

Poll rhetoric threatens India's plurality

INDIA's compelling reality is its immense diversity. No political dispensation, no matter how powerful and ideologically driven it may be, can succeed in putting a monochromatic frame over this. Ours is a shared culture, but the emphasis lies on the aspect of sharing, not of adhering. It's a crossroads culture, created through the assimilation of influences India was exposed to through the millennia. It lay at the intersecting point of the caravan routes from Central Asia, stretching into the West Asia and to the Mediterranean, and the maritime sea routes connecting it to both the eastern and western flanks of the Indian Ocean. Just as Indian religious and political thought, languages and art and architecture flowed out to these geographies outwards from the subcontinent, so, too, did corresponding influences from the latter spread across India. This has bequeathed to Indian culture and to the temperament of its people an innate cosmopolitanism, which makes Indians one of the most adaptable people in the world. We have been the original global citizens of the world. It is a matter of pride that the country has been able to conduct elections on an unprecedented scale every five years and that there has been a smooth & uneventful transfer of power. When India hosted the G20 summit in September 2023, it was most appropriate to have Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the whole world is one family) as its defining motto. But to embrace the whole world, one must begin with embracing the people of one's own country. This is also the reason why the Preamble to the Constitution lays as much stress on fraternity as it does on liberty and equality. Fraternity is particularly important for a diverse country like India. It creates a sense of affinity that transcends differences in caste, creed or religion and in the ways of living. It is fraternity which is the true basis of nationhood. Of belonging to a common cause and engaged in the pursuit of a shared national mission.

The framers of the Constitution recognised that Indian nationalism would have to be built on acknowledging rather than suppressing the multiple identities of its people. And yet, in the final analysis, they did not quite trust the people of India to successfully balance their separate identities with an overarching concept of equal citizenship. In its final shape, its subsequent amendments and in laws passed by the legislature, the Constitution enabled the coercive power of the state to be progressively strengthened at the expense of the citizen. The state became selective in allowing some assertions of separate identities but in seeking to suppress others, the touchstone being what best served political interests of the moment. Suppression of some identities would be justified on the grounds of a threat to national unity. Others may be promoted and even legitimised to ostensibly advance national unity. The state is able to use its control and influence over the media and information channels to deminish some communities but ennoble others. Political rhetoric, then, aligns with the strategy of the moment. Such rhetoric often takes on a hysterical pitch, which drowns out all reasoned arguments.

In a democracy, the holding of free and fair elections is indispensable but not sufficient. An independent media and a vibrant civil society provide the means to safeguard the ordinary citizen against transgressions by the state. They hold the state accountable on behalf of the citizen and constitute an alternative channel of information for the people. This is also the role played by a powerful and independent judiciary. In history, it has often been the case that the national security and national unity arguments have been used as powerful labels to delegitimise independent institutions and dissenting voices and, eventually, political competition. India is midway through its 18th General Election. It is a matter of pride that the country has been able to successfully conduct these elections on an unprecedented scale every five years and that there has been a smooth and uneventful transfer of political power without violence or challenge.

Palestinian knowledge ecosystem under Israeli attack

Epistemicide means the killing, silencing, annihilation or devaluation of a knowledge system.

ISRAEL's attack on universities and other educational institutions in Gaza is seen as a deliberate effort to destroy Palestinian knowledge and learning ecosystem. So far, all 12 universities have witnessed aerial strikes. Israel's targets included Al-Azhar University and the Islamic University of Gaza (IUG), resulting in the destruction of years of research by Palestinian faculty, scholars and the students. Prof Sufian Tayeh, President and Vice Chancellor of the IUG, and his family members were killed in an Israeli attack on the campus. The IUG is Gaza's leading academic institution, and Prof Tayeh was an internationally acknowledged researcher. Dr Refaat Alareer, a professor of English literature at the IUG, is among 90-odd university professors killed in the ongoing assault. As per statistics released by the Palestinian Ministry of Education, till January 20, 2024, nearly 4,400 students were killed and 7,800 injured, while 231 teachers and administrators were killed and 756 injured in the attacks along with the complete or partial destruction of 378 state-run schools and those run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in Gaza. At least 97 journalists and media workers are among more than 35,000 fatalities since the war began in October 2023. In the International Court of Justice, the legal representative of South Africa, Blinne Ni Ghralaigh, said: "Almost 90,000 Palestinian university students cannot attend university in Gaza. Over 60 per cent of the schools, almost all universities and countless bookshops and libraries have been damaged and destroyed. Hundreds of teachers and academics have been killed, including deans of universities and leading Palestinian scholars... obliterating the prospects of education of Gaza's children and young people."

Many cultural heritage sites, including libraries, archives and museums, have also been wrecked, wiping out the symbols and documented history of the people. Palestinian intellectuals see it as an effort to 'erase the Palestinian existence from history' and 'erase Palestine from the political map', as Muhannad Ayyash, Professor of Sociology, Mount Royal University, Canada, describes it in a letter to the Canadian Association of University Teachers. "The devastation of Palestinian knowledge, knowledge producers, and knowledge-producing institutions is nothing short of epistemicide," says Prof Ayyash. Epistemicide means the killing, silencing, annihilation or devaluation of a knowledge system. Sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos coined this term and designated it as the "death of knowledge — of a subordinated culture caused by colonisation, oppression and genocide". It can be both military as well as ideological/epistemological. It involves appropriation/destruction in the name of liberation, aggression in the name of peace, destruction of life in the name of the sacredness of life, and infringement on human rights in the name of the protection of rights. Rebuilding the Palestinian education system was



the topmost priority of the Palestinian educated elite after their displacement to make way for Israel in 1948. They saw education as an engine to rebuild their lives and make progress. Many scholars moved to Gaza from different places with the hope of making it a place of meaningful cultural exchange, scientific advancements, understanding of history, creative literary works and advancing the Palestinian society. Whether they succeeded or not can be debated, but for sure, Palestine is counted among the regions having the highest literacy rate. Palestine's literacy rate is 97.51 per cent, as per estimates of the World Bank. Palestinians are known as the "world's best educated refugees".

Academicians worldwide understand this and that is the reason behind the uprising by university professors and students in the US and other countries. The reverberations of what is happening in Palestinian educational institutions are being felt on campuses abroad. Encampments have been set up in several universities to protest the US government's continuous monetary, military, diplomatic and moral support to Israeli aggression. The police were called in at about 10 universities and 645 arrests were made; many of those arrested were released later. Highly ranked Columbia and Boston universities have become hubs of protests; more

than 200 arrests were made from the campuses of these two universities. A significant number of faculty members have either participated or supported the call for a ceasefire in Gaza. In some universities, the administrators have cracked down on agitating students, resulting in the expulsion of some of them.

Scuffles have been reported between pro-Palestine and pro-Israel demonstrators at the University of California at Los Angeles and other places.

The world must raise the pitch to save Palestinian education from destructive and divisive misadventures. It takes weeks to destroy the knowledge system but decades to rebuild it.

Sadly, Palestinian universities have faced exclusion in the past, when some universities of countries aligned with Israel showed reluctance to enter into academic exchange agreements with Palestinian institutions. On the other hand, students from universities of Israel were welcomed to enjoy the benefits of international collaboration. Israeli universities have 60 existing academic agreements with post-secondary institutions of Canada. It is time for academicians, faculty associations and unions, especially in the developed world, to introspect and build public opinion to end the war, besides promising support for rebuilding the beleaguered Palestinian system.

Food safety concerns

FSSAI to scale up quality checks

AMID a controversy over alleged adulteration of spices exported by MDH and Everest and the concerns over high sugar content in infant food products of Nestle India and Cadbury, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has announced a comprehensive plan to enhance inspections across the nation. By conducting pan-India monitoring of spices, culinary herbs and other food items, the FSSAI aims to enforce stringent standards and safeguard consumers against potential health risks.

However, it is a poor reflection on the FSSAI's regulatory mechanism that this initiative stems not from its own findings but from the US authorities' refusal of certain spice-related shipments over the past few months and the recent ban imposed by Singapore and Hong Kong on spice



companies which are suspected of supplying contaminated condiments and masalas. Earlier, the row

over high sugar content in infant foods had prompted the FSSAI to scrutinise baby formula products, in accordance with its mandate to protect vulnerable users.

In another proactive step towards addressing the challenges in food safety, the FSSAI has decided to leverage the expertise of specialists from universities, research institutes and government organisations to enhance its capacity for risk assessment and mitigation and, thereby, ensure robust oversight of the food supply chain. By expanding its ambit to fruits, vegetables, fish products, fortified rice and milk products, the FSSAI aims to deal with diverse aspects of the problem. Looking to allay concerns over adulteration and contamination through surveillance, testing and enforcement, the FSSAI can play a bigger role in promoting food safety and building consumer confidence in India's food industry.

Lack of a National Security Strategy disquieting

The absence of an NSS is believed to be impacting the reorganisation of the country's military into integrated theatre commands.

THE ongoing General Election has further delayed the long-deferred National Security Strategy (NSS), despite the plethora of high-powered consultative and advisory bodies and think tanks in India's strategic and military planning realms.

For the defence and security establishment that continually tom-toms its achievements, the lack of an NSS — despite three attempts to produce one in recent years — is disquieting. It is especially troubling as this hiatus persists at a juncture when India confronts threats from nuclear neighbours China and Pakistan and faces technological challenges on the 21st-century battlefield frequently enumerated by the country's military chiefs.

The absence of an NSS, from which would also flow the long-delayed and equally vital National Defence Strategy, is believed to be impacting the reorganisation of the military into tri-service integrated theatre commands (ITCs) by harnessing their combined financial, materiel and overall operational capabilities. The architecture of the ITCs was to be forwarded to the government for approval by 2022 by the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) before operationalising them the following year, but it remains a work in progress. Media reports in late 2023 had indicated that the National Security Council Secretariat was being tasked with drawing up an NSS with inputs from ministries and assorted departments and forwarding it to the Cabinet Committee on Security headed by PM Narendra Modi for eventual sanction. But no deadline was seemingly determined for such a document, the responsibility for which will now be that of the government which will assume office after the elections. But these recurrent rain checks in framing the critical national security architecture were in inverse proportion to the cluster of recommendatory organisations established over

decades to devise a robust NSS. Topping this list is the high-rolling, but seemingly dormant, Defence Planning Committee (DPC) created in April 2018 as an 'overarching' body to manage India's defence and security strategy, prepare military capability plans, fast-track materiel acquisitions and augment military diplomacy. In tandem is the attendant Strategic Policy Group (SPG), revamped some six months later the same year as the first level of the three-tiered National Security Council. The group's founding responsibility was to foster inter-ministerial coordination and integration of relevant inputs for formulating national security policies like the NSS and related policies and procedures.

Both organisations are headed by National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval, and their membership was more or less analogous, comprising the three service chiefs and the defence and foreign secretaries. DPC members also include the federal revenue secretary and Chiefs of Staff Committee Chairman — a responsibility that transferred itself to the CDS in December 2019. The Integrated Defence Staff, also headed by the CDS, was designated the secretariat of the DPC, which encompassed four sub-committees to execute its myriad responsibilities.

SPG membership was larger and included heads of the domestic and overseas intelligence-gathering agencies, the cabinet secretary and the secretaries of home, finance, defence production, revenue, atomic energy and space. The scientific adviser to the defence minister and the NITI Aayog vice-chairman, too, were members of the SPG, which was earlier chaired by the cabinet secretary. But after its refurbishment and expansion, the secretary now reports to the NSA. In short, both the DPC and the SPG were more than qualified to construct an NSS



and the attendant national defence strategy. But senior service veterans and security officials concurred that both these organisations had little or no output to show for themselves over the past eight years, with little of policy import forthcoming from either. Their meetings, too, had been infrequent.

Furthermore, these two bodies are supplemented by a host of think tanks backed by either the Ministry of Defence or hand-held by the individual services. These include the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses in Delhi, the country's foremost think tank whose founding charter encompasses advanced research in defence, strategic and security issues and other related matters.

Also, there are three service-sponsored think tanks, the Centre for Land Warfare Studies, the National Maritime Foundation and the Centre for Air Power

Studies, all operating out of Delhi. Complementing them is the high-maintenance — but low-performance — Centre for Joint Warfare Studies created in 2007 in Delhi to "rise above sectoral and departmental legacies and to examine joint warfare and synergy issues in their entirety" to provide inputs for an NSS. However, these bodies that, from time to time, are involved in organising seminars and discussions on national security and India's exalted but elusive role as a major player in global strategic matters, remain mum publicly on anything to do with an NSS, as was flagged by former Army Chief Gen MM Naravane in late 2022. At a lecture in New Delhi, Gen Naravane recommended the establishment of a higher defence organisation (HDO) with representation from all ministries for a comprehensive approach to theaterisation, which would serve as the 'interface' between the government and the ITC commanders on the ground. "Once these two pillars — NSS and HDO — are in place, we can start thinking about theatre commands," said the former Army Chief, who retired in April 2022, adding that all talk of theaterisation was simply putting the cart before the horse. But once framed, the NSS, he stated, would make it clear whether the military's role was just to defend the country's land borders and territorial waters or if it extended to the wider primary strategic arc stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Malacca Strait. Hopefully, the proposed HDO will not end up being another non-performing asset.

Kotak Mahindra bank shares fall after joint MD KVS Manian resigns

New Delhi Shares of Kotak Mahindra fell almost 4% in early trade on Thursday after joint MD KVS Manian resigned from the private lender with immediate effect. The stock has declined by 11% over the past five days and was trading at Rs 1563.50, 3.72% lower on the BSE at the time this article was being written. Manian's resignation comes days after Kotak Mahindra Bank was barred by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) from onboarding new customers online or issuing new credit cards. The bank's board has approved his resignation, as disclosed in a regulatory filing to the exchanges.

Manian, previously a whole-time director at the bank, was promoted to the role of joint MD starting March 1, 2024, following the appointment of Ashok Vaswani as the new MD and CEO. The former joint MD said in his resignation, that he was exploring other opportunities in the financial sector. "The variety of assignments handled during my career with the company have enriched me as a professional. I was truly fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with colleagues with brilliant minds and unlimited passion to imagine and achieve things that are out of the ordinary. There are just too many of such people to be named in such a short letter," said Manian. Nomura India in a report said that Kotak Mahindra Bank could face reputational impact following the RBI's action. The brokerage will monitor how the situation unfolds, particularly given the stern tone of the RBI's press release. Manian mentioned that he briefly worked with CEO Ashok Vaswani but feels that the future direction of the bank "is truly transformational."

Sensex, Nifty rise in volatile trade; Power Grid gains 3%

New Delhi Benchmark stock market indices opened the trading session on a positive note despite high volatility on Dalal Street. The S&P BSE Sensex was up 149.28 points at 74,632.06 at 10 am, while the NSE Nifty50 gained 38.85 points to 22,643.70.

The other broader market indices also gained momentum in early trade, taking cues from the benchmarks. Among sectoral indices, Nifty Auto was the top gainer, followed by Nifty Financial Services and Nifty Pharma. On the other hand, Nifty Realty fell over 1.1% and was the top loser among sectoral indices. The top five gainers on the Nifty50 were Power Grid, BPCL, M&M, Asian Paints and Grasim. The top drags were Kotak Mahindra Bank, Hindalco, Tata Consumer Products, Maruti and Wipro.

Kotak Mahindra Bank shares fell after its joint MD KVS Mani resigned from his position with immediate effect. His resignation comes days after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) took action against the private lender.

Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said, "Today's trading is expected to be volatile as the Federal Reserve maintains interest rates at a 23-year high due to inflation concerns."

"Positive factors include record-high GST revenue, FII and DII being net buyers, and WTI oil prices falling below \$80 a barrel," he added.

Tapse went on to say that investors anticipate a pre-election rally and Federal Reserve Chair Powell dismissing talks of 'stagflation'.

Gold, silver price : Precious metals record hike on MCX

NEW DELHI Both gold and silver prices recorded a hike on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX) on Thursday, May 2, 2024. Gold futures, maturing on June 5, 2024, stood at Rs 71,175 per 10 grams on the MCX, after recording a jump of Rs 450 or 0.64 per cent. The previous close was recorded at Rs 70,725.

Meanwhile, silver futures, maturing on July 5, 2024, witnessed a hike of Rs 159 or 0.20 per cent and were retailing at Rs 81,386 per kg on the MCX against the previous close of Rs 81,227. The gold and silver prices in India depend on several factors, including the value of the rupee against the dollar. Global demand also plays a key role in determining the trends observed in the rate of precious metals.

Commercial LPG cylinder price cut Rs 19, ATF up 0.7%

NEW DELHI. State-owned oil marketing companies (OMCs) on Wednesday reduced price of commercial LPG cylinders, used by businesses such as hotels and restaurants, by Rs 19 with immediate effect.

The price of a 19-kg commercial LPG cylinder will cost Rs 1,745.50 in Delhi. In April, the price of the same cylinder was reduced by Rs 30.5. However, there is no change in the price of the domestic LPG cylinder. But OMCs such as Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL), Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL), and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited



(BPCL) hiked aviation turbine fuel (ATF) prices by 0.7%. As per the price notification, ATF price in Delhi has been raised by Rs 749.25 per kilolitre to Rs 101,642.88 per kl. Earlier this year, on February 1 and March 1, commercial LPG prices had risen by Rs 14 and Rs 25.5 per cylinder, respectively, before the first reduction on April 1. The OMCs revise ATF and LPG prices on the first day of every month based on international fuel prices and exchange rates. In March, domestic cooking gas prices were cut by Rs 100 and extended Rs 300 subsidy for LPG cylinders for Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana beneficiaries

Questions over Adani's bid for Chennai-based power company Coastal Energen

The Rs 3,500 crore resolution plan has been approved by lenders of Coastal Energen, and is due for approval by the NCLT.

NEW DELHI. Former promoter of Chennai-based power company Coastal Energen Pvt Ltd has moved NCLT against the resolution plan submitted by the Consortium of Dickey Alternate Investment Trust (DAIT) and Adani Power Ltd. The plea submitted by suspended director MK Parmeshawaram in the Chennai bench of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) has pointed out 'glaring irregularities' in the way the resolution plan was approved by the lenders. A copy of the plea is with the New Indian

Express. The Rs 3,500 crore resolution plan has been approved by lenders of Coastal Energen, and is due for approval by the NCLT. According to the plea filed by the promoters of the power company before the NCLT, Adani Power piggy-backed Dickey Alternate Investment Trust to get a backdoor entry into the bidding process after the Adani's expression of interest (EoI) was rejected by the resolution professional (RP) for delayed submission. As per the plea, the EoI terms required any entity submitting an EoI as a consortium to do so at the outset, submitting the required documents and annexures as a consortium and not in an individual capacity. "This raised the questions about the legitimacy of DAIT's involvement in a consortium with Adani Power, especially since DAIT has



already submitted a resolution plan in its individual capacity, and the Adani Power's EoI had been rejected for delayed submission," reads the plea submitted by the former promoter. The submission made by the promoter also highlights that there are no documented deliberations or discussions between the

RP and the lenders regarding the inclusion of Adani Power as prospective resolution applicant. It also says no justifications were given for condoning the delay in submission of EoI by Adani Power. The plea made by the ex-promoter also points fingers at the possible conflict of interest 'undisclosed' by the RP and the Committee of Creditors (CoC).

An Adani Power spokesperson refused to comment on the issue. It must be pointed out here that the ex-promoters of the company had offered a one-time settlement of debt with the lenders. The offer included a total payment of Rs 5,847 crore, including 15% ownership of the company to its lenders to settle its debts. Coastal Energen is promoted by Ahmed AR Buhari, and is undergoing a corporate insolvency resolution process since February 2022. The company owes Rs 2,000 crore to different lenders.

Google lays off 200 'core' team employees, to shift jobs to India, Mexico: Report

New Delhi, Google has laid off at least 200 employees from its 'core' team, just ahead of its blowout first-quarter earnings report on April 25. According to a report with CNBC, the tech giant will also move some roles to India and Mexico. This comes nearly two days after Google fired employees from its Flutter, Dart, and Python teams just weeks before its annual developer conference. At least 50 of the positions eliminated were in engineering at the company's offices in Sunnyvale, California, the report claimed. The layoffs were announced by Asim Husain, vice president of Google Developer Ecosystem, who sent an email to his employees last week. He also spoke at a town hall and



told employees that this was the biggest planned reduction for his team this year, it said. "We intend to maintain our current global footprint while also expanding in high-growth global workforce locations so that we can operate closer to our partners and developer communities," the email by Husain read. According to Google's

website, the 'core' team builds the technical foundation behind the company's flagship products.

The team is responsible for underlying design elements, developer platforms, product components, and infrastructure at Google. In April this year, news agency Reuters reported that Tesla plans to lay off 6,020 employees in Texas and California as part of its strategy to address declining demand and decreasing profit margins. This came amid increasing pressure on the company due to a decrease in sales and increased competition in the electric vehicle market.

The EV manufacturer saw a decline in its quarterly profits for the first time since 2020.

Waning demand, high base effect pull down car sales

NEW DELHI: Impacted by waning pent-up demand over a very high base, passenger vehicle (PV) wholesales are estimated to have grown by a meagre 1.50% year-on-year in April 2024 to about 340,000 units. Sales of the three top players - Maruti Suzuki (MSIL), Hyundai Motor (HMIL) and Tata Motors - barely managed to remain in green last month.

"The relatively subdued growth partly stems from waning pent-up replacement demand, which supported the industry over the past couple of years, and also the effect of a higher base," said Srikumar Krishnamurthy, Senior VP & Co-Group Head - Corporate Ratings, ICRA Limited.

"The domestic PV industry reached an all-time high volume of 4.2 million units in FY24, with retail sales being

aided by healthy replacement demand. Even as the underlying demand drivers remain supportive, the volume growth for the PV segment is likely to moderate to 3-6% (from an elevated base) during FY2025," added Krishnamurthy.

The industry is now pinning hopes on new launches, a normal monsoon and a favourable elaaaction outcome to generate fresh demand and push sales growth numbers higher. The country's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki's (MSIL) domestic PV sales stood at 137,952 units in April 2024 compared to 137,320 units sold in April 2023 - a flat growth. This is a big slump sequentially given the carmaker had sold 152,718 units in March 2023.

MSIL sales were lifted by the utility vehicle segment as demand for its mini and compact cars continued to remain under tremendous pressure.

The carmaker is now betting big on the new Swift to revive its fortune in the compact segment.

Hyundai Motor India (HMIL) registered total sales of 63,701 units (Domestic 50,201 units and exports 13,500 units) in April 2024, posting a YOY growth of 9.5%. HMIL's domestic sales, however, grew by just 1% YoY to 50,201 units last month.

"In the first month of the new financial year, it looks like industry sales grew about 1.5%. This is because of the high base of the last two years.

Hoping for recovery

The industry is now pinning hopes on new launches, a normal monsoon and a favourable election outcome to generate fresh demand and push sales growth numbers higher. Maruti Suzuki's domestic PV sales stood at 137,952 units in April 2024 as against 137,320 units sold in April 2023



AUM in March as against just two in February. Andhra, Goa, Kerala, the Lakshadweep and Sikkim saw sequential declines in the reporting month with the Lakshadweep seeing the highest contraction of 57.90%, followed by Sikkim at 3.22% and Kerala at 0.59%. Interestingly, the top 5 states in terms of sequential growth are Daman & Diu, Manipur, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Meghalaya, and Tripura. The Union Territory of Daman & Diu saw the highest sequential growth at 3.60% followed by Manipur at 3.09% and Dadra & Nagar Haveli at 2.62%.

Equity-oriented schemes continued to get the maximum share from all the states for third consecutive month contributing the most towards AUM at 51.96%.

India's manufacturing growth remains strong despite slight easing in April

The HSBC final India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), compiled by S&P Global, dipped to 58.8 in April from a 16-year high of 59.1 in March.

India's manufacturing sector growth remained strong in April even as it eased slightly compared to the previous month. The performance was primarily attributed to sustained demand, prompting businesses to increase their procurement of raw materials at a near-record pace, according to a recent business survey.

The HSBC final India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), compiled by S&P Global, dipped to 58.8 in April from a 16-year high of 59.1 in March. While this decrease was below the preliminary estimate of no change, it still



indicated solid expansion, marking the 34th consecutive month of growth.

The PMI, which separates growth from contraction, remained comfortably above the 50-mark. Pranjul Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC, highlighted that April's manufacturing PMI recorded

the second-fastest improvement in operating conditions in three-and-a-half years, buoyed by robust demand. Despite the slight easing in output and new orders sub-indices from March, they still represented the second-best readings in over three years, signaling strong demand

both domestically and internationally. Business optimism also saw an uptick as firms anticipated sustained demand and increased production volumes in the next 12 months. This positive sentiment translated into increased hiring for a second consecutive month, potentially addressing the concerning issue of lackluster job growth in the country. As businesses geared up for higher production levels, they increased their stocks of raw materials at the third-fastest rate since the survey's inception over 19 years ago. However, the surge in demand led to a modest uptick in both input and output prices, although inflation remained within the central bank's target range of 2-6%. "On the price front, higher costs of raw materials and labour led to a modest uptick in input costs, but inflation remains below the historical average," said Bhandari. "However, firms passed these increases onto consumers through higher output charges, as demand remained resilient, resulting in improved margins," she added.

Police probing email ID of Russian origin, sifting through red herrings, smokescreens

NEW DELHI: The counter-intelligence unit of Delhi Police is handling the probe along with several other agencies, including Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre. Investigators suspect the real email address was suppressed in multiple layers of encryption and will use advanced "unmasking programmes" to identify the sender. Russian free email service, 'mail.ru' - it was recently targeted by Ukraine army's IT wing, leading to it being shut down - a virtual private network and proxy servers were used to send the emails, according to initial technical analysis. Police probing email ID of Russian origin, sifting through red herrings, smokescreens. An elaborate operation involving multiple agencies has been launched to track down the sender of the email to schools in Delhi-NCR which turned out to be a hoax. With the sender having used an email ID of Russian origin, Delhi Police is writing to VK, the parent firm which owns the email service, via

Interpol. The probe has been handed over to the counter-intelligence unit of Delhi Police which has advanced email analysis software and systems. The unit is working with several agencies, including Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (i4C), to investigate the matter. The investigators suspect the real address to have been suppressed in multiple layers of encryption and will use advanced "unmasking programmes" to identify the sender, said an officer. The sender has used the Russian free email service, 'mail.ru', which was recently targeted by the IT wing of Ukraine's army, leading the service to be shut down. However, the mail could have been sent from anywhere using VPN and darknet. Though mischief by an individual or a group of present and former students, who may have used IP masking techniques, is one of the lines of probe being followed, the agencies are exploring other angles too. The role of a hacker group is also being

examined. The initial technical analysis of the IP address of the email ID - Sawarim@mail.ru - used by the sender reveals that it was masked using a virtual private network and proxy servers. Cyber experts managed to fish out two addresses but then hit a dead end. "One was A05651C1686****EFC1 and the other was 66.70.xxx.5xx. But these could just be smokescreens erected by the sender. We can be certain only after we get some authentic details from the originating server," said a cyber expert who didn't wish to be named. The investigation is not focused only on tracing the sender through technical means but also on the content of the email. The content is puzzling as it quotes random Islamic verses and the sender's name, Sawarim, also seems to be stemming from a Nasheed (propaganda song) made by Islamic State which



discusses bloodshed and war, which finds an echo in the mail. The large number of schools targeted has made the police think that there was proper planning that required obtaining the email addresses of so many schools. This list could have been either procured on dark web or obtained through crawlers from open-source data available on the web, said a cyber cell officer. The

cops are also looking into a similar hoax email that was sent to a children's hospital in Shahdara on Tuesday. The analysis of the sender's ID gave out around 20 IP addresses and showed the location to be places like US, South Korea, Netherlands, Luxembourg and other places. A similar threat was made to the airport on Monday. In both incidents, the same email ID was used. "An email was received at 9.37 a.m. on feedback.iGIAirport@gmrgroup.in from 666darktriad666@gamil.com and the sender claimed to have placed three explosive devices on a few aeroplanes and at airport which would detonate in a few hours. The sender claimed that a group named Terrorizers111 was behind this," reads the FIR lodged by the airport police. The cops are probing if the same sender was involved in Wednesday's incidents as well.

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Declares Assets Worth 71 Crore

Berhampur, Odisha: Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has declared assets valued at ₹ 71.07 crore, up by over ₹ 7 crore in the last five years, as mentioned in an affidavit filed by him in the Election Commission. The BJD chief had shown assets of ₹ 63.87 crore in 2019. Mr Patnaik filed his nomination papers for the Hinjili assembly segment to seek election for the sixth time along with the 64-page affidavit in which he mentioned movable assets of over ₹ 14.05 crore and immovable properties worth ₹ 57.02 crore.



His movable assets include term deposits in various banks and post offices, while ₹ 13.66 crore Naveen Niwas in Bhubaneswar and a ₹ 43.35 crore house at APJ Abdul Kalam Road, New Delhi are among his immovable assets. Naveen Patnaik has a 50 per cent share in the New Delhi residence and a two-thirds share in the Naveen Niwas, Bhubaneswar. According to the affidavit, he possesses 45.77 gram buttons of rubies, diamonds and silver (five pieces) worth around ₹ 4.17 lakh.

The chief minister also mentioned in the document that he has ₹ 30,000 in hand and a 1980-model ambassador car. The present value of the vehicle was ₹ 6,434, which was valued at ₹ 8,905 five years ago. He has shown ₹ 92,24,900 as his income in 2022-23 in the tax return.

Lok Sabha elections: Congress maintains suspense on Amethi, Rae Bareilly choice

NEW DELHI: With just two days left for filing nomination, the suspense over Congress's candidates for Amethi and Rae Bareilly touched a new climax. As the media buzz grew that the Gandhi siblings may not file their nomination papers from UP, party sources said a final push was on to persuade them, especially Rahul, to contest. Congress spokesperson Jairam Ramesh told reporters that the party will announce the UP candidates in next 24 hours, and advised patience. A senior Congress member said, "Please wait till tomorrow. Their contesting, or at least Rahul, cannot be ruled out."

Importantly, party president Mallikarjun Kharge has cancelled his engagements for Thursday, the day the decision is to be announced. Sources said there is immense pressure on Rahul to contest, with Kharge urging him to fight from Amethi that he represented from 2004 to 2019. The Congress brass is insistent that the Gandhi family pitching the tent in UP will help the party in the northern belt, besides aiding the perception about its confidence in the coming phases of elections nationally.

In both the Congress Election Committee meetings that discussed the two seats, the state unit forcefully made the case for the Gandhis to contest their traditional seats. A party manager said Rahul has been concerned about leaving Wayanad, which he won in 2019 even as he lost Amethi.

While he has expressed confidence about his prospects in Amethi, in line with the party's positive feedback, Rahul is worried about the optics of quitting Kerala eventually. If the Gandhis don't contest, then party managers looking after the constituencies, and a distant family member, are said to be the prime contenders.

Though May 3 is the last date of nomination, Rahul is to travel to Karnataka on Thursday and likely to Maharashtra the day after. Priyanka is touring Chhattisgarh and MP on Thursday, but her programme for Friday is not known. But if Rahul finally relents, the travel for a day is negotiable. Asked if the delay suggested a lack of confidence in fielding the Gandhis from UP, Ramesh said, "Nobody is scared... the discussions are going on, and the Congress president has been authorised." He pointed out that BJP too has not announced its Rae Bareilly candidate.

US Police deny reports of Goldy Brar's murder: 'Incorrect'

New Delhi: The US Police have denied that Goldy Brar, the gangster behind Punjabi singer Sidhu Moose Wala's murder, was shot dead in California, claiming that such reports were 'incorrect.' Responding to India Today's query over Goldy Brar's death, the police said, "We can confirm that the victim was not Goldy Brar. The victim's identity is in the press release and his picture is attached. We do not know where the rumour that it was Goldy Brar began, but it wasn't from us. International news outlets began publishing this as a fact before checking with our agency."



"On Tuesday, April 30, 2024, at 5.30 pm, Fresno Police officers in the Northwest District responded to Fairmont Avenue and Holt Avenue for a ShotSpotter activation. Responding officers found 37-year-old Xavier Gladney suffering from a gunshot wound. Gladney was transported to

CRMC, but he was pronounced deceased. Additionally, a thirteen-year-old juvenile was dropped off at CRMC with a non-life-threatening gunshot wound. This juvenile was also present at Fairmont Avenue and Holt

Avenue when Gladney was fatally shot," Fresno police department stated in a press release.

"Homicide detectives have identified the suspect responsible for the murder of Gladney as 33-year-old Darren Williams. A warrant for murder and

assault with a deadly weapon has been issued for his arrest. We are asking the public for any information leading to the arrest of Williams. The motive for this shooting stems from a gang-related interpersonal dispute," it added.

After the incident, many people on social media speculated that the person killed in the incident was Canada-based gangster Goldy Brar. Satinderjit Singh alias Goldy Brar is a wanted criminal and was named a terrorist under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. A close aide of gangster Lawrence Bishnoi, Goldy Brar, came into the spotlight after he claimed responsibility for singer Sidhu Moose Wala's murder through a Facebook post. Sidhu Moose Wala was shot dead in his car near his village in Punjab's Mansa district on May 29, 2022.

East, northeast India reel under severe heatwave in April, worse in store

New Delhi: East and Northeast India experienced record-breaking heat during the month of April 2024, registering their highest minimum and mean temperatures since 1901. This out-of-season increase in temperatures, well above the average for this time of the year, has been especially pronounced in Southern peninsular India. While southern, eastern and northeastern regions witnessed significant heatwave days throughout April, northwestern India remained an exception, experiencing no heatwave days. Odisha recorded 18 heatwave days, West Bengal saw 16 while the corresponding number stood at 10 for Jharkhand during the month of April. The highest divergence from normal temperatures was witnessed at Kalaikunda in West Bengal, with the maximum temperature reaching a



scorching 47.2 degrees Celsius, a significant 10.4 degrees above normal. Baripada and Balasore in Odisha recorded maximum temperatures as high as 46.4 degrees and 46.0 degrees Celsius respectively. Ironically, northwestern India enjoyed a cooler month due to the presence of five active western disturbances, which led to a slower weather transition adding to a cooler regional climate. However, as per the weather

forecasts, the heatwave is expected to continue in the western and southern regions, maintaining the above normal temperatures in the month of May as well. In contrast to this, other regions in the country, including northwestern India, will experience temperatures below normal. The month of May is also predicted to witness a significant amount of rainfall. The expected rains may be ranging from 91-109% above normal, providing some relief amidst the searing temperatures. Meanwhile, heatwave conditions will persist, particularly in Western India with five to eight heatwave days expected. North Indian states like Delhi, Haryana, and Punjab may also record an additional two to four heatwave days. This record heat poses challenges for residents in terms of water shortage, increased,



having a clear alliance with Pakistan. "Congress ka haath Pakistan ke saath," Mr Poonawala posted. "Earlier Hafiz Saeed had said Congress is his favourite party. Mani Aiyer went to Pakistan for support to depose PM Modi! We remember Pakistan Zindabad slogans were raised recently by Congress leaders and BK Hariprasad openly batted for Pak. Time and again Congress leaders defended Pakistani terrorists too." In the video shared by Mr Hussain, Rahul Gandhi can be heard criticising the BJP, particularly targeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The edited clip focuses on Mr Gandhi's remarks regarding the Ram Mandir's inauguration, where he accuses the BJP of neglecting the interests of the marginalised communities.

Parents sue Serum Institute over daughter's alleged Covishield death

The parents of a woman who died in July 2021 after taking the Covishield vaccine have initiated legal proceedings against Serum Institute of India (SII).

New Delhi: The parents of a woman who allegedly died after taking Covishield have initiated legal proceedings against Serum Institute of India (SII) after British pharma giant AstraZeneca's admission in a court that its vaccine can cause rare side effects. Covishield, developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University, was produced by the Serum Institute of India and widely administered in the country. Venugopalan Govindan's daughter Karunya died in July 2021 after taking the Covishield vaccine. However, the national committee set up by the



government concluded there was insufficient evidence to conclude that her death was caused by the vaccine. Govindan has filed a writ petition seeking compensation, and the appointment of an independent medical board to inquire into the death of his daughter.

The development comes after AstraZeneca, which is facing a class-action lawsuit in

the UK, admitted in court documents that its vaccine could cause a rare side effect of blood clotting coupled with low platelet count. The Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid vaccine was sold globally under the brand names 'Covishield' and 'Vaxzevria', among others.

After AstraZeneca's admission, the plight of another family has also come to light. Rithaika Sri Omtri, 18, who had just

completed Class 12, was pursuing architecture when Covid hit in 2021. In May, she took her first dose of Covishield. However, within seven days, Rithaika developed a high fever, started vomiting and couldn't walk. An MRI scan showed her brain had multiple blood clots and a haemorrhage. In two weeks, Rithaika passed away. Rithaika's parents didn't know the exact cause of her death. Through an RTI in December 2021, her family got to know that Rithaika had suffered "thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome" and died due to "vaccine product related reaction". The lawsuit in the UK was initiated by Jamie Scott, who suffered a permanent brain injury after receiving the AstraZeneca vaccine in April 2021. The AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine is no longer administered in the UK due to safety concerns. While independent studies have shown its effectiveness in combating Covid-19, the emergence of rare side effects has prompted regulatory scrutiny and legal action.

NEWS BOX

Colombia to sever diplomatic ties with Israel over Gaza war

Bogota. Colombian President Gustavo Petro said on Wednesday he will break diplomatic relations with Israel over its actions in Gaza.

Petro has already heavily criticised Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and requested to join South Africa's case accusing Israel of genocide at the International Court of Justice.

"Here in front of you, the government of change, of the president of the republic announces that tomorrow we will break diplomatic relations with the state of Israel ... for having a government, for having a president who is genocidal," Petro told cheering crowds in Bogota who marched to mark International Worker's Day and back Petro's social and economic reforms. Countries cannot be passive in the face of events in Gaza, he added.

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz accused Petro of being "antisemitic and full of hate". He said Petro's move was a reward to the armed group Hamas, which on October 7, 2023 led a deadly attack on Israeli military bases and communities. Bolivia broke relations with Israel at the end of October last year, while several other countries in Latin America, including Colombia, Chile and Honduras, have recalled their ambassadors.

Tension grows on UCLA campus as police order dispersal of large pro-Palestinian gathering

LOS ANGELES: Law enforcement on the UCLA campus donned riot gear Wednesday evening as they ordered the dispersal of over a thousand people who had gathered in support of a pro-Palestinian student encampment, warning over loudspeakers that anyone who refused to leave could face arrest.

A large crowd of students, alumni and neighbors gathered on campus steps outside the barricaded area of tents, sitting as they listened and applauded various speakers and joined in pro-Palestinian chants. Overhead television cameras showed students in the barricaded area passing out goggles and helmets, as well as setting up medical aid stations. A small group of students holding signs and wearing T-shirts in support of Israel and Jewish people gathered nearby.

The law enforcement presence and continued warnings stood in contrast to the scene that unfolded the night before, when counter-demonstrators attacked the pro-Palestinian encampment, throwing traffic cones, releasing pepper spray and tearing down barriers. Fighting continued for several hours before police stepped in, and no one was arrested. At least 15 protesters suffered injuries, and the tepid response by authorities drew criticism from political leaders as well as Muslim students and advocacy groups.

Ray Wiliani, who lives nearby, said he came to UCLA on Wednesday evening to support the pro-Palestinian demonstrators. "We need to take a stand for it," he said. "Enough is enough." Elsewhere, police in New Hampshire made arrests and took down tents at Dartmouth College and officers in Oregon came onto the campus at Portland State University as school officials sought to end the occupation of the library that started Monday. The chaotic scenes at UCLA came just hours after New York police burst into a building occupied by anti-war protesters at Columbia University on Tuesday night, breaking up a demonstration that had paralyzed the school.

An Associated Press tally counted at least 38 times since April 18 where arrests were made at campus protests across the U.S. More than 1,600 people have been arrested at 30 schools. UCLA Chancellor Gene Block said in a statement that "a group of instigators" perpetrated the previous night's attack, but he did not provide details about the crowd or why the administration and school police did not act sooner.

Harvey Weinstein faces accuser as judge orders retrial over rape, sexual assault convictions

NEW YORK: Disgraced film mogul Harvey Weinstein faced one of his accusers in New York court Wednesday as he was told he would be retried for rape and sexual assault convictions that were overturned in the state. His 2020 conviction for raping ex-actress Jessica Mann, who was in the front row of the courtroom's public gallery and mere feet from Weinstein, was overturned by New York's highest court last week. Weinstein was visibly frail as he was wheeled into the Manhattan courtroom, flanked by his lawyers, smiling and waving at supporters as he was pushed in a wheelchair past the public gallery.

Weinstein, who has barely been pictured in public for years, was flanked by two armed court officers as he sat at the defendant's table wearing a dark suit, his hair thin. "We believe in this case... To that end (accuser) Jessica Mann is in court today," said prosecutor Nicole Blumberg announcing that her office would seek a retrial. "She is committed to seeing justice served once again." "We have every belief that the defendant will be convicted again at trial."

But Weinstein's lawyer, Arthur Aidala, insisted "he was acquitted of the most serious counts," accusing the prosecutor in the original New York trial of perjuring herself. Weinstein's team had sought to have their client granted bail pending any retrial, but Judge Curtis Farber rejected that, remanding him pending a retrial, which he set for after Labour Day on September 4.

"His life is on the line," Aidala said as he sought to have his client freed. The next hearing in the case will be May 29 to handle discovery issues, Farber said, adding that "we anticipate a trial schedule some date after Labour Day." "He will be remanded until trial."

Weinstein was convicted in New York in 2020 of the rape and sexual assault of ex-actress Mann in 2013, and of forcibly performing oral sex on former production assistant Mimi Haley in 2006.

"He will be remanded until trial."

Weinstein was convicted in New York in 2020 of the rape and sexual assault of ex-actress Mann in 2013, and of forcibly performing oral sex on former production assistant Mimi Haley in 2006. He was sentenced to 23 years in prison. Last week, New York's highest court ruled the trial judge erred in admitting the testimony of women who were allegedly abused by Weinstein but who were not named in the charges brought against him. Weinstein would have likely remained in custody anyway because of a conviction for rape in California for which he received a 16-year sentence.

US weighing measures to help Palestinians in bringing family from Gaza

The discussion comes as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has maintained that Israel will move forward with a major military operation in Rafah even as the Biden administration has warned that such action would be catastrophic.

Washington The Biden administration is weighing measures to help Palestinians living in the United States who want to bring family from the war-torn region. "We are constantly evaluating policy

proposals to further support Palestinians who are family members of American citizens and may want to come to the United States," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Wednesday. Jean-Pierre said discussions were underway but had no further details on how procedures might work. The new measures would help those who are legal permanent residents or US citizens and who have family in the region. It's difficult right now for anyone to get out of the Gaza Strip as the Israel-Hamas war continues, and more than 34,000 Palestinians have been killed, according to local health officials, around two-thirds of them children and women. The discussion comes as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has maintained that Israel will move forward with a major military operation in the southern Gaza



city of Rafah even as the Biden administration has warned that such action would be catastrophic.

An estimated 1.5 million people—more than half of Gaza—have taken shelter in Rafah as the war shows no signs of ending. If the US were to move forward with some sort of measure to help the families of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, it would

likely require coordination with Egypt. Early in the war, hundreds of Americans — as well as other foreign nationals trapped in Gaza — were able to escape via the Rafah border crossing with Egypt, which opened the crossing with some trepidation. Egypt as well as other Arab nations worry that an Israeli offensive could lead to a displacement of Palestinians into Sinai, a scenario it views as unacceptable. For Palestinians already in the US, the Biden administration has already agreed to what's known as "deferred enforced departure," an authority used at a president's discretion.

The directive signed by Biden last month effectively allows Palestinian immigrants who would otherwise have to leave the United States to stay without the threat of deportation for at least 18 months.

10 dead, 21 missing after heavy rain in southern Brazil

Ten people died and 21 are missing due to heavy rains this week in Brazil's southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, with the local government warning that the situation is critical and could deteriorate further. During a press conference on Wednesday, state governor Eduardo Leite said he had spoken with President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva seeking all possible federal assistance. We are experiencing in Rio Grande do Sul the worst moment, the worst disaster in our history. It is absolutely, absurdly, extraordinarily serious what is happening in Rio Grande do Sul right now," Leite said. "And unfortunately, it will get worse." Lula is due to travel to the state on Thursday. According to the governor, storms have caused the most



extensive devastation in the state in recent years, leaving several towns isolated after bridges collapsed and roads were destroyed amid floods and mudslides.

Leite declared the suspension of classes statewide for the remainder of the week and emphasized that he had requested full support from the armed forces "to

effectively participate in coordinating this moment, which is akin to facing a war." Authorities tallied over 3,400 displaced individuals in the wake of storms that led to rising river levels and flooding in various parts of the state, affecting 114 municipalities. In a Tuesday report, the state's government predicted a flood risk "across practically the entire state" given the prospect of continued "heavy precipitation" in the coming days.

The bulletin also said flooding would be severe in the basins of many rivers, with the possibility of flash floods and mass movements of earth in regions with steep slopes.

Biden keeps quiet as Gaza protesters and police clash on college campuses

WASHINGTON. President Joe Biden is staying mum about student protests and police crackdowns as Republicans try to turn campus unrest over the war in Gaza into a campaign cudgel against Democrats. Tension at colleges and universities has been building for days as some demonstrators refuse to remove encampments and administrators turn to law enforcement to clear them by force, leading to clashes that have seized attention from politicians and the media.

But Biden's last public comment came more than a week ago, when he condemned "antisemitic protests" and "those who don't understand what's going on with the Palestinians."

The White House, which has been peppered with questions by reporters, has gone only slightly further than the president. On Wednesday, press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Biden is "monitoring the situation closely," and she said some demonstrations had stepped over a line that separated free speech from unlawful behavior. "Forcibly taking over a building," such as what happened at Columbia University in

New York, "is not peaceful," she said. "It's just not."

Biden has never been much for protesting. His career in elected office began as a county official when he was only 28 years old, and he's always espoused the political importance of compromise over zealotry.

As college campuses convulsed with anger over the Vietnam War in 1968, Biden was in law school at Syracuse University. "I'm not big on flak jackets and tie-dyed shirts," he said years later. "You know, that's not me." Despite the White House's criticism and Biden's refusal to heed protesters' demands to cut off U.S. support for Israel, Republicans blame Democrats for the disorder and have used it as a backdrop for press conferences. "We need the president of the United States to speak to the issue and say this is wrong," House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, said on Tuesday. "What's happening on college campuses right now is wrong." Johnson visited Columbia with other members of his caucus last week. House Republicans sparred with protesters while speaking to the media

at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., on Wednesday.

Former President Donald Trump, his party's presumptive nominee, also criticized Biden in an interview with Sean Hannity on Fox News.

"Biden has to do something," he said. "Biden is supposed to be the voice of our country, and it's certainly not much of a voice. It's a voice that nobody's heard." He repeated his criticisms on Wednesday during a campaign event in Waukesha, Wisconsin. "The radical extremists and far-left agitators are terrorizing college campuses, as you possibly noticed," Trump said. "And Biden's nowhere to be found. He hasn't said anything." Kate Berner, who served as deputy communications director for Biden's campaign in 2020, said Republicans already tried the same tactic four years ago during protests over George Floyd's murder by a police officer. "People rejected that," she said. "They saw that it was just fearmongering. They saw that it wasn't based in reality."

Apart from condemning antisemitism, the White House has been reluctant to directly engage on the issue.

US claims global chemical weapons ban breach by Russia in Ukraine war

The US alleged that Russia violated the chemical weapons ban by deploying the choking agent chloropicrin against Ukrainian troops and using riot control agents "as a method of warfare" in Ukraine.

Washington The United States on Wednesday accused Russia of violating the international chemical weapons ban by deploying the choking agent chloropicrin against Ukrainian troops and using riot control agents "as a method of warfare" in Ukraine. "The use of such chemicals is not an isolated incident and is probably driven by Russian forces' desire to dislodge Ukrainian forces from fortified positions and achieve tactical gains on the battlefield," the State Department said in a statement. The Russian embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Chloropicrin is listed as a banned choking agent by the Hague-based Organization for the Prohibition of

Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which was created to implement and monitor compliance with the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). German forces fired the gas against Allied troops during World War I in one of the first uses of a chemical weapon. Earlier this month, Reuters reported the Ukrainian military as saying Russia has stepped up its illegal use of riot control agents as it presses its biggest advances in eastern Ukraine in more than two years. In addition to chloropicrin, Russian forces have used grenades loaded with CS and CN gases, the Ukrainian military says. It says at least 500 Ukrainian soldiers have been treated for exposure to toxic substances and one was killed by suffocating on tear gas. While civilians usually can escape riot control gases during protests, soldiers stuck in trenches without gas masks must either flee under enemy fire or risk suffocating. The State Department said it was delivering to Congress its determination that Russia's use of chloropicrin against Ukrainian troops violated the CWC. Moscow's use of the gas "comes from the same playbook as its operations to poison" the late opposition



leader Alexei Navalny in 2020 and Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in 2018 with the Novichok nerve agent, the statement said. Russia denied involvement in both cases.

The department also determined that Russia breached the CWC's prohibition on the use of riot control agents as a method of warfare, the statement said. It said it was sanctioning three Russian state entities linked to Moscow's chemical and biological weapons programs, including a specialised military unit that facilitated the use of chloropicrin against Ukrainian troops. Four Russian companies that support the three entities were also sanctioned, it said. The sanctions freeze any US assets belonging to the targeted

entities and generally prohibit Americans from doing business with them. Separately, the US Treasury imposed sanctions on three entities and two individuals involved in purchasing items for Russian military institutes involved in the country's chemical and biological weapons programs. The sanctions were among new measures announced by the United States on Wednesday targeting Russia over its 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The CWC bans the production and use of chemical weapons. It also requires the 193 countries that have ratified the convention, which include Russia and the US, to destroy any stocks of banned chemicals. The State Department was expected to convey its determination that Russia violated the CWC to the OPCW.

Russia and Ukraine have accused each other of breaching the treaty in OPCW meetings. But the organisation says it has not been formally asked to open an investigation into the use of prohibited substances in Ukraine. Reuters has not been able to independently verify the use of banned chemical substances by either side.

Anushka Sharma

and Virat Kohli's Son Akaay's FIRST Details Out: 'He's So Golu Molu'

Anushka Sharma and Virat Kohli have been extremely protective of their children. While Anushka had confirmed she was pregnant when she was expecting her first baby, Vamika, with Virat, the second time around, she did not even let the media know she was expecting her second child. The couple went on to surprise everyone with the news of their son Akaay's arrival in February. While Anushka and Virat have remained tight-lipped about the newborn, TV star Aamir Ali revealed he's seen a picture of Akaay and he's adorable. Aamir recently collaborated with Virat on an ad. In a new interview, Aamir spoke about working with Virat when he brought up his and Anushka's children. He told Zoom TV that Virat has a spark on his face when he talks about his family. "We did have a chat about cricket, but when he spoke about his family, he had a different spark on his face," he said. The TV star added, "He showed me his daughter's photo and also spoke about Anushka. He had a different spark on his face. That was the most endearing thing I liked about him." Speaking about Akaay, Aamir said, "Akaay is damn cute. I told him it's good that you've kept them away. It's Anushka's decision to keep the



kids away (from the media and fans). Kids have to be. But he's so golu molu and a cute pie, god bless him." In a statement earlier this year, Anushka and Virat announced the arrival of their second child. "With abundant happiness and our hearts full of love, we are pleased to inform everyone that on 15th February, we welcomed our baby boy Akaay and Vamika's little brother into this world!" Anushka and Virat announced. "We seek your blessings and good wishes in this beautiful time in our lives. We request you to kindly respect our privacy at this time," they added. The couple has been receiving love since the announcement. Ranveer Singh commented, "?????????" Shweta Bachchan added, "? Congratulations." Alia Bhatt also joined in and congratulated them. "How beautiful! Congratulations?," Alia wrote.



Jeo Baby-starrer Swakaryam Sambhavabahulam To Release On This Date; Motion Poster Out



Filmmaker and actor Jeo Baby will be next seen in Swakaryam Sambhavabahulam. It is written, directed and produced by debutant Naseer Badarudeen under the banner of N Tales Production. The film stars Jeo Baby and Shelly in the lead roles while Anju Antony, Arjun, Ranji Kankol, Sajin Cherukayil and RJ Anjali will be playing the supporting roles in the film. The makers have released the motion poster of Swakaryam Sambhavabahulam. The motion poster presents a brief introduction to the film's characters. The motion poster has gone viral. The first look poster of the movie was released last year. Swakaryam Sambhavabahulam is slated to release in theatres on May 31. The movie is touted to revolve around a village which weaves the lives of different characters together through an event. Jeo Baby and other actors shared the motion poster on Instagram. An eventful tale unfolds. Presenting the motion poster for Swakaryam Sambhavabahulam. Coming to theatres on 31 May 2024!" wrote Jeo Baby while sharing the motion poster. The cinematography of the movie is done by Rakesh Dharan while the music is composed by Sidhartha Pradeep.

Jeo Baby was last seen acting in the movie Pulimada which was directed by AK Sajan. He played a supporting role in the movie. Jeo Baby is also known for directing critically acclaimed movies like The Great Indian Kitchen and Kaathal-The Core. His last directorial was Kaathal-The Core which starred Jyothika and Mammooty in lead roles. The movie also came under the radar of critics due to the portrayal of a gay character by Mammooty. Despite the backlash, the movie was commercially successful at the box office. In May, the actor will be gracing his fans with two movies-Mandakini and Swakaryam Sambhavabahulam. Mandakini is slated to release on May 24. It is directed by Vinod Leela and stars Althaf Salim, Anarkali Marikar and Ganapathi S Poducal in lead roles. The film revolves around a married couple who faces an unlikely trouble during their wedding night. The movie is about how the incident affects the family and how they overcome it.

Malayalam Film Mandakini To Release On May 24; Check Out Trailer



The trailer of Mandakini, written and directed by Vinod Leela, has been released. The film stars Althaf Salim and Anarkali Marikar. The movie is produced by Sanju Unnithan under the banner of Spire Productions. The cinematography is by Shiju M Bhaskar, and music by Bibin Ashok. Mandakini is a comedy entertainer and features the lead actors as a married couple. It also stars Ganapathi, Jafar Idukki, Sarita Kuku, Vineet Thattil, Ashwathi Srikanth, Kutty Akhil, Akhila Nath, Ala S. Naina, Guinness Vinod, Rashmi Anil, Babita Basheer, Pratihsh Jacob, Ambili Sunil, Akhil Shah and Ajim Shah in important roles in the films. Anarkali is playing the role of Ambili in the film, where Althaf is playing the role of Aromal. Mandakini will hit theatres on May 24 this year. Earlier, Althaf Salim has expressed his excitement for the film's release on the social media platform. "Happily wrapped up the shoot of my first movie as the lead character with the amazing co-star Anarkali. Thanks to the wonderful team," he shared on Instagram with a poster depicting festivities of the wedding. Althaf is set to start shooting for his film Odum Kuthira Chaudum Kuthira, which stars Fahadh Faasil and Kalyani Priyadarshan. Althaf Salim also worked in many films like Odum Kuthira Chaudum Kuthira, Njandukalude Naattil Oridavela (2017) and Premam (2015). He made his directorial debut with the Nivin Pauly-starrer Njandukalude Naattil Oridavela. Mandakini marks the debut of visionary Malayalam filmmaker and scriptwriter, Vinod Leela. He was born in Kalady and studied cinematography at the esteemed Chetana Media Institute. Starting his journey with shorts such as God of Small Things, he gained recognition for his innovative storytelling with pieces such as Kalpadukal and Suhra. His journey demonstrates his dedication to technical brilliance and sophisticated storytelling.

Upasana Singh

On Initial Doubts About Iconic 'Judaai' Dialogue 'Abba Dabba Jabba': 'I Was Not Convinced'



Upasana Singh, a renowned Indian actress with a career spanning almost four decades, has captivated audiences with her memorable performances. One of her standout roles, cherished by fans, was in the 1997 film 'Judaai,' alongside Anil Kapoor, Sridevi, and Urmila Matondkar. In this Raj Kanwar directorial, Upasana portrayed a dual role, playing both Parash Rawal's wife and his daughter who becomes romantically involved with Johnny Lever's character. Her dialogue 'Abba Dabba Jabba' from the film became iconic. During the discussion about her involvement in the film, Upasana confessed her admiration for Sridevi and inquired about the possibility of sharing the screen with the cinema icon, "Raj Kanwar agreed. That's when I decided to go ahead," Upasana Singh disclosed to

the Times of India. Despite initial reservations, particularly regarding the iconic 'Abba Dabba Jabba' dialogue, Upasana eventually embraced the role, emphasizing her commitment to infusing the character with a range of expressions and vocal nuances. She shared, "Then he told me about the Abba Dabba Jabba line. I was not at all convinced that a mute person could speak only these words. He told me to try it. I told myself to play the character with as many variations of expressions and voice. I have always been experimenting with roles." Singh also revealed that she initially found the plot of Judaai, where the wife sells her husband, to be peculiar. However, she chose not to address this concern at the time. She recalled, "I was wondering how people would digest this. But Judaai became such a big hit that people started knowing me as 'Abba Dabba Jabba' rather than my real name. I did so many live shows where people demanded that I say that dialogue." Her portrayal of the character earned her widespread recognition, with audiences often associating her with the famous dialogue. Having ventured into Punjabi cinema with notable success, including directing a film, Upasana discussed her forthcoming projects, expressing her interest in production and the imminent release of several Punjabi films. Fans can look forward to seeing her in the upcoming movie 'Carry On Jattiye,' alongside Gippy Grewal.

