having seen such power shortage in my lifetime especially in summers," says 55-year-old Irshad Rasool Bhat, a resident of Soura Srinagar. "On the one hand, government is talking about development... and on the other, we don't get electricity for more than four hours. The sit-

uation has turned worse during Ramzan...". The shortage has also hit the industries and the business establishments. Riyaz Ahmad, who runs a digital printing solutions unit said, "There is no electricity. We can't use even the generators as kerosene is missing from the market and the petrol prices have skyrocketed."

"I agree, this is the worst power crisis in 50 years," said a senior Power Department officer, who didn't want to be named.

Another official said that J&K is receiving less than 50 per cent of the demand and that the situation may improve only in the second week of May.

J&K's Principal Secretary, Power Development Department, Niteshwar Kumar, didn't respond to phone calls.

SC agrees to hear pleas challenging Art 370 removal after vacation

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday agreed to consider listing after summer vacation the pleas challenging the Centre's decision to abrogate provisions of Article 370 which had given special status to Jammu and Kashmir. A bench comprising Chief Justice N V Ramana and Justice Hima Kohli took note of the submissions of senior advocate Shekhar Naphade, appearing for one of the petitioners, that the plea needed an urgent hearing in view of the delimitation exercise being carried out in the state.

"This is the Article 370 matter. The delimitation is also going on," the senior lawyer, appearing for interveners Radha Kumar (academic and author) and Kapil Kak (retired officer of the Indian Air Force), said. "Let me see," CJI Ramana said, adding, "This is a five-judge matter. I will have to reconstitute the bench." **PTI**

Man beaten to death over theft suspicion; 9 held

Mumbai: The Aurangabad city police have arrested nine persons, including two sons of a former Shiv Sena Corporator, for allegedly beating a man to death over suspicion of stealing decorative lights last week.

According to the police, the incident took place on April 21 in CIDCO area of Aurangabad.

The police said, the victim, 30-year-old Manoj Awhad, worked as a caretaker at the Meghwal Hall, which was being run by Sagar Kharat. Kharat, his brother, a decorator, and six others assaulted Awhad over the suspicion of stealing a halogen light. The accused also recorded the assault which got leaked on social media. An FIR was then registered by the victim's mother. Inspector Sambhaji Pawar, said, "The accused have been booked... There is no communal or casteist angle as claimed..." **ENS**

BJP readies for 2024 polls with booth-level plan

LIZ MATHEW
NEW DELHI, APRIL 25

ROLLING OUT a blueprint of the party's strategy for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, a team of senior BJP leaders has identified around 74,000 booths across the country for strengthening hold in some, and to gain ground in others it has not been able to win so far.

The majority of these booths are in the southern and eastern states, sources said.

The four-member team headed by BJP vice-president Bajjayant Panda has already worked on a strategy to cover all the booths spread across 2,300 Assembly constituencies where the party has an MP or an MLA while identifying more booths in 100 Lok Sabha constituencies that the BJP candidates could not win so far, sources said.

"We have identified 73,600-plus booths where the plan will be rolled out. Basically the aim is to strengthen the booths in the constituencies where the party has already won to retain them and to make more strongholds, we will be working on 100 more Lok Sabha seats where the party has not won. The mission is to maximise the party's reach and electoral wins," said a member of the team.

The team, also consisting of BJP general secretaries C T Ravi and Dilip Ghosh and party's Scheduled Castes (SC) cell head Lal Singh Arya, is expected to tour across the country to roll out their strategies in the coming three months. The committee met on Monday at the party headquarters. Once the blueprint is ready, BJP national president J P Nadda is expected to launch the mission officially,



BJP chief J P Nadda is expected to unveil the document next week. File

which is likely to be next week.

"The committee will be working with the party MPs and MLAs – 2,300 of them – across the country, state presidents and district presidents in the coming three months. "We have to ensure that the BJP does not lose any of the seats it has already won. There will be training sessions and frequent meetings for those in these booths," said the leader.

Known for its elaborate election preparation much in advance, the BJP had identified around 115 constituencies as "new catchment area" in 2016 that the party had never been able to win ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The party had worked in those constituencies in six states – Odisha, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala – and the Northeast. Although the party could not make considerable gains in the southern states like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, the party had improved its position in Odisha and West Bengal in 2019 Lok Sabha polls. In Odisha, the party won eight seats, and bagged 18 from West Bengal. The party had only one of the 21 seats from Odisha and two of the 42 from West Bengal in the 16th Lok Sabha. In Telangana, it increased its tally from one to four in the last elections.

Jharkhand: ex-CM Das alleges Soren got land allotted in wife's name

ABHISHEK ANGAD
RANCHI, APRIL 25

FORMER JHARKHAND Chief Minister (CM) Raghubar Das on Monday alleged that CM Hemant Soren's wife Kalpana Soren got 11 acres of land in Ranchi's Bijupara industrial area, even as the CM himself holds the Industries portfolio.

In a press conference, Das said: "Hemant Soren's wife Kalpana Soren has been given 11 acres of land in an industrial area in Ranchi. This is at a time when Soren is currently the Industries Minister and he has used his position to get his wife the land. He is supposed to give answers."

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha spokesperson Supriyo Bhattacharya said: "We will respond on Tuesday."

Das said that CM's political representative Pankaj Mishra and press advisor Abhishek Prasad used their position to get mining leases, when Soren holds the Mining Department portfolio.

"Abhishek Prasad got the lease in the name of one Shiv Shakti enterprise in Sahebganj district of 11.70 acre land on April 8, 2021.

According to the govt papers, Rs 90 lakh investment has also been made in this mining area. Pankaj Mishra had been given lease in the name of Mahakal stone in

Sahebganj area. The government has done it in a haphazard manner," Das alleged.

Calls made to Abhishek Prasad did not elicit any response. Pankaj Mishra could not be contacted.

Das also said that the state government has removed the religion column from the caste certificates—for Schedule Caste and Scheduled Tribe castes—which is proving harmful for the tribals who follow 'Sarna religion'. Sarna is not an official code in Jharkhand and Soren had written to Home Minister Amit Shah to include Sarna as a religion code in census.

"The BJP government had added a religion column in caste certificates so that Sarna tribals may benefit from it in jobs... Under pressure from Missionaries they seem to have been removed..." he said referring to the previous state government.

Earlier this year, Das had released documents which stated that the CM had obtained a mining lease in Ranchi area and a Letter of Intent had been issued in June last year. It also stated that in September, the CM had obtained environmental clearance for the same.

In February, a petition was filed in the Jharkhand High Court in the matter. On April 8, during the hearing, Advocate General Rajiv Ranjan said the state had committed 'a mistake' and the lease has since been surrendered.

Covid-19: Masks back in Chhattisgarh, Karnataka; Tamil Nadu, Kerala alert

ENS & PTI
NEW DELHI, APRIL 25

WITH AN uptick in daily Covid-19 cases, Karnataka and Chhattisgarh on Monday issued fresh guidelines, making masks mandatory again at public places.

The states also revoked rules for home quarantine and social distancing, besides prohibiting spitting in public.

Karnataka CM Basavaraj Bommai held a meeting with Revenue Minister R Ashok,

Health Minister K Sudhakar, Health Commissioner D Randeep and Technical Advisory Committee members to discuss the preparedness for a possible fourth Covid wave.

Sudhakar said though masks were compulsory, there would be no fine on violating the rule. "On April 27, PM Narendra Modi will hold a video conference with the CMs and Health Ministers of all states after which we will have another meeting and further measures will be taken," he said.

10 THE WORLD

TOP OF THE WORLD



Vice-foreign minister Kentaro Uesugi (centre)

JAPAN

Amid China pact worry, envoy to visit Solomons

Tokyo: Japan is sending a vice-foreign minister to the Solomon Islands on Monday amid worry over a recent security agreement that South Pacific nation struck with China that could increase Beijing's military influence in the region. Vice-foreign minister Kentaro Uesugi's three-day trip to Solomon Islands comes on the heels of a visit by a senior US delegation, who warned that Washington would take unspecified action against the South Pacific nation should the security deal with China pose a threat to US or allied interests. The security pact, which China and the Solomons confirmed last week, has also alarmed neighbouring countries and Western allies that fear a military buildup in the region. **AP**

MALI

Group linked to Al-Qaida says captured Russians

Bamako: Islamic extremist rebels in Mali linked to al-Qaida said they have captured mercenary fighters from Russia's Wagner Group in fighting earlier this month. It's the first time that Mali's extremist rebels known as JNIM have claimed to capture Russian fighters. The Wagner Group fighters were seized in the first week of April in the mountainous Segou region of central Mali, said the JNIM statement, which called the fighters "criminals." **AP**

NEPAL

Four Indian tourists killed in car crash

Kathmandu: Four Indian tourists were among five people who were killed after their car collided head-on with a bus in Nepal's Dhading district, police said on Monday. The accident occurred on Sunday night along Prithvi Highway in Thakre area, police said. The four were returning to Kathmandu after visiting Pokhara, a scenic city 200km from Kathmandu. The deceased have been identified as Bimalchandra Agrawal, 40, Sadhana Agrawal, 35, Sandhya Agrawal, 40, Rakesh Agrawal, 55, from UP. They died while undergoing treatment in a local hospital. **PTI**

EXPLOSIONS HIT MOLDOVA'S BREAKAWAY TRANSNISTRIA REGION

Russia hits rail, fuel facilities; US says Moscow failing in war aims

AGENCIES

KYIV, APRIL 25

RUSSIA UNLEASHED a string of attacks against Ukrainian rail and fuel facilities Monday, striking crucial infrastructure far from the front line of its eastern offensive, which Britain said has yet to achieve a significant breakthrough. Meanwhile, two fires were reported at oil facilities in western Russia. It was not clear what caused the blazes.

In meetings with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv on Sunday, the American secretaries of state and defence, Antony Blinken and Lloyd Austin said Washington had approved a \$165 million sale of ammunition for Ukraine's war effort.

"The strategy that we've put in place — massive support for Ukraine, massive pressure against Russia, solidarity with more than 30 countries engaged in these efforts — is having real results," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters in Poland the day after the meeting. "When it comes to Russia's war aims, Russia is failing. Ukraine is succeeding," he added.

In a video address Monday, Zelenskyy described his meeting with Blinken and Austin as "encouraging and effective."

Speaking Monday to top officials at the Prosecutor General's office, Russian President Vladimir Putin said the US and its allies have tried and failed to "split Russian society and to destroy Russia from within."

On Monday, Russia focused its firepower elsewhere, with missiles and war planes striking far behind the front lines, in an apparent bid to slow the movement of Ukrainian supplies toward the east and disrupt the flow of fuel needed by the coun-



(From left) US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken during their meeting in Kyiv on Sunday. **AP**

try's forces. Oleksandr Kamyshin, the head of the state-run Ukrainian Railways, said five railway facilities in central and western Ukraine were hit. That included a missile attack near the western city of Lviv.

Ukrainian authorities said that at least five people were killed by Russian strikes in the central Vynnytsia region. In Transnistria, a breakaway region of Moldova, several explosions believed to be caused by rocket-propelled grenades hit the Ministry of State Security. There was no immediate claim of responsibility, and no injuries were immediately reported.

Meanwhile, a major fire erupted early Monday at an oil depot in a Russian city about 100km from the Ukrainian border, Russia's Emergencies Ministry said.

EXPLAINED Why Russia has eyes on Transnistria

WHILE THE fighting in Ukraine is concentrated in the east, Transnistria, which hosts hundreds of Russian troops and has a large ethnic Russian population, occupies a strategically important spot on Ukraine's western flank, reaching within about 25 miles of Ukraine's chief port city, Odesa. Moldovan and Ukrainian militaries have been concerned whether Transnistria would enter the fighting as a base for attack from the west.



Turkish philanthropist Osman Kavala. **Reuters**

Turkish philanthropist Kavala gets lifer

Istanbul: Turkish philanthropist Osman Kavala was jailed for life without parole on Monday after he was convicted of trying to overthrow the government by financing protests.

Kavala, 64, has been in jail for 4-1/2 years without a conviction and denies the charges he faced over the Gezi protests, which began as small demonstrations in an Istanbul park in 2013 and snowballed into nationwide anti-government unrest.

The court also sentenced seven others to 18 years in jail each for aiding an attempt to overthrow the government and ordered their arrests. The court said it decided to acquit Kavala of espionage charges due to lack of evidence. **REUTERS**

Report: Sweden, Finland to apply to NATO

Stockholm: Two newspapers - one Swedish, the other one Finnish - are reporting that the governments of Sweden and Finland have agreed to submit NATO applications at the same time and that it will happen in the middle of next month.

The Finnish newspaper Iltalehti said the Swedish government has expressed a wish to Finland that they apply together in the week starting May 22 and Swedish government sources confirmed the information to Sweden's Expressen tabloid. Russia's invasion has led to growing support in Sweden and Finland for joining NATO. **AP**

Judge finds Donald Trump in contempt in NY legal fight

New York: A New York judge found former President Donald Trump in contempt of court and set in motion \$10,000 daily fines Monday for failing to adequately respond to a subpoena issued by the state's attorney general as part of a civil investigation into his business dealings.

Judge Arthur Engoron said a contempt finding was appropriate because Trump and his lawyers hadn't shown they had conducted a proper search for

JAPAN

WORLD'S OLDEST PERSON DIES AT 119

A Japanese woman believed to have been the world's oldest person has died aged 119, public broadcaster NHK said on Monday, reporting the death of Kane Tanaka. Born on Jan. 2, 1903 - the year of the Wright Brothers' first controlled flight of their motor-driven airplane - Tanaka was confirmed by Guinness World Records in 2019 as the oldest living person. She died of old age at a hospital in Fukuoka city, western Japan, on April 19, NHK said.



GOTABAYA READY FOR INTERIM GOVT: MONK

Sri Lanka Opposition says has numbers in Parliament, no-trust vote on cards

Lanka's debt restructuring to have impact on future loans: China



Sri Lanka President Gotabaya Rajapaksa

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

COLOMBO, APRIL 25

A SRI LANKAN dissident lawmaker, fired by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa from the Cabinet for his critical views, claimed on Monday that the Opposition has crossed the 113-mark required to win a no-trust motion against the government in the 225-member Parliament.

President Gotabaya had said he would hand over the government to any group that could muster 113 seats but would not step down from the presidency.

Udaya Gammanpila, who held the energy ministry portfolio before being sacked by Gotabaya Rajapaksa, is advocating an all-party interim government with the resignation of PM Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Gammanpila said with enough numbers of MPs breaking away from the government and with support from the main Opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya, Marxist Janatha Vikramthi Peramuna and the Tamil National Alliance, they are

assured of winning the no-trust vote. "We told the SJB to wait till we could get 113, now we have 120," he claimed.

Meanwhile, in a letter to the powerful Buddhist clergy, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa said, while he respects the advice of the clergy, the changes, if any, in the system of governance must be made in line with the specified constitutional provisions. Rajapaksa expressed his intention to form the interim government in a letter to the powerful Buddhist clergy on Sunday.

China said it has "done its best" to help Sri Lanka not to default on its foreign debt, Chinese ambassador in Colombo Qi Zhenhong said on Monday. "China has done its best to help Sri Lanka not to default but sadly they went to the IMF and decided to default," Qi said. "The debt restructuring definitely will have an impact on future bilateral loans" he said, adding that China was still considering the Sri Lankan request for a \$1.5 billion buyer's credit and another \$1-billion loan.

SHANGHAI SEES 19,000 NEW CASES



Since Friday, Beijing has reported 70 locally transmitted cases in eight of its 16 districts. **Reuters**

Panic buying in Beijing as district starts mass testing

REUTERS & AP

BEIJING, APRIL 25

BEIJING WILL conduct mass testing of most of its 21 million people, authorities announced Monday, as a new Covid-19 outbreak sparked stockpiling of food by residents worried about the possibility of a Shanghai-style lockdown.

Authorities in Chaoyang, home to 3.45 million people, late on Sunday ordered residents and those who work there to be tested three times this week as Beijing warned the virus had "stealthily" spread in the city for about a week before being detected.

"I'm preparing for the worst," said a graduate student in the nearby Haidian district surnamed Zhang, who placed online orders for dozens of snacks and 10 pounds of apples.

Shoppers in the city crowded stores and online platforms to stock up on leafy vegetables,

fresh meat, instant noodles and rolls of toilet paper.

In Shanghai, where most of its 25 million residents have been locked down for weeks, the main food supply bottleneck has been the lack of enough couriers to make deliveries to homes, fuelling anger among residents.

Since Friday, Beijing has reported 70 locally transmitted cases in eight of its 16 districts, with Chaoyang accounting for 46 of the total, said a local health official on Monday.

Shanghai, which has been locked down for more than two weeks, reported more than 19,000 new infections and 51 deaths in the latest 24-hour period, pushing its announced death toll from the ongoing outbreak to 138. On Monday morning, people queued at makeshift testing sites manned by medical workers in protective suits. Under mass testing campaigns in China, multiple samples are tested together.

AKIHIKO KONDO IS IN A DEVOTED FICTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS, SERVED BY VAST INDUSTRY AIMED AT SATISFYING DESIRES OF FAN CULTURE

This man married a fictional character and will like you to hear him out

BENDOOLEY & HISAKO UENO

TOKYO, APRIL 25

IN ALMOST every way, Akihiro Kondo is an ordinary Japanese man. He's pleasant and easy to talk to. He has friends and a steady job and wears a suit and tie to work. There's just one exception: Kondo is married to a fictional character.

His beloved, Hatsune Miku, is a turquoise-haired, computer-synthesised pop singer who has toured with Lady Gaga and starred in video games. After a decade-long relationship, one that Kondo says pulled him out of a

deep depression, he held a small, unofficial wedding ceremony in Tokyo in 2018. Miku, in the form of a plush doll, wore white, and he was in a matching tuxedo.

In Miku, Kondo has found love, inspiration and solace, he says. He and his assortment of Miku dolls eat, sleep and watch movies together.

Kondo, 38, knows that people think it's strange, even harmful. He knows that some — possibly those reading this article — hope he'll grow out of it. And, yes, he knows that Miku isn't real. But his feelings for her are, he says.

Kondo is one of thousands of people in Japan who have entered into unofficial marriages with fic-

tional characters in recent decades, served by a vast industry aimed at satisfying the every whim of a fervent fan culture. Tens of thousands more around the globe have joined online groups in which they discuss their commitment to characters from anime, manga and video games.

Kondo sees himself as part of a growing movement of people who identify as "fictosexuals." That's partly what has motivated him to publicise his wedding and to sit for awkward interviews with news media around the globe.

He wants the world to know that people like him are out there and, with advances in artificial intelligence and robotics allowing



Akihiro Kondo's wedding photo, taken in 2018 when he married a doll of Hatsune Miku in March 17, 2022. **NYT**

for more profound interactions with the inanimate, that their numbers are likely to increase.

It's not a political movement, he said, but a plea to be seen: "It's about respecting other people's

lifestyles." It's not unusual for a work of art to provoke real emotions — anger, sorrow, joy — and the phenomenon of desiring the fictional is not unique to Japan.

But the idea that fictional characters can inspire real affection or even love may well have reached its highest expression in modern Japan, where the sentiment has given rise to a highly visible subculture and become the basis for a thriving industry.

In Tokyo, two districts have become meccas for fulfilling character-based dreams: Akihabara (for men) and Ikebukuro (for women). Specialty shops in the neighbourhoods are packed with mer-

chandise for characters from popular games and anime.

The products for women are especially extensive. Fans can buy love letters from their crushes, reproductions of their clothes and even scents meant to evoke their presence. Hotels offer special packages, featuring spa treatments and elaborate meals, for people celebrating their favourite character's birthday. And on social media, people post photos, art and mash notes promoting their "oshi" — a term widely used by Japanese fans to describe the objects of their affection.

For some, the relationships represent a rejection of the entrenched "breadwinner-house-

wife" model of marriage in Japan, said Agnès Giard, a researcher at the University of Paris Nanterre who has studied such marriages.

"To the general public, it seems indeed foolish to spend money, time and energy on someone who is not even alive," Giard said. "But for character lovers, this practice is seen as essential. It makes them feel alive, happy, useful and part of a movement with higher goals in life."

In her experience, women see the fictional marriages as empowering, "a way to challenge gender, matrimonial norms." In some respects, Kondo's commitment, too, is an example of commercial and social forces at work. **NYT**



Lucknow

AIFF denies molestation allegations against secretary

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, APRIL 25

ENTREPRENEUR RANJIT Bajaj, who owned I-League club Minerva Punjab FC, on Monday alleged that All India Football Federation (AIFF) General Secretary Kushal Das had molested employees at workplace, a charge outrightly rejected by the national body and its top official.

Bajaj, who sold off Minerva Punjab FC in 2020 after owning it for seven years, said there were "two cases of molestation of employees at workplace" and the head of the committee which deals with sexual harassment complaints at the AIFF was "forced by president Praful Patel to bury the report".

"...Kushal Das RESIGN Or I will be revealing details about you which have been buried by @praful_patel #METOO #metoindia enuf is enuf," Bajaj tweeted.

"...two cases of molestation of his employees at the workplace ...head of madatory (mandatory) sexual harassment complaint officer of AIFF & he was forced to bury the report by @praful_patel." Later, speaking to PTI, Bajaj said, "I am not making any allegations against the federation. This is against an individual and he can go to court, make an affidavit. Let him come up with a denial, he must respond in his personal capacity instead of using the Aiff PR machinery." Das said no such complaint has reached the AIFF committee in the last 10 years. "There is always a women's cell in the AIFF to look into any kind of allegations like these and there are no such allegations in the last 10 years," Das told PTI.

"But let the women's cell look into the allegations he has made and give a report before I say something and before the executive committee takes a decision."

The AIFF, on its part, stood behind its top official and said it will take "appropriate legal action against the concerned individual". "All statements and allegations made are false and fabricated, and made without an iota of evidence in support of the same. Further, no such complaints and/or concerns were received by the Internal Complaints Committee constituted by the AIFF as per the PoSH Act, 2013," the AIFF said in a statement. The AIFF said it will also refer the matter to the Executive Committee, and also to the AGM for appropriate action. Jyotsna Gupta, the current head of the Internal Complaints Committee said she or her panel has not received any complaint against Das or any AIFF official.

"As head of the committee, I have not received any such report (of sexual harassment) against the general secretary or against any official of the AIFF," Gupta said.

Right-handed Rafa or next Novak?

Teenaged Spaniard Carlos Alcaraz, the youngest since compatriot Rafael Nadal in 2005 to break into the top-10, has taken the tennis world by storm with his all-court game and seems the real deal

SANDEEP DWIVEDI
NEW DELHI, APRIL 25

AFTER HIS straight-sets win in the Barcelona Open final on Sunday, Carlos Alcaraz, 18, eagerly followed an old and delightful local tradition. He, along with the ball boys and girls, jumped into the storied venue's - Real Club de Tenis - swimming pool. It was another spectacular splash for the Spaniard, ranked 133 a year back but now burdened with the weighty tag of 'tennis' future'.

The next day, he became the youngest player to enter the Top 10 since Rafael Nadal in 2005. Men's tennis' perpetual wait for real teenaged prodigies seemed to be over. In the era dominated by the Big Three, many pretenders promised a change of guard but failed. Now, Alcaraz, if the word on the circuit is to be believed, has it in him to shake the foundations of the old firm.

There is a general consensus about Alcaraz's class but an outrageous global divide about his style of play. Earlier this month, when he was crowned the youngest-ever Miami Masters 1000 champion, everyone from the pundits to the meme-makers felt obliged to answer the obvious 'He is the Next Who?' question.

His swiftness around the court, the eagerness to dominate points, the muscular frame and Spain's leap of faith gave him an obvious early nickname - Right-handed Nadal. However, his coach Juan Carlos Ferrero, a former French Open champ who couldn't survive the Big Three march in the mid-noughties, has said that Alcaraz's style is more like Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic. He wasn't making it easy for the boy whose every stride on court was suddenly under surveillance.

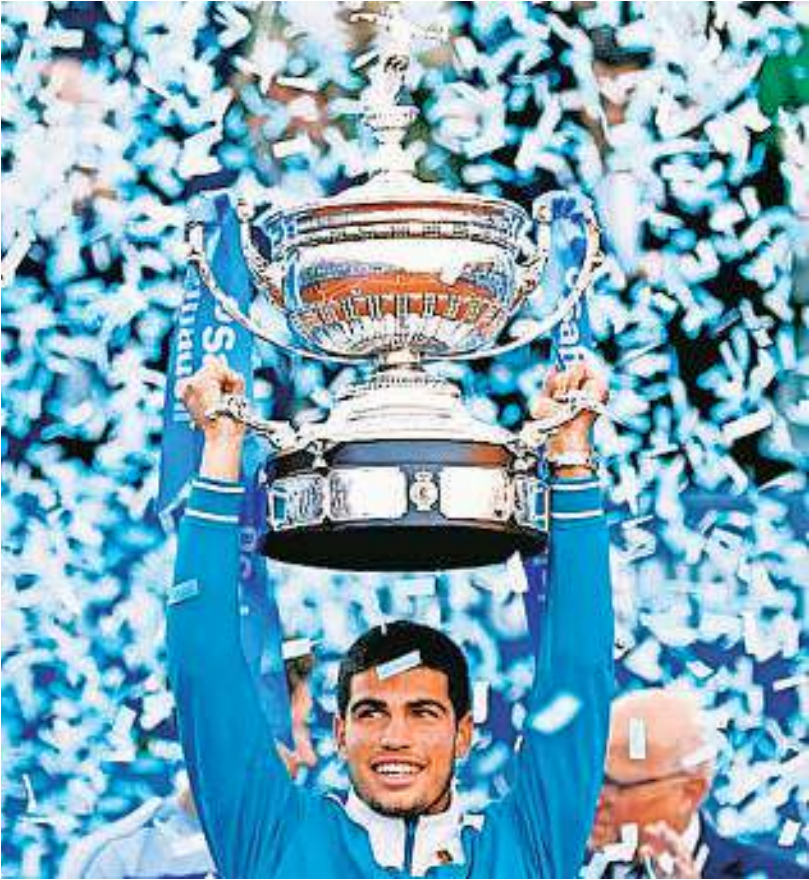
The coach's comments were a cue for the internet to dig out old match videos, slice them and then glue them side by side.

There's this one clip where Alcaraz and Djokovic, in two different frames dominating hard-court rallies, are seen moving on the baseline, swinging their racquets with choreographed synchronicity. Right down to the 'pursed lips and cocky nods' celebration after a sharp-angle cross-court forehand winner, the young Spaniard looked like the Serbian legend's identical tennis twin.

Rafa's fast feet, Djokovic's forehand and, as some observed, Andre Agassi's racquet-speed - Alcaraz was made to look like some Frankenstein programmed to hit monstrous forehands.

Blast from the past

A bit of independent YouTube on forehands throws up Sergi Bruguera, the master clay-courter from the 1990s. His whip-like



18-year-old Carlos Alcaraz of Spain won the Barcelona Open last week. Reuters

forehand would be the result of the racquet taking the trajectory of a plane taking off while hitting the ball. Alcaraz's shot-making shape and racquet path is similar.

More surfing and one bumps into another look alike. The young champion's blank brooding face is a throwback to Pete Sampras from the early days. A highly-imaginative commentator had said Sampras has the face of a shy impressionable teen who is likely to fall for an older woman. But we digress.

Maybe, numbed by the greatness thrust on him, Alcaraz has insisted that he wants to be just Carlos Alcaraz. The trivia about a picture of him with Federer by the bedside adds another layer of intrigue. But that hasn't hurt the Spaniard. Nadal, once during a press conference, looked distracted. He couldn't take his eyes away from the media room television airing one Alcaraz game. When a reporter told him that his countryman was trailing, Nadal smiled and said there are still many games to play. It wasn't too long before Alcaraz justified Nadal's faith and finished the match.

The latest tennis star to emerge from Spain

is in a way an outlier but also represents the legacy of this great tennis nation.

What separates him from Nadal is his press on the court. Since his days on the junior circuit, Alcaraz finishes most rallies from inside the baseline. One can never dismiss him as another Spanish back-court slugger. He is an eager beaver always on his toes to catch the ball early and throw the kitchen sink at it.

Versatile style

Alcaraz's overall game is also a tribute to a system that values wisdom passed down through generations and one that encourages organically-evolved original thinking.

One important weapon that Alcaraz possesses is the drop shot that glides the length of his side of the court and has just enough strength to cross the net and sink. He also has a lob that sails over his 6 feet-plus opponents and kisses the baseline. These two unconventional hard-to-pull-off strokes at crunch moments break the rhythm of his opponents and help him win those points at 40-30.

Alcaraz is a perfect brand ambassador of

MEN'S ATP RANKINGS			
Rank	Player	Age	points
1	Novak Djokovic	34	8400
2	Daniil Medvedev	26	8080
3	Alexander Zverev	25	7465
4	Rafael Nadal	35	6435
5	Stefanos Tsitsipas	23	5770
6	Matteo Berrettini	26	4570
7	Casper Ruud	23	4110
8	Andrey Rublev	24	4025
9	Carlos Alcaraz	18	3827
10	Felix Auger-Aliassime	21	3625

YOUNGEST TOP 10s			
Pos	Player	Age	Year
1	A Krickstein	17 yrs, 11d	1984
2	M Chang	17yrs, 3m, 19d	1989
3	B Becker	17yrs, 7m, 16d	1985
4	M Wilander	17yrs, 10m, 21d	1982
5	B Borg	17yrs, 11m, 27d	1974
6	A Agassi	18yrs, 1m, 7d	1988
7	A Medvedev	18yrs, 9m, 7d	1993
8	R Nadal	18 yrs, 10m, 22d	2005
9	Alcaraz	18 yrs, 11m, 20d	2022
10	J Arias	18yrs, 11m, 23d	1983

the many clay-court academies littered across Spain. For years, these have been assembly lines where kids check in after school in the afternoon and leave late at night.

In a delightful Dan Kiernan podcast Control the Controllables, two old-hand Spanish coaches Bruno Argudo and Juan Beaus paint a vivid picture of these tennis schools while talking about a culture that is very different from the academies around the world where kids pay for 'hourly sessions'.

Between completing their homework, kids get enough time for endless sets. They travel for tournaments in groups. When not playing, they sit next to their coaches, who between sips of coffee talk about strategies for different match situations.

The clay courts too have a role. On the podcast, these slow surfaces are called 'assistant coaches'. They teach patience, hone court craft and never allow one to be complacent. There are no easy points since the ball doesn't fly off the court. It is a tough grind. In a month's time, the latest Spanish sensation will be in Paris and his pedigree makes him one among the favourites.

Alcaraz may be different but it's his grooming that makes him true to the Vamos-yelling tribe that has pitched its tents on many clay courts around the world.

Nataraj breaks meet record on Day 2 of Khelo India Games

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BENGALURU, APRIL 25

TOKYO OLYMPIAN swimmer Srihari Nataraj clinched a gold medal in the 50m freestyle, clocking 23.23 seconds, on day two of the Khelo India University Games here on Monday.

The 21-year-old Nataraj broke Mihir Ambre's meet record timing of 23.78 seconds from the previous edition as he produced his fastest time in an individual race in the event.

Nataraj's win added gloss to a dominant performance from hosts Jain University, which soared to the top of the medal table with the help of four golds in swimming. The swimming events also saw five new KIUG records.

At the end of second day, 17 universities had already won a gold and as many as 41 had marked their presence on the medal table. With 10 medals up for grabs in swimming, the first went to Savitribai Phule Pune University's Shubham Dhaygude in the men's 400m freestyle. Soon, it was time for Jain University to shine as Siva Sridhar not only won gold but also in the process set a new KIUG record time of 2:05.43 in the 200m Individual Medley. Sridhar repeated win-record double in the 100m backstroke later in the day.

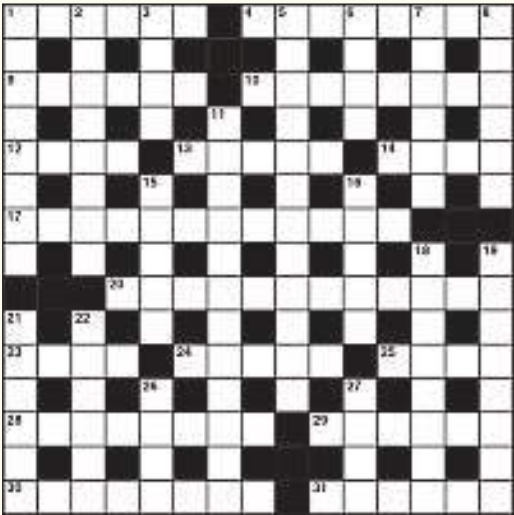
In the day's final event in the pool, Shivaji University's Rujuta Khade broke yet another KIUG record in the women's 50m freestyle, with a time of 27.38.

She broke Sadhvi Dhuri's mark from Bhubaneswar by nearly six-tenths of a second as Shivaji University sat in second place on the medal table with three gold, one silver and one bronze. Punjabi University, the overall winners at the 2020 edition, won their first gold at this edition, via Ishneet Aulakh in the women's 25m individual pistol. Aulakh and her team were beaten to silver in the team event by their state rivals Panjab University.

Following Komal Kohar's win on Sunday, Maharashtra's Dayanand University logged another gold in women's weightlifting - Sneha winning the 59kg class.

MEDAL TALLY		
Rank	University	Total
1	Jain University Karnataka	5
2	Shivaji University	5
3	University of Mumbai	5
4	CCU, Meerut	2
5	MDU, Rohtak	2

CROSSWORD 4724



ACROSS

- 1 Three of them make a quarter (6)
- 4 Ten heart operations could signal danger (8)
- 9 Faultless beginner? (6)
- 10 A place of grazing (8)
- 12 Medicine ball? (4)
- 13 Writer from the US (5)
- 14 It becomes inflamed by the lash (4)
- 17 Unable to say why you can't solve a crossword? (4,3,5)
- 20 Last thing an American can bet with? (6,6)
- 23 Just open a grating (4)
- 24 In time some fellows improve (5)
- 25 The French way to get fat (4)
- 28 To each in turn it appears unfinished (8)
- 29 Economic growth? (6)
- 30 Left in error (3,5)
- 31 Seem to be a soft fruit (6)

DOWN

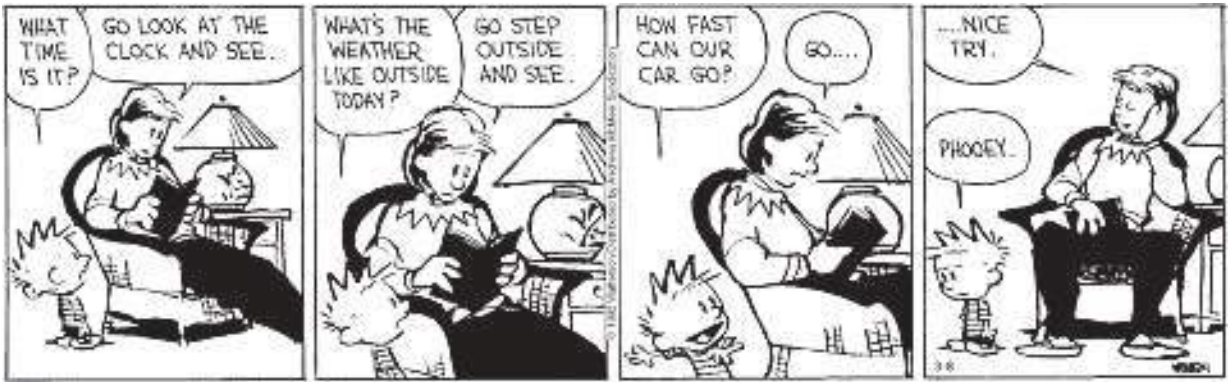
- 1 No other organisation can compete with it (8)
- 2 Love isn't unusual as the theme for her writings (8)
- 3 Kick from a horse (4)
- 5 Are tailors so addictive? (5-7)
- 6 Use a different name for Jacob's brother (4)
- 7 A number of European wars (6)
- 8 Ann set out for French city (6)
- 11 It's played for someone's benefit (7,5)
- 15 A measure in operation (5)
- 16 Being stupid I omit to include a phrase (5)
- 18 Feel a bit upset by a trifling annoyance (8)
- 19 One who hopes to get as good as he gives (8)
- 21 Share it with Nora perhaps (6)
- 22 Charm a number at a fashionable meeting (6)
- 26 Upwards of 101 meeting points (4)
- 27 Cut down on meat (4)

Solutions Crossword 4723: Across: 1 Right, 4 Arbuter, 8 For, 9 Wineglass, 10 Thrifty, 11 Needy, 13 Dealer, 15 Danube, 18 Sheaf, 19 Towpath, 21 Franchise, 23 Ion, 24 Riposte, 25 Tense. Down: 1 Refuted, 2 Germinate, 3 Towns, 4 Annoys, 5 Begonia, 6 Tea, 7 Rusty, 12 Education, 14 Effects, 16 Enhance, 17 Stripes, 18 Safer, 20 Wrist, 22 Asp.

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given clue.

When you are ____ about what you do, you feel this positive energy. It's very simple. - Paulo Coelho (12)

GMAEI



AEXNTT



HUISS



NPYCHU



Answer: When you are enthusiastic about what you do, you feel this positive energy.

SUDOKU 4816

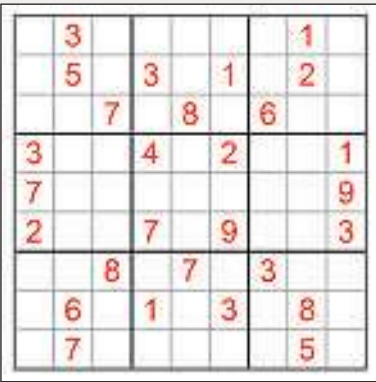
Difficulty Level 5s

Instructions

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

Difficulty Level

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



SOLUTION SUDOKU 4815



DAY TODAY

BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)

Your is not the only sign that is subject to epic astrological configurations as the planets form and re-form their patterns across your chart. Now you have more to learn about personal relationships than almost anyone else, and most to benefit.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)

There is no real lack of co-operation or consideration on the part of partners, yet it may still be difficult to finalise any long-term plans, largely because the planetary picture is changing so rapidly this week. You're on a long-range cycle of uncertainty, so don't expect instant results.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)

It's necessary to say a few more words about your financial situation. In particular, you can expect to gain from new partnerships, especially with members of the female sex, or from investments in the arts. Your most dynamic partnership, though, may still be a secret.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)

This period favours domestic repairs and decorations around the home. The emphasis seems to be on luxury and colour rather than on what is necessary for your security or survival. There is so much to gain from a generous gesture, so don't hold back.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)

The reason why someone feels that you alone can get them off the hook is that they sense the presence of the wise planet, Jupiter, in a part of your chart that is dedicated to selfless deeds, a truly noble combination. There still seems to be no way to restrict the explosion in your expenses, but a solution will appear soon.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)

In your solar chart, the signs of Capricorn and Cancer reveal much about your creative desires in the broadest sense - the wish to express your individuality on the highest level. These celestial signs' importance points you to the deeper significance of your current ambitions.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)

It's strange how a state of uncertainty internationally is reflected in changing arrangements in your life. The key is the stars' tendency to act on many different levels both in your private affairs and in your environment, and in your community.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)

It now seems without question that your planets are pulling you in two directions. Mars is insisting that you get out and about, mixing widely and making new friends, while Venus is urging you to hide yourself away with a chosen loved one, forgetting the cares of the world.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)

Take extra care when travelling over the next few days, and allow for last-minute changes of plan, probably prompted by close partners. Delays due to mechanical failure seem to be less likely, but there is some other obstacle in the way, no more than your lack of confidence.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)

We are now entering another major challenging phase, during which events that took place months ago may be repeated, though not in exactly the same form. The immediate task now is to put new relationships on a firm footing and fulfil your long-term promises.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)

According to one of the greatest astrologers of the last century, the transits you are now experiencing may operate in one of two ways. One is 'vain and idle'; the other is 'reckless and revolutionary'. You clearly have great scope for stirring up your friends and your environment. Use it wisely.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)

Home, family and property matters do not seem to be causing particular concern at the moment, at least not as much as earlier in the year. You may therefore bring your attention to bear on more wide-ranging ambitions, particularly if an emotional tie is under scrutiny.

BRIEFLY

Badminton Asia Championships: Sen, Sindhu eye medals

Manila: Focus will be on two-time Olympic medallist P V Sindhu and world championships bronze winner Lakshya Sen when they lead India's challenge at the Badminton Asia Championships, beginning here on Tuesday. A lot of hope will ride on Sen and Sindhu as the duo has been in good form in the run-up to the continent championships, which is returning after a gap of two years due to COVID-19.

WTA not returning to China in 2022

Mumbai: The WTA is still working to find a resolution to the standoff with China over the Peng Shuai issue but will not return to the country this year, Tour chief Steve Simon said. "We remain dedicated to finding a resolution to this," Simon told The Tennis Podcast. "We want to find a resolution that Peng can be comfortable with, the Chinese government can be comfortable with, and we can be comfortable with. We are not about walking away from China. We have suspended our operations there right now. We will continue to do that until we get to a resolution."

Asian Games will go ahead in Sept: OCA

Mumbai: The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) has requested an update from Beijing on the COVID-19 situation in China but remains confident the Asian Games will go ahead in Hangzhou in September, a senior official at the body told Reuters on Monday. The Games are scheduled to take place from Sept. 10-25 in the capital of Zhejiang province, some 175 kilometres south-west of Shanghai. A senior official, speaking under condition of anonymity, said the OCA had been in contact with Chinese officials but there was "as of now" no concern about cancellation or postponement.

Barca lose, Madrid 1 point from title

Madrid: Barcelona lost 1-0 to Rayo Vallecano on Sunday, marking the first time it lost three in a row at home in all competitions in the same season, and leaving leader Madrid just a point away from winning its second league title in three seasons. Madrid will have its first chance of lifting the trophy Saturday when it hosts Espanyol. Madrid is 15 points ahead of second-place Barcelona with five rounds to go.

Sharath wins 10th national TT title

Shillong: Star paddler A Sharath Kamal secured his 10th national title with a thrilling 4-3 win over G Sathiyian in the men's singles summit clash at the 83rd Senior National and Inter-State Table Tennis Championships here on Monday. The 39-year-old dropped his racquet and ran around the arena to celebrate his triumph after Sathiyian's return went out, giving him the last point for a 7-11, 12-10, 9-11, 7-11, 12-10, 11-9, 11-6 win.

PTI, AP & REUTERS

The Dhawans show

Rishi in the final over, backed by Rabada and Arshdeep, and Shikhar with the bat, help PK pip CSK



Mayank Agarwal and Rishi Dhawan celebrate after the latter dismissed MS Dhoni in the final over.

All pics: Sportzpics for IPL

SYNOPSIS: After Dhawan guided Punjab to 187, Rabada and Arshdeep squeezed CSK at the death despite Rayudu's counter-attack

ABHISHEK PUROHIT
MUMBAI, APRIL 25

IN A near-repeat of Sunday's game at Wankhede Stadium, Shikhar Dhawan's unbeaten 88 lifted Punjab Kings to 187 for 4. Ambati Rayudu's 78 off 39 turned around a misfiring chase but Kagiso Rabada sent him back with two overs left, and MS Dhoni wasn't able to reprise his last-over heroics from Chennai Super Kings' previous game against Mumbai Indians.

Monday follows Sunday

The match was played on the same side pitch on which Lucknow Super Giants defeated Mumbai Indians a day ago. And at the halfway stage of the first innings, both LSG and PK were on the exact score - 72 for 1.

Stroke-making proved to be difficult again, especially at the start, on an already sticky surface that was being used on successive nights. Even the field placings were the same; deep point and deep square leg were the two deep fielders in the powerplay, with both third man and fine leg in the ring. With CSK's three spinners in action in helpful conditions, for a while it looked like they were operating at Chepauk. But PK would go on to take 115 off the last ten overs; LSG had managed 96.

One of the differences was CSK's twin drops of Bhanuka Rajapaksa in successive overs from Ravindra Jadeja right after the powerplay. Rituraj Gaikwad and Mitchell Santner were the culprits on either side of the longer square leg-side boundary. Rajapaksa scored 42 off 32 helped along by misfield and poor deliveries in addition to the drops. He and Dhawan added 110 for the second wicket in 11.3 overs. Rajapaksa departed probably an over or two too late than what PK would have wanted, delaying the arrival of Liam Livingstone until the 18th over. But it also meant the English all-rounder came in with a clear mindset and did not

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	
PBKS	8	4	4	8	-0.419	
DC	7	3	4	6	0.715	
KKR	8	3	5	6	0.080	
CSK	8	2	6	4	-0.538	
MI	8	0	8	0	-1.000	

have to think about batting longer in tricky conditions. Livingstone and Jonny Bairstow scored a combined 25 off ten balls, helping PK post 19 more than LSG had.

Dhawan takes it deep

Continuing the similarities from Sunday night, Dhawan batted through the first innings, like KL Rahul had, but with not as much late acceleration in an 88 off 59. Rahul had taken on the longer square rope and beaten the boundary riders with deft placement. What Dhawan did instead was make good use of the shorter side. He made sure the offerings on the pads disappeared past short fine leg. He also slogged a couple of sixes over the shorter deep-midwicket boundary.

Dhawan may not be the tallest but all his moving around and arching enables him to have a decent reach. When the longer boundary was in play to his stronger off-side, he ensured CSK's helpful overpitched offerings were lofted over mid-off or driven past him for fours. It was Dhawan who started the PK acceleration with three fours in the 12th over bowled by Mukesh Choudhary, the left-arm seamer's natural incoming angle allowing Dhawan to line him up.

Rayudu steps in

The parallels with Sunday night just kept

coming. CSK's chase was foundering just like Mumbai Indians' had, both top orders failing to get going. And while Tilak Varma had threatened an MI revival for a while, Ambati Rayudu went a step ahead and got CSK close. Rayudu had hurt his left forearm at cover trying to stop a drive off the third ball of the game from Mayank Agarwal, and had spent the rest of the innings off the field.

He walked in at 40 for 3 after seven overs, and smacked his second ball from Rahul Chahar to the extra-cover boundary. The forcing cut, the massive slog-sweep, the charge-and-swish - whenever the asking-rate seemed to be getting out of hand, Rayudu had the boundary waiting.

A 23-run 16th over off Sandeep Sharma, playing his first match in nearly a month, brought the equation back to around two runs a ball. Rayudu swiped and slashed three successive sixes and ended the over with a dash to hammer a four over midwicket. There didn't seem to be much deed given there wasn't much ball-wiping from the PK fielders, but Sandeep still delivered high full tosses. And long boundary or not, Rayudu was not missing out.

But just when it seemed Rayudu's momentum would carry CSK home, Kagiso Rabada intervened, landing one around the blockhole and sending Rayudu back.

Arshdeep, Rishi see off Dhoni

Dhoni arrived with 35 needed off 13 and like Jaydev Unadkat in CSK's previous match, he had another left-armer in his sights - Arshdeep Singh, who bowled the 19th. But the young seamer stuck to the full length and wide angle across Dhoni to the longer boundary. Dhoni got one away past extra cover, but Agarwal there had already prevented one, and Arshdeep denied Dhoni off two other deliveries.

Ravindra Jadeja's inability to find the boundary meant CSK required an improbable 27 off the last over. And in his first IPL game in six years, Rishi Dhawan was good enough to bring up a comfortable victory.

BRIEF SCORES: Punjab Kings 187 for 4 in 20 overs (Shikhar Dhawan 88; Dwayne Bravo 2/42) bt Chennai Super Kings: 176 for 6 in 20 overs (Ambati Rayudu 78; Kagiso Rabada 2/23) by 11 runs

EMOTIONAL ROLLERCOASTER



Hot heads, calm minds and everything in between at the game

Livingstone's hips don't lie

From the 14-15h over on, Kings XI Punjab might well have thought about retiring out Bhanuka Rajapaksa. He had done his job and was only delaying the entry of Liam Livingstone. As it turned out after he hit a six in the 13.3, Rajapaksha only faced 7 balls, dealing in singles, over the next four overs before he sacrificed his wicket, going for a slog. Enter Livingstone, the modern-day Nathan Astle with his array of shots, going boom boom in a 7-ball 19 cameo. He is one of the clean hitters, who likes to go in the arc between long-off to long-on. Early on his career, by his own admission, he would obsess over the hitting style of Jos Buttler but re-



alised that Buttler was gifted with a wonderfully mal-leable wrists that powered his shots, and instead strived to be his original self. "I had got too whippy with my wrists". He started to work on having a strong base in his stance ("I used to lose quite bit of power with too wide a base"), move his back hip - which he reckons is his key - and smash through the line. He makes sure he doesn't have too long a front stride which renders the use of his hips a touch ineffective. "At point of contact, I make sure I whip my hips through which is where all my power comes from," he once told Sky Sports. He whipped his hips to lift Punjab over a par score.

Jadeja, captain cool

Ravindra Jadeja didn't have too much of the captaincy in the early part of the IPL with MS Dhoni being the conductor-in-chief on the field. But one characteristic of the former skipper has rubbed off on the new one - the poker face. CSK were using a tried and tested formula of slowing down the ball on a used pitch at the Wankhede. Spinners Maheesh Teekshana and Mitchell Santner bowled four of the six Powerplay overs and along with medium pacer Mukesh Choudhary had kept things tight. The skipper, a dangerous left-arm spinner who gives no room to batsmen to free their arms, came into the attack in the seventh. He would have had two wickets against his name if not for the butter-fingered fielders. Punjab's Banuka Rajapaksa decided to take him on but was dropped by Rituraj Gaikwad in the deep square leg region. In Jadeja's second over, Santner let the ball spill through his hands for a six at deep midwicket. The beneficiary was Rajapaksa again. If Jadeja was losing his cool he didn't show it. No expletives, not a hint of frustration on his face. He just looked away and got back to his bowling mark. A captain with a deadpan face has been one of CSK's success mantras.



Channel 9 duck emoji

Mayank Agarwal is almost Justin Langer in his responses to his dismissals. Not quite, as Langer would act as if he were robbed even when his stumps would have gone for a walk. But the disappointment and shake of head is pretty similar with Mayank. He has had a lot of head-shakes to do this IPL, repeatedly getting out cheaply and trudging off with one of the more expressive reactions of sadness in modern-day cricket. He would look to the heavens, shut his eyes, shake his head again and again, and like a true masochist, would catch the replay of his dismissal on the big screen and do it all over again. Then one more time in the dressing room after he catches the replay on the television. There is also another small clue that he isn't batting well. That mad risky suicidal single after tapping to mid-off. It was a pretty short delivery from Maheesh Theekshana and he went too hard with his cut and sent a dolly to point. It triggered his expressive reaction as he walked back. In some ways, he is like that old Channel Nine duck emoji that would accompany the batsman, shaking and quacking under its breath. Hotstar could well do to create an Mayank emoji or even better, a GIF, for such occasions.



Butter.fingers.will.pay

Unless you are Jonty Rhodes, fielding coaches rarely get the spotlight. But that rule changes if a team drops a series of catches and their fielder on the fence turns twos into fours. After Rituraj Gaikwad and Mitch Santner failed to hold on to simple catches and a couple of diving efforts went futile, the question that was begged to be asked was: Who is CSK's fielding coach? He is Rajiv Kumar, a 5000 plus-runs domestic giant who has played for Bihar and Jharkhand. He replaced the reputed Aussie coach Steve Rixon a few years back. Rajiv was Dhoni's captain at Jharkhand and is a go-to man for any MS update for the media. At the next CSK



nets, expect the old friends to organise a draining fielding session for the team.

‘NO DISCRIMINATION’

Smith cleared of racist decision-making as skipper & Director of Cricket

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
APRIL 25

FORMER SOUTH Africa skipper Graeme Smith has been cleared of charges of racist behaviour during his captaincy tenure and his time as the Board's Director of Cricket. The allegations were parsed by an arbitration panel arising from the earlier Social Justice and Nation Building (SJNB) hearings of Cricket South Africa.

The arbitration stated that Smith's actions could not be proved to constitute unfair racial discrimination or evince racial bias. The SJNB Ombudsman had assessed allegations against Smith, who was captain of the national men's cricket team from 2003 to 2014 and later CSA's first Director of Cricket (DoC) in December 2019.

The issues that came in for scrutiny as mentioned in the 95-page report of the arbitration:

Omission of Thami Tsolekile

CASE: The Ombudsman's tentative findings had pointed a finger at Smith who "likely had some influential role in decisions be-

tween 2012 and 2014 not to select Mr Thami Tsolekile for the Proteas."

The controversy concerns SA's series against England and Australia touring, and when hosting New Zealand in 2012-13. "Mr Tsolekile testified that, around the time he was awarded his contract, selector (Andrew) Hudson told him, while he was unlikely to play against England or Australia, he could or would play in the home series against New Zealand. Mr Hudson, in his statement, denies that it was a guarantee, but he said he told Mr Tsolekile he was likely to get his shot against New Zealand. Whatever Mr Hudson told Mr Tsolekile, there is no claim that Mr Smith gave any assurances - for or against Mr Tsolekile - at this time. It was not even alleged by CSA that Mr Smith was aware of any promise," the report reads.

ARGUMENTS: While the captain is not a member of the selection panel, he "is entitled to freely and strongly indicate his preferences in selection." Tsolekile contended that after Mark Boucher injured his eye and subsequently retired, De Villiers stepped in as the back-up 'keeper, even as Tsolekile was called up. Hudson explained the selectors' thinking as follows: "De Villiers taking the



Graeme Smith wasn't found guilty of discriminating against Thami Tsolekile as captain or of bias against Black leadership at CSA. File

wicketkeeping gloves gave the team the 'X factor' and allowed us, the selectors, to select an extra batter at No. 7." The statement was put to Tsolekile who agreed with the proposition that this was "a strategy."

Smith's evidence pointed that Boucher's injury created "an opportunity to bring in Mr

The arbitration stated Smith's actions could not be proved to constitute unfair racial discrimination or evince racial bias

Jean-Paul Duminy who was a frontline top-order specialist batsman. In turn, that lengthened your batting line up with seven top batting performers."

South Africa's Transformation Policy - the guiding principle - was argued, given there was no Black African in the Proteas team that played the Tests in England. There were, however, five coloured players - Hashim Amla, Alviro Petersen, Vernon Philander, JP Duminy and Imran Tahir - who played all four Tests.

"Again, Mr Smith did not speak against Mr Tsolekile, or in his favour. He accepted the strategy followed by the selectors that had been successful in England. Mr Tsolekile himself did not complain about his treatment at the time, or in his evidence. He appeared to accept that the same "cricketing reasons" that justified selecting Mr De Villiers

in England still applied in Australia."

However, not being picked for the New Zealand series aggravated Tsolekile's unhappiness as it became clear de Kock would be next in line. Selector Linda Zondi testified: "Mr Smith did not influence the decision of the selectors not to select Mr Tsolekile as a wicketkeeper by reason of his race."

CONCLUSION: "There is no direct evidence, concerning the England tour, that Mr Smith actively influenced the selectors to exclude Mr Tsolekile from the playing XI. Instead, it appears to be accepted that Mr De Villiers was selected because of his ability, not because of his race." While the arbitration concluded that Smith did wield influence, it could not establish Tsolekile's omission had racist reasons.

Boucher/Nkwe issue

CASE: This concerned the appointment of Mark Boucher as Proteas Head Coach and if it amounted to racial discrimination with respect to Enoch Nkwe. The latter, a Black, had obtained a Level 4 coaching certificate - the highest available one - and coached one of South Africa's professional teams - Highveld Lions - winning Coach of the Year

award and served as interim coach of the Proteas on the tour to India in 2019. Boucher had played international cricket for 12 years. Smith was keen on finding a coach who could pick the pieces after the disastrous 2019 World Cup, and went for "international experience" with England due to tour soon.

Smith was accused of not following a formal process of gathering CVs and interviewing candidates, and preferring Boucher.

ARGUMENTS: Smith testified that CSA was aware of his idea to appoint Boucher and did not object to his preference or insist on a process, but approved of the choice. The report reads: "His given reasoning - a head coach of a national team is an extremely high pressurised position, you are at the cold face of the world media, the world crowds, people don't care about CSA's equity proposition, they care about results, and I felt that CSA and the team at the time needed someone that had extensive experience in dealing with conditions, with the pressures that come with the international game."

CONCLUSION: Though the process followed was unsatisfactory, and Nkwe received an unfair deal, this did not amount to "indirect discrimination" by Smith.