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Photographer Nemai Ghosh, who had a long association with Satyajit Ray, dead
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NEARBY



Five new COVID-19 cases in Delhi, total 35

NEW DELHI
Five new cases of COVID-19 were reported in the Capital on Wednesday, taking the total number of positive cases to 35. "One case is of a person who came from abroad. And four cases are from his contact," Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

Adityanath shifts Ram idol amid lockdown

LUCKNOW
Amid physical distancing protocols and a nationwide lockdown, U.P. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday participated in an event to shift the idol of Lord Ram to a temporary structure in the Ram Janmabhoomi compound in Ayodhya till the construction of a temple.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 11

CAA protesters place shoes to mark presence

KOLKATA
Placards and dozens of pairs of shoes, scarves and dupattas have been kept as a sign of protest at the Park Circus Maidan in Kolkata where an anti-CAA agitation has been going on since the first week of January. On Wednesday, there were five to six people at the ground, each setting a few metres apart.

NORTH & EAST

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Aim is to win the war against COVID-19 in 21 days: Modi

PM urges citizens to back healthcare professionals working through lockdown

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The country is fighting a war against the novel coronavirus and the aim is to win it in 21 days, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Wednesday, a day after he announced a national lockdown of three weeks to combat the pandemic.

Interacting with people in his Lok Sabha constituency Varanasi through videoconference, Mr. Modi said: "The Mahabharata war was won in 18 days, this war the whole country is fighting against coronavirus will take 21 days."

As the total count of COVID-19 cases in India touched 606 on Wednesday, the Centre said there was still no proof of "community transmission". With one more death on Wednesday, the virus has claimed 10 lives, according to the Union Health Ministry.

Data from the States, however, put the total number of positive cases at 618, with 562 active ones. Thirteen people have died so far.

The Prime Minister urged citizens to support healthcare professionals and others who are working through the lockdown. He said he was pained to hear of inci-



Difficult times: Migrant labourers waiting in a queue to collect food packets being delivered by volunteers during the lockdown in Chennai on Wednesday. ■ R. AGAU

COVID-19

dents of discrimination and harassment faced by airline staff who helped rescue CO-

VID-19 patients, and doctors and nurses tending to such people.

Strict action

Such acts would "prove costly" to the offenders, he warned, adding: "I have told the Home Ministry and DGP to take strict action against those who are not support-

ing or not co-operating with doctors, nurses and other professionals who are serving us in this critical time."

Advance salary
Meanwhile, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik announced that the State would pay salary until the month of July in advance to all its healthcare professionals in April.

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MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 6, 7, 10, 11
SPAIN TOLL RISES ▶ PAGE 12

Indian patient in Sri Lanka

An Indian is among the nearly 100 COVID-19 positive patients currently undergoing treatment in Sri Lanka, *The Hindu* has learnt. Three other patients, who are Sri Lankan nationals, also tested positive on their return from India earlier this month, officials in Colombo said. ■ PAGE 10

e-passes for key services, says Kejriwal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Citizens engaged in essential services in Delhi can call 1031 on WhatsApp to avail e-passes to be able to commute to work, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Wednesday.

e-passes were not required for the general public, who were free to visit local shops for the purchase of essential items, even as he sought to assure citizens that Delhi was prepared to ensure the supply of essential goods to residents during the 21-day "total lockdown" ordered by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to contain the spread of COVID-19.

No panic buying

"We are here to serve you. Please do not engage in panic buying. It is our responsibility to provide you with all the essential supplies such as vegetables, milk, and medicines.

Those who are providing essential services, general store owners, water and electricity department employees, government employees, government hospital doctors, vegetable vendors, will be issued passes by the government," Mr. Kejriwal said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10
MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 2 & 3

Delivery issues add to woes for homebound

Firms worried over safety of agents

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Many e-commerce firms were forced to suspend deliveries to their customers in major cities across the country on Wednesday with local authorities unable to ensure the safety of delivery persons on the first day of the 21-day nationwide lockdown.

Angry customers vented their anger on social media even as police services scrambled to put in place a system where delivery persons for online vendors were able to go about their jobs unmolested.

"The key challenge in the field is that sometimes our delivery partners are getting stopped by the police, and some of them have even got beaten up by the police for no fault of theirs," online grocer BigBasket said in a statement.

"It will help to have better coordination between the Centre and State, and between the State and local police, to ensure that our delivery vans and bikes don't get stopped by the police," the firm added.

Late on Wednesday, the e-commerce firm put out a statement that they were now operational in Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Bhopal, Coimbatore, Indore, Mumbai, Mysuru, Noida, Surat



Reports have emerged of delivery persons being assaulted. ■ FILE PHOTO

and Vadodara. However, services remained suspended in Chandigarh, Chennai, Delhi, Gurugram, Ludhiana, Pune, Vizag, Hyderabad and Vijayawada.

Earlier, e-commerce major Flipkart announced that it had suspended its services, while rival Amazon India halted orders for non-essential products. Gurugram-headquartered Snapdeal also said it was working towards completing delivery of essential goods.

"We are an essential service and our delivery persons must be allowed to perform their duty," Shan Kadavil, CEO & Co-founder, FreshToHome, said in a statement. "The directive from the top is clear but the implementation on the ground level is different."

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10

Census, NPR exercise put off over coronavirus scare

It has been 'postponed until further orders', says MHA

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Amid the COVID-19 outbreak, the first phase of Census 2021 and updating of the National Population Register (NPR) that was to begin on April 1 has been "postponed until further orders", the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said in a statement on Wednesday.

The rally was primarily on the back of massive gains in index heavyweights Reliance Industries, HDFC twins – HDFC and HDFC Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank and ICICI Bank.

The broader Nifty ended the day at 8,317.85, up 516.80 points or 6.62%. Incidentally, the India VIX index dipped nearly 8%.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10



on March 21 that the Census-NPR exercise was all set to be postponed due to the outbreak.

Other States and UTs had notified different dates for the exercise that entailed door-to-door visits by enumerators and field representatives and was not possible under the ongoing 21-day lockdown, said a senior government official.

The Census was scheduled to be conducted in two phases – House listing & Housing Census during April-September 2020 and Population Enumeration from February 9-28, 2021. The updating of the NPR was also proposed to be done along with phase I of the Census in all the States and UTs, except Assam.

The *Hindu* first reported

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10

Terror struck



Bolt from the blue: Sikh women mourning for their relatives near the site of a terror attack in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Wednesday. At least 25 worshippers were killed by a lone Islamic State gunman at a gurdwara. ■ REUTERS (REPORT ON PAGE 12)

Coping with a COVID-19 hotspot

Bhilwara sees massive screening after outbreak in hospital

MOHAMMED IQBAL

A curfew in force for the sixth consecutive day. A massive screening exercise involving 1,500 health workers. Four fresh cases, taking the total number of infected patients to 17. Bhilwara, considered the hub of textile manufacturing in Rajasthan, has grabbed national attention following a number of positive cases of COVID-19 being detected at a private hospital in the city.

The sheer number of people being screened in Bhilwara, after the administration sealed the district's borders and imposed curfew much before a lockdown was announced in the entire State, has made it possibly the biggest exercise in the country. The outbreak of COVID-19 in Bhilwara occurred last week from the private hospital

tal where a doctor tested positive after he admitted a patient with pneumonia in the ICU earlier this month. The patient, who was allegedly carrying the virus, later died at a hospital in Jaipur.

Doctors, staff infected
Two medics and several members of the hospital's paramedical staff were subsequently found positive after multiple testing. The hospital was sealed and its 88 patients were shifted to other health facilities, while contact tracing was undertaken to find out hundreds of people who had come to the outpatient department for consultation.

The doctors and staff are among the 38 persons being kept in the isolation wards of Mahatma Gandhi Government Hospital and a few other health facilities. Bhilwara Chief Medical and Health Of-

ficer Mushtaq Khan told *The Hindu* that the doctor who first tested positive and his wife, who was also infected, have been shifted to Jaipur.

As many as 5,392 persons in Bhilwara have been told to quarantine themselves at home. The rapid response teams, which were rushed from Udaipur, are assisting the local health workers in covering about half of the city's 6 lakh population in the first phase.

After the lockdown in the city, the administration has turned its attention to the rural areas as three persons showing symptoms of the disease were found roaming in the villages. Nine villages in Mandal tehsil were placed under curfew as a precautionary measure after it was found that the villagers had earlier visited the hospital in Bhilwara.

SIB KUMAR DAS

BERHAMPUR

Restrictions in place for the COVID-19 threat are saving lakhs of Olive Ridley turtles from possible disturbance by humans, especially tourists, while they are continuing mass nesting at Odisha's Rushikulya rookery.

According to the Forest Department's enumeration, over 2,78,502 turtles nested at this coast till Wednesday morning. Since Tuesday evening, over 72,142 Olive Ridleys have arrived at the beach to dig nests and lay eggs.

DAY-TIME NESTING

Olive Ridleys began mass nesting at the Rushikulya rookery from around 2 a.m. on March 21. Later in the

day, the unusual phenomenon of day-time mass nesting took place at the coast. As a large number of turtles are still in the sea near this coast, mass nesting is expected to continue for some more nights.

This event normally attracts hundreds of people to the spot, with Forest Department personnel spending considerable time and effort in controlling the crowd. But this year, the COVID-19 lockdown has ensured no such disturbance occurs for the turtles.

Proper maintenance of cleanliness and provision of protection to the turtles at sea since November 2019, when the turtles mate, are major reasons for the large scale mass nesting at

Rushikulya this year, said Berhampur Divisional Forest Officer Amlan Nayak. Two trawlers, two speed boats and a country boat are being used by the Forest Department to patrol the sea, in order to prevent

fishing trawlers from plying along the coast. Trawlers did not cause any deaths of turtles as a result. In 2019, mass nesting of Olive Ridleys did not occur in Rushikulya, in contrast to



Safe landing: Olive Ridleys began mass nesting at the Rushikulya rookery on March 21. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

2018, when "double mass nesting" occurred in February and April, with nesting figures rising above 4,73,000.

Cyclone's aftermath
Cyclone Titli in October 2018, and the floods that followed, left huge piles of waste over about 8 km of the Rushikulya coast, which had to be cleaned with excavators. It has been estimated that minute particles of waste remained, keeping Olive Ridleys away in 2019.

This year, the beach received a thorough cleaning long before the mass nesting commenced. The Forest Department also set up 11 off-shore camps early this year to monitor the beach.

AN-NDNE

Grocers scramble to restock after night of panic buying

Employees say there is enough supply and people need not worry about shortage

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI
After witnessing a night of panic buying following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement of a 21-day restriction on non-essential services, grocery stores and supermarkets across the city were busy restocking on Wednesday and tried to enforce social distancing between customers.

Despite appeals to not hoard essentials, large packets of rice and atta, bread and tetrapacks of milk and juice were out of stock at many stores. Some local vegetable and fruit vendors were found selling produce at inflated prices but admitted that there was no shortage at the wholesale market.

Social distancing

In Kalkaji, grocery and supply stores were busy restocking empty shelves in expectation of more panic buying. Employees at one supermarket were seen enforcing social distancing by limiting the number of customers inside the store. People standing in line at several markets were also asked to maintain distance between each other.

COVID-19

Following the Tuesday night announcement, there was confusion at Nizamuddin East after a grocery store shutdown believing that a full lockdown had been ordered. Long queues were seen at other stores with bread, eggs and butter flying



Crowds at Keshavpur wholesale market in west Delhi on Wednesday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

off the shelves. The stores got a fresh supply on Wednesday and orderly queues were seen. Fruit vendor Mian Rahman said: "Phal toh mandi mein hai, par police ke dande se bach bach ke laa rahi hain [there is plenty of fruit at the wholesale market, but we have to dodge police lathis to bring the produce to customers]."

Long queues

In CR Park's Market 1, store owners said that bread, eggs, curd, rice and flour were in high demand and disappeared off shelves within minutes of the PM's speech. On Wednesday, only one of the three grocery shops was open and witnessed long queues. While the main vegetable market was closed, there were a couple of vans, which went around in the colonies selling produce.

Parul Chatterjee, a housewife said: "We had been

C Even though the authorities are saying that essential items will be supplied and that there is no reason to panic, it is difficult not to. We are just worried

PARUL CHATTERJEE
Housewife

stocking up in small quantities over the last one week. We did not realise that a 21-day lockdown would be announced. Even though authorities are saying that essential items will be supplied and that there is no reason to panic, it is difficult not to. We are just worried. Already items like bread and eggs are out of stock. There are senior citizens in our family, so we cannot take the risk of not buying items when they are available."

Two departmental stores

near the Yamuna Expressway Authority office in Greater Noida's Omega 1 did brisk business while a larger store some distance away was shut.

Supply issue

"We are trying to stock up as much as we can given the duration of the lockdown. There have been no issues regarding supply so far as edibles are concerned," said a store manager on condition of anonymity. He admitted that some customers were trying to purchase flour and milk in quantities that "seemed implausible for consumption" over three weeks.

"People are trying to buy 30 kg of atta and more than half-a-dozen packets of packed milk. We are requesting such customers not to do this, so that others who may be running out of the same items can buy them," the manager added.

Kumar, a resident of Tughlakabad, said that he makes an hour-long journey by foot now as public transport has also been stopped due to the restrictions.

With virus threatening the Capital, Delhiites working their way to safety

'Coronavirus is on my mind, but we have to serve homeless people'

For 21-year-old Pramod Kumar, outbreak of virus has only increased his workload

The workload of many have reduced since the outbreak of COVID-19 and people are working in the safety of homes. But for 21-year-old Pramod Kumar, who works as a caretaker at a government-run night shelter for the homeless, work and risk have only increased.

"My mother is worried and was asking me to come back home since the virus outbreak. But how can I go back? I just came back from home after Holi and I won't get more leaves," Kumar, who is from Bihar, said.

Kumar, who has been living in Delhi for the last four years with his brother and family, said that his workload has increased since the outbreak of virus. "I have to work overtime now as many staff who are coming from far off places are not able to reach for work," said the 21-year-old, who earns ₹18,000 a month.

"I am not afraid, this is social service. Coronavirus is on my mind, but we have to serve people," Kumar said.

On Saturday, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had announced that due to COVID-19 outbreak, anyone can go and have food from government-run night shelters and since then the footfall at the shelters has gone up and so has the work.

Short-staffed

"I live in South Ex and since there are no vehicles, I walk to the night shelter and reach here by 8 a.m. My shift is for eight hours and is supposed to end at 2 p.m., but I am still here at 5 p.m. We are short-staffed," he added.

Kumar said, he wears a mask and tie a handkerchief over it and wash his hands with soap and sanitiser as a precaution. "The government should give people like us more facilities. Masks should be provided and there should be vehicles for us to reach work and go back home," he added. d.

Nikhil M Babu



Working from home has been difficult and disorienting, says NGO worker

Gouri is now trying to find resource persons to carry out online sessions



Gouri Rajagopal, who works for Transforming Rural India (TRI), has been doing her job from home in Malviya Nagar for the last two weeks. Being an NGO worker, her job involves engaging in multiple roles, including carrying out training programmes, recruitment drives and communications.

On April 1, the organisation was getting ready to induct a new set of people with a week-long induction programme. "The programme is very intensive. It involves meeting government officials at various levels, and makes the freshers understand what a typical work day would be like. The personal interactions help invigorate those participating in the programme. In the wake of the pandemic, all of this has to be carried out online," lamented Ms. Gouri.

Currently, she is involved in figuring out what the new structure of the programme would look like, and finding resource persons to carry out online sessions.

Endless work

"Usually, if I were at office, I could just go talk to my boss or speak to my colleagues. I can't do that now...brainstorming is impossible while you are alone," she said. Working from home has been difficult and disorienting, she said. "I don't want to mix work and home... now there is no such thing as office timings and as a result work has started to spread across the day and is 'seemingly endless,'" she said.

To ensure that work goes on smoothly, she had to clear up her desk at home. She then decided to get a white board on which she could write the work schedule for a week. Apart from this, Ms. Gouri said that it is important for one to carry out activities. On her part, she is trying to exercise indoors, eat healthy food and being an extrovert, trying to find ways to exhaust herself. "It is the only thing that keeps me sane," she said with a smile.

Sidharth Ravi



Working from home is not an option for this private security guard

Roshan Kumar said, people like him can't afford to miss the ₹400-₹500 they get a day

As restrictions on non-essential services are imposed across the country to contain the pandemic, for some like Roshan Kumar, "working from home" was not an option.

The sole breadwinner in a family of four, the private security guard was seen posted outside a financial services office in Kalkaji, which is now shut.

Kumar, a resident of Tughlakabad, said that he makes an hour-long journey by foot now as public transport has also been stopped due to the restrictions.

Travel by foot

"Earlier, I would take shared rides or

even buses. However, now there is no means for me to travel except by foot. I start from my house around 8 a.m. as my shift starts at 9 p.m. and again in the evening after the shift is over, I start walking around 6 p.m., only to reach home around 7 p.m.," the 26-year-old said.

With the safety mask on, Kumar's routine these days are simply to spend hours sitting on the stairs near the office.

Even as patrolling teams go past him and tries to disperse gatherings of any kind, especially outside departmental stores and ATMs, Kumar said, "I asked my supervisor if we

[guards] could take leaves during this period. But he said that we have to report every day, even on Sundays. So I come each day. These days there are hardly any people on the roads too due to the virus. But I need work, so I have to be present. I have my mask and get home-cooked food. That is all the precaution I can take."

While adding that he had returned from his home town in Bihar a month ago, he said: "I got married and returned to Delhi last month. My wife is also in the city and I need to work for the family. I get around ₹400-₹500 a day, so I cannot afford to miss work."

Shrinjini Ghosh



Enhance emergency measures, activists write to Kejriwal

Step will prevent starvation deaths amid virus outbreak'

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Delhi Rozi Roti Adhikar Abhiyan on Wednesday wrote to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to undertake steps to enhance the emergency measures already taken, in a bid to prevent starvation deaths as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Urging the government to enhance the steps being taken to ensure access to food, the letter said, "In addition to providing cooked food at the 234 night shelters, we urge you to make it more widely available by ensuring that all anganwadis and government schools in Delhi provide cooked food to anyone who requires it. It will also prevent overcrowding at night shelters at meal times."

In the letter to the Chief Minister, activists also urged the Delhi government to an-



Daily wage workers and homeless people outside a government-run night shelter in the Capital. ■ REUTERS

nounce relevant policies pertaining to restarting the mid-day meal schemes to ensure children have access to nutritious meals despite schools being shut due to the epidemic.

Ration enhancement

Stating that under the National Food Security Act, ration cards had been issued to less than 40% of the population in Delhi, the letter added, "The enhancement of quota of ration announced

by your government will only benefit these people. There is an urgent need to universalise access to food grains, pulses, cooking oil and soap, and provide it to everyone desirous of obtaining these irrespective of whether they have a ration card or not."

In the letter, activists also urged the government to release maternity entitlements in advance and also to set up a free helpline number at the Chief Minister's office.

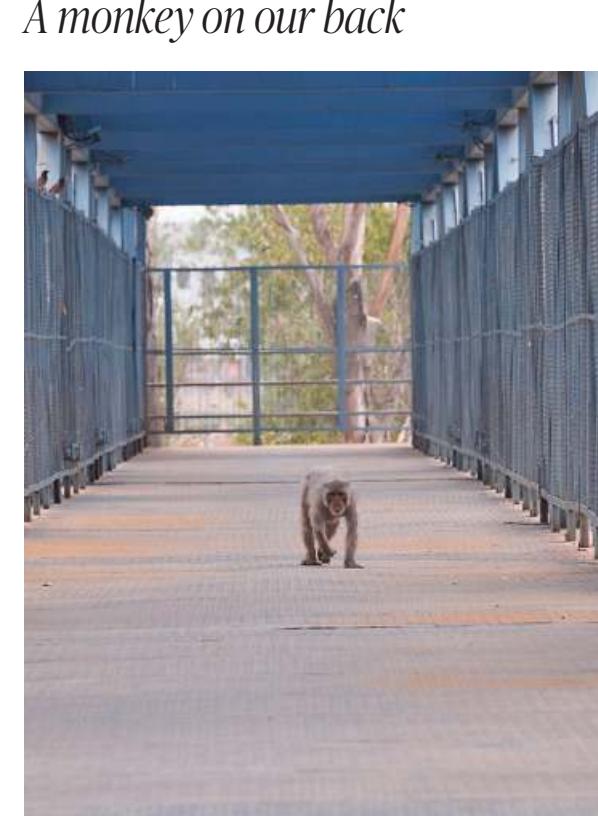
Man held for calling woman 'coronavirus'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

A 40-year-old man was arrested on Wednesday for allegedly calling a woman "coronavirus" after spitting paan on her face at a street in north-west Delhi's Mukherjee Nagar, the police said. The accused has been identified as Gaurav Vohra, a resident of Model Town, they said.

On Sunday, the woman lodged a report alleging that a man slowed down his scooter, spat paan on her face and called her "coronavirus" at a street, a senior police officer said. Thereafter, a case under IPC section 506 (word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman) was registered at the Mukherjee Nagar police station. Mr. Vohra works at a cooker manufacturing factory at Anand Parbat, the police said.

A monkey on our back



A monkey walks on a deserted foot overbridge at NH 24 during a complete lockdown amid COVID-19 outbreak on Wednesday. ■ R. V. MOORTHY

DMRC chief asks staff to follow COVID-19 rules

Steps being taken, says Mangu Singh

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

In the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, Delhi Metro Rail Corporation managing director Mangu Singh has written to DMRC employees urging them to follow guidelines and advisories issued while assuring them that all requisite precautions were being taken to ensure safety of the staff.

'Do not panic'

"This is a moment when everyone should stay calm and not panic. This is also a time when everyone must ensure that they do not spread any rumours. The evolving situation is being tracked and monitored and all necessary steps are being or shall be taken to ensure the health and well-being of the DMRC system and the employees," Mr. Singh said in his letter.

Stating that "extraordinarily



Mangu Singh

ary changes" have come about due to the epidemic, Mr. Singh said, "I would also like to advise that you abide by the advisories, instructions and guidelines issued by the government and the DMRC, from time to time."

"I would also like to call upon you to take care of the elderly, the children and those with underlying medical conditions, so that they do not fall sick or develop any medical complications," read the letter.

JNU V-C asks teachers to take online classes

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Jawaharlal Nehru University Vice-Chancellor M. Jagadesh Kumar on Wednesday wrote to faculty members to remain in contact with the students using online means and engage them in academic activities.

For students and staff still on campus, he said that during the 21-day lockdown announced by the government, all residents are required to confine themselves in their respective residences and that walking and strolling along the campus roads should be avoided. He added that only one family member may come to the campus market area for purchasing essentials.

He urged the campus community, "Let us stay united in following the COVID-19 guidelines and 21-day lockdown in letter and spirit." The university had earlier asked all students to leave campus. However, with many unable to do so, the administration kept a few hostels opened with basic mess facilities. It has banned outsiders from entering campus.

ological materials, the respective heads of these academic units are required to identify the persons and obtain permission from the security for their entry into the labs," Mr. Kumar said.

He urged the campus community, "Let us stay united in following the COVID-19 guidelines and 21-day lockdown in letter and spirit." The university had earlier asked all students to leave campus. However, with many unable to do so, the administration kept a few hostels opened with basic mess facilities. It has banned outsiders from entering campus.

'Ensure safety of Indian students in Kazakhstan'

High Court asks Central government to appoint nodal officer from Indian Embassy

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday asked the Central government to promptly appoint a nodal officer from the Indian Embassy in Kazakhstan to ensure the well-being of Indian students who are stranded at Almaty International Airport due to the outbreak of COVID-19.

A Bench of Justices Siddharth Mridul and Talwant Singh, which heard the case through videoconferencing,



communicated to the Indian students at the airport. The details should also be uploaded on the official website of the Ministry of External Affairs, immediately, the Bench directed.

The High Court's direction came of a petition, claiming that Indian national in sizeable numbers, who are enrolled for higher studies, including M.B.B.S., as regular students at Semey Medical University, Kazakhstan, are stranded in the country. The plea claimed that several Indian students at the Almaty airport are stranded without food, water, transportation and medical aid etc., since last two to three days. Taking note of the plea, the Bench directed the government to ensure welfare, well-being and safety of all such Indian students. It directed the nodal officer "to expeditiously facilitate, secure and provide the students with all basic amenities and humanitarian assistance".

DU to provide electronic resources for home

NEW DELHI

Delhi University on Wednesday said that a system had been put in place whereby teachers, research scholars and students can access all electronic resources subscribed by the university library from their homes or wherever they are. The access would help them continue their studies, teaching and research from their home. Detailed steps to access the resources have been made available on the university's website.

SDMC to extend amnesty scheme over property tax
NEW DELHI
The South Delhi Municipal Corporation on Wednesday announced that it would be extending its amnesty scheme for payment of property tax up till April 30 in wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The civic body will offer a 100% waiver of interest and any penalty on payment of outstanding dues

'We have not sold a Durga idol in 2 days'

ANUJ KUMAR
GHAZIABAD

Navaratri began on a sour note for the community of artisans who live along the road in Sahibabad, Ghaziabad. The Durga idols were the only bright spots on the deserted road on Wednesday. "We have not sold a single idol in the last two days," Kavita said, adding: "Perhaps, people have lost faith in Her when they need Her the most."

"We were expecting a low sales this year due to COVID-19 but this is unbelievable. We spend a month making the idols... now it seems all that effort and money will go to waste," said Hansraj, one of the artisans. "We are ironsmiths who once made weapons for Maharana Pratap. Once he lost the Battle of Haldighati, we left Rajasthan," Sachin Rajput said, adding: "We used to make 50-60 idols for Navratri, this year we made only 25 but we have not sold even one."

'No water supply'

"Nobody from the administration has come to take cognisance of our well-being. The expect us to be hygienic but there is no water supply here," said Manoj, standing outside one of the 25-odd slum-like structures.

In the neighbouring Shyam Park, a crowd surrounded a grocery shop despite the best efforts of the staff to maintain order. Many complained that flour was in short supply. The shopkeeper said the supplier was charging ₹30 extra per kg, something he would not agree to. "Somebody will complain about me to the police for overcharging," he said. But one could see a side door opening and closing at regular intervals to cater to some patrons who were ready to pay extra. "What to do?" was the common refrain.

Circle Officer (Sahibabad) Rakesh Mishra told *The Hindu*, "In such an unprecedented situation, the police is expected to work with a combination of sensitivity and strictness. If we find a shop overcrowded, we will shut it down. But we will also ensure that essential supplies and vegetables are not stopped. People should also play their part by not indulging in panic buying."

Capital reports five new COVID-19 cases in 24 hours

Total number of cases in city stands at 35 so far, with 23 active cases

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

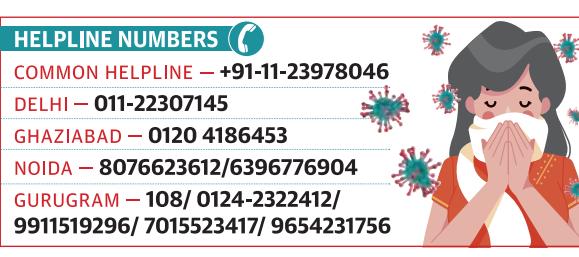
Five new cases of COVID-19 were reported in the national capital on Wednesday, taking the total number of cases to 35 so far, with 23 active cases in the city.

"In the past 24 hours there have been five new cases in Delhi. One case is of a person who has come from abroad. And four cases are from his contact. So, there are a total of 35 cases in Delhi now," Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said while addressing a press conference here on Wednesday evening.

Travel history

Of the five new cases, Case 31 and Case 32 had returned to India from Brazil and London. Both are residents of Sainik Farms.

The other three cases have direct or secondary contact with Case number 10. Case 33, a 48-year-old



Two women seen wearing masks to protect themselves from COVID-19. ■ FILE PHOTO: SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

woman, is the wife of Case 28 and both of them are doctors. Case 34 is their 17-year-old daughter and the family lives in Dilshad Garden.

Case 35 is a 35-year-old man from Jahangirpuri.

Eight people, who have been primary or secondary contacts of Case 10, a 38-year-old woman, who tra-

velled to India from the Middle East, have tested positive for COVID-19 so far, according to officials of the Delhi government's Health Department.

"We are still tracing a lot of people who are secondary contacts of Case 10 and the numbers are huge," a senior health department official said.

"From Case 10, her two daughters, brother, and mother were earlier infected," an official said. Then she met case 28, a 49-year-old male doctor at a Mohalla Clinic, at his private clinic and he was later tested positive.

"Now the doctor's [Case 28] wife and daughter [Case 33 and Case 34] have also been tested positive. Case 35 was also in contact with Case 10," the official added.

Case 32 was tested positive two days back in Haryana and has been admitted to a private hospital in Gurugram.

Baijal expresses concern over 'misbehaviour' with doctors

L-G orders transport arrangements for healthcare providers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI



Anil Baijal

ment said.

"The L-G directed departments concerned to ensure proper transport arrangements for the health care providers from their residence to hospitals to allow them hassle-free commute to their workplace and further appealed to all for cooperation and collaboration," the statement said.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal warned such individuals of "very strict action".

"Very strict action will be taken against those landlords who are harassing or misbehaving with doctors, nurses, hospital staff dealing with COVID-19 patients based only on suspicion. Orders to this effect have been issued," he said.

Delhi BJP chief Manoj Tiwari also expressed grief over such incidents. "It is very saddening and such behaviour is wrong... We should respect them. These people are putting their lives at stake for your children and family," he said.

Police issue curfew passes to delivery agents of e-commerce companies

Platform set up for such portals to share problems

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI



The police have assured the delivery agents of e-commerce portals smooth movement of essential goods. ■ FILE PHOTO •

sued by Govt. If you need any clarification, join us today in: #LockdownQuery Session 2. Timing: 5 - 6 PM. To assist the Emergency and Essential Vehicles in their unhindered and quick movement, we have also dedicated lanes with proper signages. #IndiaFightsCorona #StayHomeIndia," DCP (South) Atul Kumar Thakur tweeted.

Assisting stores
Besides patrolling streets, the police said they are also assisting local stores in ensuring social distancing with customers.

A senior police officer said that the staff has been instructed to use 'common sense' and allow passage to people who have genuine reason to come out.

Police Commissioner S.N. Shrivastava said that the staff had been instructed to behave politely and patiently with people involved in essential services.

Delhi Police orders 33% of its staff to go into isolation for 10 days

Other officers to remain in quarantine in rotation: police chief

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI



Delhi police personnel deployed at various intersections have been provided masks, gloves and sanitizers. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

form of pickets and patrolling to keep the city safe and carry on other essential aspect of police work without affecting it in any substantial manner.

Preference should be given to the age group of 50 and ones having other medical problems, the order stated.

A senior police officer said that police personnel above the age of 50, who have been suffering from diabetes, respiratory and

Nodal officers to ensure goods supply

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Lieutenant-Governor Anil Baijal on Wednesday appointed senior IAS and IPS officers as nodal officers to ensure unhindered supply of essential goods and services in the Capital during the 21-day restrictions to contain the pandemic.

Besides appointing IAS officer Sanjeev Khirwar and IPS officer Muktesh Chander to oversee unhindered inter-state movement of essential goods, Mr. Baijal also appointed 11 IAS officers to ensure the same at each of the revenue districts in the city.

TO ADVERTISE PLEASE CONTACT

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THE HINDU
India's National Newspaper

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA: MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS
RESEARCH, DESIGNS & STANDARDS ORGANISATION,
MANAK NAGAR, LUCKNOW-226011

E-OT Notice No. 10/2019
Executive Director/Stores on behalf of President of India invites Global tender Single Bid System and open tender (Single Bid System) issued by this office as follows

S. No.	Tender Number	Brief Description	QTY.	Last date of submission/opening of tender
03205006		Procurement of Rail Profile Measurement system & Wheel Profile Measurement System.	2 SET	30/04/2020 (Thursday)

For complete details of tender conditions and Corrigendum issued in tender, if any, please visit IREPS website www.ireps.gov.in

File No. SP-1/ADVERTISEMENT/E-OT/2019
Executive Director
Stores/RDSO/Lucknow
Date : 23/03/2020

For and on behalf of President of India

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

(See Section 82 Cr. P.C.)

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person **Rakesh Chaddha** S/o Shri Hem Chand R/o 6/370, Trilokpuri, Delhi has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case F.I.R. No. 514/19 u/s 328/193/195/195A/182/211/120 B/34 IPC dated 08.11.2019 registered at P.S. Kalyanpur, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon that the said **Rakesh Chaddha** could not be found and where it has been shown to my satisfaction that the accused **Rakesh Chaddha** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused **Rakesh Chaddha** is required to appear before the court to answer the said complaint on or before **06.05.2020**.

By Order

Ms. Ekta Gauba Mann
Chief Metropolitan Magistrate,
Karkardooma Court, Delhi

NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY

Important Notice

All tenders of North Eastern Railway - Stores Department-Headquarters Office due to open between 24.03.2020 to 15.04.2020 (lapsed & not opened, or Live), except tender number 28190989A, 28180704 & 28190615A due on 25.03.2020, 08.04.2020 & 08.04.2020 respectively have been postponed to 15.04.2020. The closing time of tenders shall remain the same.

CPRO/S-76
Secy. to PCMM/Gorakhpur

About any passenger amenity complain SMS on Mobile No. 09794845955

"Never travel on roof and foot boards"

Idgah camp emptied over COVID-19 fear



The camp where 20-25 people were residing was cleared out on Wednesday. ■ FILE PHOTO: SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Idgah relief camp in north-east Delhi's Mustafabad, which was set up by the Delhi Waqf Board for people displaced by riots that erupted in the city last month, was cleared out completely on Wednesday.

Mohammed Imran, media coordinator at the camp and nodal officer of the board, said the step had been taken in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak. "The camp, where around 20-25 people were residing, was cleared out on Wednesday. Most had left by Tuesday night. We have helped the people find rented accommodation in the area," he said.

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLA Haji Yunus said that it was becoming difficult to maintain distance between people in the camp. "At least 50 people were staying in one tent and that was harmful for them. There was not enough space for

INTERVIEW | AMIT KHATRI

'Focus is on ensuring supply chain is effective'

We will be starting 10 decentralised mobile grocery stores, says Gurugram official

Gurugram Deputy Commissioner Amit Khatri talks to Ashok Kumar about the challenges, priorities and preparations of the administration for COVID-19.

There have been issues with regards to the supply of essential items such as groceries, milk and medicines in the district. Many stores have run dry. Supply from manufacturers/ producers and wholesalers to the retailers has been hit. Delivery boys are being stopped and manhandled by the police. How are you going to resolve it?

Only some went to their relatives' house. Some, whose houses were in a relatively better condition, were helped in making there places liveable. All of them were given one-month ration," he added.

ply going. By tomorrow (Thursday), there should not be any issue with the supply.

How will you ensure social distancing at stores and shops?

Our efforts are to re-establish the online supply system which is app-based. Also, we will start ten de-centralised mobile grocery stores from today (Wednesday). These will be vehicles in tie-up with the big retailers. These will go to specified places at specified time to supply items of basic necessities. Based on response, the number will be increased further.

Gurugram has seen the maximum number of COVID-19 cases in Haryana. In fact, more than half of the cases are from Gurugram. How well prepared the district administration is to deal with the situation in the coming days?

We are the financial capital of the State and a large number of people here are frequent travellers to foreign countries and their relatives. So we have seen more cases than the rest of the State. But we are comfortably placed in terms of doctors, paramedical staff and ventilators.

Based on our projections, we will be able to handle it. Also, 400 rooms are now available

in various hotels for quarantine facilities for those willing to pay, besides free facility arranged by the government.

What is the mechanism in place if residents need to come out of their homes in case of medical or any other emergency?

We will put in place an online pass system for the residents by today (Wednesday) evening to allow movement in case of an emergency. They can take out a print and will be allowed to venture out. But it will be applicable only inside the boundaries of the district.

How is the compliance to the lockdown regulations? Is there a need for stricter measures?

I am, in fact, very thankful to the residents that they have adhered to the lockdown regulations satisfactorily. I believe that if the basic needs of the residents are ta-

ken care of, the compliance will be good. Our focus is on ensuring that the essential items supply chain is effective.

What about the large population of daily-wagers and slum-dwellers? What is administration doing to fulfil their basic needs.

This matter may come up as the period of lock down stretches on. Though the State government has announced a few measures, we are working in close co-ordination with the volunteers, philanthropic and social organisations to build a platform for this and arrange donations. The headquarters has also decided to release some funds for this, but the numbers are not final yet.

What about the availability of masks and sanitisers and their black-marketing?

We have the district chemist association on board. They are abiding by the prices fixed by the

Goa to enlist volunteers to home deliver essential supplies

Customers denied permission to enter shops to make purchases; District Collectors to invite applications from shops and establishments willing to make deliveries

ADITYA ANAND

MUMBAI

A day after it was criticised for not giving adequate time for citizens to stock up on groceries and vegetables, the Goa government on Wednesday said all essential groceries and medicinal supplies would be home delivered to people by volunteers as the movement of individuals and private vehicles remained prohibited across the coastal State.

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, following a high-level committee meeting, said shops relating to the sale of food, groceries, fruits, vegetables, dairy and milk booths, meat, fish and animal fodder would be permitted to function only for the purpose of home delivery. "No public or customers will be permitted to enter the shops for purchase. District Collectors will invite applications from interested shops and establishments willing to do home delivery. A maximum of two persons will be permitted for delivery," Dr. Sawant said.

A notification said jurisdictional police inspectors would issue passes to volunteers who would carry out the home delivery of goods within a 1 km range.



Total shutdown: The usually busy 18th June Road in Panaji wears a deserted look, while Mandovi bridge is bereft of traffic on the first day of the lockdown in Goa on Wednesday. ■ ATISH POMBURFEEKAR

No delivery charges were to be charged, the government order said.

Food helpline set up

The government also announced the setting up of a food helpline. "Any person or organisation interested in arranging food for the homeless and needy as well those in need of food can contact this helpline. A medical helpline for medicines to senior citizens and divyangs was also established under the Food and

Drugs Administration," the government order said. The order also gave exemptions to Central and State government employees, sanitation workers, those employed in banks, insurance, telecom, Internet, cable television, e-commerce and allied areas to move around subject to displaying of their identity cards.

The Opposition said this was completely opposite to what other States were doing, where stores dealing

I am alarmed at the way this government is handling its response to COVID-19

VIJAI SARDESAI
Goa Forward Party president

with essential supplies like vegetables, milk, groceries etc were open to public with social distancing measures observed.

Goa Forward Party president and former Deputy Chief Minister, Vijai Sardesai, said, "National guide-

lines allow all shops selling essentials like grocery, milk, meat, fish, vegetables to be open. However, it does not apply to Goa. I am alarmed at the way this government is handling its response to COVID-19." Mr. Sardesai said his party corporators, local leaders and self-help groups would ensure home delivery to residents.

An incident of lathi charge was reported from the capital Panaji on Wednesday. Officials said des-

pite being told repeatedly, a shopkeeper in Merces was selling items, which resulted in crowding around the shop.

Team leaves for Pune

Meanwhile, a Dornier aircraft of the Indian Navy, with a team of four doctors from the Goa State Health department, left for Pune on Wednesday.

The medical team led by Dr. Savio Rodrigues, Head of Department, Microbiology, Goa Medical College,

will undergo training to set up a COVID-19 test facility at Goa.

A request to the Navy for providing air transport was received by Flag Officer Commanding, Goa Area, on March 24. The Navy immediately initiated necessary procedures for the aircraft take off. A few samples of COVID-19 suspects were also carried by the medical team for testing.

The medical team is likely to return to Goa on March 27 after the training.

Foreigners evacuated

ADITYA ANAND

MUMBAI

Three hundred and seventy foreign tourists from the U.K. and Russia, who came to Goa for holidaying but were left stranded owing to the COVID-19 outbreak, were flown out in two special relief flights on Wednesday.

The relief flights approved by the Indian government saw 249 tourists fly to Manchester, while another 121 left for Moscow. Goa Airport Director Gagan Malik said despite all odds and skeletal staff on duty, the relief flights to Manchester and Moscow were handled. "There a few more of these special ferry flights that are planned in the coming days," Mr. Malik said.

This is the fifth ferry charter departures from Goa in the past three days. On March 22, about 1,000 tourists flew out of Goa in three ferry charter flights.

We will celebrate Gudi Padwa once we tackle this crisis: CM

Refrains from making negative comments about the Centre

ALOK DESHPANDE

MUMBAI

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Wednesday refrained from making any negative comments about the Centre even as he acknowledged the panic buying spree in the State after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech on Tuesday announcing the 21-day nationwide lockdown.

Mr. Thackeray in his daily address to the people said, "I know what you have been through last night. It is a war-like situation so I have compared this novel coronavirus with war. When we are not aware of the enemy then the enemy will attack us, so we have to be aware as we cannot see this enemy." He urged people to stay indoors to check the spread of the disease.

Extending greetings on Gudi Padwa, Mr. Thackeray said the festival, which marks the start of the Marathi New Year, will be celebrated only after defeating the novel coronavirus. He said, "Today is Gudi Padwa. Ideally it should have been a



Subdued festivities: A couple dons masks while celebrating Gudi Padwa in Girgaum on Wednesday. ■ VIVEK BENDRE

festive mood. But we are being forced to stay indoors. We are going to celebrate it but only after defeating this virus," he said. On the Central government's directive to switch off air conditioners, he said it won't be a bad idea to let in the fresh air in homes by opening windows.

In an attempt to cheer up citizens, Mr. Thackeray said, "May be this lockdown is bringing families together, something we have lost over the years. I am at home listening to Mrs. CM, you listen to your home minister."

He added, "We have sufficient stock of commodities like vegetables, rice and other items of daily use, so there is no need to worry. All shops selling essential goods are open too. We will celebrate Gudi Padwa once we tackle this crisis." He also reminded establishments to pay employees. "Many are talking about daily wage labourers. What about them? We have been in talks with corporates. They are coming forward to help. I again urge you not to stop paying your employees," he said.

Power demand crashes in State

Daily consumption has fallen by 20% since last month

SHARAD VYAS

MUMBAI

The economic impact of the novel coronavirus is starting to be felt in the State, which is witnessing a sharp drop in energy demands as a result of the continuing industrial and commercial shut down.

The total daily demand has fallen by 20% to 17,850 megawatts (MW) from the record high of 21,000 MW, around a month ago on February 21. Not only is the revenue of the Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Limited (MSEDCL) likely to dip, the financial situation will worsen since most of the shut industries are cross-subsidising individual and households. The supply is also likely to crash since the transportation of coal is getting affected during the lockdown imposed to contain spread of the virus, senior officials said.

In a meeting on Wednesday, the State government issued directives to impose a moratorium on penalties and interests on bills pending on due date for this month. The 31-day lockdown period will not be taken into account while calculating penalties. The

payment for consumption in the period can also be submitted on a later date, officials said. "The Chief Minister has clarified, we [consumer and the government] are in this together. Until the crisis is over, we will not even take meter readings for individuals and household, instead they would be allowed to take a reading and submit it to us. We are sure there will not be a fraud in this and we trust our consumers during this period. No power connections will be cut during this period on account of violation and non-payment," an official said.

The government said since the supply could also be impacted, as has happened on the national level with India's power supply crashing to 29,750 lakh units (LU) from 35,650 LU, a proposal would be sent to procure power from private players. It is looking at buying 250MW of other forms of electricity, like solar, from private companies willing to sell. "This is a serious threat to MSEDCL which is already under lot of financial stress. Next three months are crucial from the economic point of view," an official said.



Long wait: People stand in queue to secure gas cylinders at a distribution centre in Mumbai on Wednesday. ■ VIVEK BENDRE

Ashwini Bhide part of CM's special taskforce

She was removed as MMRCL chief

SHARAD VYAS

MUMBAI

Former Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation Limited (MMRCL) managing director Ashwini Bhide, who had locked horns with the Shiv Sena over the Metro 3 car shed project was named in the 11-member task force set up to tackle COVID-19.

The 'controversial but efficient' bureaucrat has been tasked with the responsibility of managing transport and traffic arrangements in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) and coordinating between concerned agencies in this regard.

The Mahा Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government had earlier moved Ms. Bhide out of her position as the MD of MMRCL, replacing her with Ranjit Singh Deol, an IAS officer of the 1998 batch, owing to her stand on the chopping of trees inside Aarey colony to take make way for a Metro project. Ms. Bhide was not assigned a new posting in the interim.

"We have handpicked our best officers for this task force which will run the control room in these tough



times. She has also been asked to coordinate with private services like Ola and Uber to ensure smooth vehicular movement for essential services," an official said.

The order to set up the task force, which has been handicapped by the CM, was issued by Chief Secretary Ajay Mehta. The team consists of some of the senior most officers in the force. The other members are additional chief secretaries Manoj Saunik, Nitin Katre, Rajeev Jalota, health secretary Pradeep Vyas, and secretaries Bhushan Gagrani, Sanjay Mukherjee, Sanjay Khandare, Prajakta Lavangare, Anup Kumar Yadav and Kishore Raje Nimbalkar.

Migrant workers in Gujarat leave for homes on foot

Out of work due to nationwide lockdown, workers return to villages despite threat of contracting virus

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

AHMEDABAD

In the wake of the novel coronavirus outbreak and the 21-day nationwide lockdown, thousands of migrant workers from Rajasthan working in different parts of Gujarat have started walking back to their native places in the absence of transport facility.

Gujarat Police have been trying to convince them to abide by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal to avoid travelling. A Congress leader from Ahmedabad has asked the party-led government in Rajasthan to arrange some transportation after these workers reach the Gujarat-Rajasthan border near Shamlaji town of Aravalli district, also known as the Ratanpur border.

Radheesh Patel, a native of Rajasthan's Dungarpur district and working in Ahmedabad, said there is no point in staying in Gujarat without any income. He said, "Most of us work here at tea stalls or food joints. Since everything is shut, our employers have asked us to come back only after things



Such a long journey: Migrant workers board a truck to return to their villages, in Ahmedabad on Wednesday. ■ REUTERS

get normal, as they don't have money to pay us. Since buses and other modes of transport are not available, we have decided to walk to reach our homes."

Question of survival

Mr. Patel was part of a 50-member group that started its journey on foot on Tuesday night from the city's Narayanpura area to reach the Ratanpur border, around 150 km from Ahmedabad.

"I know there is the threat of the virus, but we are helping

Over 350 detained in a day

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

AHMEDABAD

Over 350 people were detained in the last 24 hours in Gujarat for violating the lockdown, a senior official said on Wednesday. Those detained include people who violated home quarantine norms, Director General of Police Shivanand Jha said.

Speaking to reporters

the migrant workers on humanitarian grounds.

He said, "We are trying our best to discourage these migrant workers from moving to Rajasthan. This will defeat the purpose of the lockdown. Since they are desperate to reach their homes, we are providing them food and water during their journey. We are also taking action against the factory owners who have not done enough to keep these workers here."

Mayanksinh Chavda, Inspector General, Gandhinagar Range, said the police personnel are providing food packets and water to

Congress president Ashok Punjabi said over 50,000 workers left on foot from Ahmedabad alone for Rajasthan. He said, "I spoke to Rajasthan Chief Minister on this issue. I urged him to arrange bus service for migrants once they reach the Ratanpur border," he said.

Many migrant labourers started their journey on foot from as far as Surat as they have been asked by their employers and landlords to leave, said Mr. Punjabi.

Gujarat Migrant Workers'

in Gandhinagar, Mr. Jha said, "The police are doing their best to enforce the lockdown. People have also come forward to give their full cooperation to make it a success."

The police and local administration have ensured that essential services, including grocery and medicine shops, are not affected, he said.

Speaking to reporters

Unseasonal rain strikes parts of State

Showers exacerbate farmers' losses after APMCs shut down

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE

PUNE

Unseasonal rain, coupled with hail and lightning, was witnessed in parts of western Maharashtra, Pune and Kolhapur districts and in isolated areas in the Marathwada region on Wednesday.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the high temperatures coupled with excess humidity in the past few days have led to an upper air cyclonic circulation over south Madhya Maharashtra, creating conditions for thundershowers accompanied with hail and light to moderate rain in isolated parts.

Gusty winds accompanied by rain briefly buffeted Pune city, rural parts of the district, Kolhapur city and Kolhapur's Panhala tehsil.

On Tuesday, similar weather conditions were witnessed over Ahmednagar district, with intense bouts of unseasonal rain damaging orange fruit orchards spread over 50 hectares in the district's Kedgaon locality.

Unseasonal rain has exacerbated farmers' losses amid the lockdown imposed



Quick action: Farmers rush to collect turmeric kept out to dry as it begins to drizzle in Karad on Wednesday. ■ RAJU SANADI

to check the spread of the novel coronavirus pandemic. Vegetables and fruits ready to be sold in market yards were left to rot in fields owing to the complete shutdown of agricultural produce market committees (APMCs) in many districts.

Dr. Kashyapi said an induced cyclonic circulation over the western part of Rajasthan had led to moisture incursion over parts of western India, which then coupled with the moisture incursion over the Arabian Sea would result in unseasonal climatic conditions over the next few days. Earlier this week, Pune city had recorded daytime temperatures of over 37 degrees Celsius. In some districts in the Vidarbha region, mercury touched 40 degrees Celsius.

Dr. Kashyapi said an induced cyclonic circulation over the western part of Rajasthan had led to moisture incursion over parts of western India, which then coupled with the moisture incursion over the Arabian Sea would result in unseasonal climatic conditions over the next few days. Earlier this week, Pune city had recorded daytime temperatures of over 37 degrees Celsius. In some districts in the Vidarbha region, mercury touched 40 degrees Celsius.

Total prohibition imposed in Kerala

Bevco outlets closed, but govt. weighing online sale option

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
The Kerala government on Wednesday imposed total prohibition in the State to prevent people from queuing up in front of State-run liquor outlets during the COVID-19 outbreak.

However, it is weighing a proposal to allow the Kerala



Maintaining vigil: Police personnel holding a flag march in Kannur on Wednesday in the wake of a complete lockdown. ■ S.K. MOHAN

the previous financial year. Bevco operates around 280 outlets across the State.

The Excise Department had earlier cautioned the government that a total ban on the sale of legal liquor could open the door for the entry of bootlegging and illicit spirit of dubious quality and suspicious provenance into Kerala. It had pointed out that the government had not reckoned excise enforcement as an essential service and could therefore not use more officers for field inspections and border checks.

The Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) Opposition and the Indian Medical Association had flagged the need to shutter liquor

shops to stop people from gathering publicly.

The police and Excise Department had told the government that tight lines in front of the Bevco outlets posed public health risk.

Moreover, various trade unions had told the government that an increasing number of Bevco employees had expressed reluctance to report for duty out of fear.

New Ordinance

Kerala has proposed the enactment of Kerala Epidemic Diseases Ordinance 2020 as part of the State's efforts to tighten regulations to make epidemic control more efficient and effective and to ensure the compliance of pu-

blic health directives of the State. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said that the Cabinet had approved the Ordinance and has requested the Governor to approve it. The new Ordinance has been drawn up by annulling the existing Travancore Epidemic Diseases Act and Cochin Epidemic Diseases Act and making the Epidemic Diseases Act 1897 invalid in Malabar region.

The said Ordinance will give the State sweeping powers to close State borders if required in a public health emergency; impose strict regulations of public and private transport and control the functioning of public and private offices and educational institutions.

Sixty-eight foreigners quarantined in Kollam ashram

All of them were staying at the Mata Amritanandamayi Math

K.S. SUDHI

KOCHI
Two Italians and 66 other foreigners staying at the Mata Amritanandamayi Math have been shifted to a quarantine facility controlled by the Kollam district administration at the Math itself following suspicion of quarantine and surveillance protocol violation.

the labs are flooded with samples. Till now, none in the visiting group has developed any symptoms of the disease, he said.

The first set of foreigners, including those from COVID-19-hit countries, arrived during the last week of February.

The Indians came on March 4 and 5 and the last batch arrived on March 7. Though they were staying at the Math for the last 20 days, their personal details were

not fully shared by the Math with the authorities concerned. It was only on March 22 that the complete details were made available, reliable source said.

Math clarifies

The Math has been closely following the health instructions of the authorities, according to a communication issued by it.

The 58 foreigners, who reached the Math after February 25, have been put in

Nine more test positive for COVID-19 in Kerala

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

On Wednesday, nine more positive cases of COVID-19 were reported in Kerala. This includes three cases in Ernakulam, two each in Pathanamthitta and Palakkad and one case each in Kozhikode and Idukki. Announcing this, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said that the total number of COVID-19 patients currently under treatment in the State has gone to 112. Of the nine cases, six were people who had flown in from Dubai, the U.K. and France while the remaining three cases were contacts of the imported cases.

State declares free ration for all cardholders

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala government on Wednesday decided to give free provisions to all ration cardholders in the State. Below poverty line cardholders will get an additional 35 kg of rice free next month. Other sections of cardholders, including those above the poverty line and those holding non-priority cards, would get up to 15 kg of rice free. The government would also give free provision kits to those under home quarantine.

Hyderabad Commissioner holds meet in jam-packed hall

Top brass sets a wrong example on physical distancing

ABHINAY DESHPANDE

HYDERABAD

A hall packed with representatives of essential services for a meeting with Hyderabad Commissioner of Police Anjani Kumar on Wednesday shows the extent to which social distancing is being ignored at this time of COVID-19 pandemic, with the top brass setting a wrong example.

What is worse is that these very people, who were seen sitting and standing close to one another at the meeting held by Mr. Kumar and top officers of the city police, already came in contact and will continue to do so with hordes of people as part of their essential supply chain.

Though each one of them was made to wash their hands with liquid soaps at the entry gate and later given hand sanitizers, social distancing was not maintained leaving a chance for



Wrong move: Representatives of essential services attending a meeting organised by Hyderabad Commissioner.

the virus to spread, if there were to be any carrier among them.

The meeting, which saw the presence of Principal Secretary (IT) Jayesh Ranjan and several senior police officers, lasted for close to three hours.

Police personnel present and staff at the CP office were worried after seeing the large gathering. The main concept of lockdown was to make sure people don't come in large numbers

and gather at a place. Additional Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Anil Kumar appeared terrified at the huge turnout and was seen wearing a premium mask.

The conference hall at Mr. Kumar's office in Basheerbagh has a capacity to seat 180 to 200 people.

Several representatives from hospitals, marketing, cable operators, pharmacies and groceries, had to stand because the hall was jam-packed.

COVID-19: Karnataka sees 10 new cases, total rises to 51

The total includes one death and 3 persons who are cured

AFSHAN YASMEEN

BENGALURU

Ten new cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed in Karnataka on Wednesday taking the total number of cases to 51.

The 51 cases include one death and three persons who have been discharged.

The new cases include a 37-year-old woman resident of Chitradurga who had a history of travel to Guyana and arrived in Bengaluru via

Delhi on March 20. She has been isolated at a designated hospital in Davangere.

A 63-year-old man and his 59-year-old wife, who returned from South America-Brazil, Argentina; two persons aged 26, who travelled together from Spain and landed in Bengaluru via Dubai; a 63-year-old woman and her 69-year-old husband, who returned from Athens and London; a 9-year-old girl, daughter of

another positive patient and a 7-year-old contact of this patient have all tested positive. All of them are residents of Bengaluru and have been isolated and are treated at designated hospitals in the city.

This apart, a 34-year-old man, resident of Udupi, who returned from Dubai has also tested positive. He has been isolated in Udupi. Contact tracing has been initiated for all the cases.

Almanac reading a low-key affair

Welcoming Telugu New Year, reader appeals to people to be alert till May 22

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD

The almanac reading at the official Ugadi celebrations here on Wednesday attributed the ongoing spell of the COVID-19 to the trail of harm left by the outgoing 'Vikari Nama' year in its final phase.

Welcoming the Telugu New Year 'Sarvari Nama', almanac reader Bachampally Santosh Kumar Sastri appealed to the people to be alert till May 22 when the spillover of Vikari Nama will cease to be active. He regretted that the outgoing year passed on the baton to the new year, creating an alarming situation for people.

The celebrations were a low-key affair at the office of endowments at Boggalkunta in Hyderabad due to the restrictions imposed by government.

Endowments Minister A. Indrakaran Reddy, Advisor (Culture) K.V. Ramanachary and Endowments Commiss-



Bachampally Santosh Kumar Sastri reading the almanac at the office of endowments at Boggalkunta in Hyderabad.

sioner V. Anil Kumar were among the small gathering present in a hall.

Mr. Sastri asked people to heed to the advice of the State government to stay indoors and not move freely. They would invite trouble if they felt they were physically strong to weather the hazards of the virus. People should perform Chandi Ya-

kas to stay free, he said.

As the new year will be under the influence of Sun God, he appealed to people not to eat non-vegetarian food on Sundays. There was no restriction on eating the same on other week days.

Good rains predicted

Mr. Sastri predicted good rains and a good harvest of crop this year but the State's

financial position might not be strong, he said.

Finance Minister T. Harish Rao would face a challenging situation, he said.

Mr. Sastri expected subsidies for people to be cut this year under the impact of economic slowdown world over.

People would also face increasing price rise. The prices of petrol and diesel would skyrocket. Some scandals would surface in education sector and the real estate would also take a backseat, he added.

The police would deliver good results in meeting law and order problems but they must be watchful about cyber crimes. The media must tread cautiously.

The State could experience tremors in June-July, he said.

Mr. Indrakaran Reddy and Mr. Ramanachary talked about the harm perpetrated by the virus.

Lockdown: police turn Samaritans in Chittoor

Food packets distributed to destitutes and elderly

STAFF REPORTER

CHITTOOR

Though there was hardly any sign of celebration of Ugadi in Chittoor town on Wednesday under the shadow of COVID-19 lockdown, the Chittoor police swung into action to celebrate the auspicious occasion in a unique way – caring the hungry and have-nots caught in the lockdown.

After the announcement of the 21-day nation-wide lockdown, SP (Chittoor) K. Eeshwar Reddy and Chittoor II-Town CI P. Yugandhar launched the distribution at noon at the new APSRTC bus station, private bus station, near the railway station and at the arterial junctions in

Chittoor. The police personnel and volunteers spotted the sick, the destitute persons and the elderly and distributed food packets and water sachets to them. The beneficiaries, several of whom have been hungry since a couple of days, were overwhelmed at the gesture.

At Puttur, Deputy SP D. Murlidhar and his team prepared food packets for about 300 persons and distributed them.

The gesture covered the target group in Nagari, Karveti Nagaram, Nindra, and Satyavedu circles. Similar activity was conducted at Palamaner and Madanapalle sub-divisions.

61 orphans stranded at Telangana home

SWATHI VADLAMUDI

HYDERABAD

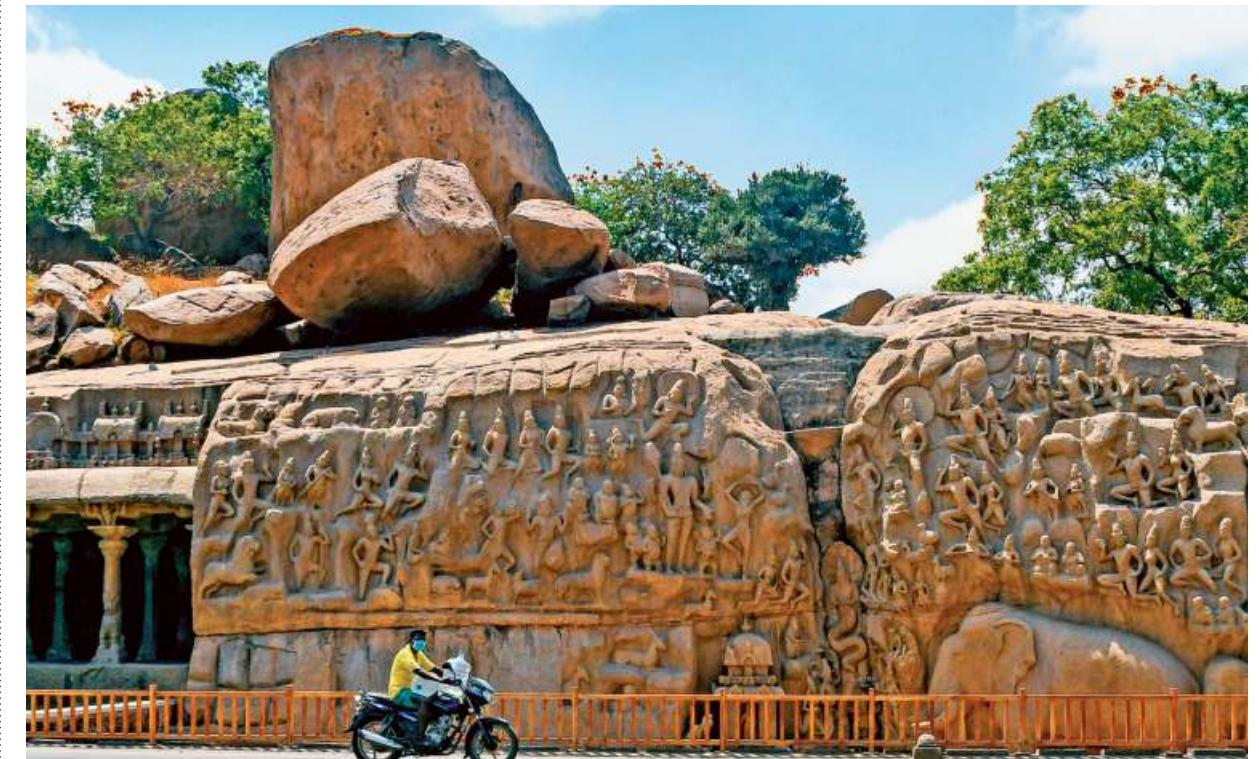
Exams are over, school children are home and watched over 24x7 by cautious parents, more so in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

But the students of the Victoria Memorial Home Residential School in Saroor-nagar in Telangana have no place to go.

Ranging between six and 16 years of age, the children are orphans and do not have a place to call home except the school. "There were 865 students in all, and a majority of them have gone back to their villages and to relatives' places in view of the spread of the pandemic.

These children, 61 of them, left in the hostels do not have anybody, hence it is our responsibility to care for

Road less taken



Rare sight: One of the main roads at Mamallapuram in Tamil Nadu looking deserted on Wednesday after the government announced total lockdown. ■ B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

Andhra Pradesh pilgrims stranded in Varanasi

Say they are forced to stay in lodge without proper food

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NELLORE

A group of pilgrims from Nellore of Andhra Pradesh, who are stranded in Kashi, are clueless on returning home as the Centre imposed a three-week nationwide lockdown from Wednesday.

In all, 27 members of the group had left for Kashi from here on March 16. Everything went off well till March 22 when Prime Minister announced the 'Janata curfew' on Sunday, forcing them to postpone their journey by the Ganga-Kaveri Express.

They were hoping to return to Andhra Pradesh during this week.

"With almost all eateries closing down, we are finding it difficult to get even one



The pilgrims from Nellore who are stranded in Varanasi.

pared for an extended stay in Varanasi. Police personnel are forcing us to confine ourselves to a lodge," complained Seshamma.

Language problem has only added to the woes of the pilgrims. "We will be grateful if the authorities arrange for our safe return at the earliest," said another pilgrim Vijayalakshmi.

'No community transmission yet'

Health Ministry says COVID-19 positive cases have touched 606, with 10 deaths

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Union Health Ministry on Wednesday said there was "no community transmission yet," with the country registering 606 COVID-19 positive cases with 10 deaths.

COVID-19

The Ministry's data indicate that 563 Indians and 43 foreigners have tested positive, with 553 active cases. "So far, 15,24,266 passengers have been screened at our airports and 22,928 samples collected," it said. Joint Secretary in the Health Ministry, Luv Agarwal, told presspersons that the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) had indicated that no community transmission had been found so far.

Speaking about the Delhi death registered on Tuesday night allegedly due to COVID-19, Mr. Agarwal said the subsequent sample testing gave a negative report, which led the Ministry to revise its numbers.



No help: A physically-disabled man had to leave empty-handed due to a shortage of food in New Delhi. ■ BIBEK CHETTRI

Punya Salila Srivastava, Joint Secretary, Home Ministry, noted that all measures are being taken to allow adherence by public of the Prime Minister's call for 21-day lockdown to fight the spread of COVID-19. "We are working with various agencies to ensure that essential supplies reach the general public. We are also encouraging e-commerce companies and State governments on home delivery."

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Wednesday highlighted the critical importance of social distancing, home quarantine protocols and supporting medical staff in combating COVID-19, after the Group of Ministers had a meeting at Nirman Bhawan.

He said around 64,000 persons have arrived from other countries to India since March 21, 2020 of which 8,000 had been put in various quarantine facilities and 56,000 were in home isolation.

"We are fighting an infectious disease. In order to protect ourselves and others, it is highly important that we follow all the proto-

cols, guidelines and directions issued by the government, failing which may lead to legal actions under Section 188 of IPC," said the Minister.

He urged that medical staff should not be ostracised and that the public should avoid spreading rumours or unauthenticated information

GoM meeting

Giving information about the GoM meeting, Dr. Harsh Vardhan said the Ministers discussed about strengthening the capacity of States, which need to devote adequate resources for creating dedicated COVID-19 hospitals, equipping the medical institutes with PPEs, ventilators and other essential equipment etc. "States have been asked to ensure that essential services and supplies remain open," he said.

He said Gujarat, Assam, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Goa, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir were setting up hospitals dedicated for the management of COVID-19.

4 ICMR labs to become approval hubs for test kits

Mylab was the first to be validated

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) has approved three other centres, alongside the National Institute of Virology (NIV), as agencies for approving diagnostic kits. These are the National AIDS Research Institute, Pune; the National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Diseases, Kolkata; and the National Institute of Pathology, New Delhi, according to a notification issued by the ICMR, signed by Director General Balram

Bhargava.

While the rules require that only kits approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and European CE be allowed, ICMR chief Balram Bhargava said last week in press briefing that this was no longer mandatory and Indian diagnostic kit manufacturers were permitted so long as their product was approved by the NIV. Mylab, a diagnostic kit maker in Pune, was the first such indigenous maker of kits to be validated on Monday.

VIVEK NARAYANAN
CHENNAI

The Chennai Corporation in Tamil Nadu has rescued a 65-year-old Japanese man who was found roaming on the streets near Albert theatre on Wednesday.

According to the police, Satoro Somaya, 65, was found by Corporation officials in Egmore.

"When we spoke to him, he said that he had come to Tamil Nadu on March 1 and had gone to Tiruvannamalai. A week ago, he came to Chennai and has been staying in a hotel," said a Corporation official.

However, it is suspected that the hotel asked him to vacate recently. "As all the flights have been cancelled, he was roaming on the streets. We rescued him around 11 a.m.," said the official.

The officials said that they had contacted the Japanese Embassy, which promised help. "However, until till 1 p.m. no one had arrived. The Japanese national has been calm and was meditating," said the official. Later in the evening, the embassy personnel arrived and took him with them. ■ R. RAGU

The officials said that they had contacted the Japanese Embassy, which promised help. "However, until till 1 p.m. no one had arrived. The Japanese national has been calm and was meditating," said the official. Later in the evening, the embassy personnel arrived and took him with them. ■ R. RAGU

"I am in charge of the paperwork and therefore I

Stranded Japanese national rescued in TN.

65-year-old found outside a hotel



The Japanese national rescued by Corporation officials. ■ R. RAGU

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD; POLLUTION DATA: CPCB; MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.00 HRS)
Forecast for Thursday: Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning, hail and gusty wind very likely at isolated places over Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Uttarakhand, west Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and west Madhya Pradesh; with lightning and gusty wind over Gujarat and with lightning at isolated places over Punjab, Delhi, Maharashtra, and east Madhya Pradesh.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	...-33.2...	18.4		Kozhikode	...-36.4...	26.0	
Ahmedabad	-37.7	23.5		Kurnool	...-38.7...	24.8	
Aizawl	-25.6	14.1		Lucknow	...-33.5...	20.6	
Allahabad	-35.2	18.8		Madurai	...-37.3...	25.1	
Bengaluru	-34.7	21.0		Mangaluru	...-34.7...	21.0	
Bhopal	-35.8	20.4		Mumbai	...-34.1...	26.0	
Bhubaneswar	-34.8	22.6		Mysuru	...-33.6...	20.6	
Chandigarh	0.6			New Delhi	1.4	32.2	16.4
Chennai	-33.5	24.4		Patna	...-33.8...	20.2	
Coimbatore	-36.6	23.8		Port Blair	...-31.7...	22.6	
Dehradun	...			Puducherry	...-33.6...	23.6	
Gangtok	-17.0	10.6		Pune	...-37.8...	21.9	
Goa	-32.2	25.3		Raipur	...-35.5...	23.7	
Guwahati	-32.0	16.8		Ranchi	...-31.2...	17.4	
Hubballi	-34.0	23.0		Shillong	0.2	20.6	3.0
Hyderabad	-35.1	22.8		Shimla	10.8	19.7	7.0
Imphal	1.0	16.6		Srinagar	1.3	13.0	6.4
Jaipur	2.0	34.0	19.6	Thiruvananthapuram	0.4	34.4	25.3
Kochi	0.4	33.0	27.0	Tiruchi	...-37.4...	24.0	
Kohima	-20.4	11.2		Vijayawada	...-33.6...	20.6	
Kolkata	-32.9	23.1		Visakhapatnam	...-32.2...	25.6	

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Yesterday

In observation made at 6.00 p.m., Muzaffarpur, Bihar recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 275 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Jalandhar, Punjab received a healthy AQI score of 35.

Pollutants in the air you are breathing
CITIES SO₂ NO_x CO PM2.5 PM10 CODE
Ahmedabad 54 34 31 ... 48 ... 90 ■■■■■
Bengaluru 08 21 47 73 ... 47 ... ■■■■■
Chennai 05 05 63 ... 47 ... ■■■■■
Delhi 10 23 23 72 ... 96 ... ■■■■■
Hyderabad 14 08 21 50 ... 64 ... ■■■■■
Kolkata 16 37 12 127 ... 98 ... ■■■■■
Lucknow 05 18 55 ... 257 ... ■■■■■
Mumbai 07 21 10 54 110 ... ■■■■■
Pune 32 11 54 ... 40 38 ... ■■■■■
Visakhapatnam ... 43 20 ... 44 65 ... ■■■■■

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■■ Moderate ■■■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)
SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.
NO_x: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.
CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

Why lockdown is for 21 days

Scientific data led to decision on the quarantine period

RAMYA KANNAN
CHENNAI

Is there any public health/ epidemiological significance to the 21-day lockdown period announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi?

It seems that rich scientific data has fed this decision to announce a 21-day lockdown period. In fact, 21-day quarantines have been discussed elaborately in the context of Ebola and the calculations are based on the estimated incubation period of the virus in a human host. The 21-day quarantine value is derived from interpretations of outbreak data, past and present, public health experts said.

In epidemiological terms, the logic is that we have arrived at an incubation period of 14 days. Give another week for the residual infection to die out, for the tail end, to be entirely safe, and you arrive at 21 days," says Tamil Nadu's Director of Public Health K. Kolandasamy. This being a new corona virus, they have estimated that the median incubation period (the time

between the entry of virus to the onset of symptoms/ disease) falls within this period.

Science Daily recently reported of a new study in the journal *Annals of Internal Medicine* that calculates that the median incubation period for COVID-19 is just over five days and that 97.5% of people who develop symptoms will do so within 11.5 days of infection. Researchers headed by Nicholas Reich, Associate Professor in the School of Public Health and Home Sciences, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, reportedly examined 181 confirmed cases with identifiable exposure and symptom onset windows to estimate the incubation period of COVID-19.

They conclude that 'the current period of active monitoring recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [14 days] is well supported by the evidence.' Prof. Reich, it said, heads a flu forecasting collaborative that has produced some of the world's most accurate models in recent years.

Dr. Kolandasamy explained that in the interim, the lockdown or quarantine also creates some breathing space – to convince people of the seriousness of the situation and build positive public opinion, carry out disinfection of all buildings, vehicles and surfaces, and allows hospitals to prepare themselves for the next phase of operations. "We cannot stay at home indefinitely, but we must make our sacrifice count, so people need to follow these instructions strictly, as if their life depended on it. It does, you know," he said.

This will help the government track and eventually coordinate delivery of essentials to the doorsteps of the quarantined.

T.N. police launch COVID-19 safety apps

VIVEK NARAYANAN
CHENNAI

The Tiruvallur police have launched a platform, that includes an application with facial recognition features, to communicate with and track those under home quarantine.

A total of 15,298 people are under home quarantine

in the State. Since Tuesday the police have booked three persons, in Kodambakkam, Koyambedu and Anna Nagar, for leaving their homes despite being quarantined for having symptoms.

In Tiruvallur district, a total of 171 persons are under home quarantine. Hence the

MUMBAI



PATNA



Tough times: Women carrying a gas cylinder from a distribution centre in south Mumbai on Wednesday and people queuing up outside a store to buy essential commodities in Patna on Wednesday. ■ VIVEK BENDRE & RANJEET KUMAR

Railways cancels all trains till April 14

NEW DELHI The Railways have announced the cancellation of all passenger trains, mail, express, suburban trains and trains of the metro rail up to April 14, in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak. However, freight operations would continue, the Railways said in an official statement. The Railway Board has also announced the suspension of bookings for all types of journeys till April 14. E-ticketing facilities for booking of reserved tickets for journey after April 14 will be available online.

Forum seeks release of 'foreigners' in Assam

GUWAHATI A forum for justice has written to the Supreme Court seeking the release of "declared foreigners" from six detention centres of Assam on humanitarian grounds in view of the COVID-19 outbreak. In its appeal on Wednesday, the Justice and Liberty Initiative (JLI) said the apex court's effort to ensure the release of certain prisoners so that the jails do not become breeding grounds for COVID-19 should be extended to the declared foreigners.

Mizoram man tests positive for virus

GUWAHATI A 50-year-old man from Mizoram who returned from the Netherlands on March 16 has tested positive for COVID-19. State's Health Minister Dr. R. Lalhlanglana said on Wednesday. His is the second case in the Northeast. The first was that of a 23-year-old student who returned to his hometown, Imphal, Manipur's capital, from the U.K. on March 21. The man, along with his wife and two children, who accompanied him on his trip to Europe, have been kept at an isolation ward in Mizoram capital Aizawl's Zoram Medical College.

T.N. CM seeks ₹4,000 crore from Centre

CHENNAI Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami on Wednesday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to provide a special assistance of ₹4,000 crore for taking precautionary measures and financial relief measures over the loss being caused by COVID-19. The Chief Minister also requested that the fiscal deficit limits of 3% of GSDP be relaxed for the financial years 2019-20 and 2020-21.

JAWAHARLAL INSTITUTE OF POSTGRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION AND RESEARCH (JIPMER)

(An Institution of National Importance under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare), Dhanvantri Nagar, Puducherry - 605 006



A long road

The unprecedented lockdown can work only if governments help people stay homebound

India's unprecedented 21-day national lockdown is an unparalleled effort at stopping the march of a fast-spreading scourge that has overwhelmed the health infrastructure of several nations. Although the Centre seems to have thought of such a move in advance in a bid to flatten the curve of transmission of the novel coronavirus, the enforcement has left millions of people unprepared for the severe disruption. The janata curfew, on Sunday, ahead of the lockdown was obviously a drill for the three-week imposition, but the government failed to anticipate the complex issues involved in confining over a billion people to their homes. Of course, as a public health measure, the full national lockdown announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is being welcomed by the medical community as a necessary measure to cut the transmission chain of the virus. Fresh arrival of travellers from abroad has already been stopped, and three weeks is long enough to allow for symptomatic cases of COVID-19 disease to emerge. This should give the government sufficient time to plan a treatment response. But for the lockdown to serve its purpose, it should lead to wider testing of all suspected cases. Regrettably, the lack of planning on the lockdown resulted in another bout of crowding, with people rushing out to buy essential supplies and medicines. There were instances of mindless police violence against workers performing routine jobs. The virtual curfew could have been made far less stressful through prior discussion with the States, and unambiguous communication to the public. Clearly, State agencies did not follow the order issued by the Home Ministry under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, spelling out provisions on essential services.

If the prolonged lockdown is to be executed without too much trauma for the general public, there has to be a war room approach. Chief among the measures needed is reliable access to food, water, medicines and emergency assistance. Here, some States have moved early and announced cash relief and free rations. The challenge is to ensure effective implementation. Again, if movement is to be restricted, essentials must be delivered virtually at the doorstep. This is enabled explicitly by the Home Ministry's order. Allowing delivery of medicines by pharmacies is important and essential personnel must be given passes that protect them from police harassment and ensure movement of goods. There is also a deplorable trend of social discrimination against health workers handling COVID-19 cases, which must be sternly dealt with. The onus is on the Central and State governments to provide for everyone during the lockdown, and they should be working round the clock. Otherwise, people will be forced into a situation where breaking the curfew might seem the safer alternative to deprivation and suffering in isolation.

The efficacy of a protracted three-week-long countrywide lockdown in the fight against the pandemic aside, what is very clear is that the shutdown is set to bring the approximately ₹200-lakh crore national economy close to a shuddering standstill. The ramifications are already so wide-ranging that measuring the fallout merely in terms of lost economic output would be grossly inadequate. The hardest hit are the millions of daily wage earners, the self-employed and small businesses, and the rural landless poor. Vulnerable segments of the workforce face the immediate prospect of a lack of income as well as hunger. On a larger scale, with public transport services now withdrawn and private vehicular movement severely restricted to the barest delivery of essential services, it is hard to see how people employed even in vital sectors of manufacturing or the utilities would be able to reach their workplaces. While the Finance Minister on Tuesday announced a welcome slew of tax and regulatory compliance-related deadline deferments as well as some credit-related relief to the MSME sector, the combined steps will at best be of marginal help to tackle the unprecedented economic crisis. Any package to address it therefore demands a set of mitigation and subsequent stimulus measures that would need to be of an exceptional scale and require implementation on a war footing.

For a start, the Centre must abandon its fiscal deficit goals at this moment of a worldwide healthcare and economic crisis that is set to tip the global economy into a recession, at the very least in the near term. In keeping with what some State governments as well as most developed economies have already announced, the Centre needs to immediately release sizeable cash grants to all persons with Jan-Dhan accounts and BPL ration cards and use its various social welfare schemes including PM-KISAN and MGNREGA to ensure that the reach of such financial aid is maximised countrywide. The plan must also encompass a broad swathe of spending measures. These should include substantial investments in public health infrastructure targeted at COVID-19 treatment – for which a beginning has been made with an allocation of ₹15,000 crore – as well as provisions for free services to all financial aid recipients; loan repayment holidays and a wage bill subsidy to all MSME businesses that retain their workforce at pre-crisis levels; and once the lockdown is lifted, a huge public infrastructure creation backed spending push to generate jobs and restart economic activity. A modest doubling of the budgeted fiscal deficit figure for 2020-21 could see about ₹16-lakh crore being freed up for the Centre to both spend directly and provide capital support in the form of grants and subsidies to State governments and banks. The government would do well to use the crisis as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to address both the economy's and the public's well-being. The lives and livelihoods lost to the pandemic should not be in vain.

Dressing a wounded economy

The two major tools that the government has available before it are monetary policy and fiscal actions



C. RANGARAJAN

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic is now felt by almost every country. First, there are the health effects of the virus, and second is the economic impact of the various actions that have to be taken to combat the virus. The world is experiencing an additional slowdown on top of the contracting tendencies already present and India is no exception. The economic impact on India can be traced through four channels: external demand; domestic demand; supply disruptions, and financial market disturbances.

External, domestic demand
As the economies of the developed countries slow down (some people are even talking of recession), their demand for imports of goods will go down and this will affect our exports which are even now not doing well. In fact after six months of negative growth, it was only in January that Indian exports showed positive growth. The extent of decline will depend on how severely the other economies are affected. Not only merchandise exports but also service exports will suffer. Besides these, the IT industry, travel, transport and hotel industries will be affected. The only redeeming feature in the external sector is the fall in oil prices. India's oil import bill will come down substantially. But this will affect adversely the oil exporting countries which absorb Indian labour. Remittances may slow down.

To ward off the spread of the coronavirus, the government has declared a lockdown of the country.

As passengers travel less, the transportation industry, road, rail and air, is cutting down schedules, sometimes drastically. This will affect in turn several other sectors closely related to them. The laying off of non-permanent employees has already started. As people in general buy less, shops stock less, which in turn affects production. Perhaps retail units will be first to be affected and they will in turn transmit this to the production units. One is unable to make an estimate of the reduction in economic activity at this point. If the situation is not reversed soon, there can be a serious decline in the growth rate during 2020-21.

Supply disruptions can occur because of the inability to import or procure inputs. The break in supply chains can be severe. It is estimated that nearly 60% of our imports is in the category of 'intermediate goods'. Imports from countries which are affected by the virus can be a source of concern. Domestic supply chain can also be affected as the inter-State movement of goods has also slowed down.

Financial market issues
Financial markets are the ones which respond quickly and irrationally to a pandemic such as the coronavirus pandemic. The entire reaction is based on fear. The stock market in India has collapsed. The indices are at a three-year low. Foreign Portfolio Investors have shown great nervousness and the safe haven doctrine operates. In this process, the value of the rupee in terms of dollar has also fallen. The stock market decline has a wealth effect and will have an impact on the behaviour of particularly high wealth holders.

How does the government deal with this sudden decline in economic activity which has come at a time when the economy is not doing



ing well? The two major tools that are available are monetary policy and fiscal actions.

Monetary policy in a situation like this can only act to stimulate demand by a greater push of liquidity and credit. The policy rate has already been brought down by 15 basis points over the last several months. There is obviously scope for further reduction. But our own history as well as the experience of other countries clearly show that beyond a point, a reduction in interest rates does not work. It is the environment of the overall economy that counts. Credit may be available. But there may not be takers. You can lead a horse to water but you cannot make it drink. Any substantial reduction of policy rate can also affect savers. Interest is a double-edged sword.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) needs to go beyond cutting policy rate. A certain amount of regulatory forbearance is required to make the banks lend. Even commercial banks on their own will have to think in terms of modifying norms they use for inventory holding by production units. Repayments to banks can be delayed and the authorities must be willing to relax the rules. Any relaxation of rules regarding the recognition of non-performing assets has to be across the entire business sector. The authorities must be ready to tighten the rules as soon as the situation improves. This is a temporary relaxation and must be seen as such by banks and borrowers.

Fiscal actions have a major role to play. Once again, the ability to

play a big role is constrained by the fact that the fiscal position of the government of India is already difficult. Even without the pandemic, the fiscal deficit of the Central government will turn out to be higher than that indicated in the budgets for 2019-20 and 2020-21. Revenues are likely to go down further because of the virus related slowdown in economic activity.

In this context, the ability to undertake big ticket expenditures is constrained. But there are some 'musts'. The virus has to be fought and brought down. All expenditures to test (there is some concern that the extent of testing that we are doing now is low) and to take care of patients must be incurred. Now that private hospitals are allowed to test, the cost of the people going to private hospitals must also be met by the government. The involvement of private hospitals has become necessary. It is mentioned that a test costs ₹4,500. The total cost can be substantial if the numbers to be tested run in the thousands and more. This may sound exaggerated. But we must be prepared so that we avoid the tragedy of Italy. Therefore, the first priority is to mobilise adequate resources to meet all health related expenditures which includes the supply of accessories such as masks, sanitisers and materials for tests. The challenge is not only fiscal but also organisational.

The job sector

Serious concerns have been expressed about people who have been thrown out of employment. These are mostly daily-wage earners and non-permanent/temporary employees. In fact some of the migrant labour have gone back to home States. We must appeal to the business units to keep even non-permanent workers on their rolls and provide them with a minimal income. Some relief can be

thought of by the government for such business units even though this can be misused. However, in general, in the case of sectors such as hospitality and travel, the government can extend relief through deferral of payments of dues to the government.

There is also talk of providing cash transfer to individuals. There is already a programme for rural farmers with all the limitations. For a system of cash transfer to be workable, it has to be universal. At this moment when all the energies of the government are required to combat the virus, to institute a system of universal cash transfer will be a diversion of efforts. The burden on the government will depend upon the quantum of per capita cash transfer and the length of the period.

As mentioned earlier, the government should advise all business units not to retrench workers and provide some relief to them to maintain the workers. A supplemental income scheme for all the poor can be thought of once the immediate problem is resolved. Provision of food and other essentials must be made available to the affected as is done at the time of floods or drought. States must take the initiative.

The fiscal deficit is bound to go up substantially. The higher borrowing programme will need the support of the RBI if the interest rate is to be kept low. Monetisation of deficit is inevitable. The strong injection of liquidity will store up problems for the next year. Inflation can flare up. The government needs to be mindful of this. All the same, the government must not stint and go out in a massive way to combat the virus. This is the government's first priority.

C. Rangarajan is Former Chairman of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister and Former Governor, Reserve Bank of India

Beware of a lopsided lockdown

The poor seem to count for very little in the Central government's curfew plan



JEAN DRÈZE

"I am willing to go hungry if there is no other way to stop this virus, but how will I explain that to my children?" We heard these poignant words two days ago from Nemi Devi of Dumbi village in Latehar district, Jharkhand. Her son and husband, both migrant workers, are stranded far away. In village after village, many other women expressed similar worries. And that was even before the Prime Minister announced a drastic 21-day lockdown, from Wednesday.

The enormity of the coronavirus crisis is gradually dawning on India. For you and me, it is still in the future. But for many informal-sector workers and their families, the crisis is already in full swing: there is no work, and resources are running out. Things are all set to get worse as the privileged hoard with abandon and food prices go north.

Hopefully, the Central government's decision to impose a 21-day lockdown will prove right in due course. But the lockdown (a virtual curfew) is crying out for relief measures, including income support for poor families. As it happens,

most of them already receive a limited form of income support: food rations under the Public Distribution System (PDS). Under the National Food Security Act, two-thirds of Indian families (75% and 50% in rural and urban areas, respectively) are covered. In most States, including the poorest, the PDS works – not perfectly, but well enough to protect the bulk of the population from hunger.

Use excess food stock

The PDS is the country's most important asset in this situation. It is essential to keep it going, even to expand it, in terms of both coverage and entitlements. Fortunately, India has gigantic excess food stocks. In fact, it has carried excess food stocks (more than twice the buffer-stock norms) for almost 20 years, and this is the time to use them. Nothing prevents the Central government from, say, doubling PDS rations for three or even six months as an emergency measure. That will not make up for most people's loss of income, but it will ensure that there is food in the house at least.

Some bold steps are required to make food distribution effective. For instance, biometric authentication (fingerprint scanning) is best removed at this time – it is a source of exclusion as well as a health hazard. Distribution needs to be staggered and tightly supervised, to avoid crowds and cheating at the ration shop. Dealers who

are caught cheating must be swiftly punished. All this is well within the realm of possibility; the main thing is to release the stocks without delay.

Having said this, the PDS is not enough. For one thing, many poor people are still excluded from it. Large-scale cash transfers are also required, starting with advance payment of social security pensions and a big increase in pension amounts (the Central government's contribution has stagnated at a measly ₹200 per month since 2006). Here, one possible hurdle is the payment system. Many pensioners collect their pension from "business correspondents" (BCs) – a kind of human automated teller machine (ATM), who dispenses money on behalf of the bank. The problem is, unlike ATMs, most BCs use biometric authentication rather than smart cards. And mass biometric authentication could accelerate the transmission of the novel coronavirus.

Payment arrangements
Ideally, biometric authentication should be abandoned for now.

Even if it is not, many BCs may vanish for fear of infection (most of them are poorly-paid employees of poorly-regulated private entities). Under both scenarios, something has to be done to ensure safe crowd management at the bank. New payment arrangements are also possible. For instance, social security pensions could be paid in cash at the panchayat bhawan on a given day of the month, obviating the need for everyone to go to the bank; this has been done in Odisha for years, with good results. Cash could also be disbursed, with due safeguards, through anganwadis or self-help groups. Cash transfers need not be limited to social security pensions. Revamping the PDS and social security pensions would go a long way, but a significant proportion of vulnerable families are likely to fall through the cracks. Further, food rations may prevent hunger but people have many other basic needs; they will need money to cope with this spell of unemployment.

There are several possible ways of extending the reach of cash transfers beyond pensions. For instance, money could be sent to the accounts of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act job-card holders, or Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) beneficiaries, or PDS cardholders. How these lists are best used and combined is a context-specific question, perhaps

best handled at the State level (my sense is that in many States, the MGNREGA job-cards list is the best starting point).

These are just some examples of possible emergency measures. Many other valuable suggestions have been made, relating for instance to mid-day meals, community kitchens and relief camps for stranded migrant workers. The first step is to make relief measures an integral part of the lockdown plan. Failing that, it may do more harm than good. For one thing, a hungry and enfeebled population is unlikely to fight the virus effectively. A constructive lockdown should empower people to fight back together, not treat them like sheep.

Finally, Centre-State cooperation is essential. Many State governments have already initiated valuable social-security measures, but they are far from adequate. The Central government, for its part, has been struck with inexplicable paralysis on this. Adequate relief measures require big money (lakhs of crores of rupees) from the Central government. Implementation, however, should be led by the States. They all have their own circumstances and methods. The Central government is unlikely to do better on their behalf. If it foots the bill, that will be a good start.

Jean Drèze is Visiting Professor at the Department of Economics, Ranchi University

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Lockdown

The 21-day national

lockdown (Page 1, "As

COVID-19 toll touches 10,

PM announces 21-day

lockdown", March 25)

though in hindsight looks a

bit belated, should be

welcomed as the pandemic

has begun playing havoc

even in medically advanced

countries. One wonders

whether we procrastinated

in screening international

passengers, as a proactive

action of early closure

could have greatly

prevented cutting

transmission. Even delaying

screening for domestic air

passengers did not make

sense, as local and

international passengers

often arrive or exit through

the same points at many

airports. The only bright

part is that despite its

political differences with

the government of the day,

the Opposition has not

criticised the actions either

during the janata curfew or

the lockdown underway.

While the government is

making attempts to please

the corporate sector with a

slew of measures, the have-

nots should also be taken

care of equally; with such a

prolonged shutdown, they

are finding it difficult in

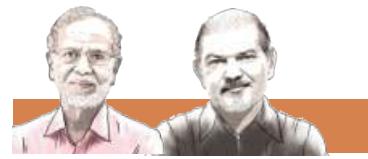
making both ends meet.

V. SUBRAMANIAN,
Chennai

■ The Prime Minister's

COVID-19 and the great Chinese puzzle

China does not know, or is not revealing, the magnitude of infection in the country



T. JACOB JOHN & PRATHAP THARYAN

The pandemic is spreading like wildfire. What started surreptitiously in late 2019 in Wuhan, China, has engulfed 172 countries and regions by March 25, 2020. Globally over 4,35,000 have been reported as infected, over 19,500 have died, and around 1,11,000 have recovered.

To be clear, the virus is SARS-CoV-2; the clinical illness is COVID-19. When not specified, reported numbers may pertain to either infection or disease or a mix, misleading decision-makers to conflate the two.

The numbers of test results put out from China have helped the world get a sense of the seriousness of COVID-19 and SARS-CoV-2 infection. In China, about 81,600 had confirmed disease; there were about 3,100 deaths. The crude estimate of case fatality was 3.7%. All diseased are infected, the reverse is not true. Not all infected are sick or tested. Hence, information from China is unhelpful to confidently project the probabilities/proportions that will get infected; get COVID-19 symptoms; develop pneumonia; die.

Virus spread in China has reportedly stopped. China is now gearing up to prevent virus transmission from citizens returning from other countries. If only 90,000 were infected among a 1.4 billion population, the proportion was only 0.0065%. Here is the puzzle: for any epidemic, its downturn consequent to high herd immunity requires about 70% infected and immune. Every second person in the community will then be a dead-end for virus spread. What proportion of the Chinese was actually infected? The proportion of 0.0065% is unrealistically low for the visible shift in epidemiology. If 70% were infected, there were 980 million infections. This extraordinary range is the puzzle.

The beginning
The story began unfolding in December 2019 with cases of pneumonia without an identifiable cause. One physician saw this and alerted his colleagues. He was reprimanded by the authorities for spreading fear. Soon they realised that the alarm was



WUHAN, CHINA - AFP

true. Among the first 41 cases, most were workers in, or had direct contact with, the Hunan Seafood Wholesale Market. On December 31, health officials informed the World Health Organization (WHO) of the outbreak of a suspected zoonosis (vertebrate-to-human transmitted infectious disease). That market and all other similar markets nationally were closed the next day. On January 7, WHO was notified that the pathogen was a novel coronavirus. Soon Chinese scientists mapped its full genome sequence and gene sequence for primers needed for diagnostic tests and made these data publicly available.

The International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses re-named it SARS-CoV-2 because of its close genetic similarity to the SARS coronavirus. By mid-January, several countries reported COVID-19. It was no longer zoonosis but had become anthropozoonosis (person-to-person transmitted infectious disease). But when did this epidemic actually start in Wuhan? How long did it remain unrecognised? The number of cases at a given time could reflect the duration of the outbreak. The numbers are not available, which is a problem.

Only on January 11 did China record the first death from COVID-19. Considering that the test had just become available, any earlier death would not have been attributed to SARS-CoV-2 infection. More than a week later China counted 26 deaths among 830 diagnosed with COVID-19. By end-January, it alerted the world that COVID-19 was widely prevalent in all 31 provinces. By February 2, the infection had already spread to 24 countries outside China-Hong Kong-Macau. Given time this contagious anthropozoonosis was already a pandemic by definition. But WHO declared a pandemic only on

March 11. Did WHO get misled by the 0.0065% risk? Countries like India that depend heavily on WHO guidance for public health action had apparently mistaken the non-declaration as a signal that it was short-lived/ non-serious. On March 12, fear gripped India as it had not done homework to face the pandemic and invoked the Epidemic Diseases Act giving the state extraordinary powers.

Growth pattern

Epidemiologists have estimated the transmissibility of SARS-CoV-2. The term basic reproduction number (R_0) denotes the number of new infections that an infected person could seed, during the infective period, if all contacts exposed were non-immune and susceptible. For this infection, R_0 has been estimated to be between 1.5 and 3.5. If we accept conservatively $R_0=2$, one infected person will, on average, infect two other people; next generation will be 4, then 8, 16, 32 and so on. When a large proportion is infected, hence immune, the scene changes. An infected person will encounter a majority of immune and a minority of non-immune among contacts, and virus transmission will slow down.

Experts outside China are projecting infection to reach 30-70% of the world's population. Data from China indicate that 80% of the infected are likely to be not very ill. Around 14% would develop severe disease, and around 6% would require critical care. Consider these figures against a total of 90,000 reported infected in all of China and extrapolate to a probable 980 million infected. If countries use these estimates to plan resource demand, no country can claim to be prepared to meet these requirements. This is why the Chinese puzzle needs exploration. If on-

ly <1% will be infected when the numbers begin to fall, countries like India have reason for optimism.

Or does this puzzle indicate that although 70% of Chinese were actually infected with SARS-CoV-2 by the third week of March, only about 90,000 of the 980 million infected (0.0092%) developed COVID-19? This could also provide reason for optimism, but is highly speculative without necessary information. Why are the data missing? For infection rate to decline, the proportion of immune, hence non-susceptible people among the whole population should be fairly high. To determine how large the COVID-19 epidemic was in China is information that we need urgently. The only way to get it is by careful antibody prevalence surveys.

China claimed success in interrupting transmission because Hubei province was under lockdown fairly early in the course of the epidemic, and China also imposed travel restrictions on other provinces. Is its claim credible? What if the epidemic had actually started, say, in August?

Since the lockdown occurred later than it should have, travellers attending the Chinese Lunar New Year celebrations transmitted the infection wherever they went. Most countries have focussed on identifying infections brought by travellers from such high-risk countries but the majority with COVID-19 infections now are showing increasing rates of local transmission. The signal from the Chinese puzzle could be that widespread infection is not inevitable and with stringent public health measures infection rate could be brought down to zero. That scenario does not make epidemiological sense. We have to conclude that China does not know, or is not revealing, the magnitude of infection in all of China.

All countries that expected very small numbers to be at risk of infection based on the China puzzle must anticipate about 70% to be infected in the first wave of the epidemic. If summer heat dampens transmission, we may not reach 70% until autumn or winter. After that, the infection may stay on as endemic and seasonal. We have to catch up for lost time because of our optimistic reading of data that were not verified or even checked for plausibility.

T. Jacob John is retired Professor of Virology and Prathap Tharyan is Adjunct Professor, Christian Medical College, Vellore

If COVID-19 affected a district

Along with the immediate response to the virus, there is need to think about creating long-term capacity in state institutions



RASHMI SHARMA

How well India fights the novel coronavirus will be shaped not only by specific measures to tackle it, but also by the overall capacity of its public health and management systems.

How capable is India's public management system of tackling COVID-19? Some indications are available in a case study that I conducted in 2017-18 of a district.

If the virus were to spread in the district studied, its elected representatives would be aware and vocal about it. The local media too would report it. There would be considerable pressure on the district administration to act. In case of laxity, we can expect adverse media reports, and complaints to the State government. However, this pressure would build up only after a visible occurrence of the virus.

Weak health infrastructure

Prevention, early detection and medical assistance to the affected would be more difficult. The first stumbling block would be the paucity of health facilities. For a population of over 12 lakh, the district had 26 government health centres with doctors, including the district hospital, community health centres (CHC) and primary health centres (PHCs), which is one per 35 villages and 0.5 towns. These had 820 beds (one for more than 1,500 people and less than one per village). There were 173 sub-health centres (SHCs), one per 5.4 villages. SHCs did not have doctors, but had auxiliary nurse midwives (ANMs) who were not medically qualified, but trained by the Public Health Department. Further, the health centres had an overall staff vacancy rate of more than 30%, and over 55% among class 1 and 2 posts, mainly doctors. One sample rural PHC had no full-time doctor. A doctor from a neighbouring PHC visited once or twice a month. The lab technician and pharmacist were shared with another PHC. There was a staff nurse who managed the PHC. When she handled a delivery at night, she had to attend to the PHC the next day. In another sample CHC, there were only three doctors against the sanctioned strength of six, one ward boy when four were needed, no dresser, and the doctors complained that there was no one to get patients in stretchers from the door.

In the sample SHCs, while basic equipment (instruments to measure blood pressure and glucose levels, vaccines, etc.) were available, the buildings were in poor condition. The ANMs did numerous surveys in

their area of five to seven villages, and those interviewed reported difficulty in carrying instruments, vaccines, etc. They had asked for transportation, but to no avail. It can be imagined that with this manpower and infrastructure, stretched even at ordinary times, it would be difficult to follow additional protocols for the novel coronavirus.

A solution, and riders

However, there could be solutions. The District Collector could take charge at an early stage. In the short term, a capable District Collector could mobilise personnel from other departments, volunteers, and private medical practitioners and create temporary medical facilities. The capacity of the health system would thus increase manifold.

However, there are three riders to the above solution. One, all District Collectors may not be capable because frequently, officials are posted on the basis of political patronage, not ability. In the district, in the previous 10 years, there had been eight District Collectors and 15 Chief Medical Officers. Thus, the leaders of the battle against the virus would most likely be new to the district. Two, the study showed rampant rent-seeking. As in the case of calamities, officials could pilfer government funds, and weaken the initiative. Finally, cracks will appear in these solutions if the crisis continues over time, even where officials are capable and honest. It will not be possible to rope in personnel of other departments or volunteers indefinitely. If there is a law and order crisis, the District Collector's attention will shift.

The bare-bones health system will then have to cope. Not only will this be inadequate, but new problems could emerge. In the district, because of deficient public health facilities, people accessed private services often. The well-off went to private doctors in nearby towns, while the poor frequently went to traditional healers and 'Bengali doctors' – individuals without medical qualifications who 'treated' the villagers at a modest fee. It is not hard to imagine that many more such doctors would appear with rising anxiety and desperation and leading to further impoverishment and possibly harm to ordinary people.

How the public management system will deal with the COVID-19 threat will be shaped by these characteristics of the system. There could be good crisis management in the short term, but in the long term, inadequate health facilities will not match up. Along with the immediate response to the virus, there is need to think about creating long-term, sustained capacity in state institutions.

Rashmi Sharma is Senior Visiting Fellow, Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations and a former IAS officer

Test, test, test for the virus

Travel bans and quarantines are imperative, but testing alone can reveal the extent of the disease

POONGOTHAI ALADI ARUNA

The novel coronavirus differs from other pandemics because of its exponential speed of transmission. The coronavirus is a novel virus because the genetic RNA has undergone mutation recently to infect humans from an animal source, thus converting a zoonotic disease to an anthropocentric one. Coronavirus RNA is new to the human immunological system. Therefore, there are a lot of unanswered questions with regard to immunity, recurrence, carrier state, treatment and vaccines. The incubation period is 2-14 days. However, research has revealed that the virus can remain in circulation for much longer in affected individuals.

The economic status of a country influences implementation of its policies. As India is a lower-middle-income country with a healthcare expenditure that is consistently below 1.5% of the GDP, it needs to be prudent and pragmatic in its approach to withstand it in the event of community spread. Therefore, the government must focus on continued surveillance, prompt diagnosis and adopt robust treatment modalities to reduce morbidity and mortality.

Increase in testing
An increase in testing will identify the actual number of cases that would require quarantine and prompt treatment. The Indian Council of Medical Research has to increase random sampling and screening of the high-risk population. Nationwide, the government has identified 75 government hospitals for testing and has allowed private labs with NABL accreditation to conduct real-time PCR assay of the RNA virus. The National Task Force has recommended that the maximum cost for testing sample should not exceed ₹4,500. The country's per capita annual income for 2019-20 is ₹1,35,048 and the average middle-class annual income is ₹10-15 lakh. Out-of-pocket expenses in healthcare is what pushes a lot of low-income Indians below the poverty line.

COVID-19 is a national emergency. Therefore, the government should

include the test under the ambit of all private and government health insurance schemes. The primary goal of the government is to ensure availability and accessibility to diagnostic tests free of cost. Setting up diagnostic centres in every district general hospital should be the top-most priority. Travel bans and quarantines are imperative measures, but testing alone can reveal the extent of the disease in the community.

Fighting misinformation

Misinformation, especially on the use of facial masks, alternative medicine, and availability of a cure, should be avoided. With limited resources, India requires protection gear such as three-layered facial masks for its healthcare workers and for those in service industries.

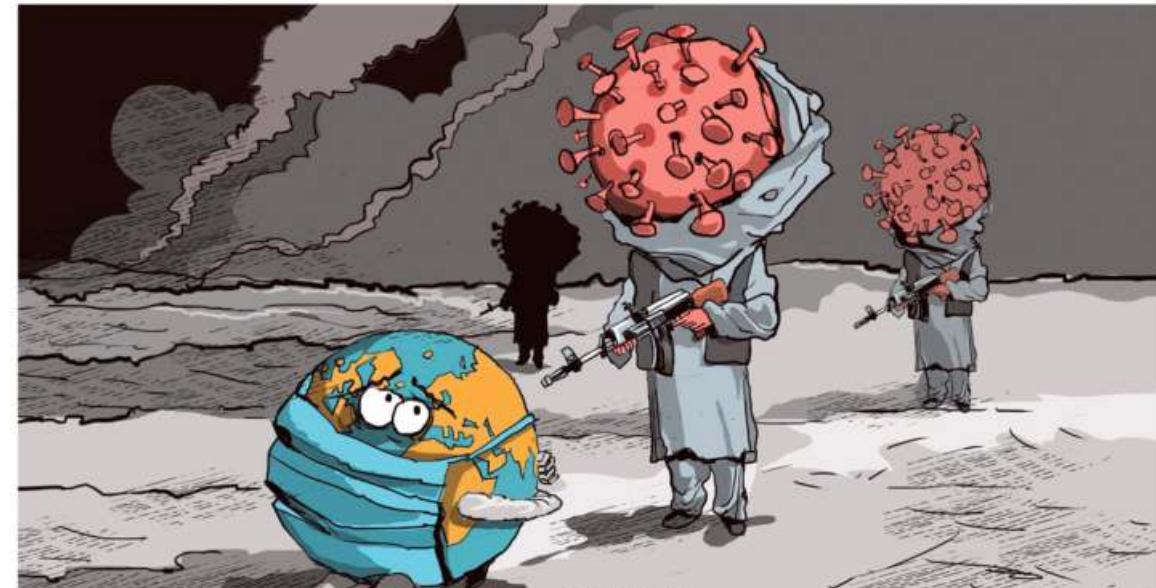
There is no vaccine to fight the virus yet. Randomised controlled trials for antiviral treatment are difficult to execute during pandemics. Researchers need to make tough choices during clinical trials, while ensuring the safety of the patients. Medication was elusive in the past for H1N1, HIV and many other viral illnesses but the human mind proved invincible. Anti-COVID-19 drugs may be available sooner than later.

The true incidence of the disease is still unknown. Evidence from the identified cases worldwide suggest that 80% of the infections will be mild with people having flu-like symptoms, about 15% will be severe requiring hospitalisation due to breathlessness or pneumonia, 3-5% will require ventilatory support, and about 1% will succumb to the virus.

Every individual at risk, and not just those in power, should be tested on request. There are authentic reports that several individuals have been denied diagnostic tests despite a contact history.

The WHO categorised India as having local transmission. If so, lessons can be learnt from South Korea which is taking 6,388 tests per million of the population compared to India's 11.6. Every life is equally invaluable.

Poongothai Aladi Aruna is a Tamil Nadu MLA



DATA POINT

Among urban dwellers, the most vulnerable to the lockdown

The COVID-19-related lockdown may have an immediate impact on close to 2.5 crore people in vulnerable jobs across India, an estimate from the latest Period Labour Force Survey suggests. Census figures on internal migration reveal a significant number of migrant workers among those vulnerable. By Vignesh Radhakrishnan

1. NO WORK, NO PAY

The table shows the estimated number of urban workers in vulnerable jobs across India. These include helpers in a household enterprise (who do not receive a regular salary) and casual labourers (who receive daily wages). The number only includes those who were in the bottom 50% of the wealth pyramid in 2017-18 (calculated based on their monthly per capita expenditure)

Working in:	Estimated workers
Household enterprises as helpers	34,63,050
Public works other than MNREGA as casual labourers	2,20,351
Other places as casual labourers	1,12,70,348
Total	1,49,53,750

2. STEADY PAY, YET UNSECURED

Of the nearly 1.78 crore urban dwellers, who were part of the bottom 50% of the wealth pyramid and worked in regular/salaried jobs, more than 52% do not get paid leave. These people (close to 94 lakh) will be among those severely affected by the lockdown. Data only include those working in non-agricultural sectors in urban areas

Workers	% share	Total workers
Not eligible for paid leave	52.8	94,25,207
With no security benefit*	47.7	85,14,817
With no written contract	72.4	1,29,23,958

*PF/ pension, gratuity, health care and maternity benefit

Source: Census 2011, PLFS 2017-18

3. MIGRANT WORKERS

Close to 81 lakh migrant workers in urban areas who were either illiterate or had studied upto 12th grade could be among those with vulnerable jobs. Many of them have been stranded due to train cancellations and sealing of borders.

Close to 3.8 lakh were in the 60+ age group that has the highest COVID-19 fatality rate

Last place of residence

All ages

60+

A rural place within a State 30,07,995 1,59,167

An urban place within a State 19,01,157 1,30,348

A rural place outside a State 23,90,630 51,792

An urban place outside a State 8,56,376 37,803

Total 81,56,158 3,79,110

4. STATE-WISE VULNERABLE MIGRANTS

Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu host most such migrants

FROM PAGE ONE

Aim is to win the war in 21 days, says Modi

"Coronavirus has called upon the entire humanity. In this battle against corona, in our first line of defence are doctors, paramedics, and [other] healthcare workers. Your sacrifice, dedication and service cannot be estimated or compared. In these difficult times, you have been working relentlessly. Me and the people of Odisha stand by you," Mr. Patnaik said, adding with folded hands, "I respect your spirit," in a video clip.

After a meeting of the Union Cabinet in which attendees kept a safe distance from one another, Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar said the existing food security programme of the government covered 80 crore

people and State governments were doing more.

The Minister said States would be given three months' supply of rations for the scheme in advance.

Asked about reports of migrant workers stranded at bus stations and railway stations, Mr. Javadekar said: "If they were working here, they must have been living somewhere. They should stay where they are."

Answering another question about online grocery delivery services not being allowed to work, he said it was "not true" that deliveries had stopped everywhere. "It's just been 24 hours since the lockdown announcement. I also didn't get the newspaper in my house today," he said.

Ministers working from home

With major appointments on hold, many opt for videoconferencing

NISTULA HEBBAR
NEW DELHI

A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a nationwide 21-day lockdown, the government too tried to get adjusted to this changed reality.

While Mr. Modi himself held a meeting of his Cabinet trying to maintain an appropriate physical distance, Home Minister Amit Shah is said to have cancelled all appointments with people other than those connected to the Ministry – that too, only if the issue cannot be resolved over the phone.

COVID-19

"He is at home, and only his staff is there with him; everyone else has been asked to stay home. Officers who are required are only called in individually," a



Measured step: Prime Minister Narendra Modi chairing a Cabinet meeting with Ministers sitting apart. • PTI / @AMITSHAH

source said.

Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari went to Nagpur (his constituency) on Tuesday just before all domestic flights were suspended. He continues to remain indoors at his home there, said an aide and had been holding conference calls and meetings over videoconfe-

rences with heads of oil marketing firms and LPG distribution networks till late in the night to resolve distribution issues over the lockdown period. While he did step into office on Wednesday, he is likely to continue from home.

Technology to the aid

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman too is largely working from home, though she did attend a meeting of the Cabinet this morning. "A lot of the work is being done through videoconferencing and technology," said a source.

A senior Minister told *The Hindu* that many in the Cabinet, including those holding very crucial posts, had serious conditions related to diabetes, and that they, if not the rest of the country, had taken the Prime Minister's injunctions to heart.

'No evidence of an Indian strain yet'

We are working with ICMR: NCBS chief

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN
SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

There isn't enough scientific evidence yet to indicate that SARS-CoV-2, or the novel coronavirus, has a separate Indian strain and the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS) is working with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) to better understand the virus, the Director of the Bengaluru-based centre, Satyajit Mayor, has said.

COVID-19
We cannot prevent the spread of a virus like this but what we can do is to slow it down

SATYAJIT MAYOR
Director, NCBS

The Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) Shi Zhengli in particular for the alleged "creation and the release of the novel coronavirus" that had been "prepared and stockpiled as a biological weapon."

Bats and SARS

Mr. Mayor explained that study of bats was a vital link in understanding the SARS family. "Bats are an interesting mammal to study because they carry so many viruses without getting sick."

The U.S. lawsuit contends that COVID-19 is an extremely dangerous disease because it has an extremely aggressive nature, designed to mutate from person to person, spreads very quickly and easily and is about "ten times as deadly as the flu".

Mr. Mayor said there was "little evidence thus far that this was a bioweapon".

This, he stated, was also a partly man-made problem. "With human intrusion into forest habitat, climate change and global warming, unpredictable behaviour by nature is only understandable. We as a species are not innocent in this crisis."

Delivery issues add to woes for homebound

"What China followed to control coronavirus, we must do the same. Home delivery is the only option to prevent the spread. We are forced to stop delivery in almost all parts of India, including Pune and Mumbai, other than Bengaluru, because our delivery boys are beaten up by police or they are not allowed to move... hopefully in a day or two, delivery across the country should resume," the statement added.

In Bengaluru, Shoba T., a customer who had ordered groceries and fish online, said she had been informed by FreshToHome that they had been unable to deliver despite their best efforts on account of "local authority

hurdles". Confusion prevailed in Bengaluru as most supermarkets remained closed, while those that were open ran out of stocks.

N.B. Swaraj, media co-ordinator of the Lulu Group in Kochi, said there was a dip in the supply of vegetables following the restrictions imposed at the inter-State borders. "However, we have enough stocks of rice and other essentials," he added.

In Hyderabad, thousands of customers of online supermarkets in the city faced massive problems with grocery deliveries either getting cancelled or disabled on account of the lockdown.

(With inputs from Mumbai, Bengaluru, Kochi and Hyderabad bureaus)

Indian among 100 patients in Sri Lanka

3 Sri Lankan nationals tested positive on their return from India early this month

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

An Indian is among the nearly 100 COVID-19 positive patients undergoing treatment in Sri Lanka, *The Hindu* has learnt. Three other patients, who are Sri Lankan nationals, also tested positive on their return from India earlier this month, officials said.

"All four of them are undergoing treatment and are stable," Director-General of Health Services Dr. Anil Jasinghe told *The Hindu* on Wednesday. The Indian High Commission here confirmed that the Indian national had arrived in Colombo on March 12 on a tourist visa and tested positive upon ar-

rival, but declined to share details of where the patient departed from.

As of Wednesday, Sri Lanka has reported 102 confirmed cases. Three of them have been discharged.

Based on the data published by the Epidemiology Unit of Sri Lanka's Health Ministry, researchers at the Colombo-based Institute for Health Policy, a non-profit research institute focusing on public health systems and policy, have generated a graphic mapping the source of COVID-19 infections as of March 22, when 78 persons tested positive.

Dr. Ravi Rannan-Eliya, executive director of the Insti-

tute, said COVID-19 "remains still largely" an infection acquired outside Sri Lanka.

A majority of the infected persons are Sri Lankans who returned from Italy in recent weeks, followed by a few from the United Kingdom, Germany and India. This is apart from the first case declared by Sri Lanka in late January of a Chinese tourist who tested positive. She returned to China following her recovery. Only four out of the 100-plus cases reported in Sri Lanka are seen to be originating from India, but the information foretells a greater risk for India, the public health expert cautioned.

Noting that the cases origi-

nating from India, of one Indian national and three Sri Lankan returnees, were detected around mid-March, Dr. Rannan-Eliya, who specialises in health systems and policy both in Sri Lanka and globally, said: "During this same period, the total case count reported by India remained below 200. Such a high incidence in our arrivals from India simply does not fit the reported Indian case numbers."

According to him, it "strongly suggests" there has been a "large undetected outbreak in India since at least early March, and the Indian authorities are failing to detect most of their cases".

e-passes for essential services, says Kejriwal

"We will issue e-passes to people engaged in manufacture, transport, and storage of essential items, as well as the people who work in private or government essential services... and engaged in the supply of milk, vegetables, ration shops, chemists and pharmacists. The helpline number for this is 1031. You can call the helpline number, intimate the authorities regarding the essential services you

are engaged in, and you will be issued the e-pass," he said.

Landlords warned

Mr. Kejriwal also warned landlords of strict action if they force doctors and nurses to vacate their premises under fear of infection.

He said the government had increased the number of spots across the city where free food for the poor would be made available.

Navy airlifts Goa health team to Pune for training

Army readies more quarantine units

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A Dornier aircraft of the Navy flew a team of four doctors from the Goa State Health department to Pune for training on Wednesday.

The medical team led by Dr. Savio Rodrigues, head of the Microbiology department, Goa Medical College, will undergo training to set up a COVID-19 testing facility in Goa, the Navy said in a statement. "A few samples of suspected COVID-19 cases were also carried by the team for testing," the Navy said. The team is likely to return to Goa on March 27.

Isolation facilities

In a statement, the Army said that in addition to its quarantine facilities for eva-

cuees at Manesar, Jaisalmer and Jodhpur, more Army facilities at Jhansi, Binnaguri and Gaya have been kept on standby with an additional collective capacity of 1,600 beds.

'Only one positive case'
"From the over 1,200 evacuees, medical staff and air crew kept in these facilities till now, only one positive case of COVID-19 has been reported so far," the Army stated.

The Navy and Air Force have also created separate facilities as part of the national effort to quarantine people. The Ordnance Factory Board too has designated 285 beds for isolation at various factories across the country.

Nitish govt. not helping those stranded, says Prashant Kishor

Hundreds of people from Bihar stuck in Delhi, other areas

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PATNA

Poll strategist Prashant Kishor slammed Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Wednesday for not helping hundreds of people from the State stranded in Delhi and other parts of the country following the countrywide lockdown.

"When governments all over are helping their people, why is the Bihar government not helping or arranging some immediate relief?... #shameonNitishKumar," he said in a tweet.

Mr. Kishor was a vice-president in the ruling Janata Dal (United) in Bihar, but was expelled after he fell out with the Chief Minister on NPR.

Prashant Kishor
NRC and CAA issues.
Earlier, in another tweet, Mr. Kishor said the decision to lock down India may be right, but 21 days was perhaps too long. "But then this is the price one pays for being behind the curve. With shaky preparedness to deal

with the COVID crisis and very little being done to safeguard the poor, we could be staring at some tough days ahead," he said.

Fourth case in Bihar

Meanwhile, Bihar reported the fourth COVID-19 case on Wednesday. The 39-year-old from the Patna city area had recently come from Gujarat. He has been admitted to the Nalanda Medical College and Hospital, which is notified by the government for the treatment of COVID-19 cases. Earlier, a youth from Munger district who had returned from Qatar had died of COVID-19.

Two more patients are recuperating in the hospital.

Assam MLA reaches out to elderly

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

A BJP legislator in Assam has started a free delivery service for the senior citizens of his constituency whose children are far away or were unable to return home before the lockdown owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ashok Singh, who represents the Dhekiajuli Assembly constituency, used social media platforms to reach out to people in need and ensure supply of groceries and medicines. "So far, 14 people staying elsewhere in India or abroad have messaged me. I have assigned specific people for delivering provisions after ensuring that they take precautionary steps," Mr. Singh told *The Hindu*.

Sensex gains amid hopes of stimulus

"The recent positive announcements from the U.S. Fed and rising hopes of a stimulus package from the Indian government have lifted sentiments," said Ajit Mishra, vice-president (Research), Religare Broking.

"We expect that volatility would remain high in the near term and any sustainable rally would largely depend upon how effectively we can contain the spread of coronavirus now with a 21-day nationwide lockdown in place," said Mr. Mishra.

The U.S. government has approved a stimulus package worth a whopping \$2 trillion that led to most markets witnessing strong gains on Wednesday.

In Asia, Nikkei gained over 8% while Hang Seng was up nearly 4%.

Back in India, the market breadth comprised almost equal number of gainers and decliners as many side counters continued to experience weakness. On BSE, 1,186 stocks gained ground as against 1,023 declines.

Census, NPR put off over coronavirus scare

As many as 13 States and UTs have opposed the updating of the NPR.

According to Citizenship Rules 2003, the NPR is the first step towards compilation of a National Register of Citizens (NRC). The modified NPR form is yet to be made public but is likely to include contentious questions on date and place of birth of father and mother, last place of residence and mother tongue." NPR was first collected in 2010 and updated in 2015 without the additional questions.

The Citizenship (Amend-

ment) Act (CAA), 2019 passed by Parliament on December 11, allows citizenship on the basis of religion to six undocumented communities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh who entered India on or before December 31, 2014.

There are apprehensions that the CAA, followed by a countrywide NRC, will benefit non-Muslims excluded from the citizens' register, while excluded Muslims will have to prove their citizenship. The government has denied that the CAA and the NRC are linked.

Mamata seeks ₹1,500 crore package

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

No new case of coronavirus was reported in West Bengal in the past 24 hours, the official bulletin of the State Health Department said on Wednesday. The number of positive cases in the city remains at nine. It includes one person who died of the infection on Monday.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has sought ₹1,500 crore package from the Centre to deal with the outbreak. Speaking to journalists at the Secretariat, she said the State was finding it difficult to manage with its "limited resources."

She said markets would remain open and police personnel would be asked not to stop those bringing essential items to the markets. She said no doctor or health care professional would be targeted by landlords or others.

Callous and cruel to continue to detain Mehbooba: Omar

National Conference leader urges PM, Shah to free PDP chief

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

National Conference vice-president Omar Abdullah on Wednesday demanded the release of Peoples Democratic Party president Mehbooba Mufti.

He also vowed to fight for the revocation of the Public Safety Act (PSA), under which most political leaders have been arrested since August 5 last year.

Tagging the official handles of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Twitter, Mr. Abdullah, who was released on Tuesday after 232 days in detention, said, "It's callous and cruel to continue to detain Ms. Mufti and others at a time like this. There was never much justification to detain them in the first place

under the PSA, which allows detention of a person for up to two years.

Mr. Abdullah, also a former Chief Minister, said he had talked about the repeal of the PSA in April 2019, months before it was invoked against him and his colleagues.

'Unimaginable trauma'
The Muftis in Srinagar were expecting Ms. Mehbooba Mufti to be freed. But no such order was issued until the evening. "My mother is hearing reports of her imminent release... But she is upset at thousands of boys jailed outside Jammu and Kashmir. The trauma their families feel because of COVID-19 is unimaginable," said Iltija Mufti, Ms. Mehbooba's daughter.

India hints at Pak. hand in Kabul gurdwara attack

MEA promises help to Sikhs, Hindus

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Modi 'pained' by harassment of doctors

They are 'a form of god' and such acts will prove costly to the offenders, says Prime Minister

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

LUCKNOW

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said he had instructed the police chiefs of different States to take strict action against those who ill-treat or don't co-operate with doctors, nurses and other professionals who are providing vital services in the fight against COVID-19.

Mr. Modi was responding to a question by a Varanasi resident during a videoconference with people of his Lok Sabha constituency.

When asked about the incidents of discrimination and harassment faced by the staff members of airlines who helped to rescue COVID-19 patients and doctors and nurses tending to such people, the Prime Minister said he was pained by such reports.



Facing the people: Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacting with citizens of Varanasi on Wednesday. ■ PTI

Such acts would "prove costly" to the offenders, he warned.

Mr. Modi said that if people noticed such incidents of ill-treatment of doctors, nurses or 'safai karamcharis', they should point it out and warn the offenders. Nurses and doctors working in white uniform against CO-

VID-19 "are a form of god," he said.

To another question on reports of people resorting to self-diagnosis, Mr. Modi warned the public not to try to get COVID-19 treated on their own. "Stay at home and act as per doctor's advice," he stressed. "First, consult your doctor," he said.

CThe biggest truth coming out of this illness is that it doesn't discriminate against anyone and ruins both the rich and the poor

If the Mahabharata war was won in 18 days, the battle against coronavirus that the whole country is fighting would take 21 days, the Prime Minister said. "Our attempt is to win it in 21 days," he said. His constituency, Varanasi, could teach the country patience, coordination and sensitivity, support, peace and tolerance during the lockdown.

Mr. Modi also asked people, especially those capable, to take care of nine poor families for 21 days as part of Navratri, as well as the animals, that could not fend for themselves due to the shutdown of services and transport. This was his reply to a question on the crisis faced by migrant labourers and the poor who were stranded in various cities without any means of support.

"This will be a true Navratri," he said, asking the people to adopt 'karuna' (compassion) as another step to defeat corona [virus].

The Prime Minister also refuted ideas that people in India were adept at battling COVID-19 owing to factors such as the hot and humid weather and lifestyle. "The biggest truth coming out of this illness is that it doesn't discriminate against anyone and ruins both the rich and the poor," he said.

He asked the people not to rely on misinformation and continue to maintain physical distancing.

Saudi King to chair G20 virtual summit

For Modi, this will be the second leadership summit after SAARC video meet

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Leaders of the G20 (Group of Twenty) nations will hold a video conference on Thursday. The virtual summit will be led by King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of Saudi Arabia, which is the current president of the economic grouping.

"G20 members will be joined by leaders from invited countries, Spain, Jordan, Singapore, and Switzerland as well as international organisations the United Nations, the World Bank Group, the World Health Organisation and the World Trade Organisation, the Food and Agriculture Organ-



King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud

isation, the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development," said a statement issued by the Saudi authorities.

Apart from 19 of the biggest economies of the world, G20 also includes the European Union. For 2020,

Spain, Jordan, Singapore and Switzerland are the invited countries.

Detailed plan expected For Prime Minister Narendra Modi, this will be the second virtual leadership summit after the video meet of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which he initiated on March 15 and led to the creation of the SAARC COVID-19 Emergency Fund. It is expected that the G20 virtual summit will yield a detailed plan for confronting the pandemic caused by COVID-19.

Leaders of the grouping had been in contact over the last few weeks and held preparatory consultations. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar discussed the upcoming virtual summit with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi on Tuesday. "Global challenges require global cooperation," he said after the conversation.

Elaborating on the video conference of Thursday, a Saudi release said Vietnam would represent the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations, South Africa the African Union, the United Arab Emirates the Gulf Cooperation Council and Rwanda the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

Rahul calls for two-pronged strategy

'Expand testing, give financial aid to prevent job losses and reassure businesses'

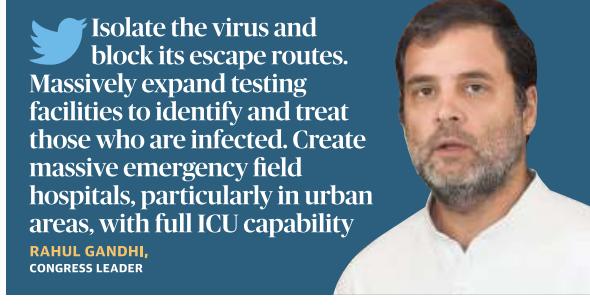
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday suggested a two-pronged strategy to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, while his party demanded the implementation of the minimum income guarantee scheme for the poor.

"The question is how can we minimise casualties in this war. I believe our strategy should have 2 components. The govt should give financial support to prevent massive job losses and reassure business owners," Mr. Gandhi tweeted.

"Isolate the virus and block its escape routes. Massively expand testing facilities to identify and treat those who are infected. Create massive emergency field hospitals, particularly in urban areas, with full ICU capability



RAHUL GANDHI,
CONGRESS LEADER

must reassure business owners of all support to tide over the crisis.

The Congress urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to implement the Nyayam Aay Yojana (Nyay) or the minimum income guarantee scheme it had promised in its 2019 election manifesto. The Nyay had promised to transfer ₹2,000 annually to the 20% of the poorest families in the country.

"Dear PM, need of the hour is to implement forthwith Minimum Income Guar-

rantee Scheme (Nyay), mooted by Rahulji & Congress. Please transfer Rs 7,500 to every Jan Dhan A/C, PM Kisan A/C & every Pension A/C to tide over nutrition needs of 21 days and give free PDS ration," tweeted Congress communication chief Randeep Singh Surjewala.

'Lacks strategy'

In a series of tweets, Mr. Surjewala said that though the party supported the lockdown, it is "deeply disappointed" by a lack of a coherent strategy on the part of the Modi government.

"Please remember, Trying times are true test of leadership. Is government ready to rise up & deliver," he asked and added, "The Congress demands a comprehensive package for daily wagers, MGNREGA workers, factory workers, unorganised workers, fishermen and farm labourers."

Amid lockdown, Adityanath shifts Ram idol in Ayodhya

Despite physical distancing norms, he took part in the event

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

LUCKNOW

Amid physical distancing protocols and a nationwide lockdown, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath early on Wednesday participated in an event to shift the idol of an infant Lord Ram to a temporary structure in the Ram Janmabhoomi compound in Ayodhya till the construction of a temple.

His action goes against his own appeal to the public not to participate in religious events as part of a physical distancing protocol against the COVID-19 outbreak. The State had recorded 37 positive cases till Tuesday.

Cheque presented He also presented a cheque for ₹11 crore to the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra for the construction of the temple.

In a video clip shared by a government spokesperson, the Chief Minister is seen chanting mantras in front of the idol along with priests.

While sharing pictures of the ritual on Twitter, Mr. Adityanath said, "The first phase of the construction of a grand Ram Mandir concluded today, maryada pur-



Idol shift: Yogi Adityanath offering prayers to the Ram Lalla idol at a new location in Ayodhya on Wednesday. ■ PTI

shottam [the most dignified man] lord Ram has moved from a tarpaulin tent to a new seat."

their rituals on Navratri from home, saying it would help to curb the spread of COVID-19.

The Opposition parties said Mr. Adityanath had not set a good example. "Yogi is telling people not to go to temples and mosques, and in view of the coronavirus epidemic this is absolutely right. But the Chief Minister himself is flouting what he is saying," Samajwadi Party State president Naresh Utam said.

Congress spokesperson Amarnath Agarwal and Aam Aadmi Party State president Sabhaji Singh criticised him for taking part in the event.

Daily wagers left in chaos, says Yechury

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

At least 45 crore Indians worked on daily wages, and with the lockdown owing to the COVID-19 outbreak being extended to 21 days without any concrete assurance from the government, they have been pushed into chaos, CPI(M) general secretary Sitaran Yechury wrote in a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He called the Prime Minister's address to the nation very disappointing, as once again, he said, Mr. Modi failed to provide any relief to the poor. The government had not come up with any measure to assist the poor migrants who were most hurt by the lockdown, he said. Most of them were stranded en route without food or shelter.

The ₹15,000-crore healthcare package announced by the Prime Minister was too less, he said.

The CPI(M) leader said that in the 2020 Budget, the government announced a cut in health expenditure even when a global pandemic was in sight. The All India Institute of Medical Sciences got a paltry hike of 0.1%. The biggest dip in allocation was for the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana – from ₹156 crore to ₹29 crore. The allocation to Ayushman Bharat remained unchanged though it should have been increased.

He said many industries were struggling and they should be helped through tax breaks and financial support to prevent massive job losses, and the government

leader who had raised an alarm about COVID-19 as early as February 12. Mr. Gandhi said the daily wage earners must be extended immediate help through direct cash transfers and free rations. "Delaying this will cause widespread devastation & chaos," he said.

Tax breaks He said many industries were struggling and they should be helped through tax breaks and financial support to prevent massive job losses, and the government

must reassure business owners of all support to tide over the crisis.

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Chidambaram terms lockdown announcement a 'watershed'

Appeals to people to be foot soldiers of 'commander' Modi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Congress leader P. Chidambaram on Wednesday called Prime Minister Narendra Modi's nationwide lockdown announcement a "watershed moment" in the country's fight against coronavirus, and appealed to people to be the foot soldiers of Mr. Modi, whom he described as the 'commander' of the fight.

The former Finance Minister also offered a 10-point cash transfer plan to deal with the economic crisis. "We should put behind us the debates that took place before March 24 and look upon the nationwide lockdown as the beginning of a new battle in which the people are the foot soldiers and the PM is the Commander.



P. Chidambaram

We owe a duty to extend our total support to the Prime Minister and the Central and State governments," he said in a two-page statement.

To put cash and food in the hands of people, he urged the government to double the amount paid/payable under PM-KISAN (to ₹2,000) and transfer the additional amount immediately to the bank account of each beneficiary.

"Bring tenant farmers un-

Learn from Kerala, D. Raja tells Centre

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Centre needs to draw lessons from the Kerala government in sensitively handling the coronavirus outbreak while taking care of the poor and daily wagers, CPI general secretary D. Raja said.

He criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to the nation on Tuesday, calling the financial package of ₹15,000 crore "too little". He pointed out that the Kerala government alone had allotted a ₹20,000-crore financial package. "The Prime Minister has not announced any relief package for the poor and unemployed. With the total lockdown, the daily wage earners and the unemployed will not be able to have minimum essentials," he said.

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Rc.No. 999/PUR-II/2020 Date : 24.03.2020

1. Name of the work : Supply and delivery of 75.47 lakh School Bag for School students in Tamil Nadu on an Annual Rate Contract Basis for the year 2020-21.
2. Sale period of Tender Document : On all working days from 01.04.2020 to 05.05.2020 between 10.00 a.m. and 05.00 p.m.
3. Last Date and Time for Submission of Tender Document : 05.05.2020 upto 11.00 a.m.
4. Pre-Bid meeting date, time & place : 27.04.2020 at 11.00 a.m. at Tamil Nadu Textbook and Educational Services Corporation, Chennai-6
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Managing Director, Tender Inviting Authority, Tamil Nadu Text Book and Educational Services Corporation, Chennai-6

DIPR/1566/TENDER/2020 Tamilnadu Text Book and

Economy in peril

Globally, governments and central banks are rippling up the policy rulebook as they battle to immunise their economies from a deeper coronavirus carnage

U.S.

- The White House and Senate leaders agreed on a \$2 trillion stimulus package, which will put cash into the hands of Americans, provide grants to small businesses and loans to larger corporations
- A separate package from U.S. financial overseers would provide \$4 trillion in liquidity to juice up the economy

SAUDI ARABIA

- Saudi Arabia, which holds the G20 presidency, confirmed that it would

CENTRAL BANKS: The ECB, after being criticised for keeping interest rates on hold, last week announced a €750 billion scheme to buy government and corporate bonds

convene a videoconference summit of leaders on Thursday

- G7 Finance Ministers and central bank chiefs said they were working on "substantial and complementary packages"

GERMANY

- Germany plans to abandon its constitutional debt limits and raise €156 bn in new borrowing to stop Europe's largest economy from going under

EUROPEAN UNION

- The EU has suspended limits on members' debt and deficit levels
- Backed by France, hard-pressed Italy wants the EU to let members pool their debts and issue so-called coronabonds

Booster shots: Printing money, gargantuan debt spending, loan guarantees, tax breaks and even direct payments to workers are all in the highly unorthodox mix



To the American people, we say, big help, quick help is on the way
— CHUCK SCHUMER, U.S. SENATE MINORITY LEADER



The Fed, the ECB and the Bank of Japan have joined other central banks in enhancing currency swaps to maintain a plentiful supply of dollars running through seized-up credit markets

SOURCE: JOHNS HOPKINS CORONAVIRUS RESOURCE CENTRE & AFP

Spain overtakes China's virus death toll

Country saw number of casualties rise by 738 in a single day; UN chief seeks \$2 billion to help the poor

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE MADRID

Spain joined Italy on Wednesday in seeing its death toll from the coronavirus epidemic surpass that of China, as more than a billion Indians joined a lockdown that has confined a third of humanity.

"COVID-19 is threatening the whole of humanity – and the whole of humanity must fight back," UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said, launching an appeal for \$2 billion to help the world's poor.

On Wednesday, the number of deaths around the world from the novel coronavirus strain stood at 19,647, with more than 436,000 declared cases registered in 181 countries and territories.

India's stay-at-home order is now the biggest, and Rus-

sia will follow suit, with President Vladimir Putin declaring next week a public holiday and postponing a public vote on constitutional reforms.

The G20 major economies will hold an emergency videoconference summit on Thursday to discuss a global response to the crisis, as will the 27 leaders of the European Union, the outbreak's new epicentre.

Spain saw the number of deaths surge to 3,434 after more than 738 people died in the past 24 hours, following Italy in overtaking the figure in China, where the virus originated late last year.

People dying alone'

At the La Paz university hospital in Madrid, A&E nurse Guillen del Barrio sounded completely empty as he re-

lated what happened overnight.

"It is really hard, we had feverish people for many hours in the waiting room," the 30-year-old told AFP by telephone. "Many of my colleagues were crying because there were people who are dying alone, without seeing their family for the last time."

Hard-hit Spain and Italy were joined by France and six more EU countries in urging Germany and the Netherlands to allow the issue joint European bonds to cut borrowing costs and stabilise the eurozone economy.

Meanwhile in Iran, the coronavirus has claimed more than 2,000 lives until now. "New journeys will be banned, leaving towns and cities will be banned," government spokesman Ali Rabii announced.

Prince Charles tests positive for COVID-19

REUTERS LONDON

Prince Charles, the 71-year-old heir to the British throne, has tested positive for COVID-19 but is in good health and is now self-isolating in Scotland.

Prince Charles, eldest son of Queen Elizabeth, is displaying what Clarence House said were mild symptoms but remains in good health and has been working from his Birkhall residence in Scotland. His wife, Camilla, 72, tested negative.

"The Prince of Wales has tested positive for coronavirus," Clarence House said. "He has been displaying



Prince Charles

mild symptoms but otherwise remains in good health and has been working from home throughout the last few days as usual."

Queen Elizabeth, who is currently at Windsor Castle, is reportedly in good health.

White House, Congress agree on \$2 trillion virus rescue Bill

Measures include aid to businesses, workers and healthcare

ASSOCIATED PRESS WASHINGTON

The White House and Senate leaders of both parties announced agreement on Wednesday on an unprecedented \$2 trillion emergency Bill to rush sweeping aid to businesses, workers and a health care system slammed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The urgently needed measure is the largest economic rescue Bill in history. It is intended as a weeks-long or months-long patch for an economy spiralling into recession – or worse – and a nation facing a potentially ghastly toll.

'Help is on the way'

"To the American people, we say, big help, quick help is on the way," Senate Minor-

ity Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said.

Top White House aide Eric Ueland announced the agreement on Wednesday, capping days of often intense haggling and mounting pressure. Some final pieces of the agreement need to be finalised in detailed legislative language.

The measure is the third Bill produced by Congress and by far the largest in response to COVID-19, building on earlier efforts focussed on vaccines and emergency response, sick and family medical leave for workers, and food aid.

It would give direct payments to most Americans, expand unemployment benefits and provide a \$367 billion programme for small

businesses to keep making payroll while workers are forced to stay home.

One of the last issues to close concerned \$500 billion for guaranteed, subsidised loans to larger industries, including a fight over how generous to be with the airlines. Hospitals would get significant help as well.

"After days of discussions, the Senate has reached a bipartisan agreement on a historic relief package for this pandemic," said Majority Leader Mitch McConnell.

The package would give one-time payments to Americans – \$1,200 per adult making up to \$75,000 a year, and \$2,400 to a married couple making up to \$150,000, with \$500 payments per child.

It would give direct payments to most Americans, expand unemployment benefits and provide a \$367 billion programme for small

Bolsonaro slams virus quarantines

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE BRASILIA

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro lashed out on Tuesday at what he called "scorched-earth" quarantine policies to contain the pandemic, saying they risked wrecking the economy.

The far-right leader condemned the containment measures in places such as Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, saying they risked killing people's jobs in a misguided effort to save lives.

"Some state and local authorities need to abandon the scorched-earth concept: blocking transport, closing businesses and confining people en masse," he said.

"We need to preserve jobs and families' livelihoods," Mr. Bolsonaro said.

Turkey charges 20 Saudis over Khashoggi murder

2 former top aides to Saudi Crown Prince among suspects

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE ISTANBUL

Turkish prosecutors have charged 20 suspects, including two former top aides to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, over the 2018 murder of Riyadh critic Jamal Khashoggi.

Prosecutors accuse Saudi Arabia's deputy intelligence chief Ahmed al-Assiri and the royal court's media czar Saud al-Qahtani of leading the operation against Khashoggi and giving orders to a Saudi hit team.

Khashoggi, 59, a commentator who wrote for The Washington Post, was killed after he entered the Saudi consulate on October 2, 2018, to obtain paperwork for his wedding to Turkish fiancee Hatice Cengiz.



Jamal Khashoggi

The Saudi insider-turned-critic was strangled and his body cut into pieces by a 15-man Saudi squad inside the consulate, according to Turkey officials.

His remains have never been found despite repeated calls by Turkish officials for the Saudis to cooperate.

Riyadh insists he was killed in a "rogue" operation.

But the CIA, a UN special envoy and Ankara have directly linked the Saudi Crown Prince to the killing, a charge the kingdom vehemently denies.

'Monstrous killing'
Turkey carried out its own investigation after being unhappy with Saudi Arabia's explanations.

The Istanbul prosecutor's office said in a statement that Assiri and Qahtani were charged with "instigating the deliberate and monstrous killing, causing torment".

The murder caused relations between Ankara and Riyadh to worsen.

ELSEWHERE



Bangladesh frees opposition leader Zia

DHAKA
Bangladesh released opposition leader Khaleda Zia, 74, from jail on Wednesday for six months to allow the two-time former Prime Minister to undergo urgent medical treatment. Zia has spent more than two years behind bars on corruption charges. AFP

67 Italian priests have died of virus: report

ROME
A total of 67 Italian priests infected with the COVID-19 have died since the pandemic reached the Mediterranean country last month, the Avvenire newspaper said on Wednesday. The youngest of those listed by the Catholic Church-affiliated paper was 53. AFP

In New York, some women will have to deliver babies alone

Spouses, partners and other family members barred as a measure to help protect mothers and children from COVID-19

CHRISTINA CARON KATIE VAN SYCKLE NEW YORK

Women giving birth at two leading New York City hospitals are being told they must labour without spouses, partners or doulas by their side – leaving the expectant mothers anxious and frightened about their upcoming deliveries.

The New York City hospital network NewYork-Presbyterian on Monday instituted one of the most restrictive visitor policies in the country for women giving birth, barring spouses, partners and other family members or outside support people, such as doulas, from the delivery room – a rule said would

help protect mothers and children during the coronavirus outbreak.

And on Monday night, Mt. Sinai Health System announced it would also bar partners and other visitors from its labour and delivery rooms, beginning Tuesday.

"We do not take this decision lightly, but these are unprecedented times that require unprecedented steps to protect our patients, their families and their new babies," Lucia Lee, a spokeswoman for Mt. Sinai, said in a statement.

The new rules at NewYork-Presbyterian network, where about 15,000 infants are delivered each year, started two days after

the New York State Department of Health issued guidance stating that one support person could be in the delivery room during the coronavirus outbreak because a support person was "essential to patient care throughout labour, delivery and the immediate postpartum period."

Moshen, 37, who is due in early June and plans to deliver at the Weill Cornell Medical Center, part of the NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital system. "I haven't been able to sleep. I've just been a mess." Ms. Moshen, a prekindergarten teacher in Manhattan, said she nearly underwent an emergency C-section with the birth of her first child, a boy who is now 4, and the experience has made her fearful that something may go wrong during her second delivery.

NewYork-Presbyterian announced Sunday that it would be instituting the new rules, saying they were "a necessary step to promote patient safety." NY TIMES



Tough times: Medical personnel outside the emergency room at NewYork-Presbyterian hospital. ■AP

Sudan Defence Minister dies at Juba peace talks

'He died of an unspecified illness'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE KHARTOUM

Sudanese Defence Minister Lieutenant General Jamal al-Din Omar died of an unspecified illness on Wednesday while in neighbouring South Sudan for peace talks with his country's main rebel groups, the military announced.

Mr. Omar had "suffered from a number of chronic illnesses," armed forces spokesman Amer Mohamed al-Hassan said without elaborating.

The government delegation in the South Sudanese capital Juba said Mr. Omar died at 2:30 a.m. (2330 GMT on Tuesday) "after a sudden

heart attack during the performance of his sacred duty".

Born in 1960, Mr. Omar was named Defence Minister after the armed forces toppled veteran President Omar Bashir in a palace coup last April following months of nationwide protests.

Before becoming Minister, he headed the security and defence committee. Before Bashir was overthrown, he served as head of military intelligence.

Since October, Sudan's transitional government has been locked in talks with rebel groups that fought Bashir's regime.

MARKET WATCH

	25-03-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	28536	6.98
Brent oil	26.47	-4.75

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	255.60	23.85
Asian Paints	1593.15	68.30
Axisc Bank	326.80	23.65
Bajaj Auto	1946.75	9.60
Bajaj Finserv	4830.30	332.55
Bajaj Finance	2585.60	111.40
Bharti Airtel	429.10	25.05
BPCL	273.75	10.90
Britannia Ind	2451.40	86.70
Cipla	376.45	-1.00
Coal India	124.50	-3.35
Dr Reddy's Lab	2922.00	64.05
Eicher Motors	14516.60	308.10
GAIL (India)	75.55	-0.90
Grasim Ind	451.35	51.25
HCL Tech.	457.60	15.55
HDPC	1646.05	140.95
HDPC Bank	856.75	89.05
Hero MotoCorp	1667.65	40.60
Hindalco	94.55	5.80
Hind Unilever	2088.15	60.30
ICICI Bank	316.90	20.40
IndusInd Bank	301.30	-11.05
Bharti Infralet	147.50	5.55
Infosys	606.20	16.40
Indian Oil Corp	77.85	-1.85
ITC	147.35	-2.35
JSW Steel	151.80	4.70
Kotak Bank	1290.15	137.25
L&T	765.75	57.85
M&M	277.85	8.85
Maruti Suzuki	5005.95	519.50
Nestle India Ltd.	14444.10	965.75
NTPC	79.70	2.15
ONGC	61.55	-0.95
PowerGrid Corp	150.25	2.95
Reliance Ind	1082.25	138.85
State Bank	189.90	6.70
Shree Cement	17438.25	458.25
Sun Pharma	347.65	12.50
Tata Motors	70.25	1.70
Tata Steel	286.80	14.90
TCS	1750.30	47.15
Tech Mahindra	526.70	23.20
Titan	880.80	64.70
UltraTech Cement	3228.60	210.50
UPL	292.80	30.75
Vedanta	64.20	1.40
Wipro	174.65	-1.70
Zee Entertainment	125.50	6.35

FinMin writes to RBI for relaxing farm loan NPA norms

Cites stress in agriculture sector; relaxation a prerequisite to interest subvention

MANOJIT SAHA

MUMBAI

The Finance Ministry has asked the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to relax asset classification norms for farm loans extended by banks following the stress faced by the agriculture sector.

In a letter addressed to RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das, the Ministry said, "it is requested to consider making appropriate relaxation in asset classification norms in respect of short-term agricultural crop loans for a period up to 30th June 2020."

The letter, reviewed by *The Hindu*, cited a communication from the Agriculture Ministry which is considering an extension of the interest subvention scheme for the farm sector which, in turn, would require relaxa-



Bleak prospects: A loan is classified as non-performing by banks if repayment is due for over 90 days. ■ PAUL NORONHA

tion of NPA norms. As per the RBI's asset classification norms, a loan is classified as non-performing by banks if repayment is due for more than 90 days.

"The Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and

Farmers' Welfare, Government of India, has [said that] in view of the unprecedented situation prevailing in the country on account of increasing incidence of COVID-19 infection and consequent lockdown across the

country, they are actively considering the possibility of extending the benefit of interest subvention and prompt repayment incentive to short-term crop agriculture loans falling due between 29th March 2020 and 30th June 2020, if the loans are repaid by 30th June 2020," the letter said.

"They have further stated that the extension of the repayment date would require relaxation in asset qualification by RBI," it added.

The spread of COVID-19 has resulted in a lockdown across the country with economic and other activities coming to a grinding halt. As a result, industry and bankers have demanded a relaxation in bad loan norms,

apart from economic stimulus from the government.

Aviation firms may suffer losses of up to \$3.6 bn: CAPA

First quarter of FY21 already looks like a washout*

LALATENDU MISHRA

MUMBAI

Indian aviation companies, including airlines, airport operators and related services, are estimated to incur a loss of \$3.3 billion to \$3.6 billion (\$24,750 crore to ₹27,000 crore) in the April to June 2020 quarter on account of COVID-19 spread in India and the resultant lockdown, aviation consulting firm CAPA Advisory said.

"They have further stated that the extension of the repayment date would require relaxation in asset qualification by RBI," it added.

As per CAPA India preliminary estimates, while airlines will incur a loss of \$1.75 billion in first quarter of the 2021 fiscal, airport and concessionaires will see a loss of \$1.50-1.75 billion and ground handlers \$80-90 million.

"India's airline system is certainly not prepared for such a severe systemic shock, and this will have an impact on the entire aviation

value chain, including airport operators, duty free, retail, food and beverage, and other airport concessionaires; ground handlers; MROs, inflight catering companies, not to mention travel distribution," said Kapil Kaul, CEO and Director, CAPA Advisory.

"The entire sector is now in a state of crisis which will certainly impact FY2021 and quite possibly well beyond," he said.

"India's aviation sector could incur losses of \$3.3-3.6 billion in Q1 of FY2021," CAPA said, adding that this preliminary estimate assumes that all domestic and international operations remain grounded till June 30, 2020.

"Even with some partial resumption of services in May and June, the financial outcomes may not change significantly," it said.

Union Cabinet approves recapitalisation of RRBs

Centre's share fixed at of ₹670 crore

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Centre has approved a ₹1,340-crore recapitalisation plan for regional rural banks (RRBs) to improve their capital-to-risk weighted assets ratio (CRAR), strengthening these institutions that are critical to the provision of credit in rural areas.

On Wednesday, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs gave its nod for an outlay of ₹670 crore as the central share for the scheme on the condition that the release of the funds will be contingent upon the release of the proportionate share by the sponsor banks, an official statement said.

This would provide minimum regulatory capital for one more year viz. up to 2020-21 for those RRBs that are unable to maintain the minimum CRAR of 9%. This



has been an ongoing scheme since 2011.

The RRBs are required to provide 75% of their total credit as priority sector lending with primary focus on agricultural credit, including small and marginal farmers, as well as micro entrepreneurs and rural artisans.

At a time of lockdown due to the COVID-19 crisis, financially stronger rural banks could also be crucial to ensuring liquidity in rural areas.

Banks get ready for merger, albeit reluctantly

Process can wait, given the lockdown the country is under, say some bankers

MANOJIT SAHA

MUMBAI

Almost half of the Indian public sector lenders – 10 to be precise, which will be merged to create four banks – are getting ready to amalgamate themselves in an exercise that takes effect from April 1.

The mergers, announced in August last, will start amid an unprecedented nationwide lockdown to fight the rapid spread of COVID-19.

Banking services are exempt from the lockdown, but are operating with minimal staff at branches with curtailed business hours, primarily focussing on essential services such as withdrawals and deposits. Banks are encouraging customers to make use of their digital platforms for transactions.

"The entire focus right now is how to continue the essential services to customers with minimum staff," said the chief executive of a



public sector bank, who did not wish to be named.

"In such crisis times, customer service is the key. Merger can wait for a quarter, at least," the executive added.

In August 2019, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the merger of 10 public sector banks into four. Oriental Bank of India and United Bank of India will be

merged with Punjab National Bank; Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank will be merged with Union Bank of India; Allahabad Bank will be merged with Indian Bank; and Syndicate Bank will be merged with Canara Bank.

According to the plan, only the balance sheets of these banks will be merged on April 1. All the branches of the transferor banks will be

come branches of the transferee bank. The actual integration of systems and processes of these banks will take time (up to a year). For example, if a customer of Andhra Bank goes to a branch which belonged to Corporation Bank before the merger (and a branch of Union Bank post merger), then the entry would still be made in Andhra Bank's system. All the branches of Union Bank will have to maintain three separate software systems in the branches. The same is the case with all other merger-bound banks.

Logistical nightmare
Also, the branding of the branches will have to change. The branches of the transferor banks will have to don the brand of the transferee bank. "With limited staff that are operating now and also the lockdown that is in place, it is going to be logistical nightmare to change the

branding," said a banker with a public sector bank.

Some bankers said the issue of postponing the merger was discussed among them informally, but no formal requests have been made to the Finance Ministry.

There are also performance-related concerns of the merged entity since economic activity has almost come to a halt due to the crisis, which will inevitably have a bearing on the bank's performance.

A section of bankers is also of the view that it is too late to postpone the merger at this point of time since only less than a week is left for the process.

"It will be business as usual after the merger as there is no impact on the customer since only the balance sheets are merged," said the chief executive of another merger-bound public sector bank.

Tax rebate for garments extended

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Centre has extended a tax rebate scheme for garments and made-up apparel from April 1, 2020 onward until it is merged with a wider scheme providing for remission of taxes on exported products.

The Union Cabinet approved the extension of its at its meeting on Wednesday, in a decision which will bring some relief to the high-employment, export-focused textile sector.

There will be no change in scheme guidelines and the rates notified by the Textiles Ministry until the two schemes are merged, said an official statement.

As petro demand declines, IOC cuts refinery throughput

Firm to raise LPG output; no need for panic-bookings, it says

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

India's largest fuel retailer Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) has cut down the throughput from its refineries across the country by almost 30% as the demand for petroleum products such as petrol, diesel, aviation turbine fuel (ATF), fuel oil and bitumen, has reduced substantially following the outbreak of COVID-19 in the country.

"Keeping this (falling demand) in view, Indian Oil has regulated crude oil throughput at most of its refineries by 25% to 30%", said IOC in a statement.

"Offtake of finished products from refiners in the last one week has helped up-

action accordingly, IOC said. In the midst of a reduction in demand for major petroleum products, there has been an increase in demand for LPG cooking gas.

Optimising operations
"To meet the rising demand for LPG, Indian Oil is taking steps to increase LPG production at its major refineries by optimising operations, improving LPG yield in LPG-producing units like FCC/Indmax, etc. Bottling plant operations and LPG refill deliveries are being streamlined accordingly," said IOC, adding adequate stocks were available and there was no need for panic-bookings by customers.

Ramco Fabrics' yarn-dyeing plant in T.N. gets rolling

Company invests ₹250 cr. to make Greige yarn-dyed fabrics

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

Ramco Fabrics, a Ramco Group company and a division of Rajapalayam Mills Ltd., has commenced the commercial production of its yarn dyeing and weaving plant at Rajapalayam in Tamil Nadu to produce dyed Greige fabric.

The new unit was established as part of the forward integration plan. It entailed an investment of ₹250 crore and it will have an initial production capacity of 10 million metres of Greige

fabric per annum, said a top official of the group.

Besides, it would also cater to the fibre-dyeing needs of Ramco Melange products, said A.V. Dharmakrishnan, director, Rajapalayam Mills.

Demand from customers
Earlier, Ramco's customers purchased high count yarn from the mill and gave it to a third party for weaving. Later, it was used for making fabrics.

"To deal with the trouble, our customers asked us to

CUMI doubles abrasives' division capacity

Firm invests ₹48 cr. in Sriperumbudur

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

Carborundum Universal Ltd. (CUMI



Wait for residents continues: The Olympic Village in Tokyo a day after the Games were put off. Its future use as residential condos is one of the issues facing the re-organised event. ■ AFP

Rescheduled Games need sacrifices, says IOC chief Bach

All options on the table, not just restricted to summer of 2021

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LAUSANNE

International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach said on Wednesday that the postponed Tokyo Games would require "sacrifices and compromises" from all sides to make them work.

"These postponed Olympic Games will need sacrifices, will need compromises by all of the stakeholders," Bach told reporters in a conference call the day after the IOC decided to delay the 2020 Games because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The IOC's role, Bach said, was "to make the Olympic dreams of athletes come true".

He admitted that cancell-

ing the Tokyo Games was "discussed and considered", but said: "It was very clear from the beginning that cancellation was not something the IOC would in any way favour."

Bach said the rescheduling of the Games in 2021 remained a "very challenging question".

'Here We Go'
A task-force, named 'Here We Go', had been created to examine the issue, Bach added, saying the first port of call would be with the 33 international federations, likely starting with a conference call on Thursday.

"The first step, we have to see with them, to see what

the options are. We also have to take into account the sports calendar around the Olympic Games," the German said.

The rescheduling, he added, "is not restricted just to the summer months. All the options are on the table, before and including the summer of 2021".

Both World Athletics and the International Swimming Federation say they are prepared to move their 2021 world championships to accommodate the rescheduled Games.

One of the many logistical headaches caused by the historic postponement of the Tokyo Olympics has been the uncertainty around the

Athletes' Village overlooking Tokyo Bay. It was supposed to be re-purposed into condos for sale after the Games.

When asked about how a postponement might affect the Village and its conversion, Bach said: "I cannot tell you what the situation is. It's one of the many thousand of questions the task-force has to address.

"It's the Olympic Village (where) the heart of the Games is usually beating."

Bach, who was part of West Germany's gold medal-winning foil fencing team at the 1976 Olympics, added: "Of course, I'd be very, very delighted if we could have the Olympic Village in the traditional form."

FIH welcomes IOC's decision

IANS
GENEVA

International Hockey Federation (FIH) CEO Thierry Weil has welcomed the decision of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and Japanese authorities to postpone Tokyo Olympics to 2021.

"On behalf of FIH, I would like to thank and express our full support to the IOC, the Tokyo 2020 organising committee, the Japanese authorities and the Tokyo metropolitan government for the decision taken to postpone the Olympics to next year," Weil said in a statement.

Don't stray out of your crease'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NEW DELHI

R. Ashwin lightheartedly invoked his 'mankad' controversy with England's Jos Buttler in light of the nation-wide lockdown.

The spin bowler tweeted a picture of his dismissal of Buttler exactly a year ago in the Indian Premier League, when he spotted the batsman out of his crease at the non-striker's end and ran him out.

"Hahaha, somebody sent me this and told me it's exactly been 1 year since this run out happened," wrote Ashwin.

"As the nation goes into a lockdown, this is a good reminder to my citizens. Don't wander out. Stay inside, stay safe! #21DayLockdown."

Athletes give thumbs up to postponement

Say the decision was the right thing to do

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS

Prospective Olympic competitors were quick out of the blocks on Tuesday after the Tokyo Games were postponed until 2021 and most gave the decision the thumbs up on social media.

"All in all a very wise decision," tweeted Eliud Kipchoge, the Olympic marathon champion and the only man to run the distance in less than two hours. "I look forward to come back to Japan to defend my Olympic title next year and look forward to witness a wonderful event."

Italian cyclist Elia Viviani, a track gold medallist in Rio in 2016, summed up much of the reaction when he tweeted: "Postponing the Olympics to 2021 is the best decision for me. Today we are all struggling with a much bigger problem... So Olympics see you in 2021!"

More preparation
One of his sprint rivals, Britain's Mark Cavendish said:

"BIG news and it's the right call," before adding: "On a sporting side, there's going to be a few nations thankful for 12 months more preparation!"

Belgian cyclist Victor Campenaerts was worried about his girlfriend, swimmer Fanny Lecluyse: "She has already been selected, will she be selected for next year's Olympics? Does she have to qualify again? She was planning to retire after these Games."

For some athletes, like Simone Biles who had said she



Optimistic: Eliud Kipchoge, who won the men's marathon in 2016, says he will be back to defend his gold whenever the Games take place. ■ GETTY IMAGES

planned to retire after Tokyo, it means another year of hard work. Her coach said the US gymnasts were ready.

Less happy

Russian gymnast Angelina Melnikova, was less happy with the decision.

"I'm very excited and now I'm very upset, we are all very upset. But now we have time," she posted on Instagram.

"I'll do my best gymnastics ever. Let's go with me."

At 25, British diver Tom Daley, who has won medals at the last two Olympics, said the extra year would take a toll.

"Yes, I'll be another year older, and my body will feel that, but I promise to work my tail off."

India's Mary Kom tweeted: "Excellent and right decision."

The 2012 women's triathlon champion, Nicola Spirig, applauded the decision but hinted it could mark the end

of her career.

But most expressed relief and optimism.

Dutch runner Dafne Schippers, who won silver in the 200 metres in Rio posted: "I was really looking forward... but for now we have to look at the bigger picture and do whatever it takes to beat the corona virus... let's make sure we'll celebrate even harder in 2021!"

US swimmer Lilly King, a double gold medallist in Rio, posted: "Just one more year to get better."

"You gonna cry about it or boss up?" asked American wrestler Jordan Burroughs, a gold medalist in 2012, in a slangy tweet, "First of all Ima do both."

French double-Olympic judo champion Teddy Riner tweeted: "See you in 2021, Tokyo. First, we have a more important fight to win."

British sprinter Dina Asher-Smith tweeted: "Tokyo2021. Same flame, new dates."

Kohli & boys handed customised indoor workouts

The routines have been created keeping in mind the demands of the players'

CRICKET

IANS
NEW DELHI

With the government calling for a lockdown to fight the coronavirus outbreak, the Indian cricketers are all home and spending time with their families. But strength and conditioning coach Nick Webb, in consultation with physio Nitin Patel, has customised routines for Virat Kohli and boys to ensure they stay in top shape despite the pandemic induced break.

To stay in shape

Sources in the team management said that the duo of Webb and Nitin have made player-specific routines for all the contracted players to ensure that they can continue to stay in shape even as the country fights the pandemic.

"All the players, irrespective of whether they play red-ball cricket or white-ball



Plan-B: With on-field action not in sight any time soon, Virat Kohli and other contracted Indian players will take recourse to indoor regimen to stay fit. ■ TWITTER

cricket or all formats have been given fitness routines which they are to follow and give updates to Webb and Nitin from time to time. The routines have been created keeping in mind the demands of the players.

"So, for example, someone like a Kohli loves to train with weights as well. So, his routine would have weights involved like the clean and jerk and deadlifts and other

exercises. While another player might be more comfortable doing free-hand exercises, so in that case, he has been given more free weight functional training options," it was stated.

In the balance

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday announced a 21-day lockdown. This has put the fate of the Indian Premier League also hanging in the balance.

While the BCCI is confident that they can pull off the league even if it starts from the first week of May, an important area of concern will be the entry of the foreign players as visa restrictions need to be removed first. The Sports Ministry has made it clear that the fate of the 13th edition of the IPL can be decided only after the government comes out with a fresh advisory after April 15, keeping in mind the situation with regards to the coronavirus outbreak.

SUDOKU

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1	6				5		2	
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					3	8	9	
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1		5				6	2	
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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★

Solution to puzzle 12892

CAPILLARIES AS
ALISSES NE
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ANNAHAAALP
MAKEFACE PEEVE
ITLHLHR
TOOLKITICON
YNSRCI
CHARSTEPHEN
CBAOPAT
OPARTBARKER
ULLRIOANLU
PALMISTRYELAND
OLOYITEMILED
NIITASCERTAINED

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

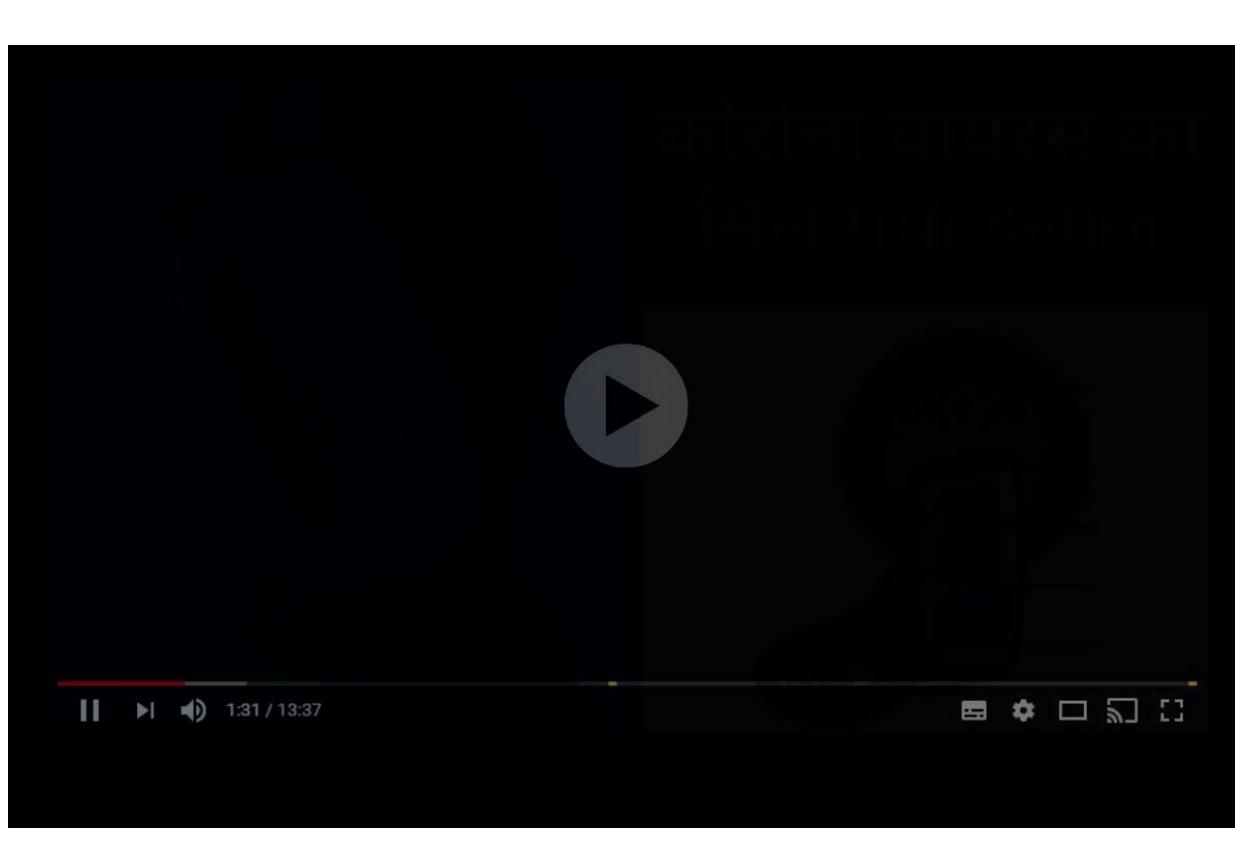
3 2 5 9 7 4 8 1 6
1 9 7 8 2 6 5 4 3
4 8 6 3 5 1 7 2 9
9 5 3 1 4 8 2 6 7
2 6 8 5 3 7 4 9 1
7 1 4 6 9 2 3 8 5
6 4 2 7 1 3 9 5 8
8 7 9 4 6 5 1 3 2
5 3 1 2 8 9 6 7 4

FAITH

Kadru's curse

The Mahabharata tells us the story of Vinata and Kadru, who were married to sage Kashyapa. When Vinata bets that the tail of the horse Uchaisravas is white, Kadru tricks her by asking her sons, who are snakes, to coil around the horse's tail to make it appear black. Some of the snakes refuse, and Kadru curses them. There is a connection between this story and the story of Janamejaya's sacrifice, said V.S. Karunakarachari in a discourse.

Janamejaya was the son of Parikshit. Parikshit was the son of Abhimanyu and the grandson of Arjuna. Parikshit was in the forest one day, hunting. He approached a sage for water and food. The meditating sage did not respond. Angered, Parikshit picked up a dead snake and draped it round the sage's neck. The sage's son cursed Parikshit, and said that he would die due to a bite by the snake Takshaka. Given a week to live, Parikshit asked sage Suka to narrate Krishna's exploits, and thus was born Srimad Bhagavatam. At the end of the week, Takshaka bit him and Parikshit died. His son Janamejaya accepted this as fate and went about his duties as his father's successor. But he later learnt that Takshaka went beyond what was required of him. As Takshaka was going to carry out the curse against Parikshit, he met a Brahmin called Kashyapa, who could revive anyone who died of snake bite by reciting the Garuda mantra. Takshaka wanted to retain his reputation as a fearsome snake. So, he gave the Brahmin more than the reward he would have got if he had saved the king. Thus, Takshaka deprived Parikshit a chance of saving his life. When Janamejaya came to know this, he performed a sarpa yaga to burn snakes. The snakes cursed by Kadru fell into the fire. So here is the connection between Kadru's curse and Janamejaya's yaga.



BWF should plan a timeline for resuming tournaments: Srikanth

Says it's challenging to re-set training schedule and goals

BADMINTON

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM
HYDERABAD

Former World No. 1 K. Srikanth, while welcoming the decision to postpone the Tokyo Olympics, feels that the Badminton World Federation (BWF) should think of a timeline for starting its other tournaments which have been cancelled recently.

"It is a good decision as it is next to impossible to host the Games given the critical scenario across the world," Srikanth told *The Hindu*.

Need for a re-think

"I personally feel that the BWF should have a serious re-think, once the situation improves and deemed fit for any sporting activity, about starting the tournaments which were cancelled in the wake of the coronavirus threat," he said.

"I appeal to the organisers to wait before declaring the next possible dates of Olympics. There has to be a periodic, critical review of the

situation before going ahead with the timeline," he said.

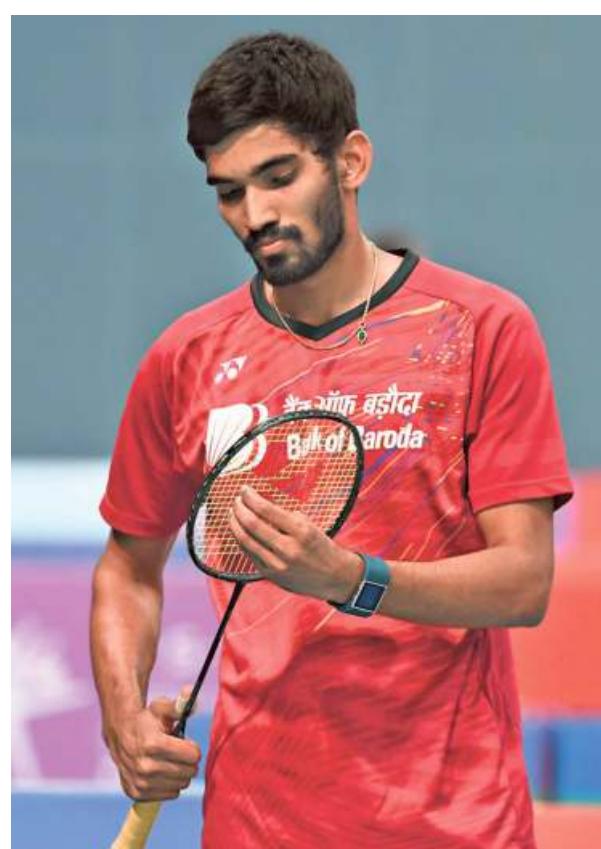
Reflecting on the preparations, Srikanth admitted it will be a difficult phase in the run-up to the next schedule of the Games.

To plan suitably

"For the last 12 months you have been tuning your physical and conditioning programme according to the original schedule. Now, you have to re-set the goal and plan these programmes accordingly."

"It is a huge task and a different kind of challenge for any athlete," the champion shuttler, who once set a rare record of winning four Super Series titles in 2017 before scaling the summit of world rankings in April 2018.

"Right now, I am in Gurur with my family members and friends. But, definitely doing those minimum exercises to stay fit and appeal to all the citizens to adhere to the guidelines of the Government and stay indoors till situation improves," he said.



Fervent plea: K. Srikanth said there is a need to wait before declaring the next possible dates of Olympics.

■ FILE PHOTO: SANDEEP SAXENA

Indian shuttlers for freeze in rankings

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Olympics postponement brought some relief but Indian shuttlers, including B. Sai Praneeth, are still wondering why the Badminton World Federation (BWF) is yet to freeze the rankings and sought clarity about the qualification process of the Tokyo Games.

The BWF had suspended all HSBC BWF World Tour events post the All England Championships due to the COVID-19 pandemic and there were calls for the extension of the Olympic qualification period which falls on April 28.

This is the time

But now with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) postponing the Olympics to next year, shuttlers believe its time BWF immediately freezes the ranking.

"Our points are getting deducted even though the tournaments were postponed by BWF due to the coronavirus."



Testing times: B. Sai Praneeth is worried that points are being deducted which will make qualification difficult.

■ FILE PHOTO: V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM

Swiss Open got postponed but my points got deducted.

"So like this, if they keep slashing the points for all the qualifiers which were postponed, I don't know what will happen," Praneeth said.

"BWF should at least freeze the rankings, later they can decide about the qualification depending on the dates of Olympics but as of now there is no clarity."

Praneeth, who was set to make his Olympic debut, said he is not sure about his participation as he will have to fight again for points.

Process will start again

"If Olympics would have happened in July, I would have been sure about my qualification but since it is now a year to go, so the process will again be on and I will have to fight for ranking points again."

"It is not easy to maintain that ranking. I can't say what will happen after one year," he said.

Borges has fitness levels to maintain

We're all doing our best to stay indoors, says MCFC's versatile midfielder

FOOTBALL

NANDAKUMAR MARAR
MUMBAI

Rowlin Borges is a tireless box-to-box midfielder, well-known for endurance on the pitch and versatility as a defensive midfielder for Mumbai City FC.

The India international is back home in Nuvem (Goa) trying to maintain a level of fitness during self-isolation.

Following a regimen

Players usually assemble for the ISL pre-season at a fixed date after India commitments are done. Instead, with the restrictions on assembly of people, Borges, 27, is following a regimen devised by MCFC's Head of Rehabilitation & Medical Services Dr. Sandeep Kurale.

"I'm in great physical condition. I'm trying to maintain fitness levels. We're all doing our best to stay indoors without compromising on our fitness routines," he said.



On his toes: Rowlin Borges says the focus is on injury prevention and bodyweight.

■ MUMBAI CITY FC

sory, followed by feedback via videos and periodic readings, is to give coaching and support staff fitness parameters of each player ready for screening and preparation.

New coach

MCFC will announce a new coach following Jorge Costa's exit this season.

"When a new set of people come in, they'll know certain things have been followed in the off-season. It will be easier for them to implement tactics," Borges said.

"The team coach or strength/conditioning coach will ask for certain data from the previous year. They will check aerobic conditioning and compare it with parameters they have in mind. Be-

fore starting the off-season, the players do the MAS (Maximum Aerobic Speed) test, involving runs over 60m for five minutes up and down the ground continuously and distance covered is calculated.

"This is the basic aerobics data we share," he said.

Borges and other players elsewhere relay the readings periodically.

"We send players' videos and email about the specific data they should record and update during the off-season. From the readings, we know exactly if a player is able to reach the required fitness level in the pre-season."

"Two other aspects we focus on is injury prevention and bodyweight. Players are told what to avoid when eat-

ing home-cooked food after long stretches away from home during the league."

Changes at the top

The Mumbai franchise underwent a change of ownership pattern, following the Abu Dhabi-based City Football Group (CFG) picking up a majority stake in the club and setting up CFG-India to oversee football operations in India.

The Abu Dhabi group owns Manchester City FC in the Premier League.

Apart from changes in team management, to be announced in the near future, a new chief coach will also be named, following the tenure of Portugal's Jorge Costa's ending in 2020 after two seasons.

'Once-in-a-life-time chance to serve the country'

Former cricketer Sukhvinder recounts his rescue mission to Italy

GENERAL

VIJAY LOKAPALLY
NEW DELHI

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi applauded the efforts of Capt. Swati Rawal and Capt. Raja Chauhan of Air India Boeing 777 that airlifted 263 Indians, mostly students stranded in Rome, it was an appreciation to cherish for the crew of that historic flight on March 22. Among those engaged in the operation was senior purser Sukhvinder Singh, former Delhi and Assam left-arm spinner.

Important assignment
The 20-member cabin crew reported at the Indira Gandhi International Airport on March 21 to perform, perhaps, the most important assignment of their careers. Flying to Rome with 120 Italian nationals and returning with Indian students, was the "call of the nation" for every crew member.

Having been employed with Air India (formerly In-

dian Airlines), for close to 30 years, Sukhvinder is among the few sportspersons who did not rest on the on-field laurels.

"When I was not playing, I was flying," Sukhvinder told *The Hindu*. His First Class career, spanning from 1986 to 2004, saw him play 47 matches (148 wickets and 2076 runs with four centuries).

"Cricket was the driving force for me to take up challenges in life. This was a mission for us. We were going to bring back the youth, the future of India. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to

serve the country," said the 53-year-old.

Rising to the occasion

"Air India has been doing a fantastic job in these times of crisis. It flew our countrymen from Wuhan and Milan. We take pride in being a part of that family. Each crew member knew it was the need of the hour. We understood the gravity of the situation and grabbed the chance when it came our way," said Sukhvinder, recalling the experience.

"We were provided with all the protection (Hazmat suit) from the COVID-19 virus. I was not scared. Being a cricketer, I have faced many challenges and pressure. I have flown with many Heads of States, but this was unique.

"I was part of a historic exercise that was evacuating our young citizens trapped in a foreign land. When we landed, most of them shed tears of joy and relief," said Sukhvinder, his voice choked with emotion.

In India, the pandemic has affected over 600 people besides 10 deaths.

FIFA monitoring virus threat in India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

World football governing body FIFA on Wednesday said it was monitoring the developments arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic in India, which is scheduled to host the Women's U-17 World Cup in November.

FIFA said it was also exploring "alternative solutions".

The coronavirus outbreak has so far claimed lives of over 20,000 people across the world while infecting more than 45,000.

In India, the pandemic has affected over 600 people besides 10 deaths.

"FIFA is currently monitoring developments regarding the coronavirus outbreak in India to decide the future of the U-17 Women's World Cup which is slated to be held in the country in November," the apex body said in a statement after PTI inquired.

Alternative solutions
"With public health and safety in mind, FIFA is also working with the Local Organising Committee to identify any potential impact on preparations for the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup India 2020, as well as finding alternative solutions to upcoming events that were planned in India in the lead up to the tournament," it added.

Sixteen teams will take part in the World Cup, of which only three have sealed their berths.

India has qualified as the host nation, while North Korea (winner) and Japan (runner-up) progressed from the Asian qualifiers.

The World Cup is scheduled to be held from November 2 to 21 with matches to be played in Navi Mumbai, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Bhubaneswar and Guwahati.

Hockey teams take postponement in stride

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BENGALURU

The news of Tokyo Olympics' postponement is yet to sink in but India's hockey captains Manpreet Singh and Rani Rampal are confident that they will take the disappointment in stride while working hard for the next one year.

"We had just finished the day's evening session when chief coach Graham Reid informed us about the postponement of the Olympic Games," Manpreet said.

India's highest-ranked player G. Sathiyan, who is in line to qualify alongside veteran Sharath Kamal, said it is still too early to talk about the game.

"Decision can only be made after the world is able to contain the virus. Indian coach is an option but will have to discuss with TTFI and SAI when the time comes and take a call," said Sathiyan.

Among the women, Manika Batra has the best chance of making the Olympics cut.

Fine start
The men's team made a fine start to the season this year with a fantastic outing in the Pro League while the women's team was stoked after its tour to New Zealand earlier this year.

"Though, somewhere at the back of our minds we anticipated this could happen considering the impact COVID-19 has made across the globe, we had never let it affect our training or the intensity needed in every session," Manpreet said.

Indian TT players get more time

Olympics postponement will help them prepare better

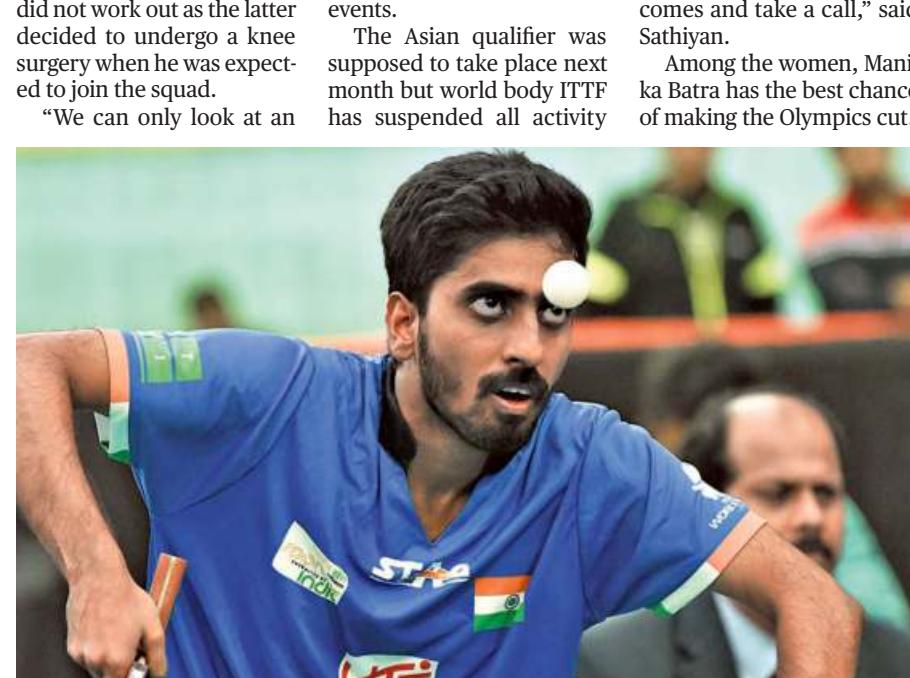
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The postponement of Tokyo Olympics to next year due to the COVID-19 pandemic has given India's table tennis squad more time to prepare and given the current scenario, the sport's governing body TTFI is looking to fill the head coach's position locally rather than hiring a foreign coach.

The head coach position has been lying vacant since the 2018 Asian Games due to multiple factors.

The Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI) had tried to rope in Canadian Dejan Papic last year, but things did not work out as the latter decided to undergo a knee surgery when he was expected to join the squad.

"We can only look at an



Need to wait: G. Sathiyan said a decision on the coach can be made only after the world is able to curtail the pandemic. ■ FILE PHOTO: G. RAMAKRISHNA

Indian coach now. There is no activity at the moment, but when things get better, I doubt a foreign coach would like to come here considering the global situation (due to coronavirus)," TTFI secretary-general M.P. Singh said.

Former national champions Soumyadeep Roy and Arup Basak have been working with the men's and women's teams respectively for more than a year.

No clarity

With the entire world sporting scene coming to a standstill due to the pandemic, there is lack of clarity over the Olympic qualification events.

The Asian qualifier was supposed to take place next month but world body ITTF has suspended all activity

until the end of April.

"We are waiting for the ITTF to give us more details about the future. The Olympic qualifying events need to be rescheduled and may be fresh rankings will have to be considered for qualification," Singh added.

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IN BRIEF



Cannes opens its doors to the homeless

PARIS

The Palais des Festivals should be preparing to welcome the hottest names in cinema onto its red carpet. Instead the Cannes Film Festival venue has now opened its doors to the town's homeless who have nowhere to go during the coronavirus lockdown. **REUTERS**



African jazz great dies in France of coronavirus

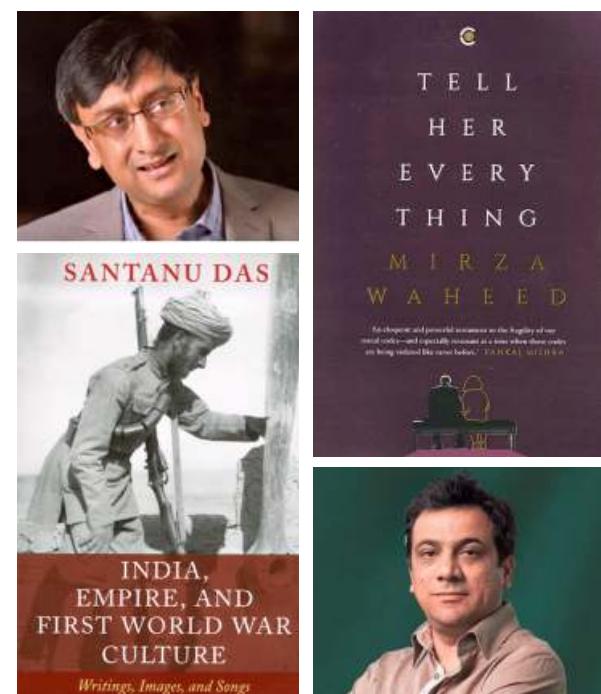
PARIS

Manu Dibango, who fused African rhythms with funk to become one of the most influential musicians in world dance music, died on Tuesday with the coronavirus, according to his music publisher. He was 86. The Cameroon-born saxophonist gained international fame with his 1972 song *Soul Makossa*. **AP**

Santanu Das, Mirza Waheed win The Hindu Prize 2019

In the award citation, jury members describe the books as sensitive and complex

R. KRITHIKA



Honour roll: Santanu Das, winner of the prize for non-fiction, and below, Mirza Waheed for fiction. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The winners of The Hindu Prize 2019 Fiction and Non-Fiction are Mirza Waheed (*Tell Her Everything*) and Santanu Das (*India, Empire, and First World War Culture: Writings, Images and Songs*). The winners for both categories were selected by an eminent panel of judges.

The jury members for fiction were diplomat and author Navtej Sarna, author and columnist Nilanjana Roy, author Pradeep Sebastian, researcher and translator J. Devika and professor Rajeswari Sunder Rajan. For non-fiction, the jury comprised Kamini Mahadevan, publishing consultant; Chandan Gowda, faculty member at Azim Premji University; Harsh Sethi, former consulting editor with *Seminar*; author Rustom Bharucha; and author and social anthropologist Shiv Visvanathan.

The citation describes Prof. Das' work as "a sensitive exploration of the hu-

man dimensions of a major modern war that reshaped global politics and culture in fundamental ways" and as one that "helps to re-exa-

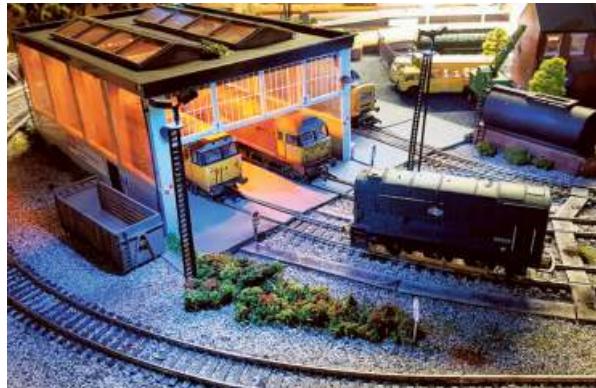
mine the scholarly and popular imaginations of the First World War which have tended to ignore the involvement of close to over a million In-

dians in it, and in particular, the tens of thousands among them who lost their lives."

"An extraordinary work of fiction whose complexity, depth and narrative mastery would be hard to match in contemporary world literature," reads the citation for Mr. Waheed's *Tell Her Everything*, describing it as "a compelling novel, both a narrative *tour de force* and an exploration of a profound existential and moral conundrum."

The Hindu Prize was instituted in 2010 to honour writers who have spent their lifetime mining the human spirit through their words and ideas. The prize is usually awarded at a ceremony during *The Hindu's* annual literature festival Lit For Life. However the 2020 edition had to be cancelled due to a challenging environment. An award ceremony to be held on March 28 was also cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Hindu* Lit For Life will be back in January 2021.

Full steam ahead for U.K.'s model railway buffs



Tiny train: A model of a small-town railway station called Cheadle Hill in Britain. ■ PAUL WILLARD/REUTERS

REUTERS
LONDON

The trains of Britain have been known to grind to a halt due to such minor hazards as leaves on the line or the wrong type of snow, but the world of model railways is made of sterner stuff.

Even pandemic of epic proportions has been unable to ruin one of the U.K.'s premier railway modelling shows.

When the annual London Festival of Railway Modelling exhibition at the grand Alex-

andra Palace venue was cancelled due to coronavirus restrictions, model-makers got the show back on track by taking it online.

Using the hashtag #TwitterModelRailwayShow, thousands of them have been posting photos and videos this week of their detailed miniature railway sets, drawing expert commentary and appreciative feedback from fellow enthusiasts.

The railway festival has carried on unabated for days, extending what was

supposed to be a two-day festival into a lasting online community.

The show's sponsor was British toymaker Hornby, which makes train sets including miniatures of real engines and more magical ones like Harry Potter's Hogwarts Express. "It just goes to show how resourceful folks are," said Simon Kohler, Hornby's marketing and product development director.

"You get knocked down, you get up again and you find another way."

The man who never missed a moment

Photographer Nemai Ghosh, who documented filmmaking, passes away at 85

NAMRATA JOSHI

MUMBAI

Veteran photographer Nemai Ghosh passed away in Kolkata on Wednesday. He was 85. He had been unwell after a recent surgery.

For someone best remembered as the visual biographer of legendary filmmaker Satyajit Ray and a documentarian of the making of his astounding body of work, an interesting aspect about Nemai Ghosh was that he started off as an actor with actor-director Utpal Dutt's Little Theatre Group in Kolkata. Arts critic and publisher-editor Samik Bandopadhyay remembers one such play that he acted in: the landmark *Angar* (1959) about the exploitation of coal miners. It had music by Ravi Shankar and complex sets (Nirmal Guha Ray) and lighting design (Tapas Sen) with an entire sequence of a mine getting submerged under water. "He was an impressive and formidable figure on stage but was never so interested in photography then," recalls Mr. Bandopadhyay.

The interest got kindled entirely by chance in 1966 when he found an abandoned camera and started tinkering and playing around with it. Being a great lover of cinema himself, he wanted to shoot the process of filmmaking which is when his path crossed with that of Ray. Initially just "tolerant" of his presence, as he once recalled, Ray discovered Ghosh's talent by and to have him become a part of his unit. *Goopi Gyne Bagha Byne* (1969) onwards, he was the still photographer for all of Ray's works till his last film *Agantuk* (1991). "The only other parallel I can draw is Raghu Rai's photographs of Indira Gandhi," says photographer Chirodeep Chaudhuri of an



Behind the lens: Nemai Ghosh at 'Satyajit Ray: From Script to Screen', an exhibition at the National Gallery of Modern Art in Bengaluru in 2009. ■ K. MURALI KUMAR

imagemaker's consistent collaboration and engagement with a personality.

Ray's son and filmmaker Sandip Ray remembers meeting him on the sets of *Goopi...* "He was a part of the family. He was always there, not just on the shoot, but our home as well," he says. The magic of his black and white images lay in the specific fleeting instants that they managed to capture, that too without flash, in natural light. "He never missed a moment, captured the right moment," says Sandip Ray.

Pictures that speak
Filmmaker Sujoy Ghosh compares his frames to videography. "Each of his photos tells a story to me. Like Jaya Bachchan in Kalighat, teeka on the forehead, prasad in hand, happy... I see many things in the process. It's instructive and informative about the process of filmmaking itself," he says. "There was an endearing quality about

his photos. You could see his love for theatre and cinema [reflected in them]," says Mr. Chaudhuri.

Apart from Ray, Ghosh also chronicled some of Mrinal Sen's films and he was the still photographer on Mira Nair's *The Namesake*. "His portraits of my father were absolutely brilliant," says Mr. Ray. Sujoy Ghosh remembers him shooting on the sets of his own film *Kahaani*. "I fell at his feet. It was such an honour that he considered our film," he says.

Beyond Ray and films, a major part of his work was on the theatre in Bengal and about Kolkata itself. His work was a reference point for Sujoy Ghosh when he went shooting in Kolkata for *Kahaani*. "It was an amazing inspiration. Every photographer and painter has a [unique] way of looking at places, objects, people which is different from ours," he says. One of Ghosh's disappointments, according to Mr. Chaudhuri, was not

being given space by the state government to archive his work. Later, he gave away most of it to the Delhi Art Gallery.

In the latter half of his life, he was passionately documenting painters at work and musicians in performance. According to Mr. Bandopadhyay, Ghosh had clicked some exclusive pictures of the ailing Italian maestro Michelangelo Antonioni, some of them in his hotel room, when the latter had come to Kolkata for the retrospective of his work at International Film Festival of India in 1994. Impressed with his images, Antonioni, who had taken to painting in his later years, had invited him for his exhibition to Italy. Ghosh had shot him at the moving around in the exhibition on a wheelchair. Having been witness to the maestro's painting phase, Ghosh wanted to preserve it in the form of a book. Sadly there were no takers for it in the commercial publishing world.

Pioneering chef Floyd Cardoz dies at 59 of COVID-19

He broke stereotypes and mentored many in the industry

ANOOTHI VISHAL



Chef Floyd Cardoz in New York. ■ KRIS CONNOR/GETTY IMAGES

He sat at an outer table, quiet and unobtrusive, eating dinner with his two companions at the then newly launched Farzi Café in Gurugram one monsoon evening in 2014, when someone pointed him out to me as the chef behind Tabla, New York.

Till then, I had known Floyd Cardoz by reputation alone. To those of us who wrote on Indian gastronomy, he was a well-known name – the Mumbai-raised, Goan chef who had put Indian food on the map in the U.S., marrying regional flavours to local produce to come up with contemporised plates and a Bread Bar whose fan following belied curry and tandoori stereotypes of desi food in the Big Apple.

Chef Cardoz died of COVID-19 on Wednesday. He had tested positive on March 18 and was being treated at Mountainside Medical Centre, New Jersey. He was 59.

A chef par excellence, Cardoz was the co-founder of Hunger Inc, the company that runs restaurants such as The Bombay Canteen and O Pedro.

The loss is unbearable, stunning all of us in the world of food in India, a community that for all its squabbles and differences is also closely knit. Just in the beginning of the month, when Cardoz was in Mumbai for the launch of the Bombay Sweet Shop (also by Hunger Inc), he had attended events with much of the restaurant and writing community in attendance. He flew back to New York, and according to his Facebook post admitted himself to a

hospital in New Jersey on March 18 after feeling feverish.

My abiding memory of Cardoz will be of that monsoon evening in 2014, when Floyd had come back to India, having earned his accolades abroad, on a mission to push the envelope even further.

Passion project

That evening as he and his two dining companions, Yash Bhanage and Sameer Seth, sat at Farzi Café, they had been discussing their plans to start a new restaurant in Mumbai. Bhanage and Seth had been mentored by Cardoz as young hospitality professionals in the U.S. Now, with their guide and father figure in tow, it was fitting that they should plan a passion project meticulously.

A year later, the trio launched The Bombay Canteen and invited me over. The food was a tribute to Cardoz's memories of a Bombay he had grown up in. His stories about feema (kheema) pao at the St. Xavier's College canteen, the crab curry and Goan sausage at home had obviously seeped into the spirit and cooking of the restaurant. As he sat remembering things past, two young men were manning the kitchen, executing his dishes, passing food out through a small service window. Chefs Thomas Zacharias and Hussain Shahzad were being mentored by Cardoz.

The two are leading restaurant chefs in India today; their own dishes define the menus of The Bombay Canteen and its sister outlet O Pedro (that opened in 2017). And their creativity is independent of their mentor's. But both did start out under the able guidance of Cardoz. There was a generosity in letting them soar independently, unshackled. It is a testimony to Cardoz's talent and leadership that all his protégées have carved out creative niches for themselves and are taking his legacy forward.

Anoothi Vishal is a Delhi-based food writer and author

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