

FIGHT CORONA

COVID-19 SPREADS THROUGH TRANSMISSION

» Wash your hands several times with soap

Keep washing your hands for a minimum of 20 seconds all through the day.



» Wear a mask before stepping out of the house

Make sure that there is no gap between your face and the mask. If the mask gets dirty, replace it immediately.



» Practice social distancing

Avoid going to public places and if you have to, then keep a minimum distance of one metre from the other person.



For all information related to coronavirus,
log on to delhifightscorona.in





THE HINDU GROUP

All it took was a microscopic organism to make us more human.

A virus has locked us down in a new world. One where we no longer haggle with the vegetable vendor, because we know he needs the money more than we do.

Today, we respect healthcare professionals, people in uniforms, and delivery agents, leaving no occasion to thank them.

We insist that our house helps stay home and take care of themselves, we make sure they are cared for.

Aged parents do not have to wait for our weekly phone calls, because it happens almost twice every day.

We have, by all means, become more human. This pandemic has changed us, for, we have developed new habits. If these are not the habits worth keeping, then what are?

THE  HINDU

Mail us about the one new habit that made you happy this lockdown at keepthehabit@thehindu.co.in and we will feature it.

#KeepTheHabit



Left parties protest against dilution of labour laws in BJP-ruled States
page 8



India will begin the evacuation of seafarers from May-end
page 10



Army planning three-year stint for civilians on a trial basis
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White House adviser Jared Kushner hints at poll delay, backtracks
page 12

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NEARBY



After audit, death toll jumps to 106 in city

NEW DELHI
The total number of COVID-19 deaths in Delhi increased to 106 on Wednesday as 20 more were added to the toll after an audit committee went through case sheets received from hospitals. The city reported 359 new COVID-19 cases in the past 24 hours, taking the total to 7,998.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

Student gets bail in Delhi riots case

NEW DELHI
A Delhi court on Wednesday granted bail to Gulfsifa Fatima, an MBA student and an activist associated with Pinjra Tod, in a case related to communal violence during the protests against the amended Citizenship Act in north-east Delhi in February.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

Haryana to resume public transport on 'trial basis'

CHANDIGARH
Haryana Chief Minister M.L. Khattar on Wednesday announced that public transport will resume in the State on an "experimental basis" from Friday, with a limited number of buses plying on select routes. He said he will not hesitate in imposing stricter curbs if things don't go as planned.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 9

Major stimulus package for MSMEs

TDS, TCS rates cut by 25% for next year; PF payments reduced from 12% to 10% for three months

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ

NEW DELHI

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday announced a ₹3 lakh crore collateral free loan scheme for businesses, especially micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), as part of a ₹20 lakh crore economic stimulus package to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic.

For salaried workers and taxpayers, some relief was provided in the form of an extended deadline for income tax returns for financial year 2019-20, with the due date now pushed to November 30, 2020. The rates of tax deduction at source (TDS) and tax collection at source (TCS) have been cut by 25% for the next year, while statutory provident fund (PF) payments have been reduced from 12% to 10% for both employers and employees for the next three months.

NBFCs get attention

Apart from MSMEs, other stressed business sectors which got attention were non-banking finance companies (NBFCs), power distribution companies, contractors and the real estate industry.

This is the first tranche of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday as a ₹20 lakh crore

Lockdown antidote

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the features for the first part of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan

For small businesses

- ₹3,00,000 crore emergency credit for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)
- Only domestic firms can bid for govt. procurements up to ₹200 crore



For employees/ tax payers

- EPF deductions slashed for 3 months to 20% from 24% of salary; IT returns deadline extended

- This will enhance take-home pay if employers pass it on, but dent retirement savings

For infrastructure sector

- Power PSUs to lend ₹90,000 crore to stressed State distribution

Relief at hand: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman addressing a press conference to announce details of the economic stimulus package in New Delhi on Wednesday.

■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

economic package. That package includes the ongoing Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana, meant to support the poorest and most vulnerable communities during the pandemic, as well as several measures taken by the Reserve Bank of India to improve liquidity. More tranches are expected in the next few days.

Ms. Sitharaman sidestepped queries on the actual cash outgo for the government, as well as how the Centre intends to raise the needed funds.

Ernst and Young's chief

policy advisor D.K. Srivastava estimated that the measures announced on Wednesday amounted to ₹5.94 lakh crore, which include both liquidity financing measures and credit guarantees, although the direct fiscal cost to the government in the current financial year may only be ₹16,500 crore.

MSMEs will get the bulk of the funding. The ₹3 lakh crore emergency credit line will ensure that 45 lakh units will have access to working capital to resume business activity and safeguard jobs, Ms. Sitharaman said. For two

lakh MSMEs which are stressed or considered non-performing assets, the Centre will facilitate provision of ₹20,000 crore as subordinate debt. A ₹50,000 crore equity infusion is also planned, through an MSME fund of funds with a corpus of ₹10,000 crore.

The definition of an MSME is being expanded to allow for higher investment limits and the introduction of turnover-based criteria. In a bid to fulfil the Prime Minister's vision of a self-reliant "atmanirbhar" India, global tenders will not be allowed

Nothing for migrants, says Chidambaram

Congress leader and former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram said there was no relief for the poor migrants in the package announced by the Finance Minister. "There is nothing for the lakhs of poor and hungry migrant workers who have walked – and many thousands are still walking – to their home States. There is also nothing by way of cash transfer to the bottom half of the population," he said at a joint press meet with party spokesperson Randeep Surjewala. ▶ PAGE 8

for government procurement up to ₹200 crore.

NBFCs, housing finance companies and microfinance institutions – many of which serve the MSME sector – will be supported through a ₹30,000 crore investment scheme fully guaranteed by the Centre, and an expanded partial credit guarantee scheme worth ₹45,000 crore, of which the first 20% of losses will be borne by the Centre.

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REACTIONS ▶ PAGE 8

LIQUIDITY LIFELINE ▶ EDITORIAL

India records 3,525 more virus cases

Cases cross 77,500, according to States

Tests matter

Maharashtra, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu are now the top three States with most COVID-19 infections. In T.N., the average daily cases in the last 10 days has increased nearly six fold, compared to the previous 10 days. But T.N. conducts more tests per day and overall tests per million as compared to Maharashtra and Gujarat

State	Total cases	Avg. case increase (May 3-12)	Avg. case increase (Apr. 23-May 3)
Maharashtra	25,922	1,334.2	586.7
Gujarat	9,268	386.2	243
Tamil Nadu	9,227	588.2	107.4

State	Tests / million	Avg. tests per day (May 3-12)	Avg. tests (Apr. 23-May 3)
Maharashtra	1,778.6	6,200.9	7,306.4
Gujarat	1,844.6	3,947.6	3,767.6
Tamil Nadu	3,455.5	11,658	8,413

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

India reported a spike of 3,525 COVID-19 cases and 122 deaths on Wednesday, taking the total number of cases to 74,281 and deaths to 2,415. The country has 47,480 active cases, the Health Ministry said.

In a release, Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said the testing capacity had increased to one lakh a day.

According to the State Health Departments, the number of positive cases is 77,553 and the death toll is 2,528. Maharashtra, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu continue to have the most number of confirmed cases.

The Indian Council of

Medical Research (ICMR) said in a release that it "has fast-tracked the rollout of the global 'Solidarity' trial launched by the World Health Organization to help find an effective treatment for COVID-19".

"Four potential anti-viral agents – Remdesivir, Chloroquine/Hydroxychloroquine, Lopinavir-Ritonavir and Lopinavir-Ritonavir with Interferon (beta-1a) – are to be evaluated in the trial," ICMR Director-General Balram Bhagat said, adding that the trial had started recruiting patients.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10 & 12

Taiwan wants to join hands with India

ANANTH KRISHNAN

CHENNAI
Taiwan has proposed a regular communication channel with India to link up medical agencies to better cooperate in the fight against COVID-19, Foreign Minister Joseph Wu told *The Hindu* in an interview on Wednesday.

He said Taiwan's sharing of information on COVID-19 with countries had been limited by its arrangement with the World Health Organization. "[India and Taiwan] have engaged in dynamic ongoing communication on many levels. Our sharing of information... has been restricted to relying on the IHR [International Health Regulations] focal point... The arrangement is far from satisfactory. Information has not been shared in a timely fashion," he said.

INTERVIEW ▶ PAGE 12

Home run



Desperate measures: Workers stranded near Pune scrambling up a truck bound for Uttar Pradesh on Wednesday. ■ JIGNESH MISTRY

Donor has been placed on watch list since December 2019

VIJAYA SINGH
SUHASINI HAIDAR

NEW DELHI
A decision by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to donate \$3.6 million to Indian laboratories and research agencies to assist in countering the COVID-19 pandemic could run into delays, given that the agency has been placed on a "watch list" since December 2019, officials said here.

On Tuesday, the U.S. Embassy issued a release saying the CDC would commit \$3.6 million as an "initial tranche of funding" to India's response to the pandemic. "Since early January, the CDC's India Office has been collaborating with sub-national and national government institutes to support the COVID-19 response in India," the release said, adding



The money from CDC, a U.S. agency, was to help boost lab capacity for COVID testing.

that the money would go towards increasing "laboratory capacity for COVID-19 (SARC-CoV-2) testing, molecular diagnostics and serology".

However, a government official told *The Hindu* that any funding from the U.S. government body would have to be cleared by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) as it had been placed on a "watch list" on December 2, 2019, that barred it from sending funds directly

to any government or private institute in India without the MHA's clearance.

Work on Nipah

Significantly, the strictures followed an inquiry into the CDC's funding of an "unapproved" Indian laboratory in Manipal for work on the Nipah virus, considered a "potential bio-weapon".

On October 30, 2019, the Union Health Ministry wrote to both the CDC and the Manipal Centre for Virus Research (MCVR), ordering them to shut down the study. In a reply to *The Hindu* in February, the CDC said, "There was initial confusion about the requirement for the Health Ministry's Screening Committee clearance for private institutions."

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

more than 1,700 subsidiary canteens that function as retail outlets.

The canteens provide consumer goods of a wide range and variety at cheaper than market rates.

The committee negotiates with the firms to get maximum discounts along with consumer promotional offers on products for the benefit of CAPF personnel. More than 400 firms, which include multi-national companies, are authorized to sell at the CAPF canteens.

On being asked if products belonging to foreign brands but manufactured in India could be sold at the outlets, a Ministry spokesman said, "Made in India is the focus."

Presently, there are 119 master canteens that also double as warehouses and indigenous products as possible and also encourage others to do so. This is not the time to be on the back-foot but to turn the disaster into an opportunity. If every Indian uses swadeshi products, then in five years, we will be self-sufficient," Mr. Shah said.

"I also want to appeal to other people to use as many

CAPF canteens to go swadeshi

Announcement comes a day after PM urges people to use local products



Amit Shah
indigenous products as possible and also encourage others to do so. This is not the time to be on the back-foot but to turn the disaster into an opportunity. If every Indian uses swadeshi products, then in five years, we will be self-sufficient," Mr. Shah said.

"I also want to appeal to other people to use as many

Requests for FB user data by India up 28%

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The number of user data requests from the Government of India to Facebook increased 28% from July to December 2019 at 26,698 queries for 39,664 users or accounts – the second highest globally, according to a latest Transparency Report by the U.S.-based social media network.

In the same period in 2018, the number of such requests was 20,805 for 27,410 users or accounts.

The number for the first half of 2019 was 22,

Timings

DELHI

THURSDAY, MAY. 14
RISE 05:32 SET 19:05
RISE 00:52 SET 11:45
FRIDAY, MAY. 15
RISE 05:31 SET 19:05
RISE 01:32 SET 12:40
SATURDAY, MAY. 16
RISE 05:30 SET 19:06
RISE 02:06 SET 13:34

Delhi Weather max min
Delhi City 37 26
Safdarjang 37 26
Palam 37 26Delhi Pali Today
37°C A cloudy and warm day. Spell of dust storm and thunder shower with strong winds will occur. Temperature will fall.Delhi Pali Tomorrow
39°C Rise in temperature. The weather will be very warm and dry with decrease in clouding.Copyright Skymet Weather 2019
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Curbs relaxed, but life far from normal

Many have restarted their lives but it has been difficult; lack of transportation is hurting business

JAIDEEP DEO BHANJ
SHINJINI GHOSH
NEW DELHI

As the Capital slowly makes its way out of the lockdown, the first to restart their profession are the self-employed, for whom working from home was never an option. For them, sitting at home meant frustration and helplessness as there was little money inflow.

Even after resuming their livelihood, there life has been difficult and different.

For Ram Pal, a cobbler, the hurdles kept mounting as business has failed to take off. Hailing from Uttar Pradesh's Barabanki district, he said: "I returned to my spot near the market a week ago, after people said that rules have been relaxed and people are stepping out. But life has remained the same. I have hardly earned anything in the last one week."

He has a family of six to fend for and has no idea where to get the money from. "The landlord is also putting pressure on us to pay the rent. How do we explain that we do not have money to buy a proper meal? So how can we afford to pay the rent? I will watch for a couple more days and then start walking towards the Saifaijung Hospital but was



A mechanic repairing cycles at Krishna Nagar; a sketch artist looking for work near LSR College. ■ R.V. MOORTHY, JAIDEEP DEO BHANJ

er option," Pal said.

Unending wait

Yusuf John, a sketch artist, who had spent 20 years near the India Gate making portraits of people, sits on a footpath near Lady Shri Ram College with his drawing pad and box of pencils hoping that someone would stop by.

"I would make at least ₹1,000 a day and even more on weekends and winter. Since May 5, I have been sitting here but have made only two portraits. I can't wait to go back to India Gate once it reopens," John says.

He added that when the lockdown started, he was undergoing treatment at the Saifaijung Hospital but was

discharged after the COVID-19 outbreak and has been living on the footpath since. "God has given me only one talent, which has fed me all my life. I am willing to work but getting customers is not easy," says John.

While many sat at home and waited for the lockdown to be lifted, some like Mohammed Kasim, a carpenter, started selling vegetables. "I live in Kotla and with the help of my wife, we used to fill sacks with vegetables and sell them on a street in Lodi Colony. Nobody questioned us because we were selling essentials and the short trip to the main road helped us earn a profit," said Kasim, who resumed his

usual work at a housing project.

Biggest hindrance

Even with the government allowing certain trades, the lack of public transport has been a hindrance. Niles Kumar, a plumber, says he does not have a motorcycle and hence restricted to places he can reach on his cycle.

"Since sanitary and hardware stores have opened, I have been standing outside these shops hoping that someone will buy something and will need help installing it. But most customers are plumbers themselves, who have come to buy fittings," Niles says.

For several others working in government offices,

who have been directed to start working out of their respective offices, the absence of public transport has put them in a spot.

A staffer working at the National Green Tribunal said: "We have been reporting for work since the first week of May on the basis of a roster. Usually we need to go every alternate day. But because I do not have a vehicle, my colleague takes a 10-kilometre detour every time, just to pick me up."

The resident of Dwarka added: "We have no other option but to carpool. Fortunately, till now our duties were on the same day. I am not sure how I will reach court if our duties get assigned on separate days."

Plea to transfer Tabligh chief case hits hurdle

Police oppose request for NIA probe

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Delhi Police on Wednesday opposed a plea in the High Court seeking direction to handover the investigation of a case against Tablighi Jamaat leader Maulana Saad to the National Investigation Agency (NIA). Delhi Police had registered a case against Tablighi chief for holding a congregation in violation of the lockdown orders.

A Bench of Justices Siddhartha Mridul and Anup Jairam Bhambhani during the videoconference hearing asked the petitioner, a Mumbai-based lawyer, to place the judgments in support of his plea to transfer the investigation from Delhi Police Crime Branch to NIA.

The petition has also sought direction to the NIA to investigate the matter in a time-bound manner and

monitor the probe by the High Court. It alleged that Delhi Police has failed to arrest the leader despite the lapse of considerable time.

COVID-19**Hearing on May 28**

Delhi government opposed the plea saying that Delhi Police was conducting the investigation in a fair manner and argued that the petitioner has no locus standi to file the plea. The High Court has posted the case for further hearing on May 28.

The plea claimed that the crime branch of Delhi Police has failed in tracing out or apprehending Mr. Saad despite lapse of considerable time and his photograph being published in electronic media.

Ramdev agrees to remove his tweet against Dabur

He compared prices of same product

SOIBAM ROCKY SINGH
NEW DELHI

Baba Ramdev has agreed before the Delhi High Court to remove a tweet he posted last month in which he had hinted at Dabur India Limited of taking advantage of COVID-19 pandemic by charging customers 25% more for its product, 'chyawanprash', than those sold by Patanjali.

On April 24, Baba Ramdev had tweeted an image comparing the prices that showed Dabur's product was sold at ₹325 per kg, while Patanjali sold it at ₹260 per kg.

Allegation

Along with the image, Baba Ramdev had tweeted that people all over the country were vigorously using Ayurvedic chyawanprash and honey to increase their im-

munity against COVID-19, but some are forgetting their responsibility towards their country and profiteering while taking advantage of the situation.

After Dabur India approached the High Court against the tweet, both Dabur and Baba Ramdev agreed that the matter can be settled on him removing the tweet from his twitter account.

They also agreed that Dabur India will have the right to approach Twitter Inc. for removal of the tweet and "will not claim any damages or any other relief".

Justice Rajiv Shakher said that Baba Ramdev can compare the price of the two products after expunging the portion of the message about others profiteering from the situation.

Delhi riots: court grants bail to student

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Wednesday granted bail to Gulfsha Fatima, an MBA student and an anti-CAA activist associated with women's collective, Pinjra Tod, in a case related to communal violence during the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in northeast Delhi in February.

Ms. Fatima was arrested for allegedly instigating a crowd of protesters that led to riots in the area. According to the FIR, she, along with others, allegedly instigated a crowd to block the road near Jaffrabad metro station on February 22 to protest against the CAA and NRC.

The court granted the relief to the woman, arrested on April 9, on the ground of parity as three co-accused in the case have been granted bail.

Set to work



Workers at a construction site in New Delhi on Wednesday. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

Maintenance of over 2,200 coaches being done: DMRC

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) on Wednesday said that maintenance of over 2,200 coaches and 264 stations were being done even as the exact dates for the beginning of operation of the metro network remains uncertain.

The date of opening of the Delhi Metro has still not been finalised and will be notified to the public in due course. All systems of the metro, including the signall-

ing, electrical, rolling stock and tracks will have to be tested in detail before services are started to ensure full safety of our commuters," said Anuj Dayal, DMRC spokesperson.

DMRC officials added that "cleaning and maintenance of 1,100 escalators and 1,000 lifts, apart from the coaches and stations are also being done".

The Delhi Metro has not been operational since the nationwide lockdown was announced.

BJP distributes food items to migrants

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A special camp was organised by the BJP on Mathura Road in Badarpur on Wednesday to provide essential food items to migrant workers.

Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Legislative Assembly, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, said migrant workers going home were not only given essential items but also screened by a team of doctors.

Jamia prepares students for online interviews

University conducts interactive session

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Jamia Millia Islamia on Wednesday started sessions to prepare students for an upcoming online recruitment drive.

In an interactive session, students were informed about expectations of companies in the present situation with instructors stressing on executing effective communication in online interviews, the university said. While



those who participated engaged in an interactive session, only 100 students managed to participate as a consequence of technical issues, it also said.

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CIN: U45200JH2013SGC001752

CORRIGENDUM - #2

NIT No.: JUIDCO/NIT/HWS/JURLP/OCB/2/339
Tender ID: - 2020_JUADB_44633_1
Ref PR No.: - 226422
All the bidders are hereby informed that Corrigendum #2 for the tender Construction and 5 years of Operation and Maintenance, Rising main, 9.5 MLD Water treatment plant, Clear water main, Overhead reservoirs, Distribution network and House service connections" has been published on the e-procurement website of Government of Jharkhand.

It is requested to please refer the same before submission of bids.

Sd/-
Project Director (Tech.)
JUIDCO Ltd., Ranchi
PR 228325 (Urban Development) 20-21 (D)

Six new cases in Gautam Buddha Nagar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Six more people have tested positive for COVID-19 in Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddha Nagar, taking the total number of cases in the district to 236, officials said on Wednesday.

Two patients have also recovered, leaving 90 active cases, the officials said.

Gautam Buddha Nagar, adjoining Delhi, has so far recorded three deaths due to the virus.

Among the new patients are a 51-year-old man from Sector 5, a 22-year-old man from Sector 22, a 24-year-old man from Sector 8, a 34-year-old man from Sector 66 and a 34-year-old woman from Sector 76 – all in Noida, said District Surveillance Officer Sunil Dohare. A 30-year-old resident of J ewar in Greater Noida has also tested positive for the infection.

Three men, two of them aged 60 and one 62, have died due to the virus.

The recovery rate of patients is 60.59%, according to official statistics. Officials added that 4,376 samples have been collected for COVID-19 test in the district so far, while 501 people are currently under institutional quarantine.

After audit, death toll jumps by 20

Govt. reports 359 new COVID-19 cases; no details on actual deaths in past 24 hours

NIKHIL M BABU
NEW DELHI

The total number of deaths due to COVID-19 increased to 106 on Wednesday as the Delhi government added 20 more to the toll after an audit committee went through case sheets received from hospitals.

All the 20 deaths did not happen in the past 24 hours. "They are deaths reported of April and May, as per case sheets received from hospitals, after audited by committee [sic]," read an official statement.

The Delhi government did not provide details or dates on which the 20 deaths occurred or the actual number of deaths that occurred in the past 24 hours. According to the government's health bulletin on Wednesday, 359 new COVID-19 cases were reported in Delhi in the past 24 hours, taking the total number of cases to 7,998.

Of the 7,998 cases, 2,858 people have recovered and there are 5,034 active cases.

The Congress and the BJP have accused Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal of hiding the actual number of deaths and positive cases from the public.

The government has strongly denied the allegations and said that hospitals



People wait for their turn to collect their meal in the Capital on Wednesday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Virus spread

Total number of COVID-19 cases	7,998
Total deaths	106*
New cases in the past 24 hours	359
New deaths in the past 24 hours	20*

*CASES INCLUDE DEATHS IN APRIL, MAY

SOURCE: DELHI GOVERNMENT HEALTH BULLETIN

the number of such deaths from just two city hospitals until Tuesday, accessed by *The Hindu*, is more. "There have been 58 COVID-19 related deaths in our hospital and 17 people were brought dead or died within 24 hours of reaching the hospital. All of them were COVID-19 positive cases," said Minakshi Bhardwaj, Medical Superintendent of Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital.

According to the Delhi government, the total number of COVID-19 deaths from the hospital is only 41.

Similarly, there were 81 such deaths in Delhi government's Lok Nayak Hospital till Tuesday, according to the government. But as per the Delhi government, there were only 19 deaths in the hospital.

Different figures
Though the total number of COVID-19 deaths reported by the Delhi government is 106,

send the number of deaths to a Death Audit Committee, appointed by the government on April 20. Only the panel can certify the deaths and only those will be counted in the health bulletin, added the government.

Odd-even policy

"Most of the business entities suggested that relief should be given to open the markets in Delhi. Most traders suggested that markets be opened based on odd-even principles and that timings of some markets can also be changed," the statement said.

However, according to the Delhi Vyapar Mahasangh, it was decided at their own meeting that these not be allowed to open at all.

"At an important meeting with all market associations and respective office-bearers, it was decided that all Delhi markets should remain closed till May due to the rising number of cases and deaths due to COVID-19," it said in a statement.

This was to ensure safety of not only traders but also the customers, the body said.

In today's meeting, 90% of the traders said that markets should open while 10% of the traders suggested that the lockdown should continue," the CTI said.

Odd-even policy
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While some trade representatives want the markets to open but with riders, others are in favour of keeping them shut till the end of May.

The Chamber of Trade and Industry (CTI), an umbrella organisation of traders, met through videoconferencing on Wednesday in which 100 traders' associations participated, the CTI claimed.

CTI convener Brijesh Goyal and president Subhash Khandelwal said representatives from Chandni Chowk, Kashmere Gate, Chawri Bazaar, Naya Bazar, Khar Baoli, Sadar Bazar, Kamla Nagar, Connaught Place, Nehru Place, Sarojini Nagar, Rajouri Garden, Gandhi Nagar, Shahdara, Mayapuri, Lajpat Nagar among other markets were present.

"In today's meeting, 90% of the traders said that markets



Migrant labourers who will be travelling by special trains to Bihar wait after the screening process at a school in the Capital on Wednesday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

Govt. receives over 4 lakh ideas to ease restrictions

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government on Wednesday said it had received an overwhelming response to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's call for suggestions related to easing the upcoming edition of the national lockdown.

Mr. Kejriwal on Tuesday had sought suggestions from the public on the relaxations of lockdown after 17 May.

"Till 5 p.m. on May 13, the Delhi government has received 4,76,000 WhatsApp messages, 10,700 emails, and 39,000 calls. 22,700 responses have been received on the Change.Org petition," the government said in a statement.

Various categories

According to the government, the responses have been received under various categories such as industrial and MSME operations, transportation, education, and day-to-day activities of the people such as commercial and non-commercial activities.

With the COVID-19 lockdown extending up to three phases, Mr. Kejriwal had said that based on the suggestions received by the people, the Delhi government will send a proposal on the same to the Centre on May 15.

He had said that the suggestions received will also be discussed with doctors and experts.

Addressing a digital conference on Tuesday, the Chief Minister had sought suggestions on the relaxation of lockdown.

CM YK

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Will bear fare for Bihar migrants'

State yet to respond on matter of payment, says Delhi govt.

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government will bear the expenses for sending migrant workers from Bihar in three special trains back to their State on Wednesday, the Delhi government spokesperson said.

"Today, three trains carrying migrant workers are leaving Delhi for Bhagalpur,

paying as the Bihar government has not yet responded to us on the matter of payment. All the three trains left by 6 p.m. and each of them was carrying around 1,100-1,200 workers," the spokesperson said.

"For all the three trains, the Delhi government will be

Barauni and Darbhanga in Bihar. @ArvindKejriwal government will pay for fares of all workers," Delhi Labour Minister Gopal Rai said in a tweet in Hindi.

"We have given them food and ticket. We hope you all will reach home safe and meet your families," Mr. Rai said in a recorded message.

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Policeman raises concern over long duty hours

Grievances of officer addressed after he writes to Police Commissioner

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Concerned over his health and hygiene during the COVID-19 outbreak, a policeman deployed at Shahbad Dairy police station of Outer North district has written to the Police Commissioner seeking relief from long duty hours.

The assistant sub-inspector wrote that due to long duty hours, he is unable to go home. He has to prepare

his own food as he cannot use mess facility due to social distancing rules, and fears contracting the deadly virus. He asked for duty at each police station to be cut short from 12 hours to eight hours.

Poor immunity
"We are unable to take care of ourselves and do not even get time to wash our uniform. We are also unable to exercise and do other activi-

ties to keep ourselves fit. All this can result in poor health and immune system of police personnel," read the letter.

The policeman said that they manage to consume half-cooked food and get to sleep for only a few hours. They are losing their immune power which will make them prone to COVID-19. Even when the reserve staff has been pressed into COVID-19 duty, they still

Delhi govt. provides aid to auto, e-rickshaw drivers

Several software applications developed to transfer money

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government has transferred ₹5,000 each to 1,10,093 PSV badge holders, like autorickshaw and Gramin Sewa drivers, who provide last-mile connectivity in the Capital.

On Tuesday, Health Minister Satyendar Jain had said that some hospitals were not sending death summaries to the government in time. "We have written to hospitals to send reports of deaths immediately. Hospitals have started sending death summaries," the Minister added.

Rail Bhawan closed

The Rail Bhawan will be closed on Thursday and Friday for sanitisation after a COVID-19 positive case was reported in the Ministry of Railways, according to an official statement.

Meanwhile, the office of the New Delhi district magistrate was sealed on Wednesday after eight civil defence volunteers working there tested positive for COVID-19, officials said.

All those who came in contact with the infected will be tested, a senior official said, adding that contact tracing has also been undertaken.

The eight personnel were involved in field work such as distribution of masks and other relief works.

According to the Delhi court judges have also gone into self quarantine at home for 14 days after one of them came in contact with an infected patient, read a circular issued by the Saket District Courts.



The Delhi government had decided to provide ₹5,000 each to 1,10,093 PSV badge holders. ■ FILE PHOTO: SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

based technology and software. The PSV-batch holders applied based on their driving licence and Aadhaar details, it said.

"This way, through mobile technology and round-the-clock efforts of the Delhi Transport department officials, we are doing the verification process. We have received nearly 1,58,000 applications," said Delhi Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot.

The Delhi government has, he said, also initiated the process of registration for e-rickshaw owners and permit holders of para-transit vehicles who do not have PSV badges.

Name verification

However, in over 60,000 cases, there was a mismatch in names between driving licence and Aadhaar leading to verification issues.

All the 13 MLOs were then directed to manually cross-check and verify the names and details in the driving licence.

"We developed mobile-

Passengers left stranded at railway station

Public can avail DTC shuttle service for their onward journey, says Delhi Police

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

+



Homeward bound: Passengers arrive at the New Delhi railway station to board special trains on Wednesday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

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Workers' exodus resumes after brief lull

Hundreds of them trudge along Kundli-Manesar-Palwal Expressway daily, with pit stops en route

ASHOK KUMAR
PACHGAON (HARYANA)

Despite the Haryana government allowing transportation of migrant workers by trains and buses, the workers, including women and children, continue to walk back to their hometowns in hordes along the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal (KMP) Expressway.

Hukum Singh, a priest at Fazalwas village near KMP toll, said around 200-250 men and women along with kids come daily to the temple and proceed with their belongings on their onward journey after taking a break for a few hours. "We provide them food and water," he said. Another villager said the exodus had stopped briefly, but the workers have started walking back to their hometowns over the past couple of days in large numbers.

Pappu, a construction worker, on his way back to Jalaun in Uttar Pradesh with his wife and children, said he had



Migrant workers walk along the KMP Expressway near Pachgaon on Wednesday. ■ ASHOK KUMAR

registered on the government website several days back but there was no response. He said that he sold his belongings to pay for the rent and decided to leave on foot.

'No response'

Another worker, Sagar, from Patna, said he too had registered online and called several helplines but there was no response. He hoped to get a ride in some vehicle on his

way back to his hometown. He was accompanied by 10 people, including his wife, nieces and children.

Vijay Bahadur, who works at a footwear company in Bahadurgarh, said he had not got salary for the month of April and was living hand-to-mouth. "My company sources raw material from China. It may take months before it starts operations," he said. Hailing from Prayagraj in Ut-

tar Pradesh, Mr. Bahadur said no monetary help from the government came his way and that he need not at least worry about two square meals a day back home. "We arranged a cab for Rs. 3,000 to reach Pachgaon from Tikri in Delhi. Now we will hire another cab to reach home. The landlord has taken the key to my room and threatened to sell off my belongings if we don't return in a

month's time to pay the rent," he said.

Chanderjeet, walking back to Uttar Pradesh's Azamgarh late on Wednesday evening, said his company was calling only regular workers for work and not the contractual workers. "We waited for more than a month after the Prime Minister's appeal, but decided to return to our hometowns now. It might take us more than a week on foot. It is 800 km by train," said Mr. Chanderjeet, who works at Satyam Autos in Manesar.

'Police helping at night'

A toll attendant at KMP toll here said hundreds of workers have been walking the highway to go back to their home States. "Though police don't allow them during the daytime, they flag down vehicles at night to help the workers board them. The exodus has begun over the past few days after a brief lull," said the toll attendant.

Two migrant labourers die in U.P. mishap

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

Two persons died and several others were injured, with half-a-dozen of them grievously, after a supply truck carrying migrant labourers back home from Ahmedabad in Gujarat rammed into a truck near Kanpur Dehat.

The incident happened early on Wednesday on a highway in the Akbarpur area of the district, police said. Ahmedabad is over 980 kms from Akbarpur.

The supply truck, coming from Ahmedabad, rammed into a truck from behind. While two labourers have been reported dead so far, six were seriously injured, said Anurag Vats, SP Kanpur Dehat.

Punjab announces compensation to liquor contractors for losses

CM Amarinder Singh approves changes in State excise policy

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Wednesday approved changes to the excise policy following the COVID-19 outbreak, announcing compensation to liquor contractors for the losses incurred by them during the lockdown.

An official statement said the Chief Minister has accepted the recommendation of the excise department, aligned to the advice of the finance department, to maintain the period of contract of liquor vends till March 31, 2021.

He has also approved the finance department's recommendation to provide pro-

portionate adjustment of MGQ (the quantity that a retailer is bound to sell in one excise year) for the losses incurred in the nine days of lockdown in March, it added.

The Chief Minister has also set up a Group of Ministers, which has been mandated to consider the issue of levying a special COVID cess on sale of liquor.

Impasse continues

Meanwhile the impasse between the Punjab Ministers and State's Chief Secretary Karan Avtar Singh over liquor policy continued even as the Chief Secretary was divested of the charge of Financial Commissioner (Taxation).

Railway porters take to construction work

With trains suspended due to curbs, they are battling hunger and unemployment

SIDHARTH YADAV
BHOPAL

Hauling cement sacks on back, and hoisting tiles onto his head, gently carrying them upstairs on the foot overbridge is no different than shouldering passenger luggage for Imratil Prajapati, except for three reasons. As a construction worker, he earns much less, can't take breaks as per convenience and the job is irregular.

And, the uncertainty of the work duration is anxiety-inducing. "We don't even know till when will this work last," said Mr. Prajapati, a porter at the Bhopal railway station. "Each tile we carry equals four passenger bags. We were labourers even before, and our own masters."

With trains suspended in view of the COVID-19 lock-



Porters working as construction labourers at the Bhopal railway station. ■ A.M. FARUQI

down, around 40 of the 122 porters at the station have taken to construction work on the premises to battle hunger and tide over unemployment. Part of the overbridge on platform number 3 collapsed in February, and its revamp has been due since.

The porters perform all kinds of unskilled labour — hammering into old tiles, heaving debris, and lugging rods, for eight hours a day. Whereas, masons take over laying of tiles and plastering them.

Batches of porters work on alternate days for ₹350. "There is barely any food at home. But there is no work for every porter at the same time. We have to give our brothers a chance too," said

Mr. Prajapati. When the trains ran, he made ₹500 every day.

The uncertainty of the work pushed unskilled workers, mostly migrants from the hinterland, to return to their villages. And this caused a paucity. "So, we proposed to the porters if they wanted to work at the revamp site," said the contractor's representative, requesting anonymity.

"The condition of porters has reached a hunger crisis," said Radhesham Chouksey, a porter for 10 years.

Pending rent

Furiously breaking older tiles, Rambabu Bhilala, from Shajapur, said his rent was ₹3,000 every month. "I haven't paid it for four months now. There are two children, wife and parents to feed at

Miners threaten stir over coal 'import'

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

Coal miners and traders in Meghalaya have threatened mass defiance of the lockdown over what is being seen as the State government's move to "carry coal to Newcastle."

The government had on May 6 issued an order allow-

ing transportation of coal from Assam and other States for cement plants here, some of them in East Jaintia Hills district. The 'irony' of the order was not lost on many in the district whose economy began suffering after the National Green Tribunal banned the rat-hole coal mining in April 2014.

"We have set the government a four-day deadline," said Shanbor Lamare, secretary of the Jaintia Coal Miner and Dealer Association. "We will defy the lockdown if the government fails to heed our demand," said Albinus Lamueng of the Meghalaya People's Labour Union, Jaintia Hills.

85-year-old grandmother recovers from COVID-19

Doctors, nurses at Odisha hospital rejoice

SATYASUNDAR BARIK
BHUBANESWAR

An 85-year-old woman, weighing just 22 kg, in Odisha's Jajpur district has recovered from COVID-19, raising hopes for others fighting the disease in the State. Doctors and paramedical staff in the city's SUM COVID Hospital were elated when she walked out of the hospital, holding her tiny grandchild in her arm.

The elderly woman hails from Jajpur's Katikata panchayat, which was declared a containment zone. She had remained with her family from March 22 to April 30. She is believed to have come in contact with another infected person between March 29 and April 25.

The woman tested positive on April 30 and was shifted to SUM COVID Hospital the same day.

'No co-morbidity'

"She did not have any co-morbidity factors except having age-related issues. She was asymptomatic for the last three days before her discharge. Doctors kept her under focused observation for 12 days," said Puspajit Samantsinghar, Medical Superintendent, SUM COVID Hospital.

Fourteen persons, including two three-year-old children from Jajpur district,

Chief Engineer (Shimla Zone)
HPPWD Nirman Bhawan Nigam Vihar,
Shimla H.P. 171002

UNDER PRADHAN MANTRI GRAM SADAK YOJANA (PMGSY)
e-Procurement Notice

The Government of India has received a loan/ credit number "P124639" under PMGSY-II (Rural Road Project-II) under World Bank Funding (Additional Financing & Green & Climate Resilience) Rural Roads Financing towards the cost of Rural Roads Project (Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana) and intends to apply a part of the funds to cover eligible payments under the contracts for construction of RRP-II works. Bidding is open to all bidders from eligible source countries as defined in the bidding document.

The Superintending Engineer 11th Circle HPPWD Rampur District Shimla HP -172001 on behalf of Governor Himachal Pradesh invites the item rate bids in electronic-tendering system for construction of roads under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (Batch-I) of 2019-20 in the district of Lahul and Spiti from 01/05/2020 to 07/05/2020.

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Three succumb to virus in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh

More Koyambedu-linked cases in A.P.; Kerala investigates local transmission

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BENGALURU
Karnataka reported two more COVID-19 deaths, from Kalaburagi and Dakshina Kannada.

Andhra Pradesh witnessed one more death due to the virus and reported 48 fresh cases on Wednesday. Eight of the new cases were migrant workers from Odisha and seven from Chittoor and, East Godavari had visited Chennai's Koyambedu market.

The State's tally rose to 2,137 and the toll touched 47. Also, 86 persons from Guntur (27), Krishna (25), Kurnool (13), Kadapa (10), East Godavari (4), West Godavari (4), Anantapur (1), Nellore (1) and Srikrakulam (1) recovered

COVID-19

and were discharged, bringing recoveries to 1,142.

Also, 948 patients were under treatment in hospitals. New cases were from Guntur (12), Chittoor (11), Kurnool (7), East Godavari (4), Anantapur (3) and Krishna (3).

With 9,284 samples tested over 24 hours Andhra Pradesh had carried out 2,01,158 tests. The first one lakh tests were in the first 51 days since the first case and 1,463 of them were positive; a positivity rate was 1.4%. In the next 12 days, the rest of the tests followed and 674 samples tested positive, a rate of 0.68%.

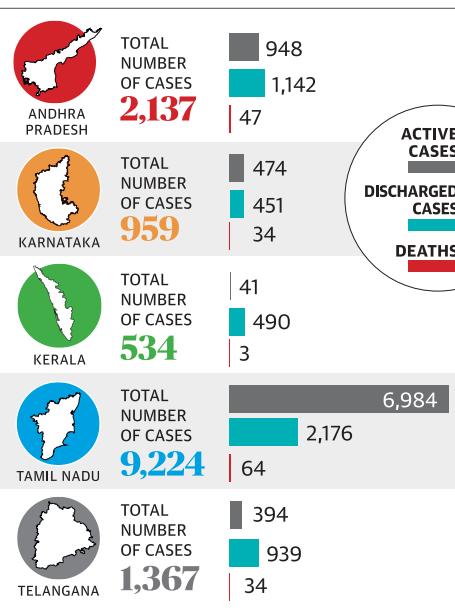
Ten more people tested positive for COVID-19 in Kerala on Wednesday, including six who were either expatriates or those who had come home from other States. Three cases were from Malappuram, two each in Wayanad and Palakkad and one each in Kozhikode,

When work calls

Despite the COVID-19 threat looming large, the Kerala government has made arrangements for the evaluation of the papers



Duty bound: Teachers wearing masks evaluating examination papers of Class 12 students in Kochi on Wednesday. ■ AFP



Kottayam and Kannur districts.

Four persons had come from West Asia recently and two were from Chennai, while four were seen as cases of local transmission.

Four cases of local transmission had been traced to a truck driver at Wayanad, who had been to Chennai.

These included two policemen from Malappuram and Kannur, on duty to Wayanad. Health authorities estimated that at least 10 persons had contracted COVID-19 from the truck driver.

Of 534 COVID-19 cases in Kerala so far, 41 were under treatment in hospitals, and 490 recovered. The State put 34,447 persons under surveillance.

With the two additional fatalities, Karnataka's toll rose to 33. A 60-year-old man from a containment zone in Kalaburagi and a 58-year-old woman from Dakshina Kannada died, even as 34 new positive cases were reported on Wednesday, raising the State's tally to 959.

Following a meeting by Health Minister B. Sriramulu, with representatives from private hospitals and specialty associations, private hospitals agreed to start treatment of non-COVID-19 cases from Thursday.

The spike in the COVID cases continued for another day in Telangana with 41 more persons testing positive to the virus on Wednesday, taking the total number of affected persons to 1,367.

The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation area continued to be the focal point in virus spread with 31 more cases being reported during the day while the number of migrant workers returning to the State is turning out to be the major inflection point for the third consecutive day.

Three deaths in T.N.

Three men, all in their 40s, died in Chennai and Tamil Nadu's overall tally of COVID-19 cases surpassed the 9,000-mark with 509 new cases added on Wednesday. After three days of reporting

more than 500 cases, the number of cases marginally dipped to 380 in Chennai, and its case count climbed to 5,262. With the fresh cases – 288 men and 221 women – reported in 16 districts across Tamil Nadu, the State's total number of cases stood at 9,227. The total number of deaths due to COVID-19 increased to 64.

Another 42 persons were discharged from various hospitals in the State. This took the total number of persons discharged after treatment to 2,176. As on date, there were 6,984 active cases and 4,623 individuals suspected to have symptoms of COVID-19 in isolation facilities.

Along with Chennai, the cases continued to surge in neighbouring districts of Chengalpattu and Tiruvallur. There were 25 cases each in the two districts. With this, the total number climbed to 416 in Chengalpattu and 492 in Tiruvallur.

(With inputs from Vijayawada, Hyderabad, Chennai and Thiruvananthapuram Bureaus)

There is a shortfall in production of organic toddy

Telangana BJP, Cong. oppose Pothireddypadu regulator work

A.P. decision to increase capacity of regulator criticised



Seeking action: Congress leaders participating in a protest in Hyderabad on Wednesday. ■ G. RAMAKRISHNA

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD
Top BJP leaders led by Telangana party unit president Bandi Sanjay on Wednesday observed a one-day fast in protest against the Telangana government's failure to prevent the Andhra Pradesh government from taking up capacity enhancement of the Pothireddypadu head regulator lift irrigation scheme.

While Mr. Sanjay observed the fast at the party office in Nampally, other leaders protested in their homes across the State.

The BJP leadership condemned the Andhra Pradesh government's decision and also criticised the Telangana government for its "failure" to prevent the neighbouring State from going ahead with the construction of increasing the capacity of the head regulator, enabling drawing

of more water from the Sri-Sailam reservoir, which goes against the Krishna River Management Board (KRMB) and Brijesh Kumar tribunal orders.

If the works are allowed to go ahead, farmers in Khammam, Rangareddy, Nalgonda and Mahabubnagar would be affected.

The Telangana Congress blamed Chief Minister Chan-

drasekar Rao for the Andhra Pradesh move to draw additional water from Pothireddypadu and said he should resign if the Jaganmohan Reddy government went ahead with its decision. The party organised a deeksha at Gandhi Bhavan protesting what it alleged the 'collusion' of Mr. Chandrasekhar Rao with Jaganmohan Reddy for mutual benefit.

The PIL was filed by Cam-

A.P. reduces SSC exam papers to seven
VIJAYAWADA
After announcing that the SSC (Class 10) Board examinations would be conducted in July, the Andhra Pradesh government has now decided to cut down the number of examination papers from 11 to seven.

"Conducting exams in adherence to the COVID-19 protocol is a challenge. We don't want the students to get exposed to any possible health threat during exams," said Education Minister Adimulapu Suresh.

Polavaram works hit as migrant workers leave

ELURU
Various works on the Polavaram project have been hit due to the lockdown as more than 1,000 migrant workers engaged at the work site have left for their home States. In all, 2,161 workers were engaged for works such as spillway, coffer dam and earth-cum-rockfill dam. Recently, migrants from Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Assam, engaged at the site, staged a protest demanding that they be sent to their native places.

At a time when people are not ready to touch anyone out of fear of contracting the COVID-19 infection, 10 Muslim youth who have been identified as 'CORONA warriors' in the Tilak Park police station limits provided the necessary help and financial assistance to the poor Hindu family of K.H.B. Colony, where a 60-year-old man died due to age-related illness on Tuesday.

Narayana Rao, 60, a physically challenged person,

was working as a tailor. He died on Tuesday. Relatives could not come due to the lockdown. K.H.B. Colony has been completely sealed after a man died due to COVID-19 and a couple, his neigh-

bours, tested positive.

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Local motif

PM Modi's call for national self-reliance might be undermined if it turns overly ambitious

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's emphasis on Tuesday, on a renewed drive for a self-reliant India is not merely a reaction to the new global realities spawned by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a throwback to the nationalist economic policies that India and other newly independent nations followed in the last century before the high tide of globalisation swept over. His statement also foretells a potential renewal of the swadeshi economic policies that continue to inspire Hindutva politics long after centrist nationalists have abandoned them. India opened itself to the global market in 1991 through its liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation policies, but remained cautious as it skirted around the whirlwind of international capital in the following decades. This hesitant approach of India often led to a clamour from various vocal quarters for faster and deeper opening of its economy but its relative insularity from disruptive global headwinds turned out to be helpful several times in the last three decades. When Mr. Modi took over as Prime Minister, there was a renewed cry from global corporations and foreign governments for bolder reforms. If anything, he travelled the opposite course – raising fresh trade barriers and seeking to strengthen India's manufacturing base through the 'Make In India' initiative. In doing so, he has been true to his ideological calling and also to his mandates of 2014 and 2019 – which were not sought or won for expanding globalisation. Mr. Modi's politics, in fact, rides on the mobilisation of people dispossessed and alienated by the rumbling march of globalisation by providing them new targets to vent their anger on.

The pandemic brought to the fore at once the limits and inevitability of globalisation. Countries such as the U.S. that relied on others for the supply of essential medicines and medical equipment were suddenly vulnerable. China's unmatched leverage in global supply chains and concerns that it may weaponise trade have prompted a renewed global discussion on the components of national security and how to protect them. At the same time, this pandemic continues to illustrate how inseparably shared is the future of humanity, across national boundaries. Mr. Modi understands this dynamics of global politics and has sought to advance India's interest within an emerging framework. He did not repudiate globalisation, but proposed a new syntax for it – a human-centric one, as opposed to the current profit motivated model, according to him. He placed India at its centre. This is largely rhetorical and might be unmindful of India's limitations. To the extent that such politics brings succour to the disadvantaged, it is to be welcomed. If this is only a facade for majoritarianism or authoritarianism, it will bring more harm to the same people that this approach professes to protect. His supporters and opponents alike would be eager to see how this philosophy translates into policy.

Liquidity lifeline

The Finance Minister did well to try and break the confidence logjam in the credit market

From an overall perspective, the first tranche of announcements made by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan on Wednesday is impressive indeed. There are, and will be, many issues in the details but taken as a whole, the measures announced will go a long way in lifting the spirits of the two key and troubled sectors of MSMEs and non-banking finance companies. While for the former it is an existential crisis, for the latter it is one of liquidity. The massive ₹3-lakh crore collateral-free assistance handed out to MSMEs will help them crank up their operations. Ms. Sitharaman has done well in extending a sovereign credit guarantee for the complete amount as banks may otherwise have been reluctant to support troubled borrowers. The government could have specified the interest cap on these loans without leaving it to individual lenders as each of them has its own rate structure. Again, the scheme could have been extended until the end of this financial year instead of until October 31. India is now entering the monsoon season when activity is traditionally dull, so it is not clear how many borrowers will get the benefit. The ₹20,000 crore partially guaranteed subordinated debt programme and the ₹50,000 crore fund of funds scheme will help boost the equity portion on MSME finances but again, the finer details need to be clear.

NBFCs, housing finance firms and micro finance entities get a much required liquidity boost in the form of a ₹30,000 crore scheme wherein their debt paper will be fully guaranteed by the government. With this, and the partial credit guarantee scheme of ₹45,000 crore, the government has broken the logjam wherein banks were unwilling to extend credit despite the RBI's strong push. This should largely attenuate the liquidity crisis in the non-banking space for now. The Minister has also done well in addressing the liquidity issues of power distribution companies through a ₹90,000 crore infusion that will be securitised on their receivables and backed by a State government guarantee. Wednesday's announcements are focused on the liquidity part of the crisis. While the headline numbers appear big, the reality is that the government will be called upon to bear the liability only if the economic situation becomes hopeless; it may not come to that. What the announcements do is to break the confidence logjam in the credit market and give the assurance to lenders and borrowers that the government is willing to backstop their commitments. This is the signal that MSMEs and their lenders needed as liquidity was always there but only for the most credit worthy of borrowers. Here, the government has played its role to perfection.

A plan to revive a broken economy

There are clear, implementable steps the Centre can take in fiscal terms to revive the economy and support livelihoods

PRABHAT PATNAIK, JAYATI GHOSH & HARSH MANDER

The Prime Minister has just announced Lockdown 4.0.

Despite some resulting increase in economic activity, vast numbers of working people will remain without their regular incomes. He also announced a package of ₹20-lakh crore, but this includes already allocated money of ₹6-lakh crore and monetary policy directives to banks and non-banking financial companies. The announcements by the Finance Minister thus far involve no additional public spending, even though this is urgently required to revive the economy and prevent further contraction. Here we discuss what the government should do immediately in fiscal terms for reviving the economy and supporting livelihoods.

Food and cash transfers first

The immediate need is to provide free food and cash transfers to those rendered incomeless. Providing every household with ₹7,000 per month for a period of three months and every individual with 10 kg of free foodgrains per month for a period of six months is likely to cost around 3% of our GDP (assuming 20% voluntary dropout). This could be financed immediately through larger borrowing by the Centre from the Reserve Bank of India. The required cash and food have to be handed over to State governments to make the actual transfers, along with outstanding Goods and Services Tax compensation.

This is easily doable for several reasons. First, foodgrains are plentiful, as the Food Corporation of India had 77 million tonnes, and rabi procurement could add 40 million tonnes. Second, because of the lockdown restrictions, the multiplier rounds of such expenditure are heavily truncated at present and would not generate as much demand as in normal times.

Third, cash transfers in many spheres will only enable current demand to continue (such as payment of house rent to continue occupancy) and not create any fresh demand. Fourth, when greater normalcy finally allows pent-up demand to surface, output could also expand because of resumed economic activity. Finally, putting money in the hands of the poor is the best stimulus to economic revival, as it creates effective demand and in local markets. Hence, an immediate programme of food and cash transfers must command the highest priority.

Revamp MGNREGA work

But the post-lockdown world will be different for several reasons. First, millions of migrant workers have endured immense hardships to trudge back home, and are unlikely to return to towns in the foreseeable future. Employment has to be provided to them where they are, for which the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) must be expanded greatly and revamped with wage arrears paid immediately. The 100-day limit per household has to go; work has to be provided on demand without any limit to all adults. And permissible work must include not just agricultural and construction work, but work in rural enterprises and in care activities too.

The revamped MGNREGS could cover wage bills of rural enterprises started by panchayats, along with those of existing rural enterprises, until they can stand on their own feet. This can be an alternative strategy of development, recalling the successful experience of China's Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs). Public banks could provide credit to such panchayat-owned enterprises and also assume a nurturing role vis-à-vis them.

The second change is the palpable unsustainability of the earlier globalisation, which means that



growth in India in the coming days will have to be sustained by the home market. Since the most important determinant of growth of the home market is agricultural growth, this must be urgently boosted.

The MGNREGS can be used for this, paying wages for land development and farm work for small and medium farmers; apart from government support through remunerative procurement prices, subsidised institutional credit, other input subsidies, and redistribution of unused land with plantations. Agricultural growth in turn can promote rural enterprises, both by creating a demand for their products and by providing inputs for them to process; and both these activities would generate substantial rural employment.

The urban focus

In urban areas, it is absolutely essential to revive the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Simultaneously, the vast numbers of workers who have stayed on in towns have to be provided with employment and income after our proposed cash transfers run out. The best way to overcome both problems would be to introduce an Urban Employment Guarantee Programme, to serve diverse groups of the urban unemployed, including the educated unemployed. Urban local bodies must take charge of this programme, and would need to be revamped for this purpose.

"Permissible" work under this programme should include, for the present, work in the MSMEs. This would ensure labour supply

for the MSMEs and also cover their wage bills at the central government's expense until they re-acquire robustness. It should imaginatively also include care work, including of old, disabled and ailing persons, educational activities, and ensuring public services in slums.

These measures are in direct contrast to those that seek to entice private investors by easing labour laws. The humanitarian crisis of the lockdown reveals the imperative for more, not less labour protection. Such measures, far from reviving investment or employment, would also further reduce domestic demand.

The 'care' economy

The pandemic has underscored the extreme importance of a public health-care system, and the folly of privatisation of essential services. The post-pandemic period must see significant increases in public expenditure on education and health, especially primary and secondary health including for the urban and rural poor.

The "care economy" provides immense scope for increasing employment. Vacancies in public employment, especially in such activities, must be immediately filled. Anganwadi and Accredited Social Health Activists/workers who provide essential services to the population, including during this pandemic, are paid a pittance and treated with extreme unfairness. We must improve their status, treat them as regular government employees and give them proper remuneration and associated benefits, and greatly expand their coverage in settlements of the urban poor.

These could easily come within the total package announced by the Prime Minister, which could be financed by printing money. But in the medium term, public revenues must be increased. This is not because there is a shortage of real resources which, therefore,

has to be taken from other existing uses through taxation. Rather, since much unutilised capacity exists in the economy, the shortage is not of real resources; the government has to just get command over them.

A combination of wealth and inheritance taxation and getting multinational companies to pay the same effective rate as local companies through a system of unitary taxation will garner substantial public revenue. They will also reduce wealth and income inequalities which have become horrendous. A 2% wealth tax on the top 1% of the population, together with a 33% inheritance tax on the wealth they bequeath every year to their progeny, could finance an increase in government expenditure to the tune of 10% of GDP.

It would be argued that this might cause large financial outflows, which the country can ill-afford. Contrarily, even foreign capital is more likely to be attracted to a growing economy than one in sharp decline because of lack of stimulus. Also, a fresh issue of special drawing rights by the International Monetary Fund (which India has surprisingly opposed along with the United States) would provide additional external resources.

These additional resources, we estimate, would suffice to finance the institution of five universal, justiciable, fundamental economic rights: the right to food, the right to employment, the right to free public health care, the right to free public education and the right to a living old-age pension and disability benefits. The broken economy must be rebuilt in ways to ensure a life of dignity to the most disadvantaged citizen.

Prabhat Patnaik is Professor Emeritus, Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi. Jayati Ghosh is a professor of economics at JNU. Harsh Mander is a human rights worker, writer and teacher

Provide income support, restore jobs

On the contrary, scrapping labour laws will only reduce wages, lower earnings and reduce consumer demand



RADHICKA KAPOOR & R. NAGARAJ

Following the adage, "never waste a crisis", the government of Uttar Pradesh, last week, introduced an ordinance that has scrapped most labour laws for three years – ostensibly for creating jobs and for attracting factories exiting China following the outbreak of the novel coronavirus. These laws deal with the occupational safety, health and working conditions of workers, regulation of hours of work, wages and settlement of industrial disputes. They apply mostly to the economy's organised (formal) sector, that is, registered factories and companies, and large establishments in general. Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat have quickly followed suit. Reportedly, Punjab has already allowed 12-hour shifts per day (72 hours per week) in factories without overtime payment to overcome worker shortage after the migrants have left in the wake of the national lockdown.

Employers' associations have urged the central government to do away with most labour rights to address temporary labour shortages. Trade union leaders from the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh to the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, and Opposition leaders in Uttar Pradesh have condemned the ordinance. It will face a challenge in courts, legal experts say.

The abrogation of labour laws raises many constitutional and political questions. But will it expand employment and output growth, as claimed by its proponents? Such a step, by popular belief, will reduce wage costs, increase profits and augment productive investment and growth. Improved supply is expected to create demand (following Say's Law in economics). Such (simplistic) reasoning assumes that labour laws are the binding constraints on expanding output.

Surely, the lockdown has disrupted supply, but only temporarily. There are no inherent shortages at the moment as the inflation rate

jobs, livelihoods, and toeholds in cities. Despite overflowing food grain stocks, governments have been miserly in providing adequate food security. Income support to workers to retain them in their places of work has also been lacking. Significantly, migrant labour will be critical to restore production once the lockdown is lifted. In fact, factories and shops are already staring at worker shortages. Instead of encouraging workers to stay back or return to cities by ensuring livelihood support and safety nets, State governments have sought to strip workers of their fundamental rights.

Before the lockdown, annual GDP growth rate had plummeted to 4.7% during October–December quarter of 2019–20, from 8.3% in the full year of 2016–17. The slowdown is due to lack of demand, not of supply, as widely suggested. With massive job and income losses after the lockdown, aggregate demand has totally slumped, with practically no growth. Therefore, the way to restart the economy is to provide income support and restore jobs. This will not only address the humanitarian crisis but also help revive consumer demand by augmenting incomes.

Scraping labour laws to save on labour costs will do just the opposite: it will reduce wages, lower earnings (particularly of low wage workers) and reduce consumer demand. Further, it will lead to an increase of low paid work that offers no security of tenure or income stability.

The rationale for scrapping labour laws to attract investment and boost manufacturing growth poses two additional questions.

One, if the laws were in fact so strongly pro-worker, they would have raised wages and reduced business profitability. But the real wage growth (net of inflation) of directly employed workers in the



factory sector has been flat (2000–01 to 2015–16) as firms have increasingly resorted to casualisation and informalisation of the workforce to suppress workers' bargaining power, evidence suggests.

Two, is it right to blame the disappointing industrial performance mainly on labour market regulations? Industrial performance is not just a function of the labour laws but of the size of the market, fixed investment growth, credit availability, infrastructure, and government policies. In fact there is little evidence to suggest that amendment of key labour laws by Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh in 2014 took them any closer to their goal of creating more jobs or industrial growth.

The role of labour market regulations may be more modest than the strong views expressed against them in the popular debates.

Rationalise labour laws

Surely, India's complex web of labour laws, with around 47 central laws and 200 State laws, need rationalisation. However, now more than ever before, reforms need to maintain a delicate balance between the need for firms to adapt to ever-changing market conditions and workers' employment security. Depriving workers of fundamental rights such as freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, and a set of primary working conditions (such as adequate living wages, limits on hours of work and safe and healthy workplaces), will create a fertile ground for the exploitation of the working class.

Presently, over 90% of India's workforce is in informal jobs, with

no regulations for decent conditions of work, no provision for social security and no protection against any contingencies and arbitrary actions of employers. Abrogation of labour laws, as proposed by the Uttar Pradesh government, will free more employers from the obligations they currently hold for ensuring the job security, health, and social protection of their workers. It will increase informal employment in the formal sector instead of encouraging the growth of formal work.

As India battles the economic and social consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, many State governments have seized the opportunity to scrap labour laws on the pretext of encouraging employment. Such a decision makes little economic sense currently, as it will reduce share of wages in output, thereby reducing growth in domestic demand and hurting output expansion. Significantly, exports cannot be an option for now as the global economy is staring at the possibility worse than the Great Depression. Hence, the Uttar Pradesh government's move will only result in a race to the bottom on workers' pay and labour standards, making workers worse off, as it is a lack of demand that is currently holding up output growth. The Uttar Pradesh ordinance needs to be revoked, lock, stock, and barrel.

Radhika Kapoor and R. Nagaraj work with the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER), New Delhi and the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR), Mumbai, respectively

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.

Steps to self-reliance

The announcement of a ₹20-lakh crore economic stimulus package sounds good, but for a self-reliant India to be realised, relegating the interests of the labour force to the background in the name of creating a pool of cheap labour to ensure growth is uncalled for. The government speaking about land, labour and laws in one breath raises suspicion. The visuals of an exodus of millions of desperate migrants across States have shown what the real India is

in reality. An *Atmanirbhar Bharat* will have to improve standards of living by focussing on health, education, skill development and social security.

Ds. D.V.G. SANKARARAO,
Nelli marla, Andhra Pradesh

E-governance agenda
The COVID-19 crisis seems to have given a further freehand to the government to push through a lopsided agenda of e-governance and digital administration (Page 1, "Aarogya Setu app mandatory for returning

NRIs, migrants" and Inside pages, "Aarogya Setu mandatory for travel, says Railways", both May 13). Whether it be the issue of e-passes for movement during the 'lockdown' or applying for e-coupons for ration or booking online train tickets by workers to travel back home, it is as if the ruling establishment has become totally unconcerned about the realities of the people and unthertled to its own constitutional duties. The compulsion to download an application includes the

compulsion to have or buy an appropriately technologically equipped mobile phone in the first place. Data show us that leave alone smartphones, crores of Indians still do not have the cheapest and simplest of mobile phones. Do the Railways and the government mean to say that these multitudes have been ejected from the nation or their citizenship and human rights suspended? It is not clear on what constitutional grounds people can be compelled to buy and carry

at all times any product or device, especially when it is not free but a consumer item of private use.

FIROZ AHMED,
New Delhi

Address to the nation

The Prime Minister's widely televised speeches during the COVID-19 lockdown have been Greek and Latin to many non-Hindi speaking Indians, especially in the South where a majority do not understand the language. Most of them were unable to follow the speeches in

real-time as we had to wait for the translation. During the demonetisation announcement in 2016, the Prime Minister's message was aired in English and Hindi. The least the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting can do is to dub the speeches in regional languages and air them in States. In a crisis of this magnitude, clear and instant communication across India is essential.

ADRIAN DAVID,
Chennai



M ND-NDE

The death of fatalism

Humanity must have a realistic view of what is given and the extent to which it can be altered



RAJEEV BHARGAVA



"The poor do not seem to abjectly surrender to their fate – they are willing to take huge risks and return home, not die of hunger when abandoned by governments." Migrant workers in Ahmedabad. •AP

The pandemic is an epoch-changing moment. Millions have fallen sick, hundreds of thousands have succumbed to the disease. We have been caught unawares and still do not know how to deal with it. Historic events such as this compel us to raise big questions usually submerged in the hustle and bustle of life: what is and what isn't in human control? How to make sense of collective helplessness in the face of abrupt changes? What is the place of contingency, fortune and misfortune in our life? Fatalism provides one answer: human agency is insignificant. We are permanent victims of inscrutable forces beyond our control.

With the arrival of the pandemic, the surge of fatalism seems inevitable within popular consciousness. What else can we expect in the land of Karma – the idea that birth, status, marriage, occupation, all life experiences, and death are predetermined? Isn't our personal destiny inscribed on our forehead or in the lines of our palm? Are we not already allotted a share (*bhaga*) of fortune or misfortune at birth? Isn't Hinduism virtually synonymous with fatalism? Surely, we must then expect a lot of fatalistic gloom in these times.

The near-absence of fatalism

Yet, there is scarce evidence for it. I don't see ordinary people resigned to their fate – an inscrutable, unpredictable force that acts on humans against their will, mocks their agency and humiliates them. Instead, they expect governments to take charge, doctors and nurses to save lives, scientists to deliver a cure, fellow citizens to behave responsibly. The poor do not seem to abjectly surrender to their fate either. They are willing to take huge risks and return home, not die of hunger when abandoned by governments. In short, Hindu fatalism seems to be a myth spun by Western, orientalist imagination. Or, perhaps, sustained by the rich who imagine the poor to be victims of fate; it is not what the poor believe about themselves.

This near-absence of fatalism in India is not a gift of modernity. Historically, large segments of Indian thought are non-fatalistic and give an important place to human agency. The philosopher Sukumari Bhattacharji made a plausible case for the absence of fatalism in various ancient texts: the Rig Veda, the Brahmanas, the Samhitas, the Upanishads, the Aranyakas, and in Jaimini's Purva Mimamsa. The theory of Karma found in the teachings of Buddha and Mahavira are not just atheistic but valorise human agency. Though the idea of fate exists, it is immanent, inscribed in and dependent upon human action spread over many births. Likewise, in Puranic literature, fate and human agency coexist. In the Mahabharata, there are two kinds of Rishis. The pravrtti sages (engaged in the world) draw upon the power of *tapas* (religious austerity) to dominate their surroundings; the nivrtti sages (renunciates) actively acquire spiritual knowledge by which to escape their surroundings. Both reject the argument that humans are victims of forces beyond their control. In ancient India, perhaps only the atheistic Ajivikas embraced fatalism.

In Indian folk literature, one frequently finds a god or goddess coming to write the *bhagya* (share of fortune/fate) on the forehead of the new born. Several Indian languages have a term for it: *talaiyeluttu* and *talavilai* in Tamil; *haneli bareddudu* and *hanebareha* in Kannada; *phalalikhita* in Sanskrit. In Hindustani too, phrases such as '*Hamari kismet mein yeh likha hai*' are common.

This is often taken as an affirmation of Indian fatalism. But then the same literature invites us to use one's

wit, to overturn or at least modify *bhagya* writ on our forehead. Fate can be thwarted by action, particularly by those prepared to take risks. It can also be challenged, especially among the underprivileged, by 'witchcraft', or worship of ancestors and local deities. Anthropologists like Kathleen Gough record the derision with which Dalits in Tamil Nadu dismiss ideas of *bhagya*, *phalalikhita*, or inexorable fate. For upper castes, astrology appears to perform the same function, for it suggests appropriate strategies to manage *bhagya* (fortune), or avert *durbhagya* (misfortune), not surrender to it.

In conditions of extreme, prolonged distress, entire world views may emerge that make human vulnerability permanent, unexpected, unpredictable forces salient, and render human agency, order and reason insignificant. Consider the idea of the absurd which emerged during the Second World War, underscoring the futility of the search for meaning, quite like fatalism that stresses the futility of human action. But extreme action-negating world views like fatalism must not be conflated with perspectives that give importance to fate. Fate is an integral, recurrent feature of the human condition. In every civilisation, such concepts emerge unbidden. All ancient world views had a term for it: *moira* in Greek, *ming* in Chinese and *bhagya* in Sanskrit. Modern world views too must incorporate fate.

Why? The human world can always be viewed as a great contest between human agency and nature, something currently beyond control. The more humans are able to control their destiny, the less room in their

perspective they have for fate. The more the world is comprehended, the less inscrutable it is. But there are times when most human beings feel utterly helpless – say, in times of wars, natural calamities, social upheavals, or personal misfortune. In such moments of extreme vulnerability and loss of control, when things seem beyond rational comprehension, ordinary human beings with their practical consciousness rely on notions such as fate. They submit, surrender, resign themselves to and eventually accept their condition – 'so be it', 'such is my lot'.

Human powers versus chance

In short, an ongoing battle rages between what the Italian humanist Machiavelli calls *Virtù* (human powers) and *Fortuna* (chance/fate). We need to constantly experience and evaluate which way the balance will tilt. Individuals, societies and, indeed, humanity must have a realistic view of what is given and the extent to which it can be altered. It is impossible to entirely give up a conception of something beyond us and equally, to entirely reject a modicum of responsibility for one's actions. We are always in part responsible for what is happening to us, though this contracts or enlarges depending on circumstances. However, one element that perpetually evades control is sheer fortuitousness in our lives – accidents, coincidences, disease, disasters, sudden bereavements – all of which defy human agency and thwart the best of plans. They compel us to rely solely on the idea of fate. Indeed, more than good luck, fate is linked to misfortune and death. No wonder accidents that result in death are called fatal and human beings who perish in disasters are called fatalities.

In sum, while fatalism whose overvalorisation of fate nullifies human agency must disappear, views that introduce the dialectic of fate and human agency to account for contingency, misfortune and bad luck cannot be erased. However, even their relevance or efficacy can be reduced by better understanding, sounder explanations, with the wisdom to know what can and cannot be controlled, indeed by properly evaluating what should or should not be controlled.

Rajeev Bhargava is Professor, CSDS, Delhi

It's time to give IRS officers their due

Despite being specialists, they are relegated to the margins



T.C.A. RAMANUJAM

The Central Board of Direct Taxation (CBDT), a wing of the Ministry of Finance, has initiated disciplinary proceedings against some Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officers for a report they submitted to the government recently. The officers are not corrupt, nor did they abuse any Minister or any functionary of the government. So, what was their crime?

A group of 50 IRS officers thought it their duty to help the government in this hour of crisis. They prepared a report titled 'Fiscal Options and Response to Covid-19 Epidemic', or FORCE, and submitted it to the government. The IRS Association's Twitter handle and website carried the report. In order to tide over the financial crisis, the report suggested raising the highest slab rate to 40% for income above ₹1 crore or re-introducing the wealth tax for those with wealth of ₹5 crore or more; providing an additional one-time cess of 4% on taxable income of ₹10 lakh and above for COVID-19 relief; providing tax relief for sectors hit hard by COVID-19; and re-introducing the inheritance tax.

These suggestions are nothing new. Inequality is on the rise everywhere. This is bound to be so, as Thomas Piketty showed, as long as r (rate of return on capital) is greater than g (rate of growth in the economy). The views of the officers can be taken to be unexceptionable on merits. So, what brought the wrath of the government then?

Generalist versus the specialist

The Ministry of Finance is always headed by an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer. The Revenue Secretary, the Expenditure Secretary and the Finance Secretary are all drawn from the IAS despite the fact that they have little experience in handling the economy. Starting as local administrators they later hold top posts in the Ministry of Finance. On the other hand, the CBDT is managed by IRS officers with rich field experience. There were suggestions time and again that the Chairman of the CBDT should be of the rank of Secretary to the Government of India. The government raised the status of the Chairman to that of a Special Secretary and not a full-fledged Secretary. At the time of the Bud-

get, it is an IAS officer who accompanies the Finance Minister for the press briefing. The IRS officer is totally invisible, despite the Budget being the handiwork of hard-working IRS officers.

Senior IRS officers know the intricacies of taxation, whether national or international. On the other hand, IAS officers know little about base erosion and profit sharing, transfer pricing, etc. And yet Revenue Administration is not in the hands of an IRS officer, but an IAS officer. The result is that the income tax law is a mess. In the past 60 years, the income tax law has never been maulled in a period of 12 months as it was in 2019-20. The Budget presented on July 5, 2019 has become irrelevant now as all the provisions were altered radically within six months. In September 2019, the Finance Minister called a press conference and announced radical changes in corporate taxation. Then followed press releases from the CBDT making alterations in fiscal laws. Then there was an ordinance.

Finally the due dates for filing the returns, fixed by the statute, were changed. The financial year was practically extended from March to June. The Income Tax Act is a national disgrace, said Nani Palkhivala. Tax publishers are not able to bring out a proper single volume of income tax law. The blame for this squarely rests on the IRS officers who are above the IRS officers.

Occupying top posts

It is mostly IAS officers who are made Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, Chief Election Commissioner, and Comptroller and Auditor General of India. IRS officers are rarely allowed to occupy top posts. And yet, a brilliant IRS officer became the Chairman of the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority against all odds. Another, Sushil Chandra (in picture), became Election Commissioner and brought out a classic book on democracy in India after retirement (in picture). Yet another was chosen by the Prime Minister himself to head the Central Vigilance Commission.

The IRS maybe the 'steel frame of India' but the steel frame has been rusting for quite some time. Can the IRS be given their due and be allowed to play a normal role? The present controversy reignites the debate on the generalist versus the specialist.

The FORCE report is sound. The IRS officers who wrote it deserve admiration and not admonition.

T.C.A. Ramamujam is former Chief Commissioner of Income Tax

Forced to adopt new habits

The pandemic has jolted us out of our inertia

ANAND DAMANI

Starting new habits is tough and requires overcoming inertia. Most of the time humans like maintaining the status quo. The majority of us don't change the default settings when we buy a new mobile phone. Nor do we change the default settings of any new app we download. The tendency to stick with defaults happens across different aspects of our lives, from personal to social to office work. But this pandemic has jolted us out of our inertia.

We're now doing new things that we haven't done before. Those not used to cleaning their own dishes or homes are doing so now. Those not used to working from home are forced to do so now. Managers who wouldn't allow their teammates to work from home have no choice but to ask them to work from home now. The pandemic has forced us to start new habits.

One habit that we Indians are not used to is maintaining sufficient physical distance from one another in public spaces. There are many reasons for this. Urban cities are densely packed with people. Houses in slums are cramped. Few roads have footpaths, forcing pedestrians to take up a portion of the road. Lanes are narrow; even main roads are narrow. Trains and buses are always packed. Queues are long. The population is overwhelming.

Environmental factors
Behavioural science studies are showing evidence that a large part of human behaviour is led by environmental factors. In normal times we don't pay much attention to our environment because we don't need to. If one has to take a crowded train to work because of lack of better choice, we get used to it because the goal is to get to office, in time. The environment becomes part of our subconscious. We navigate through life, lanes, stations, etc. without paying much attention to our surroundings. But the pandemic is now making us aware of our surroundings. Besides behaviours like hand washing, sanitising and wearing masks to prevent contracting COVID-19, the pandemic is driving another big behavioural

change – keeping safe distance.

Merely informing people that they need to maintain at least six-feet distance from one another is not enough. People tend to forget about distancing while talking to one another. Maintaining distance is an alien concept for us.

That's why we're now seeing examples of behavioural design nudges in our environment that help us in maintaining distance in public spaces.



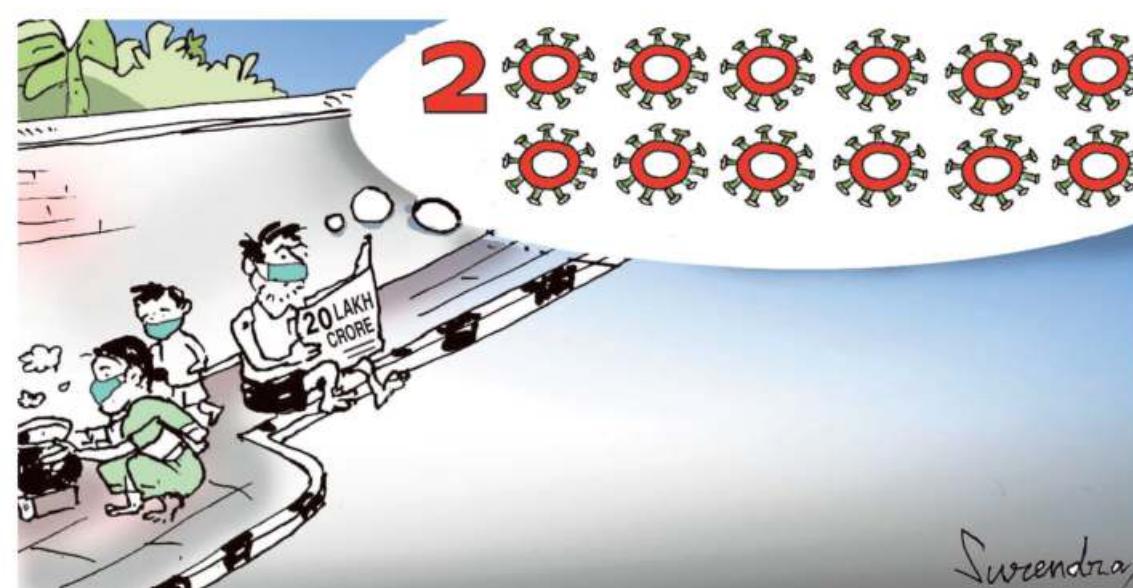
Markings in the form of circles and squares are being painted outside grocery stores and pharmacies to help people maintain distance. People are now standing in these circles and squares while waiting in queues. I hope relevant authorities implement this rule, wherever crowds need to be managed.

Maintaining physical distancing

Around the world behavioural design nudges are being implemented to help people keep safe distance from one another. Restaurants in Hong Kong are putting tapes over alternate tables so that people do not occupy tables next to each other. A bus station in Thailand has put stickers on alternate seats so that people sit leaving one seat empty. Schoolchildren in Hangzhou, China are being made to wear caps with fan-like blades so that they cannot come close to other children. A police station in Thailand has placed transparent protective shields on desks creating a barrier between the police inspector and civilians.

We are likely to see many more examples of such behavioural design in the near future that help us keep safe distance, because the lockdown will eventually be lifted.

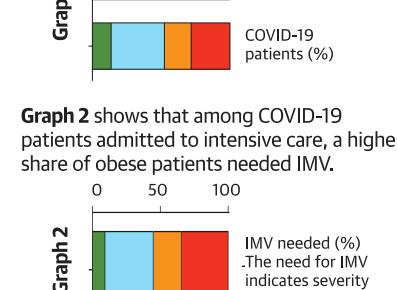
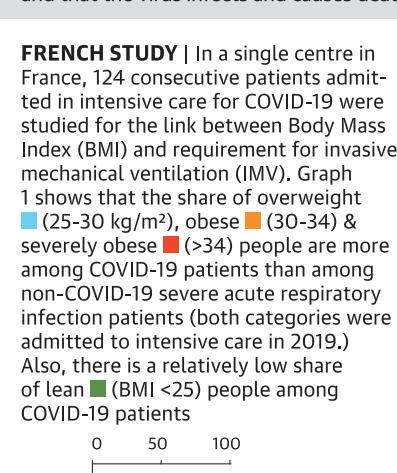
Anand Damani is behavioural scientist and partner at Briefcase



DATA POINT

The obesity link

Earlier studies from S.Korea and China* showed that the COVID-19 fatality rate increased significantly for older patients and those with pre-existing conditions. Recent studies from the U.S., the U.K. and France show that obesity is a risk factor, and that the virus infects and causes deaths more among the poorer sections of society. By The Hindu Data Team

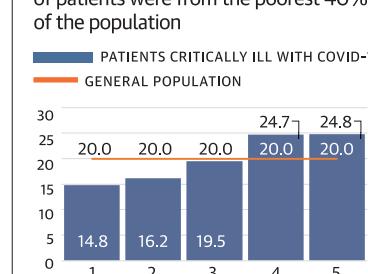


NEW YORK STUDY | A study of 3,615 COVID-19 patients who visited an academic hospital in New York shows that obesity increased the risk of severity even among relatively younger patients. For instance, patients who were highly obese (BMI >34 kg/m²) and were aged less than 60 years were **3.6 times** more likely to be admitted to ICU compared to patients in the same age group who had a BMI lesser than 30

BMI (patients <60 years)	Likelihood of admission to:	
30-34	2	1.8
>34	2.2	3.6

Sources: French study: "High prevalence of obesity in severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV2) requiring invasive mechanical ventilation", Arthur Simonnet et al. **New York study:** "Obesity in patients younger than 60 years is a risk factor for Covid-19 hospital admission", Jennifer Lighter et al. **U.K. study:** ICNARC Case Mix Programme Database.
*Refer March 19 data point "Victim Profile": bit.ly/3cpjNDs

POOR WORST HIT | A study of 8,250 COVID-19 patients admitted to critical care in the U.K. shows that nearly 50% of patients were from the poorest 40% of the population



FATALITIES | Table shows that the share of COVID-19 patients who died in critical care was highest among the poorest sections while in the past, viral diseases did not exhibit such a pattern

Wealth quintile	Among COVID-19 patients	Among non-COVID patients*
5 (most deprived)	48% died	21.1% died
4	49.1%	21.9%
3	46.3%	21.9%
2	45.7%	22.2%
1	44.1%	21.7%

*Viral pneumonia patients from 2017-19

The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 14, 1970

Counter-attack in Cambodia

North Vietnamese troops mounted their first major counter-attack in Cambodia today (May 13) charging in waves through the barbed wire perimeter of an American base. Military spokesmen said 58 of the mostly teen-age attackers were killed against U.S. losses of one dead and eight wounded. The battle came as American headquarters was reporting the first withdrawal of U.S. troops from Cambodia involving an estimated 3,000 men. This morning's attack was across the border. Strong Viet Cong elements were only 30 km. south of Phnom Penh with only a battalion of infantry and five French World War II tanks between them and the capital. The Viet Cong were applying pressure on several Cambodian towns, particularly Kampot, on the coast, and Kompong Cham and Takeo, respectively 120 km. and

FROM PAGE ONE

Major stimulus package announced for MSMEs

Power distribution companies, which are facing an unprecedented cash flow crisis, will receive a ₹90,000 crore liquidity injection. Contractors will get a six month extension from all Central agencies, and also get partial bank guarantees to ease their cash flows. Registered real estate projects will get a six-month extension, with COVID-19 to be treated as a "force majeure" event.

"What was announced today is not a stimulus package. It is in effect a survival package, so that MSMEs can survive the lockdown and restart production," said economist and former Chief Statistician of India Pronab

Sen, welcoming the measures but adding that a further stimulus may be needed after the lockdown is lifted. He expressed concern that risk-averse bankers may not extend the loan benefits to all MSMEs despite the government's 100% credit guarantee.

EPF support

Employee Provident Fund (EPF) support, provided to low-income organised workers in small units under the PMGKY is being extended for another three months and is expected to provide liquidity relief of ₹2,500 crore. Mandatory EPF contributions are also being reduced from 12% to 10%.

India records 3,525 more COVID-19 cases

Speaking about India's participation in this endeavour, ICMR Director-General Balram Bhargava said: "ICMR-National AIDS Research Institute (NARI) is the national coordination site for the trial in India."

Sheela Godbole, senior scientist, NARI, said the regulatory and ethical appro-

pvals had already been obtained and clinical trial sites had started recruiting patients. "Till now, a total of nine sites have been approved," she added.

The ICMR noted that the trial provided for simplified procedures to help even overburdened hospitals participate.

\$3.6 mn in U.S. funding to labs may be delayed

It added that once the government had objected to the project, the CDC closed the project and withheld further funding to the MCVR.

The U.S. Embassy, from which the CDC operates, did not disclose specifics of which agencies would be the recipients of the funding. However, sources said the funding would not go to any one agency, and would be spread over a number of technical partners working with the agency based in Atlanta, Georgia. Any NGO or association has to register themselves under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), 2010, to receive foreign funds. Foreign donors can directly send

funds to the NGOs and institutes registered under the FCRA; but if a foreign donor has been placed on the watch list or in the "prior permission" category, the donor cannot directly send money without clearance by the MHA, another official said.

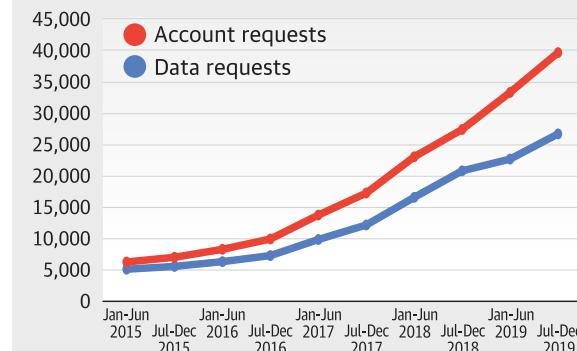
The MHA informs the RBI, which asks banks to look out for any transaction to the accounts of the NGOs from the foreign donor on the watch list.

A response is awaited from the Indian Council of Medical Research, which is the overseeing authority for all such collaborative re-search.

(With inputs from Bindu Shajan Perappadan)

Requests for FB user data by India up 28%

Seeking info In the six-month period from July to December 2019, the number of user data requests from India to Facebook increased five-fold over the previous period



"Facebook responds to government requests for data in accordance with applicable law and our terms of service. Each and every request we receive is carefully reviewed for legal sufficiency and we may reject or require greater specificity on requests that appear overly broad or vague," the company said in the report.

In the last six months of 2019, globally government requests for user data increased by 9.5% from 12,8,617 to 14,0,875.

Of the total volume, the U.S. made 51,121 requests, followed by India, the U.K. (8,378), Germany (8,013) and France (7,001 requests).

In a blog post, Chris Sonderby, VP & Deputy General Counsel at Facebook, said, "As always, we scrutinise every government request we receive to make sure it is legally valid, no matter which government makes the request. If a request appears deficient or overly broad,

we push back, and will fight in court, if necessary. We do not provide governments with 'back doors' to people's information."

Internet disruptions

As per the report, in the second half of 2019, Facebook witnessed about 50 instances of Internet disruptions affecting 11 countries. India topped the list, accounting for 78% or 40 such disruptions.

The total duration of these disruptions affecting Facebook services was 36 weeks, 6 days and 9 hours.

Other countries that were a part of the list were Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Mauritania, Myanmar, Sudan and Swaziland.

Some incidents of Internet disruption in India that Facebook has taken into account includes 21 weeks, 1 day and 20 hours in Shopian district in Jammu and Kashmir from August 5 onwards.

Vocal about local, but no snub to globalisation

There are at least four discernible strands in Modi's speech, where the slant clearly is state support for national capitalists

VARGHESE K. GEORGE
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech on Tuesday sought to outline his vision for India in a post-coronavirus world order. It was a reiteration of his world view and his faith in India's manifest destiny, seeking validation in the crisis of the old order.

Mr. Modi's pro-market supporters and his Left critics both understood him as an ally of global capitalism in 2014. Stephen Bannon, the ideologue of the Trump uprising in the U.S., termed Mr. Modi's politics anti-globalism – a point that he reiterated in a recent interview to an Indian channel. There are at least four discernible strands in Mr. Modi's speech.

First, import substitution, an objective that drove nationalist economic policies in the 20th century, is back. Profit-driven globalisation had brought to the fore multiple insecurities of countries

already when the pandemic struck, and it multiplied these fears manifold overnight. The biggest superpower's struggles with procuring enough masks and paracetamol, for instance, has exposed its vulnerabilities. Self-reliance is suddenly not a bad idea again. Mr. Modi's policies had already reflected this thinking earlier, but the new context has given him the courage to be "vocal about local". In a crisis, only the local capacities can be useful.

People-centric

Second, this is not a rejection of globalisation, but a call for a new form of globalisation – from profit-driven to people-centric, as Mr. Modi said. He believes that India is the repository of such a wisdom, it's the "Vishwa Guru", teacher of the world.

"The global brands of today were sometimes also very local like this... they became



Narendra Modi

global from (being) local." He elaborated further on India-led globalisation – on climate, on being helpful to other countries by offering them supplies in a time of crisis, led by the principle of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*.

Third, the manner in which he brought China into the picture, without naming it. India's self-reliance can only be at the cost of China. The current crisis could work to China's advantage further if it is business as

usual. His speech obliquely questioned the Chinese grip over global supply chains, and was an invitation to western partners such as the U.S. for closer partnerships.

Notion of reforms

Fourth, his notion of reforms for self-reliance, not for globalisation. The word reform is an ambiguous one but widely used as a code for pro-capital measures. In 2016, in his keynote speech at 41st AGM of U.S. India Business Council (USIBC), in Washington DC, he explained his views on "reforms". "I have said several times that my aim is to reform to transform. For me, reforms are those policies that transform the lives of ordinary citizens," he said, adding that "policies to ensure that growth benefits the poor and the weaker sections" and "a frontal attack on corruption", were reforms. On the same lines, on

Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS). The BMS has been scathingly critical of the changes in labour laws made by the BJP governments in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh in recent days, but Mr. Narayanan does not expect anything similar coming from the Centre. "There are still advisers within the government who have different views, and we will wait for the details in new announcements. But the political vision in the PM's speech is very encouraging," he said. The Swadeshi segments within the Parivar are buoyant.

But this is not an easy act to pull off. India has severe limitations in capital, technology and human resources. Balancing the interests of capital and labour is not easy. But as a political statement, this could not have been clearer or stronger, though his vocal, free-market interpreters are unlikely to make his case this time.

NEWS ANALYSIS

His speech narrows the gap between the government and the rest of the Sangh Parivar. "Small scale industries, farmers and labourers are the three pillars of the Indian economy. The emphasis of the PM's speech was on these three," said Saji Narayanan, president of the

'Stimulus package has nothing for migrants'

Details of the schemes announced by Nirmala Sitharaman are disappointing, says Chidambaram

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury said the government, while announcing the ₹20 lakh crore economic stimulus package to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, had lost focus of the actual problem.

"This is supposed to be

the first tranche of special package and the focus should have been how to strengthen the fight against this pandemic and provide relief to crores of people who are suffering..." Mr. Yechury said.

Migrant workers, the question of hunger, job loss and support to the States were not touched, he said.

The total stimulus package for the MSMEs amount-

ed to ₹3.6 lakh crore but 'where is the remaining ₹16.4 lakh crore,' he wondered.

'Cruel blow'

Mr. Chidambaram said, "Let me first point out that there is nothing in what the FM said today for the lakhs of poor, hungry and devastated migrant workers who have walked – and many thousands are still walking – back to their home States. This is a cruel blow dealt to those who toil every day. There is also nothing by way of cash transfer to the bottom half of the population [13 crore families] who have been pushed into destitution."

"The FM announced some support measures for



P. Chidambaram

national debt [Rs 20,000 crore] and equity corpus fund [Rs 10,000 crore] but we will await the 'terms and conditions'.

The devil is in the detail," he said.

"Except for the modest MSME package, we are disappointed with today's announcements," he noted. "Where is the rest of the Rs 16.4 lakh crore? This government is a prisoner of its own ignorance and fears."

Demand issue

Besides the incentives for the MSME sector, there was nothing in the package that could stimulate demand, said the Congress leader.

The government should not be unduly bothered

about running up a high fiscal deficit and could monetise part of the deficit if it reached a worrying level, he added.

More spending

"The government must spend more but it is not willing to do so." The States should also be allowed to borrow more, he said.

Asked about the BJP-ruled States like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat suspending labour laws, he said, "Drastic changes in labour laws that have been in existence from 1948 or so must not be done in a crisis situation. They should be done when normally returns and after consulting the stakeholders".

Deadlines for real estate projects to be extended

Centre to advise States and UTs

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry will advise States and Union Territories and their regulatory authorities to extend the registration and completion date of real estate projects by six months as part of economic relief measures announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday.

Referring to the announcement, Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said in a tweet:

"Relief measures announced by @FinMinIndia for India's real estate sector will benefit home buyers, builders & other stakeholders who have been de-

manding these initiatives to counter the adverse effect of the pandemic crisis on construction activities in our urban areas. (sic.)"

In another tweet, he said the six-month extension and treatment of the COVID-19 pandemic as an event of force majeure, like a natural calamity, under the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act would "de-stress the sector and ensure completion of projects."

The States' Real Estate Regulatory Authorities would give a six-month extension to registered projects expiring on or after March 25.

If required, a further extension of three months could be given.

Mamata rubbishes Centre's ₹20 lakh crore stimulus plan

Actual size of package is 2% of GDP, says Amit Mitra

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday questioned the "actual size" of the economy revival package announced by the Prime Minister and explained by the Union Finance Minister.

The "total [thing] is a big zero," she said.

'Misleading message'

The State's Finance Minister Amit Mitra said that the actual size of the economic package was "two percent of the GDP and not 10."

"We expected that the States will get something,



Mamata Banerjee

which it did not. There is nothing for market development to encourage public spending, employment generation or development of health infrastructure to combat the post COVID situation. Nearly 10 lakh of 20

lakh crore is already given," she said.

Mr. Mitra said the Prime Minister's announcement was misleading.

"Out of 20 lakh crore, eight lakh has already been given as liquidity. 1.7 lakh more also has been given. So what is left is about half of 20 lakh crore, that is 10 lakh crore. Out of that a limit of borrowing - 4.2 lakh crore - is fixed which finally will reach people. It is 2% of GDP, not 10%," he said.

Mr. Mitra added that the 8 lakh crore would not reach people immediately because of the lockdown and the entire process was slowed down.

Editors Guild slams action against scribes

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Editors Guild of India on Wednesday condemned two recent incidents of police action against journalists in Gujarat and Delhi. It noted that there was a growing trend of "misuse of criminal laws to intimidate journalists" in the country.

The first incident the Guild expressed concern over was the Gujarat police booking and detaining Dhaval Patel, editor and owner of Gujarati news portal 'Face of Nation', for sedition on May 12. The police took the action after the portal published a report suggesting possible leadership change in the State because of the increase in COVID-19 cases.

"The second instance of egregious and high-handed action has come from the Delhi Police," the Guild said in a statement, referring to the police notice to *The Indian Express* special correspondent Mahender Singh Manral on May 10.

The notice required the journalist, who had reported that police investigations found the audio clip of Tablighi Jamaat leader, Maulana Saad, being doctored, to join a probe on this matter on May 10, the Guild said.

While Mr. Manral was not charged under any law, he was threatened to join the probe or face legal action under the Indian Penal Code. "This appears to be a little more than a fishing expedition to try and extract the journalist's source and thus, warn other reporters."

Haryana to restart public transport

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Wednesday announced that public transport will resume in the State on an "experimental basis" from Friday, with a limited number of buses plying on select routes.

Even as the State looks to ease coronavirus restrictions to spur economic and other activities, Mr. Khattar made it clear that his government will not lower its guard and will not hesitate in imposing stricter curbs if things don't go as planned.

On resuming public transport, which has been shut since the lockdown was announced on March 25, Mr. Khattar said, "Local State transport, we are starting from Friday on an experimental basis. We will run a few buses on some routes."

'Huge loss for 21 major States'

₹97,100 crore loss in revenue in April: report

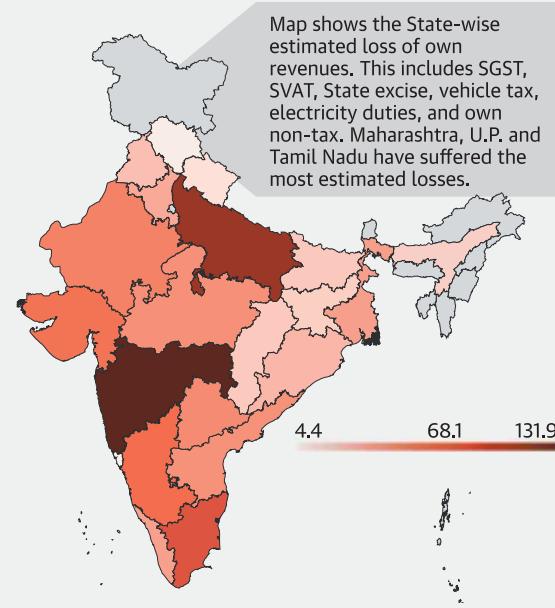
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The lockdown caused 21 major States to suffer a collective revenue loss of about ₹97,100 crore for the month of April alone, according to estimates from India Ratings and Research (Fitch Group).

"Both Union and State governments are struggling due to the dried-up cash inflow; but, the problems of States are more precarious because the actual battle against the COVID-19 and the associated expenditure being incurred by them," said India Ratings' Associate Director Anuradha Basumatari.

"Under the current circumstances there is a fair amount of uncertainty regarding the quantum and timings of the State governments' receivables from the Union government. Moreover, their own sources of reve-

Revenue shortfalls



Map shows the State-wise estimated loss of own revenues. This includes SGST, SVAT, State excise, vehicle tax, electricity duties, and own non-tax. Maharashtra, U.P. and Tamil Nadu have suffered the most estimated losses.

nue have fallen to abysmally low levels," she said, adding that this situation was pushing the State governments to adopt austerity measures and also explore new reve-

nue generation pathways. States such as Gujarat, Telangana, Haryana, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu get more than 70% of their revenue from their own sources, and

will be the worst impacted. Maharashtra and Kerala also get almost 70% of their revenue on their own.

States' own revenue mainly comes from seven heads – State Goods and Services Tax (SGST), State VAT, mostly on petroleum products, State excise, mostly on liquor, stamps and registration fees, vehicle tax, tax and duty on electricity, and own non-tax revenue.

Despite the lockdown, nearly 40% of the economy considered "essential" was allowed to remain operational, allowing some revenue to accrue to State governments under these heads, including

40% of SGST, 30% of State VAT, and 10% each of the electricity tax and non-tax revenues, said the India Ratings analysis, based on States' 2019-20 budgets.

"Things may improve somewhat in May 2020 due to the easing of some restrictions – allowing the liquor sale being the most prominent one," said the report.

Maharashtra has sought 20 companies of CAPF: Minister

State police are working in challenging conditions, he says

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government has sought 20 companies of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) to give a breather to the exhausted State police force, State Home Minister Anil Deshmukh said on Wednesday.

The police are working in extremely challenging conditions for long hours due to the pandemic and the resultant lockdown, Mr. Deshmukh said.

"Besides, Id falls on May 25 when we will need augmented security to maintain law and order. Hence we have sought urgent deployment of 20 CAPF companies," he said.

The 32 Central Reserve Police Force companies already deployed in the State are working in tandem with the Maharashtra police.



Extending help: Security personnel offering water to migrant workers in Mumbai. ■ ADESH CHAUDHARI

"Many police personnel have tested positive for COVID-19 and need time to rest and recuperate," the Minister added.

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray too had indicated in his recent address that the State would approach the

Centre. "The State police have been working tirelessly for months now. The government may ask for the Centre's help so that they can rest," he had said. Mr. Thackeray, however, had denied that the Army would be deployed in Mumbai.

Gujarat reports 364 new cases

Total case tally mounts to 9,268, fatalities rise to 566

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
AHMEDABAD

Gujarat on Wednesday recorded 29 deaths and 364 COVID-19 cases, taking the case tally to 9,268 and death toll to 566. It has become the second State after Maharashtra to have crossed the 9,000-mark in total infections.

Gujarat's trend of 300 plus cases continues for the last 10 days while its per day fatality numbers remain above 20.

Out of 29 deaths occurred on Wednesday, 25 are from Ahmedabad, three from Surat and one from Patan. Out of total 364 cases, 292 came from Ahmedabad alone.

Ahmedabad's cumulative numbers are: 6,645 cases and 446 deaths, highest reported deaths in a single city after Mumbai. After Ahmedabad, Surat is the worst affected with 967 cases and 43 deaths in Gujarat.

There are 39 patients who are on ventilator support,



vehement protest: Migrant workers blocking traffic at Gandhidham in Gujarat. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

while 5,101 others are stable.

New guidelines

On Wednesday, 316 patients were discharged as per the new guidelines of the Central government, which require no retesting of asymptomatic patients after 10 days of hospitalisation and they can be discharged if they don't develop symptoms.

The State's total recovery numbers are 3,562. So far, a total of 1,22,297 samples have been tested in the State.

Meanwhile, the exodus of migrant labourers from various parts of Gujarat continues. So far, nearly four lakh migrant workers in 300 trains have been moved to Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh.

On Wednesday, hundreds of migrant workers in Gandhidham near Kandla Port came on the national highway and blocked traffic demanding that they be allowed to return to their homes in Bihar in a special train.

"67% of the deaths reported today had high-risk comorbidities such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma and heart disease," said State Sur-

Maharashtra crosses 25,000-mark

Single-day high of 54 new fatalities take State's total death toll to 975

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PUNE

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to wreak havoc across Maharashtra, with the State reporting a massive surge of 1,495 new cases on Wednesday. Its cumulative case tally breached the 25,000-case mark to reach 25,922, while a record single-day high of 54 new fatalities took the State's total death toll to 975.

As per the State Health Department, 40 of the fatalities were reported from Mumbai city to take the city's death toll to 596 till date, while Pune district reported six fatalities to take its death toll to 170.

Two deaths each were reported from Solapur city, Aurangabad and Jalgaon, while one each was reported from Vasai Virar and Ratnagiri.

"67% of the deaths reported today had high-risk comorbidities such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma and heart disease," said State Sur-



Waiting for respite: Migrant workers and their family members at the Bandra terminal in Mumbai. ■ VIJAY BATE

veillance Officer Dr. Pradeep Awate. As many as 422 persons were discharged today, taking the cumulative discharged till date to 5,547, said Dr. Awate.

Of the new cases, Mumbai city reported a staggering 800 new cases as the city's cumulative tally crossed the 15,000-case mark to touch 15,747.

Pune district's case tally, as per the State Health Department figures, has risen to

3,169, with the district reporting at least 125 new cases today.

thane, navi mumbai

Besides Mumbai and Pune, the other sharp spike in cases came from parts of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) with Thane reporting 135 new cases to touch 1,279, while Navi Mumbai reported 23 new cases to reach a total of 1,018.

Kalyan-Dombivli, too, re-

66 new cases in Dharavi; tally crosses 1,000-mark

MUMBAI

Dharavi crossed the 1,000-mark after it reported 66 new COVID-19 cases on Wednesday. The area now has 1,028 cases. Besides, nine deaths reported this month have been added to the tally, taking the toll to 40. G North ward consisting of Dharavi, Mahim and Dadar now has the highest number of cases in Mumbai. Among the new cases is a 9-year-old girl.

ported 28 new cases as its cumulative tally reached 412, while Vasai-Virar reported 23 new cases to take its total to 286.

At least 25 new cases were reported from Akola district today to take the district's cumulative tally to 192. Till date, 2,30,857 samples have been tested in Maharashtra of which 2,03,439 (more than 90%) have returned negative while 25,922 have tested positive.

Nine more die of COVID-19 in Bengal

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

West Bengal on Wednesday recorded nine more deaths due to COVID-19 infection in the past 24 hours taking the total number of dead to 207.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said the Sentinel Survey will be conducted in every district. "West Bengal is the first State to start community prevalence survey," a statement said. It said the data will help the State develop dynamic, real-time response at the field level.

According to the government, 135 deaths were due to the pandemic and 72 due to 'comorbidities' where "COVID-19 was the incidental finding". The number of cases touched 2,290 with 117 new cases and active infections stand at 1,381. On Tuesday, the State had recorded a decline in active infections at 1,364.

Odisha sees 101 new cases, tally at 538

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BHUBANESWAR

Odisha registered a three-digit jump in a single day by adding 101 COVID-19 positive cases on Wednesday, taking its total to 538, the State Health and Family Welfare Department said.

As many as 27 patients were also discharged from hospitals during the day, the Department said.

The number of cases has increased by more than two times in less than one week, with many people who returned from Gujarat and other States testing positive for the virus.

Of the new cases, 52 were detected in Ganjam district, 33 in Balasore district, seven each in Jajpur and Sundargarh districts and two in Keonjhar district.

Of the 538 cases, 392 persons were admitted to exclusive hospitals, while 143 recovered and three died. So far, 21 of the 30 districts have reported positive cases.

With one more death, toll rises to 7 in Bihar

State reports 29 fresh cases, taking tally to 908

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PATNA

Bihar reported another death due to COVID-19 on Wednesday, taking the toll in the State to seven. With 29 new cases reported during the day, the total tally of positive cases in the State has risen to 908.



safety first: A health worker sanitising a passenger at the Patna junction on Wednesday. ■ PTI

tweeted. "She has no travel or contact history but tested COVID-19 positive on May 10," he said.

As many as 390 people have recovered, while 483 cases are active.

KERALA WATER AUTHORITY e-Tender Notice

Tender No : 22/2019-20/KWA/PHC/D4/TVM(RT3). AMRUT - TSS – Supplying and erection of pump set, transformer and Electrical accessories in the Block L Edathara pumping station EMD : Rs. 100,000. Tender fee : Rs. 7500. Last Date for submitting Tender : 08-06-2020 03:00 pm.

Phone : 04712322303 Superintending Engineer

Website : www.kwa.kerala.gov.in PH Circle

www.etenders.kerala.gov.in Thiruvananthapuram

KWA-JB-GL-6-23-2020-21

KARNATAKA POWER CORPORATION LIMITED

(Bellary Thermal Power Station)

CIN: U85110KA1970SGC001919

No: KPCL/2020-21/IND3602 Date: 12.05.2020

BRIEF TENDER NOTIFICATION

(Through e-Procurement Portal only)

BTPS, KPCL invites bids through GoK e-procurement platform <https://eproc.karnataka.gov.in> under "GOODS" category from reputed manufacturers / oil companies for "Procurement of 500KL of LDO by road tankers for BTPS" The brief bid Notification containing the pre-qualifying criteria for the bidders, calendar of bid activities & other details can be accessed from e-procurement portal. The last date & time for submission of bids: 22.05.2020 upto 16:00 Hrs. Date & time of opening of Technical bid : 26.05.2020 @ 11.05 Hrs. Date & time of opening of Financial bid : 26.05.2020 @ 11.30 Hrs. Further details can be had from Chief Engineer(Fuel Management), BTPS, KPCL, Kudathini, Bellary District, Karnataka State. Mob.: 09448290589, Fax No. : 08392 - 288669. E-mail : cefbtspkpcl@karnataka.gov.in, ceecstrn@gmail.com

Further detail conditions can be seen from the Govt. website www.tenders.kerala.gov.in

SI.No. Name of Work Bid Identification No.

1. Protection to Daya left embankment from RD 31,600 Km to 38,800 Km from village Begumpetada to Haladipada under Delang block SECIC PID 01 of 2020-21

2. Raising & strengthening to bank protection to KSD right embankment from Parimala to Kantisal including communication facilities under NABARD Assistance. SECIC PRD 05 of 2020-21

Further detail conditions can be seen from the Govt. website www.tenders.kerala.gov.in

sd/- Superintending Engineer, Central Irrigation Circle, Bhubaneswar OIPR-32160/11/0002/2021

A-34:

PROJECT MANAGEMENT UNIT

Uttarakhand Public Financial Management Strengthening Project (UkPFMS)

4th Floor, DPM Tower, Ajabpur Khurd, Kargi Chowk, Dehradun, Uttarakhand

PNU/UkPFMS-7/2020-21 /

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Govt. gears up to evacuate seafarers

Ministry tracking 20,000 people; mission to begin towards May-end

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI

Indian seafarers stranded in different parts of the world will have to register for evacuation through the Vande Bharat Mission so that the government can evacuate them, sources said here on Wednesday. The External Affairs Ministry is compiling data about the seafarers who are likely to be part of the third phase of the evacuation towards May-end.

Informed sources said the COVID-19 module of the Ministry is tracking around 20,000 seafarers in the Caribbean, Latin America, the Spanish coast, the Gulf of Mexico and so on.

"We have so far received



Back home: Repatriated Indians who were stranded in the Maldives leaving INS Magar in Kochi.

1,77,000 registered requests for evacuation of Indian nationals stranded in different parts of the world. This count is expected to go up in the coming few days as more people, especially the seafar-

ers are being added. The seafarers will be part of the same ongoing global evacuation process and we are at present adding the data to our system as the requests pour in," said a source fami-

liar with the COVID-19 related response of the Ministry of External Affairs.

Earlier, Minister of Shipping Mansukh Mandaviya had said organisations willing to arrange for evacuation

Sanitisers on flights

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

The Bureau of Civil Aviation Security has authorised passengers to carry hand sanitisers up to 350 ml in hand baggage as part of COVID-19 safety guidelines. Aircraft operators should give publicity on the instructions and inform passengers to declare at the security checkpoints items carried in conformity with the latest guidelines.

of seafarers can reach out to the government as the authorities will organise charter flights for them. However,

MEA sources said the evacuation would be through the Vande Bharat Mission.



Stitch in time: Employees working at an apparel manufacturing unit in Noida during the lockdown on Wednesday. ■PTI

This cycle, which they call a staggered workforce or a periodic asynchronous lockdown, is preferable to a scenario where 100% of the workforce works for some days followed by a second lock down and so on (periodic synchronous lockdown). In their estimate, the former method (staggered workforce) reduces the peak number of hospitalisations in the workforce by almost 50% compared with the latter (synchronous lockdown).

The model developed by these scientists is more complex and takes into account particular features of COVID-19.

Vishwesha Guttal from Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, explains, "The standard SEIR (Susceptible, Exposed, Infected, Recovered) model.

The model developed by these scientists is more complex and takes into account particular features of COVID-19.

The model developed by these scientists is more complex and takes into account particular features of COVID-19.

"Large-scale testing, contact tracing and quarantining must happen in conjunction with the asynchronous periodic lockdown, to keep the infected and hospitalisation numbers in check - this is well demonstrated via our model calculations," says Pinnaki Chaudhuri of the Institute of Mathematical Sciences, Chennai, one of the people who developed this model, in an email to *The Hindu*.

"In comparison to periodic synchronous lockdowns, there can be a 50% reduc-

'Lavish spending' worries Railway Ministry

It identifies areas of unjustified expenditure in executing projects, warns officials of action

S. VIJAY KUMAR
CHENNAI

The Ministry of Railways has expressed serious concern over the "uncontrolled" excess in estimates and spending of funds much beyond the sanctioned limit in the new line, gauge conversion and gauge doubling works in the country.

Identifying specific areas of "extravagant" and "lavish" spending, the Ministry has written to the Chief Administrative Officers (Construction) of all zonal railways, pointing out that loans were being taken for executing projects for which interest had to be paid, and therefore any change in the detailed estimate for the proposed projects should be

"summarily rejected". The Railways spends thousands of crores of rupees every year for executing projects of new lines, gauge conversion and broad gauge doubling. The finding of the Railway Board is that revised estimates are submitted after expenses beyond the sanctioned limit are incurred.

Blatant deviations

Though repeated instructions were given to the Chief Administrative Officers that revised estimates should be submitted in time for approval by the competent authority and no contractual liabilities should be entered into till then, there were violations, leading to the "uncon-



Railway personnel checking the track in Coimbatore.
■S. SIVA SARAVANAN

trolled excess in the estimates over the sanctioned qualities".

Some of the deviations identified by the Railway Board were raising of the embankment while laying track to accommodate limit

height subway/road under bridge, causing large variation in the cost of land acquisition as well as earth work.

Track centre, the spacing between tracks in doubling projects, were more than what was prescribed, resulting in more land acquisition and cost.

In the new line, gauge conversion and double line projects, passenger amenities like high level platforms were provided in excess of what was mandated in the detailed estimate.

Extravagant expenses

During scrutiny, it was observed that in a 29-km gauge doubling work, more loop lines than were required

were laid without the train traffic in the section being taken into account.

Station buildings and other passenger amenities are being charged in an extravagant manner without the sanction of the detailed estimate and in much more quantity than to be provided as per rules," B.K. Gupta, Executive Director (Projects), Railway Board, said in a note May 11, 2020.

Noting that funds were limited, he said: "Therefore, the tendency to provide facilities in an extravagant and lavish manner has to be severely curbed."

Any violation of the instructions could lead to action against the officer responsible.

Staggered exit to cut peak hospitalisations, says study

Total resumption with intermittent lockdowns more risky'

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN
CHENNAI

A staggered resumption of work following the end of the nationwide lockdown may reduce peak hospitalisations due to COVID-19 to almost 50% as compared with a total resumption that would force authorities to impose intermittent lockdowns to contain surges in the incidence of the disease, a model built by a group of scientists estimates.

With the third phase of the lockdown set to end on May 17, Indians are set to resume work once the lockdown is lifted.

The lockdown has clamped down on the number of infections and hospitalisations due to COVID-19. Lifting the lockdown immediately would imply an intensive interaction as compared to the lockdown period and an ensuing rise in infections. How does one play off the benefits of a lockdown against the economic need, but growth in infection rate of an active workforce? The best way may be to send 33% of the workforce to work at a time, in a staggered manner, finds a study by nine Indian scientists.

Lockdown scenarios

The scientists from across India involved in the initiative – Indian Scientists' Response to CoVID-19 – have built up a model of COVID-19 disease that can estimate how well different scenarios of lockdown work.

They find that the best way to return to work after the lockdown is to have 33% of workers in any organisation work for say, two days. The second 33% should take over on the third day, and the third set replaces the second on the fifth day.

In comparison to periodic synchronous lockdowns, there can be a 50% reduc-

₹3,100 crore from PM CARES allocated for COVID-19 relief

Money to be used for ventilators, migrants, vaccine R&D

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund, better known as PM CARES, will allocate ₹3,100 crore to COVID-19 relief, including funds for ventilators, migrant workers and vaccine development, according to an official statement from the Prime Minister's Office on Wednesday evening.

The announcement comes one-and-a-half months after the Fund was set up on March 27. There is no indication in the statement or on the PM CARES website how much money the Fund has collected from donors in that time.

50,000 ventilators

In order to augment the health infrastructure needed to tackle the pandemic, the PM CARES Fund Trust has decided to spend ₹2,000



Migrants on a truck to Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, on Wednesday. ■PTI

crore to buy 50,000 Indian-made ventilators, which will be provided to government-run hospitals designated for COVID-19 treatment in all the States and Union Territories, said the statement.

₹1,000 cr. for migrants

Another ₹1,000 crore will be used to support the States' welfare measures for migrant workers, and will help

provide accommodation, food, medical treatment and transport. State-wise allocations will be determined on the basis of population (50% weightage), the number of positive COVID-19 cases (40% weightage) and a 10% share split equally to ensure a basic minimum sum for all States. The money will be released to the district administration through the State Disaster Relief Commissioners, said the statement.

PM CARES will give ₹100 crore to support those in the Indian academia, start-ups and industry who are working on designing and developing a vaccine against COVID-19. The money will be spent under the supervision of the Principal Scientific Adviser.

The PM CARES Fund Trust, which decided these allocations, is headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his official capacity.

Booking of waiting list tickets allowed with cap

ing list will be capped at 200, while for AC 3 tier and AC chair car, it will be 100 each. Additionally, it will be 50 for AC 2 tier and 20 each for first AC and executive class. All 15 pairs of special trains being run to and from New Delhi have only AC coaches.

Since the reservation period for special trains has been kept at a maximum of seven days, travellers will be able to book waiting list tickets from May 15. However, there will be no RAC on these trains.

The Railways said that if a passenger is unable to travel owing to high temperature or COVID-19 symptoms, he/she will be given full refund.

SC rejects Sajjan Kumar's bail plea

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday declined a bail petition moved on medical grounds by former Congress leader Sajjan Kumar, who is undergoing life imprisonment in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots case.

A Bench, led by Chief Justice of India S.A. Bobde, observed that Kumar did not require hospitalisation.

Senior advocate Vikas Singh, representing Kumar, said his client should be granted bail because if something happened to him, his life imprisonment would become death penalty.

Haryana Cong. pays ₹40 lakh for migrants

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Haryana Congress president Kumari Selja said on Wednesday a cheque of ₹40 lakh had been sent to Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on behalf of the party as contribution towards the train fare of migrant labourers.

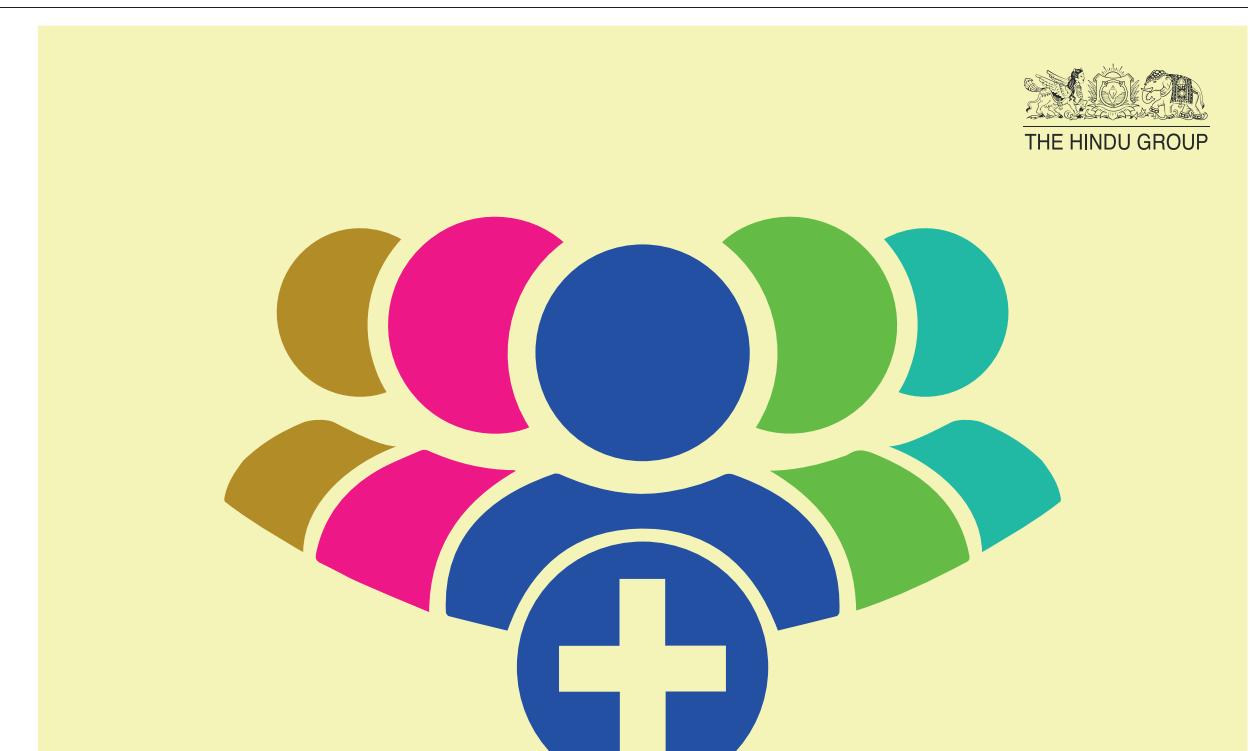
"There is a big crisis of livelihood that these workers face now. Desperate and frustrated, they now want to go back to their ancestral places but they have no means, no money and no food. In such a situation, it is our duty to extend all possible help to them," she said.

Guidelines issued on use of AC in offices

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI

The decision to switch on central air-conditioning units in government offices should be taken in concurrence with the administrative heads of the Ministry or the Department concerned, according to the guidelines to prevent transmission of COVID-19 issued by the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) on Wednesday.

The guidelines said "maximum caution should be exercised to minimise the chances of spread of coronavirus through air flow in enclosed spaces like residences, offices, meeting places and assembly places". Among the general principles were keeping the temperature between 24°C and 30°C, maintaining a relative humidity of 40%-70%, increasing the intake of fresh air and avoiding recirculating of air as much as possible and regular cleaning of filters.



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Army proposes 3-year stint for civilians

Proposal aims to reduce financial burden on the force and free funds for its modernisation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

In a first of its kind proposal, the Army plans to take civilians on a three-year "Tour of Duty" (ToD) or short service" on a trial basis to serve as officers and in other ranks initially for a limited number of vacancies which will be expanded later.

This is expected to result in significant reduction in the expenditure on pay and pensions and free up funds for the Army's modernisation.

"The proposal is under consideration. If approved, it will be voluntary and there will be no dilution of criteria in selection," an Army source said.

Cost factor

The overall purpose of the ToD concept is 'internship/temporary experience' and so there will be no requirement of attractive severance packages, resettlement courses, professional encashment training leave, ex-servicemen status, ex-servi-



Call of duty: As per the proposal, civilians will be inducted to serve as both officers and in other ranks. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

cemen Contributory Health Scheme for ToD officers and other ranks.

Analysing the cost of training incurred on each personnel compared with the limited employment of the manpower for three years, the proposal calculates that it will indeed have a positive benefit. It states that the cumulative approximate cost of pre-commission training, pay, allowances, gratuity,

fits. "Similar costs for those released after a three-year ToD is just ₹80-85 lakh," it says.

Similarly, estimates for a jawan with 17 years of service as compared to a ToD recruit with three years' service shows that the prospective lifetime savings of just one jawan is ₹11.5 crore. "Thus, savings for only 1,000 jawans could be ₹11,000 crore, which could be used for the much-needed modernisation of the Army," the proposal says.

Many advantages

Highlighting the advantages of this scheme, the sources said this scheme is for those who did not want a full career in the Army but still wanted to put on the uniform.

Individuals who opted for ToD would get a much higher salary than their peers in the corporate sector. They would also have an edge after leaving the service and going to the corporate sector. The Army hoped that

this would attract individuals from the best colleges, including the Indian Institutes of Technology.

The proposal states that as per an initial survey, corporates favour individuals aged 26 or 27 who have been trained by the military.

The proposal suggests several incentives such as tax-free income for three years and a lumpsum at the end of three years of about ₹5.6 lakh for officers and ₹2.3 lakh for others.

The Army's pay and pension bill has been increasing steeply over the years, accounting for 60% of its budget allocation. In the last five years, though the growth in the defence budget has been 68%, and for defence salaries 75%, defence pensions have increased by a staggering 146%.

The proposal adds that in addition "the nation and the corporates are likely to benefit from trained, disciplined, confident, diligent and committed men and women who have completed the ToD."

SC trades black robes for white shirts, salwar-kameez

Medical opinion is that the virus can spread through gowns

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed advocates to shed their traditional black robes and jackets for simple white cotton shirts and salwar-kameez as a precautionary measure against the spread of COVID-19 virus.

"The competent authority has been pleased to direct that the advocates may wear plain white shirt/white-salwar-kameez/ white sari, with a plain white neck band during the hearings before the Supreme Court of India through virtual court system till medical exigencies exist or until further orders," the circular issued by the court's Secretary General Sanjeev S. Kalgaonkar said.

Colonial dress code

The drastic change in attire owes to medical advice. Thus the virus has become a reason for the court to relax its colonial dress code. For years, many prominent voices within the legal fraternity have been campaigning for a dress code more suitable to our tropical climate.



Chief Justice S.A. Bobde

Chief Justice Bobde had told senior advocate Kapil Sibal, who was appearing in the case, that the change in attire was based on medical opinion that the coronavirus could spread through gowns.

While there is still no official word on whether the court would continue to function or go on summer vacation from May 17, the court has nevertheless indicated that it would be working on a "large scale" through videoconferencing. The judges have hinted that more Benches will assemble to function as virtual courts in the coming days.

Justice Nageswara Rao, who is part of the committee supervising the court's functioning during lockdown, said an arrangement would be made for judges to sit in their respective courtrooms while lawyers could argue their cases from their offices or chambers.

Archaeological Survey of India gets new chief

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) got a new Director General with the appointment of IAS officer V. Vidyavathi on Tuesday.

Ms. Vidyavathi is a 1991 batch Karnataka cadre officer, according to the order of the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet on Tuesday.

She will be serving in the rank of Additional Secretary to the Government of India.

As on Wednesday, she was yet to take charge of the post, according to ASI officials.

Nepal can let India use link road: Oli

Won't surrender the Kalapani region, he said at an all-party meeting in Kathmandu

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI



K. P. Sharma Oli

Nepal's Prime Minister K. P. Sharma Oli on Wednesday proposed a solution to the ongoing border tension saying that Nepal can allow India to use the link road to the Lipulekh Pass as part of an agreement, but will not surrender the Kalapani territory on which India has been carrying out construction.

Addressing an all-party meeting in Kathmandu, Prime Minister Oli said that he was against India's unilateral actions in the region but agreed that a solution can be found that will preserve Nepal's territorial integrity and

"The government will save the land that was added to Nepal by our ancestors. PM urged the leaders not to make their positions based on things that have come from outside."

Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali was quoted as saying in online publication Setopati.

Diplomatic solution'

Wednesday's meetings were attended by a large number of political parties, and also several former Prime Ministers. Mr. Gyawali said that the leaders sought a diplomatic solution to the crisis that involves the territory of Kalapani that India depicts

as a part of the easternmost region of the State of Uttarakhand. A similar meeting was also held earlier after India depicted the contested region as its territory in a new set of political maps published in November 2019.

Nepal expressed regret after Defence Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated the link road that will cut travelling time to the Tibetan plateau and the Kailash Mansarovar.

Kathmandu maintains that the territories to the east of Mahakali river are a part of its domain, as agreed in the Treaty of Sugauli of 1816 between the East India Company and the King of Nepal.

'Stop forest, environment clearances'

Conservationists urge Javadekar after *The Hindu*'s story on NTCA restructuring

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

A group of 291 conservation scientists and allied professionals has asked Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister Prakash Javadekar to withhold forest and environment clearances during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The group includes 12 former members of the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL), the highest advisory body on wildlife chaired by the Prime Minister.

An Assam-based environment activist has also written to Mr. Javadekar, seeking

the preservation of the autonomy of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), along with other specialised Environment Ministry (MoEF&CC) wings, such as the Forest Survey of India (FSI), the Central Zoo

Authority (CZA) and the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB).

The Hindu had broken the story on the MoEF&CC's bid to restructure its regional offices by subsuming the NTCA and all the other specialised wings.

The letter by the conservationists' group is in reference to the decisions and clearances given by the 57th meeting of the Standing Committee on April 7 for 31 proposals affecting 15 tiger reserves, sanctuaries, notified eco-sensitive zones, deemed eco-sensitive zones and designated wildlife corridors. These include the

private sector Etalin hydro-power project in Arunachal Pradesh and a coal mining project in an Assam elephant reserve.

'Integrated Battle Groups will soon be operational'

They can launch swift strikes

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Army's new concept of agile Integrated Battle Groups (IBG) as part of the overall force transformation will be operationalised very soon, Army chief Gen. Manoj Naravane told officers

on a visit to the South Western Command on Wednesday.

"The Army chief also advised optimisation of funds allotted under defence Budget in view of the economic constraints due to COVID-19 and said the funds should be utilised judiciously giving

highest priority to operational needs," Col. Sombit Ghosh, PRO Defence Rajasthan, said in a statement.

The IBGs are brigade-sized agile self-sufficient combat formations which, can swiftly launch strikes against adversary. Each IBG would be tailor-made based on Threat, Terrain and Task and resources will be allotted based on the three Ts. They will be able to mobilise within 12-48 hours based on the location.

The Army has extensively "test bedded" the IBGs to fine-tune the concept.

Single judge Benches function as virtual courts

Orders passed in 20 transfer petitions

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Three single judge Benches functioned as virtual courts in the Supreme Court on Wednesday, in a bid to improve work-efficiency during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Justices Krishna Murari, S. Ravindra Bhat and Hrishikesh Roy, sitting as three separate single Judge Benches, heard and passed orders in 20 transfer pleas through video conferencing.

The court had on May 11 announced its decision to have its judges sitting alone instead of in the usual com-

bination of twos and threes from May 13 to hear bail, anticipatory bail and transfer cases. According to a notice, besides other amendments the competent authority has provided that certain categories of matters may be heard and disposed of finally by a judge sitting singly nominated by the Chief Justice."

The single Judge Benches will hear Special Leave Petitions arising out of grant, dismissal or rejection of bail application or anticipatory bail application under various sections of CrPC.

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SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Solution to puzzle 12934

A	R	C	H	E	T	P	I	C	A	L
M	O	Y	A	R	O	E	A			
A	B	A	N	D	O	N				
T	D	R	K	V	R	N				
T	O	M	C	A	T	P	I	L		
E	A	U	T	L	O	E				
R	E	P	U	L	I	S				
P	I	N	G	O						
C	O	L	I	C	S	P	A	R	M	I
H	A	E	D	G	E	F	U	N	T	E
A	S	T	U	L	L	T				
T	O	R	T	O	N	O				
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L	A	T	I	N	A	M	E	R	A	C

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

FAITH

Sat-chit-ananda swaroopa

The most wonderful result of the Lord's avatars apart from the main purposes, protecting the good, destroying the evil and establishing dharma, is the fact that all including the learned and the unlettered are given a chance to realise the Supreme Brahman. This is exemplified in the soul stirring hymns on deities such as Rama, Krishna, Subramanya, Shiva, Bhavani, etc., of Adi Sankara, pointed out Sri K. Srinivasan in a discourse.

**A walk to remember**

Exploring Venice on foot tops Rashmika Mandanna's list of adventures from her many travels, although, given a second chance, she might get off at the right train stop this time. On the plus side, she says, "I feel like I'm a boss of Venice now." The story goes such: having requested a break from filming a song for *Bheeshma*, Rashmika, opted to travel to Venice from Rome via Florence on train. "I knew that my stop would arrive at noon," she says.

Once aboard, the train operator threw two different options. "One stop at 11.45 and the other at 12.15. I thought the earlier option was better and ended up getting off at the wrong station," she adds.

Up ahead were two more options: either walk for two-and-a-half hours with her luggage to get to her hotel in Venice, or travel by cab to a point midway and then take a water taxi. She took the cab but, as fate would have it, she could not find a boat service/operator who could speak or understand English. "I was awestruck. The entire world comes here for vacation. Maybe, it was my bad luck that nobody could understand what I was trying to ask them, like 'where to go', 'how do you reach here,' she says.

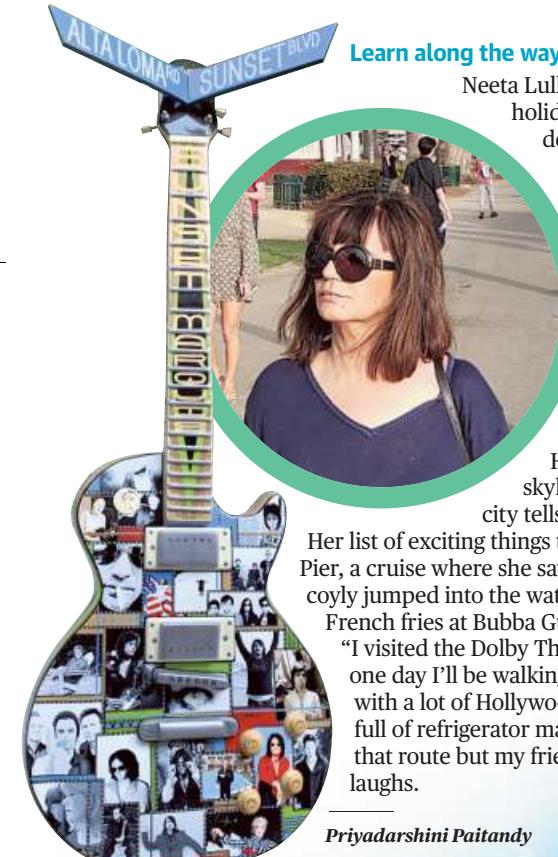
The actor decided to wing it and find her own way, perhaps, falling back on the solo traveller spirit, a move she would later regret as she ended up at the hotel only at 2 am. "I have never walked so much in my life. It was just me dragging my suitcase and walking around a residential street; there was not a single soul in sight. My phone battery was going to give up, I didn't have a map and I started to think 'okay, what if I am supposed to spend the rest of my life here?'" she laughs, adding, "I'm not kidding because I was so scared. Imagine, you are walking and you don't see any one, there are just two people walking by and staring at you, probably because they think you are weird."

The experience only strengthened her resolve to overcome the language barrier. "I stayed in the hotel the next day because I was tired, but then the next two days I was out and about, taking the water taxis all around Venice trying to figure out the city, which stop connected to which place, talking to locals and clicking pictures. I did get lost in Venice but now I feel like I know each and every spot there."

Pradeep Kumar

Come fly with me

We may not be able to hop on a plane, but no one can stop our armchair travelling. This week designers and sports stars tell us about their most adventurous holidays

**Learn along the way**

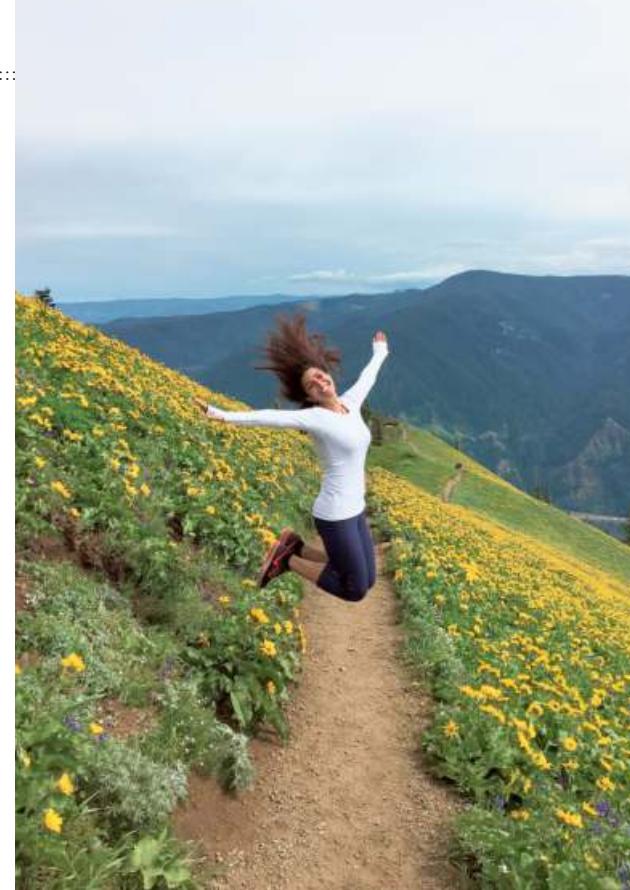
Neeta Lulla's idea of adventure is different from most others. "I am not a holiday person. For me, my work is adventure," says the celebrated designer, adding, "My trips are always a mix of vacay and work." Add to that anything that involves learning through observing or hearing what people have to say and Neeta has got herself an adventurous holiday. She fondly speaks about her latest trip to Los Angeles, where she cycled after ages. "You can hire them on Uber and scan quite a bit of the city on it. Once you are done, you can park it on another stand," says Neeta. She adds that who was in LA to meet prosthetic expert Jason Collins for Kangana Ranaut's look in *Thalaivi*. "I took three days off to chill. With its Hollywood vibes, larger-than-life ambience, the skyline and the waterfront... each and every part of this city tells a story and I love it," she says.

Her list of exciting things to do in LA includes spending time at the Santa Monica Pier, a cruise where she saw sea lions – that were perched on the watchtower but coyly jumped into the water when they saw the ferry approaching – and enjoying French fries at Bubba Gump, inspired by *Forrest Gump* and his best friend Bubba. "I visited the Dolby Theatre, sat on the steps and got pictures clicked and told myself that one day I'll be walking down its aisle. Then I did the Hollywood Walk and found a place with a lot of Hollywood artefacts for sale. I went on a complete binge picking up a bag-full of refrigerator magnets, caps, accessories, masks and what have you. I really loved that route but my friends were like, 'Aren't you being a tad too wannabe touristy?' she laughs.

Priyadarshini Paitandy



Deep blue
Shriya Saran during a diving expedition
• ANUP K JAT

**One for the road**

Nimrat Kaur has just got off a celebratory Zoom call at home in Mumbai to mark the last episode of *Homeland*, the American spy thriller series, in which she plays Tasneem Qureishi, a member of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence. She says she was stunned by the beauty of Cape Town, South Africa, where Season 4 of the series was shot. "It is a great place for treks," says Nimrat on telephone, adding, "When the rains hit Maharashtra, I step out of Mumbai to trek in the nearby ranges of the Western Ghats."

However, her most memorable adventure holiday was in 2016 when she did a road trip from Vancouver in Canada's British

Columbia past the U.S. states of Washington and Oregon into Northern California. "It was a seven-day, nearly 3,600-kilometre trip down the coast and back in a loop. I was shooting for *Wayward Pines* and we had an episode break. My personal assistant and I decided to do a driving holiday. We would drive for half a day, then trek wherever we stopped. We walked through snow-capped mountains, coastal ranges and redwood forests," she says.

The route chosen by Nimrat was wild and lonely with Pacific winds whipping the coast and the likelihood of meeting an elk rather than another car. It involved treks through wildflower-carpeted Dog Mountain on the North side of the Columbia river gorge in Washington and wandering through a cathedral of trees at Fern Canyon in the Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park where *Jurassic Park* was filmed.

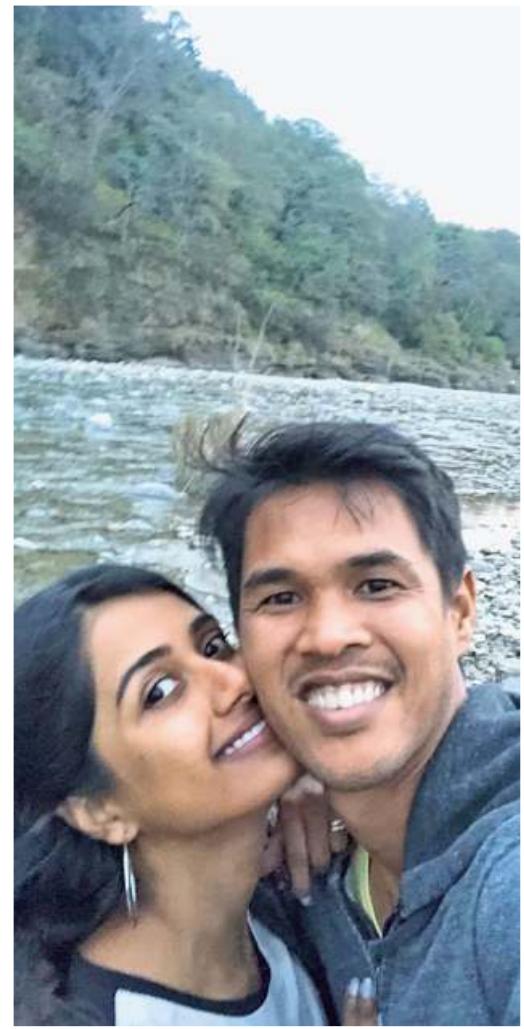
"Fern Canyon in California is filled with massive five-fingered ferns, and to the South of it stand the great redwood forests, one of the oldest known forest areas on Earth. It is spectacular to hike through woodland filled with these soaring trees."

Although Nimrat rues that she did not have the nerve to swim in the Pacific – "it was too cold" – she says the uncertainty involved made the trip all the more beautiful.

"It wasn't easy to drive such long distances and get to a place, trek, and then move on to another location to camp for the night. We stayed at a log cabin in the woods, a hotel where Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* was filmed, and an inn on a cliff edging into the Pacific. One morning I woke up to a mother and a baby whale swimming right outside my room."

"I had no idea what was coming every day; the landscape changed, there was communion with Nature, you ate what you found, you were anonymous and lost to the beauty," says Nimrat. "I would do it again – in a heartbeat."

Deepa Alexander

**Swimming with whale sharks**

The happiness is clearly evident in her voice when actor Shriya Saran recalls her travel experiences, on a phone conversation from Barcelona, where she lives. St Petersburg, Machu Picchu, Colombia, Peru, New Zealand... She reels off names and we pin her down to talk about one adventurous trip. "Maldives," she exclaims, picking her favourite diving destination. "In 2017, I had booked diving tickets for April, but landed in Maldives in March, a full month earlier. I was wondering what to do. Luckily, I met underwater photographer and diver Anup K Jat, who hails from Bengaluru. He informed me about a sunset diving expedition later that day. They accommodated me. That's where I met Andrei Koscheev (whom she married in 2018)," she says.

Shriya says she has always been a water baby but battled claustrophobia. She says diving with the gear and oxygen cylinder helped her get over the fear of closed spaces. "You follow a rhythm, without going too fast. You are always dependent on the oxygen cylinder and watch out for fellow divers."

For her, the beauty of diving is in discovering the many colours and forms in the ocean: "It's a whole different world out there. We swam alongside whale sharks in Maldives. These are huge but beautiful, gentle creatures and we felt a gentle flow of water when they swam nearby. We saw a few divers splashing water on them or going threateningly close; that's when sharks tend to react as an act of self-protection. It's important to not intrude or touch them."

She also saw sea cows, sting rays, eagle rays...

Diving is a meditative experience, believes Shriya. "It's peaceful down there. For sometime you hear nothing but your own breathing. In some time you get acclimated to the ocean and begin hearing the sounds of the ocean. It's magical and you see an endless blue."

Sangeetha Devi Dundoo

**Welcoming the warriors**

Asilia Africa, a safari operator in East Africa, is offering discounts of up to 75% on a safari, for healthcare and emergency service workers from around the globe, when travel resumes. Asilia has 19 camps across Kenya, Tanzania and Zanzibar. In recognition and gratitude for their service, healthcare workers can travel with a plus one (and children) to an Asilia property at the discounted rates until May 31, 2021. The offer applies to anyone in the healthcare sector – from doctors to carers, nurses to receptionists. All members of the emergency services, as well as anyone involved in the fight against COVID-19 are welcome, according to a statement by Asilia Africa. Asilia's flagship Kenya camp, Naboisho Camp, usually costs US\$1,065 per person per night. Healthcare workers will be offered a rate of US\$247 per person per night for travel at any time until the deadline, a saving of 75%. For further details, look up www.asiliaafrica.com

**Australia from home**

You can take a virtual trip to Sydney and New South Wales region of Australia, from the comfort of your home. The travel website visitnsw.com has a new catalogue of still and video Zoom-ready options that travellers can download and add as background collection. They are in three categories – native animals, sunrise and sunset, and spectacular scenery of the region. Some of the experiences include stargazing in the southern hemisphere's first Dark Sky Park in the Warrumbungles, sea life frolicking underwater along the coast from Tweed Heads to Narooma, aerial shots of Stockton Beach and Broken Hill, breakfast with Coffs Harbour kangaroos, and a timelapse of the Sydney Harbour. The backgrounds include wombats at Symbio Wildlife Park in Central Coast, kangaroos in Mungo National Park, sunrise and sunsets at the Sydney Harbour, breathtaking scenery in Lord Howe Island and Stockton sand dunes at Port Stephens.

IN OUR BACKYARD

Ready to mingle

The Ashy Prinia is a small sociable bird that's easy to spot, considering it's kicking up quite a racket now

ABHISHEK GULSHAN

If you have a Lantana bush or a similar shrub in your neighbourhood, you're likely to catch this small urban-garden bird, Ashy Prinia that thrives in varied habitats, including urban settlements. While it's endemic (only found) to the Indian subcontinent, it's breeding right now in Delhi, so easy to catch glimpses of.

True to its scientific name, *Prinia socialis*, (*socialis* means sociable in Latin), and unlike many small, shy birds, the Ashy Prinia is happy to show itself, so non-bird-watchers can spot it easily. The males and females look similar and the birds are often found in pairs rather than flocks.

It has a wheezy song: *jimmy-jimmy-jimmy*, or *zeet-zeet-zeet*, or the metallic yet striking *tee-tee-tee*. We often see it foraging for insects in the undergrowth or on the ground, or calling out from perches like electrical wires and other open perches though.

The bird is a small passerine (birds having feet adapted for perching) that has a slightly curved black bill (beak), ideal to ferret out larvae and insects from crevices. The bird is fast and has jerky reflexes, catching insects in



mid air - a difficult task considering their zig-zag flying pattern.

The Ashy Prinia has an ashy-coloured head, greyish-brown back and buff-orange underpart. It has an upright tail (with white edges), red eyes, and often a short white eyebrow (called supercilium in the birding world, though this may not be always be present in all birds).

A mysterious sound that most Pinias (other species as well) make are a sort of clapping *frap-frap* sound, when in flight.

Some naturalists say it's the snapping of the tail, others that the birds make it with their beaks, and still others like Douglas De-war, a prominent nature author, feel it's the beating of the wings with the tail. Whenever I am out leading nature trails, I call attention to this bird's tail that seems to have a 'mind of its own'!

These birds mostly breed from April to September, when the males usually sit atop branches of trees or shrubs and sing loudly, often engaging in aerial displays to attract females. They usually build their nests in shrubs close to the ground or in tall grasses (reed beds near wetlands) but have also been observed to nest in balconies and crevices of buildings. Like so

much of Nature, this too is opportunistic behaviour, to survive.

Like Common Tailorbirds, Ashy Pinias also stitch leaves together (to resemble a small bag) with silk from spiders webs, and often line these nests with grass strands, leaving a small entrance on one side for the adults to enter and exit.

The species has been found to be monogamous and both parents take turns in incubating eggs and feeding the young ones.

Cuckoos, being brood parasites, often lay their eggs in nearby Ashy Prinia nests and leave their young to be taken care of by the Prinia parents. I once wrote in my nature journal (yes, I maintain one!), a small bird sitting on the head of a much bigger bird and feeding it in Lodhi Garden. The former turned out to be the Ashy Prinia and the younger but bigger bird was an Asian Koel juvenile. Funny for an onlooker, not for the Prinia parents, who would have had to work doubly hard to procure food for the bigger bird.

The writer is the founder of NINOX - Owl About Nature, a nature-awareness initiative. He is the Delhi-NCR reviewer for Ebird, a Cornell University initiative, monitoring rare sightings of birds. He formerly led a programme of WWF India.

Little delights Ashy Prinia
■ ABHISHEK GULSHAN; WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/
RISON THUMBOOR

ABHISHEK GULSHAN

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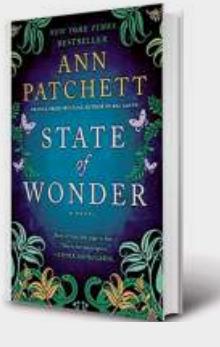
HOMING IN

Staying at home for a while? We have you covered. This week's **Reading List** features world literature handpicked by **Anees Salim**, author of *The Small-Town Sea*, *Vanity Bagh* and *The Blind Lady's Descendants*

SARASWATHY NAGARAJAN

The Return by Hisham Matar

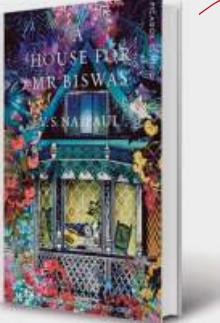
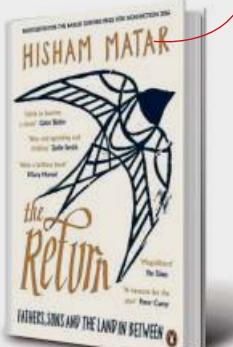
This biography, which won the Pulitzer prize in 2017, traces a son's journey through Libya in search of his father. *The Return* is more than just a memoir, it is a book of immense historical value and sketches a stark picture of a country that was first destroyed by colonial rule, then by the Gaddafi regime and time and again by warring factions. The book also rekindled my interest in the movie *Omar Mukhtar: The Lion of the Desert*.



State of Wonder

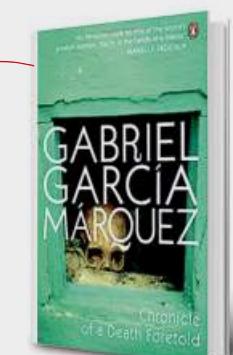
by Ann Patchett

I picked up this book without realising that it is about a group of American scientists and their pursuit of a wonder drug. It is mostly set in the Brazilian Rio Negro and narrates the lives of tribes in the deepest corner of the Amazon. The book is a bit heavy on research details, but the stunning description of the rainforest and its flora kept me engaged.



A House for Mr Biswas by VS Naipaul

I would recommend this and the next for reading during this period. The story of Indo-Trinidadian Mohun Biswas' efforts in vain to succeed in a colonial scenario. Finally, his goal is only about owning his own house.

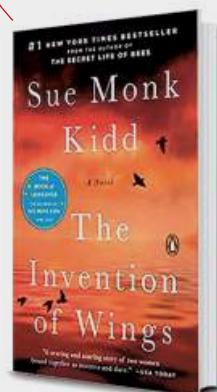


Chronicle of a Death Foretold by Gabriel Garcia Marquez

The book describes the murder of a young man called Santiago Nasar, and the events leading to this death.

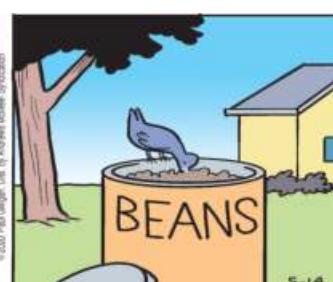
The Invention of Wings by Sue Monk Kidd

After reading *The Secret Life of Bees* by the same author, I would love to read anything by her. Based on real events and set in 19th-Century America, this book tells the story of the friendship between two women — a mistress and her slave.



We would love to know how you are keeping busy at home. Tell us what you are reading, at metro@thehindu.co.in

POOCH CAFE



PEANUTS



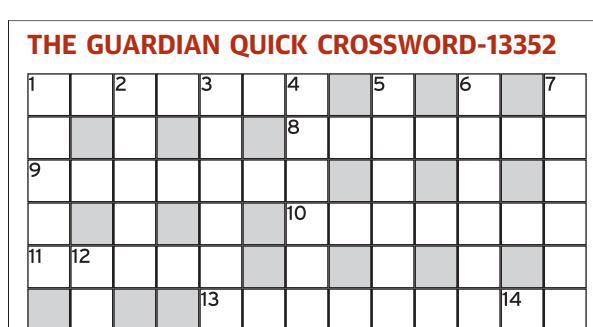
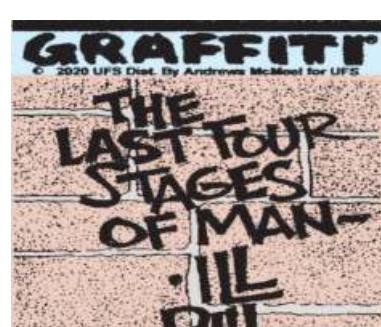
HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



CALVIN AND HOBBES



TIGER



To play the *Guardian Quick Crossword*, *The Hindu Cryptic crossword* and other puzzles online, scan the QR code.

6 Glass flask for serving wine (6)

7 Break for holiday (6)

12 Established route (4)

14 Cause trouble (4)

15 Police officer (slang) (6)

16 Unexpected – precipitous (6)

17 Freedom of access (6)

19 Wear away (5)

20 Largest port in South Korea (5)

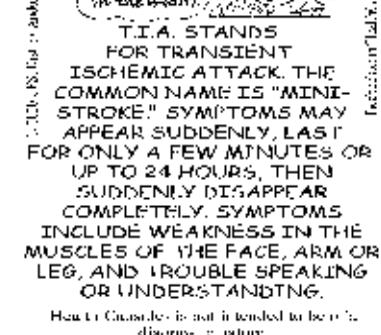
WUMO



The solution will appear on May 16, 2020.

Solution No. 13351

PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



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■ Across

1 Actor's assistant (7)

8 Set apart (7)

9 Of the heart (7)

10 Having written a valid will (7)

11 TS Eliot's 'cruellest month' (5)

13 Irrascibility (9)

15 Someone who changes position to suit the situation (9)

18 Contemptible person (5)

21 Debauchee (7)

22 Rollingick (7)

23 Cost (7)

24 American-born British sculptor, d. 1959 (7)

■ Down

1 Russian country house (5)

2 Comely (EYEFUL)

3 Give away secrets (5,3,5)

4 Rustic (anag) – gaping grimace (6)

5 Scrupulous (13)

CThe measures for MSMEs through guarantees, equity infusion and debt support will incentivise bank lending to MSMEs as well as provide crucial support to stressed entities in the current situation

RAJNISH KUMAR,
CHAIRMAN, SBI

CThe Centre is truly listening to voices and grievances of the industry and has been addressing one by one after due deliberations

VENU SRINIVASAN,
CHAIRMAN, TVS GROUP

CThe definition change to service sector MSMEs, which includes service business in MSMEs, is welcome

MALLIKA SRINIVASAN,
TAFE CHAIRMAN

CThe greatest takeaway from today's announcement was the clear focus on getting liquidity flowing into the system

SANGITA REDDY,
PRESIDENT, FICCI

CRelaxation in project timelines under RERA Act will bring relief to developers and safeguard the interest of homebuyers

NIRANJAN HIRANANDANI,
NATIONAL PRESIDENT, NAREDCO

Full guarantee may push banks to lend

Non-banking financial institutions expect an increase in banks' appetite for lower rated papers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Risk-averse banks may now have the appetite to resume lending operations, with the government deciding to provide full guarantee for the loans extended by them to borrowers to kick start the economy paralysed by the COVID-19 lockdown.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a ₹3 lakh crore emergency working capital facility for businesses, including micro, small and medium enterprises, as part of the ₹20 lakh crore financial package announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday.

This 100% credit guarantee will mean that banks do not have to make any provision for the loans, that is, they do not have to set aside capital in case the account turns non-performing.

Bankers said they will wait for operating guidelines

from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to understand whether the government will directly provide the guarantee or via agencies like the SIDBI. In case the government is directly providing the guarantee, there will be no risk weight attached to the loans. "The measures for MSMEs through guarantees, equity infusion and debt support will incentivise bank lending to MSMEs as well as providing crucial support to stressed entities in the current situation," SBI Chairman Rajnish Kumar said.

On banks' reluctance to lend, which is evident from over ₹8 lakh crore being parked by these lenders with the RBI's reverse repo window, Ms. Sitharaman said a lot of borrowers were not fully drawing up to the sanctioned loan limits due to the lockdown. As a result, banks have no other option but to keep the funds

with the RBI.

Liquidity for NBFCs

With the government announcing a ₹30,000-crore special liquidity scheme for NBFCs, which will be provided by the banks, the non-banking finance companies now expect bank funding to start. While announcing the scheme, the government said investment would be made in primary and secondary market transactions in investment grade debt paper of NBFCs, HFCs and MFIs. Such investments will be 100% guaranteed by the government. NBFCs expect that banks will now be more willing to tap the RBI's special window for liquidity exclusively meant for them. Banks were reluctant to borrow in the first such

auction — only about 50% amount was availed by them out of the notified amount of ₹25,000 crore. "Under the full and partial guarantee scheme, we expect a boost to liquidity into the NBFC ecosystem which, in turn, would help MSMEs to resume their operations," said Umesh Revankar, MD and CEO, Shriram Transport Finance.

NBFCs also expect partial credit guarantee scheme will boost banks' confidence to lend. The scheme will cover the borrowings of lower-rated NBFCs, HFCs and micro finance institutions (MFIs) and the government will provide 20% first loss sovereign guarantee to public sector banks. "The special liquidity support to lower-rated NBFCs will mean banks do not have to take credit risk and NBFC papers are likely to be lapped up," said Sanjay Chamria, VC & MD, Magma Fincorp.

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ILLUSTRATION: J.A. PREMKUMAR



India Inc. welcomes FM's booster dose for industry

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI/MUMBAI/CHENNAI

Industry captains have welcomed Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's announcements for the revival of various sectors, on Wednesday.

FICCI president Sangita Reddy said that the greatest takeaway from today's announcement was the clear

focus on getting liquidity flowing into the system. "Besides liquidity, we need to give equal focus on generating consumption demand and propping up investments. We hope that in the next set of announcements, these areas will be taken up in a comprehensive manner as well," Dr. Reddy said.

TVS Group chairman Venu Srinivasan said the collat-

eral free automatic loan of ₹3 lakh crore for businesses will definitely help the MSME sector, which is facing serious cash crunch. The Centre is listening to grievances of industry and addressing them one by one, he said.

Chandrajit Banerjee, Director General, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), said that one of the most im-

portant announcements with long-term implications is the "quantum jump in definition of MSME" that had not been changed since the MSME Development Act of 2006.

RPG group chairman Harsh Goenka tweeted: "Prescription for Economy - Injections for SMEs, sanitiser for NBFCs, masks for discoms, gloves for real estate.

Other sectors placed in containment zone till other tranches are announced. Hoping FM Nirmala Sitharaman will not do social distancing for manufacturing sector."

Deepak Jain, president at the Automotive Component Manufacturers Association of India (ACMA) expressed hope that the government will soon announce a pack-

age for demand generation for the automotive sector. "A uniform GST rate of 18% on all vehicles and auto components, backed by an incentive-based scrappage policy would bring the automotive industry back on track."

TAFE chairman Mallika Srinivasan said that the announcement regarding MSME sector recognised the critical role that they played.

Maruti profit skids as sales take a hit

Carmaker prunes planned capital expenditure to ₹2,700 crore

MARKET WATCH

	13-05-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	32,009	2.03
US Dollar	75.46	0.07
Brent oil	29.87	0.00

NIFTY 50

	PRICE CHANGE
Adani Ports	309.35 17.85
Asian Paints	1563.30 39.95
Axis Bank	414.00 27.15
Bajaj Auto	2696.00 67.15
Bajaj Finserv	4816.40 148.20
Bajaj Finance	2161.05 91.35
Bharti Airtel	555.95 -3.90
BPLC	316.55 -4.05
Britannia Ind	3079.55 -27.75
Cipla	570.20 0.05
Coal India	130.60 3.75
Dr Reddys Lab	3779.60 6.20
Eicher Motors	14271.65 104.60
ELGi (India)	89.35 0.65
Gasim Ind	522.95 5.00
HCL Tech	528.75 1.35
HDFC Bank	927.65 26.10
Hero MotoCorp	2187.60 73.30
Hindalco	123.55 2.45
Hind Unilever	1995.75 -15.80
ICICI Bank	338.05 16.85
IndusInd Bank	448.60 2.40
Bharti Infralet	196.15 6.55
Infosys	694.15 6.50
Indian Oil Corp	76.00 1.10
ITC	165.40 0.35
JSW Steel	182.35 4.15
Kotak Bank	1186.70 29.50
L&T	862.90 48.10
M&T	413.05 20.00
Maruti Suzuki	5036.10 84.80
Nestle India Ltd.	16512.35 -949.60
NTPC	93.05 1.40
ONGC	78.20 1.90
PowerGrid Corp	166.65 3.35
Reliance Ind	1496.45 17.20
State Bank	174.10 7.20
Shree Cement	19763.25 636.05
Sun Pharma	452.35 -11.55
Tata Motors	87.20 1.00
Tata Steel	276.55 2.60
TCS	1949.65 0.15
Tech Mahindra	544.75 11.50
Titan	860.45 14.00
UltraTech Cement	3546.70 197.35
UPL	389.65 15.10
Vedanta	90.25 1.20
Wipro	189.70 2.65
ZE Entertainment	165.15 10.10

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	75.27	75.59
Euro	81.62	81.96
British Pound	92.58	93.01
Japanese Yen (100)	70.29	70.61
Chinese Yuan	10.61	10.66
Swiss Franc	77.54	77.88
Singapore Dollar	53.11	53.35
Canadian Dollar	53.62	53.87
Malaysian Ringgit	17.38	17.48
Australian Dollar	48.81	49.02

Source: Indian Bank

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IN BRIEF

**Smith blow made me think of Hughes: Archer**

LONDON Jofra Archer revealed that memories of the late Phillip Hughes flashed to mind after his 92mph bouncer concussed Steve Smith during last year's Ashes. "My first reaction was that it had hit the helmet but a few seconds after he went down, everyone was like 'oh, no,'" said Archer. I'm just glad that he [Smith] came out on the other side of it and batted in two games." AFP

Women's golf starts in South Korea — sans fans

SEOUL The South Korean women's golf tour is starting up again with the KLPGA Championship opening on Thursday, an event that will be played without fans on the course. Women's golf in South Korea joins Korea's professional baseball and soccer leagues, which have already restarted in the wake of COVID-19. AP

Maharashtra, UP to host Nationals: HI**UTHRA GANESAN**

NEW DELHI Maharashtra would host the 2021 men's National hockey championships while Uttar Pradesh would host the 11th edition of the women's competition.

Haryana would host both the junior and sub-junior events for men while Jharkhand would host the women's events.

The decisions were taken during a Special online congress of Hockey India with its Executive Board and State units on Wednesday.

Holding all praise for Bumrah

Says people always speak about bowlers who skid the ball off the surface

CRICKET**LANS**
NEW DELHI

Former West Indies cricketer Michael Holding heaped praise on India fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah and spoke about his ability to hit the deck hard which made him a difficult proposition for the batsmen across formats.

He also gave a word of advice to him regarding his run-up and asked Bumrah to take care of his body as he has to put in a lot of effort to generate that kind of pace and bounce.

surface. Bumrah hits the deck hard and that creates more problems.

"Especially on that short ball which put questions in the batsmen's minds the pace with which the ball is coming towards you with that short run-up.

"My problem with Bumrah is, and I mentioned it to him the last time I saw him in England, is how long that body is going to hold up with that short run-up and the effort he has to put in. It's a human body and not a machine."

On use of saliva

Holding also expressed concerns regarding different methods being mooted to do away with the use of saliva on cricket balls during matches.

"It is going to be difficult. The natural inclination for any bowler, once he gets that ball in his hands is to apply saliva or apply sweat and then put it on the ball, that's natural," Holding said.

Creating problems

"Malcolm Marshall for instance — a great fast-bowler — used to skid the ball off the Pit Stop show.



Expert advice: Michael Holding wants Jasprit Bumrah to take care of his body as he puts in a lot of effort to generate pace and bounce off a short run-up. ■ FILE PHOTO: K.R. DEEPAK

Can Dortmund catch Bayern Munich?

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BERLIN

Bayern Munich is in pole position to win an eighth straight title, but Borussia Dortmund leads the chasing pack and is spearheaded by Erling Braut Haaland as the Bundesliga comes out of its coronavirus-enforced hibernation this weekend.

Bayern had put a patchy start to the season before winning 10 and drawing one of its last 11 league games.

The Bavarians are four points clear of Dortmund at the top and have been busy since their last game.

With Robert Lewandowski scoring 25 goals in 23 games, Bayern is formidable. It still has to visit Dortmund and Bayer Leverkusen.

It could still just about be a four-horse title race, with Borussia Monchengladbach six points off the pace in fourth, but Dortmund is best-placed to stop Bayern.

Lucien Favre's side was last seen going out of the Champions League to Paris Saint-Germain, but before that was in thrilling form led by young stars Haaland and Jadon Sancho.

Ferrari's options in its search to replace Vettel

Sainz in pole position, Bottas could be the perfect No. 2 to Leclerc; Ricciardo in the race too

FORMULA ONE**S. DIPAK RAGAV**
CHENNAI

With Sebastian Vettel and Ferrari parting ways at the end of 2020, the coveted seat at the Italian team is up for grabs. *The Hindu* looks at possible contenders to partner Charles Leclerc in 2021.

Lewis Hamilton: The most exciting option but also the least likely to happen.

There were a few clouds of smoke towards the end of last year when it was reported that the six-time champion

pion and Ferrari chairman John Elkam had had a meeting.

With Sebastian Vettel and Ferrari parting ways at the end of 2020, the coveted seat at the Italian team is up for grabs. *The Hindu* looks at possible contenders to partner Charles Leclerc in 2021.

Carlos Sainz Jr.: Widely believed to be one of the top contenders.

The former Red Bull academy driver joined McLaren in 2019, producing some stellar drives and finishing sixth in the championship.

The Spaniard can execute strong drives and his stock has hit an all-time high des-

Bumrah likely for Arjuna nomination

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah is expected to be the BCCI nomination for the prestigious Arjuna award this year after missing out on seniority to Ravindra Jadeja in 2019.

If BCCI decides to send multiple names in the men's category, senior opener Shikhar Dhawan could be preferred.

Balbir Sr. still critical

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHANDIGARH

Hockey legend Balbir Singh Sr. endured a "number of cardiac events" and remained in a critical state on Wednesday at a hospital here as he battled bronchial pneumonia. "The doctors at the Fortis Hospital at Mohali, where Balbir Sr. is admitted are doing their best," sources said.

Nutrition essential for modern-day athletes

Y.B. SARANGI
KOLKATA

The stress on nutrition in modern-day sports is clear from the webinars being conducted for athletes and coaches during the lockdown.

Commonwealth Games gold medallist boxer Akhil Kumar has seen myths being busted about the diet of sportspersons.

"There were a lot of myths even in the late 1990s. For example, after the weigh-in we used to have sweets. Now boxers are advised against it. There was no idea about nutritious food, what to have and what not to have," Akhil told *The Hindu*.

"Whoever aspires to do well in Olympics, he/she needs to spend 15-20 days in foreign land, get used to their food habits and develop a taste for it.

"You cannot be starving because of your rigid food habits as it will affect performance. You need to know how much carbohydrate, protein and water you should have," said Sanjeeva.

Former India hockey captain Mohammed Riaz agreed. "Many players don't have any idea about nutrition before they reach the National camp, I also did not know much initially.

"It is a myth that vegetarian diet cannot give you strength. The Namdharies, one of the finest hockey

teams, are strict vegetarians," said Riaz.

Sanjeeva Singh, an Arjuna and Dronacharya award-winning archer, shared an interesting anecdote.

Objective has changed

"In (1988) Seoul Olympics, a bus used to leave from the Games Village to the Indian embassy every evening and athletes from one or two disciplines used to be the first ones to get into the bus and grab Indian food after reaching the embassy.

"The target was to fill the stomach," said Sanjeeva. The objective, however, has changed.

"Former India hockey captain Mohammed Riaz agreed. "Many players don't have any idea about nutrition before they reach the National camp, I also did not know much initially.

"It is a myth that vegetarian diet cannot give you strength. The Namdharies, one of the finest hockey

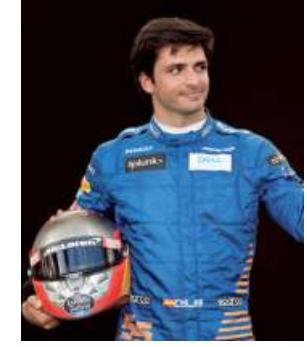
teams,

rari but had to settle for Renault when he decided to leave Red Bull after 2018.

Extremely quick in qualifying, Ricciardo is one of the best at pulling off moves on the track. But whether Ferrari has the desire to handle two alpha-males remains to be seen. And he is not going to come cheap either.

Valtteri Bottas: The Finn could be a left-field choice for his no-nonsense approach. He has shown at Mercedes that he is as fast as Hamilton, but has struggled with tyre management and season-long consistency.

He could be the perfect



No. 2 to Leclerc, capable of winning races and helping Ferrari in the constructors' championship without upsetting team harmony.

Now, a COVID-19 themed dance by Paris Laxmi

Actor Mohanlal released the video on his Facebook page on Monday

P.K. AJITH KUMAR
KOZHIKODE

A Tamil song written by a poet in Chennai, composed by a musician in Malaysia, and sung by a Carnatic vocalist based at Kochi has found beautiful expression in dance through a Frenchwoman living in the central Kerala town of Vaikom.

The song about man's fight against COVID-19 was released by actor Mohanlal on his Facebook page on Monday. Watching the superbly choreographed and executed piece of dance by Paris Laxmi, a Bharatanatyam dancer and actress who has made Kerala her home, one would hardly think that the whole thing was put together during the lockdown.

Not that Kalaiselvi Puliyan Kesikan imagined that somebody would turn her song — *Odi poyidu coronave* — into a dance. Neither did Bhagyalakshmi Guruvayur when she recorded the song on her



All grace: Paris Laxmi in a still from her dance on COVID-19.

phone and posted on it her Facebook page, though she accompanies leading classical dancers as a singer.

Ms. Laxmi is one of the dancers Ms. Bhagyalakshmi often sings for. "I have been thinking of choreographing a piece on the theme of this pandemic for a while and then I came across this song from Bhagyalakshmi," Ms. Laxmi told *The Hindu*. "I straightaway felt this song can be just right for me."

As Ms. Bhagyalakshmi had

recorded the song without any music, Laxmi had the orchestra added by Vinod Chandra, who also plays the flute. During the lockdown, getting a new costume made was well-nigh impossible, so she delved deep into her wardrobe for the two characters she wanted to play.

"I had this old, orange blouse, which I paired with a Kerala sari for the role of the woman, and I chose a black sari to portray the virus," she said. "I got Umesh P. Nair to

shoot the film. It was shot at my home."

The video opens with the virus entering the body and ends with visuals of Ms. Laxmi dancing away happily in the hope of brighter days.

Her skills as a dancer and actor along with a pleasing screen presence, make the video an enjoyable watch that has elicited positive feedback.

"I was happy to find it was liked by actor Mohanlal and dancer Rachana Narayanan, and many others," she says.

Ms. Bhagyalakshmi loved it, too. "I don't think anyone could have done a better job," she says. "When my aunt, Guruvayur Usha Dorai tuned the song and sent it to me, I didn't think that Laxmi would be giving it such a lovely interpretation through dance. The song was based on a concept suggested by Thanesh Balakrishnan to my aunt."

"I had this old, orange blouse, which I paired with a Kerala sari for the role of the woman, and I chose a black sari to portray the virus," she said. "I got Umesh P. Nair to

Navy veteran K.G. Nair felicitated in Thiruvalla on his centenary birthday

RADHAKRISHNAN KUTTOOR
PATHANAMTHITTA

Sitting in the cool portico of his son's house in Thiruvalla, Kalipillai Gopinathan Nair, or K.G.Nair of Tripunithura, recalls going to sea as a member of Great Britain's Royal Navy when he was 19 years old.

It was his passion for travelling the world that made him join the British Navy immediately after finishing school, says Mr. Nair, and indeed he went on to see almost all parts of the world, other than the American continent, he adds.

Mr. Nair turned 100 on Sunday.

Chief of Southern Naval Command A.K.Chowla called the centenarian and conveyed birthday wishes to him on Tuesday. Lieutenant



Special hundred: Family members celebrating the 100th birthday of K.G. Nair on Tuesday.

Commandant Arun from the Cochin Naval Base called on Mr. Nair and felicitated him on behalf of the Indian Navy.

Mr. Nair's youngest son, Dr. Gokulan, an Ayurvedic ophthalmologist in Thiruvalla, and Ms. Geetha, his eldest daughter, a retired teacher, said their father often shared his World War II experiences

and wartime stories with his family. "We laugh a lot when we spend time with him," says Dr. Gokulan.

Celebrations online
A simple celebration was arranged at Dr. Gokulan's house in Thiruvalla on Tuesday. Mr. Nair cut a cake and lit a ceremonial lamp with

other family members watching online from different parts of the country.

Sharing his Naval experiences with *The Hindu*, Mr. Nair recalled the horrible hours on a Christmas Eve when the ship on which he was sailing was bombed by the German air force in the Atlantic during WWII.

"We were rescued [and taken]

to the Southampton port on the Christmas day," he recalls. King George VI visited the port to congratulate the survivors and a dinner was hosted for them at Buckingham Place, later.

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