



Bedsheets and pillows being packed for cleaning. ■ FILE PHOTO

Fresh blankets, sanitised toilets soon in AC coaches

CR, WR to remove curtains, cloth blinds

AJEET MAHALE
MUMBAI

The Central Railway (CR) and the Western Railway (WR) will be removing curtains and replacing old blankets in air-conditioned compartments across trains to halt the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Shivaji Sutar, chief public relations officer of CR, said curtains would be taken off over the next four or five days and in the case of roller blinds the cloth will be removed. Mr. Sutar said, "These are the key places that come into contact with passengers. Monitoring such areas would be a tough task and hence this decision has been taken."

CR will also be replacing old blankets with fresh ones. All blankets will be soaked in high temperature in the tumble dryers of laundries, which will raise the

temperature to 75-80 degrees Celsius. The blankets will be given only to passengers who ask for them.

"We are also increasing the temperature of the air-conditioned compartments to between 23 and 25 degrees Celsius so that passengers don't feel the need for blankets," Mr. Sutar said.

A senior railway official said unlike bedsheets, fresh blankets are not provided after each trip as they are thicker and take time to dry. The official said CR will also be carrying out intensive cleaning of toilets and wash-basins using hot water.

A WR spokesperson said, "Blankets and curtains should be withdrawn till further orders. Passengers should be advised to bring their own blankets. Wide publicity should be given to this effect. Extra bedsheets may be kept for exigencies."

Timings MUMBAI

SUNDAY, MAR. 15	
RISE 06:47	SET 18:48
RISE 00:00	SET 11:14
MONDAY, MAR. 16	
RISE 06:46	SET 18:49
RISE 00:45	SET 12:05
TUESDAY, MAR. 17	
RISE 06:45	SET 18:49
RISE 01:43	SET 12:58

Mumbai Weather max min
Mumbai Airport 34 17
Pune 33 13
Mumbai City 34 17

Mumbai Today
35°C A cool and hazy morning lies ahead. A warm day is likely. A partly cloudy sky lies ahead.

Mumbai Tomorrow
36°C Dry weather is likely. A pleasant day lies ahead. Day will be very warm with a partly cloudy sky.

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THE HINDU
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Staying away



No show: (Clockwise from top left) Trainers at a gym in Borivali have a relaxed day with no one turning up for workouts following the rise in positive cases of novel coronavirus in the State. A lone movie-goer reads an order informing the closure of Anand Cinema in Thane. With no visitors, a swimming pool in Thane remains in pristine condition. ■ TRupti Arekar ■ Vibhav Birwakar



Safe zone: A conservancy worker disinfects the premises of a mall in Thane on Saturday after the State government ordered the closure of places with large gatherings. ■ Vibhav Birwakar

Virus fears drive up anxiety levels in vulnerable patients

People with mental health issues reach out to psychiatrists

JYOTI SHELAR
MUMBAI

The medication of a 30-year-old man with severe obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) had to be re-adjusted as he became extremely paranoid about the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and feared he would contract the infection.

In another case, a 20-year-old woman, who had travelled to Europe last month, had to be prescribed a mild dose of anti-anxiety medication as she could not deal with thoughts of being infected even though she presented no persistent symptoms. As COVID-19 cases multiply, many people, especially those with existing mental health issues, are finding it challenging to cope with the prevailing panic and have reached out to psychiatrists.

"It is difficult for those with existing anxiety, OCD, and depression issues and queries from them have been increasing. They are getting anxious with the slightest of symptoms and sometimes with no symp-



Stressful: Fake social media messages are also adding to the panic. ■ FILE PHOTO

toms at all," said Dr. Kersi Chavda, psychiatrist, who treated the 30-year-old man as well as the 20-year-old woman.

Nervous time
The patient with OCD required a lot of reassurance that he was unlikely to catch the infection. But eventually, I had to re-adjust his dosage," said Dr. Chavda. The woman, Dr. Chavda added, went to Kasturba Hospital to get herself checked, but continued to be nervous and had to be put on anti-anxiety medication. "She had no his-

tory of anxiety, but this episode pushed her to seek help," he said.

Another city-based psychiatrist Dr. Hozefa Bhinderwala said the caller tune on COVID-19 has also played a considerable role in triggering anxiety. "Just imagine a person having to listen to the message 25 times a day or even more. It will definitely have an impact," said Dr. Bhinderwala, who has received many queries from his patients to know more about the virus. "Some of my patients are simply panic-stricken and are calling me for authentic information," he said.

Doctors said fake social media messages are also adding to the panic. "Many of these messages have wrong figures about the number of confirmed cases. People should not believe any such messages which don't have any authenticity," said Dr. Daksha Shah, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's health officer.

Doctors also recommend temporarily staying off social media to avoid anxiety.

Elusive refunds pose headache to travel industry

With the government suspending all tourist visas till April 15, requests for cancellations have shot up

ADITYA ANAND
MUMBAI

Securing refunds for high-spending foreign tourists against cancellations is proving to be one of the biggest challenges for people in the travel industry.

With the government suspending visas, requests for cancellations have shot up, but unlike major hotels and airlines, big-ticket holiday packages like tiger safaris and the Palace on Wheels are not entertaining refunds.

Several groups from Germany and France were due to visit India and had adopted a wait-and-watch approach, but Wednesday's decision of the government to revoke visas has led to forced cancellations. "There are major challenges on the refund part. Most hotels, major airlines and taxi operators are more receptive and cooperating with refunds. It is that some government entities are just not responding," said Pronab Sarkar, president, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO).

IATO on Thursday had appealed to the government to review the travel ban after 14 days and waive the GST for the travel industry for one

If no visas are valid, within the next 10 days the travel and tourism industry will come to a virtual stop

SUBHASH GOYAL
Chairman of Assocham National Council on Tourism and Hospitality

month. It has also sought the intervention of Ministry of Tourism with regard to issuing refunds.

Mr. Sarkar said besides the Palace on Wheels, where tariffs for the seven nights and eight days trip ranges from ₹2.73 lakh to ₹7.56 lakh per person, national parks are refusing refunds despite taking advance payments.

The luxury train takes tourists to Jaipur, Sawai Madhopur (Ranthambore National Park), Chittaurgarh, Udaipur, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Bharatpur, and Agra before returning to Delhi. The Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation, which operates the Maharajas' Express, is however promptly giving refunds to tourists.

Mr. Sarkar said, "Refunds are due from Ranthambore, Corbett, and Pench national parks. We have told them that this is not the time to



Putting plans on hold: Passengers wearing protective masks arrive at the international airport in Mumbai. ■ FILE PHOTO

make money but to cooperate with the tourists so that they get back their refunds and plan trips in the near future. If we cancel and not refund it means that the chapter is closed and this will only lead to the tourists telling others not to visit India because the money gets stuck. This will have a bad impact."

Foreign tourists already in India are feeling the effects of the travel restrictions. In Punjab, a group of tourists from Denmark, wanting to attend Hola Mohalla, were asked to undergo a medical

HC restricts hearings to only matters of urgency

Measure will be in effect for a week

SONAM SAIGAL
MUMBAI

The acting Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court on Saturday restricted hearings to only urgent matters across all courts in the State for a week from Monday as a precautionary measure to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

The notification is applicable to all Benches in Mumbai, Aurangabad, Nagpur and Goa, and district, sessions and subordinate courts in Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur and Ahmednagar.

It states, "Advocates, litigants and parties in persons may mention their matters showing the urgency before the concerned courts and upon satisfaction about the urgency, the court shall hear such matters. CMIS [Case Management Information System] dates would be given to the rest of the matters. Orders of ad-interim and interim relief subsisting in the matter shall continue to operate."

All bar associations and advocates have been directed to restrict the entry of litigants and allow only one person in cases where their presence is unavoidable. The notification said, "Advocates and party in person are requested to provide number and stage of matter

on daily board, which they want to be taken up urgently by the concerned court sheristar or associate prior to 11 a.m. Rest of the matters on Regular Board shall stand adjourned."

Highest level of hygiene
The advisory for lower courts mentions that principal judges should ensure that sanitizers are made available in court complexes for visitors and staff, particularly those manning windows. Housekeeping staff have been directed to maintain the highest level of hygiene and spray disinfectants on a regular basis.

The circular said, "In criminal matters, the request for exemption from personal appearance of the accused be considered favourably. In civil matters, wherever possible, service of local commissioner be availed of for the purposes of recording of evidence, after obtaining the consent of both the parties. Instead of physical production of undertrial prisoners from jails, facility of videoconferencing be availed of. Unnecessary crowding in the lock-up be curtailed and appropriate steps in this regard be taken by all District and Sessions Judges in consultation with prison authorities."

Ola, Uber must protect drivers amid air of mistrust, say unions

Demand companies to set up kiosks to provide safety kits

AJEET MAHALE
MUMBAI

Unions of Ola and Uber drivers have demanded the companies to provide them with safety kits so that they don't get infected with the novel coronavirus.

"Ola and Uber drivers are often the first ones to come in contact with passengers who may have coronavirus. The two companies should not expect drivers to reach their centres to receive the safety kits, but set up kiosks offering disinfectants, masks and hand sanitizers at major pick-up points such as airports," said Shaik Salauddin, national general secretary, Indian Federation of App Based Transport Workers (IFAT). Mr. Salauddin also highlighted the case of an Ola driver who tested positive after ferrying two people from Mumbai to Pune.

He said over the past



Drivers are often the first to come in contact with infected passengers. ■ FILE PHOTO

week several drivers have reported that their customers are insisting that they wear masks and disinfect their cars. "Why should the driver buy masks and disinfectants? Don't the companies have a social obligation?" Mr. Salauddin said.

K. Somashekhar, leader of the app-based drivers' union in Karnataka and office-bearer of IFAT, said the compa-

nies should declare a 14-day paid sick leave for drivers as implemented in Australia and the U.S. Andrew Macdonald, senior vice president, Rides and Platform, said work is on to provide compensation to drivers and delivery agents under quarantine for up to 14 days. "This has already begun in some markets and we are working to implement such mechanisms worldwide. We believe this is the right thing to do," Mr. Macdonald said.

Spokespersons of Ola and Uber said they had set up a dedicated team to deal with the outbreak and drivers have been briefed on dos and don'ts to ensure their safety. "Our walk-in centres are equipped with a steady supply of health advisories, hand sanitizers and masks that can be picked up and used by the driver-partners," an Ola spokesperson said.

hotel, aviation and travel sectors. "We estimate it will lead to direct loss of not less than ₹8,500 crore," he said.

Subhash Goyal, chairman of Assocham National Council on Tourism and Hospitality, said he foresees job losses in these sectors as companies are trying to tide over the crisis by removing non-essential work forces and stopping recruitment.

Mr. Goyal said, "The government should review the decision to suspend visas for a month and allow inbound travel through limited gateway cities. If no visas are valid, within the next 10 days the travel and tourism industry will come to a virtual stop. It would mean that everyone will cut down costs and terminate non-essential staff and stop recruiting additional staff."

Gurbax Singh Kohli, vice president of Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India, said hotel room cancellations had crossed 80%. "New bookings are almost completely on hold, including the non-resident Indian segment, which accounts for 60% of tourism revenues mostly from April to September," he said.

IN BRIEF

Kidnapped teen found in U.P. after 5 years

THANE
A girl kidnapped from Rabodi five years ago was traced to Meerut in Uttar Pradesh and reunited with her parents, the police said on Saturday. The girl was 17 when she was kidnapped, said senior inspector Ashok Kadlag from the Anti Human Trafficking Cell. "She was kidnapped on December 10, 2014. Acting on a tip-off, we rescued her. She now has a four-year-old son and a one-year-old daughter. She has said she eloped with a man, Nazeem Bulho Khan, and got married," he said. PTI

Pollution watch

FORECAST TODAY (AQI*)

Bhandup	140
Colaba	204
Malad	146
Mazagaon	165
Worli	152
Borivali	139
BKC	111
Chembur	210
Andheri	173
Navi Mumbai	310

*AIR QUALITY INDEX

Good	Satisfactory	Moderate
0-50	51-100	101-200
Poor	Very poor	Severe
201-300	301-400	401-500

IN MAJOR CITIES

	PM10	PM2.5	Avg.
Mumbai	135	77	146
Delhi	147	46	132
Pune	93	56	82
Ahmedabad	130	65	119

Construction goods theft racket busted, one held

Drivers of trucks ferrying material sell some of it en route

GAUTAM S. MENGLE
MUMBAI

The Mumbai Police Crime Branch has busted a racket where drivers of container trucks ferrying construction material have allegedly been pilfering goods worth lakhs of rupees using an ingenious and intricate method. While one person has been arrested so far, the scope of the racket is expected to widen to several States.

According to Crime Branch officers, the Property Cell received a tip-off that construction material was being pilfered on a regular basis, causing losses to builders. Acting on the information, the Property Cell patrolled the Tagore Nagar stretch of the Eastern Express Highway for several days till they hit pay dirt on Wednesday.

"We saw a 16-wheel trailer carrying iron rods used in building construction weighed at a government-approved weighbridge, which issued a certificate bearing his name and truck's licence plate number, along with the weight of the consignment. After selling two tonnes of iron rods in Amravati, Mr. Nath drove to Tagore Nagar, where he had a second cabin for the trailer, with the exact same licence plate, waiting at a secluded spot. A cabin that pulls trailers has two compartments, a front seat and a space in the back. This empty back space was filled to



SURAJIT PATRO

Nath (28), described the modus operandi to the investigating team. Officers said the method was unheard off till date but, according to Mr. Nath, has been in practice for a long time.

According to investigating officers, there are several cabins packed with sand in the back space being used by drivers, which have enabled the racket to run for a long time. On an average, a trailer driver makes two to three trips in a month. Iron rods sell for ₹40,000 per tonne in the open market, and even if the driver sells two tonnes for ₹25,000 each, he makes ₹50,000 on each trip.

Mr. Nath was arrested and charged with cheating and forgery under the Indian Penal Code. He has been remanded in police custody till March 19 and the Property Cell is working on identifying the other players.

The driver, Udyogsingh

Quash special facilities in jail for Mallya: PIL

'Assurances are in violation of Article 14'

SONAM SAIGAL
MUMBAI

A public interest litigation (PIL) was filed at the Bombay High Court on Friday, challenging assured special facilities to be given to fugitive economic offender Vijay Mallya at Arthur Road Jail, when he is brought there.

Citizens Action Group filed the PIL before a Division Bench of acting Chief Justice B.P. Dharmadhikari and Justice Nitin Borkar, challenging the assured special arrangements in jail barracks for Mr. Mallya and Sanjeev Chawla, a bookie brought to India from U.K.

The PIL says the duo will be given special treatment while there are many prisoners living in inhumane conditions and urges that the assurances given by the authorities to be quashed as they are in violation of Article 14 (equality before law) of the Constitution.

ventilation, storage for personal belongings, sufficient access to clean drinking water, toilets with separate flushing lavatories, a television, and special dietary requirements.

Mr. Mallya has also been assured access to lawyers daily with facility for video conferencing and that he would be provided with a specialist or private doctor of his choice as and when required. Mr. Chawla has been assured a separate cell of six square metres on single occupancy basis, excluding toilet and sanitary area.

The PIL says the duo will be given special treatment while there are many prisoners living in inhumane conditions and urges that the assurances given by the authorities to be quashed as they are in violation of Article 14 (equality before law) of the Constitution.

Institute which talks about rights not paying employees minimum wages, says union

TISS contract workers protest at Azad Maidan to press demands

AJEET MAHALE
MUMBAI

Over 100 contract employees of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) held a protest at Azad Maidan on Friday to place several demands to improve their current working conditions, chief being a revision in their salaries, which have been pending for several years.

The employees, many of whom have been working at the institute for over a decade, came together to form a union around two years ago to press their demands. Vijay Dalvi, secretary, Sarva Shramik Sangh, said in an institute which talks and teaches about rights, its employees were not even getting minimum wages.

"Our demands are from the TISS administration as they are the principal employer," he said.

The salary revision that



Fight for rights: Employees from TISS protest at Azad Maidan on Friday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

these contract employees are demanding has been pending since 2014. "There is huge discrepancy in the salaries of contract workers as compared to those who are permanent. For instance, a peon on contract earns only ₹2,500 a month, while one who is permanent can earn anywhere between ₹28,000 and ₹35,000 per month," Siddharth Phadke, who works in the academic section, said.

He said nearly 75% staff at the Mumbai and Tulapur

campuses were on contract, the former has 350 contract staff and the latter has 120. "We have gone on a one-day mass leave to press our demands," Mr. Phadke said.

Other major issues include restoration of bonus and a five-day week. The employees claim the latter was arbitrarily revoked and turned into a six-day work week in 2017.

Vikas Gangurde, who works in the dining hall department, said another major issue was regarding over-

time and pending leave. "A new contractor was appointed in January, who did not consider our pending leave. On an average, all of us had 53 leaves pending," he said.

Mr. Phadke said the old contractor would pay only ₹12.5 per hour overtime, which was much less than what was mandated by law. "The new contractor has agreed to pay us overtime as per the law, but has been forcing people to take compensatory leave instead," he said. A group of protesters also met with Minister of State for Labour Baccu Kadu.

M.P. Balamurugan, acting registrar, Mumbai campus, TISS, said they had been in touch with the employees and on March 11 had agreed to two of their demands, and that other demands were being looked into. "We have been paying salaries in accordance of the law and they receive salaries that are higher than minimum wages. We have already agreed to carry forward 45 days leave and paying overtime according to the Payment of Wages Act," he said.

Ferry capsizes near Mandwa jetty

Water started entering boat after it hit a rock; all 90 on board rescued

RAINA ASSAINAR
NAVI MUMBAI

An Ajanta Catamarans boat belonging to Gateway Elephanta Jal Vahatuk Sahakari Sanstha, carrying 90 people, capsized near Mandwa in Raigad on Saturday morning.

All the 85 passengers and five staff on the ferry were rescued and no one was hurt in the mishap, the Raigad police said. The ferry was on its way to Mandwa jetty from Gateway of India when the incident occurred around 10.15 a.m. According to the police, prima facie, the boat hit a rock and water started entering it, after which an alert was issued.

The police's Sadguru Kru-pa patrol boat, which was close to the ferry's location, was diverted to the spot to rescue the passengers, who had already donned life jackets. Constable Prashant Gharat, who on the patrol boat, spotted Al Fatah and realised it was tilted. "I took the trawler near the ferry and heard people crying for help since the boat had capsized partially. Mandwa jetty had been alerted and a speedboat was on its way. We managed to take 80 people on our trawler and remaining 10 were carried by the speedboat," Mr. Gharat said.

The ferry had left from Ghatewadi around 9 a.m. "While it was around a kilometre away from Mandwa jetty, it hit something and water started entering the boat. Due to the dredging work happening for RoRo service,



Close shave: Al Fatah, a ferry carrying 90 people from Gateway of India to Mandwa jetty, capsized a kilometre away from its destination on Saturday. ■ PTI

Vessel drifts, collides with INS Karanja jetty

Nothing suspicious found on ship

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI

A private vessel drifted and collided with a jetty at INS Karanja in Uran in Navi Mumbai on Thursday, an official said. The vessel, MV Halami Star, drifted after its anchor broke, an official said, adding that the jetty did not suffer damage.

The police are verifying the boat's documents. "We have not registered any case and are following the due procedure," assistant police inspector Dharmaraj Sonke, Mandwa police station, said.

"These boats are 40 to 50 years old hence they often face technical issues. Maharashtra Maritime Board and Directorate General of Shipping should conduct a proper survey and check their condition," Chandrakant Mokal, president, All India Passengers Association, said.

not working. There are just two crew members on board. The duo raised an alarm when the vessel was drifting and this alerted the coastal police and naval personnel," the official said.

He said the vessel's owner arrived on Saturday with tug boats and other equipment to remove it.

INS Karanja is an important naval base housing armament depots of Western Naval Command's INS Tunir as well as the elite MARCOS.

Russian tourist's phone traced within hours

Woman had left her phone in a taxi

GAREEMA BANGAD
MUMBAI

A Russian tourist will go back home with fond memories of India, after the Byculla police traced and recovered her cell phone, which she had forgotten in a taxi, within a few hours of the incident being reported.

According to the Byculla police, the tourist, Shaisidikova Tatiana (27), took a cab from Kamala Mills compound in Lower Parel to go to Hotel Heritage in Byculla, where she reached around 11.30 p.m. on Wednesday. It was only after the cab left that she realised that she did not have her cell phone, an iPhone 11.

"Ms. Tatiana approached us on Thursday morning, and we initiated inquiries into the matter. We started by examining footage from CCTV cameras covering the path that her taxi took,

which helped us locate the vehicle. We then used the footage to identify the licence plate number of the taxi," senior police inspector Dinesh Kadam, Byculla police station, said.

Language barrier

Mr. Kadam said the investigating team used the vehicle number to obtain the taxi driver's details from the Regional Transport Office and traced him.

"We found that the driver had her cell phone but could not contact her using it as the default language set on the phone was Russian, which he knew nothing about," Mr. Kadam said.

The police then called Ms. Tatiana to the police station and handed her phone over to her. Mr. Kadam also said no action will be taken against the driver, considering the circumstances.

Police looking for 'builder' who cheated doctor of ₹6.5 lakh

RAINA ASSAINAR
NAVI MUMBAI

The Kamothe police are on the lookout for a builder who cheated a doctor by promising a flat at Vichumbe village in Panvel.

Dr. Sunil Samatkar, a resident of Sewri, used to work at a hospital in Parel in 2014, where he met Sushant Pawar, a friend of his colleague. Mr. Pawar said he was a builder from Kamothe. He told Dr. Samatkar about his new project at Vichumbe village in Panvel, where bookings were open, and the latter showed interest.

On April 10, 2015, the duo entered into an MoU in which Mr. Pawar said the possession of the flat would be given in 18 months. From then to January 22, 2016, Dr. Samatkar paid ₹6.5 lakh for the flat. However, when he demanded to see the construction, Mr. Pawar started avoiding him.

Finally, the doctor filed a complaint with the police.

BMW accident: driver battles for life

40-year-old suffered multiple injuries, including one to head

GAREEMA BANGAD
MUMBAI

The Worli police have booked a 40-year-old woman for allegedly causing the death of three people, including her own mother and infant daughter, due to rash and negligent driving. The accused is battling for life with critical injuries.

According to the police, the incident occurred at 4.10 p.m. on Friday near Mela restaurant in Worli. Namita Chand (40), a resident of Andheri, was driving her BMW with her six-month-old daughter Nishika, mother Bhavana Bhatija and relative Juhi Gurnani (50) in the vehicle when they met with an accident.

"Ms. Chand left from her residence with her mother and daughter to have a meal at the National Sports Club of India (NSCI) in Worli and picked up Gurnani from her Worli residence on the right," senior police inspector Baccu Kadu said.

Eyewitnesses to the accident said Ms. Chand drove over a speed breaker at a very high speed and lost control over the vehicle.



Policeman inspects the damaged car. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

"Ms. Chand might not have seen the speed breaker and hit it at full speed, because of which the car jumped and dashed into the divider on the right, damaging it as well. Bhatija, who was sitting in the front seat, was partly thrown out of the car through the broken windshield," Usman Sheik, who runs a butcher's shop near the accident spot, said.

Dinesh Soni, a vegetable seller who was at the spot, said, "We ran to the vehicle and saw Nishika near Bhatija's feet. We picked her up to find her breathing and stopped an ambulance that was approaching, after which we rushed the injured to Jaslok Hospital at Peddar Road." Doctors declared Nishika, Bhatija and Gurnani dead on arrival.

"Ms. Chand is fighting for her life in the intensive care unit of the hospital. She has suffered multiple injuries, including one to her head," Mr. Varpe said.

The police have booked Ms. Chand for causing death due to rash and negligent driving under the Indian Penal Code along with relevant sections of the Motor Vehicles Act, officers said.

'No passenger on Dubai-Pune flights travelled to any high-risk country'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PUNE

None of the passengers who arrived here by two Dubai-Pune flights on Saturday had travelled to any of the seven high-risk coronavirus-hit countries in the last few weeks, an official said. More than 110 passengers were on board the flights operated by SpiceJet and Air India Express.

The "high-risk nations", which have reported a large number of positive cases of the novel coronavirus, are China, Italy, Iran, South Korea, France, Spain and Germany.

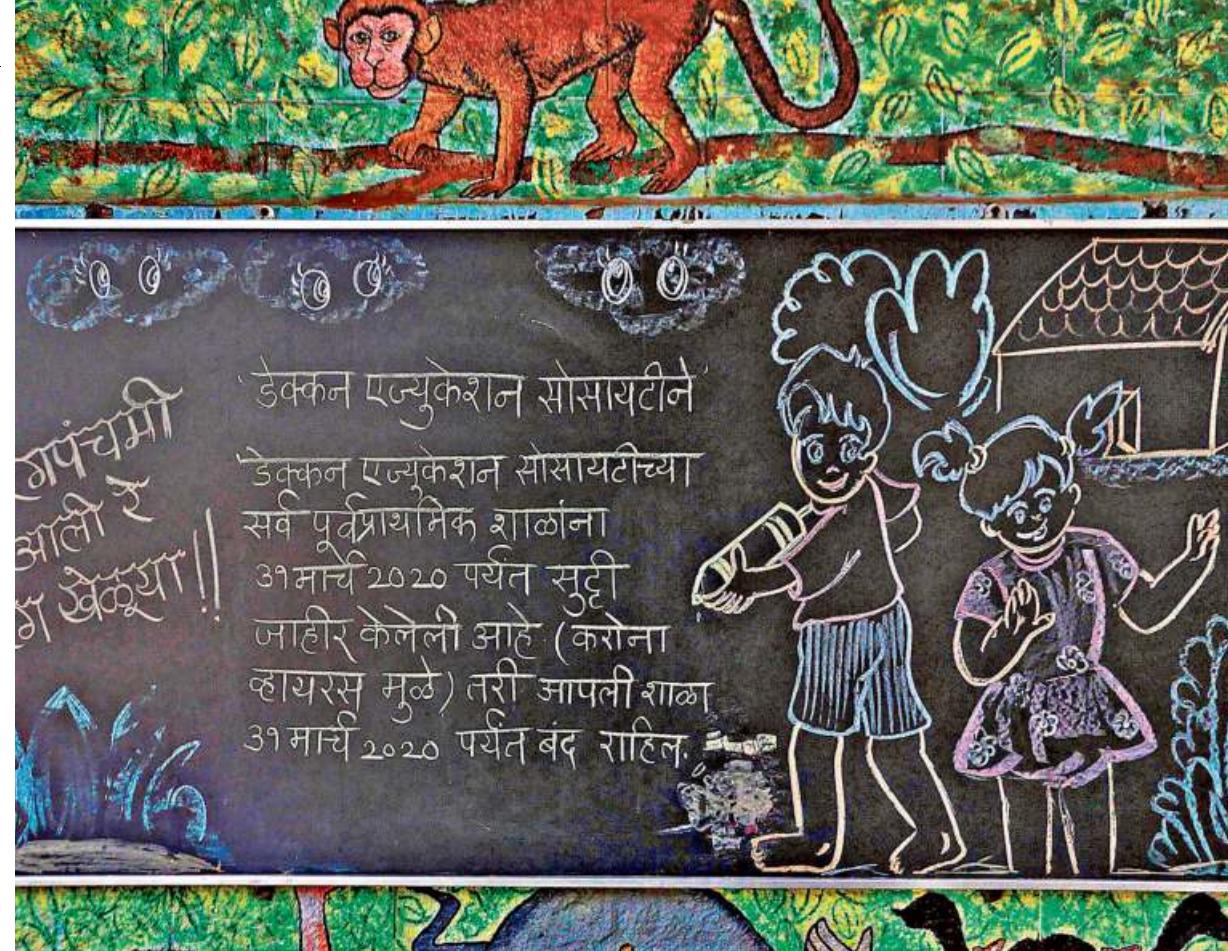
The Pune district administration had on Thursday announced that passengers of Dubai-Pune flights would be placed under "institutional quarantine", irrespective of whether they show any symptoms of the virus, if they had visited any of the high-risk countries after February 15.

"The SpiceJet and Air India flights from Dubai arrived at the Pune International Airport in the early hours of Saturday with 112 passengers on board of both the flights. On checking their travel history, we found that none of the passengers had travelled to the seven high-risk countries after February 15," the official said.

All the passengers were screened and no one was found with symptoms of the disease.

All passengers on both flights have been asked to stay in quarantine at home.

Writing on the wall



The Nyayamurti Ranade Balak Mandir in Shaniwar Peth, Pune, displays the notice of closure of the school till March 31 following the government's orders due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak on Saturday. ■ JIGNESH MISTRY

Palghar Commissionerate holds GST outreach event

Traders made aware of new filing framework

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The Palghar Commissionerate of Central GST Mumbai Zone organised an outreach programme earlier this week to make traders and industry participants more aware of the new return filing framework that will come into effect from April 1.

The programme was attended by around 100 guests including members of trade, trade associations and chartered accountants fraternity.

Ganesh Havanur, Commissioner CGST, Palghar addressed the programme that was organised in the industrial area of Vasai.

As part of the programme, Mr. Havanur

Schools, colleges, malls shut down

Class X and XII exams will not be affected; grocery shops to remain open

ALOK DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government on Saturday announced closure of all schools, colleges, training institute, anganwadis in urban areas as the number of novel coronavirus cases rose to 26 in the State.

Health Minister Rajesh Tope said in the Assembly that new patients have been detected from across the State. Of the 26 cases, 10 are from Pune, five from Mumbai, four from Nagpur, two from Yavatmal, and one each from Panvel, Ahmednagar, Kalyan and Navi Mumbai.

Mr. Tope said, "All schools, colleges, training institute, anganwadis in urban areas will remain closed till March 31. All examinations, except that of Class X and XII, stand postponed. Private coaching classes have also been asked to shut down." Malls too have been asked to close, except for grocery shops.

Instructions have been given to examination centres for Class X and Class XII to ensure that no unwell student comes in contact with others. "It will be the responsibility of the school and examination centre to monitor the health of students," he said.

When someone mentioned the number of rumours being spread on social media, Home Minister Anil Deshmukh said directions have been issued to take strict action against rumour mongering. "We have also directed the jail authorities to conduct medical check-up of prisoners and if needed, to keep them in isolation wards," he said.



No business: The Carnival Mall in Pimpri Chinchwad wears a deserted look on Saturday after all malls and other establishments have been closed till March 31. ■ JIGNESH MISTRY



Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar appealed to the people to make sure crowded places are avoided. "Even in case of weddings, I appeal to both sides to limit the number of invitees. The administration has given clear instructions for various establishments to follow. In case anyone is found floating it, strict action will be taken against concerned establishments," he said.

Sudhir Mungantiwar (BJP) pointed out that the government resolution (GR) allowing MLAs to use their fund for publicity against novel coronavirus in their respective constituencies has not been issued to which Mr. Pawar said that 10% of the ₹3 crore MLA fund can be used.

Meanwhile, Municipal Commissioner Praveen Parshadi has written to Commissioner of Police Parambir

Singh stating, "Some people are spreading false information on WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter or other social media which can lead to panic among people. I request you to give instructions to take action against such people under National Disaster Management Act, 2005 immediately."

Civic elections

Talking to journalists later, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said on Saturday that the government is in contact with State Election Commission to check the possibility of postponing the upcoming Navi Mumbai and Aurangabad Municipal Corporation polls.

"Due to ongoing restrictions on public gatherings and programs, we are considering recommending postponing the civic polls," said Mr. Thackeray, adding that holding campaign, public rallies would be difficult.

Casinos, pubs, other public places ordered closed in Goa

Situation will be reviewed at the end of this month: CM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PANAJI

The Goa government on Saturday announced closure of educational institutions and public places including casinos, swimming pools and pubs in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak in the country till March 31.

The order will come into force from Sunday (March 15) midnight.

No confirmed coronavirus case has been reported from the coastal State as yet.

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Saturday chaired a high-level meeting attended by health minister Vishwajit Rane and other officials.

After the meeting, Mr. Sawant announced a slew of preventive measures.

Schools and other educa-

tional establishments will be closed till March 31, while the examinations of the Goa Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education for Class X and XII will take place as per schedule, he said.

Public swimming pools, cinema halls and casinos would be closed. The order will be reviewed at the end of this month, the CM added.

While the State does not have a single confirmed case of coronavirus, one suspected patient remains quarantined at the Goa Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) and some 30 others are in home isolation.

On Friday, Mr. Rane had said that his department had invoked the Epidemic Dis-

eases Act, 1987, which empowers the government to ban mass gatherings.

Mr. Sawant, meanwhile, said that the March 22 Zilla Panchayat elections in the State will be held as per schedule, but candidates should avoid mass gatherings and indoor meetings.

The coronavirus outbreak and resultant closure of public places will have a huge impact on the tourism industry but the preventive measures are unavoidable, he said.

Among other steps, thermal guns at Goa airport would be replaced with a thermal scanner and all international and domestic passengers will be screened with this to spot possible carriers, Mr. Sawant said.



Team ATK FC arrives ahead of the Hero Indian Super League 2019-20 football final with Chennaiyin FC, at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, Margao, on Saturday. The match was played in an empty stadium. ■ PRASHANT NAKWE

Fadnavis seeks action against Umar for inciting Delhi violence

On last day, House witnesses pandemonium over CAA, NPR

ALOK DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

Former chief minister and Leader of Opposition in the Assembly Devendra Fadnavis on Saturday asked the Home Department to take action against former Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) student leader Umar Khalid alleging his speech in Amravati asking the people to come out and protest on the streets led to the violence in New Delhi.

"Umar Khalid had addressed a rally in Amravati and asked people to come out on streets during the visit of United States president Donald Trump to India. Riots took place in Delhi on the day Mr. Trump visited India. The State government did not take any action against him," Mr. Fadnavis said during the discussion on the budget on the last day of the session on Saturday.

Earlier, Mr. Fadnavis speaking on the budgetary demands for Home Department transgressed into the debate over Citizenship



Amendment Act (CAA), National Population Register (NPR) and National Citizenship Register (NRC) which led to the uproar in the Assembly.

Objection to remarks

The treasury benches objected to Mr. Fadnavis speaking on issues not related to the Budget to which the Opposition position said that it was speaking on policy issues. Sudhir Mungantiwar (BJP) read out a list of subjects

which could not be talked about in Assembly and said there was nothing wrong in the LoP's speech.

Minority Affairs minister Nawab Malik and Food and Civil Supplies minister Chagan Bhujbal said the CAA matter was being heard in Supreme Court and could not be discussed in the House. Mr. Fadnavis had said that CAA doesn't take away citizenship of Indian citizens. "But rumours are being spread about CAA. In NPR, information is optional. Prime Minister had already said NRC is not being implemented," he said.

Mr. Bhujbal and Mr. Mungantiwar indulged in sharp exchanges over the names of each other's party. Members from both sides entered the well of the Assembly and traded charges and shouted slogans. The Speaker Nana Patole adjourned the House for 30 minutes. After the House regrouped, Mr. Patole ordered that the name calling by NCP and BJP be expunged.

'Special 2-day session will be convened for Disha'

ALOK DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

A special two-day session of the legislature will be convened to pass a Bill on the lines of DISHA Act in Andhra Pradesh to counter atrocities against women, said Home Minister Anil Deshmukh on Saturday.

He said that to make the proposed Bill a reality, it is necessary to take the opinions of Law and Justice, Women and Child Development and Finance Departments. "But the government had to curtail the current session due to outbreak of coronavirus. It is important to make this Bill foolproof and it won't be right to rush through with it. Therefore a special two-day session will be held," said Mr. Deshmukh in the Assembly.

Leader of Opposition in Assembly, Devendra Fadnavis said the draft of the Bill should be made available online for the people to give their opinion. Mr. Deshmukh agreed to this.

Greenfield highway to connect Konkan

ALOK DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

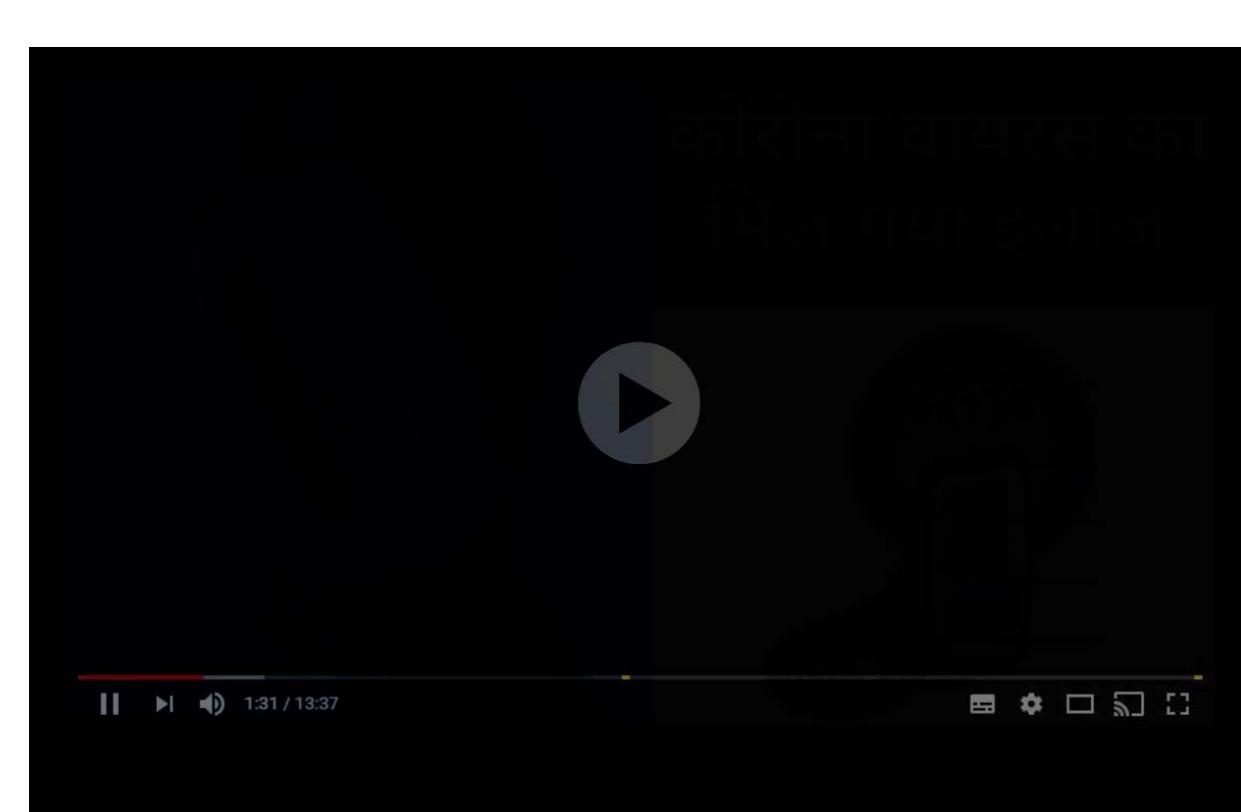
Taking a cue from the previous government's ambitious Mumbai-Nagpur super expressway named after Shiv Sena founder Balasaheb Thackeray, the tripartite Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government on Saturday announced a new 500-kilometre greenfield highway connecting Raigad, Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts of Konkan which will run parallel to the sea coast.

Announcing this on the last day of the Budget session, the Urban Development Department (UDD) minister Eknath Shinde said the road would bring Konkan closer to international market. "The expressway will start from Chirle village in Raigad district where

Mumbai Trans Harbour Link connecting Sewri to Nava Sheva port ends and will run up to Patradevi at Maharashtra-Goa border in Sindhudurg district," said Mr. Shinde.

The road will be built by Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC) which falls under Mr. Shinde's department.

"This road will run parallel to Konkan's coastline and will boost tourism. It will give access to Alphonso mangoes, cashew, betelnut, and coconut produced in the region to the international market, and create employment opportunities for the locals," he said, adding that locals would be taken in confidence before going ahead with the project.



Punjab, Himachal Pradesh widen COVID-19 safety net

State govts. close cinema halls, gyms, swimming pools, schools and colleges

VIKAS VASUDEVA
CHANDIGARH

The Punjab government has decided to shut down cinema halls, gyms and swimming pools across the State till further orders as a precautionary measure in the wake of COVID-19.

An order from Department of Health and Family Welfare said, "To prevent and control the spread of COVID-19, in public interest, under the regulation notified, dated 5.03.2020 under the Epidemic Disease Act, 1897, all cinema halls, gyms, swimming pools in the State of Punjab shall remain closed till further order after the midnight of March 14, 2020."

No public gatherings

The Department has also put a ban on all public gatherings including sports events, conferences, cultural events, fairs and exhibi-

Go vegetarian, advises Vij

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH
Haryana Health Minister Anil Vij on Saturday said people should become vegetarian to avoid the threat of COVID-19-like diseases.

Mr. Vij said that as a precautionary measure, the State government has decided to impose a ban on public rallies.

"The government has imposed a ban on all political, religious or social rallies, sports events, protest etc. in the State till further orders. Action will be taken against anyone who fails to comply with the order under Section 188 of IPC," he said.

Earlier during the day, Mr. Vij had tweeted in Hindi: "Shakahari bano tarah-tarah ke jeet jantu khakar corona jaise virus paida kar manav jaati ke liye khatra

tions till further orders from midnight of March 14.

Separately, an official statement denied reports that suggested a few per-

sons suspected of COVID-19 were absconding or missing in the State.

"Government of India has shared lists of 6,850 passengers with State. All these passengers have been screened at Delhi and different airports and have been found asymptomatic. State has contacted 6,058 passengers till today and surveillance of all passengers is being done. The contact details of 335 passengers are incomplete and lists have been shared with the district administration to contact these passengers once to know about their health status. It is very incorrect to say or suggest that these are suspected cases of COVID-19," said the statement.

The Himachal Pradesh government has also ordered that all schools, colleges, universities and cinema halls in the State will remain closed till March 31.

A statement in this regard was made by Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur during the ongoing Assembly session on Saturday.

SP to hold cycle yatra on March 23

Party plans protests on different issues on 22nd of every month starting April

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

LUCKNOW

The Samajwadi Party held its national executive meeting on Saturday and decided to organise cycle yatra at tehsil level on March 23 on the occasion of the birth anniversary of socialist leader Ram Manohar Lohia.

Party spokesperson Rakesh Chaudhary said that keeping in mind the 2022 Assembly polls, protests on different issues will be held on the 22nd day of every month starting April.

Lohia's anniversary

"The national executive meeting was chaired by party chief Akhilesh Yadav. It



SP president Akhilesh Yadav, general secretary Ram Gopal Yadav and others in Lucknow on Saturday. ■ PTI

was decided that a cycle yatra at tehsil level will be held on March 23 on the occasion of the birth anniversary of

Ram Manohar Lohia. After this, there will be protests on 22nd day of every month from April raising 22 issues," he said.

11 killed in truck-jeep collision in Rajasthan



Mangled remains of the jeep after it collided with a truck in Jodhpur on Saturday. ■ PTI

MOHAMMED IQBAL

JAIPUR

Eleven persons were killed and three injured when a trailer truck collided with a jeep on the Balotra-Phalodi mega highway in Rajasthan's Jodhpur district on Saturday. The deceased included six women and a child.

The local villagers helped in removing the bodies. Those injured were referred to Mathura Das Mathur Government Hospital in Jodhpur.

1 dead, crops damaged in Jharkhand due to rain

Power supply disrupted for 16 hours

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MEDININAGAR/HAZARIBAG

A 60-year-old farmer was killed and crops were damaged after heavy rain lashed many parts of Jharkhand since Friday night, officials said on Saturday.

The farmer was killed in Palamu district and crops were damaged in Hazaribag and Giridih districts, they said.

The man died after the rain-soaked walls of his mud house fell on him following heavy rain in Noudih village in Palamu district on Friday night, a police officer said.

Rain caused heavy dam-

age to Rabi crops, Hazaribag Agricultural Officer Sanjay Kumar said.

Hazaribag Deputy Commissioner Bhuvanesh Pratap Singh said that there was a heavy loss to crops and properties in the district.

According to the Jharkhand Bijli Nigam Limited (Hazaribag circle), power supply was disrupted for nearly 16 hours.

Heavy rain caused flooding in the Harda river and water is flowing over the road bridge.

The chana crop was damaged in Giridih district, officials said.

COVID-19: AMU suspends classes till March 22

University, school exams to be held as per schedule

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GHAZIABAD

Aligarh Muslim University has suspended all its classes, including sessional tests, in the university and schools till March 22 as a precautionary measure in view of the COVID-19 threat. However, all examinations of the university and schools will be

held as per schedule, an official release said.

The off-campus centres at Murshidabad, Malappuram and Kishanganj will follow the directives of their respective State government.

The decision was taken after a consultative meeting of the deans of faculties, principals of colleges, provosts of residential halls and other functionaries under the chairmanship of AMU Vice-Chancellor Professor Tariq Mansoor on Saturday.

It has also been decided that the students can consult their respective teachers through emails for teaching help, stated the AMU circular, issued after the meeting.

All conferences, seminars, extension lectures, workshops, hall functions, sports events and other programmes have been postponed till March 31, while educational tours have been postponed till April 15. The matter will be reviewed after two weeks as per the

situation.

AMU Registrar Abdul Hamid has advised the staff and students not to believe rumours and fake news and visit the official website of the University for any event and update.

Meanwhile, the Controller of Examinations announced that the presentation-cum-interviews scheduled from March 23 for admissions in PhD have been postponed and fresh dates will be notified later.



A GREETING TO REMEMBER

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Viral impact: Workers wearing protective masks at the Thiruvananthapuram international airport; a scene at a mall in Mysuru that was closed to visitors; a doctor checking the temperature of the Union Minister for Civil Aviation Hardeep Singh Puri at the Wings India 2020 International expo; and inmates manufacturing face masks in the tailoring unit at Central Prison, Visakhapatnam, on Saturday. ■ S. GOPAKUMAR, M.A.SRIRAM & NAGARA GOPAL



Kalaburagi hunkers down

District administration responds to COVID-19 death by restricting public gatherings

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

KALABURAGI

Tightening curbs on public gatherings after the country's first COVID-19 death was reported from Kalaburagi city, Deputy Commissioner of Kalaburagi district B. Sharat escalated the high alert on Friday, cautioning residents not to come out of their houses unless it was absolutely necessary.

"There is a good chance that the virus has spread. There is a possibility of coming across infected people. I strongly advise residents to confine themselves to their homes. A family member can go out and buy necessary commodities taking adequate care. We are not declaring curfew, but advising people to self-restrict their mobility. We are going to close down all non-essential shops. Only those that sell essential commodities will remain open," Mr. Sharat said at a media conference on Saturday.

The number of people in isolation and being monitored jumped from 46 on Friday to 71 a day later.

Four people developed symptoms, including a staff



Fear factor: Few tourists are seen in front of Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Saturday. ■ K. MURALI KUMAR

nurse who treated the victim and a five-year-old child.

The officer also expressed helplessness as the victim's family members were not cooperating with contact tracing.

In addition to restrictions on all government events,

COVID-19

the Deputy Commissioner imposed restrictions on private events such as weddings and birthday parties.

"People need to get permission from the authorities for events. We will give per-

sons for allegedly spreading false information that two individuals had tested positive for the virus.

Lokesh, 32, from Kumudavadi in Chamarajanagar and Nagendra, 21, from Nanjangud were held and produced before the Principal Civil Judge in Chamarajanagar on Friday night. They were remanded in judicial custody till March 26, Superintendent of Chamarajanagar district police Ananda Kumar said.

The duo had spread information that a girl from Nanjangud and a man from Kabali village in Gundlupet taluk had tested positive for the novel coronavirus.

They had used bold and highlighted text with pictures morphed on screenshots of a private television channel to make it look authentic. After seeing the post on social media, the girl went to Nanjangud police to clarify that she was healthy.

Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh's Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (ABPS), which was to begin on March 15 in Bengaluru, has been cancelled due to the COVID-19 situation.

Fresh case in Telangana, number rises to two

HYDERABAD

Telangana reported a fresh case of COVID-19 on Saturday, taking the total number of positive cases in the State to two. A person, who travelled to Italy, tested positive for the virus, Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao told the Assembly.

Meanwhile, the government barred all public gatherings, including functioning of educational institutions, cinema halls, marriages, public meetings, clubs, rallies, all kinds of sports activities and exhibitions with immediate effect. Mr. Rao said the restrictions would apply till March 31. PTI

'No more wait at the Vaikuntam complex'

TIRUMALA

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) has decided to temporarily scrap the system of making pilgrims wait at the Vaikuntam Queue Complex prior to their darshan of Lord Venkateswara. Normally pilgrims wait between two and 10 hours at the complex. In view of the COVID threat, the TTD has decided to strictly follow the 'time slot' system in darshan and let in the pilgrims on an hourly basis. The new system will come into force on Tuesday. Pilgrims should report at the complex only at the time mentioned in darshan tickets.

Kerala takes more stringent steps to combat COVID-19

Announcement of virtual lock down triggers panic

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala is throwing all its energy, attention and human resources into surveillance, monitoring and contact tracing, in an attempt to ensure that the window of opportunity for the containment of COVID-19 is not lost. More stringent measures were announced on Saturday for strengthening surveillance at airports, railway stations and border points to ensure that every one entering the State is screened properly.



Respite at last: Those who arrived from Italy, Germany and Spain being taken for medical examination. ■ THULASI KAKKAT

total panic in the capital city on Saturday.

With little time for preparation, panic buying by people for essentials ensued.

Even though the Chief Minister clarified later that the government only intended to warn people about reducing crowding and that malls were not to be closed, the damage had already been done.

Long wait ends

Meanwhile, 20-odd passengers landed at the Cochin international airport on Saturday after spending more

than 72 disquieting hours at the Fiumicino international airport in Rome.

After being denied flight in the last minute on Tuesday, a group of 40-odd Malayalis were stranded at the airport before a section of those passengers were taken in by the Emirates flight on Friday.

Interestingly, they were not required to produce a medical certificate clearing them of COVID-19 infection as mandated by the Union government for allowing them entry into the country. (With inputs from Kochi)

Farmers confident as pink flower finds value addition

Spurt in demand for products made with lotus

ABDUL LATHEEF NAHA
MALAPPURAM

Value addition is increasingly being found for the lotus being cultivated in the wetlands of Tirunavaya in the district.

Even when major temples across the State find a slump in the number of devotees arriving for darshan and major temple festivals facing postponement in the wake of the COVID-19 scare, the two dozen-odd farmers engaged in lotus cultivation at Tirunavaya are confident that this year's yield will not go begging.

The Tirunavaya lotus has always been in demand as it is preferred to the lotus from other places such as Thrissur and Nagercoil because of its colour, size and smell. The Tirunavaya pink lotus is preferred in temples across the State, including Guruvayur.

Farmers are hopeful that there will be a spurt in demand for value-added products such as kondattam, squash, pickles and other herbal products made with lotus. Several Ayurveda medicines, especially some meant for children, are made with lotus.

"We used to supply lotus to Ayurveda medical firms, including Kottakkal Arya Vaidya Sala, whenever we had good yield. But our priorities continue to be for puja in temples," said Mohammed Aslu K., alias Aslu Lotus, a farmer at Tirunavaya.

Re-Echo initiative
An initiative made by the Re-Echo, an environment protection group based at Tirunavaya, for promoting lotus cultivation and creating value addition to the beautiful pink flower since 2015, has

had its results. The Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) at Tavanur had shown interest in lotus and explored the potentials of the flower for making such products as kondattam, squash, pickle and cream.

"We could bring the attention of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), the lead bank and several other organisations to lotus farming. We could win some respect for the farmers as well," M.K. Sateesh Babu, financial literacy counsellor of the Malappuram District Cooperative Bank.

The Re-Echo conducted a Lotus Mela at Tirunavaya in 2015 and a couple of years later conducted a mega floral carpet by using 12,500 lotus flowers. This floral carpet had secured an Asian record for using the largest number of lotus.

Charred remains



Policemen looking at a coach of the train that caught fire at Moula Ali Railway Station in Hyderabad on Saturday. There were no casualties as the train, parked at the station for maintenance, was empty. ■ G. RAMAKRISHNA

Bitter harvest for Telangana's honey hunters

Widespread use of pesticide in orchards, flower farms decimate bees

S. HARPAL SINGH
ADILABAD

The use of chemical sprays in mango orchards and flower farms has led to a drastic fall in honey production in the districts of Nirmal and Nizamabad of Telangana along the Godavari river.

In particular the honey produced by small honey bees, *Apis florea*, has seen a huge reduction.

"The use of chemicals when the mango trees are in bloom or in the flower farms – the flowers being the major sources of nectar for these bees – kills them. The trend of spraying chemicals was initiated a few years back and has severely impacted honey production," said Waghré Mahesh, an expert honey hunter from



Waghré Mahesh, a honey hunter, selling honey on the Uttron road. ■ S. HARPAL SINGH

the temple town of Basar in Nirmal.

Mr. Mahesh belongs to the Tenugolu community, which has traditionally thrived on collection and sale of fruits and honey from

the forests.

"We used to extract honey in quintals until the sprays started," the honey collector recalled.

"Now, an individual hunter may not find even a few

kgs on a single day," Mr. Mahesh's brother Arun added.

Greener neighbours

The brothers point to the bountiful honey harvest in neighbouring Nanded district of Maharashtra. "You go to Bhokar and Mudkhed, you will find much honey as the farmers do not use sprays in mango orchards and flower farms," they said.

"We collect the honey from hives just using beehive smoke to scatter the bees. The bees do not die this way and we remove only the honey loaded comb while the hive containing eggs of the bees is left on the tree," Mr. Mahesh said, describing the sustainable methods used by his community over the next two days.

Some local people were caught unawares, as the RRTs wearing protective

500 birds culled in pockets of Malappuram

Action to continue for the next two days; local residents caught unawares

STAFF REPORTER
MALAPPURAM

Over 500 birds, mostly poultry, were culled on Saturday in a few areas within one km from Malappuram's Palathinaling, where avian flu was detected two days ago.

Ten rapid response teams (RRTs) of the State Animal Husbandry Department, supported by health and civic body officials, took up the operation in wards 15, 17, 18 and 19 of Parappanangadi municipality near Palathinaling. About 4,000 birds are expected to be culled in the next two days.

Chickens, ducks, turkeys, pigeons and doves were among the birds culled.

Some local people were caught unawares, as the RRTs wearing protective



A bird being taken away to be culled at Palathinaling in Kerala's Malappuram district on Saturday. ■ SAKEER HUSSAIN

gears swooped down on the village in the morning. Local people said they had not been informed of the culling.

As many as 20 veterinary surgeons, 119 livestock inspectors and 30 attendants

institute for Animal Diseases, Palode, who led the operation, said culling would continue on Sunday and Monday. Birds in Munniyoor and Tirurangadi regions will be culled on Monday.

Licences suspended
The district administration has suspended the licences of poultry shops within 10 km area from Palathinaling in Tirurangadi and Parappanangadi municipalities.

Sale or transport of poultry or any other pet bird is banned in the region for the next three months. District Collector Jafer Malik said people would be compensated for the culled birds as per government rates. A special three-day cleaning drive will begin after the culling.

CMYK

A B-MME

COVID-19: air travellers feel the heat

Passengers are forced to reschedule their flights at higher prices

JAGRITI CHANDRA
NEW DELHI

Travellers forced to cancel flights after the government's advisory against non-essential travel, have been left in the lurch as most airlines have offered full refund only for travel to countries for which there is an outright ban.

In many cases while airlines have waived re-booking fees, travel agents and aggregators have either failed to pass on the benefit to passengers or such travellers are forced to reschedule flights at a higher price.

for a backpacking trip from Mumbai on Friday by Kuwait Airways.

However, her flight was cancelled after Kuwait banned the entry of nationals from several countries, including India. Despite the

COVID-19

cancellation by the airline, the Mumbai-based writer was offered only a free date change.

Determined to join her friends, Ms Bhalerao then booked a ticket on Gulf Air for ₹39,000 which she was forced to cancel following the government's advisory and received only half the fare as a refund.

"I booked both my tickets through Make My Trip (MMT). When Kuwait Airways cancelled the ticket, MMT said they were helpless and I will have to contact the airline. The airline offered only a date change, but that



In dire straits: Passengers wearing masks at Patna airport on Saturday. ■ RANJEET KUMAR

is not an option for me as I was travelling to celebrate my sister's birthday and also because there is no clarity on how long the COVID-19 infection will continue," Ms. Bhalerao told *The Hindu* over the phone.

A communications professional, Durga Nandini, was booked for travel to Vietnam on Malaysia Airlines between April 2 to 12.

Following the government's advisory, the mother of a four-year-old is apprehensive about travelling. Though the airline allows

her to change the date of her travel for free unlimited times until December 31, according to Make My Trip's website.

Ms. Durga will have to cough up ₹5,220 per ticket as penalty for rebooking. Alternatively, she will have to cancel her travel and bear the entire loss.

"I am a mother of a four-year-old and travelling for me is not an option because of the fear about COVID-19. Medical experts have argued that it may take upto 18 months to develop a vaccine and, therefore, I don't want

"We have also received many complaints about travel aggregators and we have asked airlines to ensure that their third party vendors implement waivers offered in toto," the official said.

It is not an option for me as I was travelling to celebrate my sister's birthday and also because there is no clarity on how long the COVID-19 infection will continue," Ms. Bhalerao told *The Hindu* over the phone.

A communications professional, Durga Nandini, was booked for travel to Vietnam on Malaysia Airlines between April 2 to 12.

Following the government's advisory, the mother of a four-year-old is apprehensive about travelling. Though the airline allows

to take the risk of travelling in the next eight months but my airline allows me to reschedule only until the end of the year," says Ms. Durga.

"For regions where airlines have cancelled existing and new flights, we are offering 100% refund to our customers. Additionally, we are working in tandem with our airline partners to offer an option to change travel dates with no-fee charge; and are passing full fee waiver benefits rolled out by our partners to travellers," Make My Trip said in an email response to queries.

Complaints about agents

A senior DGCA official told *The Hindu* that the regulatory body had met with several international carriers, including Malaysia Airlines on Friday, and advised them to waive cancellation and rescheduling charges.

"We have also received many complaints about travel aggregators and we have asked airlines to ensure that their third party vendors implement waivers offered in toto," the official said.

'Body cremated after refusal'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The body of a 68-year-old woman from Delhi, who succumbed to COVID-19, was cremated at Nigambodh Ghat on Saturday after initially being denied permission by the crematorium, said her family. "They told us they did not have any guidelines from the Health Department about coronavirus victims," said Sanjeev Arora, the deceased's relative.

Man from cruise ship back home

STAFF REPORTER
BERHAMPUR

Sibashis Nayak, the software engineer from Berhampur who had been evacuated from the Diamond Princess cruise ship, returned home on Friday after spending 14 days in quarantine at Manesar to rule out coronavirus infection. He was brought back to New Delhi from Tokyo in a special Air India flight on February 27.

Benches to hear 12 cases each

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Six benches of the Supreme Court will on March 16 take up only 12 urgent matters each to avoid overcrowding of court rooms, following the decision to restrict the court's functioning in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak. The Supreme court on Saturday also issued precautionary guidelines, including thermal screening of all employees and closure of cafeterias.

Man spreads rumour, held

STAFF REPORTER
BERHAMPUR

A person was arrested in Odisha's Rayagada district on Friday for spreading rumours on COVID-19 online. Satyanarayan Samal, 32, had uploaded a post on Facebook claiming that an infected person had returned from Kerala and admitted in the Rayagada District Headquarters Hospital. Police said the claim was false and advised people to refrain from spreading such fake news.

MHA withdraws order on ex-gratia relief

Assistance to victims' families removed

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Hours after it issued a notification that an ex-gratia of ₹4 lakh will be paid to the families of those who die of COVID-19 infection, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) withdrew the order.

In an order issued on Saturday, the MHA said it has decided to treat COVID-19 as a "notified disaster" for the purpose of providing assistance under the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF).

The SDRF is the primary fund available with the State governments for responses to notified disasters to meet expenditure for providing immediate relief to the victims.

The Centre contributes 75% of the SDRF allocation for general category States and Union Territories and 90% for special category States (northeast, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir).

Under the old notification, the MHA listed ex-gratia relief to families of deceased persons and "cost of hospitalisation for managing COVID-19 patients at rates fixed by the State government" among the items



for assistance from the SDRF pool.

It issued another "partially modified" notification the same day where the above two items were removed.

It said the items that would be included for assistance under the SDRF are measures for quarantine, sample collection, screening and procurement of essential equipment/laboratories in response to COVID-19.

No explanation was given by the MHA officials for the modified notification. An MHA spokesperson did not respond to a query on the reasons that led to the modification of the notification.

Border check posts to be shut in north, east

Only 20 points will remain open

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has ordered the closure of all but 20 immigration land check posts in eastern and northern India from Saturday midnight in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The decision was taken by the Immigration Section of the Foreigner's Division of MHA.

"All types of passenger movements through all the Immigration Land Check Posts located at Indo-Bangladesh border, Indo-Nepal

Border, Indo-Bhutan Border and Indo-Myanmar Border will be suspended with effect from 00:00 hours, March 15, 2020, till further orders except through the specified posts," the MHA said.

However, the curbs on the Indo-Nepal and Indo-Bhutan borders are applicable "only for third country nationals and not to Indian nationals or nationals of Nepal or Bhutan."

The border markets on the India-Bangladesh border too will be suspended.



Courting controversy: A member of the Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha drinking cow urine at the event in New Delhi on Saturday. ■ GETTY IMAGES

Group hosts 'cow urine party', says COVID-19 due to meat-eaters

'Global leaders should import the liquid from India'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

People lined up for their share of cow urine being poured from kettles into 'kulhads', at a 'gaumutra party' (cow urine party) here organised by Swami Chakrapani, the president of the Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha.

The event began with a 'yagna' and prayers to the cow and the virus itself, asking

it to leave peacefully and not kill any more people. A large poster in the backdrop depicted an avatar of Hindu god Narasimha as the virus.

At the event, Chakrapani claimed that COVID-19 is an "avatar" that has "come to punish those who eat non-vegetarian food."

Asking for forgiveness from the virus on behalf of meat eaters, he pledged that Indians will never eat meat

again. "Coronavirus has come because of the people who kill and eat animals. When you kill an animal, it creates a sort of energy that causes destruction in that place," said Chakrapani at the event.

"They (global leaders) should get cow urine imported from India because the almighty resides only in the Indian cow and not in any foreign breed," he said.

POSTGRADUATE INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL EDUCATION & RESEARCH CHANDIGARH

ADMISSION NOTICE NO. 04/2020

Online applications are invited from eligible candidates to appear in entrance test for admission to MD/MS course for the July, 2020 session through online computer based test (CBT) to be held at different cities across country.

Tentative schedule of related activities is given below:

Commencement of online Registration and filling of Application form on PGIMER website www.pgimer.edu.in	17.03.2020
Closing of Online Registration and submission of Application form	16.04.2020
Computer based Entrance test (CBT)	23.05.2020
Expected date of declaration of result	02.06.2020
Application processing fee (excluding transaction charges, if any). Fee once deposited will not be refunded at any cost.	SC/ST - Rs. 1200/- Others - Rs. 1500/- PwBD category is exempted.
Mode of payment	Through Debit/Credit card/ Net Banking only.

Note: For any enquiry : 0172-275556

For eligibility criteria and other details, applicants are advised to read the prospectus and instructions given there in carefully before starting online registration and filling of application form. The prospectus of admission is available on Institute's website i.e., www.pgimer.edu.in. Distribution of seats will be uploaded separately on the website of Institute.

REGISTRAR, ACADEMIC BRANCH

INDIAN RAILWAYS

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

Proforma 10.01

Notice is hereby given to all users of Railway lines and premises situated on the completed section of the under noted sections of Southern Railway that the 25000 Volts, 50 Hz, ac overhead traction wires will be energised on or after the date specified against the section. On and from the same date the overhead traction lines shall be treated as "LIVE" at all times and no unauthorised person shall approach or work in the proximity of the said overhead lines.

Section	Date
Newly erected Overhead equipment on the proposed Down line between Mecheri Road and Mettur dam from loc. 20/19 (ch. 20/516.50) to loc. MTPP/02 (ch.36/58.0) in connection with the doubling of track between Salem and Mettur dam in Salem division of Southern Railway.	20.03.2020

Proforma 10.02

INTRODUCTION OF ac 25 KV TRACTION "WARNING TO ROAD USERS"

It is notified for information of the public that in connection with introduction of 25 KV ac electric traction over the section of newly laid Down line between Mecheri Road and Mettur dam from loc. 20/19 (ch. 20/516.50) to loc. MTPP/02 (ch.36/58.0) in connection with the doubling of track between Salem and Mettur dam in Salem division of Southern Railway, the height gauges have been erected at all the level crossings with clear height between 4.76m and 4.78m above road level with a view to prevent loads of excessive height from coming into contact or dangerous proximity to live traction wire (contact wire), which shall be at a height of minimum 5.5m above the rail level at level crossings. Public are hereby notified to observe the height specified above for the purpose of loading vehicles and to see that the loads carried in road vehicles do not infringe the height gauges under any circumstances.

The dangers of a Load of Excessive Height are as follows.

- Danger to the height gauge and consequent obstruction to the road as well as the Railway line.
- Danger to the materials or equipment carried or the vehicle itself.
- Danger of fire and risk of life due to contact with or dangerous proximity to the conductors.

File No. E.320/X/CRS vol. XII
Date : 11.03.2020
Place : Chennai Egmore

Chief Electrical Engineer, Southern Railway, Construction, Egmore, Chennai - 600 08.

CENTRAL UNIVERSITIES COMMON ENTRANCE TEST

CUCET-2020 (www.cucetexam.in)

INFORMATION

Central Universities Common Entrance Test (CUCET-2020) is scheduled during May - June, 2020 for admission to different Programmes of 14 Central Universities and 4 State Universities at different centres across the country

IMPORTANT DATES

Opening of Online Application Form	16 March, 2020
Closing of Online Application Form	11 April, 2020
Issue of Admit Cards	18 May, 2020
Exam Date (UI & PG)	30 - 31 May, 2020
Exam Date (RP)	6 - 7 June, 2020
Result	26 June, 2020

GENERAL INFORMATION:

- Detailed information about CUCET-2020 is available on CUCET website: www.cucetexam.in
- Candidates are required to apply [online](#) through CUCET-2020 website
- Candidates who are appearing in the final examination of the qualifying degree/certificate are also eligible to apply
- Details of Programme of Studies, Eligibility Criteria, Programme Structure, Faculty Profile etc. are available at the respective website of Participating Universities (PU) and **candidates are advised to check the eligibility criteria of each PU for a given programme before applying for CUCET-2020**
- All Research Programmes (RP) examination will be conducted in Computer Based Test (CBT) mode
- All Integrated/ Under-Graduate (UI) and Post-Graduate (PG) examination will be conducted in Offline (OMR) mode
- CUCET-2020 provides facilities for applying to admission to these universities by single examination process with nominal examination fees
- Online admission counselling facility is available for some universities with additional fees

Media Partner: BENGALURU DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS UNIVERSITY Rajaji Hall, Central College Campus, Bangalore University, Bengaluru-560 001 Website: www.base.ac.in

Coordinating University for CUCET-2020 CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF RAJASTHAN NH-8, Bandarsindri, Ajmer-305817, Raj. Website: www.curaj.ac.in

ADMISSION QUERY : Mob.: 9560268076 Phone: (24X7 Help desk) 01463-238729(CURAJ) E-mail : enqcucet2020@curaj.ac.in

DPR/DDU/2802/2019-20

CM YK

FROM PAGE ONE

Virus cases rise,
more airlifts planned

According to the district health department, 854 people in Gautam Buddha Nagar in Uttar Pradesh were under surveillance till Friday.

Officials announced that the Padma Award ceremonies, scheduled for March 26 and April 3, have been postponed.

According to the Health Ministry's guidelines, those quarantined at home should stay in a well-ventilated, room, preferably with an attached or separate toilet. If another family member needs to stay in the same room, it's advisable to maintain a distance of at least a metre between the two. Quarantined individuals must stay away from the elderly, pregnant women, children and persons with co-morbidities within the household as their immunity may be low.

The Health Ministry has now also said that people under moderate risk which includes "asymptomatic passengers coming from China, Democratic Republic of Korea, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Iran and are elderly (above 60 years) who are hypertensive, diabetic, asthmatic, are to be shifted by State governments to a dedicated quarantine facility and monitored daily by State governments for next 14 days. In case they develop symptoms, they should be isolated."

UNICEF in a statement released on COVID-19 outbreak noted that characterising the disease as a pandemic is not an indication that the virus has become deadlier, rather an acknowledgement of the disease's geographical spread.

SAARC virtual meet on COVID-19 today

When asked if India was amenable to including an official from Pakistan rather than its Prime Minister or President, an MEA official said this is "not an issue", as the aim of the conference is to discuss a "strong strategy" for the region to deal with the coronavirus, that has claimed nearly 5,000 lives globally in the last few weeks.

"What is important is that all [SAARC] countries will be represented at the meeting," the official said.

The Ministry of External Affairs is coordinating India's response to the virus through a "special cell" headed by Additional Secretary Dammu Ravi and assisted by four officers and other staff, who will brief the Prime Minister during the

video-conference. The MEA says it has set up helplines in all its missions to respond to queries and help the Indian community around the world dealing with the pandemic.

The government has paid particular attention to helping SAARC member countries with their response as well, the MEA highlighted in a note released on Saturday.

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar had announced on February 7 that India was prepared to airlift stranded citizens from all neighbouring countries. Special Air India and IAF planes to China, Japan, Iran and Italy have airlifted more than 1,000 people, including about 30 from Bangladesh, Myanmar, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Centre hikes excise duty on fuels by ₹3 per litre

The gains during the remaining three weeks of the current fiscal would be less than ₹2,000 crore.

Petrol and diesel prices, which are charged on a daily basis, were cut by 13 paise and 16 paise respectively as the oil marketing companies adjusted the excise duty hike against the drop in prices brought on the international rates slumping the most since the Gulf War.

Petrol now cost ₹69.87 a litre in Delhi and diesel ₹62.58.

Duty raised nine times
Between November 2014 and January 2016, the government raised the excise duty on petrol and diesel on nine occasions to take away gains from the plummeting global oil prices. In all, the duty on petrol rate was increased by ₹1.77 a litre and on diesel by ₹1.47 a litre in those 15 months. This helped the government more than double its excise

mop-up to ₹2,42,000 crore during 2016-17 from ₹99,000 crore in 2014-15. It cut excise duty by ₹2 in October 2017 and by ₹1.50 a year later. But it raised excise duty by ₹2 in July 2019.

Government sources said that while the benefit of the reduction in crude prices in the first quarter of this year had significantly gone to the consumer, the Centre had increased the duty to raise some revenue because of a tight fiscal situation. This would help to generate the resources for development of infrastructure, they said.

Benchmark crude oil prices have halved since January to \$32 a barrel. In sync with this, the prices of petrol and diesel have also come down by more than ₹6 per litre (from ₹76.01 a litre on January 11, 2020, to ₹69.87 a litre on March 14 for petrol, and from ₹69.17 to ₹62.58 for diesel during the same period in Delhi).

GST on mobile phones hiked to 18%

Pankaj Mohindroo, chairman at India Cellular & Electronics Association, said the move to increase GST by 6% would be detrimental to the vision of Digital India.

"Consumption will be stymied and our domestic consumption target of ₹6 lakh crores by 2025 will fall short by at least ₹2 lakh crores," he said.

In a letter to the Finance Minister earlier this week, Mr. Mohindroo said that instead of rationalising the GST on components and inputs, the "bizzare" move to increase the rate on the final product was not in the interest of consumers as well as

the industry. On the calibration of rates for other items where similar problems arise, such as footwear, textiles and fertilizers, Ms. Sitharaman said that after a detailed discussion it was decided to take up the matter at future meetings.

The GST rate on maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) services in respect of aircraft has been reduced from 18% to 5% with a full input tax credit.

"This change is likely to assist in setting up of MRO services in India," she said at a press conference after the meeting.

The channel named "Jit-tega Punjab" invited all like-minded people for discussions and interviews. "It is a platform to propel Punjab towards revival and renaissance," Mr. Sidhu said in a statement.

The channel was inspired by the path of universal brotherhood, love and peace shown by Baba Nanak, it said.

Will work to restore J&K statehood: PM

Centre will resolve all issues, Modi assures a delegation from Kashmir's newly formed Apni Party

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said the government would work with all sections of the population in Jammu and Kashmir to restore its statehood "at an early opportunity".

A 24-member delegation of the newly formed Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party, led by its leader Altaf Bukhari, called on Mr. Modi at his residence here on Saturday evening, and discussed various issues such as concerns about demographic changes, the delimitation exercise and the grant of domicile, officials said.

"Referring to his statement in Parliament, the Prime Minister underlined that the government will work with all sections of the population to realise the

hopes of statehood for Jammu and Kashmir at an early opportunity," an official statement said.

The Prime Minister called for *janbhagidari* (people's participation) in transforming the Union Territory, and emphasised the importance of an administration that gave voice to the people. He noted that democracy in the region could be strengthened through a fast-moving process of political integration, the statement said.

Job avenues for youth
Speaking about youth empowerment, he emphasised that youngsters should act as catalytic agents for the development of Jammu and Kashmir. He highlighted the importance of skill development and creating employment opportunities



Reaching out: Narendra Modi interacting with a delegation from the J&K's Apni Party, in New Delhi on Saturday. ■ PTI

for the youth to bring in an overall transformation in the Union Territory, it said.

Extending full support of the government to resolve all issues being faced by the people of Jammu and Kashmir, Mr. Modi assured the delegation that the Centre was committed to the region's

economic development through extensive focus on infrastructure development and creating new investment opportunities in sectors such as tourism.

The delegation thanked the Prime Minister for his "unstinted support" and "untiring efforts" towards

the development of the Union Territory, and appreciated the efforts of the government, security agencies and the people of Jammu & Kashmir towards maintaining peace and security in the region, the statement said.

Mr. Bukhari said the Prime Minister heard them patiently and promised to make all Central laws applicable in the Union Territory. The team requested Mr. Modi to release all leaders from detention, he said.

The Apni Party was formed on March 8 by Mr. Bukhari, former Finance Minister of the erstwhile State of J&K, along with 30 political leaders from various regional and national parties, to pitch for restoration of statehood and ensure domicile rights over land and jobs.

Dulat says met Farooq on a personal note

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A.S. Dulat, former chief of the Research and Analysis Wing, said on Saturday that he did not meet National Conference chief Farooq Abdullah in detention on behalf of the government, and it was only a personal visit.

Asked if his February 12 meeting could have triggered the release of Dr. Abdullah, Mr. Dulat said: "I have no idea why he has been released now."

"Obviously, I couldn't have met him without government clearance but nobody [in the government] helped and I did not go on somebody's behalf. I just went as a well-wisher to enquire about his health," Mr. Dulat told *The Hindu*.

Azad wants all J&K leaders freed

He met Farooq Abdullah, but refrained from commenting on Article 370 and 35A

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

Senior Congress leader and Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad on Saturday met National Conference (NC) president Farooq Abdullah, MP, who was released on Friday, here and pitched for release of all detained mainstream leaders, while avoiding any comments on Articles 370 and 35A.

"Development in J&K, which has come to a halt, cannot be carried out by putting the leaders under detention. A political process is to be initiated and can only proceed only after the [mainstream] leaders are released. Firstly, democracy should be restored here," Mr. Azad said.

Mr. Azad is the first na-



Catching up: Farooq Abdullah and Ghulam Nabi Azad outside the residence of the NC chief in Srinagar. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

tional leader to meet Dr. Abdullah, who was released after over seven months of detention, at his residence on Gupkar Road here. Conspicuously, Mr. Abdullah chose not to issue any statement as Mr. Azad briefed the media after the meeting.

"It was the happiest mo-

ment to meet Dr. Abdullah after seven months. He is a friend. Besides, I met him on behalf of those who raised their voice against his detention since August last year, in Parliament and at other platforms," Mr. Azad said.

Avoiding any comment on the August 5 episode, Article

370, 35A or reunification of the pre-August State of J&K, the Congress leader suggested that there be immediate restoration of Statehood to J&K.

In an oblique reference to Mr. Azad's statement, People's Democratic Party president Mehbooba Mufti, whose Twitter handle is run by her daughter Iltija Mufti, tweeted: "Article 370 abrogation is unconstitutional and illegal. It's the elephant in the room that most don't want to acknowledge. Downgrading J&K into a UT was done to shift goal posts. Seasons might have changed since August but the tinge of betrayal remains."

Dr. Abdullah met his incarcerated son Omar Abdullah at the Hari Niwas on Gupkar Road.

If anyone is feeling alienated please don't, just get involved post or no post. Young vs old narrative is a hollow one, we need everyone

SUSHMITA DEV
Mahila Congress chief

body's name.

The young versus old narrative has only resurfaced with Mr. Scindia's exit.

Rajasthan scene

Amid reports that the BJP could now target the Congress government in Rajasthan where Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot shares a frosty relationship with Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, Mr. Pilot sent a cryptic tweet on Wednesday.

"Unfortunate to see @JMScindia parting ways with @INCIndia. I wish things could have been resolved collaboratively within the party," he said in a tweet, indicating that the 'collaborative' effort was missing.

Many believe Mr. Pilot's tweet was a signal to the high command that seems to have ignored signs of trouble between the Rajasthan CM and his deputy.

Calling the current phase a "defining moment", Mahila Congress chief Sushmita Dev said a day later: "If anyone is feeling alienated pls don't, just get involved post or no post. Young vs old narrative is a hollow one, we need everyone."

Speaker accepts resignation of six rebel Congress MLAs now in Bengaluru

STAFF REPORTER
BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh Assembly Speaker N.P. Prajapati on Saturday accepted the resignations of six rebel MLAs, who are in Bengaluru, after they failed to appear before him to attest to their resignations even after being given time to do so on two days.

"The news given by them relating to this in electronic media is also raising questions marks," Mr. Prajapati wrote in his order, accepting the resignations submitted on March 10. "This way, their conduct seems to be astounding and they are not fit to be members of the Vidhan Sabha."

CM's recommendation
The six were Ministers and supporters of Jyotiraditya Scindia, who crossed over to the BJP. Governor Lalji Tandon on Friday approved Chief Minister Kamal Nath's recommendation to remove



Placing a demand: BJP leaders meeting Governor Lalji Tandon in Bhopal on Saturday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

them from the Cabinet.

Mr. Nath wrote to the Union Home Minister to ensure the release of 22 rebel MLAs held in "captivity" in Bengaluru so that they could attend the session from Monday.

"There is no point in the demand for a floor test if 22 of my MLAs are held hostage

outside," he wrote.

On Friday, Mr. Tandon asked Mr. Nath to provide cover of the central paramilitary forces for those MLAs asked to appear before the Speaker.

"I assure you that if Karnataka police ensure their release, I'll provide them with the highest security arrangements."

They also demanded that no other issue ought to be taken up during the session.

Mr. Chouhan said the 22 rebel MLAs had made it clear in videos released by them that they had resigned.

Sidhu starts YouTube channel

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Cricketer-turned-politician Navjot Singh Sidhu, who quit the Punjab Cabinet last year and went into a self-imposed political exile, announced the launch of his YouTube channel on Saturday.

The channel named "Jit-tega Punjab" invited all like-minded people for discussions and interviews. "It is a platform to propel Punjab towards revival and renaissance," Mr. Sidhu said in a statement.

The channel was inspired by the path of universal brotherhood, love and peace shown by Baba Nanak, it said.

Trinamool begins 2021 campaign in earnest

Kolkata wakes up to Mamata hoardings telling voters to choose between her and the unknown

BISHWANATH GHOSH
KOLKATA

In West Bengal, people are long used to hoardings and posters that credit Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee with every celebration or celebration-worth event that takes place in the State. These are everywhere – outside airports and railway stations, at bus stands and on roads and flyovers.

Beginning of a campaign
In such a situation, when her presence already occupies a lot of public space and landscape, fresh billboards have now sprung up all over Kolkata, hailing Ms. Banerjee as *Banglar gorbo* – Bengal's pride. The golden billboards are minimalist. They bear no

distracting slogans or images: only the face of Ms. Banerjee and the words *Banglar gorbo*.

These hoardings are a war cry – the beginning of a fierce campaign that is going to unfold over the next 12 months leading to the Assembly election in 2021.

The overnight mushrooming of the hoardings comes at a time when the country is in the grip of the fear of COVID-19 and Ms. Banerjee herself has ordered the shutting

down of all educational institutions till March 31.

"They [the hoardings] have Prashant Kishor written all over them," a top bureaucrat told *The Hindu*, referring to the election strategist who had earlier devised the *Didi Ke Bolo* (Tell Didi) campaign which never quite took off.

Familiarity factor

"I think they are trying to capitalise on the fact that the BJP, in spite of its popularity, does not have a popular face in West Bengal," the bureaucrat said on condition of anonymity.

Even well-known political analyst Biswanath Chakraborty is of the opinion that the strategy is to tell voters to

choose between her and the unknown. "Projecting her as a face creates a huge gap between the ruling party [Trinamool] and the Opposition," he said.

Mr. Chakraborty, in fact, sees the hoardings as an attempt to reconstruct the old image of Ms. Banerjee. She first stormed to power in 2011, defeating the Left Front that had been in power for long years and had seen a decline in its popularity.

But since then, a lot of water has flowed under the Howrah Bridge. Her party machinery has been afflicted with allegations of misrule, corruption and undemocratic practices. "Therefore she

MPs' panel concerned at Defence fund shortfall

Reduced allocation will affect modernisation and triservice organisations, says parliamentary standing committee

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

The parliamentary standing committee on Defence has expressed concern that the widening gap between projections and allocations in the outlay for the Defence sector will affect modernisation and recommended a dedicated fund for committed liabilities and procurements.

The shortfall in allocation has affected the setting up of three triservice organisations and the operational readiness of the Andaman and Nicobar Command, the committee noted.

"From the information submitted by the Ministry, the committee notes that since 2015-16, none of the three Services has been given the matching allocation as per the projection."

The gap in capital allocation for the Army increased

from ₹4,596 crore in 2015-16 to ₹17,911.22 crore in 2020-21 (14% to 36%). For the Navy, the gap increased from ₹1,264.89 crore to ₹18,580 crore (5% to 41%). The Air Force's gap rose from ₹12,505.21 to ₹22,925.38 crore (27% to 35%).

At a disadvantage

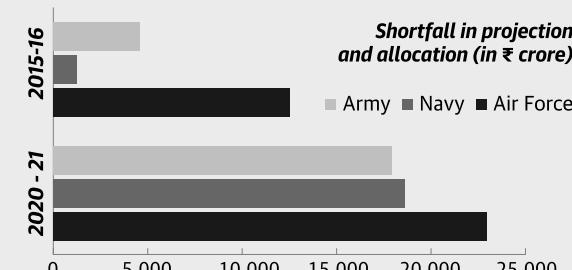
"The committee opines that such situation is not conducive for preparation of country to modern-day warfare, where possession of capital intensive modern machines are a prerequisite for not only tilting the result of war in our favour but also having a credible deterrence," the report said.

The committee noted the considerable shortage in the allocation in the capital head, which is 35% less than the projection, for all the forces put together.

"The committee observes

Missing the target

There is a widening gap over the last five years between projections and capital allocation for the defence sector



Such a situation is not conducive for preparation for modern-day warfare, where possession of capital intensive machines is a prerequisite for not only tilting the result of war in our favour but also has a credible deterrence — Standing Committee report

that the Navy's fighting capabilities depend on the high-value platforms like aircraft carrier, submarines, destroyers and frigate but the allocation of the capital budget for Navy [percentage-wise]

has the sharpest decline," the report said.

On the committed liabilities, which are payments anticipated during a financial year for contracts concluded in previous years, the com-

mittee noted that they constitute a significant part of the capital head.

Inadequate allocation would definitely lead to a "default situation" on contractual obligations, the committee said. "Therefore, the committee has no option but to recommend that a dedicated fund should be earmarked for committed liabilities and new schemes, invariably from the next Budget onwards."

Commitments made

The Navy and the IAF have committed liabilities higher than their share of the capital allocation in the Budget. To offset this, the Services have been forced to defer payment of committed liabilities of the defence public sector undertakings among other measures.

In the allocation for the joint staff, the projection un-

der miscellaneous expenditure was ₹660.94 crore while allotment is ₹294 crore. The standing committee was informed that the carry-forward burden from previous year is ₹32.14 crore. Hence, the net availability is ₹261.86 crore and the net shortfall ₹399.08 crore.

The implications of shortfall in miscellaneous expenditure include inability to operationalisation of Defence Space Agency (DSA), Defence Cyber Agency (DCYA) and Armed Forces Special Operations Division (AFSOD)."

Other implications are lower operational readiness of Andaman and Nicobar Command ships due to impact on annual refit plans, maintenance of SIGINT (Signal Intelligence) equipment and administration of training institutes and operational units.

15 to 20 MLAs will remain in the State to attend Assembly proceedings since the Budget session is under way.

"We are all united against the BJP, which is desperate to block the opposition party's strength with money. Several BJP leaders tried to approach our members offering huge money and ministerial positions," said Gandhinagar North MLA C.J. Chavda.

Five candidates are in the fray for four Rajya Sabha seats in the State, with the BJP, fielding three candidates despite being short of numbers.

"The fact that the ruling party has fielded a third candidate despite not having the required numbers makes it amply clear that the BJP is up to something unethical," a senior Congress leader said.

Cong. moves Gujarat MLAs to Rajasthan

Party fears poaching of legislators

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
AHMEDABAD

Fearing poaching of its legislators by the BJP ahead of the Rajya Sabha election in Gujarat, the Congress on Saturday decided to move its MLAs to party-ruled Rajasthan.

More than a dozen legislators were flown to Jaipur in the evening, while another batch will be taken to Udaipur by road on Sunday.

Leadership's fear

"We are shifting our members to Rajasthan because the BJP with use of money power and government agencies is trying to poach them," senior Congress legislator Harshad Ribadia said.

According to party sources, more than 50 legislators will be kept in two batches in Jaipur and Udaipur, while

Gangsters Act imposed on 28 in Lucknow

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

The Lucknow police have slapped the Gangsters Act against 28 persons accused of vandalism and arson during the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in the city on December 19.

They have been accused of setting the Sathkhanda police outpost under the Thakurganj area on fire with the "intent to kill" and firing on the police team, the Lucknow police said in a statement. The accused also allegedly vandalised public property, looted police belongings from the outpost and set vehicles on fire, said police.

All 28 booked under the Gangsters Act were from the Muslim community.

'Acted as a group'
The police said the Act was invoked as the accused had "planned" the anti-government act as a group.

The accused were identified through photographs and video footage of the violence, police said.

A forgettable spring



All quiet: Shikaras standing idle on the banks of the Dal Lake in Srinagar on Saturday despite the favourable weather, as tourism in Kashmir has come under the shadow of COVID-19. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

Protester dies after long battle in hospital

He sustained bullet injuries during violence in Aligarh on February 23

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GAZIABAD

A 22-year-old who was in a critical state after sustaining bullet injuries on February 23 when a protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in Aligarh turned violent, died on Friday night. A former leader of the Bharatiya Janta Yuva Morcha (BJYM), the youth wing of the BJP, has been arrested in this regard, while two other accused are on the run.

Mohammed Tariq Munawwar was lodged in the spinal cord. As a result, the lower half of his body was already paralysed," said Haris Khan, Medical Superintendent, Jawaharlal Nehru Medical Hospital and College. "The body



Mohammed Tariq Munawwar

was taken by the police and the post-mortem was carried out in the government hospital. The bullet could be retrieved now," he told *The Hindu*.

Munawwar's relatives demanded the immediate arrest of the other two accused and compensation from the State government. Earlier, the district administration had announced a compensation of ₹3 lakh to Munawwar.

Situation tense

Local sources said Aligarh remained tense of Friday as the market in the Babri Mandi area, where the incident happened, remained shut. Muni Raj G, Senior Superintend-

ent of Police, Aligarh, said the post-mortem had been done. "The bullet has been sent for a forensic test. The post-mortem report would be sent to the team of ballistic experts in Agra which is already working on the case."

He said Vinay Varshney, an ex-office-bearer of the BJYM, had been arrested. "His licensed revolver has been recovered. The other two, Sunder and Triloki, will also be arrested soon." He had earlier told *The Hindu* that the video evidence suggested that Mr. Varshney and Munawwar were on their respective rooftops when the incident happened.

Two Chhattisgarh policemen killed in naxal attack in Bastar

They were providing security for road construction work

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
RAIPUR

Two Chhattisgarh Armed Force (CAF) personnel were killed in a naxal ambush in the jungles of Bastar district in the State on Saturday, the police said.

A CRPF jawan was also injured in a blast triggered by naxals in a separate incident in the same area, they said.

A team of the CAF — which is part of the State police force — was out patrolling to provide security for road construction work in the Mardoom police station area, said Inspector General of Police (IG) Sundarraj P.

Around 3.30 p.m., when the team was between Bodli and Malewali villages, it

came under attack, he said.

"Two CAF head constables were killed," the IG said.

In the same area, a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) jawan sustained minor injuries in an IED blast carried out by naxals, he said.

The jawan is being treated at a local hospital.

Four surrender

Four naxals, three of them with rewards totalling ₹15 lakh on their heads, surrendered in the Bastar division of Chhattisgarh on Friday, the police said.

While three hardcore ultras, including a couple, surrendered before senior police and CRPF officials in

Sukma district, a woman quit the banned outfit in Bastar district, a senior police official here said.

One of the men, Kartami Vaga, alias Badal, was active as a deputy commander of the Maoists' platoon number 26 and carried a price of ₹8 lakh on his head. Badal was allegedly involved in several attacks, including in the Burkpal ambush, where 25 CRPF personnel were killed in 2017, the police said. His wife, Madkam Kamli, who had a price of ₹5 lakh on her head, surrendered too.

Sukhmati, alias Jyothi, the woman who surrendered in Bastar district, had been active in the Barsoor area, the police said.

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH, APEWIDC, VIJAYAWADA
Door No.9-76, Sai Fortune Heights, Block-A, Vaddeswaram, Guntur (Dt)-522502.
NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING
"e-Procurement Notice Inviting Tender"
NIT No's : 16 to 21 /MD/APEWIDC/2019-20 dated 03-02-2020 & Corrigendum dated 17-02-2020
Procurement of Furniture items a, b & c is postponed and further dates will be announced subsequently. For d, e & f submission of bids is extended up to 20-03-2020, 14.00 Hrs.
For NIT No : 22 & 23 dt. 28-02-2020 submission of bids is extended up to 20-03-2020, 14.00 Hrs.
All other conditions of NIT will remain unaltered. For all details, visit e-procurement Platform @ www.apewidc.gov.in (Published earlier in The Hindu & Times of India)

Sd/- Managing Director,
APEWIDC, Vijayawada.

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER LMC CIRCLE CAD, KOTA
Tel. No. 0744-250056. Email: selmcircle.cad@rajasthan.gov.in
No: 4713-41 Date: 06-03-2020
E-TENDER NOTICE NO. 02/2019-20
On behalf of Governor of Rajasthan E-Tenders are invited from "AA" Class category or equivalent contractors / firms registered CAD / Water Resources Department and State Government / Other State Government / Authorized Organizations of Central Government / CPWD / Post and Telegraph Department / Railway etc. for the Balance work of Retrofitting work of 4 Nos. Aqueducts of Bundi Branch Canal Amounting to Rs. 900.00. The tender documents & other details may be downloaded and uploaded from the following websites:
1. <http://www.eproc.rajasthan.gov.in>
2. www.depronline.org
3. <http://www.sppr/raj.nic.in>
4. <http://www.cadkota.rajasthan.gov.in>
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E-AUCTION / E-TENDER SALE NOTICE

In terms of Govt. directives vide public Notice No. 50/2005 Dated 01.12.2005, 52/2005 dated 09.12.2005 and section 48 of the Customs Act 1962, AAICLAS being custodian of Air Cargo shall be conducting e-Auction / e-Tender on "As is where is basis" for the Import Air Cargo / International Courier lying uncleared / unclaimed / unconnected / abandoned for more than thirty days before the date of e-Auction proposed and lying in the custody of AAICLAS.

The last date of submission of EOI document is extended hereby up to 30/03/2020, 3.00pm. The corrigendum-1 notice is also available in the institute's website www.iitgoa.ac.in (Tender section) & CPP portal.

Those interested may apply in the prescribed format available on Institute's website. Tender documents are available for view/download till 30/03/2020.

Date / Timings of Display 10:30-1700 hrs Date / Timings of e-Auction / e-Tender from 1100 hrs onwards

11.05.2020 (Import-A-37)

15.06.2020 (Courier-e-A-C7)

04.08.2020 (Import-A-38)

12.10.2020 (Courier-e-A-C8)

15.12.2020 (Import-A-39)

06.01.2021 (Import-A-40)

29.01.2021 (Courier-e-A-C9)

16.02.2021 (Import-A-41)

02.03.2021 (Courier-e-A-C10)

23.03.2021 (Import-A-42) & (Courier-e-A-C11)

22.03.2021 (Import-A-43) & (Courier-e-A-C11)

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Chief Engineer, Construction, Egmore, Chennai-8.

DIPR/C/2282

Notice Inviting Bids

OFFICE OF CHIEF ENGINEER, IGNP, BIKANER-334001

Tel.No. 0151-2226406 and Email: aceimpn@gmail.com, eefmd.ignp.bkn@rajasthan.gov.in, elmdbkn@gmail.com

NOTICE INVITING BID NO.ACEM-01 of 2019-20

NIB Code IGB1920A0239

Bids here by invited on behalf of the Governor of Rajasthan for the following Procurements & related Services from original Manufacturer, their authorized dealers / service providers / business partner or experienced bidders who meet eligibility criteria after

SNAPSHOTS



Little stem bird
Scientists have discovered a fossil of a tiny bird-like creature whose skull was preserved in 99-million-year-old amber. This tiny stem bird - a bird close to the point where avians split from the dinosaur ancestors - has tiny teeth. The creature is the tiniest Mesozoic dinosaur to be discovered so far. Such discoveries have an impact on how paleontologists reconstruct the past.



Iron rain on exoplanet
A distant giant exoplanet described in a *Nature* report, recently, probably has iron raining on it. During its daytime, temperatures reach about 2,400 degrees Celsius, which can evaporate metals like iron. Strong winds carry this vapour to the night side where it cools and condenses as iron rain. Named WASP-76b, the exoplanet is some 640 light years away.

Superhydrophobic coating to save metallic surfaces

Created with polyurethane and silicon dioxide nanoparticles, the coating can be easily spin-coated on steel

ASWATHI PACHA

Fascinated by the beauty of water rolling off a lotus leaf, a team of chemical engineers has now created a similar superhydrophobic coating that can be used to save steel from rusting.

The team from the Indian Institute of Technology (Indian School of Mines), Dhanbad, and Ohio State University used polyurethane and silicon dioxide nanoparticles to create the coating which can be easily spin-coated on steel.

"Not just steel, the coating can be done on other metallic surfaces, such as aluminum, copper, brass. We have also successfully developed superhydrophobic coatings for glass, cloth, paper and wood," explains Aditya Kumar from IIT (ISM) Dhanbad and one of the corresponding authors of the work published in the journal *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A*.

Treated surface

Before applying the coating, the team created a roughness on the steel using a chemical etching process to improve the adhesion strength. Without this, the coating tends to easily peal off due to smoothness of steel.

The team also tried different methods for the applica-

TIFR study reveals role of glucose in regulating liver functions, ageing

Study shows both over-activation and under-activation of longevity factor SIRT1 can lead to diseases

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

An enzyme that goes by the name SIRT1 is known to be associated with regulation of metabolic activities and also ageing and hence has become a target of therapeutics. A study by researchers from Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai (TIFR) shows that glucose controls the function of SIRT1 directly. A shortage or absence of this control can lead to a diabetic-like state, while excess feeding and sustained low levels of SIRT1 can lead to obesity and enhanced ageing. The study was published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.



Life activities: The study paves the way to regulating this modification, which may help tackle lifestyle disorders and ageing related diseases. ■ GETTY IMAGES

TIFR, found the mechanism that triggers the liver to go from one stage to another in the feed-fast cycle.

Role of glucose

Now, working on a different angle, the group has discovered that glucose controls the functions of a protein SIRT1 which in turn maintains everyday feed-fast cycles and is also associated with longevity. "In normal healthy individuals, SIRT1 protein levels are known to increase during fasting and decrease during feed, which is essential to maintain a

balance between glucose and fat metabolism," says Prof Kolthur-Seetharam.

"Despite decades of work on the beneficial roles of SIRT1, metabolic factors that decrease its functions both during normal feed-fast cycles and in nutrient excess states (like obesity) was unknown," explains Tandrika Chattopadhyay, who is the first author of the *PNAS* paper in an email to *The Hindu*.

"While there is active research to identify drugs that can activate SIRT1 which would be beneficial in coun-

tering ageing and metabolic diseases, the cost of uncontrolled overactivation of SIRT1 has not been investigated especially since it decreases in a healthy individual in a fed state," says Dr. Chattopadhyay.

Glucose puts a check on the activity of SIRT1 in the fed state. In the absence of this check, SIRT1 activity increases and results in hyperglycaemia in a fasted state, mimicking diabetic state. "Constant feeding or high calorie intake that leads to sustained reduction in the levels of SIRT1 (by glucose) is associated with ageing and obesity," she says.

"Our study shows that both overactivation and under-activation of this longevity factor could lead to diseases," she adds.

Future steps

This study paves the way to regulating this modification, which might be beneficial in tackling lifestyle disorders and ageing related diseases.

The group next seeks to investigate if glucose-dependent control can dictate gene expression during feed-fast cycles. "Also, we would like to investigate if small chemical molecules or drugs can selectively activate SIRT1 which could be used in the clinic to either increase or decrease the levels of SIRT1, as per the needs of the individual," says Prof. Kolthur-Seetharam.



G. RAMAKRISHNA

The time is right for OneHealth science

Emergence of pathogens calls out for cross-country collaborations

ABI T. VANAK
MRIDULA MARY PAUL

As India goes into emergency mode to tackle the potentially catastrophic impacts of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), the 'Kerala model' is being widely cited as an example to emulate. In 2018, Kerala reacted quickly and efficiently to tackle the Nipah virus outbreak and successfully managed to confine it to 23 cases. This success has been credited to the strong public health infrastructure and the political will to quickly seek help from a multidisciplinary team of national and international experts. The Kerala Nipah virus outbreak was thought to have come from fruit bats, a group of animals that may also be implicated in other more deadly outbreaks, possibly including the novel coronavirus.

These diseases, which "spillover" from animals to humans are referred to as zoonotic diseases, and represent more than 60% of emerging infectious diseases worldwide. The destruction of the natural environment, globalised trade and travel and industrialised food production systems have created numerous pathways for new pathogens to jump between animals and humans. Understanding this critical intersection between human health, domestic and wild animal health and the environment requires a new integrated framework – a paradigm called 'OneHealth'.

Kyasanur Forest Disease

Although OneHealth, as a conceptual entity, emerged relatively recently, a stellar example of OneHealth being operationalised in the field was seen in India in the late 1950s. It helped discover the source of Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD), a highly dangerous haemorrhagic fever more threatening than COVID-19. It was locally called 'monkey fever' because of the links between monkey deaths and human infections in Shimoga District of Karnataka where it emerged in 1957. It took pioneering interdisciplinary work to bring together diverse entities like the Rockefeller Foundation and the Virus Research Centre (later the National Institute of Virology), Pune, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Bombay Natural History Society.

The Rockefeller Foundation provided the financial and technical support, including laboratory facilities, while P.K. Rajagopalan and a team of dedicated researchers from the Virus Research Centre combed the forests of the Western Ghats for potential carriers and autopsied monkeys in their investigations into the cause of the disease. The legendary bird man of India, Salim Ali, supported by WHO funds, tagged migratory birds to rule out the possibility that they were carrying pathogens responsible for the disease in their cross-continental flights.

As successful as the epidemiological investigation into KFD was, it largely remained an isolated example. This model of cross-sectoral collaboration did not set the tone for further research along similar lines or fructify into readying our public health system to address zoonotic diseases. To our great loss, everyone slipped back into their silos. Many decades later, India is yet to operationalise a true OneHealth policy.

Range of permissions

Further, the regulatory framework for doing OneHealth research in India with international collaboration typically requires approvals from multiple authorities, including ICMR, the Ministries of External Affairs and Finance, Directorate General of the Armed Forces, National Biodiversity Authority, Committee for the Purpose of Control & Supervision of Experiments on Animals and State health authorities, among others. Additional permissions are required from state forest authorities and biodiversity boards for accessing biological resources within natural landscapes. While the necessity for research permits is not being questioned, the range of permissions needed and the long waiting periods (ranging from three months to more than a year), raises the issue of whether we are unwittingly hampering our ability to rapidly respond to emerging threats from infectious diseases.

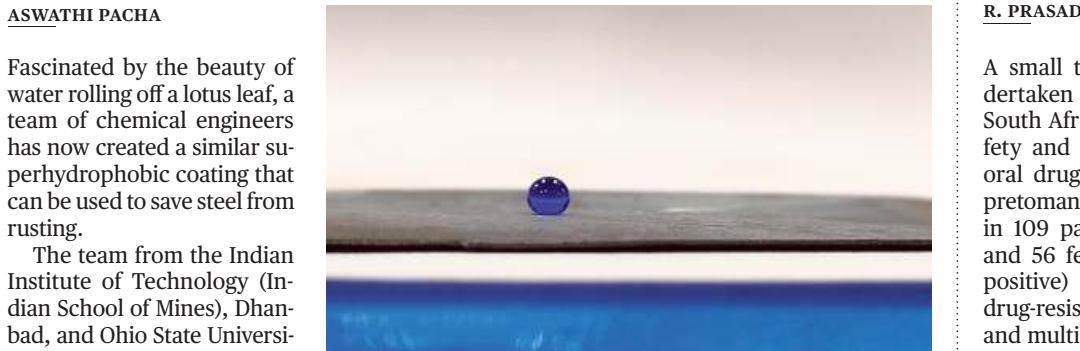
Given our pioneering historical contribution to combat zoonotic diseases, and robust institutional framework for biomedical research, India has the opportunity to take the lead in combating the massive public health crisis posed by emerging infectious diseases. An opportunity now exists for India to leap-frog over the systemic and institutional barriers that prevent an integrated OneHealth framework from being operationalised.

The Government of India has recently launched the National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Well-being. The mission aims to explore the neglected links between biodiversity science and human well-being across the sectors of health, economic development, agricultural production and livelihood generation, in combination with efforts to mitigate climate change and related disasters. One of the components of the mission explicitly links biodiversity to human health through the OneHealth framework.

The OneHealth programme aims to encourage team science by having networks of institutions collectively bid for grants to set up integrated OneHealth surveillance systems across India at 25 sentinel surveillance sites in potential emerging infectious disease hotspots. In this manner, government and private institutions, across a range of disciplines, from virology to epidemiology, genomics to ecology, and social and behavioural sciences to veterinary and animal sciences can collaborate to understand how zoonotic diseases can emerge, the threats they can pose, and the mechanisms by which the emergence or spread can be controlled.

The frequency with which new pathogens are emerging or old ones are re-emerging across the world are alarm calls for greater transparency, cross-country collaborations, and enhanced national infrastructure and capacity for integrated OneHealth science. The cause of mitigating large-scale human suffering justifies making such a hitherto unprecedented effort.

Abi Vanak is a Clinical and Public Health Fellow, DBT/Wellcome Trust India Alliance Program, and Mridula Mary Paul is a Senior Policy Analyst with ATREE



Repels water: In the case of a coated sample, water droplets roll away leaving the surface free of dust. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

tion of the coat on steel and found that spin coating was advantageous and cost-effective compared to immersion coating and spray coating. Spin coating dried quickly and the thickness of the coat could be controlled easily.

However, in the case of a coated sample, water droplets roll away while collecting dust from the surface.

Easy to make

"The chemicals used to make the coating are easily available in our country and they are environmental friendly too. When mass-produced on commercial scale, the cost of coating will further reduce," adds Mukesh Kumar Meena, first author of the paper who completed his M.Tech from IIT (ISM) Dhanbad.

Now the team is working on developing an antimicrobial superhydrophobic coating for biomedical applications.

Trial shows success in treating drug-resistant TB

The small trial using three oral drugs in 109 patients showed a treatment success rate of 90%

R. PRASAD

A small trial (Nix-TB) undertaken at three sites in South Africa to test the safety and efficacy of three oral drugs – bedaquiline, pretomanid and linezolid – in 109 patients (57 males and 56 females who are HIV positive) with extensively drug-resistant TB (XDR-TB) and multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) showed encouraging results – treatment success rate was 90%. The favourable results held true regardless of the HIV status of the patients.

The treatment using the three oral drugs lasted for 26 weeks and was followed-up for six months after the end of the treatment. Patients received the treatment daily for 26 weeks. The trial of 109 patients included 71 who had XDR-TB and 38 with MDR-TB.

Success rate
The 90% treatment success in the case of hard-to-treat patients is at par with the success rate seen while treating drug-sensitive TB.

Adverse effects
"This study shows that XDR tuberculosis and complicated MDR tuberculosis can be treated with a regimen consisting of three oral agents for 26 weeks," the authors write. The results of the study were published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*.

ing the six-month follow-up period. Of the 98 patients who were successfully treated using the three drugs, 63 patients had XDR-TB and 35 had MDR-TB. The treatment success rate was 89% (63 of 71) for XDR-TB and 92% (35 of 38) for MDR-TB patients included in the trial were either not responsive to standard treatment or had discontinued treatment due to side effects.

Of the three drugs used in the trial, a "high-percentage" of patients experienced adverse effects related to linezolid drug. Of the 109 patients treated, 88 patients (81%) had peripheral neuropathy (weakness, numbness and pain usually of hands and feet due to nerve damage), though the symptoms were mild to moderate in the majority of cases.

Two patients developed optic neuritis, where the optic nerve becomes inflamed, which was resolved when linezolid drug was withdrawn. Also, 40 had anaemia, while eight patients had adverse event of the liver and the regime had to be interrupted (but they eventually resumed and completed the 26-week treatment).



Combating resistance: The 90% treatment success in the case of hard-to-treat patients is at par with the success rate seen while treating drug-sensitive TB. ■ GETTY IMAGES

Heat stress may impact over 1.2 billion people annually by 2100: study

This is more than 12 times the number who would have been affected without industrial era global warming

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Stress from extreme heat and humidity will annually impact areas which are home to about 1.2 billion people worldwide by 2100, assuming current greenhouse gas emissions, according to a study.

This is more than four times the number of people affected today, and more than 12 times the number who would have been affected without industrial era global warming, said researchers from Rutgers University-New Brunswick in the US.

Rising global temperatures are increasing exposure to heat stress, which harms human health, agriculture, the economy and the environment, according



Heat stress: High temperatures may damage the brain and other vital organs. ■ GETTY IMAGES

to the research published in the journal *Environmental Research Letters*.

Most climate studies on projected heat stress have focused on heat extremes but not considered the role

of humidity, another key driver, the researchers said. "When we look at the risks of a warmer planet, we need to pay particular attention to combined extremes of heat and humidity, which

In New York City, for example, the hottest, most humid day in a typical year already occurs about 11 times more frequently than it would have in the 19th century.

DAWEI LI

University of Massachusetts

are especially dangerous to human health," said senior author Robert E Kopp, from Rutgers University-New Brunswick.

"Every bit of global warming makes hot, humid days more frequent and intense. In New York City, for example, the hottest, most humid day in a typical year already occurs about 11 times more frequently than it would have in the 19th century,"

said lead author Dawei Li, a former post-doctoral associate at Rutgers, and now at the University of Massachusetts.

Heat stress is caused by the body's inability to cool down properly through sweating. Body temperature can rise rapidly, and high temperatures may damage the brain and other vital organs.

Heat stress ranges from milder conditions like heat rash and heat cramps to heat exhaustion, the most common type.

The study looked at how combined extremes of heat and humidity increase on a warming Earth, using 40 climate simulations to get statistics on rare events.

It focused on a measure of heat stress that accounts for

temperature, humidity and other environmental factors, including wind speed, sun angle and solar and infrared radiation.

Annual exposure to extreme heat and humidity in excess of safety guidelines is projected to affect areas currently home to about 500 million people if the planet warms by 1.5 degrees Celsius, and nearly 800 million at 2 degrees Celsius, the researchers said.

The planet has already warmed by about 1.2 degrees above late 19th century levels, the said.

An estimated 1.2 billion people would be affected with 3 degrees Celsius of warming, as expected by the end of this century under current global policies, according to the study.

The frequency with which new pathogens are emerging or old ones are re-emerging across the world are alarm calls for greater transparency, cross-country collaborations, and enhanced national infrastructure and capacity for integrated OneHealth science. The cause of mitigating large-scale human suffering justifies making such a hitherto unprecedented effort.

Abi Vanak is a Clinical and Public Health Fellow, DBT/Wellcome Trust India Alliance Program, and Mridula Mary Paul is a Senior Policy Analyst with ATREE



Onerous task: BCCI president Sourav Ganguly and secretary Jay Shah arrive for a crucial meeting in Mumbai on Saturday. ■ VIVEK BENDRE

IN BRIEF

Kiwis abandon tour of Australia

SYDNEY
New Zealand abandoned its one-day cricket tour of Australia on Saturday after Wellington tightened border restrictions to combat the spread of coronavirus. The Blacks Caps lost the opening game of the three-match series and were due to play the second here on Sunday, but will fly home after New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced everyone entering the country from midnight on Sunday would have to self-isolate for 14 days.

All England: Axelsen in final

SPORTS BUREAU LONDON

Viktor Axelsen of Denmark entered the final of the All England badminton championships here on Saturday after rallying to get past Malaysia's Lee Zii Jia 17-21, 21-13, 21-19.

He will now meet Chou Tien Chen of Chinese Taipei, who had an easy passage to the final after Anders Antonsen, his opponent from Denmark retired midway through the first game. Chen was leading 17-14 at that time.

In the women's semifinal, Nozomi Okuhara, the conqueror of P.V. Sindhu, fell rather tamely to the Chinese top seed Chen Yu Fei 21-14, 23-21.

ATK has the last laugh, picks up a record third title

Javier Hernandez's brace leaves Chennaiyin FC ruing its missed chances

ISL

AMITABHA DAS SHARMA FATORDA

Javier Hernandez's brace helped ATK defeat Chennaiyin FC in the final and create Indian Super League history, at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here on Saturday.

A handful of lucky people – mainly friends and family of the team owners who were given special access – were witness to the interesting action which was held behind closed doors because of the Coronavirus scare.

In guiding ATK to its record third title, Antonio Lopez Habas became the most successful coach of the ISL as the Spaniard picked his second crown while returning to the side after a break of three seasons. The ATK centre-half Hernandez, who had never scored before the final, stepped up as the finisher scoring the first and the third goals while Spainard Edu Garcia scored one in between. Nerijus Valskis pulled one back for Chennaiyin FC

It could be a truncated IPL: Ganguly

BCCI will keep 'reviewing the situation every week'

AMOL KARHADKAR MUMBAI

After a day of frantic activity at Cricket Centre – the BCCI headquarters – where the Board's office-bearers met with the owners of all the eight Indian Premier League (IPL) franchises, followed by the IPL Governing Council discussing the way forward after suspending the event till April 15, BCCI president Sourav Ganguly hinted that "truncated IPL" is the only way forward but that's the last possible option that the BCCI is considering.

Anxious wait

Once the BCCI adhered to the government advisories on Friday and suspended IPL's 13th edition till April 15 in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, the franchise owners were anxiously waiting to be briefed by the BCCI bosses on Saturday.

No wonder then that the meeting saw virtually all the high-profile owners – including Kolkata Knight Riders' Shahrukh Khan, Mumbai Indians' Akash Ambani, Ness Wadia of Kings XI Punjab and Parth Jindal of Delhi Capitals – in attendance, along with

their chief executives.

While the BCCI secretary Jay Shah, in a statement, stressed that "the BCCI and all its stakeholders are committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for everyone involved in our great sport and the nation" after the meeting, Jindal and Wadia, while speaking to reporters, also stressed on the "safety" aspect, without spelling out the details.

After the Governing Council meeting, however, Ganguly admitted that truncated IPL is definitely being considered. "It (truncated IPL) will happen because if it is (starting by) April 15, then in any case 15 days are gone, so it has to be truncated. How truncated, how many games, I can't say at the moment. Till April 15, (there are) no visas," Ganguly said.

Various options

However, multiple franchise officials confirmed to *The Hindu* that the BCCI office-bearers and IPL executives tabled various options to the teams. Possible start dates that were mentioned were April 15, April 20, April 25, April 30 and May 1.

"We were told that with multiple double-headers, a full IPL season will require 37 days, so considering the IPL can be stretched till May 31, if the season can start on or before April 25, there's a bright chance of playing the full season," said a franchise official.

"There are a couple of options for a truncated IPL: Eight teams playing each other just once instead of home and away in the league (32 games, including 4 playoffs) or the teams being divided into two groups of four each and playing home and away basis (28 games, including playoffs) can be considered should the need arise," an IPL official said.

He corroborated that the two possibilities of a truncated IPL will arise only if the Union Government gives a go-ahead and clears visas of overseas players and support staff members for a start at the end of April or early May.

However, all these possibilities will arise if and when the COVID-19 pandemic subsides in India. Till then, as Ganguly admitted, BCCI will keep "reviewing the situation every week".

All domestic games put on hold

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

A day after suspending the Indian Premier League and India's two ODIs against South Africa, the Board of Control for Cricket in India has put the whole domestic season "on hold" on Saturday.

"In view of the ongoing novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, the BCCI on Saturday announced that all matches of the Paytm Irani Cup, Senior Women's One-Day knockout, Vizzy Trophy, Senior Women's One-Day Challenger, Women's Under-19 One-Day knockout, Women's Under

19 T20 League, Super League and knockout, Women's Under-19 T20 Challenger Trophy, Women's Under-23 knockout, Women's Under-23 One-Day Challenger have been put on hold till further notice," Jay Shah, BCCI secretary, said in a statement.

In fact, the national selection panel had even finalised the Rest of India squad, with Hanuma Vihari as captain. However, considering the rapidly perpetrating coronavirus cases in various regions of India, the BCCI decided to suspend all official cricket tournaments.

Adjah helps Neroa hold CCFC

I-LEAGUE

IANS IMPHAL

Host Neroa FC played out a 2-2 draw with Chennai City FC (CCFC) in the I-League here on Saturday. Khangam Horam found the net for the host just 21 seconds after kick-off – the quickest goal of this season.

Mashoor Sheriff equalised in the 21st minute before Adolfo Miranda made it 2-1 for CCFC before the break.

Philip Adjah saved the day for Neroa, converting a penalty in the added time to give a vital point for his side.

Chances had been abundant on either end and not surprisingly so. The linesman flagged seven off-sides in the first forty five minutes and with both teams playing a high line at the back, the statistic seems to suggest that both managers may have considered throwing caution to the winds to an extent.

The hosts climb to ninth with 19 points while Chennai remains at seventh.

The results: Neroa 2 (Horam 1, Adjah 90+P) drew with CCFC 2 (Sheriff 21, 45+2).

At Srinagar: Real Kashmir vs. TRAU FC – Match cancelled.

Gopi welcomes BWF's decision

BADMINTON

V.V. SUBRAMANYAM HYDERABAD

India's chief national coach P. Gopi Chand welcomed the Badminton World Federation's (BWF) decision to suspend till April 12, all events from March 16 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"It is a good decision and one cannot ignore the health risk of players, officials and spectators."

"When the whole world is witnessing so many restrictions, it was not the ideal scenario to go ahead with the BWF events," Gopi told *The Hindu* on the way back to Hyderabad from London.

"Unless, there is a clear message detailing the qualification norms, what sort of impact they will have on the players, especially those aspiring to make it from India," the former All England champion said.

The tournaments which will be affected by the BWF directive on Saturday include Swiss Open, India Open 2020, Orleans Masters, Malaysia Open and Singapore Open and other International Grade III tournaments.

Significantly, Gopi also revealed that most of the national campers at two of his academies in Hyderabad are in 'isolation' if not quarantined.



Gopi Chand. ■ FILE PHOTO

In football goals matter: Habas

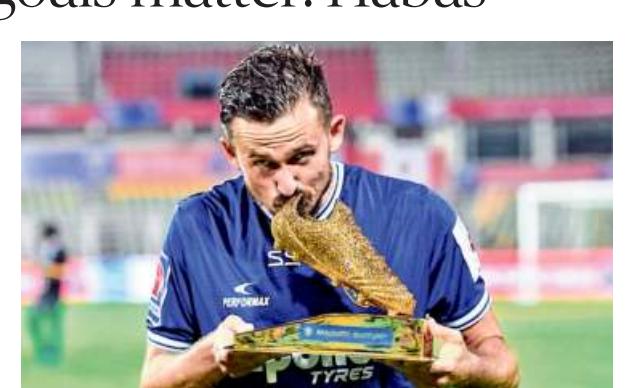
AMITABHA DAS SHARMA FATORDA

The ATK head coach Antonio Lopez Habas, who earned a record two ISL titles helming the same franchise, said the second crown was more precious as it came in a more competitive atmosphere.

"There is a big difference between the two. In the first season the league was just settling down to a professional format but this season the league has grown really big with better players, coaches and had more competition. So this one is more special to me," Habas said after ATK's triumph.

Habas said his team succeeded in realising the most important aspect in football – that is scoring goals.

"In the first half we were better while Chennaiyin played a better second half. You see in football the goals matter and that's where we did better than our opponents," Habas said. "Our strength this season was the cohesion in the team and it was really the great mix of



Well done! Nerijus Valskis of Chennaiyin... winner of the Golden Boot award. ■ PRASHANT NAKWE

not clinical enough in converting chances. "When we look at the match tonight our team failed in two areas. One was that we were not clinical enough to convert the chances and secondly, we also let the opponent get away with their chances."

"As a whole we could have played lot better and ATK should be lot happy to be going back with the title," Coyle said. "Goals changes matches and see how ATK made the most of the first chance coming their way. We had two easier chances and not getting a goal from them became crucial in the end," Coyle added.

Chennaiyin FC head coach Owen Coyle said his side was

Cup of joy: The victorious ATK team with the trophy. ■ PRASHANT NAKWE



Cup of joy: The victorious ATK team with the trophy. ■ PRASHANT NAKWE

late in the second half.

Missed chances

The final could have easily gone the other way had Chennaiyin FC managed to avail two opportunities in the first four minutes.

Chennaiyin FC pressed the attack mode right from the start and had Andre Schembri running up the right to cut the ball back to winger Rafael

Crivellaro in the box.

The latter's attempt took a deflection off an ATK defender and was headed into the goal but Pritam Kotal made a timely goalmouth clearance to save ATK. Keeping up the pressure, Chennaiyin made another inroad in the fourth minute but this time it was the crosspiece that blocked Valskis' attempt.

ATK released the pressure

by getting the goal in the 10th minute. It was the result of a fantastic combination in the attack which saw Roy Krishna moving up on the left to collect a long floater from the centre.

The Fijian forward essayed a nice cross upfront to his colleague David Williams, who played a dummy letting Hernandez move from the centre and finish with a spectacular

scissors kick. ATK could have doubled the lead in the 23rd minute when Krishna set up another cross which was partially cleared by Vishal Kaith. Schembri had the chance to draw level for Chennaiyin FC in the 31st minute but the ATK goalkeeper Arindam Bhattacharya put up a fantastic effort to clear the former's header. The ATK suffered a big blow when Roy Krishna walked off the pitch in tears after suffering an injury in the 40th minute. The setback, however, did not appear to hurt ATK much as it came back after the break to double the lead in the 48th minute.

Edu Garcia did the finishing act to set ATK on the victory path. Valskis made it 2-1 in the 69th minute but that appeared to come a bit late as ATK effectively sealed its back-line. Hernandez made it 3-1 in the injury-time to complete a fantastic win for ATK.

The result: Final: ATK 3 (Javier Hernandez 10, 90+3, Edu Garcia 48) bt Chennaiyin FC 1 (Nerijus Valskis 69).

the Indian and the foreign players that brought success to us," ATK's Spanish head coach added.

Chennaiyin FC head coach Owen Coyle said his side was