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Announcement
The Board of Directors
of The Hindu Group
Publishing Private
Limited has decided
to appoint Raghuvir
Srinivasan, Business
Editor of *The Hindu*,
to succeed Raghavan
Srinivasan, Editor of
Business Line, when
the latter retires on August
31, 2020.

The appointment
is on the basis of a
recommendation of
the Nomination &
Remuneration
Committee of the
Company's Board.
Raghuvir Srinivasan will
take up his responsibility
as Editor, *Business Line*,
on September 1, 2020.

427 new COVID-19 cases reported in the Capital

New Delhi

The number of COVID-19 cases in the Capital saw the highest single-day jump for the second consecutive day on Sunday with 427 new cases, said government officials. However, no deaths were reported.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

EDUCATIONPLUS ▶ PAGE 11

Central health teams to monitor 20 districts with heavy case load

Nationwide virus tally crosses 40,000; 83 new deaths take toll to 1,306

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in India crossed 40,000 on Sunday, making it one among 16 countries that have crossed that figure. With 83 more deaths since Saturday, a single-day high, the death toll nationwide has gone up to 1,306.

India currently has 28,070 active cases and 10,886 patients have recovered, according to the latest numbers available on the Health Ministry website. Maharashtra, Gujarat and Delhi led

Rising fatalities

Gujarat has the highest COVID-19 case fatality rate (CFR) of 5.3 while Bihar (0.8) has the lowest. The table on the left shows the eight States with the highest COVID-19 CFR among States that have recorded at least 350 cases, while the one on the right shows the ones with the lowest CFR

HIGH CASE FATALITY RATE			LOW CASE FATALITY RATE				
State	Deaths	Cases	State	Deaths	Cases		
Gujarat	290	5428	5.3	Bihar	4	503	0.8
M.P.	151	2,846	5.3	Kerala	4	499	0.8
W.B.*	48	922	5.2	Tamil Nadu	30	3,023	1.0
Maharashtra	521	12,296	4.2	J&K	8	701	1.1
Karnataka	25	614	4.1	Haryana	5	376	1.3
Telangana	29	1,063	2.7	Delhi	64	4,122	1.6
Rajasthan	71	2,832	2.5	U.P.	43	2,645	1.6
A.P.	33	1,583	2.1	Punjab	21	1,102	1.9

*48 deaths in West Bengal is the official figure, which does not include fatalities due to comorbidities. Data for all States are as of 8 p.m. on Sunday

with the maximum number of cases.

The Centre has announced the formation of Central Public Health teams to investigate 20 districts in 10 States which have registered the maximum cases. These districts and cities include Mumbai, Pune and

Thane in Maharashtra; Ahmedabad, Surat, and Vadodara in Gujarat; Indore and Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh; Chennai in Tamil Nadu; Hyderabad in Telangana; Kolkata in West Bengal; Kurnool, Guntur, and Krishna in Andhra Pradesh and South East and Central Delhi.

These teams, comprising experts from the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), AIIMS, JIPMER and the All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health among others, will submit reports to the State health authorities with recommendations.

In terms of total cases, three other countries are comparable to India – the Netherlands, Peru and Belgium, with confirmed infections from 40,000-49,900.

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MORE REPORTS ON ▶ PAGES 2, 3,
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Colonel, Major among five personnel killed in J&K

Two militants were also killed during the 18-hour operation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR

Five security personnel, including a Colonel, a Major and a sub-inspector, and two militants were killed in an 18-hour operation in north Kashmir's Handwara.

"In a firefight at Changimul in Handwara of Kupwara district, two terrorists were eliminated and the team of five security personnel, comprising two Army officers, two soldiers and one police sub-inspector, also died," an Army spokesman said in Srinagar.

Initial investigation suggested that one militant was a local and the other was a resident of Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir, identified as Hyder alias Iqbal. Sources said Hyder was "a wanted militant commander".

Hostage situation

The spokesman said the operation started after intelligence inputs suggested that terrorists were taking inmates of a house at Changimul hostage. "A joint opera-



Final goodbye: Security personnel paying tribute to the soldiers killed in the encounter on Sunday. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

tion was launched by the Army and the police on Saturday. A team of five Army and police personnel entered the area, occupied by the terrorists, to evacuate the civilians. They successfully extricated the civilians. However, during the process, the team was subjected to heavy fire by the terrorists," said the Army.

Police officials said the operation was called off on Sunday morning after the bodies of the security per-

sonnel and the militants were spotted in the house in the village, nestled in a forest zone.

The deceased were identified as Colonel Ashutosh Sharma, Major Anuj Sood, Naik Rajesh and Dinesh and sub-inspector Mohammad Sagier Qazi of the Jammu and Kashmir police's Special Operation Group. One soldier was injured, officials said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Aerial salute



Thanksgiving: A Navy helicopter showering petals on the medical staff of INHS Asvini in Colaba, Mumbai, on Sunday as part of a nationwide exercise to express gratitude to frontline COVID-19 warriors. ■ AADESH CHOWDHARI (REPORT ON PAGE 9)

Economic recovery may take over a year, says CII

'Allow high performing districts to resume all industrial activity'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

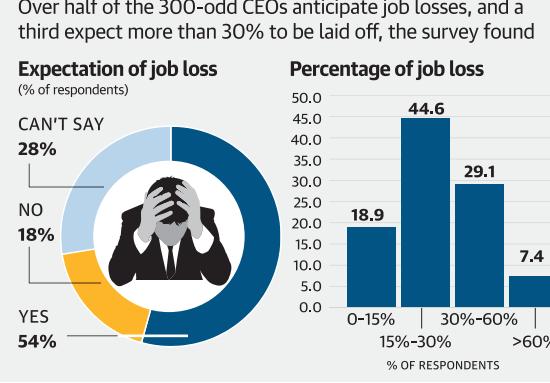
The country's high performing economic districts should be allowed to play by different rules in the third phase of the lockdown beginning on Monday, according to the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

In a strategy paper submitted to the Centre on Saturday, the CII called for changes in zone classification, saying that the 100-150 districts with the highest economic value – identified either through GDP contribution or density of industrial clusters – should be allowed to restart industrial activity, even in containment areas, if stringent rules are followed. It argued that the cost of 100% testing and aggressive health protocols is lower than continued shutdown in these areas.

In such a situation, the industry body argued for a calibrated exit from the lockdown in the country's most crucial economic regions.

Grim outlook

Over half of the 300-odd CEOs anticipate job losses, and a third expect more than 30% to be laid off, the survey found



Within these districts, small restricted areas such as the actual street, *mohalla*, building or industrial complex where COVID-19 cases have been identified should be treated as containment zone. An area of about 500 m radius around these areas should be treated as orange zone. The remaining area of the district should be classified as green zones.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Over 3,200 migrants arrive home in U.P.

Special trains from Maharashtra, Gujarat reach State; passengers sent home in buses

OMAR RASHID LUCKNOW

Special trains ferrying over 3,200 migrant labourers stranded in Maharashtra and Gujarat arrived in Lucknow, Agra and Kanpur on Sunday.

While 847 passengers from Nashik reached Lucknow by the Shramik Express, 1,265 migrant workers from Ahmedabad arrived in Kanpur via a special Sabarmati Express and another 1,200 people from the same city arrived at the Cantonment station in Agra. Two more trains are expected to reach Gorakhpur in eastern Uttar Pradesh later on Sunday or early Monday morning.

The Shramik Express arrived at the Charbagh railway station at 6 a.m., said the Divisional Railway Manager, Lucknow. After their arrival, the migrants were sent in queues to the screening booths for inspection, following which they boarded roadways buses to their home districts. Only one migrant who was found symptomatic was sent to quarantine, said Awanish Awasthi, Additional Chief Secretary,



Passengers from Nashik arriving at Charbagh railway station in Lucknow on Sunday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Home Department.

Screening at stations

All passengers arriving in Agra were screened and dispatched to their home districts in 40 buses, said spokesperson for Agra Railway S.K. Srivastava. Those arriving in Kanpur were inspected and sent to their hometowns in 42 buses. Among those who arrived in Lucknow was Shivam Singh, a vendor working at the Mumbai Central railway station. He said he was

stopped and quarantined in Nashik when he tried to walk back home from the Maharashtra capital. "We ran out of money, so I thought of walking back home. What would we do there (Mumbai) hungry and penniless," he asked. "Sometime we reached Nashik after travelling at night, but were stopped and kept in quarantine."

A resident of Jalaun district in the drought-stricken Bundelkhand region, from where migration of young

men has been rampant over the decades, Mr. Singh said he had to borrow money to pay ₹470 for his travel fare.

However, he was relieved to be going home after being stranded for weeks. "I will at least reach my district now," he said.

Some migrants praised the arrangements made by the railways, but some said the food provided to them was not sufficient. A passenger said they were provided food only at two places during the journey.

Lucknow District Magistrate Abhishek Prakash said the administration has already chalked out 17 routes on which buses would transport the migrants to their home districts. The bus ride would be free of cost. He said the station was mopped and sanitised before the arrival of the special train.

Mr. Awasthi said trains from south India would also start ferrying migrants back to U.P. Around 8,000 migrants from Rajasthan and 1,600 from Uttarakhand arrived in the State over the past 48 hours, he added.

27 Bangladeshi nationals held in Assam

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT GUWAHATI

The police in western Assam's Dhubri district on Sunday detained 27 Bangladeshi nationals, who had entered the State on a tourist visa before the COVID-19 nationwide lockdown, but were found to have been working for a contractor in the eastern part of the state.

The 27 persons, travelling on two minibuses that were seized, were caught during a routine check at Bahalpur under the Charap police station.

The police said they were studying the travel documents of the 27 people and organising their health check-up.

Dhubri Deputy Commissioner Anant Lal Gyani said the vehicles had come from Jorhat in eastern Assam, 470 km from Chapar, on curfew passes issued in the name of a local contractor for inter-district travel.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 10



At the Sultanpuri facility, members of the Tablighi Jamaat are wholeheartedly donating blood plasma, with a wish and a prayer for faster recovery of COVID-19 patients

Inside a quarantine centre, a drive to save lives

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

At the quarantine centre in Sultanpuri, one of facilities where members of the Tablighi Jamaat are being kept, a handful of men can be seen roaming around with their masks on while others sit in the balconies of their rooms, carefully observing every movement outside.

A community hall on the premises has been demarcated for blood plasma donation and a queue stretches outside, of men willing to contribute in whichever way possible to save lives.

A tall, lean man walks lazily near the hall. When greeted, he identifies himself as Ehtesham Ahmad, a 24-year-old policeman from West Bengal.

"I was the first person to donate plasma. It's the holy month of Ramzan and what can be a better deed than saving someone else's life," he says, looking towards the community hall.

For Mr. Ehtesham, coming to Nizamuddin in March was just "bad timing".

Recalling his trip, he says he had come to the Nizamuddin police station on an official visit on March 20 and was staying at the police quarters adjacent to the station. "I had gone to a mosque in Nizamuddin to offer namaz on March 23. I hadn't gone inside the Markaz [Tablighi Jamaat centre] though. I was taken to Rajiv Gandhi Hospital because I had visited the mosque," he says, adding that he stayed at the hospital for 20 days before being shifted to the Sultanpuri centre.

Mr. Ehtesham says he tested positive in the first test but his next two tests were negative.



(Top) Members of Tablighi Jamaat inside a quarantine centre in Sultanpuri; a man at the facility. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

To his surprise, a friend whom he had asked for help was also sent to a quarantine centre in Nizamuddin. Mr. Ehtesham blames himself for his friend's ordeal. "I had asked him [the friend] to pick up my belongings from the police quarters. Because of that he was also taken and quarantined. He doesn't even know why he is there because he has tested negative throughout."

Mr. Ehtesham says he also sought help from his department in West Bengal to reach home in Kolkata but was informed that he can only come back after the authorities in Delhi relieve him.

He blames the media for the "negative image" of those associated with the Tablighi Jamaat. "The media has hyped it. Cases are increasing even now when the Tablighi Jamaat members are recovering," he says.

Time to amend things?
A few metres ahead, a man wearing a chequered lungi, a T-shirt and a skullcap, stands in the long

queue of likely donors. After ticking off several boxes on the requirement list, he is ready for the tests.

Sharfuddin, 49, works as a technician in government departments in Port Blair. An ardent follower, he says he came to the Nizamuddin centre on February 15 and stayed there till he was evacuated on March 29 and taken to the Lok Nayak Hospital.

"Maulana Saad sahab [Tablighi Jamaat leader Maulana Saad Kandhalvi] has asked us to donate plasma. People want to harm him by spreading rumours about Tablighi Jamaat," he says.

"Whatever happened was wrong, it shouldn't have happened, but this is the time to amend things," he says.

Mr. Sharfuddin was brought to the Sultanpuri facility on April 19. He too tested positive once and then tested negative twice. His fourth test report is awaited.

Back home in Port Blair, his two sons and wife are waiting for him. He speaks to them on the

phone every day but doesn't know when and how he will be able to meet them.

First visit

Standing a little away from the crowd, Saleemuddin, a 50-year-old resident of Allahabad, looks agitated when asked about his story.

"This was my first visit to the Nizamuddin centre. I am an illiterate person. My elders were coming here and they asked me to join them. I came here as late as March 21," he says, adding that the centre was shut on March 23 and he got stuck.

On March 29, he was shifted to the Lok Nayak Hospital and then to this facility in Sultanpuri.

"I came to Delhi for the first time, didn't know something like this would happen to me. I will not come again," he says, adding that he can't wait to go back home to his wife and four sons.

A power loom worker, Mr. Saleemuddin says he donated plasma a day earlier. "I was told that donating blood will help cure another person, so I gave." Asked about plasma therapy, he says he had no knowledge of what was being taken out from his body till a doctor told him that it was plasma and not blood.

On his life inside the quarantine centre, he says he spends his time praying and watching life pass by from the windows and balconies. "People here treat us well. They maintain a distance. There is a person assigned for each building who leaves breakfast, lunch and dinner at our door and attends to our needs. They have given us electric kettles, biscuits and fruits in our twin-share-

ing accommodations," says Mr. Saleemuddin.

Stuck for no reason

There are also those who are spending time in quarantine for no reason. Ibrahim, a senior citizen, complains that he never tested positive for the virus but was still moved to the facility and there are many like him. "We don't know what's happening with us."

He says irrespective of the scenario and the presumptions about the Tablighi Jamaat outside, over 750 people from the community queued up to donate plasma at the community hall the evening before. "So many foreigners were willing to donate plasma but they were not allowed. Minimum requirement even for an Indian is to test negative twice, be between 18 and 60 years of age and have no complications in complete blood count report," he says.

Dr. Ishrat Kafeel, who is supervising the donation of plasma by members of Tablighi Jamaat at three quarantine centres in Delhi, says his interaction with them sometimes leaves him surprised. "I was holding a conference with the donors at the quarantine facility in Narela. I asked them, 'Plasma therapy is a clinical trial, it's Ramzan and you're fasting, yet you are so willingly waiting for your turn. Why does this matter to you?' A man from the centre, about 70 years old, told me, 'Because it's not about how much I give or what I give but how much love I put into giving. Even if the last drop of my blood can save someone's life, I am more than ready to give it, without question and without hesitation.'

'The infection is not about a religion, community or nation'

For three Tablighis quarantined in Nuh, COVID-19 is a collective fight



Sohrab Khan (centre) with others quarantined at the Malabah Polytechnic College in Nuh. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ASHOK KUMAR
NUH

RASEEL RAHMAN
39, Kozhikode (Kerala)

How did it feel to become a "corona warrior" after being labelled "corona spreader" by sections of the media? Raseel Rahman chuckled: "It's all people's choice. We (Tablighis) don't want any label."

He said some people formed an opinion about the Tablighi Jamaat without knowing what had actually happened at the Nizamuddin centre in the days leading up to announcement of the nationwide lockdown on March 24.

Having recovered from COVID-19, Raseel, from Kerala's Kozhikode, was under quarantine at Nuh's Malabah Polytechnic College till May 2.

A Tablighi Jamaat worker, the 39-year-old is one of those who have offered to donate their plasma for the treatment of those infected with the deadly virus. The Haryana government, however, is yet to initiate the process of collecting plasma.

Raseel said his decision to donate plasma was not to seek anyone's approval, but for the "pleasure of his creator". "Whatever we [the Tablighis] do, whether in public or private, is not to show off or to earn a label. We want the pleasure of our creator. This is our only focus," he said.

Scheduled to return to Kozhikode on March 30, the commerce graduate was left stranded due to the sudden lockdown. Out to propagate the Tablighi Jamaat's message in Nuh, Raseel voluntarily went to a government health camp in Bisru village on March 30. Along with some other Tabligh workers, he was taken to Malabah Polytechnic College the next day and then to Al Afai Civil Hospital on being diagnosed with influenza-like illness symptoms.

The results for the test came two days later after a swab was taken on April 1 and Raseel, along with three others, tested positive. He was then taken to Shaheed Hasan Khan Mewati Government Medical College and discharged on April 16.

MOHAMMED ALAMGIR
32, Sitamarhi (Bihar)

A footwear seller from Bihar's Sitamarhi district, Mohammad Alamgir, also quarantined at the Malabah Polytechnic College in Nuh, said he felt good about his decision to donate plasma since someone could benefit. The 32-year-old said he had not watched television since he reached Delhi for a Tabligh programme on March 10 and did not know what people had to say about the cluster of cases emanating from the Tablighi's Nizamuddin centre, but "we are sorry if we have caused illness to anyone".

Alamgir said he had reached Pinangwan in Nuh on March 11 for a 40-day Tabligh programme after spending a day at the Nizamuddin centre before he tested positive for COVID-19 on April 6. He said he reached Punhama camp after the sarpanch told him about the administration's directions and was found infected along with three more people in his group of 11. Raring to go back home, Alamgir said that he would abide by the directions of the government and the doctors.

**SOHRAB KHAN
70, Nuh (Haryana)**
A retired Central Reserve Police Force Assistant Commandant, Chaudhary Hazi Sohrab Khan is waiting to return home after his quarantine ends on May 5. He had gone to Malaysia along with six more people from Nuh for a Tablighi Jamaat congregation and tested positive on his return.

He also spent two days at the Nizamuddin centre on his return from Malaysia on March 17 and was tested only after 10 days. He has now offered to donate his plasma. A resident of Siroli village in Nuh, Sohrab said it was wrong to single out a community for the spread of the infection since it was not about a religion, a community or a nation. "It is just because we were travelling that we contracted the virus. Lakhs of people have been infected and they are from different religions. An illness cannot be associated with one community," said Sohrab.

Sohrab, 70, said he had donated his blood on several occasions earlier during his long government service and was willing to do it again. He was hopeful that people's opinion about the Tablighis in particular and Muslims in general would change as misconceptions disappear.

Under lockdown, life in Nizamuddin

A month on, the area around the Tablighi Jamaat HQ is far from normal but the Ramzan month has ushered in some respite



After news of the outbreak from Nizamuddin in late March, residents have been living behind barricades. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

Bang next to the Hazrat Nizamuddin police station, a lane going towards the *basti* is barricaded and guarded by CRPF officials. A huge white building hidden behind lush green trees is visible. It's the infamous Nizamuddin centre where members of the Tablighi Jamaat gathered and were then being vilified for a massive spike in COVID-19 cases.

After news of the outbreak from Nizamuddin in late March, Nizamuddin residents have been living behind the barricades and for most the world outside the area has been reduced to an apprehensive stare.

As this reporter walked from the police station, to the left and the right, all entry and exit points could be seen heavily barricaded with thick ropes covering the little space left uncovered by the barricades.

From behind one barricade, Shamim Bano, a 30-year-old resident of the *basti*'s Nizam Nagar area, who used to work as a sani-

tion worker in the UPSC Building on Shahjahan Road, was seen walking around, tragedy writ on her face.

When asked, she began to share an ordeal she won't forget – the birth of her grandson about two weeks ago. "My daughter went into labour. I called for ambulance but no one picked up. I went to the police station and they told me to call PCR. Though the van came in 20 minutes, my grandson was already born. She still hasn't got injected with tetanus," she said.

Ms. Shamim said that while

there were medical shops opening inside the *basti*, there were no doctors available inside 24x7. "The medical shops open only for a limited period of time, about two hours each in the morning and evening. Only basic medicines are available there. No clinics are open here and no doctors are available. There's a dispensary accessible for us where doctors come for a particular time," she said.

Inside the *basti* – where the houses are as small as the size of a large trunk with seven-eight family members cramped – is a con-

tract to the empty spaces outside. Grocery, chicken, fruits and vegetables vendors have their shops and stalls open as a loudspeaker message from Delhi Police runs on loop asking people not to step outside without a purpose.

"There is no problem for fruits and vegetables for buyers inside because we bring them from Okhla Mandi every morning after standing in queue for four hours. Most houses in Nizam Nagar are

dependent on public toilets, which are cleaned by the municipal corporation workers in the morning. However, Mr. Kumar keeps a vigil on those moving about aimlessly and ensures they go home.

A shop owner sitting inside his grocery store, who gave his name as Raju said that over the last one month, there had been no change or relaxation in the restrictions inside the *basti* due to which the situation is under control. Police sources said that the last person who was reported positive was on April 24.

Restricted entry

The famous Nizamuddin Dargah also has its doors shut for public, but three persons are allowed to offer prayers every day inside this Dargah and about 18 other mosques in the area. The three persons sanitise themselves and pray every day, locals said.

Altamish Nizami, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya's ancestral descendant and also member of the Dargah Committee, said that eve-

rything was available inside and even home deliveries were happening. He also said that during Ramzan security personnel have allowed people to move around "only a little" in the evening while breaking the fast.

"There's absolute restriction on entry and exit but for people residing inside, they are allowed to step out a little for opening their fast in the evening," he said.

Mr. Nizami also shared how the Dargah Committee is preparing and distributing about 500 food packets every evening for the needy. "Every year, about 2,000 people break their fast at the Dargah and we prepare food for them. This year, we can't host them but still we are sending food," he said.

When talking about the religious centre, several residents were sympathetic towards the members of the Tablighi Jamaat. "They were evacuated but not all of them were infected. They should not be vilified like this," Mohammed Shahnavaz, another resident of the area, added.

Timings

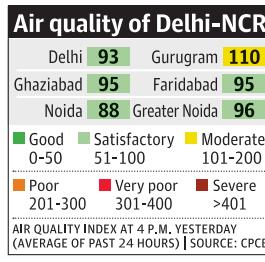
DELHI

MONDAY, MAY. 04
RISE 05:39 SET 18:59
RISE 15:38 SET 03:35
TUESDAY, MAY. 05
RISE 05:38 SET 18:59
RISE 16:44 SET 04:13
WEDNESDAY, MAY. 06
RISE 05:37 SET 19:00
RISE 17:52 SET 04:52

Delhi Weather max min
Delhi City 35 26
Safdarjung 35 26
Palam 34 25Delhi Palam Today
36°C The weather will be cloudy and warm. Few spells of duststorm and thunder-shower with strong winds will prevail.Delhi Palam Tomorrow
35°C A warm and cloudy weather to prevail. Spell of duststorm and thundershower with strong winds is likely.© Copyright Skymet Weather 2019
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IN BRIEF

Kin of NDMC staff to get relief in case of death

NEW DELHI
The New Delhi Municipal Council on Sunday announced a compensation of ₹15 lakh in case of death of any of its employees contracts COVID-19 while on duty. This compensation will be available to all eligible cases for a period of three months from the date of issue of the order. The sum will be paid to the kin of the deceased.

8 new COVID-19 cases in Gautam Buddha Nagar

NOIDA
Eight more people, including two women, tested positive for COVID-19 in UP's Gautam Buddha Nagar on Sunday, taking the tally of COVID-19 cases in the district to 167, officials said. Seven patients were discharged from hospitals and the number of recoveries crossed the 100 mark. PTI

Delhi Police Commissioner takes stock of situation

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI
Delhi Police Commissioner S.N. Shrivastava on Saturday held a meeting through videoconferencing with senior police officers to review the preparation and arrangements to contain the spread of COVID-19.

In the meeting, Mr. Shrivastava reviewed the situation arising out of the lockdown and health of police personnel who tested positive for COVID-19.

He reviewed the status of police officers' health. It was reported that 59 police personnel have been found positive for COVID-19 so far, out of which nine have recovered. Mr. Shrivastava directed all supervisory officers to brief their subordinate staff on precautions to be taken while discharging their duties.

He directed all joint CPs to assess the ground situation regarding migrants living in shelter homes as well as other localities.

During the meeting, he took feedback from six committees he had formed to take stock of the situation at police stations and police colonies.

THE HINDU
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Baba Saheb Ambedkar Hospital nurses to go on strike today

Capital records highest single-day jump with 427 cases; no deaths reported

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The number of COVID-19 cases in the Capital on Sunday saw the highest single-day jump for the second consecutive day with 427 new cases, said government officials. However, no deaths were reported. The latest health bulletin by the Delhi government stated that 1,362 people have recovered and 64 have died so far.

On the other hand, nurses at Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Hospital in north-west Delhi said they would go on strike on Monday after the administration failed to address their demands.

Nurses demand

In a letter to the Medical Director of the hospital on Sunday, the nurses asked for separation of COVID-19 suspected and non-suspected patients, making PPEs available to all, provision of quality quarantine facilities for healthcare workers, insurance cover for treatment of medical staff among other issues.

A spokesperson for the



Doctors and medical staff thank the Defence Forces for showering petals on them at the Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital in New Delhi on Sunday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

COVID-19

union said nurses were "treated differently" at the hospital.

For instance, after a technician tested COVID-19 positive, doctors who came in contact with him, were quarantined but the nursing staff were "posted back to duty without getting tested negative", the letter reads.

It also alleged that the nurses, who tested positive for the virus, were being "dumped at quarantine centres with no facilities".

"This is the honour we get

for being a part of hospital services and on the front line," the letter reads. Their demands also include the provision of decent isolation facilities for those who tested COVID-19 positive, provision of hotel accommodation for nursing staff working in COVID-19 areas, private hospitalisation of nurses who develop symptoms, sanitisation of premises, and reduction in the percentage of staff on duty to control exposure to the virus.

Six doctors test positive

Nine people, including six

Virus spread

Total number of COVID-19 cases	4,549
Total deaths	64
New cases in the past 24 hours	427
New deaths in the past 24 hours	0

SOURCE: DELHI GOVERNMENT HEALTH BULLETIN

doctors, in connection with two hospitals – Hindu Rao Hospital (HRH) and Kasturba Hospital – run by the North Delhi Municipal Corporation, were found COVID-19 positive on Sunday.

The persons, who had come in contact with the patients, have been put in quarantine, said officials, adding that their samples have been collected.

The nine patients were already in quarantine, said north civic body spokesperson.

Earlier, a nurse from HRH and a first-year postgraduate student from Kasturba Hospital were tested positive for the virus following which the hospitals were sanitised, said officials.

After new lockdown rules, RWAs against allowing helps

Representatives hit out at govt. for shifting responsibility

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

Most of the Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) in the city have decided not to allow domestic helps to enter their neighbourhoods after relaxation of the lockdown, said an association representative on Sunday.

Under directions issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs, the RWAs had been asked to take a call on whether domestic helps would be allowed in their localities following relaxation of the lockdown on Monday.

Containment certainty

Sharat Jha, president of the Apartment Owners Association (AOA) in Sangam Vihar said, "Till there was 100% certainty about the containment of the virus, we won't allow."

Mr. Jha, and many others argued that with a large number of asymptomatic cases, there was no way of ascertaining who was carrying the virus and who was not.

He informed that only certain e-commerce services, from verified companies undertaking safety precautions



The Central government should take a call on disallowing services such as domestic helps. ■ FILE PHOTO: R.V. MOORTHY

been neglected in decision-making, he said.

Rajiv Kakria, convener of the 'Save our City' campaign, an association for RWAs and NGO, argued that such a decision must not be shifted on to the RWAs.

Stressing on the difficulties of enforcing such a rule, he pointed out that there were several households that were already asking maids to visit their houses, some with "genuine reasons". However, with the relaxations extended, "once the floodgates open... hundreds of maids will come", he warned.

GEARING UP

List of permitted activities



I stand by my social media post: DMC chairman

Zafarul Islam Khan says posts on Twitter and Facebook not deleted

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Delhi Minorities Commission chairman Zafarul Islam Khan, who was on May 2 booked on charges of sedition after he allegedly made "provocative" social media posts, on Sunday said he did not delete his post and stands by it.

"It has been erroneously reported in a section of media that I have apologised for the tweet and deleted it. I apologise not for the tweet itself but because it was ill-timed and insensitive in the midst of a medical emergency faced by our country," Mr. Khan said, adding that the post was still there on his Facebook and Twitter pages.

"I stand by my views and convictions. I will continue, now and in future, the fight against hate politics in the country. FIRs, arrest and imprisonments do not change

this path which I have chosen continuously to save my country, people and the Indian secular polity and the Constitution," he said.

A senior police officer said the FIR has been registered under Sections 124 A (Sedition) and 153 A (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to

maintenance of harmony base on a complaint by a resident of South Delhi's Vasant Kunj.

The complainant said Mr. Khan on April 28 had shared a post on Twitter and Facebook which was "provocative".

Mr. Khan, in his post, had thanked Kuwait for taking note of the persecution of Indian Muslims, in the context of the violence in north-east Delhi.

Stop targeting anti-CAA protesters

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

Over 1,100 feminists from across the country have demanded an immediate stop to targeting of anti-CAA Muslim women activists under the garb of the nationwide COVID-19 lockdown.

Well-known rights activists, including Annie Raja, Medha Patkar, Farah Naqvi, Aruna Roy, Shabnam Hashmi and others, have demanded that false cases against peaceful anti-CAA protesters must be dropped, and all those arrested on trumped-up charges must be released immediately.

The list of signatories condemned the "brazenly malicious attacks, arrests and intimidation by the Delhi Police of Muslim women, students and activists, as well as other citizens who have spoken up against the unconstitutional moves of the present ruling dispensation".

"Media reports that over 800 anti-CAA protesters have been held or arrested since the lockdown, which means they have had little or no access to lawyers and legal aid," they said.

List hospitals for free treatment, HC to govts.

Non-COVID-19 patients suffering: plea

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has directed the Centre and the Delhi government to place on record the list of hospitals where patients could receive free-of-cost treatment for ailments other than COVID-19, according to their eligibility.

A Bench of Justice Vipin Sanghi and Justice Yogesh Khanna also directed AIIMS to also state whether these patients could be provided treatment at the hospital itself, as they were receiving earlier.

AIIMS facility

The court's direction came on a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by Karan Seth highlighting that about 100 out-station patients and their attendants, who were

earlier being provided treatment at AIIMS for several ailments are not being provided treatment any longer.

The plea said that due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, AIIMS stands converted into an exclusive facility to treat COVID-19 patients.

The plea also said that these patients and their attendants are being housed in Rain Baseras opposite AIIMS where social distancing norms were not being maintained.

AIIMS's counsel submitted that the main hospital facility is not an exclusive COVID-19 facility, and that the health institute continues to treat patients with other ailments.

It sought time to submit a status report on the issue. The HC will hear the case on May 8.

Four held for robbing five persons in two days

Milkmen, food delivery boys targeted

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

Three people were arrested and a juvenile was apprehended for allegedly robbing five people in the last two days alone in south Delhi amid the ongoing lockdown, the police said on Sunday.

The victims of the robberies were milkmen and food delivery boys, the police.

The incidents came to light after the police received two calls regarding robbery from Malviya Nagar and Neb Sarai on Saturday night.

HC registry official tests COVID-19 positive

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

A Delhi High Court registry official has tested positive for COVID-19 and has been admitted to Lok Nayak Hospital here.

The person is stated to be stable. The Registrar General, on behalf of the Chief Justice of Delhi High Court, has enquired about the well-being of the staff and one senior official has been deputed to check on his health on a regular basis.

The official has also been requested to inform the Registrar General in case of need or assistance of any kind either for himself or his family members, a High Court source said.

According to sources, the official has not been coming to the court complex since March 20.

"He has, so far, not been able to find out as to how he got infected," the source said. The official was admitted to the hospital on Saturday.

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Punjab witnesses biggest one-day spike

One death and 331 new cases, many of them pilgrims who returned from Nanded in Maharashtra

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Punjab on Sunday reported one more COVID-19-related death, taking the total tally to 21, besides the State saw its biggest one-day spike of 331 cases, according to an official statement.

The total number of COVID-19 positive cases have reached 1,102 in the State, with most of the new cases linked to pilgrims who had recently returned from Nanded in Maharashtra, where they had gone to pay obeisance at Gurdwara Hazur Sahib.

The latest victim, who was from Ferozepur, was being treated at Guru Gobind Singh Medical College.

The State health department said on Sunday that 75 new patients were reported from Amritsar, 62 from SBS Nagar, 46 from Hoshiarpur, 43 from Muktsar, 33 from Bathinda, 24 from Gurdaspur, 16 from Ludhiana and nine from Ropar districts.



Railway workers repair a track in Amritsar amid the ongoing COVID-19 lockdown. ■ FILE PHOTO: PTI

The total number of active cases in the State at present is 964. As many as 117 patients have so far recovered, it added.

Meanwhile, politics surrounding the Nanded pilgrims continued as the Congress and the Shiromani Akali Dal leaders indulged in verbal spat over the issue.

Health Minister Balbir Singh Sidhu asked SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal

and other Akali leaders to apologise to "Sikh Sangat" for their misleading propaganda over the return of Nanded pilgrims after 20-25 sewadars of Gurdwara Langar Sahib in Maharashtra tested positive.

"In view of the sewadars of Gurdwara Langar Sahib in Nanded testing positive after tests conducted there, it was evident that pilgrims had contracted the virus before

entering Punjab," he said. Mr. Sidhu hit out at the Akali leaders for indulging in political one-upmanship over a very sensitive issue, that too without verifying any facts. "These leaders unnecessarily hyped this issue by spreading propaganda that pilgrims are being labelled COVID-19 positive as part of a conspiracy. By indulging in politicising this issue, Akali leaders are not only trying to demoralise all corona warriors who are going beyond their call of duty to save Punjab but also giving false and fabricated comments over such a sensitive issue," he said.

On the other hand, SAD leader and former Minister Bikram Majithia asked the Punjab government to transfer the entire Hazur Sahib pilgrims, who were quarantined in unhygienic government facilities, to Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee "sarai", saying Sikh organisations

and SAD would look after them.

Accusing the Congress leaders of playing politics on the issue, Mr. Majithia said the party would not allow Congress leaders to turn the pilgrims into scapegoats to hide their own failures. "We will also not allow anyone to demean Takth Sri Hazur Sahib or the sangat which has returned after paying its obeisance," he said.

Guidelines not followed

Mr. Majithia said the Punjab government did not follow ICMR guidelines while repairing the pilgrims. "Air-conditioned buses were used against established norms. Social distancing was not followed. The buses came through red zones and it was because of this mishandling that pilgrims, who were in good health in Nanded for more than one month, tested positive for COVID-19 on their return to Punjab," he alleged.

Migrant workers escape from quarantine centres in Odisha

Most of them rounded up, search on for others in Ganjam

SIB KUMAR DAS
BERHAMPUR

Over a 100 migrant labourers back from Gujarat's Surat escaped from two quarantine centres in Kodala block of Odisha's Ganjam district on Sunday.

It happened while thousands of migrant labourers from outside the State started arriving in Ganjam district by buses and trains.

The escaped migrant workers had been kept in the quarantine centres at Janata High School of Begunipada and Odisha Adarsh Vidyalaya at Ragapur in Kodala block.

According to sources, the Janata High School quarantine shelter had 221 returnees from Surat, while the Ragapur quarantine centre had 179. Most of them had reached Ganjam district by buses on Saturday night.

Alleging lack of proper amenities and bad food, over a 100 migrant workers escaped from these two quarantine centres on Sunday morning. They tried to reach their homes through agricultural fields and orchards.

Meanwhile, for the first time two COVID-19 cases were reported in Ganjam district on Sunday morning. Both were Surat returnees. Return of thousands of migrant workers from Surat has increased the threat of rise in COVID-19 cases in Ganjam district.

Special train

A special train with 1202 Odia migrant workers from Surat reached Jagannathpur station on outskirts of Berhampur in Ganjam district on Sunday.

After initial medical check up at the station, arrangements were made to take them to their respective panchayats in Ganjam district to be kept in institutional quarantine for 14 days.

Three more special trains have started from Surat on Sunday for Ganjam district. They will arrive on Monday.

Sector markets to open in Gurugram

Barber shops also get the nod, domestic workers can return to work from today

ASHOK KUMAR
GURUGRAM

In line with the new guidelines of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs for orange zones issued on May 1, the Gurugram district administration has decided to allow the opening of barber shops and sector markets and domestic workers to return to work, besides resumption of operations for industries with "marginal procedural changes". The relaxations came more than six weeks after the first phase of lockdown began beginning March 24.

However, Galleria Market, Sector 29 commercial sector and Sadar Bazar are still not allowed to open, besides the shopping malls.

"We are going to implement all (Ministry of Home Affairs) guidelines for orange zone in Gurugram. There is no change," said Chief Executive Officer, Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority V.S. Kundu, also Nodal



A large number of migrant workers turned up in Kho village on Sunday for registration to return home. ■ SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Officer for COVID-19 for Gurugram.

The relaxations come into force from Monday onwards.

Mr. Kundu clarified that mohalla markets and sector markets for the local residents would open, but the designated markets such as Galleria, Sector 29 and Sadar Bazar are not allowed to open.

As per the MHA guidelines, taxis and cab aggregators with one driver and two

passengers only are allowed in orange zone. Also inter-district movement of individuals and vehicles, only for permitted activities, is allowed. However, inter-district and intra-district plying of buses are prohibited.

On the industries front, all e-commerce activities are allowed with 50% staff in the first week of the extended lockdown, and with 75% staff in the next week. Similarly, the Information Technology

and IT-enabled services companies are allowed to operate with 50% staff in the industrial areas with access control such as Special Economic Zones and 75% staff in the second week. However, all industrial units and entrepreneurs need to apply on Saralharyana portal for passes to employees.

Maruti gets permission
The Maruti Suzuki India Limited also received permission to run its Gurugram Sector-18 plant on May 2 with more than 10,000 workers and 24 vehicles, but the company's spokesperson said the decision for resumption of production was not taken as yet.

In a related incident, migrant workers in Manesar's Kho thronged the village streets in large numbers on Sunday to fill forms for returning to their homes. Police have filed an FIR for violation of distancing norms.

Punjab's textile industry in dire straits

Losses because of lockdown, economic slowdown pegged at ₹2,000 cr. so far

VIKAS VASUDEVA
CHANDIGARH

CHANDIGARH

than 20 lakh pigs."

The Minister said the disease was first reported in November-December 2019 from areas of China bordering Arunachal Pradesh. Pigs in the eastern part of Assam started dying in mid-April.

"On the brighter side, the rate of infection has flattened a bit in the past couple of days. Data collected from the affected districts says about 2,500 pigs have died and the infection is more among the animals that are not confined to sties," Mr. Bora said.

Veterinary officials said a few organised piggeries have been affected and the possible carrier could be humans.

Amid the economic slowdown during the ongoing nationwide lockdown, Punjab's textile industry has pegged losses at around ₹2,000 crore so far.

"The collective turnover of the textile industry here (Amritsar) is between ₹7,000 crore and ₹8,000 crore yearly. The global and domestic shutdown for the last two months due to the pandemic had huge cascading impact on textile trade. The complete closure of wholesale and retail markets across all continents have dismayed the clothing sector, which is facing a bleak and uncertain future. The industry in Amritsar has already suffered a loss to the tune of not less than ₹2,000 crore," Amit Kandhari, senior member of Amritsar Textile Processor Association (ATPA), told *The Hindu*.

Mr. Kandhari said that the current year is a total washout with payments as well as new orders have been put

on hold by customers, which has virtually created a debt trap for the entire clothing and garment business.

"We are unable to operate our units under the current financial situation due to the spike in COVID-19 cases in India and other countries and very precarious financial conditions. This segment can only be revived back provided all supply chains including all textile outlets and retail showrooms start operation in full swing that too in next two months, otherwise it would not be possible to redeem their payment stuck at various level across the board," he said.

Open weaving units
P.L. Seth, a prominent shawl manufacturer, said that the government must ensure protection of the outstanding dues.

"In case the lockdown is further extended for next two more months, this sector would not only become sick but a majority of the un-

its would come under 'NPA' category," he said.

"The State and the Centre should allow the opening of small weaving units to operate the night shift with limited labour and staff," said Mr. Seth, who is also president of the Shawl Club.

Another textile mill owner Sandeep Sajdeh said that with blocked orders and funds, it would be extremely hard to pay wages and salaries.

"The exports orders for woollen fabrics are in the pipeline but the constraints of reopening of mills is a huge task with supply chains under current lockdown was making it very difficult to operate," Mr. Sajdeh said.

"My export shipment is stuck at Bangladesh border awaiting clearance for last one month. I am hoping lockdown will ease and the consignment would reach Bangladesh," he added.

"Amritsar, which is a thriving textile business hub for the last one century producing woollen fabrics,

shawls, blankets besides having large number of nylon knitting and embroidery mills is on its throes as the opening of this segment is facing uncertainty with depressing economic situation," Mr. Sajdeh said.

Devise exit strategy
Ashok Sethi, a member of the task-force constituted by the Punjab government to devise an exit strategy from the lockdown has sought an immediate financial stimulus by way to total waiver of bank interest for minimum of six months and deferment of term loan EMIs for at least one year.

"The governments should open up the ESI and PF corpus worth over several thousand crores and come to the rescue during huge payment crisis as the industry has literally no resources to pay wages at present. On the GST front at least 50% relief will be provided which would help the industry not only to survive but also grow," he said.

"The governments should open up the ESI and PF corpus worth over several thousand crores and come to the rescue during huge payment crisis as the industry has literally no resources to pay wages at present. On the GST front at least 50% relief will be provided which would help the industry not only to survive but also grow," he said.

Haryana govt. flayed for VAT, bus fare hike

Decision anti-people, says Selja

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

The Haryana government's decision to increase bus fares and hike the VAT on diesel and petrol besides imposing market fees on sale of vegetable and fruit in mandis, has evoked sharp criticism from the Congress.

Terming the government's decision "insensitive and unfortunate", State party president Kumari Selja has accused the ruling BJP-JIP government of ignoring the interests and burdening the people of the State.

Ms. Selja, in a letter to Chief Minister Manohar Lal, said that instead of giving relief to the public the government has put additional burden on them by taking anti-people decisions.

She said that already the people of the State were struggling with financial crisis and the COVID-19 epidemic and in such a scenario the government decision to increase VAT on fuel and

hike in bus fares would hit people very hard.

"Also, the government has restored 2% market fees in vegetable and fruit market under market committees. There will be 1% market fee and 1% HRDF cess," she said, adding that the Congress government had waived this fee in 2014.

Ms. Selja said on account of these decisions petrol, diesel, vegetables and fruits will be expensive and people will have to pay more for travelling in the roadways buses.

Unfortunate move

"In the time of such epidemic, this will put more economic burden on the people of the State. These decisions are insensitive, unfortunate and ignores the suffering of the people of Haryana. I urge the Chief Minister to take back these decisions which would inflict economic casualties on the people," she said.

Two accidents force Odisha to divert buses

Over 75 buses with migrants from Gujarat have entered the State so far

STAFF REPORTER
BERHAMPUR

Following two accidents involving buses carrying migrant labourers from Gujarat's Surat at Kalinga ghat on Kandhamal-Ganjam district border, the Odisha government on Sunday decided to change the route of buses to Ganjam district.

According to official sources, since Saturday night, over 75 buses with migrants from Gujarat have entered Odisha. Most of them are

on their way to Ganjam district.

Two migrants had died on Saturday and several others were injured when their bus hit the guard wall at a turn on Kalinga ghat road.

On Sunday, another bus from Surat to Ganjam met with a similar accident. Luckily, only three were injured in the second accident.

Both accidents had occurred as the drivers of buses from Gujarat were not acquainted with the turns on the dangerous hilly road. The Odisha government has or-

dered a probe into the accidents. Transport Minister Padmanabh Behera said instead of traversing the hilly road of Kalinga ghat, the buses carrying migrants would now travel to Ganjam district via Boudh-Chirichhak-Nayagarh.

According to the Sub-Divisional Police Officer of G. Udaygiri in Kandhamal district, both accidents happened because the bus drivers lacked the skill and knowledge about the dangerous turns on the hilly road.

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Chaos in Telangana over e-passes; Karnataka operates free buses to districts

STAFF REPORTER

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

While there was chaos in Telangana on Sunday over e-passes for migrant workers, the Karnataka government operated free buses, and in Kerala, five Shramik Special trains to Bihar were pressed into service.

In Telangana, hours after Director-General of Police M. Mahender Reddy announced an e-pass initiative to help the stranded return to their States, the Tolichowki area near Hyderabad saw a large number of migrant workers coming onto the roads seeking travel permission.

The workers were not able to get any such immediate permission for inter-State travel since they did not have private transport. They demanded that the government make arrangements to send them back to their native places.

Police officials reached the area and pacified them, promising food and other help as long as they were in Telangana.

Most of the migrant workers were from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal.

The Railways operated



On their way: Migrant workers boarding buses at the Majestic bus station in Bengaluru on Sunday. ■ K. MURALI KUMAR

five 'Shramik Special' trains from Kerala to Bihar on Sunday to facilitate the return of migrant workers. One train each was operated from Kozhikode, Thrissur, and Kannur, and two from Ernakulam. The two trains from Ernakulam had a total of 2,201 workers from Bihar. The train bound for Barauni left at 3 p.m., carrying 1,140 passengers, while the Muzafarpur-bound train left at 6.30 p.m. with 1,061 people, said Ernakulam Deputy Commissioner of Police G. Poonguzhali.

Checking at camps

"Ten teams, comprising officials of health, labour, police and revenue departments,

visited workers' camps, registered them online and conducted health check-up there itself. The shortlisted people were brought to the Ernakulam Junction railway station on KSRTC buses, accompanied by police personnel," Ms. Poonguzhali said.

500 buses

After facing flak for charging exorbitant fares to transport stranded migrants in Bengaluru, the Karnataka government started ferrying migrants to their respective districts without any fare from Sunday morning. This service will be available till Tuesday from the BMTC and KSRTC bus stands in Majes-

Telangana students in Delhi ask to be evacuated

HYDERABAD

Around 200 students from Telangana pursuing various courses in Delhi and civil services aspirants are awaiting evacuation from the capital. A student, coordinating with the NCR administration, said they received a call on Sunday that their request for evacuation had been accepted. "The Telangana government has to work out the modalities," said another student.

tic. On Sunday, the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) operated around 500 buses from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. with around 15,000 people travelling to over 45 destinations across the State, sources said. From Tuesday, buses will ply from 7 a.m. in the morning.

Thousands of people, including migrant workers, students and others thronged the BMTC bus stand in Majestic on Sunday, immediately after the State government announced that it would ferry stranded migrants to their respective districts without any fare.

(With inputs from Hyderabad and Bengaluru bureaus)

■ K. MURALI KUMAR

zone districts of Kurnool, Guntur and Krishna. Kurnool alone had 30 fresh cases while Guntur and Krishna reported 11 and eight cases respectively. Anantapur had seven and Chittoor and Nellore two fresh cases each.

Also on the same day, 47 persons were discharged from hospital following recovery. The data on those discharged were: Guntur 18; Chittoor 13; Kurnool 11; East Godavari 3; and Krishna 2. So far, 488 patients, or 31% of total positive cases recovered and 33 patients (2% of the total cases) died.

Cumulative data for the State were: Kurnool 466 cases, Guntur and Krishna 319 and 266 cases, Nellore (91), Kadapa (83), Chittoor (81), Anantapur (78), Prakasam (61), West Godavari (59), East Godavari (45), Visakhapatnam (29) and Srikakulam (5).

Kurnool, inching closer to the 500 mark reported nearly 30% of the State's positive cases. The State had so far tested 1,4937 samples.

The number of COVID-19 cases in Telangana rose to 1,082. While 20 cases were from Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation area, one was from Jagtial. Of the people in isolation wards, 46

New cases leave Telangana, Karnataka and A.P. in the red

Kurnool in Andhra Pradesh adds 30 cases; relief in Kerala as it stays clear

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD

Andhra Pradesh reported 58 new COVID-19 positive cases, and Telangana 21 new cases on Sunday. No fresh cases were recorded in Kerala but after several days of low case numbers, Karnataka had 34 cases.

The tally in Andhra Pradesh rose to 1,583, but no deaths were reported. Most of the new cases reported on Sunday were from the red

Hero's welcome

The armed forces conducted fly-pasts and showered petals on several hospitals across the country to express gratitude to doctors, paramedics and other frontline workers fighting the pandemic



COVID-19

zone districts of Kurnool, Guntur and Krishna. Kurnool alone had 30 fresh cases while Guntur and Krishna reported 11 and eight cases respectively. Anantapur had seven and Chittoor and Nellore two fresh cases each.

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were discharged after recovery. Of the total, 508 were active cases, 545 were discharged, and 29 people died.

For the first time the number of people discharged was higher than active cases. State Health Minister Eatala Rajender said hospital authorities were acting on issues related to medical services pointed out by those who recovered.

One COVID-19 patient who recovered was a 68-year-old man with diabetes. The patient was admitted with bilateral pneumonia, and respiratory problems. The Health Minister's office said the patient in intensive care unit was administered Hydroxychloroquine, Liponavir, Ritonavir. He was discharged after recovery. The number of districts with zero cases in 14 days increased to 17.

95 under treatment

No fresh COVID-19 cases were reported in Kerala on Sunday. The Health department said in a statement that



had gone up to 28 in the district, he said.

Meanwhile, the case tally in Karnataka stood at 635. A total of 293 patients were discharged, 21 being discharged on Sunday.

With 266 persons testing positive for COVID-19 on Sunday, the number of people who contracted the novel coronavirus infection in Tamil Nadu has crossed the 3,000-mark. As many as 203 of the new patients were from Chennai, taking the city's tally to 1,458.

A 44-year-old man admitted to the Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital, who tested positive for the infection, died around 2.15 p.m. With this the total number of deaths due to the infection has risen to 30 in the Tamil Nadu. Currently, 1,611 persons State-wide are under treatment, including 1,190 persons in Chennai, where 250 patients have been discharged.

After several days of reporting low case numbers, Karnataka recorded 34 COVID-19 positive cases on Sunday. Davangere district was in focus, as 21 of the cases were from there. With this, the number of active cases

(With inputs from Vijayawada, Thiruvananthapuram, Bengaluru and Chennai)

Pinarayi defends staff salary deferment

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Sunday attacked Congress-led service organisations for criticising the government's decision to defer the remittance of 30 days' salary over five months to steady the State's finances.

In his weekly television programme, *Nam Munnottu*, Mr. Vijayan said teachers who had burnt the government order had become objects of public ridicule. The students of their schools had



Pinarayi Vijayan

set an example for them by contributing their mite to the Chief Minister's Distress Relief Fund (CMDRF).

On the teachers who

torched the order, he said, "Their perverse mindset will never change."

He said the COVID-19 lockdown had choked the government's conventional revenue streams. Kerala had protected its employees from arbitrary wage and dearness allowance cuts resorted to by the Central government. The Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party had done the same in the States ruled by them.

Mr. Vijayan defended his action to hire highly paid la-

wyers to argue for the government and said his special advisers bore minimal cost to the public exchequer.

He also justified the government's decision to hire a helicopter for a "high monthly rental" by stating that the State would deploy it during natural disasters.

Kerala Congress chief Mullappally Ramachandran said the Chief Minister's sense of insecurity had caused him to splurge on helicopters, bulletproof vehicles and expensive escort cars.

Farmers in panic after wild elephants kill cattle

Herd also devoured standing crops

IN BRIEF



Kannada poet Nisar Ahmed passes away

BENGALURU

Well-known Kannada poet K.S. Nisar Ahmed, best known for his iconic work *Nityotsava*, passed away at his residence here on Sunday. He was 84. Prof. Ahmed was suffering from age-related ailments. His last rites will be held in Bengaluru on Monday, family sources said. Just over two weeks ago, he lost his younger son to cancer but wasn't able to take part in the last rites as his son lived in the United States which, like India, is under a lockdown owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Liquor to cost 25% more in Andhra Pradesh

VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government is going to allow reopening of liquor shops during the lockdown, subject to social distancing and other guidelines laid down by the Central government, besides reducing their number significantly. This apart, the government has ordered that the prices of liquor be jacked up by 25% as a step towards implementing total prohibition. These decisions were taken at a high-level meeting chaired by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Sunday.

Navodaya students from Rajasthan sent back

THIRISSUR

Navodaya students from Rajasthan, who were stranded in Kerala's Thirissur following the lockdown for the last one-and-a-half months, were sent home by a special bus on Sunday. A group of 23 students, including 15 boys and eight girls, from Tonk in Rajasthan had reached Navodaya School, Mayannur, as part of an exchange programme. The students were sent by a special bus arranged by the Rajasthan government.

Huge number

Though the villagers heard the agonised cries of the cattle, they remained indoors due to the big number of the herd.

Second incident In the past week, two herds of wild elephants killed two cattle in a field at Bandameedu Jaravaripalle village under the Palamaner forest range.

According to information, the herd of eight elephants entered the fields close to the village around Saturday midnight and devoured the standing crops of tomato and other vegetables, besides trampling a stretch of paddy.

Seeing the commotion, two cattle, which were tied outside a watch-hut, started bellowing. The herd moved towards the cattle and trampled them.

Huge number Though the villagers heard the agonised cries of the cattle, they remained indoors due to the big number of the herd.

Even Cobra hatchlings are lethal, caution experts

Warning comes after video of a Malayalam actor holding a hatchling on her palm goes viral

K.S. SUDHI
KOCHEE

It doesn't require an adult cobra to snuff the life out of you; even hatchlings are capable of it, warn herpetologists.

Snake specialists sounded caution on handling snakes after a video of a Malayalam actor holding the hatchling of a cobra on her palm went viral on social media. The hatchling, a few centimetres in length, could be seen holding its hood up in the video and launching itself forward as if to strike.

Oblivious of the risk, the actor continued speaking on

The actor was also seen introducing the snake to some children.

Enough venom'

"The young cobra has enough venom, fully developed fangs and a poison delivery system sufficient enough to kill an adult person or cause serious health risks. The cobra venom is neurotoxic. It was suicidal on the actor's part to hold the snake on her palm and go for a video recording," said Jose Louies, an IUCN specialist on snakes.

Cobra is one of the four venomous snakes that ac-



The venom in a hatchling is of high concentration.

video the about the compassion to be shown towards such small guests.

counts for most of the snakebite deaths in the country. Russell's viper, Saw-scaled viper and the Common krait are the other members of the lethal league.

The venom in the cobra hatchling would be of high concentration. The striking distance between the snake and the human body was a few centimetres in this case.

With its agility, the young snake could strike at any angle with lightning speed, said Mr. Louies, also the founder of Indiansnakes, a website that tracks snakes and snakebites.

Snakes hatch towards the

end of summer months and the chance of encountering them were higher during the monsoon period. Most cases of snakebite occurred during monsoon, he said. Ideally, one



Slow release

A less rigorous lockdown does not mean COVID-19 has been overcome

Balancing lives and livelihoods, the Centre has extended the national lockdown for COVID-19 for two weeks from May 4, with fewer restrictions on activity. But the highly contagious virus has not disappeared and the weeks ahead present a challenge to States. They must ensure that the gains from the lockdown in terms of a relatively low death toll and a cap on new cases are not reversed overnight in the red, orange and green zones, where normality of varying degrees is to be restored, barring the containment zones. Kerala, lauded for its success in containing the pandemic, has chosen to retain some curbs even in green zones. Allowing some economic activity, though not at full pace, and under safeguards, was inevitable, although the stipulations in the Home Ministry's orders require a high degree of civic cooperation. The continued suspension of air, rail, inter-State and urban public transport, and the ban on mass gatherings and entertainment venues remove a major source of crowding, although the restrictions on the number of passengers allowed in private vehicles and taxi cabs, and the protocol for personnel in industries call for strict adherence to succeed. Allowing outpatient clinics to reopen and the permission given for plumbers, electricians and other technicians to work with safeguards are welcome. The relaxation process can be eased greatly if States adopt a 'how to' approach and communicate to citizens clearly.

In the absence of medical remedies, prevention remains the only option against the virus. Using face masks, now mandatory, hand washing and physical distancing at all times are universally recognised precautions. Such measures were adopted relatively late in India, with politicians initially reluctant to even adjourn legislatures, leave alone impose strict curbs on public activity. It has taken more than a month to move migrant workers back to their home States by train; in the interim, several desperate families have tried to walk home across vast distances and many have perished. Besides ensuring decent conditions for these workers and the education of their children, States must also prepare for the arrival of expatriate workers in large numbers from West Asia and elsewhere. These unprecedented pressures add to the need to maintain the highest vigil against COVID-19. Unsurprisingly, the biggest cities, with a legacy of market-driven housing policies, unplanned densification, rampant pollution and poor health-care access are red zones, with large infection clusters. Their decay is marked by the absence of usable commons, including pavements in normally crowded localities, making it difficult to maintain distancing. This is an appropriate moment to start repairing that damage. What the public must be told emphatically is that the relaxation of the lockdown is not a return to life as it existed before the coronavirus. It is a new reality, one that calls for safe, measured activity.

No comfort in numbers

The shame is not in detecting cases, but in hiding deaths caused by the virus

West Bengal, which reported its first COVID-19 case in mid-March, has now recorded a total of 922 cases. The State has reported 48 deaths but had not counted 72 who died of comorbidities. Though it is India's fourth populous State, it now ranks fourth lowest in terms of the number of those tested, and is also way lower than Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Against a national average of 721 tests per million, West Bengal has a dismal 212.6 tests per million. But what is disturbing is the general reluctance of the government to ramp up testing and to acknowledge deaths from the disease as such. This comes as a surprise given its initial proactive stand on several fronts to tackle COVID-19. It was the first State to move from containment to mitigation to contain the spread when it announced a complete lockdown before the Prime Minister announced it nationally. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was seen doing all the right things including demonstrating how social distancing is to be practised and setting up quarantine centres in every district. While it is not clear if testing has improved, there is clearly a reluctance to divulge the true extent of spread of the virus. The hesitation is pronounced on the issue of sharing mortality numbers.

At over 13%, the case fatality rate is very high in West Bengal while the detection rate continues to remain the same, which is a reflection of poor surveillance and a failure to actively look out for fresh cases. When surveillance is good and testing is ramped up, the number of cases reported is bound to increase, as was seen in Kerala, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, and even South Korea in particular. As Kerala has demonstrated, early detection of cases and tracing of contacts, quarantining and testing will not only help in containing the spread but also markedly reduce the case fatality rate. Trying to keep the numbers artificially low by testing fewer people or not divulging the actual numbers and tracing their contacts allows the virus to spread unchecked. At some point, poor surveillance and delay in testing will overwhelm the health system and result in even more deaths, something that no government would be proud of. A higher number of cases is only a reflection of how active the State has been in waging a war against the virus, while a higher case fatality rate serves as evidence of poor response. With the lockdown now extended by two more weeks, the government should follow the advice of WHO and cover lost ground by aggressively testing and isolating cases, and tracing contacts. Assembly polls next year should not be a reason for the Union and the State governments to politicise a public health issue that has been declared a pandemic.

Pandemics without borders, South Asia's evolution

Rather than deliver an autocratic wasteland, the epidemic should be an opportunity to transform the region's politics



KANAK MANI DIXIT

Even if the COVID-19 pandemic spares South Asia the worst impact it has reserved thus far for the northern latitudes, it is certain that this region of nearly a fourth of the global population will be wounded gravely – economically, and as the process unfolds, socio-politically. Holding the largest volume and density of poverty in the world, the countries of South Asia are looking into an abyss of distress and discontent.

Dire sign

As the region from the Indian Ocean to the Himalaya is hit by recession, more than half a century's effort against poverty could be wasted. The coddling of the middle class and neglect of the majority underclass, so starkly seen during the pandemic response, points to all that has gone wrong in our electoral democracies; no country of South Asia is presently a formal dictatorship.

Amidst our separate insularities, South Asians should take the pandemic as a wake-up call beyond public health, on ills ranging from plastic pollution to global warming, extinction of species, hijacking of the commons, dirty water, toxic air, a weakening of the welfare state, infrastructural exceptionalism – and the rapid conversion of our demographic diversity into the worldwide sameness of a suburban mall.

If we fail to act, the COVID-19 episode will be but an interlude as we wade further into the Anthropocene quicksand. You can see the return to 'normalcy' in the aircraft tracking apps that show China's airways bustling once again, as they were before the coronavirus

radiated out from Wuhan.

As a dire telegram sent by Earth to Humanity, COVID-19 has laid bare the demagoguery that marks the democracies of South Asia. The response of the regimes has been to entrench themselves further, and they are shifting blame on mal-governance to the pandemic even as they tighten state control through surveillance, repressive laws and radical populism backed by ultra-nationalism.

The public's fear of the virus is allowing Presidents and Prime Ministers to press on with top-down rule, whereas the lockdown should be the time to generate momentum towards federal devolution and Gandhi's empowering 'gram swaraj' – a term that must be revived without a sense of embarrassment.

In Sri Lanka, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa takes advantage of COVID-19 to grant pardon to a war criminal. In Pakistan, the Army has Prime Minister Imran Khan against the ropes, and Nepal's political class uses the pandemic for political adventurism and Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli engages the military to carry out key COVID-19 tasks, from buying protective gear to contact tracing. The virus has solidified the foundation of Sheikh Hasina's one-party rule in Bangladesh.

India's continent-sized polity craves federalism, but COVID-19 has energised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's centralising mission. His Hindutva-backed, Pakistan-focused ultra-nationalism creates a web of control that strengthens Mr. Modi but weakens India. After a series of polarising actions from Kashmir to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, we watch unbelievably as Islamophobia is injected into the pandemic response.

The majoritarian attitude exhibited by the state, mass media and social media towards India's 200 million Muslims will before long transfer to the Dalit, tribal and Adi-



vasi communities, and the underclass as a whole. The anti-poor imperiousness seen in the demonetisation of November 2016 was evident also in the four-hour notice given for lockdown on the night of March 23, in a country of more than 350 million workers, many of whom are internal migrants. Since Mr. Modi shuns unhearsed encounters, journalists and academics are not able to challenge him about the fabric of India that is tearing.

Soft power

The reason to talk at length about India within South Asia is that the country comprises much of the region by population and geography. Further, the actions and the omissions of India impact each neighbour. While all the other capitals have adversarial positions vis-à-vis New Delhi, however, it is also true that modern India has been aspirational for neighbouring societies – till now, that is.

The trajectory of India, with its galloping centralisation, removes governance from the people's reach. There was a time, decades ago, when New Delhi's messaging was limited to promises of 'roti, kapda aur makaan', but ever more populist slogans were required to maintain command. Hence, the strident Hindutva-laced nationalism, which can only divert attention of the huddled masses, not spread prosperity nor social justice.

In both India and Pakistan, the two large countries of South Asia, ending insensitivity and inefficiency in governance require power

and agency to pass to the provinces/States. Self-correction is only possible in smaller, devolved polities. As has been seen during the ongoing crisis, the States of India have risen to the occasion and are seen to be more caring, for the simple reason that they are closer to the ground and more accountable.

India has shone in the world because of its soft power, defined by a textured history, empathetic open society, "scientific temper" and Gandhian legacy. India simply cannot succeed as a hard power, which is why under the Bharatiya Janata Party-Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the country is losing the very values that command respect abroad.

If India were an internationally confident nation-state, as in decades past, it would have used its clout to lobby and build demand for a sitting of the UN Security Council to discuss the global security threat represented by the COVID-19 pandemic. India is also weakened internally by the New Delhi intelligentsia's China fixation, which must be overcome. Unknowingly or with deliberation, New Delhi seeks to copy-paste Beijing's centralism as well as its xenophobia, both of which are bound to backfire in a country whose historicity and circumstances are quite different.

A reformatting

The unflinching lack of caring for the citizenry by governments in South Asia can only be reversed through a formula that incorporates the internal and external to the nation-states, a reformatting of relationships. Internally, power must devolve from the capital to the provincial units of the two larger countries (Pakistan and India), as well as empowerment of local governments all over (as done in Nepal under the 2015 Constitution, but not yet fully implemented).

Externally, the countries of

South Asia must bring down the hyper-nationalist mind barriers to allow porous borders, thereby reviving historical synergies in economy, ecology and culture. This is essential for both social justice and economic growth, and cannot happen without a palpable reduction in military expenditures that will come with abandonment of the national security state.

South Asian regionalism requires resuming the evolution of the subcontinental polity that was terminated in 1947 with Partition.

Regionalism would lead to collaborative battles against pestilence, and for wealth creation through trade, comparative advantage, and economies of scale. Regionalism would help fight plastic pollution in our rivers, battle the air pollution that wafts across our frontiers, promote cooperation in natural and human-made disasters, and boost the economies of the geographical "periphery" of each country.

The push for South Asia-wide thinking and planning need not be seen as a malevolent attempt to subvert India. Instead, it is the path for India's own socio-economic advance, and the way to garner international recognition of its soft power. Internal devolution and cross-border bonding has always been a necessity but impossible for some to contemplate. Hopefully, the shake-up of the COVID-19 pandemic will succeed where past exhortations have failed.

The opinion-makers of India – economists, political scientists, philosophers, sociologists, diplomats and others – have tended to be New Delhi-centric, and, as a result, downright reluctant to address issues of both federalism within and regionalism without. They have thus far been unable to see the jungle for the trees.

Kanak Mani Dixit, a writer and journalist based in Kathmandu, is founding Editor of the magazine, 'Himal SouthAsian'

India's disease surveillance system needs a reboot

There is enough reason to fear a combination of COVID-19 with existing illnesses and medical complications in India



MAYA JOHN

In a recent press briefing, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare reported noticeable trends with respect to COVID-19 cases in India. Its data shows that 75.3% of deaths have been concentrated in the age group of 60 years and above, and in 83% of deaths, the deceased were battling pre-existing identified health conditions. Evidently, we have reason to fear the novel coronavirus for which we have no established cure. However, there is even more reason to fear a combination of COVID-19 with existing illnesses and medical complications. The disease is lethal for those with compromised immunity brought on by age, existing respiratory infections, or essentially, malnutrition. In technical medical terms, this is a situation of comorbidity, which in ways makes it difficult to differentiate between dying of COVID-19, or, dying with COVID-19.

Issue of disease watch

In comparison to many western countries combating the disease, India appears to have the advantage of a relatively young population. This is, of course, negated by the poor health conditions of the vast majority of Indians. It is then imperative that we do not ignore already prevalent diseases and ill-

nesses. Unfortunately, the recent experiences of the public health-care system in India indicate the side-stepping of precisely this issue.

There are many among the poor who are battling various diseases but now have little access to major public hospitals in the wake of the lockdown. Routine functioning, particularly of out-patient department services in public hospitals, has been severely affected, and largely, emergency cases are being entertained. Patients now complain of even greater high-handedness of hospital staff in the still functioning emergency intensive care unit, labour rooms, tuberculosis (TB) wards, etc. Ironically, cardiology and neurology departments that cater to elderly sick patients are turning away many in the bid to streamline "critical" cases. In such circumstances we can expect an aggravation in the poor health conditions already affecting large sections of people who have limited access to health-care services.

Let us scrutinise this issue more closely. Many of the adverse medical conditions prevalent among the vast majority of our country are not even identified due to the lax disease surveillance system. The failure of disease surveillance requires explanation. For one, a significant number of the infected (poor and marginalised people) do not have access to health-care facilities and so fail to report their condition to certified medical practitioners. Even when an infected person has access to such facilities, their clinical case does



not always culminate in the required testing (blood/serum, throat swab, sputum, stool, urine). Third, there is a widespread practice among pathological laboratories to categorise diseases on the basis of the pre-existing classification system, which results in failure to identify the definitive cause (aetiology) for an illness by differentiating and separating pathogens (disease-causing microorganisms) on the basis of variations in groups, subgroups, strains, etc.

Silent epidemics

There is, consequently, pervasive non-identification of a definitive cause behind a number of illnesses. Many ailments are simply clubbed together and referred to by generic names such as 'Respiratory Tract Infection' (RTI), 'Urinary Tract Infection', 'Acute Febrile Illness (AFI)', 'Acute Undifferentiated Fever', 'Fever of Unknown Origin' (FUO). Certain of these undifferentiated illnesses are known to affect lakhs of people every year worldwide. They claim many lives, especially of the poor who are victims of low immunity and have limited access to health care. Sources claim that RTI kills over 900 people in India every day. Likewise, Acute Lower Respiratory Tract Infection (ALRTI), which af-

flicts mostly children below the age of five years, has been known to infect approximately 3.40 crore people every year worldwide. In recent years it has led to roughly 66,000 to 199,000 deaths. Shockingly, 99% of these deaths are reported from developing countries, and India has a larger share in it. The large number of hospitalisations, enormous deaths and suffering caused by contagious undifferentiated diseases indicate the prevalence of persistent but undetected silent epidemics.

Even if the definitive cause of an illness is identified, it does not necessarily gain the focused attention of scientific research. As the disease evolves but "interest" in it remains fleeting, the differences developing in the sub-groups, strains in genotype of the pathogen concerned fail to be consistently tracked. Knowledge of the pathogen, and, consequently, the required disease control soon lag behind. This overall process is due to the selective, biased approach of mainstream scientific research that is driven by the profits of private pharmaceutical companies, and is the fallout of the lack of priority that governments assign to general health care and diseases of the poor.

Even when the identity of a contagious disease and its treatment are well known it does not mean that the disease's prevalence will generate the necessary reaction. TB is a suitable example. According to public health experts, one person in every 10 seconds contracts TB, and up to 1,400 people in India die every day of the dis-

ease. This indicates that TB has a R0 value (basic reproduction number) and fatality rate that is way higher than those attributed to COVID-19 so far. However, it is important to note that TB and many other contagious diseases are ignored as "ordinary", and elicit very low attention. In contrast, some diseases are quickly identified as epidemics of greater public concern.

Diseases are being selectively discovered and have the propensity to be identified as an epidemic when they have a signalling effect for the scientific community. In a majority of instances, it is only when there is a threat of transmission to the well-to-do sections of society or wealthier regions that the disease actually has such a signalling effect. It is not a coincidence that a relatively downplayed disease such as TB is largely a poor man's disease.

Clearly, we are confronted by a skewed relationship between our ways of knowing (social epistemology) and epidemiology. It is precisely in this context that COVID-19 has gained singular prominence over several other lethal diseases. Importantly, pre-existing diseases have the potential to combine with COVID-19, and with devastating consequences. It becomes imperative to identify the comparative fatality rates of many of the silent epidemics, which in their own right require urgent attention.

Maya John teaches in Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi, and is working on the history of epidemics and epidemiology

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

The ride home

No it's not the noise of clapping, vessels being beaten, or the vision of rose petals being showered from helicopters that India must note. It is certainly about developments that have set alarm bells ringing. 'Stay at home' has been interpreted as 'let me go home' by migrant workers. Their desperate attempts walking, riding or hiding even in concrete mixers to escape haunted ground have reached the limit. Their lemming-like exodus is based on the illusion that the other side of the fence is always green. And with

colour coded zones changing in a matter of time, we need to ask ourselves what we are trying to fence out and who we are trying to keep safe.

DAVID BALASINGH,
Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu

■ While the decision of the Indian Railways to operate "Shramik Special" trains for stranded migrant workers is welcome, it is atrocious and inhumane on the part of the Railway Board to announce extra fare charges (Tamil Nadu, "Special train travellers will have to pay extra", May 3). When the migrants have already run

out of cash and are nearly starving, this is only rubbing salt into their wound. All the suffering they have undergone could have been avoided with advance notice before the national lockdown. The situation only

points to the need for a national policy using inputs from States, the Centre and the employers of workers.

A. JAINULABEEN,
Chennai

Urban planning
The severe spread of COVID-19 in Mumbai, more so in Dharavi, will prove to be a huge challenge for the respective governments.

Those in power at the State and Centre should note the destructive possibilities of having such densely populated areas from the point of view of disaster. Relief operations become a nightmare. Therefore, it is important that measures are initiated to replace the slums with multi-storied tenements and dormitories for the working class especially as they are the backbone of economic prosperity. It will no doubt be an expensive project and may even prove to be a procedural nightmare, but it has to be done. Politicians should keep their outlandish projects on

V.H. SUBRAMONEY,
Bengaluru

Health plan
The public health strategy for COVID-19 has to sharply focus on helping people determine their infection status through widely available testing. It is most unfortunate that the Centre and States have failed to take advantage of the prolonged lockdown period to augment testing capacity. Senior citizens are the worst

sufferers. A person displaying symptoms such as mild cough or fever undergoes psychological trauma because of lurking suspicion of infection.

Prompt testing can relieve anxiety for the rest of the family. Hospitals and nursing homes face a challenge in treating these patients. Many States have not given permission to accredited private labs to test. The ICMR should revise guidelines to facilitate priority testing for senior citizens.

N. SUKUMAR,
Hyderabad

To read

No relief for the nowhere people

Policy responses to the migrant crisis reinforce the idea of two Indias



RAVI SRIVASTAVA

Jamalo Makdam, 12, died on April 18 walking back from the chilli fields of Telangana to her home in Chhattisgarh. She and a group of other workers decided to return home on foot, as many migrant workers did, after losing their jobs, incomes and even accommodation following the announcement of a nationwide lockdown. Her journey ended in death, possibly due to electrolyte imbalance and exhaustion, said health officials.

In the past month, migrant workers have died, been lathi-charged, herded into shelters with minimum facilities, sprayed with dangerous chemicals, and denied entry into their home villages by the dominant elite. These reports and images have seared our conscience.

No rights and entitlements

The labourers – men, women and children – are the classic nowhere citizens of India. They have no rights and entitlements in the areas in which they work and to whose prosperity they contribute. Being from the poorest and the socially discriminated groups, they are also denied entitlements in the villages to which they belong. Not surprisingly, they have been invisible in policy discourse. There are no firm estimates of their numbers. Estimates prepared by this author and updated from time to time suggest that short-term and circular migrants in the informal wage economy could number 60-65 million. About 40% of these migrants work in the construction sector and 15% in agriculture. The rest are engaged in manufacturing, transport, and other services. With accompanying family members, their numbers would not be less than 100 million. About half these labourers are inter-State workers. We exclude in this estimate longer-term circular migrants who also work in the informal wage economy and as self-employed workers in the urban economy.

Data from the National Sample Survey and the India Human Development Survey (IHDS) show that



"The lockdown imposed by the government has exposed the deep fault lines in India's labour market." Migrant workers wait to board a special train to return to Agra from Ahmedabad. • AP

these migrant labourers are mainly from rural areas in poor regions and States, and belong to the poorest socio-economic classes. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes are over-represented among them. They form the largest section of child, bonded and trafficked labour. They predominate in activities that are characterised by three Ds – dirty, dangerous, and difficult – and consistently face a fourth D – discrimination. Nearly 70% of migrants work in urban and peri-urban areas in and around growth centres in States in the north, west, and south of the country. Industry and employers are bemoaning, for the first time, the fact that activities in a number of crucial sectors and industries will not see revival without these workers.

The lockdown imposed by the government has exposed the deep fault lines in India's labour market which operates in a sea of growing informal employment relations. We know that nearly 81% of wage workers even in non-agricultural sectors do not have any contract with their employers and enjoy no security of tenure. Many do not even know their final employer. The IHDS tells us that half the migrant labourers are hired through contractors. Their condition shows the dismal state of implementation of labour regulations, particularly with respect to inter-State migrants.

With the government's sudden lockdown decision, wages for jobs already carried out remained unpaid. A large percentage of migrants remained saddled with debt taken as advances from their employers, con-

tractors, or landlords. The government's announcement of a tepid relief package on March 26 did not address any of the concerns of this section as the frail social security net largely does not cover them. Crucially, the government side-stepped its major responsibility of paying compensatory wages to the informal workers for the lockdown, putting this onus on employers who are already hit hard by the lockdown.

As the migrant workers tried to move to their homes, the government responded with a strict State and inter-district lockdown and ordered placing migrant workers in quarantines-cum-shelters, and the detention of workers who remained on the move. In a status report submitted to the Supreme Court on March 31, the government argued that the movement of these workers to rural areas constituted a serious risk of spread of COVID-19, a fact that has remained unsubstantiated.

By the end of the first week of April, the government submitted that about 6.3 lakh workers were in shelters run by governments in different parts of the country, while another 4.5 lakh were in shelters run by NGOs and others. Nearly 10 million workers were receiving food assistance through governmental and non-governmental sources. About 5 lakh to 6 lakh workers had reached their source States. As a matter of fact, reports from the ground suggest that a large proportion of intra-State migrants had trudged back home so the total returnees was probably closer to 25 million. At present, with about a million migrant workers in

shelters or quarantines, at least 20 million such workers are still stranded at worksites or living in hovels. Most of these, as successive surveys attest, have not been able to avail of any food or cash assistance, and are on the brink of starvation.

Shifting the burden

On April 19, the Indian government issued a standard operating protocol on movement of stranded labour, permitting the movement and employment of stranded migrant workers in worksites only within the States in which they were involuntarily detained in shelters. On April 29, the Central government issued another notification finally permitting stranded labourers and populations to travel inter-State to their homes only by buses. On May 1, the Railways were permitted to run special trains for migrants with coordination and costs being borne by the States and, in some cases, fares being paid by the hapless migrants. The receiving States, it must be pointed out, are precisely those which have the weakest fiscal capacity. The ensuing confusion and delay has also increased the plight of the migrants. It goes without saying that it must be the responsibility of the Centre to coordinate the movement of the stranded populations by trains, air and buses, and to provide adequate resources, not only for transportation, but also for wages and food requirements of all such workers whose loss of jobs and incomes followed the national lockdown.

The fight against the pandemic can only be built on a vision of a society that is inclusive, equitable, and non-discriminatory. India needs a unified labour market and universal social security system which can ensure security, safety, and dignity to all workers. Pandemics do not recognise artificial walls between living spaces and work spaces, and both have to be able to provide basic amenities and access to health security to all. However, it seems that current policy responses to the crisis and towards the migrants are still embedded in a short-sighted framework that recognises and reinforces the idea of two Indias.

Ravi Srivastava, former Professor of Economics at JNU, is now honorary Director of the Centre for Employment Studies, Institute for Human Development, Delhi

FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

Being wrong

Acknowledging and correcting a mistake is an essential element of ethical journalism



A.S. PANNEERSELVAN

The headline of this column written on World Press Freedom Day draws from a fascinating book by Kathryn Schulz, *Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error*. The 2010 book has some excellent observations about the three stages of committing errors: why we make mistakes, why we don't know we are making them, and what we do when recognition dawns.

COVID-19 has not reduced readers' expectations of a responsible newspaper. When they see any infraction in journalistic principles or humanistic values, they respond within hours, even during this pandemic. A front-page report with a Ghaziabad dateline, "2 priests found dead on U.P. temple premises" (April 29), triggered responses from readers. They cited my earlier columns – "Cloak-and-dagger words" (December 18, 2017) and "Why context matters" (August 20, 2018) – while registering their protest against the report. The memory of cyberspace cannot match the memories of committed readers.

A criminal act, not a hate crime

An academic friend asked whether the report passed the test I had spelt out on the use of religious or caste identity. I had argued that in cases of excesses – be it lynching or expulsion from a public space – the journalistic team, which comprises reporters and the desk, gives due consideration to human dignity in reporting, editing and providing headlines: "identities of victims are mentioned only when the victim's dignity is trampled upon because of her identity. The team makes a fundamental difference between a crime and a crime that is driven by hate and bigotry."

G. Selva, a reader from Kachaleswarar Agraharam in Chennai, was taken aback by the fact that the report mentioned the caste of the suspect. He wrote: "[The report] does not only openly state the caste of the suspect but also identifies the suspect as drug addict and thief. Therefore, it indirectly associates drug addiction and thievery with Scheduled Caste groups, in a society where Scheduled Castes are oppressed, excluded and stigmatised in everyday life. Moreover,

this news also carries the picture of the suspect being [taken by the police] in his underwear." News suggesting that a Scheduled Caste person is the suspect and was paraded half-naked is not only disturbing, but also has the potential to lead to further violence against Dalits, he said, allowing perpetrators to act with more impunity. Most readers in different ways said that direct identification of a suspect as belonging to a Scheduled Caste will only intensify stigmatisation.

The readers are right, and the newspaper was wrong in this instance. The U.P. crime cannot be treated as a hate crime. It is a mistake to identify a criminal act as a hate crime. The Editor had given specific instructions to the desk about the use of caste and religious identity in reports. But the slip-up happened and we can offer no excuses.

Not just the Readers' Editor, but the Editor too sometimes has to suffer the Sisyphean burden of witnessing mistakes like these, about which he had already warned the desk. There are manuals, style books and value statements that guide a newsroom, and the popular belief is that these should ensure flawless copy that adheres to the highest standards. The former Managing Editor, P. Jacob, while updating *The Hindu*'s in-house style book a couple of years ago, had remarked: "The style book should not be reduced to a rare reference book. It should be an essential part of the daily practice. Unless journalists internalise the features, the fear of slip-ups and mistakes looms large."

A tricky subject

Handling caste in journalism is not an easy task. The desk must know when to name a community and when to refrain from doing so. This is not a form of self-censorship. One needs to understand the power of the caste hierarchy that perpetuates a dominance-dependency equation undermining our egalitarian imagination. Journalists must understand that their writing should uphold the dignity of people and not become a tool to humiliate them. Most importantly, one cannot permit the journalistic space to normalise any form of humiliation.

Apart from deadline pressures, a journalist sometimes tends to read what he assumed he wanted to say rather than what he had actually written. But a Readers' Editor has not only the benefit of time but also the advantage of collective scrutiny of a text. Acknowledging and correcting a mistake is an essential element of ethical journalism.

readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

BRICS against COVID-19

The New Development Bank's financial model can become a template to address natural disasters

ATUL ANEJA

In the global war against the novel coronavirus, emerging economies, many belonging to BRICS, have reached out to other countries humbled by the pandemic. India has reinforced its credentials as a rapidly emerging pharmacy of the world. As the world's largest producer of hydroxychloroquine, India has recently exported the drug not only to SAARC countries and to its "extended neighbourhood" in the Gulf, but also to Russia, Brazil, Israel and the U.S. This has set the stage for India to forge an inclusive BRICS-driven pharma alliance, which could also actively explore the production of vaccines.



tional Airport. Since Soviet times, Russia has top-of-the-line emergency services, which are equipped to handle any kind of emergency including biological attacks, nuclear radiation, and chemical weapon attacks.

On the African continent, South Africa, the current rotating head of the African Union, is engaged in framing a pan-African response to COVID-19. Among the BRICS nations, only Brazil's response may need a course correction, as its resistance to breaking the infection chains through travel bans, lockdowns, isolation and testing appears to have led to an infection surge.

Time to coordinate efforts

Having demonstrated their comparative strengths as providers of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), BRICS countries now need to pool and coordinate their efforts, in partnership with the WHO, and Europe and North America, both badly affected by the pandemic, as part of a global assault on the virus. But for seeding a robust institutional HADR response, the BRICS countries may have to reactivate an existing disaster response mechanism, and earmark resources and assets to combat a whole range of natural disasters, with special focus on the emerging economies and the global south.

The Shanghai-based New Development Bank of the BRICS countries has already demonstrated the way forward to allocate financial resources to combat COVID-19. In April, during a meeting of the NDB Board of Governors, NDB President K.V. Kamath announced that apart from disbursing a \$1 billion emergency loan to China, and subsequently to India, South Africa and Brazil, the NDB had the financial heft to provide \$10 billion in "crisis-related assistance" to BRICS member countries. The NDB's financial model, demonstrated to address the pandemic, can now become a template to address natural disasters.

Despite fighting the virus at home, Russia too sent its doctors and virologists overseas, including the launch of the famous 'From Russia with love' air mission to Italy. At the request of U.S. President Donald Trump, a Russian Antonov-124, packed with medical supplies and experts, landed at New York's John F. Kennedy Interna-



LOCKDOWN UPDATE
MOBI 2.0 LOCKDOWN 3.0 WILL BEGIN
INSTALLING IN A FEW SECONDS
INSTALL NOW
IF YOU DON'T, IT WILL AUTOMATICALLY
UPDATE PAST MIDNIGHT

DATA POINT

Distress continues

1. RATIONS | The chart depicts the % of workers who did not have access to govt. rations between April 14 and April 26 in four major States and the overall trend for the surveyed States

3. INSUFFICIENT FUNDS | In all States, over 90% workers who reached out between Apr. 14 and Apr. 26 said they did not receive cash assistance from the govt. In T.N., 97% were not paid during the lockdown and in Punjab, 84% had less than ₹100 remaining

As the nationwide lockdown to limit the spread of COVID-19 has been extended until May 17, stranded migrant workers continue to bear the brunt of it, data show. The numbers, compiled and presented by the Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN), were collected from 16,863 distressed workers who reached out to SWAN volunteers from different parts of the country as of April 26.

2. COOKED FOOD | The chart depicts the % of workers who did not have access to cooked food from any source between April 14 and April 26. Delhi and Haryana fared relatively better

4. FUTURE PLANS | Most migrant workers who reached out from Delhi and Haryana (35%) and Tamil Nadu (33%) were unsure of what to do post-lockdown. Most from Maharashtra (31%), Karnataka (49%) and Punjab (48%) said they will continue in the same line of work with the same employer. A relatively smaller % of workers said they will find work in their hometown

Plans post lockdown	Maharashtra	Karnataka	Delhi and Haryana	Punjab	Tamil Nadu
Continue in the same line of work/same employer	31%	49%	25%	48%	28%
Earn some money and leave	3%	1%	12%	3%	0
Leave, but return after sometime	25%	10%	17%	5%	11%
Find work in hometown	13%	13%	11%	3%	28%
Unsure	29%	27%	35%	40%	33%

The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 4, 1970

India and Nepal

King Mahendra, who recently set himself up as interim Chairman of his own Council of Ministers, has now appointed a Royal Council under his son and heir, Prince Birendra, to look after routine State affairs during his convalescence. The King is reported to be recovering from an attack of chicken-pox. King Mahendra is the fountain of all power in Nepal, and he is of the opinion that the panchayati system alone is fitted to his country. But there are demands from certain sections of his people for some modifications at least in the three-tier system of panchayat elections and for more civil liberties. The King may eventually have to satisfy these demands. Relations between India and Nepal have been passing through a difficult stage in recent months and Indian personnel who had been doing useful work in that kingdom are being progressively withdrawn. Indian wireless operators from eight checkpoints on the Nepal-Tibetan border have returned home and others will return by the end of this year.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 4, 1920

Khilafat and non co-operation

At the request of the Madras Khilafat Committee, Mr. C. Rajagopalachari addressed a political meeting of Hindus and Mohammedans on the subject of the "Khilafat and non co-operation". Mr. Rajagopalachari, who spoke for nearly an hour and a half, devoted a good portion of his speech to answer certain adverse criticisms made by Mr. C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar and Dr. Subramania Iyer in the volumes of the "New India" paper in respect of the Resolution on Non Co-operation passed at the Khilafat Conference held recently in this city. The speaker said that he agreed to the view expressed by Dr. Subramania Iyer "that the interests of India are inevitably bound up with the maintenance of British power as long as it is possible to preserve it by every legitimate means," but he protested emphatically against his statement "that I cannot as a Hindu subject of the Empire consent to co-operate with other subjects in it who would seek to destroy the British power on grounds not strictly connected with the Indian interests." Far from Muslim British subjects in this country seeking to destroy the British power, they sought to get the British Government resolve the Khilafat problem so as to continue to maintain their power.

FROM PAGE ONE

20 central teams to monitor hotspots

Data from State Health Departments put the nationwide death toll at 1,389. The number of positive cases overall stood at 42,037, with 29,965 active ones. Mumbai reported 441 new cases and 21 deaths, taking the total number of cases to 8,613 and fatalities to 343, an BMC official said.

Fewer tests

India is one of 11 countries that have tested over one million samples, with the latest Health Ministry update reporting 74,000 tests a day. However, at just 758 tests per million of population, India ranks among countries that have tested the lowest fraction of their population.

In an interview to the Press Trust of India, NITI Aayog Member, V.K. Paul said extending India's lockdown was part of a plan to curb infection transmission.

"...Real goal of lockdown was to suppress the chain of transmission of the virus."

Colonel, Major among 5 personnel killed in J&K

Colonel Sharma, Commanding Officer of the Army's 21 Rashtriya Rifles, was stationed in Handwara.

Army sources said the militants, who were in a cowshed, were presumed dead on Saturday evening after the exchange of fire stopped for over one hour. The operation against the militants, who escaped from the Rajwara forests on Friday afternoon, was launched around 3.30 p.m. on Saturday.

The Army officers and their team went into the house near the cowshed to "rescue the civilians", but their communication with the search-and-operation personnel outside got disconnected, forcing them to hold fire for the whole night. The operation was also "slowed down" by heavy rain and thunder, police sources said.

They said the officers found themselves in front of the militants, who had sneaked in from the rear of the house. "Two weapons and a war-like store were also found at the site," officials said.

Six injured in blast

In a separate incident, six civilians were injured when four boys fiddled with an unattended explosive at Ahgam in Handwara, the police said. The area is 3 km-4 km from the site of the encounter. The police did not reveal the details of the blast.

Colonel Ashutosh Sharma and sub-inspector Qazi were known for their successful anti-militancy operations and their meticulous planning, which earned them gallantry awards in

So, we will lose that if we abruptly end it," Mr. Paul said.

On April 25, Mr. Paul, who also heads a key government empowered committee on medical management, presented a study to suggest that the lockdown had slowed the rate of transmission and increased the doubling time to about 10 days. He also presented an analysis showing that new cases would cease by May 16, though – as *The Hindu* had reported – this was a guesstimate and questioned by experts.

Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said on Sunday that the rate of growth in new cases in India was steady. "As per data today, for the past three days, the doubling rate is 12; for seven days 11.7 and for 14 days its 10.4. We need to adhere to strict physical distancing and hand hygiene to take lockdown 3.0 to a logical end," a release quoted the Minister as saying.

Though public transport



Colonel Ashutosh Sharma

the past. "I salute the bravehearts who made the supreme sacrifice in Kashmir. Proud leaders like Colonel Ashutosh Sharma, the CO [Commanding Officer], who led from the front. He had been decorated with Sena Medal twice earlier too," said Lt. Gen. Satish Dua, who served as General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the Srinagar-based 15 Corps during 2015-16.

Brigadier Chandrakant Sood (retired), father of Major Anuj Sood, said his son had made "a supreme sacrifice".

"It was part of his duty and what he was trained for. I feel sad for his wife as they got married three or four months back," he was quoted as saying by a Delhi-based wire service.

The Ministry said a review was prompted by the "fast evolving broadcasting technology" and "changes in the market scenarios". It has called for suggestions from

In a recent social media post, Major Sood wrote: "When you're older, you will realise the only thing that matters, the only thing, is that you had courage and honour. Lose those things and you won't die any quicker, but you'll be less than the dirt on your boots. You'll still be dust, but you'll have wasted your short time in the light."

A police spokesman in Srinagar said sub-inspector Qazi, "led various successful anti-terror operations".

Economic recovery may take over a year'

The CII suggested that full industrial operations could be restarted in these priority districts, even within containment zones, if aggressive door-to-door testing, or group testing covering 100% of the population is carried out, and stringent sanitisation and distancing protocols are followed.

Personal protective equipment would be provided free of cost for all within the industrial unit. Workers would have to be housed on the premises or within walking distance, and both raw materials and finished goods would be disinfected and kept in isolation for 72 hours before use.

At the end of the day, the CII argued that a cost benefit analysis favours such an approach. "The cost of undertaking precautionary measures by way of repeated sanitisation, wearing of PPE,

masks, monitoring, group testing etc. will be much less than the economic loss if businesses in such high performing districts have to remain shut for a longer duration," said CII Director General Chandraprat Banerjee.

The poll of CEOs, the majority of whom belong to the crucial MSME sector, showed that almost two-thirds of respondents expect their revenues to fall more than 40% in the current April to June 2020 quarter. For the full financial year 2020-21, a third of respondents still expect a more than 40% revenue fall, while another third expect their topline to drop between 20% and 40%. Most of the firms polled expect domestic demand to recover faster than exports. Only 18% do not expect job losses in their sector. Only 35% have faced salary reductions in their own firms so far.

Centre reviews health situation

Ministry issues clarification on order allowing movement of stranded persons

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI



Long wait: A ticket collector checking the tickets of migrant workers inside a special train to Agra on May 2. ■ AP

Days after it allowed movement of stranded migrants, pilgrims and tourists during the extended lockdown period, the Union Home Ministry on Sunday clarified that the order was for "stranded persons who had moved from their native places and workplaces just before the lockdown but could not return due to the restrictions".

In a letter to the States, Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla said the "facilitation envisaged in the order is meant for such distressed persons" and does not extend to those category of persons who are "residing normally at places other than native places for purposes of work etc. and who wish to visit their native places in normal course".

Though public transport

remains suspended, the Railways is running special trains to facilitate the movement of stranded persons.

Short on infrastructure'

On Sunday, Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba held a video-conference with the Chief Secretaries and Directors-General of Police of States and Union Territories to discuss the health scenario in the wake of the extend-

ed lockdown. Nine out of 20 districts, where most COVID-19 positive cases have been reported, are "short on infrastructure," the States were informed at the meet-

In zones where high rate of deaths were reported and those facing shortage of healthcare workers, the Centre has asked States to "borrow staff from adjacent districts, hire private doctors

on a contractual basis and explore the possibility of engaging retired professionals, final year medical students, NGOs etc."

A presentation, 'Public Health Response COVID-19', by the Health and Family Welfare Ministry, said "20 districts account for 68% active cases and 72% deaths."

It said that in eight districts – Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Central Delhi, North Delhi, Kolkata, Kanpur Nagar (Uttar Pradesh) and Krishna (Andhra Pradesh) – the doubling rate was faster than 10 days.

The Ministry released guidelines to prevent spread of COVID-19 in prisons and correctional homes. It asked police to collect information from persons being arrested about their travel history, cough, fever symptoms or recent contacts.

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Air warriors salute bravehearts on the ground

Fighter jets and helicopters shower flowers on hospitals across India to honour health workers fighting the pandemic

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Three formations of Su-30MKI, MiG-29 and Jaguar fighter jets and C-130 transport aircraft of the Indian Air Force performed a flypast on Rajpath here on Sunday which is otherwise only done during the Republic Day parade. The display was part of the efforts of the armed forces to show gratitude to all corona warriors. Fighter jets carried out flypasts over several cities across the country, while military helicopters showered petals on hospitals treating COVID-19 patients.

"Two C-130J transport aircraft flew from Srinagar to Kanyakumari on the north-south leg. The east-west leg was done by three Su-30MKI jets from Dibrugarh to Ahmedabad," the IAF said in a statement. The aircraft flew between a height of 500 metres and 1,000 metres keeping aerospace safety in mind especially with respect to bird activity.

35 aircraft

In all, the IAF said 35 aircraft were utilised – 10 fighters, four transport aircraft and 20 helicopters. IAF helicopters dropped flower petals on 20 cities and 58 hospitals across India.

The efforts of the armed forces began at 9.30 a.m. with the laying of wreaths at the national police memorial and showering of petals by an IAF Mi-17 helicopter to honour the sacrifices of the pol-



Mission Solidarity: Su-30 jets streak over Marine Drive in Mumbai, while health workers receive a shower of petals from helicopters in Guwahati and Bhopal. ■ VIVEK BENDRE, RITU RAJ KONWAR AND A.M. FARUQUI

ice across the country.

Appreciating the efforts of the armed forces, the Defence Ministry quoted Defence Minister Rajnath Singh as saying: "The armed forces

today organised several activities to express gratitude to the corona warriors who are battling against the pandemic. These frontline warriors are doing commendable work in strengthening the morale of all those involved in India's fight against COVID-19."

Navy personnel on board India's sole aircraft carrier

INS Vikramaditya expressed their appreciation by forming a human chain saying "Indian Navy salutes corona warriors".

"Personnel on board In-

dian Navy ships mission deployed from the west to east in the Indian Ocean region, expressed their appreciation and saluted the corona warriors including doctors, nurses, other health workers, sanitation staff and police personnel who have been relentlessly fighting against the COVID pandemic," the Navy said in a statement.

In all, 25 warships across nine port cities, including the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, were illuminated from 7.30 p.m. to midnight, the Navy stated. In addition, four mission-deployed ships took part to express their gratitude, while 15 helicopters and aircraft took part in showering flower petals and flypast in coastal cities.

Coast Guard ships were il-

luminated at 25 locations cov-

ering the entire coastline of

the country including And-

aman and Nicobar and Laksh-

adweep and Minicoy islands,

a statement said. A total of

46 ships and 10 helicopters

took part, it said.

Army and IAF bands visit-

ed COVID hospitals and

played tunes in an expres-

sion of gratitude. In New Del-

hi, helicopters showered pet-

als on 12 hospitals.

As the single biggest clus-

ter in the State and the sec-

ond largest cluster after

Mumbai, Ahmedabad has

reported 3,817 cases and

208 deaths so far. On Sun-

day, the city reported 274

cases and 23 deaths. The sit-

uation is alarming in the city

as the fatality rate stands at

5.5% and the recovery rate a

mere 14%. A total of 533 pa-

tients have recovered and

been discharged from hos-



Healthcare workers waiting for a patient in Ahmedabad on Sunday. ■ VIJAY SONEJI

pitals. The number of cases has only gone up despite the strict lockdown measures taken in the city, including two weeks of curfew in the containment zones and in the areas from where the high incidence has been re-

ported.

After Ahmedabad comes Surat, where 30 deaths have occurred and 686 cases have been reported and 156 patients have been discharged. Vadodara has reported 350 cases, 25 deaths and 146 cases of recovery.

The government has decided to continue the lockdown measures in Ahmedabad, Surat, Rajkot and Vadodara, despite some relaxations allowed by the Ministry of Home Affairs from Monday. "There will not be any relaxation in the main cities, and except for shops selling essentials, everything else will remain shut," said an official statement.

Six more deaths in Madhya Pradesh

49 new cases emerge, taking the tally to 2,837; 798 persons have recovered so far

STAFF REPORTER

BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh on Sunday reported six deaths owing to COVID-19, taking the total to 156, the Directorate of Health Services said.

Three persons died in Ujjain, two in Indore and one in Khandwa. The fatality rate in Ujjain, which has registered 156 cases and 30 deaths so far, climbed to 19.2%. The State-wide rate touched 5.5%, according to a bulletin issued by the Directorate.

Forty-nine fresh cases were reported. The tally now stands at 2,837. One hundred and seventy-four patients were discharged from hospitals after recovery.

As many as 798 persons, or 28% of those testing posi-



Grand welcome: Recovered patients at Chirayu Hospital in Bhopal when an IAF helicopter showered petals. ■ A.M. FARUQUI

Mr. Chouhan said the situation in the State was more or less under control. "The fatality rate is declining as is the positivity rate, but the crisis is not over yet. It is important to be attentive. If we are to win over it completely, we have to be disciplined and stick to the law," he said.

At a review meeting, I.C.P. Keshari, Additional Chief Secretary, Commercial Tax Department, and in-charge of the State Control Room, said around 4,000 workers were brought back from Gujarat on Sunday. Around 42,000 workers trapped in different districts of the State were transported to their native places in the past 8 days.

So far, 59,000 workers have been brought back to the State.

M.P. govt. denies 9,271 test results were unaccounted for

Number of positive and negative samples not provided

STAFF REPORTER

BERHAMPUR

After covering 1,836 km, the first special train with 24 coaches from Kerala carrying around 1,150 Odia migrant workers reached Jaganathpur station in Odisha's Ganjam district on Sunday morning. The migrants mostly worked at Perumbavoor and Aluva in Ernakulam district of Kerala and boarded the train in Aluva on Saturday evening. This is the second special train to transport stranded workers across the country. The first train had travelled from Telangana to Jharkhand. Jaganathpur on the outskirts of Berhampur was the first stoppage of this special train in Odisha, where over 511 migrant labourers got down.

The report was based on the data released by the State Directorate of Health Services through its media bulletin. P. Narahari, Secretary, Public Relations Department, said the data were being recomplied by the government.

In a rejoinder, he stated as of April 2, the number of cumulative samples received was 50,749, samples tested 46,578, samples rejected 1,542 and those under process were 2,629.

P. NARAHARI,
Secretary, Public Relations Department

which raised questions about accuracy of data maintained by the State government. The difference between the two metrics was at least 9,271 tests whose results were unaccounted for.

In the rejoinder, the number of positive and negative samples was not provided, neither was the variance between cumulative test reports received and the sum of samples that tested positive and negative disputed.

However, the report had instead stated there was a wide variance between the cumulative COVID-19 test reports received and the sum of samples that tested positive and negative until April 30 in Madhya Pradesh,

3,000 tests whose results were unaccounted for. The report was based on the data released by the State Directorate of Health Services through its media bulletin. P. Narahari, Secretary, Public Relations Department, said the data were being recomplied by the government.

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3,000 tests whose results were unaccounted for.

As per figures from the Health Department, Mumbai reported 21 fatalities, while four were reported from Pune city and one each from Bhivandi and Navi Mumbai.

Mumbai city reported 441 of the 678 new cases as the city's cumulative tally rose to 8,800 cases with 343 fatalities thus far.

As per figures from the Health Department, Mumbai reported 21 fatalities, while four were reported from Pune city and one each from Bhivandi and Navi Mumbai.

Mumbai city reported 441 of the 678 new cases as the city's cumulative tally rose to 8,800 cases with 343 fatalities thus far.

While the Health Department put Pune district figures at 1,396 active cases, the district administration put the number at 1,464, with a surge of at least 68 fresh cases today. According to the Health Department, Pune district's death toll stands at 106.

While the Health Department has not recorded any rise in the cases in the Pimpri-Chinchwad area, district officials reported six new cases on Sunday, including those of four women, among them a 71-year-old lady, and two youths in their early 20s.

Pimpri Chinchwad Muni-

cipal Corporation Commissioner Shrawan Hardikar has divided the township into 21 containment zones, sealing off the Pimple-Saudagar and Sangvi areas from where the fresh cases were reported.

Thane reports 28 cases

Other parts of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) saw a sharp spike in fresh cases as well, with Thane district reporting a rise of 28 new cases as its tally rose to 548, while Navi Mumbai reported 12 new cases as its cumulative tally touched 216, and Kalyan-Dombivli reported 17 new cases as its to-

tal tally rose to 212.

Malegaon in Nashik dis-

trict – a virus hotspot in north Maharashtra – reported a rise of 10 new cases (as per the State figures) as Nashik's tally surged to 284 active cases, of which 229

are from Malegaon city.

"There are 997 active con-

tainment zones in the State

currently. A total 11,078 sur-

veillance squads have screen-

ed more than 51 lakh peo-

ple till date. Presently,

1,81,832 people across the

State were in home quar-

antine and 13,158 persons were

in institutional quarantine

facilities," said Dr. Awate.

"The relaxation is applica-

ble in all districts marked

green zones. Assam has no

red zone and only four of

the 33 districts are marked

orange.

"All offices and business-

es allowed to function will

operate during the day hours

with sufficient time for em-

ployees to return home before

a total curfew starts from 6

p.m. to 6 a.m. until further

notice," Finance and Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Sunday.

Shops and offices will

have to close by 5 p.m.

All public and private sec-

torial offices will, howev-

er, be allowed to operate

with 50% employees, while

women employees who

have children below 5

years have been allowed to

stay home. Construction

activities have been per-

mitted with 50% workers.



Homeward bound: Migrants waiting to collect application forms for travel in Mumbai. ■ ARUNANGSU ROY CHOWDHURY

Dharavi reports 94 fresh cases

STAFF REPORTER

MUMBAI

Dharavi recorded 94 fresh cases on Sunday, the highest single-day rise so far, pushing the total number to 590. It recorded two deaths, bringing the tally to 20.

A 54-year-old man died.

Mahim, which falls under the same G North Ward as Dharavi, reported 16 fresh cases, including one death, on Sunday.

INTERVIEW | SAUD BIN MOHAMMED AL SATI

'Saudi investments in India on track despite economic downturn'

We will continue to invest in India as our strategic partnership continues to deepen in all sectors, says the Kingdom's Ambassador

SUHASINI HAIDAR

NEW DELHI

Despite a massive 50% drop in oil revenues and a downturn in the economy, Saudi Arabia's investments in India will not be affected, says Saud bin Mohammed Al Sati, the Kingdom's Ambassador to India, in a written interview, adding that worries of retrenchments in the country are premature.

What measures has Saudi Arabia adopted to counter the virus? Has the kingdom, like Kuwait and the UAE, requested Indian medical teams to help manage the situation, and also treat Indians who may be affected?

■ There are a large number of expatriates living in Saudi Arabia, which includes around three million Indians. As per King Salman's royal decree, the kingdom is providing coronavirus-related medical care free of charge to all residents in the

country, including those who are staying illegally in the kingdom.

As for the Indian medical professionals, some of them were on leave when the COVID pandemic hit. We have been working closely with the Government of India to ensure that they are able to return to Saudi Arabia. There is also the continuation of medical exports from India to the Saudi market.

Saudi Arabia's General Directorate of Passports has also decided to extend the validity of exit and return visas that expire between Febru-

ary 25 and May 24, 2020, at no charge. The extension will continue for an additional three months for them.

How many Indians are estimated to require to return from Saudi Arabia, and what can you tell us about the preparations and arrangements made in Saudi Arabia for food and shelter for stranded Indians?

■ In Saudi Arabia, these numbers are relatively small. Most of the Indian nationals who will be coming back in the coming days are people whose contracts have ended or those who would like to go home for personal reasons or were Umrah pilgrims who weren't able to return on time because of the suspension of flights.

Considering the large In-



■ We are cooperating with India to make sure that all those who would like to come back can be accommodated

dian community in the kingdom, these numbers are within the range of several thousands. In addition to this, there will be those who may get short-term leave

from their employers until business activities can revert to their usual state before lockdown. We are cooperating to make sure that those who would like to come back can be accommodated.

There are worries in India that there will be massive retrenchments in Saudi Arabia, owing to falling revenues, and many Indian migrants will lose their jobs. How can India and Saudi Arabia cooperate to mitigate these losses?

■ While efforts in the kingdom and regionally are being focused towards combating COVID-19, efforts are also made to ensure that people don't lose their jobs. It should be noted though that even in this environment, the kingdom did not an-

ounce any intentions to delay any projects. Activities will resume to what they were before the pandemic hit. This will be across all economic sectors as the situation stabilises and the markets gradually continue to open.

Last September, you had said that Saudi Arabia had planned investments in India worth \$100 billion in various areas, including oil infrastructure. Would these investments be affected by the economic impact of the COVID-19 outbreak?

■ These investments were announced during the historic visit of HRH Crown Prince to India in February 2019. Meetings of ministerial committees concerning investment, energy, trade, poli-

tical and security cooperation, and senior officials meetings for the same will be convened soon.

India is one of the fastest growing economies today and also one of the largest.

We will continue to invest in India as our strategic partnership continues to deepen in all sectors. Our plans regarding investment in India are on track.

In particular, what will be the impact due to a fall in Aramco's profits (21%) on its projected investment in India?

■ As I said, our plans to invest in India remain on track as of now.

The OIC, which is headquartered in Saudi Arabia, issued a strong statement this month calling on India to protect its minorities, and spoke of a "growing tide of Islamophobia". Has this been discussed bilaterally, and what is Saudi Arabia's position on the OIC statement?

■ I think I answered this question. Our investment plans are on track.

I ask because Saudi Finance Minister Muhammad Al Jadaan has just said that

I would rather not comment about this. This is not a bilateral issue for us.

EPFO staff
donate ₹2.5 cr.
to PM CARES

27 Bangladeshis held in Assam

Bangladeshi diplomat says they were stranded because of the lockdown

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The staff of the Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) have contributed ₹2.5 crore – one day's salary – to the PM CARES Fund to counter the COVID-19 pandemic, the EPFO said in a statement on Sunday.

... Officers and staff of EPFO are also contributing by putting in extra efforts for providing relief by expeditiously processing EPF withdrawal claims, including COVID claims under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana package, etc," the EPFO said.

Since the scheme was rolled out on March 28, over 7.4 lakh claims under the special pandemic withdrawal scheme had been processed as on April 28, it said

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The police in western Assam's Dhubri district on Sunday detained 27 Bangladeshi nationals, who had entered the State on a tourist visa before the COVID-19 lockdown but were found to have been working for a contractor in the eastern part.

The 27 persons, travelling on two minibuses that were seized, were caught during a routine check at Bahalpur under the Chapar police station.

The police said they were studying the travel documents of the 27 people and organising their health check-up.

Dhubri Deputy Commissioner Anant Lal Gyani said the vehicles had come from Jorhat in eastern Assam, 470 km from Chapar, on curfew

passes issued in the name of a local contractor for inter-district travel.

"They said they came to Assam on a tourist visa before the lockdown, but according to the rules you cannot work with such a visa. They could not answer the questions of the police properly, but said they were

keen on returning to Bangladesh," he told *The Hindu* from Dhubri town.

"Right now, they are being detained. We are trying to find out whether their passports are fake or expired. Action will be taken according to the relevant law if their papers are not in order," said District Superintendent of

Police Yuvraj. Police officials investigating the case said some of the Bangladeshi nationals claimed to be involved in fishery.

'Stuck in the State'

A Bangladeshi diplomat posted in eastern India said the Bangladeshi High Commission could arrange for their travel back home if the State government raised the issue formally.

"We have already sent back more than 40 Bangladeshi nationals. In all probability, these people were stuck in Assam, but their overstays should not be a punishable offence given the relaxation of visa terms for the lockdown," he said.

He said the people should have informed the High Commission of their travel plan in Assam.

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This is almost equal to two-and-a-half months' supply in normal situations

T. RAMAKRISHNAN

CHENNAI

The Food Corporation of India (FCI) has supplied around 126 lakh tonnes of food grains to States and union territories under the norms of the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and other schemes, according to D.V. Prasad, FCI Chairman and Managing Director.

Between March 25 and April 30, States and union territories obtained 37.13 lakh tonnes of wheat and 89 tonnes of rice, totalling

126.13 lakh tonnes.

On an average, every month, the FCI issues around 50 lakh tonnes of food grains to States and union territories under the norms of the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and other schemes, according to D.V. Prasad, FCI Chairman and Managing Director.

Of the five zones in the country, the northern zone was given the maximum of 39.95 lakh tonnes; southern zone - 29.18 lakh tonnes,

followed by the east - 28.33 lakh tonnes; west - 23.03 lakh tonnes and the north-

Increase in supplies

(in lakh tonnes)

Scheme	Rice	Wheat	Total
NFSA (regular)	26.58	23.30	49.88
PMGKAY	54.23	7.58	61.82
Non-NFSA cardholders	1.55	0.81	2.36
Other welfare schemes	1.29	1.00	2.29
Open market sales scheme	5.31	4.43	9.73
GRAND TOTAL**	89	37.13	126.13

*Lockdown refers to the period from March 25 to April 30

**Grand total figures for rice and wheat include quantities of foodgrains issued to non-governmental and charitable organisations

SOURCE: FOOD CORPORATION OF INDIA

sal is the implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana (PMGKAY), under which beneficiaries of the NFSA are given 5 kg of food grains each per month free of cost for three months (April - June) over and above their monthly entitlement of 5 kg per person.

have been positioned across the country to meet demands of the State governments for feeding the people affected due to COVID-19, Mr. Prasad points out.

During April, the FCI moved 60 lakh tonnes of food grains to its godowns across the country, a record quantity, surpassing the previous high of 38 lakh tonnes in March 2014. This included transportation of about one lakh tonnes by road to the Kashmir Valley and Leh/Ladakh as well as about 81,000 tonnes to Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya in the north-east.

Enough stock

Nearly 62 lakh tonnes of food grains have been lifted by the States under the PMGKAY and this is about

50% of the total allotment of around 120 lakh tonnes.

Enough food grains stocks

Tripura groups oppose settlement of Brus

They warn of demographic imbalance

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GUWAHATI

Amid the COVID-19 lockdown, two community-specific groups have renewed their opposition to the permanent settlement of Bru refugees from Mizoram in Tripura.

A joint team of the Nagarkriti Suraksha Mancha, mostly representing Bengali people displaced from erstwhile East Pakistan post-partition in 1947, and the Mizo Convention on May 2 submitted a memo-

126 lakh tonnes of food grains given to States: FCI

This is almost equal to two-and-a-half months' supply in normal situations

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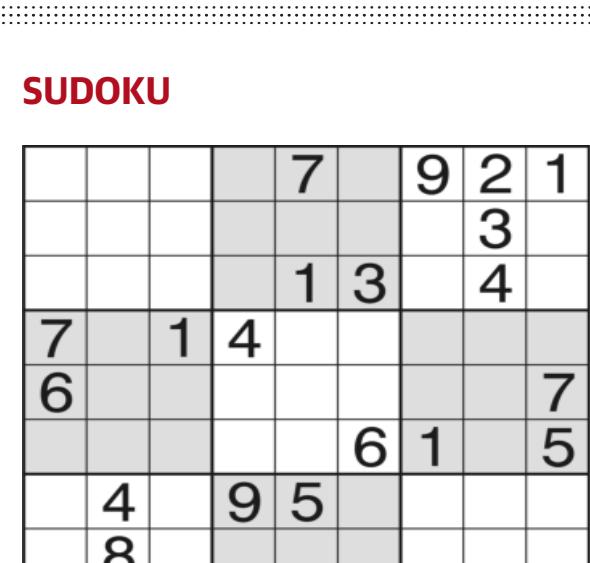
followed by the east - 28.33 lakh tonnes; west - 23.03 lakh tonnes and the north-

east - 5.63 lakh tonnes.

What has contributed to the steep hike in the disbur-

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

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Solution to puzzle 12925

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

Grief too deep

Having ensured that Rama, Lakshmana and Sita were proceeding to Chitrakuta, Sumantra returns with a heavy heart to a desolate Ayodhya. Parting with near and dear ones can cause untold grief and Valmiki captures the pathos of the situation with accuracy and realism, pointed out Swami Paramasukhanda in a discourse. Grief does not spare anyone and takes its toll on all from the greatest to the simplest in an impartial manner. Could there have been anyone more fortunate and blessed than Dasaratha who was specially selected by the Supreme Lord to be His father during Rama avatar? This scion of the Ikshvaku clan was also reputed for his righteous reign and extraordinary valour.

But now Dasaratha bewails the lot that has befallen on Rama, Sita and Lakshmana who did not in any way deserve the hardships of forest life. He is immersed deep in the ocean of grief and as he struggles to cope with this, he is eager to hear their parting message from Sumantra. Rama offers His respects and obeisance to all. He asks His father to abide by dharma and

EDUCATION PLUS

GET THE EDGE

PURUSHOTTAM BASAVA AND SMARTHVEER SIDANA

COVID-19 is bringing about a whole set of new challenges in every possible realm; higher education being just one. Given the rapidly evolving situation around the pandemic, has this forced shift from offline to online mode of teaching-learning given us a peek into the reality ahead? How will COVID-19 transform the future of teaching-learning?

Technology-enabled teaching is definitely the future we are looking towards, but will it be easy to make this transition? How should different stakeholders contribute to ensure a smooth transition? It is important to identify key challenges for students and teachers in the current scenario. Once identified, academic leadership and the government can address these through innovations in focus areas. Here is a list:

1 Semester completion

Challenge: Since neither students nor teachers were prepared for this sudden lockdown, it has become difficult for them to continue as per the original plan.

Focus area: Emphasis should be given to develop a robust plan in order to complete semesters and ensure degree completion of final-year students. The academic plan needs to be modified in order to suit the current situation, changing both teaching and assessment methods. Shift from offline to online methods should be encouraged – building technology infrastructure to deliver content, strengthening the existing Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) content platforms like Swayam, along with promoting innovative personalised teaching-learning platforms, teacher training and student awareness will be key. As a short-term solution,



The new normal

With the pandemic set to transform higher education as we know it, there are huge challenges before us, as well as room for innovation

allowing course completion via Swayam as a substitute for course requirements within universities can address this crisis.

In the long run, these investments will help ensure personalised teaching-learning in the classroom, along with reducing the workload on the teacher. However, ed-tech models pose a huge scalability challenge given the limited Internet penetration.

Hence, a blend of traditional and online methods of teaching-learning could emerge as the more feasible and scalable model.

2 Jobs and internship opportunities

Challenge: Some com-

panies are rescinding job/internship offers after being negatively impacted by COVID-19. Junior students are finding it harder to find internships, especially foreign research opportunities, which play a key role in interdisciplinary research and exposure to global research facilities.

Focus area: New project opportunities by universities and within government institutions should be floated and due recognition given. In the long run, leadership within universities and government institutions should push policies to motivate and support an entrepreneurial ecosystem within colleges by setting up more innovation and

incubation centres, grants/fellowships to pursue start-up ideas and flexible policies for deferred placement for start-up enthusiasts.

3 Psychological disturbance

Challenge: It is normal for faculty and students to undergo stress because of the uncertainty they are facing. Not being able to carry on with a set routine will further add to their anxiety and affect their mental health.

Focus area: A proper psychological support system needs to be established through courses/curriculum and training. Focus should be on maintaining mental

well-being in these difficult times.

4 Innovation through research (COVID-19-related research)

Challenge: Even though many students and faculty are coming together to find a solution to COVID-19, the lack of financial support in the form of a dedicated COVID-19 research grant might hold them back.

Focus area: Faculty and students should be encouraged to undertake research, and proper funding for it should be ensured by the university, industry and government Institutions

In the long run for non-COVID-related research

Challenge: Companies might show a lack of interest and funds to sponsor non-COVID-19 research due to a

falling economy, and give more preference to COVID-19 research. This can lead to tech research being compromised in the long run.

Focus area: A policy needs to be in place to ensure proper financial support for all kinds of research, whether COVID-19 related or not. The proposed National Research Foundation will address the challenges mentioned above, and it is imperative that it is set up at the earliest.

5 Spending on tech infrastructure:

Challenge: Universities will suddenly need to invest huge amounts to establish a tech-enabled teaching-learning network. This will be a problem with most private universities who are already asset heavy and hence may hesitate to spend more money during times of recession.

It is important to identify key challenges for students and teachers, in the current scenario. Once identified, academic leadership and the government can address these through innovations in focus areas.

Focus area: Private universities should come up with innovative solutions and use open-source platforms for digital transformation and to build their tech infrastructure.

6 Reduced paying capacity of parents

Challenge: This will be a time of global recession, with many people experiencing financial difficulties. The gap between private and public mode of education will further increase because of the sudden requirement of a digital facility – creating even more problems for students from middle and lower classes.

Focus area: New avenues for scholarships and loans should be opened, enabling students to complete their higher education, get placed, and repay the loan.

In short, to move forward post the pandemic phase, it is important to:

1. Build a robust infrastructure for tech-enabled teaching-learning, ensuring both students and teachers are fully equipped for the digital transformation in higher education

2. Create a three-way communication channel between students, teachers and the government, which operates offline and online and bridges the teaching-learning gaps in areas without an Internet/4G access.

3. Relax criteria/policies for universities to offer online and hybrid degrees. This will enable universities to cater

to a much wider audience in tier-2 and tier-3 cities, making degree certifications much more economical and logically easier.

4. Boost counsellor/teacher capacity to provide psychological support within institutions, catering to the growing mental health issues. Teachers should be trained to understand their students' mental health needs.

5. Build, maintain, and fund entrepreneurial ecosystems in universities, leading to job creation in the short run and boosting the economy in future.

6. Increase upper cap over financial support for biotech research projects, to ensure there is no constraint for students/faculty doing COVID-19 related research.

7. Push collaboration for interdisciplinary research. For example, motivating research across engineering, medical and management, which may bring innovative outcomes.

8. Set up Disaster Management Research Centres. All universities must have a mandatory course on Disaster Management to ensure that everyone is prepared for a sudden crisis like this one and can ensure least damage.

We must remember that this is only a phase and this too shall pass. However, we must make sure that it does not create a long-term impact, which is difficult to mend. It will take a huge amount of public and private sector investment, in terms of time and money, to tackle this impending educational crisis.

Disclaimer: Views are personal and do not represent the views of work organisations of the authors.

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ENTERPRISE

PAROMITA PAIN

When campuses across the U.S. were starting to shut down because of COVID-19, Shravya Gurrapu and Elena Mosse realised that this was only a glimpse of the challenges that people, especially students like them, around the globe were confronting. In a bid to contribute in these physically isolating times, they helped launch CoviDB.org (<https://covidb.org/>), a crowd-sourced education platform, which works a bit like Wikipedia, to serve as a directory of verified information pertaining to various topics ranging from health to the pandemic's effects on the economy to country-specific statistics. For example, if you are looking for different low-tech solutions people in India were using to combat the COVID-19, you will find various resources from the Medical Council of India as well as links from trusted media sources providing information.

Launched on April 6, with students and alumni from Stanford University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard University, Dartmouth College, and the University of Colorado at Boulder, as well as others around the world, CoviDB.org has more than 123 active members globally, involved with the execution and maintenance of the site and future initiatives. Among the plethora of information found online, CoviDB stands out because it seeks to be a one-stop hub with verified information from all parts of the world. The key is the fact-checked information that the site makes available.



Type, Search, READY

CoviDB stands out because it seeks to be a one-stop hub with verified information from all parts of the world.

Aid, which helped compile and distribute resources for Stanford students affected by the campus closures. "Being sheltered in our homes, it felt like there was so little we could do to help with the incomprehensibly massive problems," they say. "We wanted to support our communities in ways we were equipped to during these challenging times."

Shravya and Elena reached out to their mentors at TeachAids who encouraged them to think big. "Given the international urgency, TeachAids was also contemplating various projects to support COVID-19. Together, we created CoviDB," they say. This initiative was conceived, built, and launched in one week by a group working entirely remotely while social distancing. Launching under the TeachAids infrastructure meant that CoviDB could build upon a diverse array of skill sets and ex-

pertise that their volunteers, researchers and industry experts would bring to the project. Their team consists of programmers coding as early as ninth standard, senior citizens contributing resources on ways to protect the elderly, and dozens of professionals in between. There is no age limit on who can submit information but TeachAids subject matter experts ensure that the content on the site is reliable and trustworthy.

Resources such as the WHO, CDC, and other government sites serve the latest information regarding COVID-19 from a mostly medical and public

CoviDB.org has more than 123 active members globally, involved with the execution and maintenance of the site and future initiatives.

health perspective. But, as Dr. Piya Sorcar of TeachAids says, "COVID-19 is affecting people more than just medically; it's impacting education, finances, the economy, mental health, and more. People need to find resources to help support the parts of their lives that are being impacted, and CoviDB serves to fill that need." For example, a recent link provides information on a consortium that seeks to assist families coping with the fallout of the pandemic. Participants are encouraged to submit resources online through the site through the "Add a resource" link (<https://covidb.org/Add>) or email the team at info@covidb.org.

Students, interns and volunteers are an integral part of TeachAids. Together, they worked night and day taking a simple idea and transforming it into a growing movement. Dr. Sorcar

says students in particular play a key role in spreading information during this time. "Our young TeachAids volunteers are well-versed in online technologies and are poised to reach out to their friends despite where they live."

With the immediate challenges around COVID-19, Shravya and Elena were recently asked to speak at a graduate level course at the University of Nevada, Reno, where a group of students were eager to help and spread the word about this initiative. "The discussions on how we could make the CoviDB database even more accessible to the global population was insightful," they said. Leadership at CoviDB is eager to have participants from India and say, "Our team's plan is to create a hub of information about COVID-19 that cuts across boundaries and is ultimately of help to anyone seeking real, verified information about the virus across the globe."

Timely and verified

Given the urgency of the matter, the team also had to overcome a number of challenges. As Dr. Sorcar explains, "We were working against ever-changing information on the disease. The taxonomy was built to answer today's questions, but tomorrow is still unknown and unanswered." They will continue to plan additional features and filters in the coming weeks and months. To be most impactful, CoviDB needs as much verified content as possible. This is particularly important from around the world where countries have been able to reduce infection rates quickly as well as locations where the virus has not peaked yet. Making critical resources available in English, and expansions into other languages, will be an ongoing challenge during this time. That's why CoviDB needs your help. All resources can be easily uploaded via their website where the content is then vetted by global experts.

The writer is an Assistant Professor, Global Media Studies, University of Nevada, Reno. <https://deekshapainpani.com/>

ETCETERA

Virtual classes during COVID-19 shutdown

The COVID-19 outbreak and the resultant uncertainty has impacted schools and educational institutes across India. Rising to the occasion, JD Institute Fashion Technology has announced its full support to students so that the learning does not get affected. Rupal Dalal, executive Director, JD Institute of Fashion Technology, said, "We have taken steps to ensure our students' safety. Apart from disinfecting classrooms and distributing free masks to staff and helpers, we have started virtual classes for students, where queries are taken online and will continue until authorities announce a return to normal teaching."

Free bridge courses for PU science students

Deeksha has initiated a free 21-day online bridge course, which helps students who have completed their class X to transition smoothly into PUC science streams. The course focuses on important concepts, problem-solving and formulae in the core subjects of math, physics, chemistry and biology. The course will have six-day, four-hour classes. Post registration, students will be given a login ID and password to the Impartus platform where lectures are taught and later uploaded for access, along with live doubt clarification and homework. To register for the course, call 9513743874. For more details, visit <https://deekshalearning.com/>

Uninterrupted

learning for the underprivileged

Social enterprise Avanti recently launched Sankalp, an app to help students from government and Hindi-medium schools to ensure that there are no dropouts from the financially weaker sections. The free-of-cost e-learning facility will not be confined to the COVID-19 lockdown period, and will continue throughout the year as the social enterprise aims to be beneficial to weaker sections. The app integrates math and science curriculum for Hindi-medium government school students between classes IX and XII. For details, visit <https://avanti.in/>.

India's largest student-managed investment fund

Masters' Union School of Business, Gurugram, recently announced the launch of The Masters' Union Investment Fund, which has a corpus of ₹ 5 crore and will invest in real estate, capital markets, derivatives, stressed assets and startups. This idea behind a student-managed fund is to instil portfolio management skills in students as a part of the programme and offer them real-time exposure to different asset classes. The student fund-managers will be mentored by veterans from the industry who are teaching at Masters' Union. The students will begin investing from November this year, after their first trimester. Forty percent of the fund will be allocated to capital markets (debt, equities, futures), 30% to real estate, and the remaining to startups. For details, visit <https://mastersunion.org/>

GOWRI S

Weekly grocery runs are now characterised by masks, alcohol-based sanitiser bottles, and a pair of gloves, as people around the globe try to adhere to the norms of physical distancing while shopping for essentials. What do you do with groceries thereafter? On social media, we have seen some put veggies in the dishwasher; some scrub them down with alcohol-based wipes; and some soak them in potassium permanganate.

But when does caution become paranoia? We asked experts what the right way to clean groceries was, whether we were bringing them in or a delivery was. First though, "Remember that it is a respiratory virus we are dealing with: that it has to be inhaled to cause infection; and not ingested. So, that is what we need to safeguard against," says Dr Ravi Santosham, Chennai-based pulmonologist. However, maintaining this level of cleanliness and hygiene can reduce the possibility of contracting any aerosol or droplet-related infections, such as tuberculosis.

Processing it

Once you are back from your grocery run, head straight to the kitchen. Ideally, before leaving for the market, place all your cleaning implements near the sink. When you are back, dump your mask and gloves into the dustbin. Gloves should be removed in such a way that your bare fingers don't touch them. Wash/sun all the produce and bottles. Clean down the kitchen sink and area surrounding it like you usually would, with the regular wash you would use for your utensils. Head to the bathroom and wash your clothes immediately with detergent. Have a bath using soap and shampoo.

The big bag WORLD



How to handle packaging and produce when you are back from your grocery run

While on grocery runs

Keep at least a three to six-metre distance from people around. "Wearing masks is mandatory; there are a lot of asymptomatic carriers

who will be active and out and about. If everybody wears a mask, the safety is two-fold," continues Dr Santosham.



While shopping for groceries, one inevitably ends up touching many surfaces. Does a pair of gloves help? "It's not foolproof, though it has its advantages. When you have a pair of gloves (you can get them at a chemist) and a mask, the tendency to take your hand to your face reduces. You are instantly reminded that you should not be doing it," continues Dr Santosham.

How to handle food deliveries

Opting for contact-less deliveries (an option which is now enabled by both Swiggy and Zomato), helps a great deal, as the packet is left at one's doorstep, minimising contact with the delivery executive. According to Dr Santosham, once the item is taken in, immediately dispose of the extra packaging, including covers, bowls, and cardboard boxes, in a bin with a garbage bag. This can be taken outside and thrown into the main dump if accessible or left outside for the collection to take place. So try and plan deliveries for a time just before garbage collection happens. Transfer the cooked food to a clean container and heat the food before consumption.

**How to clean each item**

Vegetables and fruits: Rinsing them with soap is not a good idea, as there's the danger of ingesting soap, which can cause gastrointestinal distress leading to vomiting and diarrhoea when consumed in large quantities. Alcohol-based wipes have lab-made chemicals that are unsafe to ingest, and could have unknown long-term effects if used too often. If you've used it a couple of times in the past it won't have done much damage. Simply run tap water on vegetables and fruits for about 20 seconds (the same duration you would wash hands for). Dumping veggies in a dishwasher is inadvisable. "If you want to be doubly sure, lay out the vegetables in the sun for an hour or two before taking them into the house," adds Dr Santosham. There is no scientific proof that turmeric, rock salt vinegar or baking soda added to the water gets rid of a virus, but there is no harm doing it, since these are food items, so safe to ingest. Follow up by washing your hands with soap. Creating 'dunk tanks' where all vegetables are washed together in large quantities is also enough. "Potassium permanganate is an antiseptic and can be used, but there is no scientific backing to this," says Dr Santosham.

Eggs: The best way to clean eggs is to rinse them with water thoroughly.

Packets and cardboard boxes: These can be wiped down with alcohol-based wipes since you will not be ingesting it.

Tins and water cans: "Before you remove the seal, wash the can with running tap water and use hand wash to clean the nooks and crannies. Use after allowing it to dry," adds Dr Vinay D, Consultant and Head, Department of Infectious Diseases, Apollo Hospitals, Bengaluru.

THE CREAKING TREE

The pancreatic diaries



SHOVON CHOWDHURY

Since I'm in the middle of trying to write a book about Gandhi, this was all very useful. They say you should write what you know, and now, when it comes to enemas, I do. I also had my first ever CT scan, conducted by two men from Lucknow, who were extraordinarily polite. They injected me with blue dye, and kept asking me, with a mixture of concern and hope, whether it was hurting. They apologised repeatedly throughout the process. One of them may have kissed me on the forehead before sending me in, and periodically asked me to hold my breath in the nicest possible way.

During my stay, I was also exposed to different styles of nursing. Most of the nurses were from Kerala. They were competent, confident and multilingual, speaking both incomprehensible Hindi and incomprehensible English, depending on patient profile. Their contrasting approaches to patient care came out most vividly when the plaster and bandages connecting my needles needed to be removed. Some nurses were gentle and patient, coaxing off the sticky bits little by little, while others used it as an opportunity to strike a blow against patriarchy, yanking it off in one rapid movement, ignoring my high-pitched screams.

"This is what it's like when women have to wax," said one of them, which was deeply unfair. I have never asked anyone to wax in my life. Nevertheless, a hospital visit is a strong argument in favour of being nicer to women. You may justify your innate sense of male superiority using a combination of statistics, gut feel and the laws of Manu. But Manu never went to hospital, whereas you almost certainly will. When you do, remember that at some point, you will be alone, in the dark, strapped to a bed, and a woman will be holding the needle. Be nice now, before it's too late.

Otherwise this is not going to end well. And whatever else you do, be kinder to your pancreas.



No pancreases were harmed during the production of Shovon Chowdhury's most recent novel, *Murder With Bengali Characteristics*

■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

HYPE OR HAPPENING?

Speed keto

SUSAN JOE PHILIP

This restrictive diet has been devised by Harlan Kilstein, who calls himself "an author, entrepreneur, and lifestyle coach" in America. His website speedketo.com claims that the diet solves all the problems of a traditional keto diet, such as constantly having to count macronutrients or the weight loss stall that people experience after the body is in a state of ketosis for a while.

Speed keto combines keto and intermittent fasting. A typical keto diet consists of consuming fat- and protein-rich food, cutting down drastically on carbohydrates. Intermittent fasting, on the other hand, includes fasting for 16 hours and consuming food in an eight-hour period.

"In speed keto, a person will have only one high-fat low-carbohydrate food in a day. It puts the body in a state of ketosis where it burns body fat instead of glucose or sugar for its energy, thus leading to weight loss," says Priyanka Rohatgi, Chief Clinical Dietician and HOD, Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, Apollo Hospitals, Bengaluru.

Typically, it can take two-three days for the body to reach the state of ketosis. According to WebMD, ketosis happens when our body does not have enough carbs to burn energy. So, instead it burns fat, thereby producing an acid called ketones, which is then used for fuel. "The time to reach ketosis depends on several factors like a person's health condition and metabolism," says Priyanka.

Is it a healthy diet? "While it



■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

helps in weight loss, it is not healthy in the long run. There are chances of micronutrient deficiency and one will have to take supplements. People will also feel lethargic and it can later lead to mood swings," says Vinitha Krishnan, Consultant Clinical Nutritionist, Fortis Malar Hospital, Chennai.

Priyanka says that she will not recommend it, especially during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. "It is easier for a body to pick up infections when one is fasting for a long time. There is not much scientific information that says that speed keto is better than keto or intermittent fasting. With the low amount of fibre, it can disrupt intestinal mobility, leading to bloating and constipation. Without enough carbohydrates and fibre, the probiotic bacteria in one's body cannot thrive and it affects our digestive capability," she says.

In this column, we decode health trends and decide if it's all just 'hype' or actually 'happening'

HYPE

EXERCISE AT HOME

GIVE IT A SKIP

Most people have a skipping rope at home, and you can build this into either a workout or a part of play with your children

NISHA VARMA

**Do it right**

- Wear shock-absorbing shoes
- Dress in light-weight clothes, and for women, supportive sports bra
- Keep water handy as it is a hot, sweaty workout
- Choose a rope that feels comfortable
- Warm up by walking for 10 minutes and doing ankle, wrist, and shoulder rotations (this helps you swing the rope)
- Land on the balls of your feet



Total time: 45 minutes

This is a high-intensity interval training programme

Warm up and mobility, 10 minutes

Skip, one minute

Squats with rope held taut in both hands and arms raised overhead, one minute

Forward lunge hold with figure of eight, one minute on each leg

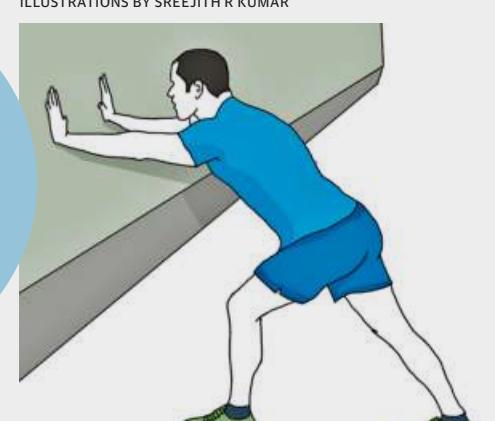
Repeat six cycles of this pattern, quickly, without a break

Stretch all the lower body muscles, especially the calves, post workout, 10 minutes

■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK, ILLUSTRATIONS BY SREEJITH R KUMAR

Calf stretch

Place both hands on the wall. Take the left leg back, making sure your heel touches the ground. You will feel an intense stretch in the calf region. Hold for at least 20 seconds on each leg.

**But avoid...**

- If you have injuries, heart or lung ailments, or any other chronic issues
- Doing too much too soon, if you are new to skipping. Include a one-minute interval in your regular cardio session, no more. Give yourself at least five to six weeks of practice before skipping continuously for longer periods
- Landing on your heels
- Variations (single leg, jumping Jack, backward skipping) until you are comfortable with the form of regular skipping.

Nisha Varma is an ACSM-certified exercise physiologist. A monthly column with exercises for a home workout

Wind in the willow
(Clockwise from right) The West Indies win the ICC World Cup Twenty20 in 2016; Yuvraj Singh as captain of the Pune Warriors in 2011 at an IPL match, the book, M. Muralitharan at practice before an IPL match
• K. R. DEEPAK,
V. GANESAN,
G.P. SAMPATH KUMAR



VIJAY LOKAPALLY

For Tim Wigmore and Freddie Wilde this was a very valuable project that took two years of work. They wanted to write what they wanted to read. With cricket undergoing drastic changes and new versions looking to make every season more delightful than the previous, *Cricket 2.0: Inside The T20 Revolution* is a welcome addition to the cricket library.

Wigmore is a journalist by profession and Wilde a cricket data analyst. Both, based out of the U.K., are equipped to debate the technicalities of the game and present the intricacies in a form easy to understand. Forewords by Michael Vaughan and Harsha Bhogle set the tone for this book, replete with anecdotes and match situations that bring alive the shortest version of the game. They've also spoken to several cricketers, analysts, and administrators.

Behind the T20 game

"T20 has changed cricket so profoundly since it was created in 2003, and we wanted to read an account bringing this all together, explaining what had changed on and off the field, bringing the characters together and looking at what would come next," says Wigmore.

Wilde supports his co-author, "Broadly speaking we wanted to im-

prove and elevate the understanding of T20 cricket because the format is so popular, but widely misunderstood. We also wanted to tell the story of the players who have come to dominate the format. They have fascinating human stories. Just because they play T20 doesn't change that."

Many are convinced that traditional cricket has taken a beating. "In some ways T20 cricket has forced Test cricket to improve its product. Look at day-night matches, and the introduction of the World Test Championship. One of the big lessons of T20 leagues is that every match matters and has a clear narrative. Sadly this isn't true for a lot of Test cricket - that needs to change," says Wigmore.

Wilde notes, "I am more doubtful than Tim. T20 does provide many valuable les-

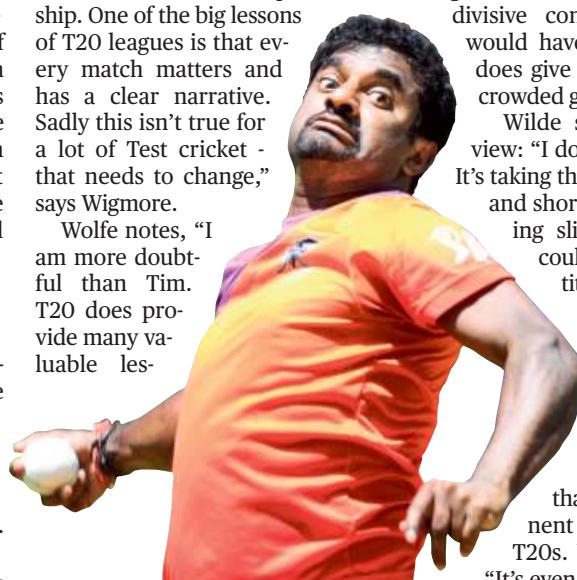
sons for Test cricket and if administrators can adopt them then it may have a fighting chance of coexisting."

Through the book

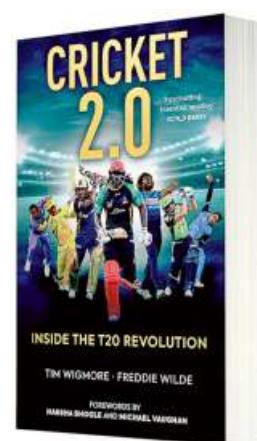
The book delves into the possibility of 100-ball cricket, which many believe would make T20 redundant. "It's a very interesting experiment," confesses Wigmore. "In some ways, the ECB (England and Wales Cricket Board) is now trying to out-IPL the IPL, by packing a game into a shorter period. It's a very divisive concept and personally I would have stuck with T20, but it does give England a USP in a very crowded global marketplace."

Wilde supports his co-author's view: "I don't see a problem with it. It's taking the logic of T20 - simplifying and shortening the game - and going slightly further. I think it could have been a T20 competition but political differences in implementing that alongside the existing county T20 competition may have created this new 100-ball game."

It is generally accepted that cricket has three prominent versions: Tests, ODIs and T20s. Wigmore asserts though, "It's even more than three: you also



Book cricket



have T10, sixes cricket and now the Hundred. But having three at the international level has helped the game be adaptable and appeal to different fans and different countries in different ways, even if it has created difficulties with the congested calendar. If managed properly - which sadly it normally hasn't been - three formats should be a strength for cricket."

There are portions in the book that favour the growth of T20. Wigmore insists, "When T20 came along a lot of people predicted that it would be a game of bits-and-pieces players. But quality will out. Look at bowling: you need five high-quality bowlers in your team, and spin bowling is the most effective style. And, as we explore in *Cricket 2.0*, the tactical thinking in T20 is perhaps the most sophisticated of any format. Ricky Ponting tells us that strategy is more important in T20 than the Test game."

Wilde adds, "It's a game played on a cricket pitch, at cricket venues, with cricket equipment and cricket laws and played by cricket players. It is beginning to evolve into its own strand of the sport but it is fundamentally cricket."

Future perfect?

Speaking on the reluctance of the ECB to accept the Indian Premier League (IPL) as an essential part of the international cricket calendar, Wigmore says, "We have a chapter in the book on the ECB's vexed relationship with the IPL.

It boils down to a certain jealousy, the innate conservatism in English cricket and simply the calendar: the IPL takes place in May, which is part of the English summer. But England's attitudes have come a long way in a very short time. Before 2015, an average of 12 English players per year appeared in major overseas T20 leagues each year; since 2015, an average of 35 have."

As the world waits for good times to return post COVID-19, Wigmore says, "There's so much uncertainty so it's hard to predict - but I'm sure that both Tests and ODIs will still be around in the post COVID-19 world. More broadly, we have a chapter at the end with predictions for the future based on our research. Here are two obvious ones: the continued rise of short-format cricket; and the growing importance of club-based cricket. Ultimately I envisage the structure of cricket becoming more like football, with the calendar dominated by domestic leagues, and international cricket being more about tournaments, and less about bilateral fixtures."

In Wilde's view, "How cricket emerges from this crisis will be fascinating. The financial pressures placed on the sport may well accelerate things that we might have previously thought would take longer. Ultimately short form cricket is the most popular and profitable form of the game. If any format will benefit from COVID-19 it is likely to be T20."

For Wigmore and Wilde, recognition for *Cricket 2.0* has come in a big way. It was adjudged the Wisden Book of the Year 2020, a tribute to the writers' hard work, but also an indication that short format cricket is only set to grow.

Cricket 2.0: Inside The T20 Revolution, Penguin RandomHouse India; ₹399 on the Kindle

Larger than life

Praveen Kumar Sobti admits he is known more as Bheem from the Mahabharat series, than the track and field sportsperson he used to be

UTHRA GANESAN

Anyone who has three Asian Games medals, one in the Commonwealth Games, and is two-time Olympics participant in track and field, would be a legend. But for Praveen Kumar Sobti, it was Doordarshan and B. R. Chopra's *Mahabharat* that gave him everlasting fame.

Praveen played the second brother Bheem in the tele-serial that achieved cult status when it was first telecast 30 years ago. Currently enjoying a second wind on DD Bharati as part of I&B Mi-

nistry's bouquet of re-runs, *Mahabharat* has quickly become a TRP topper all over again, bringing fame and recognition to the characters and actors from a whole new generation.

"Even those in their 30s would have just been born then. Those in their 40s would have seen it as just another serial. Now they see it with a completely different perspective and understanding of the incidents on screen. The love and affection across age-groups is amazing," he admits.

It is an identity he cherishes. "When I call someone and identi-

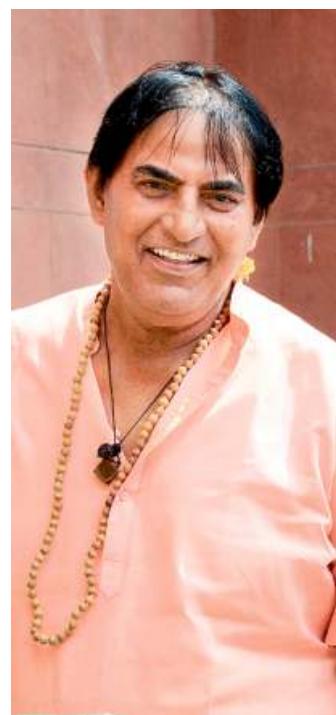
fy myself as Praveen, most people do not recognise me. Then I say 'Bheem' and the connect is instant," he says.

"Let's be honest. People who know you for sports invariably forget. After 35-40 years of leaving athletics, those who knew me as an athlete are all either retired or out of sports. But the identity *Mahabharat* gave me can never be forgotten."

Along with *Ramayan*, *Mahabharat* has remained one of the most popular series in Indian television history. A BARC-Nielsen report DD has now become the most watched Indian channel, with a 43% rise from pre-COVID-19 times.

It wasn't just Praveen who became iconic after *Mahabharat*. Every actor from the serial went on to make a mark in the entertainment industry - to varying levels. Feroz Khan, who played Arjun, officially changed his name to 'Arjun' after the serial!

Ironically, Praveen never saw it



Big personality Praveen Kumar
• R.V. MOORTHY

when it first came on air in 1988 but makes it a point not to miss an episode now, watching it along with his wife.

"I remember one incident during the shooting when the director, Ravi Chopra, okayed a scene but I felt I could do better. I could not tell him this but late at night I got a call saying there had been some technical issue with that particular scene and it was to be shot again the next day!"

He feels there is little to fault. "I don't think there is much scope for improving on *Mahabharat* as it was made then. Mainly it was because most of the scenes had several actors and any small mistake meant everyone had to re-shoot! So everyone was perfect with their homework every day," he says, laughing.

He's all praise for Dr. Rahi Masoom Raza, who wrote the dialogue. "I was part of the show and even I did not realise the depth and meaning of those lines," he says.

SHORT TAKE



The best of German theatre, online

Every year since 1964, the Berlin Theatertreffen has been bringing together the best German theatre from the country and the world to one stage. The year 2020 is the first time it cannot do so, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The major cultural event continues online under the name Theatertreffen Virtuell, and you can watch it sitting at home in India. According to the website, this edition will feature "six productions from our selection of 10, as on-demand recordings for a period of 24 hours each." Live talks with artistes and audience interactions are also being planned, as is a programme exploring digital practices in theatre, all on the official website berlinerfestspiele.de/en/. And don't worry, English subtitles are available.

POOCH CAFE



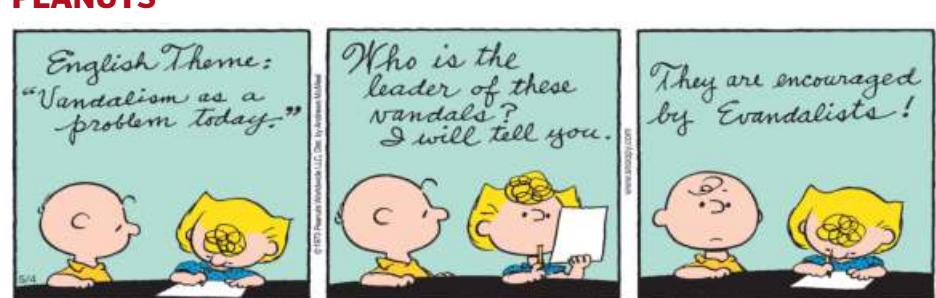
HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



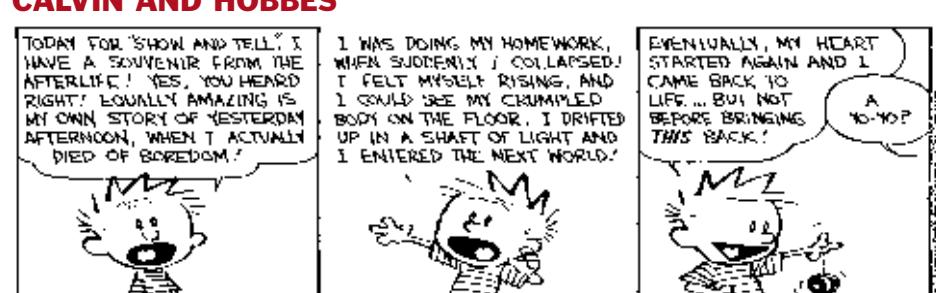
TIGER



PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBES



PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



Hard-hit Italy prepares to lift lockdown

After two months of closure, industries, restaurants and stores can resume business, and residents can step out of homes

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

ROME European nations on Sunday prepared for further cautious easing of COVID-19 restrictions following signs the pandemic may be slowing, with hard-hit Italy set to follow Spain in allowing people outside after weeks of confinement.

More than 2,43,000 people have been killed and 3.4 million infected worldwide by the virus, which has left half of humanity under some form of lockdown and pushed the global economy towards its worst downturn since the Great Depression.

COVID-19

With signs that the spread of the disease is coming under control, parts of Europe, Asia and the U.S. have begun to lift restrictions to try to inject life into economies crippled by weeks of closures and ease the pressure on populations weary of confinement.

Strolling in parks

After a two-month lockdown, Italians on Monday will be allowed to stroll in parks and visit relatives. Restaurants can open for takeaways and wholesale stores can resume business, but there was some confusion about the extent of the easing. Romans were doing aerobics on their rooftop terraces and exercising indoors on Sunday and the squares in the city centre were mostly empty on the last day Italians were obliged to remain within 200 m of their homes.

Italian authorities have said some preventative measures are still needed in a country that has the second-highest number of virus deaths in the world after the



Hitting the road: People exercising in Madrid, Spain, on Saturday, as the country eased lockdown measures. •AP

United States. Several industries, including automobile sector and construction, have already restarted work.

But Italy's 20 regions have imposed their own regulations, leading to some confusion over what people can and cannot do. Veneto and Calabria lifted their lockdowns early and allowed bars and restaurants to open with outdoor tables.

Football in Germany?

Elsewhere in Europe, Germany will continue its easing on Monday, while Slovenia, Poland and Hungary will allow public spaces and businesses to partially reopen.

In another sign of life returning, Germany's Minister for the Interior and Sport said Sunday he supports a resumption of the country's

football season this month as long as teams respect hygiene conditions.

Face masks will be mandatory on public transport starting Monday in Spain, where people were allowed to go outdoors to exercise and walk freely on Saturday after a 48-day lockdown.

Even as some European countries gradually lift restrictions, officials in Moscow urged residents to stay with outdoor tables.

There are also signs that the pandemic is slowing down in some parts of the United States. In New York City, the epicentre of the U.S. outbreak, an emergency field hospital erected in Central Park is set to close, the Christian charity running it said on Saturday, as virus cases decline in the city.

Pompeo hints at Wuhan lab's role

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

WASHINGTON U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Sunday that there was "enormous evidence" that the COVID-19 pandemic originated in a laboratory in Wuhan, China.

"There is enormous evidence that this is where it began," he said on ABC's "This Week."

But while highly critical of China's handling of the matter, Mr. Pompeo declined to say whether he thought the virus had been intentionally released.

President Donald Trump has been increasingly critical of China's role in the pandemic. He has insisted that Beijing recklessly

concealed important information about the outbreak and demanded that Beijing be held "accountable."

News reports say Mr. Trump has tasked U.S. spies to find out more about the origin of the virus, at first blamed on a Wuhan market selling exotic animals like bats, but now thought possibly to be from a virus research laboratory nearby.

Not a man-made virus
Mr. Pompeo told ABC that he agreed with a statement on Thursday from the U.S. intelligence community in which it concurred "with the wide scientific consensus that the

COVID-19 virus was not man-made or genetically modified." But he went further than Mr. Trump, in citing "significant" and "enormous" evidence that the virus originated in a Wuhan laboratory.

"I think the whole world can see now, remember, China has a history of infecting the world and running substandard laboratories," Mr. Pompeo said. He said early Chinese efforts to downplay the coronavirus amounted to "a classic Communist disinformation effort. That created enormous risk."

"President Trump is very clear: we'll hold those responsible accountable."

South Korea will relax social distancing rules further from May 6

Public facilities like schools & parks could reopen in phases

REUTERS

SEOUL

South Korea will further relax social distancing rules from May 6, allowing a phased re-opening of businesses, as the nation has largely managed to bring the COVID-19 outbreak under control, Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun said on Sunday.

Widespread testing, intensive contact tracing and tracking apps have enabled South Korea to limit the spread of the virus rather than rely on the lengthy lockdowns seen elsewhere.

Disinfection guidelines

The government "will allow businesses to resume at facilities in phases that had remained closed up until now, and also allow gatherings and events to take place assuming they follow disinfection guidelines," the Prime



Monks in Seoul celebrating the Buddha's birthday last week. •AP

Minister told a televised meeting of government officials.

Further easing of rules means public facilities such as parks, libraries as well as schools could reopen in phases, although the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended citizens to continue to ex-

ercise some caution in everyday life.

The new guidelines from the government advise everyone to stay home for three to four days if they feel unwell, stay arms-apart with others in public spaces, and wash hands frequently.

Successful policy

Seoul extended its social distancing policy until May 5 even as it managed to bring down daily infection cases of more than 900 in late February to around 10 per day in the past week.

The national tally is at 10,793 as of midnight Saturday, with 250 deaths.

Some professional sports, including baseball and soccer, are due to start their new seasons this week after being postponed over virus fears, although the matches will be played behind closed doors.

U.K. had contingency plan for PM's death

Boris Johnson spent three nights in intensive care as he battled COVID-19

REUTERS

LONDON

The British government had a contingency plan for Prime Minister Boris Johnson's death as he battled COVID-19 in intensive care last month, he said in an interview with *The Sun* newspaper.

Mr. Johnson, 55, returned to work on Monday, a month after testing positive for COVID-19. He spent 10 days in isolation in Downing Street before he was taken to London's St Thomas' Hospital where he spent three nights in intensive care.

"They had a strategy to deal with a death of Stalin-type scenario," Mr. Johnson was quoted as saying in Sunday's edition of *The Sun*. "It was a tough old moment, I won't deny it."

Resisting hospital visit

Mr. Johnson said that during the period when he was self-isolating in Downing Street, he had resisted going to hos-



Back to work: U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson outside 10 Downing Street, London, last week. •AP

pital. "I was in denial because I was working and I kept doing these meetings by video-link," he said. "But I was really feeling pretty groggy... I was feeling pretty wasted, not in an intoxicated way, but just, you know, pretty rough."

"Then I was told I had to go into St Thomas. I said I really didn't want to go into hospital. It didn't seem to me to be a good move but

they were pretty adamant. Looking back, they were right to force me to go."

Admitted on April 5

Mr. Johnson was admitted to a ward on April 5 and given oxygen via a face mask and a tube in his nose. "I was going through litres and litres of oxygen for a long time," he said. He was moved to intensive care on April 6.

At one point, doctors dis-

cussed invasive ventilation. "The bad moment came when it was 50-50 whether they were going to have to put a tube down my windpipe," he said.

"That was when it got a bit... they were starting to think about how to handle it presentationally."

"The doctors had all sorts of arrangements for what to do if things went badly wrong... The bloody indicators kept going in the wrong direction."

After he was discharged, St Thomas' said it was glad to have cared for the Prime Minister, but gave no details about the gravity of his illness beyond stating that he was treated in intensive care.

Mr. Johnson and his fiancée, Carrie Symonds, on Saturday announced they had named their newborn Wilfie Lawrie Nicholas, partly as a tribute to two doctors who they said saved Mr. Johnson's life.

Israel: hearing to challenge govt. begins

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

JERUSALEM

Israel's top court on Sunday started hearing arguments to bar Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from forming a new government as he faces a criminal trial on corruption charges. The Supreme Court will also hear petitions challenging a coalition deal with his rival-turned-partner Benny Gantz, who is currently speaker of the Knesset, Israel's Parliament. Either case carries with it the danger of forcing another election, after three polls in less than a year failed to produce a government and left the country in a grinding political deadlock. The hearing was broadcast live on the court website.

Cycling activists seize the moment, seek more bike lanes

From Germany to Peru, they are demanding a transition to more bike-friendly cities as virus wreaks havoc on economies

ASSOCIATED PRESS

MADRID



Planned for a safer future: A man cycling near a piece of street art in London. •AP

aged as a way to avoid unsafe crowding on trains and buses. Cycling activists from Germany to Peru are trying to use the moment to get more bike lanes, or widen existing ones, even if it's just a temporary measure.

The transition to more bike-friendly urban environ-

ments "is necessary if we want our cities to work," said Morton Kabell, who co-chairs the European Cyclists' Federation. "A lot of people will be afraid of going on public transportation, but we have to get back to work someday. Very few of our cities can handle more car traffic,"

he said. In addition to bike lanes separated by curbs, Mr. Kabell backs subsidising electric bicycles.

The benchmarks are Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, where half of the daily commuters are cyclists, and the Netherlands, with its vast network of bike lanes.

Still, countries around the world are catching up at different speeds. The French government asked cycling activist Pierre Serne to draw up a plan for when its lockdown ends May 11. His recommendations, including bicycle lanes separated from other vehicles at an estimated cost of €50,000 per km, have been submitted to the Transportation Ministry.

In Berlin, the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg council simply painted yellow lines on the some roads to take

space from car lanes. This bike infrastructure builds on what is called "tactical urbanism" – low-cost changes that are technically simple and reversible.

Taking over space

Similar initiatives are popping up elsewhere. Officials in Lima, Peru; Barcelona, Spain; and Milan, Italy, are speeding up plans to expand bike paths or take space from cars or current parking sites. In Bogota, where bicycles are used mostly by Colombia's blue-collar workers, Mayor Claudia López has urged everybody returning to work this week to cycle instead of using public transportation, which is now operating at 35% of capacity.

With many U.S. nonessential businesses closed, there is little point now in cycling

Kim did not undergo any surgery, says Seoul

Gunfire exchanged near Korea border

REUTERS

SEOUL

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un did not undergo surgery during almost three weeks of absence from public life, a South Korean official said on Sunday, as the two Koreas exchanged gunfire at the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) separating the two sides.

The government official declined to provide reasons, but said speculative reports that Mr. Kim had had an operation, citing some differences in his leg movements, were untrue.

"Our assessment is that (Kim) did not undergo surgery," the official, who declined to be identified, told reporters. Asked if media reports of Mr. Kim having undergone a simple medical treatment were also untrue, the official simply said: "Yes."

Multiple gunshots fired

North and South Korea exchanged gunfire around a rural guard post, raising tension a day after North Korean state media showed Mr. Kim visiting a factory, the first report of him making a public appearance since April 11.

Multiple gunshots were fired from North Korea towards a guard post in South Korea, the South's Joint Chiefs of Staffs (JCS) said in a statement. South Korea responded by firing two shots towards North Korea, the JCS said. No casualties were reported.

After weeks of intense speculation about Mr. Kim's health and whereabouts, which included one report he had undergone cardiovascular surgery, North Korea's official media pu-



Kim Jong-un in a region north of Pyongyang on Saturday. •REUTERS

blished photographs and a report on Saturday that Mr. Kim had attended the completion of a fertilizer plant.

The exchange of gunshots on Sunday was the latest confrontation between the rival Koreas that technically remain still at war after their 1950-53 conflict ended in a truce, not a treaty.

In a lengthy briefing held later on Sunday, an official at South Korea's JCS said the gunshots did not seem a planned provocation.

The U.S.-led UN Command, which oversees affairs in the heavily fortified DMZ, said it was working with the JCS to assess the situation. "The UNC will conduct a thorough investigation tomorrow to determine if there was an Armistice Agreement violation, and will provide the report to the appropriate authorities once completed."

Choi Kang, vice president of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, said he believed the timing of the provocation shows it could have been planned to show that Mr. Kim was still in charge of the North Korean military.

Ewha University international affairs professor Leif-Eric Easley in Seoul said the shooting could be aimed at boosting morale in the North Korean military.

ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's COVID-19 tally crossed 19,000 on Sunday after 989 new patients were diagnosed in 24 hours. The Ministry of National Health Services said 23 patients died in this period, taking the total toll to 440. So far, 4,817 people have recovered, the Ministry said. PTI

18 militants killed by Egypt military in Sinai

CAIRO

Egypt's Interior Ministry said on Sunday that 18 suspected militants were killed in North Sinai in a fire fight with security forces, two days after a blast claimed by the Islamic State. "National security received intelligence about terrorist elements hiding out in a home in Bir al-Abed, where they were planning to launch hostile operations," it said. AP

ASK US

VIDYA BALA

Long-term investment

Q. I am 31 years old and looking for some good investment options on a long-term basis for me and my husband. We can't have a PPF account as we are NRIs right now. What is the best option for us? Last week, I started investing in Bajaj Allianz Goal Assure on a monthly basis. Is this a good option?

MALEMGANBI NAOREM

A. We do not know about your time frame and goal and what plan under the Bajaj Allianz Goal Assure you have chosen. This is a ULIP. So, if your primary purpose is to build wealth, you have to make sure the fund is performing well. Ask your adviser/agent to send regular updates on the growth of your money. If you find the performance not up to the mark in five years compared with mutual funds, consider stopping SIPs then. Try not to invest in bundled insurance products unless you are sure you understand all the features and costs.

As for other investment options, your time frame is paramount in deciding the risk you can handle. Having invested in a ULIP, I am assuming that you are willing to take market risks. If you are an NRI outside U.S./Canada, you can consider some exposure to index funds or ETFs in India. There are funds on the bellwether indices such as the Nifty 50, Next 50 or Nifty 500. You can own a mix of these for the equity component of your portfolio. This should constitute a long-term portfolio for the next 5-10 years, with regular SIPs to average the cost.

For the debt component, for the next 1-1.5 years, the low interest rate notwithstanding, consider NRE deposits in large private or public banks. We may see smaller banks coming under pressure post COVID-19 and hence, you need to be careful with the choice of banks.

This is not a time to chase returns in deposits. Look for safety. Lock into shorter tenures (1-1.5 years and not more). If you have a demat account, you can also check with your broker if they offer government securities (called gilts) and you can invest in those for the long term.

Any top-rated PSU bonds (nothing other than PSU) maturing in 3-4 years, traded in the market, will also be the options if your broker will help you with the same.

If you are based out of the U.S./Canada, your investment options are quite restricted here. It would be better for you to seek the advice of a fee-based investment adviser who is also familiar with the U.S. security and tax laws.

Retiring from the Army

Q. I am retiring from the Indian armed forces at 35. I will get pension and some lump sum in the form of PF, gratuity and other dues. Where and how should I invest my money?

RATUL BASUMATRY

A. We are assuming that you will take up some employment and have some regular income or that your pension will be sufficient for regular expenses. In that case, you can invest this sum for the long term for any goal you may have, including retirement from your next career, a couple of decades later.

If you are very conservative and only safety matters, then consider large public or private bank deposits, post office time deposits and deposits with large NBFCs like HDFC or Sundaram Finance. Lock into these for only 1-1.5 years as rates are low now. You can renew them when rates go up a year or two later.

If you can take some risks, then our suggestion would be that you park 20-30% of your corpus in equity index funds such as Nifty 50 or Nifty 500 for a minimum of 7-10 years. You can also park 5-10% of this in Indian funds that invest in U.S. indices such as the S&P 500 or Nasdaq 100.

This will help provide exposure to the U.S. markets, too, by just investing in rupees.

Use a systematic investment plan to invest in these over the next 1-1.5 years and don't let the market ups and downs worry you. Make sure 70% of your money is in safe in deposits. You can also consider the RBF Taxable Bond available with all major banks. Do not be lured by any high interest rates in deposits. Over the next 1-2 years, high interest will carry far higher risks.

(The author is co-founder, Primeinvestor.in)

Readers can send in queries on personal finance and investing to moneywise@thehindu.co.in. Our experts who write on personal finance will answer these queries. Moneywise will not give specific recommendations for investment in a particular mutual fund scheme, share or fixed deposit.

LOOSE CHANGE

RAVIKANTH



The number you have dialled is switched off. Please try later. The number you have dialled is switched off. Please try later. The...

Look before you leap

Ask questions about your investments before, and not after, making them

JOYDEEP SEN

We are going through challenging times. There is correction in the equity market, defaults in debt funds and even issues with certain banks. Many investors are wondering what is 'safe.' Nothing has changed fundamentally in our economy or the financial markets. Due to COVID-19, economic growth has been impacted, but we will come back over a period of time. There is no reason to suspect something is going wrong with investments in general.

To put the current situation in perspective: the equity market, in particular, the global markets, pre-COVID-19, had a significant run up.

There was a lot of surplus liquidity floating around (there still is) and that pushed up prices in equity markets in advanced economies. In India, the equity market had moved up but more at the index level (Nifty, Sensex) and in large cap stocks. The broad market, taking all listed stocks into consideration, had not moved up as much. After the pandemic, the sharp correction has been inevitable as advanced economies are staring at a recession.

With markets being inter-linked, the correction had to happen in India as well.

The defaults in debt funds happened due to multiple reasons, the major one being the cleaning up of the system. Earlier, the practice of ever-greening was rampant i.e. granting one more loan so that an existing loan does not go bad. With stricter regulations, including the IBC, some companies were taken to the NCLT.

The risk in debt is still

there as the economy has slowed down but it is not so alarming as to make one exit all one's debt investments. For now, due to the challenging situation, the government is supportive and going slow on entrepreneurs.

Issues in banks are specific to a few lenders. The macro issue due to higher NPAs and consequent losses have been addressed by the infusion of capital by the government. Certain banks had suppressed NPA information earlier, which is coming to light now, leading to issues.

Concerns due to the reasons mentioned above and their impact on your investments are natural. It is in human nature to make an investment without caring about risk factors. Afterwards, when something breaks out, people tend to over-react to the risks by moving out of the investment at the wrong time (when prices are low) or trying to pin the blame on somebody.

What should you do?

First, decide which asset categories you want to invest in. The investment avenues are equity stocks, debt i.e. bonds and, to a limited extent, other investments such as gold and real estate. You may invest either directly i.e. purchase shares or bonds, or, do it through a vehicle such as mutual funds.

Every investment avenue has its own worth, return potential



THINK INVESTOR

Lessons to learn in personal finance

A mix of equity and bank deposits can add to heft to your investment portfolio

VENKATESH BANGARUSWAMY

Most people in the lower income group want to start working even at the risk of contracting COVID-19. There are lessons to learn from this. In this article, we discuss why you could experience a similar risky attitude with your goal-based portfolios and how to moderate the same.

Avoiding losses

Do you invest in bank deposits and gold? Specifically, do you avoid equity investments because you consider them risky? Then, there is a cause for concern. Why?

Picture this. You need ₹1.5 crore in 10 years to finance your child's college education. You invest in bank deposits and gold to achieve this goal.

Two years before your child has to enter college, you realise that given the actual returns, your investments will fall short of funding your child's education.

What will you do?

Because you cannot postpone the goal, it is highly likely that you will make risky investments to bridge the shortfall. Or you may be forced to borrow at a high interest rate. So, what should you do to moderate the possibility of having to take high



Investments only in bank deposits and gold, while avoiding equities, may endanger your financial goal. ■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

risk to bridge a shortfall?

Forward SIPs

You know that the expected return on equity is higher than that on bank deposits. So, if you invest in equity along with bank deposits, you can expect to accumulate more in your investment portfolio for the same amount of savings.

But that is easier said than done. Bank deposits offer certainty in cash flows. You know today, the value of your deposit at maturity. You want to avoid equity because of the uncertainty in the investment outcome. Yet, you willingly take high

risk at the end when faced with a confirmed shortfall in your investment portfolio!

To overcome your fear of investing in equity and at the same time reduce the possibility of having to take high risk, set up a forward systematic investment plan (SIP) on an equity fund at least a month before your annual salary raise.

For instance, set up an SIP in April that will start in May (the month of salary raise) with savings from the incremental salary. Why? For one, it is easy to risk your savings you do not have as yet! For another, you are not cutting your current living stan-

dards to save more. Importantly, if your investments are profitable, you may not have to make risky choices towards the end of the time horizon for your life goal.

Given the current scenario, you may not get a salary raise immediately. But, if you realise how your attitude of taking risk can change, you should be on course to setting up forward SIPs when you expect a salary raise.

What if you experience negative returns on your equity investments? You will then have to borrow to bridge the shortfall which you will anyway do if you were not invested in equity!

Yet, there is a good chance that your equity investments will perform well, and you may not have to take high risk at the end to achieve your life goal.

Conclusion

So, do you want to take high risk at the end in an attempt to bridge a confirmed shortfall in your portfolio? Or, do you want to invest in equity, hoping to achieve your goal without having to take high risk at the end? The choice is yours.

(The author offers training programmes for individuals to manage their personal investments)

risks at the end when faced with a confirmed shortfall in your investment portfolio!

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For instance, set up an SIP in April that will start in May (the month of salary raise) with savings from the incremental salary. Why? For one, it is easy to risk your savings you do not have as yet! For another, you are not cutting your current living stan-

and risk factors.

You should understand these before you make the investment so that you know what you are getting into and will not be taken by surprise later on. If you are investing through an adviser, ask questions and understand the downside, i.e. potential correction such as the one happening in the equity market now.

If you are managing investments yourself, you have to do the research and convince yourself about what you are getting into. (About) 30% correction in the equity market is not unheard of in history; the question is whether you are aware of it and mentally prepared for it. Defaults in bonds is a potential risk; what is happening over the last one-and-a-half years is on the higher side and unnerving investors.

Once you decide which asset you want to invest in, decide how much to invest and into which category. Certain investments have a higher potential for uneven returns such as equity. If you have a longer period to stay invested in, you can cross over the volatile phases and reap the returns. It would be a wrong decision to exit from equity at this juncture, just because prices have come down. Rather, lower prices are a reason to buy more.

Growth potential remains
The growth potential of the Indian economy remains the same, only that there is a dull phase till we come back from the lockdown. In assets such as equity, you should keep as much as you can for a long pe-

riod of time, without worrying about day-to-day returns. For debt investments, which is preferably done through the mutual fund route, there are risks of volatility and default.

You have to choose the fund category accordingly, so that you understand the risk-return profile of that fund. Your allocation to debt funds should be as much as you can keep for the appropriate period, which is less than equities.

Gold, as an asset, does not produce anything; its value increases in times of uncertainty like war or a pandemic. Hence, the allocation of your funds to gold should be of a lower proportion. Your investments should be productive, not just depending on uncertainties to prolong.

If you raise the concerns before making the investments, you can save yourself the hassles of agony on negative returns in a particular phase or defaults in debt, and sleep peacefully.

The other aspect you have to take care of is the communication gap between you and your services provider.

You are investing your hard-earned money and you have to be clear about what you are getting into. For this, you have to ask the relevant questions and convince yourself: why it is suitable for you; how long you have to stay invested; and what the potential for negative surprises is. The only reason to exit an investment prematurely is if the nature of the investment itself is changing, which is not the case now.

(The author is founder, wi-seinvestor.in)

TECH TRAIL: PRECIOUS METALS

Mixed picture for gold, silver

B. KRISHNAKUMAR

There was a strong uptrend in the early part of April that pushed the price of Comex gold to seven-year high on April 14. The recovery in the equity markets in the latter half of April played a key role in capping the rise in precious metals. As a result, they remained largely range bound in the second half of the month.

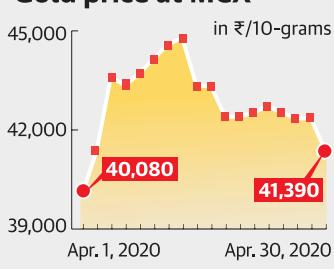
Comex gold gained 6.1% in April to settle at \$1,694.2 an ounce while Comex silver, too, gained by 5.2% to settle at \$14.9 an ounce. In the domestic market, gold futures at MCX gained 3.9% in April to settle at ₹44,906 per 10 gm. MCX silver futures gained 4% in April to close at ₹41,390 per kg.

In the short-term, Comex gold is likely to remain in the range of \$1,650-1,800 zone. A strong breakout from the extremes of this range would set the tone for the next move in gold. Above \$1,800, gold price could rally to \$1,860-1,870 an ounce. On the other hand, a fall below \$1,650 would be a sign of weakness and another slide to \$1,155-1,180 is likely.

Comex silver has a strong resistance at the \$16.8-17 zone. A move above \$17 would be a sign of strength and the price could then rise to the subsequent target of \$17.8-18.2 range. A fall below \$14 would indicate weakness and silver could then slide to \$12.4-12.8 zone. As long as \$14 is not breached, there would be a case for a rally to \$17.8-18.

MCX gold futures ruled firm in April and also achieved the earlier mentioned target of ₹44,800-₹45,000. The short-term outlook is

Gold price at MCX



positive and a breakout past ₹46,800 would push the MCX gold price to the short-term target of ₹47,800-49,000. The trend would turn weak if the price falls below ₹44,000 per 10 gm.

MCX silver, too, edged past the earlier mentioned target of ₹43,500. The short-term outlook is positive, and the price could move up to ₹47,500-48,000 range per kg. A breakout above the immediate resistance at ₹45,000 would strengthen the positive view. A drop below ₹39,500 would be a sign of weakness and reduce the possibility of a rally to ₹47,500-48,000.

To summarise, precious metals present a mixed picture. While the prices of gold and silver are stuck in a range in the international markets, the short-term outlook in domestic markets is relatively positive.

(The author is a Chennai-based analyst/trader. The views and opinions featured in this column are based on the analysis of short-term price movements in gold and silver futures at Comex and the Multi Commodity Exchange of India. This is not meant to be trading or investment advice.)

Life insurance term plan premium

Male: 30 Years, Sum insured- Rs. 1 crore, Cover upto - 70 Years

Insurance company	Plan name	Maximum cover premium (Rs.) Up to (Years)	Annual Premium (Rs.) (Male)
Aditya Birla Capital	Life Shield Plan	80	12,998
Aegon Life	iTerm Insurance Plan	10	

IN BRIEF



Want to retire in KKR jersey: Andre Russell

NEW DELHI
West Indies all-rounder Andre Russell says playing for Kolkata Knight Riders in the IPL is where he gets the "most goosebumps" and wants to remain in the side till his very last game in the league. The 32-year-old was speaking to KKR's official Knights Unplugged online show. "Let me confess something... IPL is where I get the most goosebumps. I get that in CPL (Caribbean Premier League) as well but when it comes to playing in IPL, especially Eden Gardens, there is no comparison," Russell said. PTI



Shami recalls his fight with depression

NEW DELHI
India speedster Mohammed Shami has claimed that he thought of committing suicide thrice while battling personal issues a few years ago. He said his family members feared he "might jump" from their 24th-floor apartment. Shami opened up on his personal and professional life during an Instagram chat with Rohit Sharma. "I think if my family had not supported me back then, I would have lost my cricket," Shami said.

Carlsen to face Nakamura in final

NEW DELHI
Magnus Carlsen bounced back to win the last two games and pipped Ding Liren at the post with a 2.5-1.5 verdict on way to the final of his signature event – Magnus Carlsen Invitational Online chess tournament – on Saturday. In the final, Carlsen will take on Hikaru Nakamura. **The result: Semifinal:** Magnus Carlsen (Nor) bt Ding Liren (Chn) 2.5-1.5.

Duplantis, Lavillenie tie in back-garden event

PARIS
Three of the best pole vaulters of all time went head-to-head from their back gardens in a competition on Sunday. World record-holder Armand Duplantis and former Olympic champion Renaud Lavillenie cleared five metres 36 times in half an hour, while World champion Sam Kendricks managed 26 successful attempts. The event saw Lavillenie competing from his home in Clermont-Ferrand, France, with Swedish star Duplantis in Lafayette, Louisiana and Kendricks in Oxford, Mississippi. AFP

Indian-owned company develops test kit

If it is approved, COVID-19 testing speed and accuracy may increase significantly

ADITYA ANAND

MUMBAI
After the United States, Italy and Europe, India might soon see the deployment of antibody ELISA kits to know if a person has actually recovered from the COVID-19 coronavirus without even knowing that he or she had been infected, thus returning to a normal life without restrictions.

The kits will be put to use after they receive the approval of the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation, the national regulatory body for pharmaceuticals and medical devices. They have been developed by scientists from India, the U.S. and the U.K. for Erba Mannheim, a company founded by Mumbai-based businessman Sunil Vazirani.

'Not going away'
Speaking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Vazirani, who started TRANSASIA Bio-Medicals in 1979, long before he set up Erba Mannheim Germany in 1995, said that the world was realising the coronavirus was not going away without a vaccine.

"Our kits help identify individuals who had COVID-19,

2021 WC is pretty much open'

Mithali says there will be no favourites at the showpiece event in New Zealand

LAVANYA
CHENNAI

India ODI captain Mithali Raj believes the pause in sporting activity due to the coronavirus pandemic has evened out the competition ahead of the 2021 Women's World Cup in New Zealand.

With lockdowns in place almost everywhere in the world, sport finds itself in limbo, with games suspended and strict physical distancing norms in place.

On hold

"Access to gyms is restricted and play has been put on hold. So the 2021 World Cup is pretty much open and there are no favourites," Mithali told *Sportstar* in an Instagram live session.

She said that the players were in regular touch with coach W.V. Raman and the support staff to devise training routines that will suit their requirements.

"Some of us have running space while others like me



Not finished yet: The 37-year-old Mithali Raj feels she still has the ability to put in the long yards. ■ FILE PHOTO

have to manage within the restricted spaces indoors, so our trainers are adapting routines for us. W.V. Raman (sir) is trying to be creative with our skill training regi-

men. It is difficult because irrespective of how much we train indoors, we need to get out onto the ground to be fully prepared," Mithali said.

Relying on experience

The 37-year-old announced her retirement from T20 cricket last year to prolong her ODI career. On her priorities in the run-up to 2021, she said: "Fitness, at my age, is something I need to consciously and constantly keep up. I know I can't forget my skill – I still have some batting in me. I might need a few sessions to get my rhythm going."

Mithali has enlisted the assistance of her watchman and his son in her daily cricket practice. "I get them to bowl to me with a tennis ball or I use a hanging ball. It's nowhere close to a regular routine at the nets, but it keeps me going with my basics and helps me clock some batting time," the Hyderabad-based cricketer added.

CA secures \$50 million loan as safety cover

To offset losses if India fails to tour

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MELBOURNE

Cricket Australia has secured a loan of \$50 million, an upfront payment as part of a larger \$200 million credit, which it has sought to cover the losses if India fails to tour the country later this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to a report published in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, stakeholders have been informed that the loan with the Commonwealth Bank is a "done deal".

More questions

However, it raised fresh questions about CA's decision to stand down 80% of its staff due to financial crisis.

CA stood down more than 200 staff on 20% pay until the end of June with chief executive Kevin Roberts fearing they might run out of money by August if



Kevin Roberts. ■ AFP

the drastic cuts were not made.

The decision, which had saved CA about \$3 million, is in question now with the governing body securing \$50 million loan.

Staggering

CA is staring at losing a staggering A\$300 million in the wake of the pandemic and India's four-Test tour in December-January could provide relief to the struggling body.

WTC points system is ridiculous'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

West Indies fast bowling great Michael Holding has termed the World Test Championship's points system as "ridiculous", where some of the Tests will be rendered inconsequential once teams realise that they can't finish in top two in the points table.

As per the current points system, the value for each Test match win in a two-match series is 60 points a game.

However, if it's a five-match series, the value of a Test match win is reduced to 24. So basically, a team can gain up to 120 points from a series, regardless of the number of matches. The top two qualify for the final.

"First of all, the points system is ridiculous. You can't play five Test matches and get the same amount of points if you play two Test matches.

"And secondly, at some point you're going to have teams who know they cannot get to the final and so those Test matches aren't going to be all that entertaining. People know it's just another game."



Holding. ■ FILE PHOTO

Plan to resume national camps from May end, says Rijiju

'Can't open all coaching centres, will allow only elite athletes'



SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Union Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju on Sunday said the Government would allow elite athletes to resume their training at the earliest in order to keep them ready for future competitions.

"We are planning out a way to start functioning as soon as possible. I thought we should first allow practice for athletes who have qualified for the Olympics and those participating in the qualifiers or important championships. We can't open all the coaching

centres, so we will allow only elite athletes [to train]. Junior camps have to wait for some time as safety will be the priority," said Rijiju, at a video conference attended by 140 boxers and coaches.

Top pugilists, including Mary Kom, Amit Panghal, Pooja Rani, Simranjit Kaur, Lovlina Borgohain, Vikas Krishan, Satish Kumar and Manish Kaushik, took part.

Rijiju expressed confidence that boxing – nine Indians have won Olympic quotas already – would help the country shine at the Tokyo Games next year.

Early hiccups
The 40-year-old Bopanna recalled how he was not selected for Britannia Tennis Amritraj (BAT) scheme in Chennai, and could not win a scholarship for the Batra Centre run by coach Nandan Bal in Pune.

Having started playing tennis at 11, and reaching a career-best rank of 601 among juniors, Bopanna did well to shine on the professional tour as a late bloomer. He reached a best singles rank of 213. He played some vibrant matches against some of the world's best players in the Davis Cup and on the Tour.

"I didn't have tennis-specific fitness those days," Bo-



On the upswing: Bopanna expressed gratitude to Mahesh's father, C.G.K. Bhupathi, for bolstering his game. ■ FILE PHOTO

testing kits from China. Mr. Vazirani claims that his COVID-19 antibody ELISA kits can test 100 samples an hour, with an accuracy rate of 98%.

Research tells us that the SARS-CoV-2 viral antigens stimulate the body's immune system to produce antibodies that can be detected with IgM and IgG antibody tests. IgM is produced first and is detectable during early onset of the disease. IgG is produced later and is maintained for long-term immunity. ERBA Mannheim's kit, called ErbaLISA® COVID-19 ELISA kits, can detect both antibodies.

Through group company TRANSASIA India, Mr. Vazirani's team has applied for permissions to use the kits in India, for which 500 sample kits have been imported. "Antibody tests are important to do. India imported rapid test kits from China which, as per the Indian Council of Medical Research, have a 6-30% [rate of] accuracy," he explained.

A team that includes Drugs Controller General of India Dr. V G Somani and others is looking into approvals for the antibody kits.

'Not going away'
Speaking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Vazirani, who started TRANSASIA Bio-Medicals in 1979, long before he set up Erba Mannheim Germany in 1995, said that the world was realising the coronavirus was not going away without a vaccine.

"Our kits help identify individuals who had COVID-19,

were asymptomatic and recovered without even knowing. They can thus confidently return to work and bring back normalcy to life, while reducing the stress on the frontline warriors," Mr. Vazirani said.

Italy is testing 5 lakh people a day using the kits developed by Erba Mannheim. Each kit can be used to perform 100 tests, Mr. Vazirani said. The kits took a month-and-a-half to develop.

After first receiving the European CE approval, Erba Mannheim also received the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's nod for the advanced method of testing antibodies, which it claims is much faster than the rapid

tests from China. Mr. Vazirani claims that his COVID-19 antibody ELISA kits can test 100 samples an hour, with an accuracy rate of 98%.

Asked how many people could actually be infected with COVID-19, Mr. Vazirani said, "It is anybody's guess, but 20-30 times more than those [who have been] tested have been infected. Our understanding is that 80% of those infected don't show symptoms."

Existing plants

Once the approval is obtained, Mr. Vazirani plans to produce the kits at existing TRANSASIA India plants in Daman and Sikkim, which will further the setting up of a COVID-19 unit making only testing kits for the virus. This plant in Andhra Pradesh's Med Tech Zone is backed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and is awaiting necessary regulatory approvals and on-ground permissions.

For the future, Mr. Vazirani believes that the kits will help individuals test themselves, and also help companies test their employees in a big way.

"Everybody is worried. This is an easy and affordable test. It will help bring back confidence in people – that they have the antibodies," Mr. Vazirani said.

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