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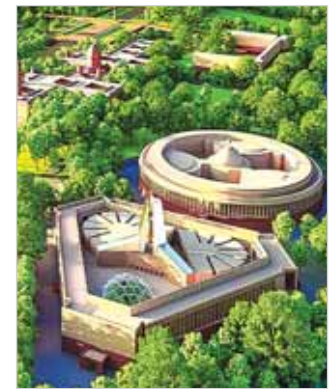
PAPER WITH PASSION

Unedifying

Neither the Oppn nor the Govt has covered itself in glory over the inauguration of new Parliament

By boycotting the inauguration of the new Parliament building, the 20 Opposition parties have not covered themselves in glory, notwithstanding their loud rhetoric. In a joint statement, 19 Opposition parties said that the President is not only the Head of State in India but also an integral part of Parliament as she summons, prorogues, and addresses it. "Yet, the Prime Minister has decided to inaugurate the new Parliament building without her. This undignified act insults the high office of the President, and violates the letter and spirit of the Constitution. It undermines the spirit of inclusion which saw the nation celebrate its first woman Adivasi President." While their argument is not without merit, the accompanying bombast—"undignified act," violation "of the Constitution," undermining of "the spirit of inclusion"—is unwarranted and unnecessary. The Opposition's conduct would have been dignified and praiseworthy had it slammed the Government without boycotting the inauguration. After all, the event is about Parliament and Indian democracy, not about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's participation in it. One has to be viscerally anti-Modi to believe that his Government has disrespected President Droupadi Murmu. We should not forget that she became President during Modi's tenure as Prime Minister. The Opposition is making a mountain out of a molehill. In general, the Opposition—indeed the entire political class—must acknowledge the fact that there are ways of expressing one's displeasure over something other than boycotts and bans.

If the Opposition has not reacted appropriately to the inauguration of the new Parliament building, the Government too has not shown great sagacity in handling the issue. And this is not just about propriety and this particular instance. Its continuously aggressive stance towards the Opposition has generated a great deal of divisiveness in our polity. Till a few years ago, many foreign observers were impressed by the fact that politicians in rival parties had good interpersonal relationships; they would fight fiercely each other in Parliament and in public debates, but remained friends otherwise. Healthy dialogue and good relations are also needed because politicians have to interact and work together all the time. For example, there is considerable interaction between the Centre and States, and often both are run by different parties. Unfortunately, the interparty bonhomie is diminishing rapidly. This has also had an effect on public discourse and political debate, which are increasingly becoming bitter and dirtier. From the Bharatiya Janata Party's perspective, its recent rise in political strength and the concomitant rise in assertiveness seem to be bringing various Opposition parties together. Fear is a very strong sentiment; it can work as an effective glue in politics. It has united 20 parties over the Parliament inauguration issue; it can do more in the foreseeable future.



PICTALK



An employee checks Rs 2000 currency notes given by customers at a petrol pump in Gurugram

A fairy tale that is The Kerala Story

The Kerala Story has been making waves ever since it opened in theatres but its content is far from reality, it is a fantasy at best



DEEPAK SINHA

The central theme of the film revolves around three girls who fell victim to "manipulative conversion" to Islam that practically destroyed their lives. The main protagonist is Shalini Unnikrishnan, a convert to Islam. She narrates her ordeal from her prison in Afghanistan, of how she once wanted to become a nurse but was brainwashed and manipulated by religious vanguards, turned into an ISIS terrorist and sent on her way to Syria.

It is loosely based on the accounts of three women from Kerala who converted to Islam and travelled with their husbands to join ISIS in Afghanistan between 2016 and 2018, along with two other women and their husbands. Their husbands were killed in the fighting and these women remain in an Afghan prison. Incidentally, only one of these women, Nimisha Nair alias Fathima Isa, was Hindu and married to a Christian, who subsequently converted to Islam as well. The other two women were Christians before their conversion. The Government of India has refused to repatriate them as they remain hardcore adherents of ISIS philosophy, unlike what has been depicted in the movie.

While it has been alleged there are many more such people in prison in Afghanistan, official records only point to four. The film-makers have also suggested that there are "many girls" who have been manipulated into converting to Islam and in support quote then Chief Minister of Kerala, V S Achuthanandan, who, in 2010, said that fundamentalist Muslim organisations were using "money and marriages to make Kerala a Muslim majority state".

In that context, the issue of "manipulative conversion", commonly termed "love jihad", is concerning and cannot be wished away. Not because of the conversion itself, our Constitution allows us the freedom to practice as we wish, but



because of the motive and the manner such conversions are undertaken. It must be added that such allegations of fraudulent conversions have been made against some Christian denominations as well. Such actions damage the secular fabric of our society, which is why we have stringent laws against it. One estimate suggests about 7000 girls from the State converted to other religions over the last decade and the total number of Indians who joined ISIS was not more than 250, with about 20% from Kerala.

Critics agree that the movie is watchable as a work of fiction, but what detracts and gives weight to allegations that it is nothing more than a propaganda film, is its adverse depiction of all Muslims in general and repeated assertions that there are over 32000 such cases. This is untrue and a Bench of the Supreme Court has reproached the producers of the film for distortion of facts, directing them to add a disclaimer to that effect.

However, this is a theme that resonates greatly with the Hindutva lobby, as we saw from the Prime



TAKEN AT FACE VALUE THIS MAY SEEM TRULY SCARY, BUT THE TRUTH IS IT HAS NO BASIS IN FACT AND IS AIMED AT SPREADING FEAR AND CONSOLIDATING VOTES

Minister's exhortations to the public to see the movie, during his election rallies in Karnataka. Recently, Mr Amit Malviya, head of the BJP IT Cell, wrote on Twitter that "love Jihad is real and dangerous. Our girls are being lured away and used as cannon fodder for radical terror organisations. We can bury our heads in the sand, like an ostrich, at our own peril. It will engulf the rest of us sooner than we think. The Kerala Story is a grim reminder of what lies ahead if we don't act now".

Taken at face value this may seem truly scary, but the truth is it has no basis in fact and is aimed at spreading fear and consolidating votes. Comparison of census data from 2001 and 2011 shows that the Hindu population in Kerala, for example, declined from 56.16% to 54.73%, or 1.43%, while the Muslim population increased from 24.70% to 26.56% or 1.86%. A simple interpolation, at existing growth rates, suggests that the Muslim population would equal that of the Hindu population only by the last decade of this century. Unlikely, as growth

rates overall are on the decline. If anything, in the coming years Kerala's problems will not be about religion, but managing migrants from other states that keep its economy ticking!

Similarly, Mamata Banerjee's ban on the film presently stayed by the Supreme Court, and its "voluntary" non-screening in Tamil Nadu by movie theatres, is over the top and only feeds the long-standing narrative of minority appeasement. We must acknowledge that to be truly secular, breaking the stranglehold of those who benefit by dividing us through religion is inescapable. An essential step in this direction can be the introduction of the long overdue Uniform Civil Code (UCC), which would codify and apply a set of uniform laws related to personal matters such as marriage, divorce, adoption, and inheritance to all citizens, regardless of their religion.

(The author, a military veteran is a Visiting Fellow with the Observer Research Foundation and Senior Visiting Fellow with the Peninsula Foundation, Chennai)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MANIPUR UNREST CONTINUES

Sir — As per report the house of Manipur PWD Minister Konthoujam Govindas in Bishnupur district was vandalized by an irate mob on Wednesday, claiming that the state government has not taken any sufficient and appropriate steps to protect locals from armed militants belonging to another community. Govindas, who also holds the Youth Affairs and Sports portfolio, is a senior BJP member. The minister and his family members house was attacked by 100 agitated people, mostly women, ransacked the house in Ningthoukhong Bazar area of Bishnupur district and damaged the gate, windows, a furniture, electronic gadgets and vehicles parked at his residence. This is for the first time a minister and a senior BJP leader's house was vandalized after the ethnic violence between Meitei and Kuki community people broke out in Manipur on May 3, claiming the lives of at least 71 people and injuring over 300. With this all is not well for the BJP government in Manipur and have to face the anger of the people.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

NEW PARLIAMENT BUILDING IS READY

Sir — The day has finally come when Independent India will have its own, first of a kind Parliament without any colonial influence. May 28th of the year 2023, will be written as a golden day in India's political history as we gave our nation our new Parliament building with more advanced technology, space and improved system. Now that we are almost ready to enter to new building which will be the house of making legislation, relating this to our special history is also very important. The Sengol and all other related aesthetics with are the part and parcel of India's glorified history and rich culture will be put in place on this special occasion.

It is a big day for every Indian, in our 75th year of Independence, we are proudly moving ahead with the spirit of self-reliance and Aatmanirbharta. We are no more in the mortar and brick estab-

Kazi Nazrul: The rebel poet



part from his literary works on religious harmony with humanitarian lines like 'Are they Hindus? Are they Muslims? Who asks questions so asinine? O Captain! Pray tell them 'tis your brothers dying, children of your Mother!'; the pen of Kazi Nazrul Islam also used to act as a sword while protesting against atrocities by the British, thereby earning him the epithet of "rebel poet" and also finding himself landed in prison for urging the youth (through his mighty poems) to engage in a revolution against the imperialist force.

In the current communally-vitiated environment in the society, it would not be out of context if we take a look on Nazrul's opinion on religion as practiced in the society: ---

"No prophet has said, 'I have come for Hindus/ I have come for Muslims/ I have come for Christians.' They have said, 'I have come for the humanity for everyone, like light'. But the devotees of Krishna say, 'Krishna is for Hindus.' The followers of Muhammad says, 'Muhammad is for the Muslims.' The Disciple of Christ says, 'Christ is for Christians.' Krishna-Muhammad-Christ have become national property. This property is the root of all trouble. The matter which deserves to be noticed is that Nazrul's comments were highly relevant then, extremely relevant now and probably to remain relevant after centuries. It is high time we learn to jump into the waters and save the drowning person by seeing the human being in him/her instead of contemplating whether he/she is a Hindu or a Muslim. After all, at the end of the day, we are all children of that Ultimate Divine!

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

lishment of Britishers. Lutyens and Baker's Parliament is now replaced with domestically made new Central Vista, which reflects the democratic and aspirational spirit of state of the art architecture design. India had come so far and now we are ready to get rid of colonial establishments where laws for modern India are drafted.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

WOMEN TOPPERS IN UPSC

Sir — Four women Civil Services Examination-2022 aspirants occupying the top four positions, actually underlines the palpable change taking place in the otherwise male dominant scenario in most of the walks of life in the country now, thanks to the Union Public Service Commission's (UPSC) adamant stance keeping the political duress at bay. The icing on the cake, a record over one-third of the successful candidates comprise women- Hats off to Ishita Kishore,

Garima Lohia, Uma Harathi and Smriti Mishra quad for their perseverance, dedication, grit and indefatigability winning them the laurels on the first four slots respectively. Interestingly, a Delhi Police head constable with 667th rank is also on the UPSC list. I squarely acquiesce with the editorial view that the Union Public Service Commission, a Constitution Body, has been doing its jobs professionally in a country where many an institution has been intruded upon by some political powers that be, adversely affecting the institution's public image of stern rectitude. Thankfully, most of the bureaucrats are impartial bearing no political leanings and keeping this prestigious institution clear of any gender bias as is evident from the record in the last couple of years.

Azhar A Khan | Rampur

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Terrorists are using newer ways of executing their acts

The world is reeling under the shadow of terrorism. Middle East and North Africa were worst hit in 2022, write SUNIL GOYAL & DIMPLE KHOKHAR

Since the turn of the millennium, few topics have shaped the global discourse as much as terrorism. Following the 9/11 attacks in New York, on September 20, 2001, the U.S. president at the time, George W. Bush, declared a "War on Terror" and sent America to war with Al-Qaeda. The USA first invaded Afghanistan in 2001 to evict the Taliban regime and to chase Osama Bin Laden. Then, two years later, the country invaded Iraq due to highly disputed claims about the regime of Saddam Hussein positing weapons of mass destruction.

Many commentators argue that, rather than solve the problem, the War on Terror served only to validate the use of terrorist tactics, and that it threw these countries into further chaos. The Global Terrorism Index is an annual ranking produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace. As even the definition of terrorism is hotly debated, it is essential to highlight that the methodologies used to measure terrorism are also contested. The Global Terrorism Index ranks 163



countries on four indicators weighted over five years. These four factors are the number of terrorist incidents per year, the number of fatalities caused by terrorists per year, the number of injuries caused by terrorists per year, and the total property damage caused by terrorism per year.

The global terrorism index systematically ranks countries of the world according to their terrorist activity. As per the data released by Statista, in 2022, Afghanistan ranked first on the global terrorism index with a score of 8.82 points, making it the country most affected by terrorism on Earth. The ranking also shows that Afghanistan suffered

from the highest number of terrorist attacks and the highest number of fatalities from the terrorist attacks. Although terrorism is a worldwide problem, its victims are highly concentrated in certain areas of the world. The area that saw the highest number of terrorist attacks in 2022 was the Middle East and North Africa. According to Institute for Economics and Peace, the terrorism index in India decreased to 7.43 in 2021 from 7.67 in 2020. Terrorism Index in India averaged 7.65 Points from 2002 until 2021, reaching an all-time high of 8.12 Points in 2011 and a record low of 7.22 Points in 2004.

India Terrorism Index - values, historical data and charts - was last updated in May of 2023. A report based on the Global Terrorism Index noted India has a number of low-level conflicts in some of the border areas but the vast majority of the country's population lives outside of these India was among the 25 worst terror-hit countries but also among 56 of the 120 nations surveyed with no respondents selecting war and terror as the biggest threat to their

daily safety, according to the 10th edition of the Global Terrorism Index (GTI). The international community holds a collective view that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations must be condemned. There cannot be any exception or any justification for any act of terrorism, regardless of the motivations behind such acts. We also recognize that the menace of terrorism cannot be and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group. However, in spite of the progress we have made to tighten the legal, security, financing and other frameworks to combat terrorism, terrorists are constantly finding newer ways of motivating, resourcing and executing acts of terror. Unfortunately, there are also some countries that seek to undermine or subvert our collective resolve to fight terrorism. That cannot be allowed to pass.

(Prof. Sunil is Dean and Chairman of - the Board of Studies at Dr BR Ambedkar University of Social Sciences, Ambedkar Nagar and Dimple Khokhar is a research scholar)



FIRST COLUMN

WORLD IS UNDERGOING TRANSFORMATION

That day is not far wherein every being would be divine and have a purity of character



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

That day is not far when we would see a world of purity of character and values, where every being would be divine and would coexist in harmony with nature.

Most of the religious scriptures are known to have described heaven, and paradise in detail as a period of peace, prosperity and happiness which is said to have existed thousands of years ago. That is why the whole concept of paradise has fascinated humans for centuries. However, in reality, paradise or heaven is not a different world but rather a period when everything in this world was perfect and harmonious. In the cycle of time, heaven, which is also called the Golden Age, occurs in the very beginning.

It is followed by the Silver Age, which is characterised by a lesser degree of perfection but is still free of negativity. By the time the Silver Age ends, the human souls lose some of their spiritual energy, and as the Copper Age starts, they are no longer soul-conscious and begin to come under the influence of vices. These vices bring sorrow as well as fear, repentance and a longing for a world without suffering, which the souls remember existed in the past.

Hence, in the hope of regaining that lost world of unalloyed joy, humans start remembering or praying to a Supreme entity who they believe can remove all their sorrows. Now, what needs to be understood practically is that – the same souls, who were divine humans, at the start of the cycle of time, end up becoming vicious and with devilish tendencies. It is at this point when one cycle of time is near its end and a new one is about to begin, that Supreme Power descends on earth to uplift mankind and rejuvenate the whole world, including the elements of nature. God explains to the souls about the cycle of time and the law of karma, whereby they realise that vices are at the root of all the suffering and that one can accumulate a fortune by performing elevated actions.



Not many are aware that the much-awaited greatest event of human history has already occurred. But a majority of humans are still in a deep slumber of ignorance and are still looking for God. In Bhagavad-Gita, Almighty Supreme clearly says that humans cannot reach God by prayer, penance, reading scriptures or doing charitable deeds. HE gives HIS introduction to everyone when God comes to this world at the end of the Iron Age when unrighteousness has reached extreme proportions and humanity is experiencing great sorrow.

He also reminds us of our true identity, that we all are eternal souls and not bodies and finally HE teaches us the unique art of Raj Yoga, by which the souls can cleanse themselves of all their sins and become worthy of taking birth in the Golden Age where there is complete peace, purity and happiness.

That day is not far when we would see a world of purity of character and values, where every being would be divine and would coexist in harmony with nature. There will be no form of violence, be it physical, mental or emotional. Every person will be an embodiment of truth and divine virtues. Pure love and respect will form the basis of relationships. They will be completely free from and ignorant of evil, vices and suffering. Materially, they will be living in opulence and abundance. Science will be used for creating perfect technology and comforts that are foolproof, eco-friendly and safe. People will enjoy perfect health, natural beauty, and a long lifespan and there will be no sign of sickness or untimely death. Everybody will be happy and content. There will be lightness, innocence, purity and joy in every action. This process of world transformation is underway right now.

(Writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist for publications across India, Nepal & UK)

Who will end the free-run of freebies?



UTTAM GUPTA

Political parties don't want freebies to go. It is their much-cherished tool to harness votes. And they know it works like a charm



In the just concluded assembly elections in Karnataka, the grand old party (GOP) Congress had promised five guarantees viz. Gruha Jyoti, Gruha Lakshmi, Sakhi programme, Yuva Nidhi, and Anna Bhagayain in its manifesto.

Having got a decisive mandate to form the government, Congress pledged to approve all the five guarantees in the very first meeting of the Cabinet. The big question is: is it worth spending so much of taxpayers money?

The guarantees are intended to be a welfare scheme. Under it, the government should ensure that (i) the assistance goes to a person who is desperately in need (one who is poor or very poor); (ii) it should be given for a 'limited period' after which she should stand on her own and (iii) the scheme should be funded in a manner such that it doesn't destabilize the budgetary position.

Under Gruha Jyoti, the GOP promises to provide 200 units of free electricity a month for every single household (HH) in the state. The very idea is abhorrent. It presumes that every HH is so poor that it can't afford to pay even Rs 1000 a month being the cost of 200 units of electricity @ Rs 5 per unit.

Further, in the absence of any mention of 'for how long', it is assumed that free supply will continue for the full term of this government i.e. 5 years. The scheme will impose a 'needless' burden on the state exchequer for that long.

It will also strain the finances of power distribution companies which will have to supply zero tariff power to all HHs on behalf of the state government and won't get paid by the latter in time or paid less or not paid at all as is the case in many states who are already supplying power free or at concessional tariff.

Under Gruha Lakshmi, Every Woman head of a house will get two thousand rupees a month. This again is bizarre! Going by the manifesto, even a billionaire woman is eligible. Distributing money in this manner is a sheer waste of scarce resources. The GOP says "We are keeping the money in the hands of women to

ensure that they're in control and in charge of their own life".

The idea of empowering the woman is fine. But, we must not forget the context. For schemes like PM Awas Yojna where houses are built for the poor and the ownership is vested with the woman head, this makes eminent sense. But, to give money to all and sundry and then trumpet about women's empowerment looks ridiculous. The Sakhi programme under which free bus tickets for all women to travel in Karnataka are provided too suffers from the same absurdity.

Under Yuva Nidhi, the government will provide support to the Youth of Karnataka for two years by paying Rs 3,000 to unemployed graduates and Rs 1,500 to unemployed diploma holders every month. Prima facie, this may be in sync with the principle of extending support to a person who needs it. But, it can't be divorced from the economic status of the family she belongs to. If an unemployed youth belongs to a rich family which can take care of her during the difficult period i.e. when she remains without a job, there is no need for state support.

State support should be given only if the unemployed youth is from a poor HH. That apart, while choosing the beneficiary, the government must ensure that she is not self-employed. The manifesto doesn't talk of any of these riders. Finally, under Anna Bhagayain, the GOP has promised to give 10 kgs of rice per person per month to BPL families. Such families are already getting 7 kg of food per person per month under the National Food Security Act or NFSA (2013).

Redeeming these guarantees will cost around Rs 62,000 crore a year which is even higher than the States' fiscal deficit or FD (excess

of expenditure over receipts) of Rs 60,500 crore during 2022-23. Unless there is a cut in expenditure under some head or an increase in receipt for an equivalent amount, the FD would be Rs 122,500 crore. Expressed as a share of the state gross domestic product (SGDP) this would go beyond 5 percent against the 3 percent ceiling fixed under Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act.

The guarantees don't follow the cardinal principles of a welfare scheme. These are neither directed to the needy nor have any terminal date and will have a destabilizing effect on the budget. These benefits distributed by Congress using public money for garnering votes are known in common parlance as 'freebies'. The menace has gripped most of the political parties that use freebies as the key to winning elections.

Emboldened by its victory in Karnataka, the GOP will use freebies even more brazenly in state elections slated towards the end of 2023 as also during general elections in 2024. This will force others including the ruling BJP to offer similar or even more tempting allurements (already, BJP top brass has started galvanizing its thought process in that direction). This rat race will have devastating implications for the finances of both states and the Centre.

Is there any way this menace could be reined in?

To get an answer, let us look at a judgment of the Supreme Court (SC) in S Subramaniam Balaji vs the Government of Tamil Nadu & Ors delivered way back in July 2013. It has been observed that the distribution of freebies of any kind influences all people. "It shakes the root of free and fair elections to a large degree." This

would have led any logical person to believe that the SC would give a strict direction to stem the rot. But, what followed was a lame-duck order.

The SC had held that promises in the election manifesto cannot be construed as "corrupt practice" under the Representation of People Act (RPA), or any other prevailing law and, hence, distribution of freebies can't be stopped when the ruling party uses public funds for this purpose through the passage of Appropriation Acts in the state Assembly.

In the same order, it directed the Election Commission of India (ECI) "to frame guidelines that could govern the contents of the election manifesto of all the recognized political parties as when it had acted while framing guidelines for general conduct of the candidates, meetings, processions, polling day, etc". Further "this can also be included in the model code of conduct – under a separate head for guidelines for election manifesto – for guidance of political parties and candidates".

The ECI never came out with any such guidelines.

After a long hiatus, hearing a PIL seeking directions against 'freebies' on January 25, 2022, the SC observed "this is no doubt a serious issue. Budget for freebies is going above the regular Budget. This disturbs the level playing field". Its concern this time was more intense than it was in 2013. But, what about the action?

On August 3, 2022, the SC asked the parliamentarians to enact a law on curbing freebies but only after a committee set up by it examines all pros and cons. But, the majority of political parties don't want freebies to go away. It seems, India will have to live with this menace eternally.



EMBOLDENED BY ITS VICTORY IN KARNATAKA, THE GOP WILL USE FREEBIES EVEN MORE BRAZENLY IN STATE ELECTIONS SLATED TOWARDS THE END OF 2023 AS ALSO DURING GENERAL ELECTIONS IN 2024

(The writer is a policy analyst)

India to be a major player in the multipolar world

A multilateral world would be to India's advantage. It would also be welcome by the Global South which looks up to India for direction and leadership

There is a shift underway in the international system. The ongoing Ukraine conflict, the emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a centre for global politics, and the relentless rise of China have all resulted in a move away from a unipolar or bipolar world order to a multipolar one. This move is also one which suits India very well. As India positions itself globally as the leader of the Global South and a rising power, multipolarity assures India a position as one of the centres of power. This thought was very evident in the address made by External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar at the recently held EU-India Pacific Ministerial Forum in Sweden where he pointed out that,



SIMRAN SODHI

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"The more European Union and Indo-Pacific deal with each other, the stronger will be their respective appreciation of multi-polarity. A multipolar world is feasible only by a multipolar Asia."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rather busy calendar is another indication in this direction. The G7 Summit in Tokyo which also saw a Quad Summit on the sidelines, a visit to Papua New Guinea and then Australia all tie in to this thought. The PM's much-anticipated visit to the United States next month, which is only the third State visit by a foreign leader in US President Joe Biden's tenure, will further cement not only India's growing stature on the world stage but also be a timely pointer towards multipolarity. It is a

shift India well understands and is cautiously working towards.

The Ukraine crisis has hastened this change. While the US and its Western allies have and continue to routinely condemn Russia over its actions, India has stuck to its guns and played it according to her interests. There was much pressure on India during the first few weeks of the conflict to censure Russian actions but the fact that India did not do so and eventually it also brought about a change in Western attitudes has been a fine diplomatic victory for India. In March last year Biden had termed India's response to the Ukraine conflict as 'somewhat shaky'. But with time the messaging out of Washington changed with a gradual accep-



tance of India's position.

India has consistently abstained from the United Nations at resolutions brought in by the Western world against Russia. This has helped India retain an old friend. About half of India's military supplies come from Russia. Courtesy of the Ukraine conflict, India's trade

with Russia is at a record high. Despite the never-ending critique, India continues to buy oil from Russia. It is also worth remembering here that Russia used its veto power in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) many times when resolutions on Kashmir were tabled. The fact that India has done this fine balancing act, of maintaining and strengthening ties with both the US and Russia, makes it a unique power centre in itself.

Another point in the study is, of course, the Quad (a grouping of the US, India, Japan and Australia). It would not be an overstatement to say that the Quad today is one of the most influential groupings in the world of geopolitics. It is also essentially a

forum to check China. As the politics of the Indo-Pacific take centre stage in the world, India becomes an even more valuable ally not just to the US, but to the entire Western world.

For India, China remains the biggest worry. China's aggressive behaviour at the border and its expansionist agenda in the South China Sea have almost every world leader worried. The Ukraine conflict has also seen another related development and that is the tightening of embrace between China and Russia. And that is unlikely to make India comfortable. That somewhere again takes us back to the argument that for India, censuring Russia over the Ukraine conflict would only result in a closer China-

Russia nexus. Both Russia and China are wary of the West and critical of a world they feel is dominated by Western ideals and nations. The US-China trade wars and the sanctions against Russia by the Western powers have helped consolidate that feeling and what one sees is the beginning of an anti-West Block.

A multilateral world would be to India's advantage and would also be welcome by the Global South. One of the end games of course would be a much-needed change in the structure of the UNSC and a permanent seat for India. That would also be more representative of the present world. The beginnings have been made but it's still quite a long road ahead.

'Republicans pushing debt ceiling talks to the brink'

House Republicans are pushing debt ceiling talks to the brink, displaying risky political bravado as they prepare to leave town on Thursday for the holiday weekend just days before the US could face an unprecedented default that could hurl the global economy into chaos.

until Tuesday, just two days from June 1, when Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has said the US could start running out of cash to pay its bills and face a federal default.



Speaker Kevin McCarthy addressing mediapersons

as leverage to extract other partisan priorities. McCarthy is holding out for steep spending cuts that Republicans are demanding in exchange for their vote to raise the nation's debt ceiling.

leader says that's not enough. "We have to spend less than we spent last year. That is the starting point," said McCarthy, R-Calif.

abroad. Anxious retirees and social service groups are among those already making default contingency plans.

Wednesday. The Senate, where Democratic Majority Leader Chuck Schumer has vowed to move quickly, would also have to pass the package before it could go to Biden's desk to be signed into law, right before next Thursday's possible deadline.

back bolstered funding for the Internal Revenue Service if they agree to instead allow the White House to push that money into other domestic accounts, the person said.

At the White House, press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre blamed Republicans for risking a devastating default that would hit "every single part of the country" as they demand "extreme" spending cuts that would hurt millions of Americans.

The White House has continued to argue that deficits can be reduced by ending tax breaks for wealthier households and some corporations, but McCarthy said he told the president as early as their February meeting that raising revenue from tax hikes was off the table.

US Prez picks AF fighter pilot as next Joint Chiefs chairman

Washington: President Joe Biden will announce Thursday that he is tapping Air Force Gen C Q Brown Jr, a history-making fighter pilot with deep knowledge of China, to serve as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Brown's confirmation would mean that, for the first time, both the Pentagon's top military and civilian positions would be held by African Americans. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, the first Black Pentagon chief, has been in the job since the beginning of the administration.

The nomination has been long expected. If confirmed by the Senate, Brown would replace Army Gen. Colin Powell.

Biden saw Brown as the right person for the job because of his work modernizing the US fleet of aircraft and its nuclear arsenal and his years of experience in shaping US defenses to meet China's rise, a senior administration official said.

Brown, 60, has commanded at every possible level in the Air Force and in joint commands, including in Europe, the Middle East and Asia. He also helped build and lead the US air campaign against the Islamic State militant group. Brown is a career F-16 fighter pilot with more than 3,000 flight hours and command experience at all levels.

Russia signs deal to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus

Russia and Belarus signed a deal on Thursday formalising the procedure for deploying Russian nuclear weapons on Belarusian territory. Control of the weapons will remain with Moscow.



Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, left, and Belarusian Defense Minister Viktor Khrenin exchange documents on Thursday

Minister Viktor Khrenin said in Minsk during a meeting with his Russian counterpart, Sergei Shoigu.

facility on the territory of the Republic of Belarus." No detail was announced regarding when the weapons would be deployed in Belarus, but Putin previously said that the construction of storage facilities for tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus would be completed by July 1.

Our forces handing control of Bakhmut to Moscow: Wagner

The head of the Russian private military contractor Wagner claimed Thursday that his forces have started pulling out of Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine and handing over control to the Russian military, days after he said Wagner troops had captured the ruined city.

Turkish voters weigh final decision on next prez

Two opposing visions for Turkey's future are on the ballot when voters return to the polls on Sunday for a runoff presidential election that will decide between an increasingly authoritarian incumbent and a challenger who has pledged to restore democracy.

alliance, has campaigned on a promise to undo Erdogan's authoritarian tilt. The 74-year-old former bureaucrat has described the runoff as a referendum on the direction of the strategically located NATO country, which is at the crossroads of Europe and Asia and has a key say over the alliance's expansion.

Germany eco shrinks, signalling recession

The German economy shrank unexpectedly in the first three months of this year, marking the second quarter of contraction that is one definition of recession. Data released Thursday by the Federal Statistical Office shows Germany's gross domestic product, or GDP, declined by 0.3 per cent in the period from January to March.

Palmas, senior Europe economist for Capital Economics. "Germany has experienced a technical recession and has been by far the worst performer among major eurozone economies over the past two quarters," Palmas said, predicting further weakness ahead.

US economy growth revised up to 1.3% annual rate

Washington (AP): The US economy grew at a lackluster 1.3 per cent annual rate from January through March as businesses wary of an economic slowdown trimmed their inventories, the government said on Thursday, a slight upgrade from its initial estimate.

SVB announces layoffs at failed institution; no impact on team based in India

Raleigh (US): The bank that acquired the remnants of Silicon Valley Bank after it failed amid a March bank run announced layoffs Wednesday.

Kohinoor display gets 'transparent' makeover

The Kohinoor diamond, claimed by India, will go on display with a new exhibition at the Tower of London on Friday within a "symbol of conquest" setting to try and contextualise its turbulent colonial history in a "transparent, balanced and inclusive" way.

palaces. "It references its long history as a symbol of conquest, which has passed through the hands of Mughal Emperors, Shahs of Iran, Emirs of Afghanistan, and Sikh Maharajas. We conducted extensive audience research before putting together this display, as well as consulting local community groups and specialist academics, which has informed our approach throughout and shaped our presentation of the Koh-i-Noor's story," the spokesperson said.



"The 1849 Treaty of Lahore compelled 10-year-old Maharaja Duleep Singh to surrender it to Queen Victoria, along with control of the Punjab. Koh-i-Noor means 'Mountain of Light' in Persian," reads the label.

earlier Mughal cut. It was re-cut in 1852 to improve its sparkle and conform to European tastes." With Queen Alexandra's Crown of 1902, the label reads: "The Koh-i-Noor, sometimes considered lucky, developed a reputation for bringing bad luck to men who wore it. From 1902 it was set in the crowns of several Queens Consort, beginning with Queen Alexandra's Crown, now set with replicas. The Koh-i-Noor is currently set in Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother's Crown, 1937."

Table with financial data for JINDAL LEASEFIN LIMITED, including Income, Expenses, Profit, and Tax. Columns include Particulars, 31.03.2023 Audited, 31.12.2022 Unaudited, 31.03.2022 Audited, 31.03.2023 Audited, and 31.03.2022 Audited.

Table with financial data for Kotak Mahindra bank Ltd, including Assets and Liabilities. Columns include Particulars, As at 31.03.2023 Audited, and As at 31.03.2022 Audited.

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FINAL CALL ON ASIA CUP VENUE TO BE TAKEN AFTER IPL FINAL: BCCI SECY

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
 A decision on Asia Cup's fate will be taken on the sidelines of the IPL final, which will be attended by a host of top Asian Cricket Council (ACC) dignitaries, BCCI secretary Jay Shah said on Thursday.
 Pakistan have the hosting rights for this year's Asia Cup but with BCCI deciding against sending its team to the neighbouring country without government permission, PCB chairman Najam Sethi had proposed a 'hybrid model' where they will organise at least four games on home soil and India will play their matches at a neutral venue.
 It couldn't be confirmed whether Sethi has been formally invited for the IPL final.
 "As of now, the decision with regards to hosting of Asia Cup hasn't yet been finalised. We are busy with IPL but the top dignitaries of Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC), Bangladesh and Afghanistan Cricket Board are coming to watch the IPL final. We will have a discussion and take a final decision in due



course," Jay Shah told PTI.
 It has been learnt from ACC sources that Sethi's proposed hybrid model looks like a feasible solution although ACC had made no formal statements. According to the model, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and Afghanistan play four preliminary matches in Pakistan and India would play all their games at neutral venues.
 The two India-Pakistan games will also be held in Sri Lanka although the PCB wants them in Dubai. The weather in UAE in September is not at all

The PCB doesn't mind playing India at a neutral venue. "PCB would prefer Dubai because it would lead to more gate receipts but it is open to playing in another country (read Sri Lanka) provided the ACC matches the gate receipts amount (USD 0.5 million) that Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) received in 2022 from the Indo-Pak games in Dubai," an ACC source privy to development told PTI on conditions of anonymity.
 The window for the Asia Cup this year is between September 1-17.
FORMAT AND OTHER MODALITIES
 The six teams in the Asia Cup are India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Nepal.
 One group will have India, Pakistan and Nepal while the other group will comprise Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.
 According to ACC sources, if the 'hybrid model' goes ahead, then Pakistan would like to host the following four games in their country.
 These games are Pakistan vs Nepal, Sri Lanka v Bangladesh, Bangladesh vs Afghanistan and Afghanistan vs Sri Lanka.
 As per the format, the top two teams from each group will constitute Super Fours where they again play against each other. After the Super Four round robin phase, the top two teams will play the final.
 The Super Fours will ensure that at least two Indo-Pak encounters are guaranteed, which is profitable for the host nation, broadcaster as well as ACC.
 If India and Pakistan qualify for the summit clash, then it will be three matches between the arch-rivals.
 "Sethi has said that in preliminary round, Pakistan is only playing Nepal. His proposal is to make it six games with two Super four non-India matches, involving Pakistan to be played in Pakistan," the ACC source added.
 As far as final is concerned, even if India doesn't qualify, the ACC will conduct it at a designated neutral country — Sri Lanka or UAE.



MI face IPL champ GT in Qualifier 2

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD
 Kash Madhwal's breathtaking bowling performance against Lucknow Super Giants in the Eliminator would have given five-time IPL champions Mumbai Indians wings and they would be fancying their chances against defending champions Gujarat Titans in Qualifier 2 to be played in the world's largest stadium here on Friday.
 Mumbai Indians, riding on magical figures of five for five produced by Madhwal at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Wednesday night, knocked out LSG from the race to the final with an 81-run win.
 The massive MI victory was a warning to the rivals that they could lift their game according to the occasion even in the absence of star pacers Jasprit Bumrah and Jofra Archer and batting mainstay Tilak Varma.
 MI pride themselves on thriving when the odds are stacked against them, something they have done throughout the season. Having finished last in the previous edition, Rohit Sharma's team has ground it out this season to remain in contention for a sixth IPL title even with limited resources.
 The likes of Cameron Green, Suryakumar Yadav and Tim David have responded well to the challenges and now form the backbone of the batting department with the young Nehal Wadhwa too making a huge impact, and the opening pair of Rohit and Ishan Kishan doing a fair job.
 It will be a stern test for the Titans' bowling attack, led by Mohammad Shami (26 wickets in 15 matches), to get the better of MI's bat-

Khelo India University Games kick-starts in UP

PTI ■ LUCKNOW
 Uttar Pradesh has become a 'sangam' of sportspersons from across the country, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday after inaugurating the Khelo India University Games.
 Addressing the inaugural event virtually, Modi said the Commonwealth Games scam demonstrated the approach of the previous government towards sports.
 The scam had surfaced during the tenure of the Congress-led UPA II Government in 2010.
 "Earlier no attention was paid to the development of sports. It was considered that sports is a means only to spend spare time. But today, I am happy that the perception of society and parents has changed in the country," the prime minister said.
 Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and



Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports Anurag Thakur were among those present at the event.
 This year, the Khelo India University Games are being held from May 25 to June 3 in Uttar Pradesh. Over 4,750 athletes from more than 200 universities will be competing in 21 sports. The competitions will be organised in Varanasi, Gorakhpur, Lucknow and Gautam Buddha Nagar.
 The university games are part of various schemes launched by the government to support budding sportspersons and efforts have been put in to strengthen the sports ecosystem in the country.
 The mascot of the games is named 'Jitu', which represents Swamp Deer (Barasingha) - the state animal of Uttar Pradesh. The closing ceremony of the games will be held in Varanasi on June 3.

Individuals showed lot of character to reach successive WTC finals: Rohit

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
 Captain Rohit Sharma feels all individuals showed a lot of character and stepped up when needed to take India to the World Test Championship final for the second consecutive time, especially after losing in the inaugural edition in 2021.
 India will take on Australia at The Oval in the 2021-2023 cycle WTC final, starting June 7.
 "After the World Test Championship (2021 final) in Southampton, we quickly had to regroup and get ready for the next cycle," Rohit said in a video posted by BCCI on its website.
 "I thought in that cycle we played some really, really tough cricket. We were challenged a lot of times and I thought to come out of that was obviously going to take a lot of character from not just a few individuals, but everyone." Rohit was full of praise for the fighting character of his teammates after the disappointment of losing the inaugural WTC final to New Zealand in 2021.
 "Look, it's a cycle of two years and we play a lot of Test matches during that period. Lot(s) of players have played in that cycle," he said.
 "Different individuals have stepped up, putting the performances that we were looking for from the individual."
 In the upcoming WTC final, India will be without the services of three key players -- Rishabh Pant, Shreyas Iyer and Jasprit Bumrah. While Bumrah and Iyer are down with injuries, Pant is recovering from a horrific car crash earlier in the year.
 Besides Rohit, Pant and Iyer were the only two Indian batters to average over 40 in the inaugural WTC, scoring more than 500 runs, while Bumrah picked up 45 wickets from 10 Tests during that period.
 Senior India batter Cheteshwar Pujara said the team should recognise the contributions of the trio.
 "There have been many players who have contributed to the team. Some of them are not part of this squad currently, but it's important that we recognise all the players that have contributed in this cycle," Pujara said. "It's been a great team effort... The team management, captain, everyone has been looking forward to this moment where we qualify for the WTC finals and the guys are really excited to play at The Oval. We've got some good memories playing against England in UK. Overall, if I look at the last couple of years, it's been a very good journey for the Indian Test team."



I am not Bumrah's replacement: Madhwal

PTI ■ CHENNAI
 Kash Madhwal, who engineered Mumbai Indians' comprehensive 81-run win over Lucknow Super Giants in the IPL Eliminator, doesn't consider himself as Jasprit Bumrah's replacement and is happy to fulfil the responsibility entrusted on him by the team.
 Madhwal, an engineer from Uttarakhand, returned impressive figures of 5 for 5 in 3.3 overs as MI inched one step closer to the IPL summit clash on Wednesday night.
 "I am trying my best to fulfil the responsibilities given to me by the team. I am not Bumrah's replacement but I'm trying my best to do what I can," Madhwal told reporters after the match.
 Though the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai has not benefited the pacers much this season, Madhwal spoke about what worked for him.
 "The wicket at Chepauk was good. As you saw, the ball was not gripping but skid-



ding. I am a swing/sling bowler, and I pitched my deliveries in hard lengths

aiming for wickets," he said.
 Madhwal said skipper Rohit Sharma knew his strengths and how to use him.
 "Rohit bhैया knew that yorkers were my strength but during the nets and practice matches, he also found that I can bowl well with the new ball," he said.
 "So he had an idea as to how to use me as the situation warranted. I'm also very chilled out and relaxed and I'm having fun because I'm pursuing my passion."
 Meanwhile, LSG bowler Naveen-ul-Haq said he enjoyed the "Kohli, Kohli" chants at the stadium on Wednesday as it gave him the passion to play well for his team.
 During the league stage of the ongoing IPL, Naveen-ul-Haq had a heated chat with Royal Challengers Bangalore star Kohli. After the RCB-LSG game, the Afghan even posted Instagram stories about mangoes whenever the Bangalore-based outfit did not perform well in their matches.
 "I enjoy it. I like everyone in the ground chanting his (Virat Kohli) name or any other player's name."
 "It gives me passion to play well for my team," he said after his brilliant spell of 4/38 against MI, albeit in a losing cause.
 "Well I don't concentrate on the outside or the noise from outside or anything else. I just focus on my own cricket and my own process. Crowd chanting or anyone saying something doesn't affect me."
 "As professional sportsmen you have to take this in your stride. When you don't do well for your team, fans are going to give it to you. And when you do good for your team, (the) same people are going to chant your name. Basically this is part and parcel of the game," he added.

Bharat would be obvious choice to go with in WTC final: Shastri

PTI ■ DUBAI
 Former India chief coach Ravi Shastri feels KS Bharat would be the "obvious choice" of the team management for the wicketkeeper's role in the World Test Championship final against Australia to be played in England next month.
 With India's first-choice wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant recovering from a horrific car crash and his back-up KL Rahul recuperating from a surgery on his right thigh, the Indian team management is in a dilemma on who to select between Bharat and Ishan Kishan as its first-choice govmen for the WTC final at The Oval starting June 7.
 Shastri said since Bharat had kept wickets during the Border-Gavaskar series earlier this year, he expected the 29-year-old to get the management's nod ahead of Kishan.
 "You have to see who's a better keeper. Is it Bharat or Ishan Kishan? Now, the fact that Bharat was given a run against Australia, where he played all the Test matches, I think he would be the obvious choice to go with," Shastri said on the ICC Review.
 While Bharat gave a good account of himself behind the stumps, he was below-par with the bat, managing just 101 runs from six innings on turning tracks.
 "Having pummelled Lucknow Super Giants by 81 runs in the Eliminator, MI will face defending champions Gujarat Titans on Friday in the second Qualifier to decide Chennai Super Kings' opposition in Sunday's final.
 Green in fact said even skipper Rohit Sharma told newcomers in dressing room that the five-time champions are slow starters.
 "Obviously, all experience that he (Rohit) has got for India and in IPL, he kind of knows. I think MI never won the first game of IPL and he tries to mention that to us," Green told Star Sports after having scored 40 odd and effecting two run-outs in LSG innings.



MI peaking at right time: Cameron Green

PTI ■ CHENNAI
 Cameron Green is finally justifying his Rs 17.5 crore billing just when Mumbai Indians needed him the most and is happy that his team after initial struggles is now a step away from the IPL summit clash.

Jason wants to renegotiate ECB contract in order to play MLC T20 in US

PTI ■ MUMBAI
 Opener Jason Roy is mulling over renegotiating his contract with the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) in order to take up lucrative offers to play in the first season of the upcoming Major League Cricket (MLC) in the United States of America.
 With global cricket ecosystem witnessing an increasing loyalty shift towards franchise-based T20 leagues, a lot of English cricketers like Roy would be sought after in every league and it might make them think about the amount of time they want to devote in national duty.
 Six players from England - Roy, Topley, Harry Brook, Dawid Malan, Matthew Potts and David Willey - have incremental contracts with the ECB. The report informed that these contracts are worth around GBP 66,000 per year and act as a 'top-up to County salaries'.
 Apart from the right-handed opener batter Roy, who recently played for the two-time Indian Premier



League winners Kolkata Knight Riders, fast bowler Reece Topley is also considering making the same move.
 However, Topley's decision could be influenced by his fitness status following a surgery to his shoulder, reported ESPNcricinfo.
 Topley was also last seen in the IPL, wherein he played a few initial matches for the Royal Challengers Bangalore.
 The report added that England players, who are full central contracts, are not likely to feature in the MLC this

year but Roy has an incremental deal with the ECB, is planning to terminate it, which would help him to take up a role in the league to be played in the US.
 The MLC is slated to be held from July 13-30 this year at the Grand Prairie Stadium in Texas.
 The league has considerable backing from India and Australia, with four IPL team owners investing in as many MLC franchises and Australia's Cricket Victoria and Cricket New South Wales have stakes in the remaining two teams.
 The MLC's first edition is also set to clash with the English summer as the semifinal and final of the T20 Blast will be on July 15, whereas two County Championship games will also be in the same duration. Additionally, the ECB's Hundred starts on August 1.
 Due to these fixtures, ECB will not issue NOCs which would enable their contracted players to take part in the MLC. While the fully-contracted players will not be able to negotiate a release with the ECB, those who have incremental contracts are in a position to do so.
 Meanwhile, Surrey are expecting Roy to play the MLC, most likely for LA Knight Riders, which will be between the end of the T20 Blast and the beginning of the Hundred.
 Australia's Marcus Stoinis, South Africa's Quinton de Kock, Sri Lanka's Wanindu Hasaranga, South Africa's Anrich Nortje and New Zealand's Glenn Phillips have been revealed as the overseas signings in the MLC.