



President Kovind on
COVID-19 and the
message from nature
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Gogoi takes oath as
Rajya Sabha member
amid Oppn. walkout
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I work every day, listen
to what people want, I
am not a Tsar, says Putin
page 14



World Athletics chief
Sebastian Coe says Tokyo
Olympics could be delayed
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NEARBY



Those suspected of COVID-19 stamped

NEW DELHI
People arriving from abroad at the IGI Airport are being checked for COVID-19, and if directed to remain at home, are being stamped 'Home Quarantined'. It states "Proud to protect Delhiites. Home quarantined" and has a date of the stamp.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

Maintain one-metre distance: DMRC advisory

NEW DELHI
The DMRC on Thursday issued an advisory in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak and asked commuters to use metro services only in "essential and unavoidable" circumstances. Passengers will be required to maintain one-metre distance and "standing passengers will not be allowed".

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

Will police pay for Jamia library damage, asks MP

NEW DELHI
Will the Delhi police pay for "vandalising" the Jamia Millia Islamia library on December 17, on the lines of the U.P. government's order to make the anti-CAA protesters pay for the damage to public amenities, a Samajwadi Party MP asked HRD Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday.

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FRIDAY REVIEW ▶ 4 PAGES

COVID-19: PM calls for social distancing, people's curfew

Task force to reduce economic impact; employers told to pay employees in full

NISTULA HEBBAR
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday urged Indians across the country to face the coronavirus pandemic with collective determination and patience to make sure that "humanity and India prevails". In his address to the nation on television, Mr. Modi also announced the setting up of the COVID-19 task force, under Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, for measures to mitigate some of the economic hardships engendered by the pandemic.

There were nine calls to action in Mr. Modi's address, including a self-imposed 'janata curfew' (people's curfew) on March 22, not to resort to panic-buying, asking senior citizens to stay indoors, social-distancing, avoiding elective surgery or routine health check-ups not to overburden health services, asking employers to pay employees in full when they have to stay home and to stay away from rumours.

Serious situation
The pandemic, he said, was a serious, global crisis, "involving more countries than any previous natural or political crisis, even during World War I or World War II."

Fighting a crisis

There were several calls to action in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to the nation. The key ones are:

Janata curfew: People were urged to follow a curfew on Sunday (March 22) from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. They were requested not to go out or gather in their societies, and stay at home

Panic buying: Amid reports that some were stocking up on food items, the PM said essentials, including medicines, should not be hoarded

For senior citizens: Those above 60 were urged to avoid going out in the next couple of weeks

Social distancing: He told people to give up the attitude

Mr. Modi said that as there was no clear treatment, medicine or vaccine to counter the coronavirus, it was incumbent on people to observe escalation via social-distancing. He asked all Indians to observe a voluntary people's curfew between 7 a.m. and 9 p.m. on Sunday. This would be observed and implemented by the people themselves, not to stir out of their houses.

that all was well or that they would escape the disease

Health services: People should avoid elective surgery or routine checkups to not overburden health services. On Sunday, at 5 p.m., he urged them to express appreciation for those employed in hospitals, airports, railways & police

For employers: Traders as well as the affluent have been asked to look after the interest of their staff and not penalise them for being not able to attend work due to travel and other restrictions

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 12

No new local cases in China

China on Thursday reported no new local infection for the first time since the COVID-19 outbreak three months ago, a milestone in its battle against the virus. China has hailed its success as evidence of what can be achieved when a vast, top-down bureaucracy is mobilised in pursuit of a target. However, China is not out of danger from a revived contagion. Questions have been raised about the accuracy of its statistics. ▶ PAGE 14

Indian pilgrim dies in Iran

One of the 255 Indian pilgrims in Iran suffering from COVID-19 has died, the government announced on Thursday. The death of the unnamed pilgrim came on a day when the Indian Embassy opened a hostel to house a part of the pilgrims who had tested positive for the virus. The Ministry of External Affairs has assured those unaffected by the infection that they will be evacuated to India. ▶ PAGE 9

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 12

Virus toll touches 5; Gujarat, Chhattisgarh report first cases

Ban on all international passenger flights from March 22-29

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Two more Indian nationals succumbed to COVID-19 on Thursday – one in Punjab and the other in Iran – taking the death toll to five on a day the government announced a total ban on flights by scheduled international passenger aircraft at Indian airports from March 22 to 29.

Globally, the number of deaths due to the epidemic crossed 9,200, while the number of cases rose to over 22,500 from 200,000 in the last 24 hours.

The number of COVID-19 positive Indians rose to 424, of which 148 contracted the disease in the country and 276 overseas. Twenty-five foreigners have already tested positive in India.

148 active cases

"The total number of active COVID-19 cases across India stands at 148 so far," the Union Health Ministry said.

Twenty others have been cured/discharged/migrated. Till Thursday, 14,31,734 people were screened across airports, the Ministry said.

Reports from the States put the number of persons in the country who have tested positive at 186, with 167 active cases.

"We advise anyone over 65 years and below 10 to stay indoors and limit any expo-



In the shadow of the gun: A newly married couple being scanned at Kanaka Durga temple in Vijayawada. ■ K.V.S. GIRI

Stay wherever you are: MEA

The Ministry of External Affairs has urged Indians who are stranded abroad to find alternative accommodation locally at least until the month-end. Indian missions are helping them make arrangements and they must "stay put where they are". The government is requesting other countries to extend the visas for Indians who have to stay on. ▶ PAGE 9

first COVID-19 patients.

Samples test negative
Speaking at a press briefing, Joint Secretary in the Health Ministry Lav Agarwal said there had been no community transmission in the country so far. "We will continue surveillance."

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LOK SABHA EXPRESSES CONCERN ▶ PAGE 13

Supreme Court orders M.P. floor test today

It says uncertainty can't continue

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court ordered a floor test in the Madhya Pradesh Assembly on March 20, agreeing that uncertainty over whether the Kamal Nath-led Congress government enjoys the confidence of the House cannot go on for even another day.

A Bench of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and Hemant Gupta overrode a decision by Speaker N.P. Prajapati to adjourn the session to March 26. Justice Chandrachud remarked that a floor test was best before the politics got any murkier.

"The state of uncertainty in Madhya Pradesh must be effectively resolved by issuing a direction for convening a floor test... The session of the Legislative Assembly which has been deferred to March 26 shall be reconvened on March 20," the

Resignation of 16 MLAs accepted

STAFF REPORTER
BHOPAL

Speaker N.P. Prajapati late on Thursday night accepted the resignation of 16 rebel Congress MLAs staying in Bengaluru. With this, the effective strength of the Assembly comes down to 206. The Congress will need 104 votes to stay in power. The BJP has issued a whip to its MLAs to vote against the government.

court said in a short order.

It agreed with Governor Lalji Tandon that every day of delay in conducting the floor test would be a win for horse-trading.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 12

CHOUHAN HAPPY ▶ PAGE 12

As plea before court fails, four Nirbhaya convicts to be hanged

HC rejects eleventh-hour petition seeking stay on execution

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The four death-row convicts in the December 16, 2012 gang-rape and murder case are scheduled to be hanged on Friday morning after the Delhi High Court dismissed a eleventh hour petition seeking a stay on the execution.

The High Court, which heard the petition of the convicts till late night, pronounced its order around 12 a.m. and said the plea was without any merit.

Having exhausted all available legal remedies, including mercy petition before the President, three of the convicts have met their respective families for the last time. The family of one of the convicts did not come to visit him.

Earlier during the day, a Delhi court rejected the plea

of death row convicts Akshay Kumar, Pawan Gupta and Vinay Sharma seeking stay on their executions on the ground that the second mercy plea of one of them was still pending.

Divorce plea
Advocate A.P. Singh, representing the convicts, argued that Akshay's wife has filed for a divorce in a city court in Bihar which was pending. Responding to this, the special public prosecutor said the petition does not fall under the purview of legal remedy in the present case.

On March 5, a trial court had issued fresh death warrants for March 20 at 5.30 am, as the date for the execution of convicts Mukesh Singh, 32, Pawan Gupta, 25, Vinay Sharma, 26, and Akshay Kumar Singh 31.

This final court order

comes seven years after the horrific incident in which the four death row convicts and Ram Singh, the fifth accused who died in prison; and a minor, brutally gang-raped a paramedical student. The victim succumbed to the injuries after 13 days.

The March 20 date has come after a series of postponements. The first death warrants were issued by a trial court on January 7 for execution on January 22 but it was postponed by the court to February 1 and then further to March 3.

The convicts witnessed a flurry of dismissals of their petitions in the Supreme Court on the eve of the execution of their death sentences.

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Delhi shuts eateries, caps gatherings at 20

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government on Thursday ordered the shutting of all restaurants in the national capital till March 31, but the restrictions will not apply to home deliveries and takeaway orders.

from Friday, he said after a meeting with Lieutenant-Governor Anil Baijal. The number of people allowed to gather for any event was also modified from 50 to 20.

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Rajasthan wakes up to life in the slow lane

Normal life disrupted with prohibitory orders imposed in State; fear of lockdown triggers panic buying

MOHAMMED IQBAL
JAIPUR

The prohibitory orders imposed in entire Rajasthan after the detection of three fresh COVID-19 positive cases in Jhunjhunu disrupted normal life in several parts of the State on Thursday, with the roads and markets wearing a deserted look, public and private functions being called off and people mostly staying indoors.

Residents of Jhunjhunu town, where curfew was clamped in a one-km radius area around the infected family's house for two days, were in a state of shock. Jhunjhunu Collector U.D. Khan said about 350 teams of the Medical & Health Department had started surveillance in three zones to trace



A deserted Badi Chaupar in Jaipur on Thursday after the imposition of prohibitory orders in Rajasthan. ■ ROHIT JAIN PARAS

those who came in contact with the COVID-19-positive couple and their daughter. "The screening of the entire population will be done to ensure that no positive cluster is formed in the town," said Mr. Khan. About 20 persons whom the family had

met during the last 10 days after their arrival from Italy were shifted to a special isolation ward in Churela village. The prohibitory orders imposed under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, disallowing the assembly of 20 or more persons at public

Rumours hit business
Arif Ali, a shopkeeper selling fish and chicken in the near-by Gole Market, said people were eating lesser quantity of non-vegetarian food after a rumour spread about infection in meat. "We are in the market to sell our goods.

places, led to panic buying of essential items by people in Jaipur, who fear a complete lockdown in the days to come. Pappu Meena, handling the counter at Taza Phal Sabzi Bhandar in Jawahar Nagar locality, said buyers were stockpiling vegetables and fruits because of uncertainty. "The supplies are unhindered, but Section 144 has instilled an apprehension among the people," he said.

Rumours hit business
Arif Ali, a shopkeeper selling fish and chicken in the near-by Gole Market, said people were eating lesser quantity of non-vegetarian food after a rumour spread about infection in meat. "We are in the market to sell our goods.

Why should people panic?"

The tourism and hospitality industry in the desert State is set to get the shock of prohibitory orders with the closure of all tourist places and historical monuments. Ramakant Saini, a security guard outside Pink Square Mall, said the government's decision to curtail movements would lead to loss of livelihood for thousands of poor people in the city.

R.S. Khangarot, principal of Agrawal Post-Graduate College, said the institution was open for routine administrative work and faculty members were attending the college for planning of the next academic session. "Section 144 is not applicable inside the college," he remarked.

Desired Qualification
Must have appeared for CSE interview at least once or Mains at least twice

Professional Skills:
Aptitude for teaching and learning new things, analytical and creative thinking

What we offer

Chance to be part of a learning revolution

Tech-enabled teaching experience

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Dynamic and innovative work environment

Recruitment Process:

• Faculty: Online demo • Content Developers: Online Test on March 22, 2020

Railway stations bear deserted look with cancellation of over 160 trains

Precautionary measures rolled out at all stations to break the virus chain

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

In the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, railway stations, including the New Delhi railway station, bore a deserted look as compared to the usual hustle. With over 160 trains cancelled as of Thursday, officials of the Northern Railway said that several other precautionary measures were rolled out at stations.



Thermal screening facility at the New Delhi railway station. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

COVID-19

Several passengers turning up at stations with masks on visited the help desks set up by the railway authorities meant to attend to such concerns. Passengers were at liberty to get "voluntary" thermal screenings at the kiosks

set up by authorities, in case if they feel any discomfort.

"While there are a series of precautions undertaken by the Railways, there is provision for the passengers to get thermal screening done at the platform. In case there are symptoms, the person will be referred for further

medical attention. There are special wards available at the Central Hospital for this purpose," said an official of the Northern Railway.

Apart from increasing the frequency of cleanliness in coaches, their toilets and pantry cars, hoardings and display boards carrying mes-

sages pertaining to precautionary measures to be taken to prevent the spread of the deadly virus were put up at the platforms of the New Delhi station.

Drop in business

With a thinned out crowd at stations, auto drivers stationed outside also complained of a drop in business due to the epidemic.

"Increasingly we are seeing a drop in business. Now we hear that a lot of trains have also been cancelled which means the coming days will be worse for us. We also have families to run but what do we do? We cannot blame anyone. We are worried and don't know what to do," said Mukesh Kumar, an auto driver.

No standing passengers allowed, says DMRC's COVID-19 advisory

'Use metro services only if circumstances are unavoidable'

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) on Thursday issued an advisory in the wake of COVID-19 outbreak and asked commuters to use metro services only if the circumstances are "unavoidable".

The DMRC also said that passengers travelling on the metro are required to maintain a one-metre distance from others and that "standing passengers will not be allowed."

"Alternate seats be left vacant," read the advisory issued by the DMRC.

The advisory added that "random thermal scanning" of passengers will be carried out in all metro stations across the network.



Seats lying vacant on a metro train on Thursday. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

"In case anyone has fever or is observed to have any symptoms of the virus, he or she will be referred for medical tests and quarantine to the authorities," the DMRC said.

Metro trains "may not" stop at stations which are crowded, the DMRC said, while adding that frequency of trains might also be al-

tered "depending on the exigencies of the situation."

"In course of the journey and stay within the metro premises, passengers are requested to follow the advisory issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, from time to time to contain the spread of COVID-19," the DMRC said.

Allow ad hocs to work from home: DUTA

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Delhi University Teachers' Association (DUTA) on Thursday wrote to the Vice-Chancellor pointing out that certain staff were still being called for work and demanded that all colleges desist from doing so to help contain the spread of COVID-19.

"We have learnt that a few colleges are still insisting that teachers working on ad hoc basis and guest faculty should necessarily be present in the college," the letter said.

It argued that while institutions should make arrangements which enable teachers to provide teaching material through e-resources, it should not insist on their physical presence to prevent the spread of virus.

Hostellers in a catch-22 situation as varsities ask them to leave

Question before them is whether to travel home and expose themselves to COVID-19 or stay back and tide over the crisis

AISHWARYA TRIPATHI

NEW DELHI

As universities are issuing advisories to clear out hostels, students are stuck in a catch-22 situation: whether they should travel home exposing themselves to COVID-19 or stay back and tide over the situation.

Ananya, a student at Jawaharlal Nehru University, said she felt unsafe taking public transport to her home town in Bihar's Buxar due to the rising cases but preferred reaching home than being stranded in Delhi as her hostel was being vacated.

"We were advised to vacate hostels but the ones choosing to stay back were



A girl wears a mask while travelling to work in the city on Thursday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

asked to give "genuine reasons" for their decision. We have also been asked to clear all mess bills till January. It is inevitable that the movement within the campus might be restricted soon which would

put the hostellers in a fix," she said.

Residents of Hindu College's girls hostel resisted on grounds of fear of exposing themselves to the virus when they were being compelled to

vacate the hostels. The hostel committee held meetings to discuss the feasible options and later gave a choice to stay. While most rooms are unoccupied, a few students are held back due to academicic reasons.

"Hostel felt safe until I started getting anxious about the construction workers and janitors who had no restrictions on movements. It made more sense to me to take a train now rather than face a situation of complete public transport shutdown and being stuck," said Ujasra Tripathi, a student of Hindu College, who strongly agrees with the administration's advice of vacating the premises.

Hostels of Ambedkar University which cater to a strength of 250 students is left with just 50 occupants because of reasons ranging from "no internet at home for online classes" to "hesitation to travel due to corona scare". Many preferred stockpiling items of personal use and ready to eat food to avoid frequent outdoor visits.

JNUTA's reaction

Reacting to JNU administration's measures like closing eateries, advising students in hostels to return home, the JNU Teachers' Association said that it was causing great hardship to students. "Reducing the number of func-

tional messes may not be in the best interest of either the students, the protection of others on the campus or from the larger social point of view. Apart from creating hardship and even impossible to implement in the face of cancellations of trains and flights and financial constraints faced by students, these measures may actually increase the chances and scale of transmission of the virus within the university and outside," the JNUTA said.

The teachers said that a large number of residents will be on the campus and the flow of essential commodities to them has to be maintained.

Partial lockdown in IIT-D; only staff to be on campus +

Foreign students allowed to stay back

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Indian Institute of Technology-Delhi, which was among the first educational institute to instruct students to leave hostels due to the COVID 19 pandemic, has said that only international students and students with special needs can stay back and all others are requested to vacate at the earliest.

The institute said that faculty members are strictly discouraged from stopping students from going home.

The campus will function in a partial lockdown mode and visitors will be screened at the entry points and will be allowed inside only after providing valid reasons for their visit, it said.

the campus.

The goal will be to minimise disruption to the academic calendar and ensure that students will be able to complete their graduation requirements within the specified time, the IIT Director said and added that a contingency plan has been put in place by the institute for switching over to the online mode of instruction.

Virus scare

The institute on March 17 had a COVID-19 scare when it was learnt that a 33-year-old researcher on his way back from Italy stayed in one of the guest houses on the campus on March 7 and later tested positive for COVID 19 in Bhubaneswar on March 16.

All the persons at the guest house, who had come in contact with the researcher, had been quarantined and tested, the premier institute had said. The institute came to know about the researcher testing positive after health officials in Bhubaneswar alerted them about the case.

EDMC waives late fees to avoid crowd gathering

It tells citizens to not come to its offices

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

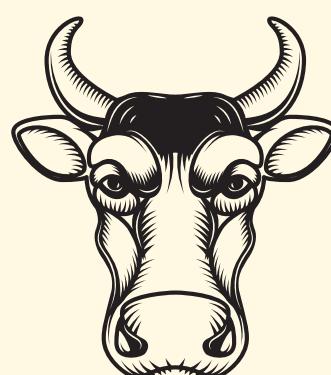
The standing committee of the East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC) on Thursday passed a resolution appealing to citizens not to come to its offices for birth and death certificates to avoid the spread of COVID-19.

Keeping in view of the coronavirus disease, to reduce crowd gathering at the municipal corporation's office, late fees on

the registration of all types of documents such as birth and death certificates have been waived off till April 15.

The East body has appealed to the public living in its jurisdiction to go for online registration. The civic body would only face a loss of about ₹40,000 per month as a consequence of this, the resolution stated.

IF YOU REALLY FEEL THE URGE TO MILK SOMETHING, KINDLY GO FIND A COW.



The world is faced with a health crisis unlike anything it has experienced in recent years. In a time like this, being thoughtful is the least one can do. However, some are attempting to milk the situation. Sad, but true. We, at The Hindu Group, refuse to be drawn into this opportunistic rat race. In fact, we strongly discourage it. Going by this stance, we urge

marketers, companies and the general public to not use advertising space and social media in any way to take advantage of this scenario for personal/material gain. However, if your messaging is responsible, considerate and empathetic towards the situation, we are more than happy to spread it through our publications.

THE HINDU BusinessLine THE HINDU YoungWorld

FRONTLINE LEADING THE DEBATE SINCE 1981

SPORTSTAR

Disclaimer: With an approach like this, our intention is not to take the high ground. It is to stop something that just does not feel right.

write to us at hello@thehindu.co.in

Air Quality of Delhi-NCR	
Delhi 186	Gurugram 192
Ghaziabad 236	Faridabad 194
Noida 184	Greater Noida 198
■ Good 0-50	■ Satisfactory 51-100
■ Poor 101-200	■ Moderate 201-300
■ Very Poor 301-400	■ Severe >400
Air Quality Index at 4 p.m. yesterday (Average of past 24 hours) Source: CPCB	

Delhi govt. shuts restaurants, caps gatherings at 20 people

Home delivery services to continue; CM issues appeal to work from home

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government on Thursday ordered the shutting of all restaurants in the national capital till March 31, but the restrictions will not apply to home deliveries and takeaway orders.



Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, along with other Ministers, addressing the media on Thursday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Announcing a whole host of measures, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said all educational institutions have also been directed to remain shut till month-end for both teaching and non-teaching staff. Non-essential public services will be disallowed from Friday as well, he said after a meeting with Lieutenant-Governor Anil Baijal to assess the status of measures put in place to combat the COVID-19 epidemic in the city.

The police said, "No drunken driving checking unless someone is visibly drunk and driving so recklessly as to endanger his or her or other's lives and that too with all possible precautions."

The police also shared data on drunken driving challans and in what can be called the sharpest fall in this category, no challan was issued on Wednesday and only one was issued on Tuesday. According to the data, six challans were issued on March 14 as compared to 89 on February 14. From March 15 to March 18, a total of 11 challans were issued compared to 176 between February 15 and 18.

The police have also stopped giving permission for protests in the Capital.

ing all relevant measures to contain the spread of COVID-19. "We have had 10 cases in Delhi until now, with the unfortunate demise of one of the patients. Two patients have recovered and 1 patient has left for Singapore. We currently have 6 patients, most of them are recovering now," he said.

Existing capacity

The Delhi government, he said, has an existing capacity of 768 beds to be installed in quarantine facilities until now, of which only 57 beds are currently occupied.

Of the 550 isolation beds in Delhi government hospitals for the treatment of COVID-19 patients, 40 beds have been occupied with suspected cases. There are 95 beds available in the Central

government-run hospitals, out of which 67 beds have been occupied by suspected patients.

"We have also started stamping all the people who have been advised to self-quarantine themselves, owing to many of the patients who have been escaping the quarantine premises... if you do not abide by the Dos and Dont's, we will have to take strict measures like filing an FIR or taking you into custody," Mr. Kejriwal said.

"We are disinfecting buses, ISBTs, and metros daily. We are also disinfecting private public service vehicles like autorickshaws, taxis, and cabs daily in two shifts," he said.

The Chief Minister appealed to the people to realise the intensity of the situ-

ation and avoid stepping out of their homes.

"Stay at home as much as you can and work from home. I want to appeal to the private sector institutions to provide work-from-home permits to their employees. Senior citizens need to be the most cautious of all," he said.

Baijal directives

In a related development, Raj Niwas, in a statement, said Mr. Baijal has appealed to everyone to follow government directives, practice social distancing and avoid unnecessary travel.

The statement said the L-G has directed several steps, including promoting contactless digital transactions, stopping breath analyser tests by traffic police, waiving tax for hotel rooms for quarantined persons, and a fine on spitting in public places and its strict enforcement. The private sector has also been advised to work from home wherever possible.

The L-G also directed that the provision of mobile vans with essential commodities of daily use and medical items in different residential areas may be explored to minimise the need for people to visit markets.

People allowed to gather for any event was also modified from 50 to 20. "We had recently announced that no social, political, cultural, family, sports and seminar gatherings comprising of more than 50 people will be allowed in the city. We have brought down the number of people allowed to 20," Mr. Kejriwal said at a press conference.

Seeking to allay people's fears, the Chief Minister said the Delhi government is tak-

ing all relevant measures to contain the spread of COVID-19. "We have had 10 cases in Delhi until now, with the unfortunate demise of one of the patients. Two patients have recovered and 1 patient has left for Singapore. We currently have 6 patients, most of them are recovering now," he said.

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"We are disinfecting buses, ISBTs, and metros daily. We are also disinfecting private public service vehicles like autorickshaws, taxis, and cabs daily in two shifts," he said.

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Inflammatory messages: 15 statements registered

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Assembly's Committee for Peace and Harmony on Thursday said they have registered statements of 15 people regarding "inflammatory and hate messages" being spread on social media in connection with the communal riots in north-east Delhi.

The committee also decided to summon the administrators of Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and other social media platforms to ascertain preventive as well as legal actions taken by them against dissemination of inflammatory messages.

'One tenders apology'
AAP MLA and chairman of the committee, Raghav Chadha, said that an offender, who has been spreading hate messages, has tendered his unconditional apology to the committee.

Govt. employee loses vision in riots

The man was shot at near his house in north-east Delhi on February 24

HEMAMI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

Mohammed Nasir Khan was shot at on February 24 during the riots that broke out in north-east Delhi, a few steps away from his house. He has permanently lost vision in the left eye.

Ghonda resident Nasir (34), a Delhi government employee and a former CISF official, thought he would be safe in his area since locals knew him as a man who helped people prepare for civil services examination and fitness. But he was proved wrong.

'Concealed identity'

Recalling the day, Mr. Nasir who works as Junior Assistant with National Cadet Corps, said that he was on his way back from a private hospital in Shalimar Bagh with his mother and sister in a cab when he was stopped by a mob in Khajuri Khas. "It was around 3.30 p.m. I knew the situation was turning tense. While in the cab, I



Nasir has undergone plastic surgery. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

had already asked my mother to remove her burqa so that we were not identified as Muslims. When the mob intercepted us, they asked my name and I lied. I told them my name's Krishna. I also told them that my sister is ill and we were coming back from hospital. They let us go," he said. The sister, he said, was admitted for a minor operation on February 22.

The cab driver then took the forested route and helped the family reach home safely. "Since the situation was tense outside, I offered the driver to stay at

our house till it got better. An hour and a half later, he said he needed to go home because his wife was crying and worried for him," he said.

Mr. Nasir decided to help the driver reach Gokulpuri junction safely and went with him in his car. While on his way back home on foot, he was spotted by a friend, a Hindu, who offered to drop him close to his house, till Vijay Park, to ensure his safety.

But when he reached the residential street, a mob caught hold of him and started thrashing him. "I told them I was a local and that we had been making sure the temple next to our house was safe, but they did not stop. They also kept on chanting 'Jai Shri Ram.' In the meantime, another group arrived and he was suddenly shot at after which the people fled, he said.

"I was bleeding...a part of my skull was visible. I somehow managed to reach

home. My father was standing outside. On seeing my condition, he started crying. We called the police but no one came," he said.

He was then rushed to Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital by a neighbour in an autorickshaw. "The mobs even tried to stop the autorickshaw, but they could not as my neighbour was driving very fast," he said.

Mr. Nasir went under the knife. He said his plastic surgery was conducted and that the doctors took good care of him, but his vision is lost. He was released from the hospital five days ago.

"I am not sure if the loss of vision will impact my work. Thankfully, the other eye is fine. My family is thankful for the fact that I am alive," he said.

Mr. Nasir lives with his parents, two sisters and two brothers in a double-storey house. He had quit the CISF job while under training, in two months, and started working at the NCC.

Expedite process of DNA test of unidentified body, says HC

The body was recovered from a drain in Bhagirathi Vihar

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday directed the government to expedite the process of DNA test of an unidentified body recovered from a drain at Bhagirathi Vihar village in north-east Delhi.

Shabuddin, in his petition, claimed that his son Ameen had gone missing on February 25 here. He said that on March 1, an unidentified body was recovered from the drain, which, he apprehended, could be his son.

done expeditiously. Considering the fact that the petitioner is under severe stress and trauma due to the missing status of his son the family of the petitioner ought to have some closure in this matter," the court said.

It also reiterated an order of the High Court passed on Wednesday where the court said that "delay in DNA testing cannot be countenanced and that DNA testing ought to be done without any specific orders from any court".

Nirbhaya convicts restless, in tears ahead of execution

They have been kept under surveillance in separate wards

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

After all four convicts in Nirbhaya gang rape and murder case came to know about their hanging on Friday morning, they started sobbing and refused the evening tea on Thursday.

The Tihar jail authorities held a meeting over preparations besides doing a final trial run.

A Tihar jail officer said that after the convicts were informed that the Delhi court has rejected a plea seeking a stay on their executions, they were found to be restless and sobbing. The convicts have been kept in separate wards.

Counsellor allotted

"They even tried to harm themselves but were stopped by the jail staff. The Tihar authorities will cremate the bodies as per procedure if the families

was asked to talk to them. The jail staff have been instructed to keep a watch on them.

Staff will be stationed outside each of their [convicts'] wards to keep a watch on their activities," said the officer. The officer said that they were following procedures as mentioned in the Tihar jail manual.

The bodies will be shifted to DDU Hospital by 8 a.m. for post-mortem.

The convicts have been allowed to meet their family members one last time. All took the opportunity except for Akshay as nobody from his family turned up.

The families have not informed the authorities whether they would take the bodies for cremation.

The Tihar authorities will cremate the bodies as per procedure if the families

refuse, said the officer.

He added that the money earned by the convicts during their stay in jail will be handed over to their family members since they have not mentioned any beneficiary or signed any will.

Just before the convicts will be taken to the gallows, the Jail Superintendent will meet them in his cell. The Superintendent shall read out a translation of the warrant in vernacular to the convicts.

Any other documents requiring attestation by the convicts, such as his will, shall thereafter be signed and attested in the presence of the Superintendent.

All other prisoners will remain locked when the execution will be carried out at 5.30 on Friday morning.

Police discuss modalities for handing over convicts' bodies

Security personnel deployed at Ravidas Camp; arrangements in place at Lodhi Road crematorium

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

A night before the hanging of the Nirbhaya convicts, the Delhi police on Thursday held a meeting to work out the modalities for handing over the bodies to the respective family members after their post-mortem.

A senior police officer said that they have deployed security personnel at Ravidas Camp in R.K. Puram where the convicts used to stay with their families. It is part of precautionary measures taken to avoid any confusion at the last moment, they said.

"We have also coordinated with Lodhi Road crematorium to keep all arrangements ready. The bodies will be handed over to family members after a post-mortem at Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital. The bodies will be taken to the crematorium under police protection and will be cremated," the officer also said.

Arrangements at the electric crematorium at Lodhi Road are ready, but if the families of the convicts wish to take the bodies to their respective home towns, then arrangements will be done as per the procedure.



A view of Tihar Central Jail in New Delhi. ■ FILE PHOTO

dy, then it shall be cremated or buried in the jail burial ground in accordance with the custom applicable to the faith of the deceased.

A police officer, who was part of 2012 Nirbhaya case investigation, said that a total of 79 witnesses recorded their statement supported by technical and forensic reports during the trial and that has led to the conviction of all the four men in the case.

"It was one of the horrific crime cases I have investigated. The victim had faced extreme cruelty and the accused deserved to be

hanged. They should have been hanged long ago," the officer added.

Pratibha Sharma, investigating officer in the case, said that she would achieve job satisfaction and consider her work done only after the convicts in the Nirbhaya case were hanged.

"When I was handling the case, I stayed at the police station for four days. My daughter used to call me every few days and ask about Nirbhaya's condition. The incident has had a severe impact on the lives of the officers who were part of the probe," said Ms. Sharma.



ONLINE REGISTRATIONS INVITED UNDER THE CHIEF MINISTER ADVOCATES' WELFARE SCHEME

All the advocates who are enrolled with Bar Council of Delhi and are also in the voters' list of Delhi, are hereby informed that the process of registration under the Chief Minister Advocates' Welfare Scheme has been started.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SCHEME:

- ★ Group(Term) insurance providing life cover of Rs. 10,00,000/- per advocate
- ★ Group medi-claim coverage for advocates, their spouse and two dependent children up to the age of 25 years, for a family floater sum insured of Rs. 5,00,000/-

REGISTRATION STARTS: 21.03.2020 at 9:30 AM

LAST DATE OF REGISTRATION: 31.03.2020

For registration, log on to: www.law.delhigovt.nic.in



JHARKHAND BIJLI VITRAN NIGAM LIMITED
(CIN : U40108JH2013SGC001702)
Engineering Building, HEC, Dhurwa, Ranchi - 834004.

e-TENDER NOTICE

e-tender notice is invited from the reputed, technically, financially sound and capable manufacturers / company Supply, Installation, testing & commissioning of Three Phase four wire Trivector Energy 0.2s Accuracy class 33KV ABT Meter and system maintenance of ABT metering system for five years under ADP head for the Electric Supply Area Jamshedpur. Details of bid time and bid submission details are as below:-

Sl. No.	NIT No. & Description of item	online bid uploading/ submission start date	Submission of pre-bid queries	Pre bid meeting date, time & venue	online bid uploading/ submission closing date and time	Last date & time of physical submission of tender fee and EMD	Technical bid opening date and time
1	306/PR/JBVNL/19-20 Supply, Installation, testing & commissioning of Three Phase four wire Trivector Energy 0.2s Accuracy class 33KV ABT Meter and system maintenance of ABT metering system for five years under ADP head for Electric Supply Area Jamshedpur.	From 20.3.2020 16:00 hrs onwards.	30.03.2020	03.04.2020 till 18:00 hrs	15.04.2020 till 18:00 hrs	16.04.2020 till 15:00 hrs	16.04.2020 on 16:00 hrs

Note: Submission of tender fee/ EMD will not be accepted by courier/ Regd. Post. Further details can be seen on website <http://www.jharkhandtenders.gov.in> & <http://www.bvnl.co.in>. Contact person Mobile No. are 9431708983 / NIC Helpline No. is 0651-2400178.

स्वित एवं समिति में जारी बदलाव। कृपया अपनी शिकायतों को टॉल फोन 1800 345 8570 पर दर्शकों करें।

PR 227267 (Jharkhand Bijlee Vitran Nigam Ltd)19-20#D

Sd/-
GM (Commercial)

GOVERNMENT OF JHARKHAND
DRINKING WATER & SANITATION DEPARTMENT
EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FOR EMPANWLMENT OF THIRD PARTY

INSPECTING AGENCY

FOR INSPECTION OF MATERIALS IN INDIA FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE.

Expression of Interest is invited by Drinking Water and Sanitation Department, Government of Jharkhand for third Party inspection of materials for quality assurance of materials to be used by the Department. All the empanelled /to be empanelled Third Party inspection Agency are requested to follow the procedure of inspection and are also requested to submit information in the prescribed formats and supporting documents exclusively in physical form in a sealed envelope for necessary approval by Chief Engineer, CDO.

- Background information & brief particulars along with the formats for providing information by intending bidders can be obtained from the office of the Chief Engineer (CDO), Drinking Water & Sanitation Department, Doranda, Ranchi -834002, Jharkhand or can be downloaded from the official Website www.jharkhand.gov.in.
- The applicants are advised to go through the Background information & brief particulars along with the formats carefully and participate accordingly after properly understanding the instructions.
- TENDER FEE :-Rs. 10,000/- (Rupees Ten Thousand only) non refundable will be charged in shape of demand draft and in favour of Executive Engineer, D.W. & S. Division, Ranchi West, Ranchi, payable at Ranchi.
- The applicants having recognition from National Accreditation Board of Certification Bodies (NABCB) will be treated technically eligible for empanelment of TPIA and they are required to submit financial bid only.
- The applicants will have to furnish their full permanent and local address. The applicants are requested to sign on each of the documents before submitting it.
- The Department will not accept any application after the due date and time as below. The name/ tel. no./mob. no./ fax/ email address of the Applicant shall clearly marked on the Envelope.
- The applicants would be required to furnish all the information's specified in this EOI.
- Any legal dispute shall be subject to law in courts in Jharkhand.
- The selection shall be entirely at the discretion of the Department. Further, the Department reserves the right to accept or reject any or all application at any time, without assigning any reason thereto.
- Ant queries/additional information's concerning this EOI can be obtained from the office of the undersigned on any working day during office hours.

Important Dates

- Date & Time for publishing of NIT & TOR on website 23.03.2020 at 5.00 pm
- Date /Time /Venue of pre Bid Meeting 31.03.2020 at 3.00 PM in the O/o Chief Engineer, CDO, Drinking Water & Sanitation Department, Doranda, Ranchi -834002, Jharkhand.
- Last date of submission of proposal (In hard copy) with tender fee 15.04.2020 upto 3.00 PM in the O/o Chief Engineer, CDO, Drinking Water & Sanitation Department, Doranda, Ranchi -834002, Jharkhand.
- The E.O.I. will open the same day at 4.00 PM in the Office of undersigned.
- Contact no. for procurement officer 0651-2490581
- Help line no. for e- procurement cell 0651-2480345

Sd/-
Chief Engineer (CDO)
DW&SD, Jharkhand, Ranchi

PR 227252 Drinking Water and Sanitation(19-20)D

ENTERPRISE CONNECT

Himachal Pradesh CM directs officers to expedite work on four-laning of NH projects



Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur directed the officers to expedite the work on four-laning of National Highway (NH) projects, so that these could be completed within the stipulated time period and commuters could be facilitated from these. Jai Ram Thakur was presiding over the review meeting with regard to acquisition of land for High Priority Infrastructure Projects, here today.

Chief Minister said that rationalization of circle rates of land acquisition was under consideration and after consent from State Cabinet and thereafter amendment in circle rates of land acquisition would be notified in respect of Pinjore-Baddi-Nalagarh section of National Highway-105. He said that the National Highway Authority of India would be required to acquire the balance 4.43 hectare private land and the remaining structures to start four-laning works on this road. He said that this road would provide best infrastructure facilities to the entrepreneurs and give a big boost to the industrialization in the area.

Hon'ble Finance Minister reaches out to CAs for promoting Vivad se Vishwas scheme



The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) has always supported various initiatives & schemes launched by the Government for the benefit of stakeholders & public at large. In its endeavour to reach to maximum number of Chartered Accountants & clear their doubts, ICAI through its Direct Taxes Committee organised a Live Webcast on "The Direct Tax - Vivad se Vishwas Bill, 2020" on March 16, 2020 at ICAI Head Office , New Delhi.

Efficient Service Camps- A step forward by HSIIDC

Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (HSIIDC) is committed to resolve all issues of its allottees. As a way forward to settle the grievances of the allottees, the Corporation has started holding "Efficient Service Camps" in all Industrial Estates on weekly basis. The schedule is available on the website of the Corporation i.e www.hsiidc.org.in.

Sh. Anurag Agarwal, IAS, Managing Director of the corporation further added that HSIIDC is working on a theme "Facilitating your business is our prime concern". To facilitate the industrialists, the Efficient Service Camps shall provide a platform

for it. On the spot resolution to the issues pertaining to Estate wing / Engineering wing / Planning Division / Commercial & Housing / R&R issues.

Issues such as Pending approvals of Building Plan, Occupation Certificate, Possession, Transfer, Leasing, Outstanding dues, Maintenance issues of Industrial Estate including water supply, power supply, maintenance of internal roads, green belt, R&R issues etc., shall be addressed in these camps.

Delhi Assembly Committee for Peace and Harmony



The Delhi Legislative Assembly Committee for Peace and Harmony held its meeting on Tuesday 10 March at the Delhi Vidhan Sabha. The meeting was chaired by Rajinder Nagar MLA Raghav Chadha, who is also the Chairperson of the Committee. Mr. Chadha said that the Committee has received 7732 complaints within 2 weeks of the launch of WhatsApp number and e-mail id to check fake news and rumour mongering. He said that the committee has screened 2110 complaints, out of which 504 were found to be inflammatory, provocative and incriminating in nature.

HPCL's subsidiary Lanco Teesta Hydro Power Limited (LTHPL) awards Civil Works package (Lot-II) of 500 MW Teesta-VI HE Project, Sikkim



Lanco Teesta Hydro Power Limited (LTHPL), which is a wholly owned Subsidiary of HPCL Limited, has awarded the Lot-II package of Construction of Balance Civil Works Package of 500 MW Teesta-VI HE Project, Sikkim to M/s. Gammon Engineers and Contractors Private Limited on 15.03.2020 for a contract price of Rs.1248.44 crore. This Package includes works for underground Power House & Transformer Cavern, Part of HRT-I & HRT-II, Surge Shafts, Pressure Shafts & Adits, TRT and other associated structures etc. The work has been awarded in record time well before the scheduled date. HPCL provided the consultancy works for the same including invitation of bids, tendering and evaluation etc.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION AT HPU

HP University Vice-Chancellor Prof. Sikander Kumar has called for Equal Opportunity to the women in every sphere. He was presiding over a workshop organized by Center for Women Development Studies here today.

Prof. Kumar has said that there is an

urgent need of changing the mind set of every man in the society and plead for equality for women. He said that we have to respect a woman as we respect our Mother, Sister and Daughter.

Prof. Kumar made a clarion call for the participation of women in every decision making as it is only the female who play very important and pertinent role behind the success of every renowned people in the society. He said that the women involvement in decision making and policy planning must be made compulsory for equal and all-round development.

Earlier Prof. Sushma Rewal Chugh introduced the subject matter "Each for Equal" and welcome the participants Mrs. Sudarshana Kumari shared her experiences and views on the participation of women in development of society.

Present among others were Registrar Shri Ghanshyam Chand, Non-Teaching Employees and Students.

NTPC crowned 'Champion of Champions' at PRCI Conclave



NTPC, India's largest power generating company bagged 28 awards at Corporate Communication Excellence Awards 2020 and was conferred with the 'Champion of Champions' Title' in a grand ceremony organised during the 14th Global Communication Conclave by Public Relations Council of India (PRCI) at Bengaluru recently.

Shri Saptarshi Roy, Director (HR), NTPC received the PRCI Chanakya Award for Best Communicator and Shri KM Prashanth, AGM (Corporate Communications) was also honoured and inducted to the PRCI Hall of Fame for the year 2019. The awards ceremony was graced by Shri Basavaraj Bommai, Minister of Home, Govt. of Karnataka, Justice H N Nagmohan Das, Former Justice of High Court of Karnataka, Shri N Bhaskar Rao, Commissioner of Police, Bengaluru, Dr K R Vice Chancellor, Bengaluru University and Shri M B Jayaram, Chief Mentor and Chairman Emeritus, PRCI.

Mr. DILIP JAWALKAR, Secretary Tourism, Govt. of Uttarakhand honored the members of the state's ski and snowboard team



First Khelo India Winter Games held at Gulmarg from March 7 to 11 in an event organized at the tourism headquarters in Garhi Cantt. It is noteworthy that Uttarakhand received a total of 10 medals in various events in this event.

Timings	
DELHI	
FRIDAY, MAR. 20	RISE 06:25 SET 18:33
	RISE 04:14 SET 15:04
SATURDAY, MAR. 21	
	RISE 06:24 SET 18:33
	RISE 04:53 SET 15:58
SUNDAY, MAR. 22	
	RISE 06:23 SET 18:34
	RISE 05:29 SET 16:52

Delhi Weather	
LUCKNOW	max min
Delhi City	31 16
Safdarjung	31 16
Palam	31 16

Delhi Palam Today
31°C A comfortable morning. A partly cloudy sky. Thundery activity likely in parts.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
31°C Rain/thundershower likely in parts. A cloudy sky and warm day may prevail.

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THE HINDU
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Yogi calls for social distancing, but Ayodhya mega fair is on for now

District administration still awaiting directions on its possible cancellation



U.P. CM Yogi Adityanath

religious rituals from home," the government said.

The government, however, did not specify if the CM's appeal would extend to the mega fair in Ayodhya, which would be the first to be held after the Supreme Court awarded the disputed land for the construction of a Ram temple last November.

While Ayodhya DM Anuj Jha, who is an ex officio trustee of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra, was unavailable for comment, his office indicated that the administration was still waiting for directions from Lucknow on the possible cancellation of the gathering.

"There has been no order from the government yet. Whatever order it issues, that will be followed. As of now, it (the mela) is proposed," said an official.

Another official said that

the government could decide on the Ram Navami Mela and other upcoming religious festivals and fairs in the State, like in Devipatan and Mirzapur, in a day or two.

Precautions taken

SSP Ayodhya Ashish Tiwari said he was taking all measures to tackle the threat of COVID-19 in the pilgrim town and equipped police personnel with masks, gloves and sanitizers, as well as counselled them about the disease. The district police has also deployed the videoconferencing facility in all police stations to ensure communication, he said, adding that the Dial 112 emergency police services were also being roped in against COVID-19. "Based on the mobile network, we have created a videoconferencing infrastructure," he said.

AMU closes its central library

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GAZIABAD

In the wake of COVID-19 spread, Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) has closed the reading halls of the Maulana Azad Library till April 2. The decision to close the library applies to reading rooms, while books will continue to be issued and the matter will be reviewed depending on the situation, an official release said.

The step was taken as a pre-emptive measure for the containment of the virus in a meeting of university functionaries.

cautions. Otherwise, we will be forced to go into self-quarantine from Friday, 10 a.m., he added.

Dr. Malik further demanded that like other hospitals, the OPDs should either be closed or the number of working hours should be reduced. "Only an OPD for flu patients should continue for a few days," he said. Right now, he added, the security staff does not have infrared thermometers to check and isolate patients with a high fever. "We have been told one thermometer has been bought," he noted.

Bengal government ropes in private hospitals to tackle COVID-19 crisis

It's not a time to do business and not follow rules, it's time to help each other: CM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA

Observing that the next few weeks were going to be crucial, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday roped in private hospitals to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

The Chief Minister held a meeting with representatives of private hospitals as well as State-run facilities and said that they should be prepared to admit patients with COVID-19 infection.

"It is not a time to do business and not follow rules. It is a time to help each other," Ms. Banerjee said during the meeting at State Secretariat.

Currently, only one coronavirus infection has been reported in the State.

While the Chief Minister



Victoria Memorial, which has been closed to public till March 31, bears a deserted look on Thursday. ■ RAJEEV BHATT

applauded the work of the

State's primary referral hospital, the Infectious Diseases and Beliaghata General Hospital, she said it was necessary to reduce the pressure on the facility. Over the past few days, patients who have arrived from abroad have queued up at the ID&BGH,

causing a lot of rush there.

More beds

"There are 22 beds there. We will have to increase it to 100. At the Bangur Hospital, there is a new building. 150 beds can be arranged there. But the entrance of the hospital should not be same as the

main hospital," she said.

Ms. Banerjee suggested another 50 beds be provided at a building at the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital, which is serving as a night shelter. She assured those present at the meeting that her government has made all necessary arrangements.

"We have ordered 300 ventilator machines, of which 70 have been delivered. We have ordered 2 lakh masks and 30,000 gloves," the Chief Minister said.

"We have started a ₹200 crore fund. Let it be set up as a fund where private sector [entities] which want to help can share the cost to solve the problem. If the corporate sector can sponsor equipment, it will help humanity," she added.

Sharp fall in Kolkata Metro traffic

Ridership drops to 4.6 lakh from average 6 lakh, the lowest ever

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

The Kolkata Metro on Wednesday registered its highest-ever drop in daily ridership in its more than three-decade history as the COVID-19 global pandemic and ensuing government advisories on social distancing forced more people to avoid public transport.

Data indicate that 4.6 lakh commuters used the metro on Wednesday against an average weekday traffic of six lakh passengers, a decline of about 1.4 lakh.

"We have never witnessed such a drop in passengers," Chief Public Relations Officer of Kolkata Metro Indranil Banerjee told *The Hindu*. "The drop in passengers is almost over a lakh to the average

number of people commuting on a weekday," she said, adding that the decline was clearly a result of concerns over the spread of the coronavirus infection, which was forcing more and more people to stay indoors.

Fall in revenue

As a result of the drop in the number of passengers the Kolkata Metro has suffered a loss in daily revenue, running into lakhs of rupees. While on an average weekday the Kolkata Metro earns a revenue of about ₹85 lakh, on Wednesday the figure fell to around ₹60 lakh.

On February 3, the underground commuter railway network had registered a record number of passengers

when as many as 6.33 lakh commuters used the service helping the Kolkata Metro earn ₹1 crore in a day.

One of the primary modes of transport in the city, the Kolkata Metro was the country's first metro railway system when it started operations in 1984. It now connects

Noapara near Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Airport to Kavi Subhash Metro station near Garia, on the North-South axis of Kolkata over a length of 27.2 km. The Metro Railways has started making announcements on platforms and trains on the safety precautions people need to take to prevent infection. The Metro authorities are also trying to sanitise the plastic tokens issued to passengers.

Puri temple shut to public from today

STAFF REPORTER
BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government has shut down the Shree Jagannath Temple in Puri for devotees from Friday till April 1— a rare event in the hundreds of years of the temple's history.

"The Puri district administration has restricted access of general public to Jagannath temple from tomorrow [Friday]. In this spirit, the State government has instructed religious institutions, including temples, mosques and churches, to enforce similar restrictions," said Subroto Bagchi, chief spokesperson for Odisha's fight against COVID-19, on Thursday.

₹15 lakh relief to apprentice who lost an arm

A clear case of negligence on the part of employees of the utility, says OHRC

STAFF REPORTER
BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Human Rights Commission recommended a compensation of ₹15 lakh to a youth who lost an arm after suffering an electric shock during his apprenticeship in the North Eastern Electricity Supply Company of Odisha Limited (NEESCO).

Pabitra Kumar Barik was doing some repair work on an 11-KV feeder at Dhamagar sub-station on April 13, 2015, when a high-voltage electric shock led to the am-

putation of his right arm.

Company's contention

The victim moved the OHRC seeking compensation. During the hearing, the NEESCO authorities said since the victim was engaged as an apprentice, he was supposed to observe the maintenance and electrical work and never authorised to do the repairing work. "The victim, on his own, climbed up the pole and interfered with the live-line as a result which the electrical accident oc-

urred," they argued.

The OHRC, however, rejected the company's argument saying he was pressured to take up the repair work by a line man. "The commission is of the considered view that the victim as an apprentice trainee was not supposed to attend to the repairing work. But he was pressured by one line man to take up the repair work by climbing one electric pole.

Therefore, merely on the basis of the fact that he was not supposed to attend to the re-

pairing work and yet he took it up, it cannot be concluded that the victim had contributed to anything that led to the accident," OHRC member Asim Amitabh Dash said.

The electrocution occurred due to the charging of 11-KV feeder while the victim's work was going on. Thus it is a clear case of negligence on the part of the employees of the NEESCO utility... the employee is vicariously liable for any damages caused on account of negligence," he said.

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Pavneet Singh Batra GM (BD & Projects)

State may release 5,000 prisoners to reduce congestion in jails

Govt. affidavit in SC says they may be given temporary bail or medical furlough

SHARAD VYAS
MUMBAI

In an unprecedented move, the State Government will facilitate the release of thousands of inmates from the State's overcrowded jails as the number of COVID-19 cases rises in Maharashtra.

In an affidavit before the Supreme Court (SC), the State Home Department has suggested a proposal to release over 5,000 inmates on temporary bail or medical furlough as one of the several measures to reduce congestion in jails.

The recommendation says those facing a jail term of three to five years for petty crimes may be released on bail while medical furlough be given to first-time, low-risk, non-violent, and bailable offenders. The government response was filed as



Playing safe: The population of inmates is nearly 50% higher than the actual capacity in the State's jails. ■ FILE PHOTO

part of the affidavit submitted to the SC on Thursday.

Senior officials hope the numbers will bring down congestion by about 15%,

COVID-19

from the current 36,000.

The population of inmates is nearly 50% higher than

the actual capacity in almost 60 jails in the State. The temporary release will bring down the numbers closer to the capacity of 24,000 inmates, officials said. "We expect the congestion to come down between 15% and 20% if such a move is implemented. The SC can facilitate this by way of a decree or order and the States can follow suit

depending on the congestion in prisons. We are prepared," said a senior official.

The SC had last week asked chief secretaries of all States to respond by March 20 on measures against overcrowding in prisons following the COVID-19 outbreak. The court will take up the matter again on March 23.

Maharashtra has already started measures to curb congestion and prevent an outbreak in jails. It has moved a number of inmates from the overcrowded Arthur Road Jail to Taloja prison in Navi Mumbai. One ward in Taloja has several barracks of 50 prisoners in each while the ward populations often add up to 500, officials said. "We have also started screening and regular cleaning of the prison," said an official.

Village school conducts classes on WhatsApp

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

AURANGABAD

Coronavirus may have led to the closure of schools and colleges in Maharashtra, but technology and social media apps have come to the rescue of students.

A zilla parishad school at Bangalwadi in Osmanabad district is using WhatsApp to run its routine classes.

The government had directed schools and colleges in the State to remain shut till March 31, due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Despite the lockdown, educators at a school in Bangalwadi village of Paranda tehsil have ensured that there are no roadblocks in the process of learning, by conducting classes on WhatsApp.

Teachers have formed class-wise WhatsApp groups to help students continue their studies without interruption.

"I have been posting videos about different chapters for my students. I allot poems and other assign-

ments to children every day at 8 a.m. Students also post their homework assignments on WhatsApp," said Vishwas Gaikwad, who teaches primary classes.

As many as 75 students are part of these groups, he added.

Children whose parents don't have smartphones, have enrolled for these WhatsApp classes with the help of their relatives and neighbours, Mr. Gaikwad said.

"We have seen some positive changes in children who are lazy. They have now started working hard, as their parents are able to monitor their progress," he said.

Classes via video conferencing are quite common in city schools, education officer for primary schools S.M. Jadhav said. "However, the use of such technology in rural areas is rare. Students may have stopped coming to school, but teachers haven't stopped their classes," he added.

Earlier, only those international passengers who arrived at the airport and were found with symptoms were sent to Naidu Hospital. The administration was looking at increasing their quarantine facilities across the district to accommodate 10,000 persons either suspected or who had tested positive for COVID-19.

On the question of postponement of elective surgeries, he said the decision had been taken following a meet-

ing of doctors and that there was no blanket ban on this from the administration's point of view.

"We are making it clear, in case of postponement of an elective surgery, the decision would completely rest with the doctor depending on the patient-doctor relationship. We have not put any ban in this regard," he stressed.

Shops to shut

Meanwhile, the Federation of Trader Associations of Pune (FTAP), which has nearly 40,000 shops under its umbrella, has called for a shut down until further directives from the district administration.

This means that barring essential commodities like foodgrains, vegetables and medicines, all other shops including jewellery, apparel, automobiles, stationery across the city are to remain closed.

The FTAP had earlier called for a three-day shutdown on March 16. Today, after reviewing the situation and considering the gravity of the crisis, its representatives have decided to extend the duration of the shutdown with a view to preclude mass gatherings in shops.

A number of areas in Pune city wore a deserted look following the District Collector's order of Wednesday issued under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and the Epidemic Act 1897 banning the assembly of five or persons in public as well as private places, including work spaces.

District Collector Naval Kishore Ram said that all restaurants and hotels, too, would be closed with the aim of discouraging assembly. However, there would be no stoppage of online food services.

Following the Pune district administration's order urging all the private firms involved in non-essential services to facilitate 'work from home' for their employees, the city police on Thursday visited offices in the major IT hubs at Hinjewadi and Magarpatta city to ensure that this was being adhered to.

Meanwhile, Dr. Mhaisekar said that the Pune Mahanagar Parivahan Mahamandal Ltd (PMPML) had cut down its bus services by 50% in a bid to enforce social distancing and discourage commute.

"As a result, the number of commuters using public transport has come down from 12 lakh to 4.84 lakh. We expect the numbers to go down further in the coming days. This gradual process will be on to restrict movement within the city," said Dr. Mhaisekar.



Actor Vikram Gokhale, two others booked for 'cheating'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

Police have registered an offence against noted actor Vikram Gokhale and two others for allegedly duping 14 people in a land deal in Pune district, an official said on Thursday.

The two other accused were identified as Jayant Mhalgi and Sujata Mhalgi, the official said on Wednesday.

The action has been taken following a complaint by Jayant Bhairat with the Paud police station in Mulshi taluka of Pune district, he added.

In his complaint, Mr. Bhairat alleged that the trio had cheated him and others in connection with a project called Girivan, promoted by Sujata Farms Pvt Ltd.

Senior inspector Ashok Dhumal said the complainant alleged that despite the sale deed, he has not yet received possession of the land.

The complainant also said that the firm had misrepresented the project as government approved, he said.

The complaint named Mr. Gokhale as the chairman of the firm and Mr. Mhalgi and Ms. Mhalgi as its directors, Mr. Dhumal said.

"Based on the complaint, an FIR has been registered against them. But we are verifying the facts and further action will be taken after investigation," Mr. Dhumal said.

When contacted, Mr. Gokhale said the allegation against him was completely "baseless and misleading".

"I have already tendered my resignation from the company," he said.

State to study T.N., Bihar's stand on NPR clause

Cabinet sub-committee to look into issue of 'date and place of parents' birth'

SHARAD VYAS
MUMBAI

A Cabinet sub-committee to decide the fate of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), National Register of Citizens (NRC) and National Population Register (NPR) in Maharashtra will visit Bihar and Tamil Nadu to study how the provisions can be implemented "in its 2010 form" with one amendment.

The committee, headed by State Parliamentary Affairs Minister Anil Parab, held its first meeting on Thursday and decided that Maharashtra must reject the latest NPR amendments, including those related to the contentious clause related to 'date and place of parents' birth'. Maharashtra is willing to implement the



Women have been in the lead in the protests over CAA, NRC, and NPR with the demonstration in Mumbai Central continuing non-stop for almost two months now. ■ FILE PHOTO

NRC/NPR if the clause is dropped like in Bihar and Tamil Nadu, committee members believed.

The two States were among the first to pass reso-

lutions not to implement NRC, and said the NPR should be implemented "in its 2010 form" with one amendment. "We want to study their model and will

soon visit these States. Once the visit is complete, we will submit our report to the Chief Minister, who will decide what stand Maharashtra has to take," said a senior State minister.

Thursday's meeting was attended by Minority Development Minister Nawab Malik, Housing Minister Jitendra Awhad, Animal Husbandry Minister Sunil Kedar, Higher and Technical Education Minister Uday Samant.

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had announced in the recently-concluded Budget session that a committee had been formed to guide him to take a final decision on the contentious legislations.

The committee was constituted on March 13, 2020.

All international travellers arriving at Pune airport to be quarantined

Bus services by 50%; number of commuters falls from 12 lakh to 4.84 lakh

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
PUNE

The Pune district administration on Thursday announced a 24-hour compulsory 'institutional quarantine' for all international travellers disembarking at Pune Airport.

Pune Divisional Commissioner Dr. Deepak Mhaisekar said all elective surgeries that could wait for the time being were being postponed thus giving medical staff more time to focus on tackling the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

"Henceforth, all passengers disembarking at Pune airport would be sent straight to an institutional quarantine facility. We will also start screening at certain points in different railway stations either tonight or tomorrow morning to make sure that we have not skipped screening anyone landing at the airport who should decide to travel by rail," said Dr. Mhaisekar, adding that the number of flights landing at Pune airport had reduced from 110 to 67.

Earlier, only those international passengers who arrived at the airport and were found with symptoms were sent to Naidu Hospital. The administration was looking at increasing their quarantine facilities across the district to accommodate 10,000 persons either suspected or who had tested positive for COVID-19.

On the question of postponement of elective surgeries, he said the decision had been taken following a meet-



All international passengers will have to undergo institutional quarantine as Pune cracks down on coronavirus outbreak. ■ FILE PHOTO

ing of doctors and that there was no blanket ban on this from the administration's point of view.

"We are making it clear, in case of postponement of an elective surgery, the decision would completely rest with the doctor depending on the patient-doctor relationship. We have not put any ban in this regard," he stressed.

Shops to shut

Meanwhile, the Federation of Trader Associations of Pune (FTAP), which has nearly 40,000 shops under its umbrella, has called for a shut down until further directives from the district administration.

This means that barring essential commodities like foodgrains, vegetables and medicines, all other shops including jewellery, apparel, automobiles, stationery across the city are to remain closed.

Deserted site



Unusual sight: The iconic Se Cathedral church in Old Goa, which along with other heritage sites like St. Augustine Tower and Basilica Of Bom Jesus has been ordered by the Archaeological Survey of India to remain closed till March 31 as a precaution to prevent the spread of novel coronavirus. ■ ATISH POMBURFELKAR

Fire breaks out in Pune slum cluster

Blaze believed to have been caused by a cylinder explosion

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
PUNE

A major fire broke out at the Wadawadi slum cluster in the city's Shivajinagar suburb area early on Thursday, gutting around 20 shanties and causing significant material damage.

Authorities said there was no loss to life in the blaze which is believed to have been caused by a cylinder blast around 1.30 a.m.

"We received a call a little after 2 a.m. today that a big fire had broken out in the Wadawadi slums. We rushed around 15 fire-fighting vehicles, including three tankers and three Quick Response Vehicles (QRV). Prima facie, the blaze appears to have been caused by a cylinder explosion," said a fire department official.



The scene at Wadawadi in Pune on Thursday morning after a fire destroyed several shanties. No casualties were reported in this incident. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

after 3 a.m.," he said.

In November 2018, a fire, which was caused due to a gas cylinder explosion, rapidly engulfed scores of timber slum-houses in the city's Patil Estate area. Around hundred shanties were estimated to have been charred as fire-fighters faced a harrowing time in navigating the narrow slum lanes.

The complainant also said that the firm had misrepresented the project as government approved, he said.

The complaint named Mr. Gokhale as the chairman of the firm and Mr. Mhalgi and Ms. Mhalgi as its directors, Mr. Dhumal said.

"Based on the complaint, an FIR has been registered against them. But we are verifying the facts and further action will be taken after investigation," Mr. Dhumal said.

When contacted, Mr. Gokhale said the allegation against him was completely "baseless and misleading".

"I have already tendered my resignation from the company," he said.

AN-ND-E



Empty spaces: An aerial view of the usually crowded Malampuzha dam garden in Palakkad, Kerala, on Thursday; a bird's-eye view of a deserted flyover near the Secretariat in Telangana's capital Hyderabad; the deserted Kanaka Durga temple in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh; and the usually busy Kempegowda bus station wears an empty look in Bengaluru, Karnataka. ■ K.K. MUSTAFAH, PTI, K.V.S. GIRI & SAMPATH KUMAR G.P.



IN BRIEF



Vizag ports cautious in the wake of virus scare

VISAKHAPATNAM After finding out the health status of crew members of ships calling at Visakhapatnam Port Trust (VPT) for 14 days from the date of their departure from a foreign port to the arrival at the anchorage, the authorities are allowing them to berth in the harbour. Following a directive from the Ministry of Shipping and Ministry of Health on precautions to prevent COVID-19, VPT has screened 1,200-member crew on-board 55 ships.

Two Karnataka-Kerala checkposts closed

KALPETA The Wayanad district administration has closed the border checkposts at Bavali and Tholpetty on the Kerala-Karnataka border following the detection of a confirmed case of COVID-19 in Kodagu, Karnataka on Thursday. The Kodagu district administration invoked Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure in that district after a case was confirmed at Madikeri on the day. A person who travelled to India from Saudi Arabia had tested positive, sources said.

Kerala plans stimulus to cushion virus impact

All families will be given foodgrains for a month: CM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday announced a ₹20,000 crore stimulus plan to cushion the economic impact of COVID-19, revitalise key sectors and to recapture normal social life in the State.

Briefing mediapersons here, Mr. Vijayan said the Finance Department and the Planning Board were studying how the virus had impacted various sectors.

After two consecutive days of no new positive cases, a lone positive case was reported from Kasaragod on Thursday. The patient is a UAE returnee who was in quarantine. He had arrived at the Calicut International Airport on March 11. The next day, he travelled by train to Kasaragod by the Maveli Express.

On March 17, he went to the Kasaragod General Hospital after he developed symptoms and was admitted to the isolation ward. On Thursday, his test results



Helping hands: Volunteers making hand sanitizers for free distribution in Kochi on Thursday. ■ THULASI KAKKAT

proved positive. Efforts are on to prepare his route map and trace his contacts.

25 cases in State

The number of cases in the second wave of COVID-19 is thus 25. A total of 31,173 persons are under surveillance in Kerala, with 6,103 people added on Thursday. But only 237 are isolated in hospitals while the rest are in self-quarantine in homes.

Announcing the details of the financial package, Mr. Vijayan said ₹2,000 crore would be disbursed to families as loans through Kudumbashree, ₹1,000 crore would be utilised on rural employment guarantee schemes,

and ₹1,320 crore for disbursing two months' social security pensions. The pensions for March and April would be disbursed this month itself. Regardless of APL/BPL status, all families would be given a month's supply of foodgrains.

Mr. Vijayan said ₹14,000 crore was being set aside for the arrears of contract payments in various sectors. He announced relief in fitness charges for autorickshaws and taxis, three months' relief in the payment of taxes by buses and a month's allowance in paying electricity and water bills. Cinemas would get a waiver on entertainment taxes.

No darshan at Tirumala for one week

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT TIRUMALA

Pilgrims will not be allowed for the darshan of Lord Venkateswara at Tirumala for about a week from Friday. The decision was taken following COVID-19 cases across the country and in accordance with the directives of the Andhra Pradesh government. It is after a gap of about 128 years that the temple will be kept out of reach for pilgrims for about one week.

Maize farmers, poultry farms hit in A.P.

STAFF REPORTER VIZIANAGARAM

As concerns over COVID-19 mount in Andhra Pradesh, poultry owners have stopped buying maize from farmers, with the demand for eggs and chicken plummeting. Maize, which used to command a price of ₹2,200 per quintal till December 2019, is sold at ₹1,200 per quintal. Farmers, who have grown maize in 26,000 acres in the district, are at their wits' end.

High alert in Karimnagar after eight test positive for COVID-19

100 rapid action medical teams formed to hold check-ups

K.M. DAYASHANKAR KARIMNAGAR

In the wake of eight Indonesians, who camped in Karimnagar a few days ago, testing positive for COVID-19, the district administration sounded a high alert in the town on Thursday.

The district administration has formed 100 rapid action medical teams to conduct door-to-door medical check-ups in and around the Collectorate premises covering 3 km.

COVID-19



All in: Members of a self-help group stitching masks near Khammam, Andhra Pradesh, on Thursday. ■ G.N. RAO

including towels as a precaution. Medical authorities provided sanitizers to students at the examination centres.

Collector K. Shashanka told *The Hindu* that the administration has sounded a high alert and the medical teams have already started door-to-door checking in the areas where the Indonesians had moved. He appealed to people not to move out of their houses except for emergencies.

Three new cases

Three more COVID-19 positive cases were reported in the State on Thursday. This takes the total number of

cases in the State to 16, including the index (first) case who was discharged last week after recovering completely.

The 14th patient is a man who travelled from Dubai to Hyderabad on March 14. On developing virus symptoms on March 17, he was isolated at a government hospital and samples were collected.

The 15th case travelled from London to Hyderabad via Dubai, and developed symptoms. He was isolated at a government hospital on Wednesday and tested positive on Thursday. The 16th case travelled from London to Hyderabad, and also tested positive.

Counselling is key for those in quarantine

AFSHAN YASMEEN BENGALURU

The case of a 23-year-old quarantined person jumping to death from the seventh floor of Safdarjung Hospital building in Delhi on Wednesday has brought into focus the importance of mental health counselling in patients undergoing isolation on the likelihood they may be infected with COVID-19, to reassure them that quarantine does not mean they are being stigmatized.

Mental health experts said the pandemic was creating conditions for anxiety and panic, and people with pre-existing mental health conditions such as anxiety disorders, depression, OCD, and paranoia in particular could be severely impacted.

Traumatic period Realising that being quarantined can be traumatic for some isolated persons, Karnataka's Health Department started mental health counselling for all those under isolation even before the first positive case was reported from the State.

"Mental health professionals from the district mental health team are following up through telephonic counselling apart from regular follow up by surveillance teams," Jawaid Akhtar, Additional Chief Secretary (Health and Family Welfare and Medical Education) told *The Hindu*. "We have successfully counselled over 3,000 persons so far and nearly 20 among these have been treated for stress and anxiety," he added.

"While quarantine has proved to be effective in controlling epidemics, it is important that the process is sensitive enough to ensure that such people do not suffer mental agony," the official stressed.

Great rush



Panic situation: Passengers trying to board a train at the Puratchi Thalaivar Dr. MGR Central railway station in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, on Thursday. Southern Railway has cancelled several trains due to low occupancy. ■ R. RAGU

SC dismisses pleas against Karnataka steps for quota

'Provisions can be challenged in independent proceedings'

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday rejected a series of pleas to apply post-based reservation and creamy layer principle at entry level with regard to promotions to SC and ST employees in Karnataka.

A Bench of Justices U.U. Lalit and D.Y. Chandrachud said the pleas challenged the State's move to implement its Reservation Act of 2018 after the constitutional validity of the law was upheld by the apex court in May 2019. The 15-page judgment suggested that the applicants could challenge the provisions in "independent proceedings."

"The present MAs [Miscellaneous applications] are, in effect, a substantive challenge to the actions of the



direction from the apex court to "re-work" all promotions on the basis of 'post based reservations'. Secondly, they asked the court to direct Karnataka to apply 'creamy layer' principle. Thirdly, the applications had urged the court to ensure that the State implements its Reservation Act 2018 in compliance with the apex court decision in Nagaraj case, that is to extend reservation for SC/ST to promotions with certain conditions.

The court said the pleas were "not maintainable."

The government order of May 15 last year had lifted the State's earlier stay on implementation of the reservation law and the June 24, 2019 circular contained frequently asked questions and their answers with regard to preparation of seniority list.

State government in implementing the Reservation Act 2018 through the government order dated May 15, 2019 and the circular dated June 24, 2019. If the applicants are aggrieved by the steps which have been taken by the State government, it is open to them to pursue a substantive remedy for challenging the steps taken by the State in independent proceedings," the apex court said.

The application sought a

direction from the apex court to "re-work" all promotions on the basis of 'post based reservations'. Secondly, they asked the court to direct Karnataka to apply 'creamy layer' principle. Thirdly, the applications had urged the court to ensure that the State implements its Reservation Act 2018 in compliance with the apex court decision in Nagaraj case, that is to extend reservation for SC/ST to promotions with certain conditions.

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POCSO case against teacher in Kerala

The case was reported by Childline

STAFF REPORTER KANNUR

The police registered a Protection of Child from Sexual Offences (POCSO) case on Wednesday against a schoolteacher for sexually abusing a Class 5 student inside the school toilet at Pathathayi, near Panur in Kannur, Kerala.

According to the police, Childline reported the case based on a statement by the parents.

Multiple occasions They alleged that Malayalam teacher Padmarajan repeatedly abused the girl in the school toilet on various occasions.

The police have charged a case under Indian Penal

Wedding in the time of virus

Family cancels ceremonies, hardly 50 attend event

RADHAKRISHNAN KUTTOOR PATHANAMTHITTA



Masked affair: Vishnu Panackal and Parvathy during their marriage at Konni on Thursday. ■ LEJU KAMAL

Pathanamthitta hit the headlines, with Ranni becoming the epicentre of State's second spell of COVID-19 infection on March 7. The government imposed restrictions on people's movement and on public and private functions.

Parents of Vishnu and Parvathy advertised in regional newspapers inform-

ing invitees of the decision to cancel the ceremonial part of the wedding.

Hardly 50 persons, family members and close relatives, turned up for the wedding. All of them were given face masks. Sanitiser too was available to clean their hands. Tying the knot was held without any fanfare.

75 stuck in Singapore await MEA nod to return

The students fear deportation to Manila

RAMESH SUSRASRA ANANTAPUR

While around 343 Indian students reached Delhi and Visakhapatnam on Wednesday from Kuala Lumpur after getting stuck there for more than 18 hours, 75 students from the University of Perpetual, Manila, are still stuck at the Singapore airport awaiting permission from the Ministry of External Affairs to return home.

On Thursday (11 a.m. IST and 1.30 p.m. Singapore local time), K. Namratha Reddy, a medical student from Chittoor district in Andhra Pradesh, and Manasa from Bengaluru, both from the same university in the Philippines, told *The Hindu* over phone that while 70 stu-

dents were still stuck in Manila, a batch of 50 students bound for Mumbai and 25 to Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka, had arrived at Singapore on March 17 and 18, but were not being allowed to fly out.

"The Indian High Commission in Singapore is in touch with us, but it has expressed its inability to do anything unless the Indian government give permission to fly into India. We are worried that we will be deported to Manila as we are on a transit visa in Singapore," Ms. Manasa said.

Parents of the 75 students appealed to the Indian government to make early arrangements to bring back their children.

Stay where you are, MEA tells Indians abroad

Not advisable for people to move from one region to another, say officials

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

Urging Indians and residents who are stranded in different cities abroad to find alternative accommodation locally at least until the end of the month, the Ministry of External Affairs said Indian missions are helping them make arrangements and they must "stay put where they are".

"It is not advisable for people to move from one region to another region. This must be understood in the context of the gravity of the crisis. These restrictions are temporary, so one should not panic. If Indians are held up in some places, our advice would be to stay put," said Dammu Ravi, Additional Secretary in charge of coordinating the efforts to counter COVID-19.

MEA spokesperson Ra-



Safe stay: The government has requested other countries to extend the visas for Indians who have to stay on. ■ K.R. DEEPAK

happen until we know the full extent [of the virus's spread]."

Assistance unlikely

When asked how Indians and resident OICs in these locations, including many students on a tight budget, were expected to manage, MEA officials said, "Ideally they must take care of themselves locally with whatever resources they have, and our missions are in the forefront to support these stranded Indian and helping them to the

best of our abilities."

In addition the MEA said it was attempting to arrange enough flights for "Coronavirus-negative" Indians who are stuck at airports including London, Schiphol, Rome, Manila, Kuala Lumpur and other cities, as soon as possible, but may not be able to facilitate their return before the Sunday deadline.

According to Mr. Ravi, the government has managed to bring back all those who needed to be brought back from Singapore.

Indian pilgrim dies of COVID-19 in Iran's Qom

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

One of the 255 Indian pilgrims in Iran suffering from COVID-19 has died, the government announced on Thursday. The death of the unnamed pilgrim came on a day the Indian Embassy opened a hostel to house some of the pilgrims who had tested positive for the virus.

Meanwhile, reports of the retesting of 6 of the 44 pil-

grims who returned from Iran last week have come negative. The pilgrims, who completed a week of quarantine in Mumbai on Thursday, had already tested negative before being evacuated. They will return home in Jammu and Kashmir after March 26.

"The Embassy, in cooper-

16 return after treatment

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Sixteen Indian nationals on board a cruise ship, who had tested positive for COVID-19, were back home after treatment at hospitals in Japan, Minister of State for External Affairs V.

Muraleedharan informed the Parliament.

ation with health authorities in Qom, set up a wellness facility to take care of and undertake 24/7 supervision of infected pilgrims. The facility, surrounded by greenery, has ample space for the pilgrims to walk around," said the Embassy in a statement.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 19.00 HRS)
Forecast for Friday: Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning, hail and gusty wind at isolated places over West Bengal, Sikkim, Odisha, Jharkhand, Assam, Meghalaya, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Telangana.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	~.33.1	18.2	10.2	Kozhikode	~.35.4	26.4	26.2
Ahmedabad	~.38.2	19.9	11.5	Kurnool	~.39.4	26.2	26.2
Aizawl	~.25.7	12.5	10.5	Lucknow	~.31.2	15.7	15.7
Allahabad	~.31.1	15.3	10.5	Madurai	~.37.2	25.0	25.0
Bengaluru	~.35.2	20.9	15.5	Mangalore	~.35.8	25.5	25.5
Bhopal	~.33.5	18.6	10.5	Mumbai	~.33.1	21.0	21.0
Bhubaneswar	0.7	34.4	24.2	Mysuru	~.35.0	21.6	21.6
Chandigarh	~.27.4	14.3	10.5	New Delhi	~.30.7	16.0	16.0
Chennai	~.34.4	25.7	18.5	Patna	~.30.6	17.2	17.2
Coimbatore	~.36.9	23.7	18.5	Port Blair	~.32.7	23.6	23.6
Dehradun	~.28.2	11.8	10.5	Puducherry	~.33.8	24.2	24.2
Gangtok	1.8	13.2	10.0	Pune	~.36.1	15.8	15.8
Goa	~.34.2	23.6	18.5	Raipur	~.33.0	22.0	22.0
Guwahati	~.33.0	15.7	10.5	Ranchi	~.28.8	14.6	14.6
Hubballi	~.36.0	23.0	18.5	Shillong	~.19.5	9.4	9.4
Hyderabad	~.36.0	24.4	18.5	Shimla	~.17.9	6.7	6.7
Imphal	~.27.5	10.6	10.5	Srinagar	~.20.6	4.2	4.2
Jaipur	~.32.0	19.4	18.5	Thiruvananthapuram	~.34.4	25.8	25.8
Kochi	~.33.0	26.2	18.5	Tiruchi	~.37.4	24.4	24.4
Kohima	~.22.0	10.8	10.5	Vijayawada	~.37.0	24.5	24.5
Kolkata	~.32.9	21.4	18.5	Visakhapatnam	~.8.2	32.7	23.6

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Yesterday

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO ₂	NO _x	CO	PM _{2.5}	PM ₁₀	CODE
Ahmedabad	~.17	~.10	~.51	~.66	~.200	■■■■■
Bengaluru	17	28	21	51	66	■■■■■
Chennai	06	09	54	77	~.200	■■■■■
Delhi	43	52	36	266	258	■■■■■
Hyderabad	02	59	44	107	111	■■■■■
Kolkata	13	92	20	255	132	■■■■■
Lucknow	06	55	300	~.200	~.200	■■■■■
Mumbai	69	13	70	157	~.200	■■■■■
Pune	42	15	86	65	64	■■■■■
Visakhapatnam	08	68	44	74	105	■■■■■

In observation made at 7.00 p.m., Siliguri, West Bengal recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 247 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh recorded a healthy AQI score of 43.

COVID-19

phone and alerted the Railways after his train entered Assam," he said.

"He travelled by train to Howrah. In Kolkata, he took the Kanchenjungha Express and was supposed de-board at Guwahati," NFR spokesperson Subhanan Chanda said.

INTERVIEW | K. SRINATH REDDY

'Care and containment are equally important'

Stress on private sector to be raised

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN



Professor K. Srinath Reddy President, Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI) and former head of the Department of Cardiology at All India Institutes of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), speaks on how India's strategy will change if community transmission starts.

What should be India's specific plan if we slip into community transmission?

■ It depends on how localised or widespread the transmission is across the country, and the speed of spread from one location to another, especially the urban to rural spread.

At all times, care and containment will both be important, but relative priorities will change depending on the extent of community spread.

Dedicated intensive care areas are also being created in hospitals across the country. There is also an accompanying need for health personnel in intubation, efficiently operating the ventilators and providing respiratory care with efficiency and safety.

The private sector has already been invited by the government to join hands in providing an accessible, effective and equitable response by participating in laboratory testing and in providing hospitalised care. It is up to the private sector to step up as a willing partner in a time of major national health emergency and use its institutional capacity and expertise. The specific modalities are being worked by the relevant governmental agencies at the Central and State levels.

What is your advice to the general public?

■ The public should, to the maximum extent possible, practice personal protection and social distancing to protect themselves. They should not be misled by incorrect messages on social media and try to access authentic information. Xenophobia, of any kind, should be avoided. If there is an illness that arouses concern, they should report to a nearby health facility where they will be assessed.

How are we enhancing our lab capacity? Do we have enough ventilator beds?

How will the private sector be involved?

■ Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) is expanding the laboratory capacity by accrediting medical colleges, research institutions and private laboratories which meet the required standards. The test kits needed are also being scaled

Tamil Nadu records third COVID-19 case

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

A third person has tested positive for the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Tamil Nadu.

The patient, a 21-year-old student who had returned from Dublin, tested positive for COVID-19 on Thursday after having been admitted to the isolation ward at the Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital (RGGH).

Health Minister C. Vijayabaskar said the student arrived in Chennai on March 17 and underwent screening, following which he was placed under home quarantine. He developed symptoms on March 18 and reported himself to RGGH.

The Minister tweeted that the patient's condition was stable. On Wednesday, a 20-year-old, who had travelled from Delhi to Chennai, tested positive for COVID-19, and is currently undergoing treatment at RGGH.

Dedicated intensive care areas are also being created in hospitals across the country. There is also an accompanying need for health personnel in intubation, efficiently operating the ventilators and providing respiratory care with efficiency and safety.

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RPF traces Assam man who fled quarantine

24-year-old had escaped from Kerala

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

nanee Deka said the Kerala police had tipped off about the man having fled a facility along with two others - one from Odisha and the other from West Bengal. "We tracked his mobile

The 24-year-old man, from Lohorighat in central Assam's Morigaon district, was taken off a train at western Assam's New Bongaigaon railway station and kept at an isolation ward of the railway hospital for further observation.

Morigaon district's Superintendent of Police Swap-

panee Deka said the Kerala police had tipped off about the man having fled a facility along with two others - one from Odisha and the other from West Bengal. "We tracked his mobile

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The private sector has already been invited by the government to join hands in providing an accessible, effective and equitable response by participating in laboratory testing and in providing hospitalised care. It is up to the private sector



Drastic, but necessary

Speakers must realise that deliberate inaction on defection matters is no more an option

The Supreme Court's order stripping a Manipur Minister of his office and barring him from entering the State Assembly may appear drastic and unusual, but is quite a reasonable and necessary course of action. T. Shyamkumar was elected as a Congress candidate, but defected to the BJP to join the Biren Singh Cabinet. In a landmark judgment in January, which put an end to the deliberate inaction of Presiding Officers on petitions for disqualifying defectors, a Bench headed by Justice Rohinton F. Nariman had ruled that courts have the power to fix a time-frame for Speakers to dispose of petitions under the anti-defection law. In the Manipur case, the court had given a reasonable period of four weeks – the deflection complaint is pending since 2017 – but the Speaker failed to comply with it. On March 4, he had promised a decision within 10 days, but on March 18, he again sought time. It is in this background that the court invoked its extraordinary powers under Article 142 of the Constitution to take the sort of measures that would kick in if the defector concerned had been disqualified. The order is interim in nature, and the next hearing is on March 30. This means that the Speaker can still decide the matter, but a strong message has been sent out that courts will no more aid them in their attempts to protect defectors from the consequences of their floor-crossing.

The possible objections to the order keeping the Minister out are two-fold: that it goes beyond the court's power of judicial review, and that any intervention in a matter under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution (the anti-defection law) can be made only after the Speaker's final decision. However, it ought to be borne in mind that it was out of respect for the Speaker's powers that the court refrained from deciding the matter itself, though there was ample evidence that the Speaker had failed to discharge his duty. His obvious reluctance to decide the matter even within an extended deadline necessitated the latest course of action. In any case, as pointed out in the January verdict, a 2007 precedent (*Rajendra Singh Rana*) is available to show that 'failure to exercise jurisdiction' is a stage at which the court can intervene. The order is a natural follow-on measure after the earlier decision opened a window for judicial intervention whenever Speakers refuse to act on legitimate complaints that some members had incurred disqualification. It is quite disappointing that the Manipur Speaker did not meet the court's deadline even after it was made clear that inaction is no more a legal option for him. This only underscores the importance of the other limb of the court's earlier judgment recommending that Parliament consider creating a new mechanism to replace the 'Speaker' as the adjudicating authority under the Tenth Schedule.

Waiting for Rajini

Rajinikanth's aspirations are far above the efforts he is willing to put in as a leader

Two years after declaring himself worthy of filling the perceived political vacuum in Tamil Nadu, Rajinikanth appears confused and doubting. Not only has he ruled himself personally out of the electoral race, but mandated his followers to show "a wave of resurgence" among the people for him to launch a party. By placing such an impractical condition a year before the Assembly elections, he has lent credence to the charge that he is a reluctant political player with a big gap between aspiration and effort. He expects people's endorsement for his three-point strategy for an alternative model of politics. He envisages heading a party but appointing a young, visionary and knowledgeable person as Chief Minister; fielding young candidates, 65% of them aged below 50; and disbanding the party organisation structure after the election retaining only a minimal set of office-bearers, apparently to prevent party leaders from fighting for the spoils of power. Separating party leadership from elected office is not novel as the founders of the Shiv Sena and Pattali Makkal Katchi have shown. But this model, far from promoting abstinence as practised by Mahatma Gandhi or Jayaprakash Narayan, will result in creating extra-constitutional authorities. Though Rajinikanth insisted that there will be no parallel power structure, he had no qualms in saying he would replace the Chief Minister – a job legitimately belonging to legislators – should the need arise. Clearly, he wants to retain power in the very act of renouncing it.

Rajinikanth's indecisiveness perhaps could be attributed to his reading of the ground situation and refusal to accept anything short of a spectacular victory. This goes against the essence of his stated goal to usher in political reforms to cleanse the system. At the dawn of 2018, he was confident of utilising the space created by the political exit of Jayalalithaa and M. Karunanidhi. Down the line, the AIADMK and DMK have filled the leadership vacuum. In fact, Rajinikanth has conceded that star power could at best make him a vote divider. He has also concluded that it is a "now or never" opportunity to oust the Dravidian giants. Referring to Gandhiji's and Swami Vivekananda's transformational moments in Tamil Nadu, he says he wants a 1967-like 'revolution', when C.N. Annadurai led a regional party to power for the first time. What he fails to realise is that these personalities had drawn people to participative democracy, and not expected their supporters to deliver political power to them in a neat package. If he desires to lead, Rajinikanth should show the way and not expect others to propel him to power to fulfil an as yet unarticulated political agenda.

Giving Human Rights Commissions more teeth

The Madras High Court is to decide on whether the recommendations made by such panels are binding upon the state



GAUTAM BHATIA

In 1993, the Indian Parliament enacted the Protection of Human Rights Act. The purpose of the Act was to establish an institutional framework that could effectively protect, promote and fulfil the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution. To this end, the Act created a National Human Rights Commission, and also, Human Rights Commissions at the levels of the various States.

The National and State Human Rights Commissions are examples of what we now call "fourth branch institutions." According to the classical account, democracy is sustained through a distribution of power between three "branches" – the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary, with each branch acting as a check and a balance upon the others. However, the complexity of governance and administration in the modern world has necessitated the existence of a set of independent bodies, which are charged with performing vital functions of oversight. Some of these bodies are constitutional bodies – established by the Constitution itself. These include, for instance, the Election Commission and the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General. Others have been established under law: for example, the Information Commission under the Right to Information Act, and Human Rights Commissions under the Protection of Human Rights Act.

In the two-and-a-half decades of their existence, however, the functioning of the Human Rights Commissions has come under scrutiny

and criticism. There have been the usual critiques of the politicisation of autonomous bodies, and selectiveness. Even more than that, however, it has been alleged that for all intents and purposes, the Human Rights Commissions are toothless: at the highest, they play an advisory role, with the government left free to disobey or even disregard their findings.

Pending case

In this context, a pending case before the High Court of Madras has assumed great significance. A Full Bench of the High Court will be deciding upon whether "recommendations" made by the Human Rights Commissions are binding upon their respective State (or Central) governments, or whether the government is entitled to reject or take no action upon them.

Under the Protection of Human Rights Act, the Human Rights Commissions are empowered to inquire into the violations of human rights committed by state authorities, either upon petitions presented to them, or upon their own initiative. While conducting these inquiries, the Commissions are granted identical powers to that of civil courts, such as the examining witnesses, ordering for documents, receiving evidence, and so on. These proceedings are deemed to be judicial proceedings, and they require that any person, who may be prejudicially affected by their outcome, has a right to be heard.

The controversy before the Madras High Court stems from the issue of what is to be done after the Human Rights Commission completes its enquiry, and reaches a conclusion that human rights have been violated. Section 18 of the Protection of Human Rights Act empowers the Human Rights Commission to "recommend" to the concerned government to grant compensation to the victim,



to initiate prosecution against the erring state authorities, to grant interim relief, and to take various other steps. The key question revolves around the meaning of the word "recommend."

The Full Bench of the Madras High Court is hearing the case because different, smaller benches, have come to opposite conclusions about how to understand the word "recommend" in the context of the Protection of Human Rights Act.

According to one set of judgments, this word needs to be taken in its ordinary sense. To "recommend" means to "put forward" or to "suggest" something or someone as being suitable for some purpose. Ordinarily, a mere "suggestion" is not binding. Furthermore, Section 18 of the Human Rights Act also obligates the concerned government to "forward its comments on the report, including the action taken or proposed to be taken thereon, to the Commission", within a period of one month. The argument, therefore, is that this is the only obligation upon the government. If indeed the Act intended to make the recommendations of the Commission binding upon the government, it would have said so: it would not simply have required the government to communicate what action it intended to take to the Commission (presumably, a category that includes "no action" as well).

While intuitively plausible, I

suggest that this view needs to be rejected, for many reasons.

The first is that there is often a gap between the ordinary meanings of words, and the meanings that they have within legal frameworks. Legal meaning is a function of context, and often, the purpose of the statute within which a word occurs has a strong influence on how it is to be understood. For example, the Supreme Court has held, in the past, that the overriding imperative of maintaining judicial independence mandates that "consultation" with the Chief Justice for judicial appointments (as set out under the Constitution) be read as "concurrence" of the Chief Justice (this is the basis for the collegium system). Recently, while interpreting the Land Acquisition Act, the apex court held that the word "and" in a provision had to be construed as "or".

Constitutional commitment

Of course, there needs to be good reason for interpretations of this kind. This brings us to the purpose of the Human Rights Act, and the importance of fourth branch institutions. As indicated above, the Human Rights Act exists to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights. To fulfil this purpose, the Act creates an institutional infrastructure, via the Human Rights Commissions. The Human Rights Commissions, thus, are bodies that stand between the individual and the state, and whose task is to ensure the adequate realisation of constitutional commitment to protecting human rights. It stands to reason that if the state was left free to obey or disobey the findings of the Commission, this constitutional role would be effectively pointless, as whatever the Human Rights Commission did, the final judgment call on whether or not to comply with its commitments under the Constitution would be left to the

state authorities (effectively, the state judging itself). This, it is clear, would defeat the entire purpose of the Act.

Indeed, in the past, courts have invoked constitutional purpose to determine the powers of various fourth branch institutions in cases of ambiguity. For example, the Supreme Court laid down detailed guidelines to ensure the independence of the Central Bureau of Investigation; various judgments have endorsed and strengthened the powers of the Election Commission to compulsorily obtain relevant details of candidates, despite having no express power to do so. It is therefore clear that in determining the powers of autonomous bodies such as the Human Rights Commission, the role that fourth branch institutions are expected to play in the constitutional scheme is significant.

And lastly, as pointed out above, the Human Rights Commission has the powers of a civil court, and proceedings before it are deemed to be judicial proceedings. This provides strong reasons for its findings to be treated – at the very least – as quasi-judicial, and binding upon the state (unless challenged).

Indeed, very recently, the Supreme Court held as much in the context of "opinions" rendered by the Foreigners Tribunals, using very similar logic to say that these "opinions" were binding.

In sum, the crucial role played by a Human Rights Commission – and the requirement of state accountability in a democracy committed to a 'culture of justification' – strongly indicates that the Commission's recommendations should be binding upon the state. Which way the Madras High Court holds will have a crucial impact upon the future of human rights protection in India.

Gautam Bhaitia is a Delhi-based lawyer

COVID-19: What nature seems to be telling us

It is reminding us that we need to acknowledge, with humility, our quintessential equality and interdependence



RAM NATH KOVIND

The outbreak of COVID-19 has created an unprecedented situation around the world. Humankind is no stranger to calamitous outbreaks of diseases. However, this is the first viral outbreak of this nature and scale in our lifetime.

Today, my thoughts are with all those battling the virus, with the families of all the victims around the world, and also with the doctors, paramedics and health officials and all others who have put their lives at risk for the rest of us.

I commend people for their mature response in the face of the crisis. Their support is helping all institutions work in a coordinated manner to fight the outbreak. Our healthcare system has shown great alacrity and competence in meeting the extraordinary and evolving challenge. Our leadership and administration have proved their mettle in these testing times. I believe that together we will weather the storm. I also commend the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, for taking pre-emptive measures in right earnest to contain the pandemic at the very be-

ginning and reaching out to our neighbours in SAARC to launch joint efforts to check its spread in the neighbourhood. Even the World Health Organization (WHO) has acknowledged India's efforts as worthy of emulation for the rest of the world.

Quarantining oneself

The outbreak has forced us to keep a respectful distance from others. This isolation, self-imposed or medically mandated, can be taken as an ideal opportunity to ponder about our journey so far and the future path. As we are passing through a tough phase, let us turn this challenge into an opportunity and try to decipher what nature has been telling us through this crisis. The messages are many, but for the purpose of brevity I will dwell upon a few here.

We all know that hygiene is the first and obvious lesson. Precaution is the only cure for this new strain of coronavirus. As precaution, what doctors advise is basic hygiene, apart from social distancing. Sanitation and cleanliness are among the humblest of the civic virtues, and it is easy to underestimate their significance. It needed a Mahatma to attach the utmost priority to them. In South Africa and in India, his historic campaigns always began with or ran parallel to the question of sanitation and hygiene. In 1896, Gandhiji



was visiting India, and plague broke out in Bombay. He offered his services to the State, and the offer was accepted. As he was in Rajkot, he volunteered there. Do you know what he did as a volunteer? He inspected latrines and exhorted people to pay attention to cleanliness. We need to imbibe all his lessons in our daily life, and in this year of his 15th birth anniversary we may begin by rededicating ourselves to the cause of personal and social hygiene. The nationwide 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' (Mission Clean India) is a precursor to this great social awakening.

Respect for nature may be the next lesson intended for us. Homo Sapiens is the only organism that has overpowered all other animals, taken control of the whole planet, and even set foot on the moon. Now it stands humbled by a microorganism. We would do well to keep in mind the fact that at the end of the day we are merely biological organisms, dependent on

other organisms for survival. Humankind's craving to control nature and exploit all its resources for profit can be wiped out in a stroke by an organism we cannot even see with the naked eye.

Let us remind ourselves that our ancestors saw nature as mother, and asked us to respect it. At some point in history, we forgot ancient wisdom. When pandemics and abnormal weather phenomena are becoming the norm, it is time to pause and wonder where we lost the way, and how we can still make a comeback.

The whole world is a family

Equality may be a factor less apparent, but nature tells us that we are all equal. This new virus strikes beyond man-made distinctions of religion, race and region. The world has been busy drawing distinctions and waging wars over 'us vs. them'. But we suddenly realise that in the face of a grave mortal threat like the present one, we have but one identity – we are human beings.

Interdependence is also something we tend to overlook in normal times. In my speeches, I have often referred to the Sanskrit dictum, "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam", which means the whole world is but a family. Today, it turns out to be truer than ever before. We realise how deeply each one of us is connected with everybody else. We are as safe as we

take care of the safety of others, not only of human beings but also of plants and animals. Faced with an extraordinary crisis, most people tend to be selfish, but this is a crisis that teaches us to think equally of others.

Though voluntary services through social mobilisation are not encouraged due to the highly contagious nature of the disease, there are many ways in which people can help contain and mitigate the viral spread. Every citizen can contribute towards raising awareness and equally by refraining from spreading panic, taking prudent precautions advised by the government. Those who can should also share resources, especially with less resourceful neighbours, and senior citizens who are vulnerable to the disease. The coronavirus challenge underscores the necessity for "action in absence of crisis".

Nature is reminding us to acknowledge, with humility, our quintessential equality and interdependence. It is a lesson – imparted at a heavy price – that will come handy in mitigating global challenges like climate change as well as in building a better, common future. In the meantime, I join you in reaffirming our resolve to come out of the present crisis at the earliest, stronger than ever as a nation.

Ram Nath Kovind is President of India

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.

Battling COVID-19

There has been a steady increase in the spread of COVID-19 across the country. At this juncture, there is an onerous task on the citizens to display some much-needed resilience by shouldering social responsibilities for ensuring the common welfare in the society ("Time for powerful display of humanity," Editorial Page, March 19). There should be no blame-game across nations on the origins of the virus; there should instead be timely awareness campaigns. In this connection, it would be very pertinent to follow the best practices adopted by places like South Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong.

A Justice-turned-MP

Prashant Bhushan has literally ripped the veil off the nomination of former Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi to the Rajya Sabha, a mere four months after he demitted office as CJI ("In upper house nomination, a fall for 'loofness,'" March 19). It is an accepted fact

where the people, apart from protecting themselves, have also played a significant role in preventing the spread of the virus by exhibiting high levels of humanity. Hence, we need to behave like "citizen warriors" in our crusade against the virus. G. RAMASUBRAMANYAM, Vijayawada

that almost all the judgments delivered by the Supreme Court benches presided over by Justice Gogoi went in favour of the present dispensation. The grim irony is that Justice Gogoi was one of the four judges to come out openly in 2018 against the then-Chief Justice Dipak Misra whose role as 'master of the roster' was faulty. While the other three have walked into the sunset without any fanfare, Justice Gogoi has blotted his copybook. By accepting the nomination without the least demur, he has clearly done a disservice to the judiciary which, as such, is hard pressed to assert its independence and

sovereignty in a situation where the executive has never shied away from wielding the whip using weapons in its arsenal like transfers, elevations etc. C.V. ARAVIND, Bengaluru

Biden vs. Trump?

Joe Biden's victory in Arizona and Florida on Tuesday has given him a near-insurmountable lead. Significantly, in 2016, Donald Trump took both the States. Mr. Biden spoke directly to Bernie Sanders' supporters, saying he and his opponent "may disagree on tactics, but we share a common vision" on the need to make healthcare more affordable,

reduce income inequality and curb climate change. Mr. Sanders earlier pledged to support his opponent if he loses the nomination. Democrats are concerned about defeating Mr. Trump – and believe Mr. Biden is the best person to do it. S.S. PAUL, Chakdaha, Nadia, West Bengal

Minority rights

The cultural and educational rights under Articles 29 and 30 of the Constitution have given the minorities a sense of security and belonging. A vast majority of *madrasas* in the country are run by Muslims with their contributions of *zakat* (an obligatory tax paid by the rich). The clergy who were earlier reluctant to introduce subjects like mathematics and science in the curriculum have changed their stand. The minority institutions established over the years have been contributing a great deal to bring the Muslim community to the national mainstream. This being the case, the ambiguity owing to different judicial interpretations on Article 30 is indeed a cause for concern (Op-Ed, "An SC verdict violative of minority rights," March 19).

SYED SULTAN MOHIDDIN, Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh



Will Modi's COVID-19 fund initiative revive SAARC?

PARLEY

Only robust political will and cooperation, not conflict, can lead to development in the region

On Sunday, while addressing the leaders of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) member states, Prime Minister Narendra Modi proposed the creation of a novel coronavirus (COVID-19) Emergency Fund for SAARC. Mr. Modi's sudden proposal came as a surprise to many, as the Indian government has maintained for many years now that SAARC has not been successful in containing the regional threat of terrorism. The last SAARC summit was held in Kathmandu in 2014. The 19th SAARC summit, scheduled to be held in Islamabad, was cancelled after the September 18, 2016 attack on the military base in Uri. Since then, India, the largest SAARC country, has held that the grouping has inherent problems and has instead highlighted the role of newer outfits like the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) as an alternative to SAARC to deliver on connectivity, development, and counter-terrorism efforts. In a conversation moderated by Kallol Bhattacharjee, Major General (Retired) Abdur Rashid and Qamar Agha discuss the relevance of SAARC today. Edited excerpts:

Do you think Mr. Modi's initiative will help SAARC?

Major General Abdur Rashid: There are certainly many commonalities [among these nations] regarding threats and perceptions of threats. Such initiatives will always be welcome. This initiative [Mr. Modi calling for a SAARC meeting] came as a bolt from the blue since everyone thought SAARC is now in the coffin. But once the meeting was initiated by Mr. Modi, it was welcomed. The people of Bangladesh have also shown a positive attitude. Besides, there is concern about the problem in all these countries. We can talk and keep moving ahead. This will reduce tension and create robust cooperation.

Qamar Agha: I fully support the Major General's argument. The region is integrated culturally and historically. There have been migra-

tions for centuries within the region and we have always been cooperating with one another. It was after British rule that the visa passport regime was introduced. After SAARC, we thought cooperation would develop. It was, in fact, developing. We have common problems: not just COVID-19 but other enormous problems including water sharing and poverty. If we come together, that will once again lead to cooperation.

An initiative such as the creation of a health fund was not tried earlier, though the SAARC Charter hints at such cooperation. Given the absence of a collaborative spirit between India and Pakistan, is there a spirit in SAARC to prevent such front-line threats?

AR: The concerns of every nation should be addressed in SAARC. Leaving Pakistan aside, you can see how other organisations like BIMSTEC are growing because every nation is on board there. Regarding SAARC, we have to see that all nations are on board and see if we can create a common platform. This fund is a good proposal. Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina accepted the proposal happily.

There have been concerns about the relevance of SAARC, especially after the Islamabad summit could not be held. Do you think India-Pakistan problems could once again create trouble for the grouping's revival?

QA: Pakistan should realise that the future of the region lies in cooperation with India. Not just India, the Afghan government is also having a very bitter experience in dealing with Pakistan as they say militants are coming from Pakistan. Nevertheless, Pakistan is a very important country and that is why we insist that Pakistan should come on board.

But over the last few years we have been repeatedly told by leading Indian policymakers



and officials, including External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, that there are inherent problems in SAARC. So, is India's effort sincere?

AR: Security is of great concern in the region and the India-Pakistan security situation certainly affected SAARC. But India-Bangladesh cooperation has become a great example of security management. We in Bangladesh have also been quite concerned about Pakistan's attitude towards terrorism as they have an internal force which always promotes terrorism. So automatically we have to take into consideration every nation's concern [in SAARC] on this. I am sure if we can build a robust political will, SAARC may go higher. If we live with suspicion and lack of trust, then development will be reversed. I think Pakistan has also learnt that conflict and tension cannot take the country ahead. At the moment, Bangladesh has gone ahead with development plans and it has shown that ties with India can go ahead.

In view of Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's recent statement which indicated that the country is not prepared to deal with the crisis, it's natural to ask if Pakistan will show political will for a SAARC collaboration and, consequently, for its revival.

QA: I think they are gradually coming around. The problem is so big that no country can handle this alone. Pakistan borders Iran and it's a common problem for the whole region. The problem in Pakistan is that the elected government tradi-

C Fostering economic integration and development and supporting social and educational development and integration are some of the important things that India can do.

QAMAR AGHA

tionally has tried to establish good ties with India. But all the leaders – whether Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Benazir Bhutto or Nawaz Sharif – have faced major setbacks. The Pakistani military establishment is still reluctant to deal with us but circumstances are forcing Pakistan to at least cooperate on this issue. Second, they are also facing a very serious economic crisis in the country. Earlier they used to get money from oil-rich countries but oil prices have fallen and these countries also have troubles such as the war in Yemen. Pakistan is totally dependent on China but this too cannot go on for long as China-U.S. ties are also evolving. So, a situation like the 1990s, when cooperation was possible, is once again a possibility. Later normalisation of relations may also be possible.

There are other problems that are emerging among SAARC member countries like the proposal for a country-wide National Register of Citizens in India. This has triggered concern in Bangladesh. There's also the Madhesi issue with Nepal and the border dispute in Kalapani. Can the revival plan of SAARC overcome these challenges?

AR: India is a big neighbour, so automatically all the smaller countries that surround it will have some concerns about it. So, cooperation from India to look after the concerns of its smaller neighbours is very important.

From Bangladesh's point of view, we have solved the land boundary agreement (LBA) and exchanged the enclaves. We conducted it very peacefully without dislocating a large number of people. In comparison, 1947 was a humanitarian disaster as far as dislocation of lives was concerned. We have established that we can solve bilateral problems with India. All SAARC countries must have the political will on how to address such differences with India. Bangladesh maintains that the Citizenship (Amendment) Act is an internal matter of India's. Bangladesh will respond when it creates an impact on us.

The most important thing is that government-to-government cooperation is not enough. The more long-lasting thing is people-to-people ties. In this, India and Bangladesh are far ahead than India and Pakistan. It is not just with India but also with Myanmar.

Ms. Hasina has emphasised a peaceful solution to the Rohingya issue. If India can emulate these ideals and mentality to support smaller neighbours, we can build a peaceful South Asian region.

Do you think issues like NRC and CAA can create hurdles for SAARC?

QA: CAA is a difficult issue because there is some internal opposition too. Barring Pakistan, other SAARC states have accepted that it is India's internal affair. But the security issue will remain important as far as Pakistan is concerned. But as far as other mechanisms are concerned, with other neighbours of India, they are working. We have organisations like BIMSTEC and bilateral engagements to deal with these differences. Almost with all the countries of the region, India has managed relations so far, except with Pakistan. Pakistan cannot achieve its objectives with the help of militancy. The economic situation is bad in Pakistan and foreign investment is not pouring in as there is a possibility that Pakistan could be placed on the blacklist in the Financial Action

Task Force. I am hopeful that the SAARC summit will take place in Islamabad or in an alternative location.

When an organisation is not used for some time, it loses its strength. This is also true for SAARC. What can be done now to help boost SAARC?

AR: SAARC lacked momentum for some time. After SAARC, we had started BBIN [Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal], BIMSTEC, BCIM [Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar Economic Corridor]. Leaving aside Pakistan, the security concern of India will not be resolved. This time an opportunity has been given to Pakistan, as pointed out by Mr Agha. Bangladesh is equally concerned about Pakistan's patronisation of terror elements. Jaish-e-Mohammed supports outfits in Bangladesh too, and we have lot of examples on that front. Therefore, we need to build trust and Pakistan will have to give the first commitment that it will not support these unethical forces. As discussed here, Pakistan has a unique civil-military problem. But Bangladesh has shown the way as it exercises political control over its military and focuses on development and that is why we are in a better position. Neighbours will have problems but we have to solve these issues amicably. The LBA and maritime boundary agreements have also shown the way for SAARC. Social and cultural contacts should be fostered to help people-to-people contact within SAARC.

What can India do to boost SAARC at this juncture beyond the COVID-19 crisis?

QA: Individual countries cannot develop because we are in the age of globalisation. Fostering economic integration and development, supporting social and educational development and integration are some of the important things that India can do. India has been developing connectivity with Myanmar, Bangladesh, Thailand. So similarly we sought to have connectivity with Pakistan but that did not happen. Now we are trying to build that in Chabahar. These are some of the things that need to be boosted further in SAARC.



Major General (Retired) Abdur Rashid
heads the Institute of Conflict Law and Development Studies in Dhaka



Qamar Agha
is a Delhi-based security expert and a veteran commentator on regional affairs

Need for re-orientation

State universities will have to deliver more to the State where they are located

C.N. KRISHNAN

Out of about a thousand higher education institutions (HEIs) that are authorised to award degrees in India, about 400 are state public universities that produce over 90% of our graduates (including those from the colleges affiliated to them) and contribute to about one-third of the research publications from this country. That their quality and performance is poor in most cases is accepted as a given today. It is evidenced by their poor performance in institutional rankings, the poor employment status of their students, rather poor quality of their publications, negligible presence in national-level policy/decision-making bodies, poor track record in receiving national awards and recognition, poor share in research funding and so on.

Commonly stated reasons for these observations include government/political interference in the management of the university, lack of autonomy, poor governance structures, corruption, poor quality of teachers, outdated curricula, plagiarism, poor infrastructure and facilities, overcrowding, evils of the "affiliation" system and poor linkages with alumni and industry.

While many of these observations are no doubt valid, they appear to be only the symptoms and consequences of some deeper malaise and not the underlying cause. For example, it is often said that you cannot expect much quality from these universities as they are run by the government. This is a fallacious statement since many of the HEIs like the IITs are doing relatively better than other institutions even though they are government institutions. Lack of a proper diagnosis of the problem has led to fragmented and ineffective approaches to improving the performance of state universities. An attempt is made here to identify a core causative factor for this malaise.

For a State contract

In order to receive much more funding and support from the State system then, State universities would have to commit to delivering lots more to the State and its people where they are located. They must come up with a new vision and programmes specifically addressing the needs of the State, its industry, economy and society, and on the basis of it make the State-level players commit to providing full ownership and support to them. In other words establish a contract between the State universities and the State system similar to what seems to be existing between the Central institutions and the Central government and other national-level stakeholders.

The initiative to start a larger dialogue on the future of our State universities would have to be taken primarily by the academic community of these institutions.

C.N. Krishnan is a retired professor of Anna University Chennai



NOTEBOOK

Waiting patiently for information during a pandemic

It is difficult to contact officials but getting accurate information is worth the effort

SERENA JOSEPHINE

For a reporter, not every phone call and not every effort to meet an official ends as expected. Our aim is to not only get information, but to get information that is accurate. Especially at a time like this, when we are at the centre of a global pandemic, no information can be published without ascertaining its accuracy first. Putting forth credible information is our most important responsibility.

These bulletins, released any time between 6 p.m. and 7 p.m. every day, have come in handy but they have limited information. There are many things that journalists need to know apart from what the bulletins provide. The bulletins tell us how many passengers have been screened at airports, how many patients are under quarantine in hospital, and how many are under quarantine at home. To get more information, we call or try to meet officials. However,

meeting them is almost impossible now, except at press conferences. I made a quick count of the number of calls I made to various officials of the Health Department over the past two-three days. They ranged anywhere between 10 to 15 calls. Many of these calls went unanswered; often, the number was busy. Apart from this, I have also been spending a lot of time simply staring at WhatsApp or SMS, fervently hoping that the official will reply to my messages.

Some officials do make life easy for journalists. They provide the right information at the right time. However, there are some who never do so. A reporter has to understand that he or she isn't the only journalist trying to reach the official; there are several others. And these officials, who form the core team working to control and prevent the spread of the disease, have a series of

meetings every day. Some of them do answer immediately or call back in between meetings, in hushed tones.

It is crucial to understand the seriousness of the ongoing global health crisis, and their role in tackling it. Journalists must remember that many public health officials and their teams, numbering hundreds, have been working across Tamil Nadu since mid-January. Every time I make a call, I ensure that I remember that he or she has a job at hand. Yes, it is important for them to provide information, but it is equally a responsibility for journalists like me to keep trying, to wait patiently to get authentic information.

The last few weeks have been challenging, especially in terms of reaching officials. These are days that cannot be planned until we are COVID-19-free. But it is worth the effort to keep dialling the officials.

The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 20, 1970

The UN and Rhodesia

The watered-down resolution on Rhodesia adopted by the Security Council shows clearly the limits to which the major Western Powers are willing to go. They will not do anything more than what they have been doing so far - and that has been quite ineffective - to bring the illegal Smith regime to heel. That they are not for throwing out that racist regime by force is implicit in the Anglo-American veto of the Afro-Asian proposal to condemn Britain for not having used force. The Council imposed economic sanctions a long time ago but it has not worked because many countries, particularly Portugal and South Africa, have found ways to circumvent it. The Council has now ordered diplomatic sanctions and the severance of all transportation to and from Rhodesia but these steps are not likely to be of any more value than the leaky economic sanctions. The Smith regime can count on continued help from Portugal and South Africa, even if all the other U.N. members should honour the Security Council's directive.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 20, 1920.

Franchise for Indian Women.

Mrs. Jinarajadasa writes: - I enclose a copy of a Resolution passed at a large representative meeting of the citizens of Wellington, the Capital of Zealand, on the 11th February. I shall be glad if you will publish the resolution and this letter, in your paper.

Since have been travelling through New Zealand and Australia I have found every where very great interest is taken by the people of these countries in the development of Indian women. There is invariably a good deal of ignorance as to the conditions in India, and a general idea that the women in India are a suppressed and uneducated class. I have, in each large centre that we have visited, held meetings, and a very great deal of interest has been shown, and the people have been astonished to find out how large a part the women play in the national life in India, and the interest that they have taken and the work that they have done in connection with their enfranchisement. The people in Australia and New Zealand feel that, if India is to be acknowledged as an equal by all the other parts of the Empire, the women of India must necessarily occupy the same position and status as the women in the other parts of the Empire, and, therefore, they feel that a measure of women's suffrage should be passed by the Indian Legislative Councils.

FROM PAGE ONE

SC orders floor test in Madhya Pradesh today

"Yes, the Governor cannot have a *carte blanche* to destabilise governments. But, equally, there is a modicum of authority with the Governor to call for a floor test," Justice Chandrachud said.

The two judges heard the submissions beyond court hours on Thursday and reserved the case at 5 p.m. They reassembled after an hour of discussion in their chambers.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, for the BJP, called the Speaker's decision on March 16 to adjourn the session because of COVID-19 a "humbug". "It was a budget session. It was regarding the finance of the State. It was adjourned even as the whole House was assembled for the session. Apparently, they discovered that coronavirus has come only at 12 o'clock that day!" Mr. Rohatgi said.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, for Mr. Kamal Nath, said the BJP "manufactured my minority".

PM calls for people's curfew, social distancing

He urged people to give up the attitude that all was well or that they would, somehow, escape the disease. "Since there is no firm treatment available for this virus, social distancing is the only thing to do. Therefore, give me a few weeks, and avoid going out unless it is strictly necessary," Mr. Modi urged the people.

He reiterated that enough supplies of necessities were available. "Therefore, I urge all of you to avoid panic buying and buy only as much as you would normally do."

Stating that the economic impact of the pandemic was significant and worldwide, Mr. Modi said he had set up a 'COVID19 Task Force' under Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to consult with stakeholders and come up with measures to address the crisis.

Appeal to employers

"This pandemic will hit our middle and lower middle class and our poor economically," he said, appealing to industrialists and employers to ensure that salaries of employees are not cut due to temporary shutting down of businesses and to take a "humane view" of things.

Mr. Modi also asked people to desist from routine check-ups and elective surgeries as hospitals would get overloaded. He urged senior citizens to stay indoors, stating "stay healthy to keep others healthy".

Virus toll touches five; first case from Gujarat

"The Ministry of Consumer Affairs has also been asked to take necessary action against anyone charging exorbitant prices for masks, sanitisers and other health-related logistic materials," Mr. Agarwal added.

The Ministry added that it was in advanced level talks with private labs that can help in testing.

Announcing a slew of measures, the Centre asked the State governments to enforce work for home for private sector employees, except those working in emergency/essential services. The States have also been requested to take steps to ensure that all citizens above 65, except for public representatives, govern-

ment servants and medical professionals, and children below 10 remain indoors.

Staggered timings

To reduce crowding in government offices, the Department of Personnel and Training on Thursday issued a fresh directive stating that only 50% of Group B and C employees should attend office every day, and the rest must work from home. They will be asked to attend office on alternate weeks, for which a duty roster will be drafted. Their office hours have also been staggered into three slots: 9 a.m. to 5.30 p.m., 9.30 a.m. to 6 p.m., and 10 a.m. to 6.30 p.m.

The instructions will remain effective till April 4.

As plea fails, 4 Nirbhaya convicts to be hanged

A five-judge Bench, led by Justice N.V. Ramana, on Thursday dismissed the curative petition of Pawan Kumar Gupta. "We have gone through the curative petition and relevant documents. In our opinion, no case is made out".

A three-judge Bench, led by Justice R. Banumathi, in

back-to-back decisions, rejected the writ petitions filed by Mukesh and Akshay. Mukesh had argued that there was "no proper consideration of evidence" in his case.

Late in the evening, Tihar Jail authorities said hanger Pawan and the Jail Superintendent took stock of the preparations.

Akhil Gogoi rearrested

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

Less than 48 hours after being granted bail by a special court of the National Investigation Agency (NIA), Assam peasant leader Akhil Gogoi was rearrested and taken to eastern Assam's Sivasagar on Thursday.

A team of Sivasagar police

took Mr. Gogoi into custody around 5:30 a.m. and left for Sivasagar, about 360 km east of Guwahati. He was lodged at the central jail there and would be in the custody of the Sivasagar police for four days. Mr. Gogoi was taken into custody for organising an "illegal assembly" of people in Sivasagar, the police said.

Kamal Nath govt. will face defeat, says Chouhan

Our MLAs have to take up a big responsibility now. The BJP bastion is strong: former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister

SIDHARTH YADAV
Bhopal

Hailing the Supreme Court order directing the Congress-led Madhya Pradesh government to take the floor test on Friday, BJP vice-president and former Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan exuded confidence that the government would face defeat, paving the way for a new regime.

"Satyamev Jayate! Truth has prevailed today, injustice has been defeated," Mr. Chouhan told reporters. "People's anger is taking the Kamal Nath government down. Our MLAs have to take up a big responsibility now. The BJP bastion is strong."

Confident that the BJP had the numbers, the former CM

said, "It will be proven on Friday that this government is in minority. Pressure tactics, allurement and threats, Mr. Nath and especially Digvijaya Singh have tried them. Today, they have been defeated."

Law Minister P.C. Sharma, however, expressed confidence the government would survive. "It will be a victory for the Kamal Nath government by all means. More hands will be raised for us in the Assembly," he said.

'Rebels must be heard'
Stating that the 16 rebel Congress MLAs in Bengaluru, who have reportedly pledged loyalty to the erstwhile Congressman-turned-BJP leader Jyotiraditya Scindia, "must be heard", Mr. Sharma said the Congress would take suggestions from lawyers representing it on the further legal recourse.

The embattled government is shored up by 92 Congress MLAs in Bhopal, while four Independents, two BSP members and the lone SP MLA have backed it in the past.

Even as the party tried desperately to woo back the 22 MLAs, who are currently in Bengaluru, the rebel members sent in their resignation letters through BJP leaders. The Speaker has so far accepted the resignations of six members, all of whom were Ministers in the government.

In the wake of these six re-



Shivraj Singh Chouhan

significantly, has 107 members in the Assembly. On whether the rebels would return to vote, Mr. Chouhan said, "It is for them to decide."

Revenue Minister Jitu Patwari, on the other hand, said it was crucial for the rebels to return and participate in the vote. "If they don't, it will be considered a murder of democracy. How will they face their voters after that? To protect democracy, they have to be here."

The Congress has contended that the MLAs had been held hostage in BJP-ruled Karnataka, where several attempts by Congressmen to reach out to them had been foiled by the State police. The rebels, in several videos on social media, have

ostensibly voiced their protest against the Congress government.

On Monday, when the Speaker adjourned the Assembly to March 26 in view of the coronavirus threat, the BJP paraded 106 of its MLAs at the Raj Bhavan to show the Governor that it had the numbers.

Meanwhile, Mr. Nath posted on Twitter: "We will study the Supreme Court's order and its every aspect, hold discussions with our legal experts, take advice, and based on that take a decision."

Congress chief whip Govind Singh has issued a three-line whip to all MLAs directing them to vote in favour of the government during the test.

Will back govt. in fight against virus: Cong.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Moments after Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the nation on COVID-19 on Thursday, the Congress said it would support "every initiative of the government to fight coronavirus".

The party also offered some specific suggestions, including getting ready for a complete lockdown if India faces community transmission.

Addressing a press conference, senior Congress leader Ajay Maken said: "We will fully back the government's efforts..."

However, CPI (M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury said the PM did not talk about the government's preparations. "Apart from the symbolism that PM proposed, what is the govt doing to mitigate the crisis faced by the majority of India that cannot 'work from home' and survive on their daily earnings?" he asked.

Trinamool leader Derek O'Brien called Mr. Modi's speech high on gimmicks.

Appointment has disgraced judiciary: Cong.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Former Chief Justice of India (CJI) Justice Ranjan Gogoi on Thursday took oath as a Rajya Sabha member amidst protests and walkout by Opposition parties. The Congress said his appointment had disgraced the Indian judiciary.

The ruckus began as soon as Chairman Venkaiah Naidu called out Justice Gogoi's name. Opposition parties, including the Congress, Left parties, the DMK and the MDMK, started raising slogans "Shame on You" and many screamed "Deal". Mr. Naidu ordered that the sloganning would not go on record. He attempted to bring order to the House but without avail. The Opposition parties staged a walkout even as Justice Gogoi was taking oath.

"We know the constitutional position; we know the precedents; we know the powers of the President of India. We should not do anything like this in the

House. Whatever views you have, you can express them outside; you are at liberty," Mr. Naidu said.

Justice Gogoi, 65, who retired in November last, took oath in English.

In defence
Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad rose to defend his government's decision to nomi-

nate Justice Gogoi citing the tradition of choosing eminent persons from diverse fields, including former Chief Justices by Congress governments in the past. "Hon'ble member Ranjan Gogoi, who has taken oath today will surely contribute his best as a nominated member. It was grossly unfair on their part to do like

that," Mr. Prasad told the Opposition.

Rangnath Mishra case

Minutes later, Congress leaders Anand Sharma and P. Chidambaram addressed a press conference outside the House. Mr. Sharma said Justice Gogoi's appointment raised bona fide questions about quid pro quo. "It has

lowered the very dignity of the office that he had or rather disgraced judiciary."

He said that examples like Rangnath Mishra, the 21st Chief Justice of India who gave a clean chit to the Congress in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, serving as a Rajya Sabha member of the Congress between 1998 and 2004 could not be compared to Justice Gogoi's appointment because there was a time lag between his appointment to the House and retirement. In the case of Justice Gogoi, the difference between his retirement and entry to the Rajya Sabha was just four months, he noted.

The Congress pointed out that Justice Gogoi himself had said that post retirement appointment or accepting any position would be a scar on the independence of the judiciary.

During Justice Gogoi's 13-month tenure, the Supreme Court delivered landmark judgement in the Ayodhya case, on the decriminalisation of homosexuality, the entry of women into Kerala's Sabarimala temple and the Rafale jet deal along with Assam's National Register of Citizens (NRC).

Don't avoid depositing before probe agencies citing session'

Venkaiah's remark comes in the backdrop of summons to MP



Venkaiah Naidu

ing him for making the position clear.

Will cooperate, says MP

Mr. Chandra on Monday tweeted, "I have been requested by ED to make a statement on the information which is already available with them. I will be more than happy to be personally present at their office, honouring their request, in order to extend all the required co-operation."

He added that the Essel Group which he heads, had never made any transactions with Yes Bank promoter Rana Kapoor or his family or for that matter any private entities controlled by them.

He was to appear before the ED to record his statement on Wednesday, but he did not appear citing the ongoing Parliament session.

Though Opposition

members, including Kerala's N.K. Premachandran, sought to move some amendments, these proposals were defeated by a voice vote. Three institutes would be part of the proposed conglomeration.

National tag for ayurveda institute soon

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha on Thursday passed a Bill that will accord the Jamnagar-based Institute of Teaching and Research in Ayurveda the status of 'institution of national importance' by clubbing the cluster of ayurveda institutes at the Gujarat Ayurveda University campus in Jamnagar.

Minister of State for AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy) Shripad Yesso Naik said people across the globe were now showing greater interest in ayurveda.

Is it a fact that the Jamia University has sent an assessment of ₹2.66 crore to government to compensate for the damage done by the Delhi police in its library?" SP MP Javed Ali Khan asked.

Drawing a parallel with the U.P. administration's announcement to make the protesters pay for the damage to public goods, Mr. Khan further enquired: "Since the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh has already booked the protesters for damage to public amenities,

Will police pay for Jamia library damage, asks MP

HRD Minister evades query from MP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Will the Delhi police pay for "vandalising" the library at Jamia Millia Islamia University on December 17, on the lines of the U.P. government's order to make the anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act protesters pay for the damage to public amenities, a Samajwadi Party MP asked HRD Minister Ramesh Pokhrayan on Thursday.

The Minister said the University Grants Commission funded all universities and would also be footing the bill in this case. "Universities are autonomous bodies and they have the right to act independently," he said.

'There's proof of attack'
Asking a supplementary question, Congress MP Rajeev Gowda asked if the government had plans to take any action against the Delhi police for attacking students at Jamia. "As HRD Minister, you are the protector of students in universities across the country. Here, in Jamia, we saw that the students were attacked. There is evidence out there which shows policemen damaging the CCTV to cover up the evidence. What action have you taken against these police personnel?" he asked.

The Minister said the matter was sub-judice and the government was not in a position to act against any body till the courts adjudicate on the matter.

New definition of MSMEs soon: Gadkari

Govts, PSUs owe crores to the sector: Minister

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Union Minister for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) Nitin Gadkari told the Rajya Sabha on Thursday that the government would come out with a new definition of MSMEs, which are currently defined on the basis of investment in plant and machinery, by the end of the ongoing session.

Congress member Jairam Ramesh had suggested that MSME units should be defined on the basis of turnover

as it would increase compatibility with the Goods and Services Tax (GST) system.

Responding to concerns raised by several MPs, Mr. Gadkari admitted that "there are problems" but asserted that the government was trying to convert those hurdles into opportunities. It had accepted 39 suggestions by the U.K. Sinha committee appointed by the Reserve Bank of India, including the setting up a "fund of funds" for the sector. The MSME sector currently contributed 24% of the GDP growth and 48% of exports, with an annual turnover of ₹1 lakh crore this

year. A target of ₹5 lakh crore in five years had been set, he said.

Among the hurdles before the sector was the pending payments by governments and public sector undertakings, which Mr. Gadkari estimated were ₹5.5 lakh crore to ₹6 lakh crore. These dues needed to be cleared in order to boost the sector.

He said he had made recommendations to help the sector in view of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic and that Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had called a meeting to discuss the same on Friday.



Nitin Gadkari

try that started on Wednesday, Mr. Gadkari said the government was working on the new definition.

Congress member Jairam Ramesh had suggested that MSME units should be defined on the basis of turnover

as it would increase compatibility with the Goods and Services Tax (GST) system.

Name of Patient: Muazzam Khan, 14 years
Hospital Name: Christian Medical College.
Diagnosis: Thalassemia Major (is a type of blood disorder).
The estimated cost of further treatment will be approximately Rs. 20,00,000/-
We request Kind Hearted Philanthropists to save him. Kindly send donation by Cheque

LS expresses concern over virus spread

Members ask government to bring back Indians who are stranded abroad

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha on Thursday reverberated with concern over the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the large number of Indians, students and others stuck abroad and also the racial profiling of those from the northeast as carriers of the virus.

COVID-19

As soon as question hour concluded, leader of the Congress legislative party in the Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Choudhary expressed concern over the handling of the virus and the fate of many Indian students and others stuck abroad. Trinamool Congress leader Sudip Bandopadhyaya too demanded that Prime



Safety matters: Congress leader P. Chidambaram and his son Karti outside Parliament on Thursday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Minister Narendra Modi make a statement in the House on the efforts to combat the pandemic. Mr. Modi will address the nation via television at 8 p.m. on Thursday.

Shiv Sena's Vinayak Raut referred to the 58 Indian students struck at the Singapore airport and urged the government to bring them home. He said of the 58, 25 are women and they should not remain stranded there. "We have conveyed these concerns to Prime Minister Modi also, as he met us this morning," said Mr. Raut.

As matters under rule 377 began, more and more members raised specific issues with regard to the pandemic. Raju Bista, BJP MP from Darjeeling, said his constituency sees a large

number of tourists but facilities for screening for the disease are not adequate. He raised the issue of racial profiling of people from the northeast as carriers of the disease.

"Lately we are seeing that people from the northeast with different facial features

are being singled out and racially profiled as carriers of the virus. I would like the government to give attention to this aspect as well," he said.

Sumalatha Ambareesh, MP from Mandya, said while the virus was a big challenge, combating rumours

circulating on social media was also a challenge. "This is the first pandemic in the age of social media and combating rumours is also important in the fight against the disease. I want to ask the government to set up a dedicated social media account just to bust rumours," she said.

Margani Bharat Ram of the YSRCP also raised the issue of Indian students stuck in the Philippines and said arrangements should be made to bring them back and put them in quarantine here.

The Congress members in the Rajya Sabha demanded that the Parliament session be deferred.

Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu said adjournment is no solution and that hand sanitizers have been given to people dealing with papers. Members are free to give suggestions, he said.

Mukesh Singh, 32, Pawan Gupta, 25, Vinay Sharma, 26, and Akshay Kumar Singh, 31, are scheduled to be hanged on Friday at 5.30 a.m. for the gangrape and murder of a 23-year-old physiotherapy intern on the night of December 16, 2012.

This is the first time that four men will be hanged together in the jail, South Asia's largest prison complex that houses more than 16,000 inmates.

Pawan Jallad, a hangman from Meerut, has reported to the Tihar jail authorities on Tuesday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Armed forces set up eleven new quarantine facilities

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

With coronavirus continuing to spread across the country, the armed forces have set up 11 additional quarantine facilities, in addition to the four presently in operation, the Defence Ministry said. These facilities can be made operational in 24 to 48 hours.

"There are four such facilities in operation at the moment, at Manesar and Jaisalmer, run by the Army; at Mumbai run by the Navy and at the Hindon air base run by the Indian Air Force (IAF)," the Defence Ministry said in a statement. In addition, more quarantine facilities are being readied



Soldiers have volunteered to provide care to people returning overseas.

and may be made operational within 48-72 hours, if needed, it stated.

These facilities are at Jodhpur, Kolkata and Chennai by the Army, at Visakhapatnam and Kochi by the

Navy and at Dundigal near Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Kanpur, Jaisalmer, Jorhat and Gorakhpur by the IAF.

The IAF had deployed C-17 Globemaster aircraft to evacuate a few hundred Indian nationals from COVID-19 affected countries and also some people from friendly countries like Maldives, Myanmar, Bangladesh, US, Madagascar, Sri Lanka, Nepal, South Africa and Peru. Several others were also brought in by Air India flights and quarantined at military facilities.

Evacuated people are being kept under quarantine for a period of 14 days under the supervision of medical authorities. "

All HoDs are advised to

draft a weekly roster of duty for Group B and C staff and ask them to attend office on alternate weeks," said the order.

While deciding the roster for the first week, the HoDs have been told to include officials who are residing in close proximity to their office or use their own transport to travel to the offices.

The working hours for all those who attend office on a particular day has to be staggered.

"The officials who are working from home on a particular day as per the roster drawn up should be available on telephone and electronic means of communication at all times," said the memorandum.

This will be followed by a dummy execution – a dummy or a bag of sand weighing 1.5 times the weight of the prisoner will be hanged and dropped between 1.830 and 2.440 metres to test the rope.

The execution, specifies the Delhi Prison Rules 2018, will take place in the presence of the superintendent, deputy superintendent, medical officer in

charge, resident medical officer and the district Magistrate or additional district Magistrate.

The body of the executed prisoner is disposed of according to the requirements of the religion.

It will be handed over to the family following a post-mortem.

An ambulance shall be used for the transportation of the body to the cremation

Tihar gets ready to execute all Nirbhaya case convicts

Four men will be hanged together for the first time

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI



Pawan Jallad, a hangman from Meerut has reported to the Tihar jail authorities on Tuesday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Nirbhaya's mother says she is relieved

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Wife of convict faints outside court

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Wife of Akshay Singh, one of the four death-row convicts in the Nirbhaya gang rape and murder case, fainted outside the Patiala House Court on Thursday saying that she and her minor son be hanged too.

"I want justice too. Kill me too. I don't want to live. My husband is innocent. Why is the society after us? We were living with the hope that we will get justice but we are being killed everyday for the past seven years," she said. The counsel for the victim's parents said however that the convict does not deserve leniency.

or burial ground.

On March 5, a trial court here issued fresh warrants for March 20 at 5.30 am.

Their executions were deferred thrice earlier.

The last hanging in Tihar was on February 9, 2013, when Afzal Guru, a resident of Sopore in north Kashmir, was executed at 8 a.m. and buried in the prison premises for his role in the terror attack on Parliament.

DoPT issues new directives for prevention

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) on Thursday issued another set of directives for government employees on preventive measures to contain the spread of COVID-19.

The orders will remain in force till April 4.

The fresh instructions have been issued in continuation of the office memorandum dated March 17.

"Heads of Department [HoDs] may ensure that 50% of Group B and C employees are required to attend office every day, and the remaining 50% staff should be instructed to work from home," said the order.

"All HoDs are advised to

draft a weekly roster of duty for Group B and C staff and ask them to attend office on alternate weeks," said the order.

While deciding the roster for the first week, the HoDs have been told to include officials who are residing in close proximity to their office or use their own transport to travel to the offices.

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charge, resident medical officer and the district Magistrate.

The body of the executed prisoner is disposed of according to the requirements of the religion.

It will be handed over to the family following a post-mortem.

An ambulance shall be used for the transportation of the body to the cremation

Anil Ambani appears before ED

Nine firms belonging to him owed ₹12,800 cr. to Yes Bank

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Reliance Group Chairman Anil Ambani on Thursday appeared before the Mumbai office of the Enforcement Directorate in connection with the investigations against the Yes Bank. Mr. Ambani left around 7 p.m. after nearly 10 hours of inquiries.

According to ED officers, summonses were issued to several leading businessmen who were found to have taken loans from the bank during the tenure of founder and former Chairman Rana Kapoor, now under arrest.

Sources said Mr. Ambani's company was among the biggest borrowers as well as non-performing assets (NPAs) of the bank, with its dues running into over



₹12,800 crore.

"We had issued a summons asking Mr. Ambani to appear on Monday, but he sought exemption citing personal reasons. We then issued a fresh summons asking him to come on Thursday," an ED officer said. The officer said nine companies belonging to Mr. Ambani had a debt of ₹12,800 crore to Yes Bank, as per a preliminary examination of the bank's financials.

Firm's statement

A statement released on Thursday evening by the Reliance Group said, "Mr. Anil Ambani met ED officials today [on Thursday] to clarify on the Reliance Group's exposure to Yes Bank. All transactions between the Reliance Group and Yes Bank are in compliance with the law and financial regulations." The statement said, "Mr. Ambani also clarified to the agency that Reliance Group has no direct or indirect exposure to Mr. Rana Kapoor or his wife or daughters, or any entities controlled by Mr. Rana Kapoor or his family."

Pakistan slammed for raising Kashmir issue

NEW DELHI

India slammed Pakistan on Thursday for raising Kashmir during a SAARC video-conference earlier this week, saying Islamabad "misused" the occasion as it was not a political platform, but a humanitarian one. A Pakistan Minister had called for an immediate lifting of the "lockdown" in J&K. PTI

Bid Submission (before):

07.04.2020 (17:00 hrs)

Contact Person: Mr. Rajesh Badhe

General Manager (AE-I)

Phone No.: 0129-2294453

Email: badher@indianoil.in

Visit <https://eprocure.gov.in/epublish/app> for details. Addendums/Corrigenda, if any shall be hosted on this website only.

IndianOil

CN - L2201MH1995GCI 011588

R&D Centre, Faridabad

Expression of Interest (EOI)

EOI No.: R&D/AE/2020/01

Name of Work: IndianOil R&D

intends to procure 5 Tons per day

segregated food and kitchen waste

for a minimum period of 30 days on

continuous basis.

Bid Submission (before):

07.04.2020 (17:00 hrs)

Contact Person: Mr. Rajesh Badhe

General Manager (AE-I)

Phone No.: 0129-2294453

Email: badher@indianoil.in

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BRUHAT BENGALURU MAHANAGARA PALIKE

Office of the Executive Engineer, Mahadevapura Division, Mahadevapura Zone, ITPL Main Road, Mahadevapura, Bangalore - 560 048.

No. : BBMP/EE/MD/TEND/12/2019-20

Date : 19-03-2020

INVITATION FOR SHORT TERM TENDER

(Through GOK e-Procurement Portal only)

The Executive Engineer, Mahadevapura Division invites Item Rate Tenders from eligible tenders registered in BBMP / CPWD / KPWD / Railways / MES / any State or Central Government Organisations for the works given below.

Sl. No.	Name of the Work	Approx. Amount Put to Tender (Rs. in Lakhs)	Reserve for SC / ST / Others	EMD (in Rs.)
1.	Development of Roads in Gundur Village Limits	50.00	Other	1,00,000/-
2.	Development of Roads in Byappanahalli Village Limits	30.00	Other	60,000/-
3.	Development of Lake Road via Punya Bhoomi Layout from Gundur Bidarhalli Main Road (Two Cover)	60.00	Other	1,20,000/-
4.	Development of Road from Avalahalli to Doddabanhalli Village via Bidare Agrahara (Two Cover)	100.00	Other	2,00,000/-
5.</				

Italy overtakes China's virus death toll

It records 3,405 deaths against China's 3,245; London faces shutdown, Queen heads for ancient castle

REUTERS
LONDON/BEIJING

Italy's death toll from the COVID-19 outbreak overtook that of China, where the novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, first emerged, on Thursday, as hospitals said they were being overwhelmed and the government prepared to prolong emergency lockdown measures.

A total of 427 deaths were registered in Italy over the past 24 hours, bringing the total nationwide tally to 3,405 since the outbreak surfaced on February 21. China has recorded 3,245 deaths since early January.

Limited testing

Officials and experts believe the total number of infections here is significantly higher, with testing largely limited to those arriving for hospital care. The country's large, elderly population, who are particularly vulnerable to the virus, is also seen as factor for the high number of fatalities.

COVID-19

"There's a high level of contagion and we're not even counting the dead any more," said Daniela Confalonieri, a nurse in Milan.

Underscoring the scale of the drama, 15 trucks and 50 soldiers were deployed to transport coffins to neighbouring provinces overnight from the northern town of Bergamo, northeast of Milan, whose cemetery has been overwhelmed.

With almost 2,28,000 infections and more than 9,200 deaths, the epidemic has stunned the world and drawn comparisons with painful periods such as Second World War, the 2008 financial crisis and the 1918 Spanish flu.

"This is like an Egyptian plague," said Argentinian hotelier Patricia Duran, who has seen bookings dry up for

her two establishments. "The hotels are empty – tourist activity has died."

Tourism and airlines have been particularly battered, as the world's citizens hunker down to minimise contact and curb the spread of the COVID-19. But few sectors have been spared by a crisis threatening lengthy global recession.

The virus has jumped to 172 other nations and territories with more than 20,000 new cases reported in the past 24 hours – a new daily record. Cases in Germany, Iran and Spain rose to over 12,000 each.

Britain, where death toll has risen to 144, was bracing for the virtual shutdown of London as underground train stations closed and schools prepared to shut their doors on Friday.

Some 20,000 soldiers were on standby. Queen Elizabeth headed for sanctuary in the ancient castle of Windsor, and the Tower of London was to close.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Thursday said Britain hopes to turn the tide on the virus within the next 12 weeks.

"At the moment, the disease is proceeding in a way that does not seem yet to be responding to our interventions," he told a news conference. "I do think, looking at it all, we can turn the tide within the next 12 weeks... but only if we all take the steps that we have outlined."

Liquidity taps opened

Policymakers in the U.S., Europe and Asia have slashed interest rates and opened liquidity taps to stabilise economies hit by quarantined consumers, broken supply chains, disrupted transport and paralysed businesses.

U.N. chief Antonio Guterres warned that a global recession, "perhaps of record dimensions", was a near certainty.



Keeping spirits up: A personal trainer giving out an exercise lesson to her neighbours from her balcony in Rome. Italians cannot leave their homes due to a lockdown. ■ REUTERS

Trump defends 'Chinese virus' label

KATIE ROGERS
LARA JAKES
WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump on Wednesday defended his increasingly frequent practice of calling the novel coronavirus the "Chinese Virus," ignoring a growing chorus of criticism that it is racist and anti-Chinese.

"It's not racist at all," Mr. Trump said, explaining his rationale. "It comes from China, that's why."

But the term has angered Chinese officials and experts

say labelling the virus that way will only ratchet up tensions between the two countries while resulting in the kind of xenophobia. Asian Americans have reported incidents of racial slurs and abuse because of the erroneous perception that China is the cause of the virus.

"The use of this term is not only corrosive vis-à-vis a global audience, including here at home; it is also fuelling a narrative in China about a broader American hatred and fear of not just

the Chinese Communist Party but of China and Chinese people in general," said Scott Kennedy, a China expert at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

Mr. Trump said that he was attaching "China" to the name of the virus to combat China's disinformation campaign.

"I didn't appreciate the fact that China was saying that our military gave it to them," Mr. Trump said. "I think saying that our military gave it to them creates a stigma." ■ NY TIMES

Spain toll soars nearly 30% to 767

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MADRID

Spain on Thursday announced that deaths from COVID-19 had jumped by nearly 30% over the past 24 hours to 767. The number of people who have contracted the disease has, meanwhile, grown by around 25% to 17,147.

U.S. reports 10,491 cases, 150 deaths

REUTERS
WASHINGTON

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Thursday reported 10,491 cases of COVID-19, an increase of 3,404 from its previous count, and said the death toll had risen by 53 to 150, the biggest one-day jump so far.

One person dying every 10 minutes in Iran

REUTERS
DUBAI

One person dies of COVID-19 every 10 minutes and 50 get infected from the virus in Iran, Health Ministry spokesman Kianush Jahangir tweeted on Thursday, as the death toll climbed to 1,284, with 149 new deaths in past 24 hours.

ELSEWHERE



Pompeo says U.S. citizen detained in Iran freed

WASHINGTON
U.S. citizen Michael White, who was under detention in Iran since 2018, has been released on Thursday on medical furlough, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said. The U.S. Navy veteran is now in the custody of the Swiss Embassy. "He will undergo medical testing and evaluation," he added. ■ REUTERS

SpaceX plans first manned flight to space

WASHINGTON
SpaceX will send astronauts to the International Space Station for the first time in May, NASA said, announcing the first crewed launch from the U.S. to the platform since 2011. Elon Musk's firm will launch a Falcon 9 rocket to transport NASA astronauts in a first for the space agency as it looks to cut costs. ■ AFP

Sri Lanka parliamentary elections postponed

Government declares 'work from home' week

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's general elections, which was scheduled to be held on April 25, have been postponed in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak.

It was not possible to hold polls amid the coronavirus crisis, Chairman of the Election Commission of Sri Lanka told media persons on Thursday, when the number of positive COVID-19 cases in the island rose to 59.

A new date for the polls will be announced in the coming weeks, officials said.

A public holiday has been in force in Sri Lanka this week and on Thursday, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa declared a "work from home" week until March 27 for both, the public sector and the private sector. The mea-



Operation clean-up: Sri Lankan government soldiers spraying disinfectant at a railway station in Colombo. ■ AP

sure, a statement from his office said, sought to prevent congregation of people.

The Tamil National Alliance, the main grouping of parties representing Tamils of the north and east, welcomed the Election Com-

mmission's decision to postpone polls in light of the global pandemic that hit Sri

Lanka last month. The TNA, along with several fellow opposition parties, had urged authorities to put off the elections to help the country focus on combating the viral disease.

Sri Lanka has suspended all international flight arrivals until the end of next week.

Losses leave Sanders with no realistic path to nomination

Joe Biden has now amassed a huge lead in delegates needed to clinch the nomination after winning the Arizona, Florida and Illinois primaries

SYDNEY EMBER
REID J. EPSTEIN

Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont was reassessing the future of his presidential bid on Wednesday after a crushing round of primary losses left him with no realistic path to the Democratic nomination and the 2020 race itself was on hold because of the coronavirus outbreak.

Mr. Sanders' campaign has stopped actively advertising on Facebook, and his campaign manager sent an email to supporters without asking for donations – the kind of steps that sometimes precede the end of campaigns. His aides say Mr. Sanders is not suspending his bid, even as some Democrats

have become increasingly vocal that he should consider leaving the race.

The party's front-runner, Joe Biden, has now amassed a nearly insurmountable lead in delegates needed to clinch the nomination after winning the Arizona, Florida and Illinois primaries on Tuesday. Mr. Biden has swept so many States and attracted so many demographic groups that Mr. Sanders has little left to go on besides his political message and his passionate base of liberal supporters.

Some Democrats said that with the delegate outlook so bleak, and with a deadly pandemic gripping an anxious nation, Mr. Sanders risks ap-

pearing self-centred and out of step if he insists on pressing ahead.

"Bernie is getting beat by 30 and 40 points – it's over," said Rep. Don Beyer of Virginia, who has endorsed Mr. Biden. "This is the adult thing to do – knowing when it is time to disappear."

Mr. Sanders, who has not said when he will make an announcement about his future, was testy on Wednesday when asked by a CNN reporter about his plans, suggesting his sole focus should be on the virus.

"I'm dealing with a global crisis," he said at the Capitol. "You know, we're dealing with it, and you're asking me these questions."

"Right now, I'm trying to do my best to make sure that we don't have an economic meltdown and that people don't die," he added. "Is that enough for you to keep me busy for today?"

Some Democrats said Mr. Sanders had already accomplished a great deal by promoting his liberal policy agenda. Yet they warned that staying in the race could damage the coalition he has

China hits a milestone: no new local COVID-19 infection

Government hails the efficacy of its top-down bureaucracy

JAVIER C. HERNÁNDEZ

China on Thursday reported no new local infections for the first time since the COVID-19 crisis began three months ago, reaching a milestone in its battle with the deadly outbreak that has upended daily life and economic activity around the world.

As governments in Italy, the U.S. and elsewhere grapple with the pandemic, China has hailed its success as evidence of what can be achieved when a vast, top-down bureaucracy that brooks no dissent is mobilised in pursuit of a single target.

If Thursday's numbers are more than a statistical blip, it would represent a remarkable turnaround for the Chinese government, which drew widespread public outrage when officials initially concealed and mismanaged the outbreak, even punishing the doctors who sought to raise the alarm.

Those missteps, critics say, allowed the virus to spread uncontrolled across the city of Wuhan in central China, forcing the government to impose draconian travel and quarantine restrictions over hundreds of millions of people that could have been avoided.

While Beijing's sledgehammer approach – seen by many as a brutal experiment unprecedented in size and scope – worked to quickly lower the number of infections, the price in human trauma and economic loss was severe.

And China is not out of danger from a revived contagion and instability. A vast swath of the country's populace has been embittered by how the ruling Communist Party has handled the scourge. Questions have been raised about the accu-



Safe zone: Medical practitioners embracing as they prepare to leave Wuhan for their homes on Thursday. ■ AFP

racy of China's statistics. And even if zero local infections has been achieved, that does not mean zero new cases.

Officials said on Thursday that 34 new cases had been confirmed among people who had arrived from elsewhere, pointing to how difficult it will likely be for China – or any country – to keep the virus completely out.

Within China, many provinces and cities have essentially shut themselves off to travellers, raising the question of whether the virus will re-emerge once such barriers are lifted and people begin criss-crossing the country again.

Fear of a second wave

"It's very clear that the actions taken in China have almost brought to an end their first wave of infections," said Ben Cowling, the head of the division of epidemiology and biostatistics at Hong Kong University's School of Public Health.

"The question is what will happen if there's a second wave because the kind of measures that China has implemented are not necessarily sustainable in the long term."

China's leader, Xi Jinping,

had called for a "people's war" against the epidemic, and the party's propaganda outlets have in recent weeks hailed the party's response as a success and a model for other countries.

At what cost?

The party's approach has also come at a great cost to civil liberties and economic livelihoods, and some critics have questioned whether it would be viable in open societies where personal freedoms are fiercely protected.

In recent days, fear of the virus and pressure from the public to take stronger measures has pushed democratic governments such as Italy, Spain and France to impose stringent lockdowns on citizens, strategies that some countries were hesitant to adopt just weeks ago.

The longer-term effects of such policies have been particularly evident in Wuhan and Hubei province, where more than 50 million people have been subject to severe restraints since late January.

"The question is what will happen if there's a second wave because the kind of measures that China has implemented are not necessarily sustainable in the long term."

China's leader, Xi Jinping,

An amendment approved last week would allow Mr. Putin to run for another six years in the Kremlin in 2024 and again in 2030. The reforms will be subject to a public vote.

When asked what he foresees past 2024, Mr. Putin deferred to the perspective of "people's sentiments... what people want."

"The primary source of power is the people," he said. "It's very important for me to feel and understand what people want."

"Tsar is one who just sits there, looks down from above and says: 'They will do as I order,' while he just tries on a cap and looks at himself in the mirror," Mr. Putin said.

"On the contrary, I work every day."

Tulsi Gabbard quits race, backs Biden

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

U.S. Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard dropped out of the Democratic presidential nomination race on Thursday and endorsed rival Joe Biden as flag bearer in the election against President Donald Trump.

"Today, I'm suspending my presidential campaign and offering my full support to Vice-President Joe Biden in his quest to bring our country together," the lawmaker said. "Although I may not agree with the V-P on every issue, I know that he has a good heart, and he is motivated by his love for our country and the American people."



Losing ground: Senator Bernie Sanders leaving the U.S. Capitol in Washington on Thursday. ■ REUTERS

built since 2015.

"It's time to throw in the towel knowing that he has won the battle of issues," said Wilbur Colom, a Democratic National Committee member from Mississippi who formerly supported Michael Bloomberg. "The Democratic Party has moved within inches of his revolution on all major issues."

Yet 26 States, territories and the District of Columbia have yet to hold primaries and caucuses, and there are still 1,399 delegates left to be awarded. With the primary season essentially on hold because of public health concerns, it could be at least two months before Mr. Biden accumulates enough to secure

the nomination. DNC rules require a presidential nominee to accrue 1,991 delegates, and Mr. Biden cannot win those delegates if States don't hold their primaries.

But if Mr. Sanders does quit, Mr. Biden would be free to move on to focus on the general election, President Donald Trump and the national challenges posed by the virus.

"Bernie is not running a campaign so much as leading a movement," said Winston Apple, a DNC member from Missouri who supports Sanders. "He will be a more effective leader for our movement if he remains in contention throughout the process." ■ NY TIMES

MARKET WATCH

	19-03-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	28288	-2.01
US Dollar	75.12	-1.16
Gold	40718	0.08
Brent oil	26.18	0.11

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	258.35	-2.05
Asian Paints	1601.20	-17.00
Axist Bank	428.25	-45.20
Bajaj Auto	2166.60	-2.40
Bajaj Finserv	5785.50	-524.70
Bajaj Finance	2746.10	-315.25
Bharti Airtel	444.75	19.20
BPCL	300.25	-32.30
Britannia Ind	2318.15	-183.80
Cipla	374.70	-11.30
Coal India	123.55	-21.50
Dr Reddy's Lab	2623.95	-44.50
Eicher Motors	15046.45	-907.70
GAIL (India)	69.40	-1.45
Grasim Ind	491.05	-36.00
HCL Tech	413.45	-20.80
HDPC	1617.60	-4.95
HFDC Bank	895.55	18.65
Hero MotoCorp	1712.45	31.30
Hindalco	99.75	-9.45
Hind Unilever	1838.30	-85.50
ICICI Bank	338.55	-16.50
IndusInd Bank	444.05	-16.75
Bharti InfraNet	124.05	-25.85
Infosys	545.55	11.25
Indian Oil Corp	87.95	0.35
ITC	161.85	11.15
JSW Steel	163.30	-1.05
Kotak Bank	1210.85	38.90
L&T	843.10	-61.45
M&M	314.20	-32.20
Maruti Suzuki	4819.55	-533.10
Nestle India Ltd.	13120.30	-416.50
NTPC	78.35	-2.20
ONGC	61.05	-7.10
PowerGrid Corp	147.15	3.00
Reliance Ind	917.70	-50.80
State Bank	203.65	-1.20
Shree Cement	17731.45	-1562.50
Sun Pharma	360.40	-2.35
Tata Motors	72.95	-2.55
Tata Steel	271.85	-9.00
TCS	1636.35	-18.05
Tech Mahindra	530.00	-49.65
Titan	903.50	-27.25
UltraTech Cement	3166.05	-137.50
UPL	296.75	-25.10
Vedanta	69.35	-3.60
Wipro	162.35	-7.60
Zee Entertainment	141.20	-22.90

EXCHANGE RATES		
Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on March 19		
CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	74.79	75.11
Euro	80.76	81.11
British Pound	86.77	87.15
Japanese Yen (100)	68.11	68.41
Chinese Yuan	10.51	10.56
Swiss Franc	76.66	77.00
Singapore Dollar	51.60	51.84
Canadian Dollar	51.66	51.90
Malaysian Ringgit	16.94	17.02

Source: Indian Bank

It may take 6 months for normalcy: CII

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BENGALURU

India Inc. may require at least three to six months to restore normalcy and business continuity after the entire course of the COVID-19 event is over, says Vikram Kirloskar, president, Confederation of Indian Industry.

"All of us are facing a tough challenge. Overall, things are not looking good. All industrial segments are suffering. Small-scale industries are under severe pressure. Large industries can't run without ancillary companies and supply chain support."

"Stock markets are down globally. The rupee is under attack," Mr. Kirloskar told *The Hindu*.

However, he said, "The good news is that, the Indian government has been handling the issue very sensibly, right from the beginning, compared with other affected geographies. Some say India is the safest place today."

IBA frames business continuity plan for banks

Lenders told to relocate top officials

MANOJ SAHA

MUMBAI

The Indian banking sector has been advised to take adequate preparations for any eventuality amid the spread of COVID-19, with the Indian Banks' Association (IBA) issuing norms for banks, including staggering of duties and back-up of essential services.

Since the MD and CEO as well as executive directors are located in the head office, banks have been advised to relocate top officials in different offices in the unforeseen event of quarantining the entire building.

Banks have been asked to monitor key installation centres such as data centres holding the core banking solutions, ATM switch, treasury and SWIFT operations centre, among others. Key officials managing these installations have been ad-

Fuel sales drop on virus impact

People now commuting less; ATF sales hit as more international flights cancelled

PIYUSH PANDEY

MUMBAI

Sales of sensitive petroleum products such as petrol and diesel have dropped in March compared with February as more people stay back at home to prevent COVID-19 from spreading.

Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOC), India's largest fuel retailer, has witnessed a 10.92% fall in sales of diesel and a 1.74% drop in sales of petrol across its retail outlets in India in March compared with February.

IOC's diesel sales had fallen by 1,84,071 kilo litres (KL), or 10.92%, to 15,00,965 KL as on March 18 compared with a sales of 16,85,036 KL from February 1-18.

Similarly, its petrol sales reduced by 13,492 KL, or 1.74%, to 7,60,629 KL as on March 18 compared with a sales of 7,74,121 KL from February 1-18. Aviation turbine fuel (ATF) sales have



IOC saw a 10.92% fall in diesel sales and a 1.74% drop in sales of petrol in March compared with February. ■ S. RAMBABU

come down in March by 7%.

"During the period between March 1 and 17 (compared with February 1 and

COVID-19

17), IOC's ATF sales are down by about 7%. It is expected to drop further in the coming days if the present scenario continues," a source in the

know of the development told *The Hindu*. Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited's (BPCL) aviation business has been more impacted on falling ATF sales as it services more international flights, which witnessed higher cancellations in March.

"The fall in the sales of sensitive petroleum products was sharper in the last

one week and is likely to fall at a faster rate in the coming weeks as more and more people are staying back at home to avoid getting affected by the virus," said an oil marketing company board member.

Double-digit decline

BPCL and BPCL have also seen double-digit decline in diesel and ATF sales.

R. Ramachandran, director, refineries, BPCL, told *The Hindu*, "We have seen a double-digit fall in diesel and ATF sales in March so far due to COVID-19 impact. Petrol is marginally up now but will also become negative by the end of this month, if the trend continues."

The decline in sales comes even as prices of petrol had fallen by over ₹6 a litre and diesel by about ₹7 a litre since January 2020 on the back of plummeting global crude oil prices.

Rupee breaches 75 to a dollar, hits record low

Bond yields harden despite OMO plan

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The rupee tumbled past the 75-to-a-dollar mark on Thursday for the first-time ever as foreign investors continued to pull out of emerging market economies following the spread of COVID-19 that has put global economic growth at risk.

The rupee opened weak at 74.96 to a dollar compared with the previous close of 74.26 and went on to hit 75.31 a dollar. Currency dealers said state-run banks had been spotted intervening on behalf of the central bank, helping the currency stem losses.

The rupee closed the day at 75.12, down ₹0.84 or

1.16%. The rupee weakened despite the sharp fall in oil prices over the last few days and a narrowing current account deficit. "The rupee remains under tremendous pressure given the fallout of COVID-19," said Hitesh Jain, lead analyst, Yes Securities.

"On the rupee outlook, we see the rupee in the range of 74-76 for the next 1-2 months," he added.

The weakness in the currency market spilled over to the bond market with the yield on the 10-year government bond jumping 11 bps to 6.41%. Bond yields hardened despite the RBI saying it would buy bonds worth ₹10,000 crore on Friday,

He said developers would face the daunting task of servicing interest outflows amid constrained cash inflows,

Real estate sector likely to suffer big jolt

'New sales may be hit badly amid surge in loan defaults and cash constraints'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The spread of COVID-19 in India and the resultant restrictions imposed by government authorities to contain it is expected to impact the real estate sector significantly, say developers and analysts.

"In the mid-term, it is expected that new sales will be badly impacted and there will be a surge in default by customers. This will certainly have a cascading effect on the repayment of loans availed by customers and developers," said Sanjay Daga, chief operating officer, Runwal Developers.

He said developers would face the daunting task of servicing interest outflows amid constrained cash inflows, which come along with it in the coming months," he added. Farshid Cooper, MD of Spenta Corporation, said the disruptions in the business cycle are bound to impact the demand for commercial as well as residential real estate.

"People are avoiding stepping out of homes and hence there is a dip in walk-ins across all residential projects too. Investors, as well as end-users, are opting for a 'wait and watch' policy amid the pandemic," he said.

Too early to predict

"While it is too early and difficult to predict the exact impact on the realty market, we need to wait for the full

economic cycle and implications that come along with it in the coming months," he added. Farshid Cooper, MD of Spenta Corporation, said the disruptions in the business cycle are bound to impact the demand for commercial as well as residential real estate.

"People are avoiding stepping out of homes and hence there is a dip in walk-ins across all residential projects too. Investors, as well as end-users, are opting for a 'wait and watch' policy amid the pandemic," he said.

Commenting on the issue Nirajan Hiranandani, national president, Naredco, said, "The pandemic menace has hit at a particularly sensitive time, that of the financial year closing. Across real estate companies, this is the time when statutory payments and streamlining of balance sheets happen."

He said this year's festive occasion of Gudi Padwa/Ugadi might see a drop in launches and delayed deal closures, following a direct effect on site visits by potential buyers.

Crisil cuts FY21 GDP growth forecast to 5.2%

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Crisil has cut India's GDP growth rate forecast for FY21 citing financial sector stress and COVID-19 impact.

Crisil, while observing that domestic consumption demand may take some hit, said it was too early for it to get reflected in data.

"Currently, the other downside to growth is also due to the financial sector stress now percolating to private sector banks. In view of this, Crisil has cut its base-case GDP growth forecast for fiscal 2021 to 5.2%, from 5.7% announced recently," it said, adding the forecast will be reassessed continuously as new information becomes available.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BENGALURU

constituents lost ground. During intraday trades, the benchmark fell below the psychological 8,000-mark to touch a low of 7,832.55, which was also touched on November 9, 2016 – a day after demonetisation was announced.

On the BSE, more than 1,800 stocks lost ground on Thursday as against 549 gainers, as investor concerns over the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to keep the markets in a bear grip and foreign investors continue their selling activity unabated. As per provisional numbers, foreign investors were net sellers at nearly ₹4,623 crore.

Yes Bank yet to use RBI's credit lifeline

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

After the moratorium was withdrawn from Yes Bank on Wednesday at 6 p.m. the troubled lender, so far, has not drawn from the creditline provided by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), indicating the bank is having sufficient liquidity to tide over the initial bout of cash withdrawals.

The RBI had sanctioned ₹59,000 crore for Yes Bank under the section 17(4) of the RBI Act that allows the central bank to give loans to lenders in lieu of securities. Sources said if Yes Bank were unable to meet cash withdrawal demands on its own, then the limit would have been used. They said initial trends suggested the bank was able to meet cash withdrawal demand and there was also a good amount of



Rajinikanth's debut TV show will be launched first on streaming app Discovery Plus

GAUTAM SUNDER

Joining the OTT platform race in the country is now infotainment giant Discovery with the launch of its streaming app Discovery Plus, that will lock horns with the other binge-watching mediums that already exist in India today. The difference? Everything is unscripted.

"We come from a background of providing 25 years of factual entertainment, and our content is hugely valued by our loyal audience. In the recent past, we have also focused on localisation, and now our programmes are present in several regional languages as well. While the television network continues to be in demand, why enter the OTT space now? We realised that over 40-odd streaming websites existed, but they all provided only scripted entertainment. At the most, some had a few shows that cater to the unscripted segment, but there was no dedicated platform," explains Megha Tata, managing director, South Asia, Discovery.

The app launched earlier this

week with an introductory offer of ₹299 per year, and has been curated specifically for India. Offerings include marquee programmes from Discovery's massive library of content such as Bear Grylls (*Running Wild with Bear Grylls, Man vs Wild*), Josh Gates (*Expedition Unknown*); kid-friendly shows like *Through the Wormhole* with Morgan Freeman, and more.

"Our content is replenished every year, and the aim is for it to reach Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities as well, where consumption on OTT platforms are increasing too," adds Tata.

The Discovery Plus app is instantly pleasing to the eye, and the easy-to-use and accessibility features indicate the level of design and insight that has gone into its making. Says Isaac John, business head - digital (South Asia), Discovery, "The app has been formulated to allow discoverability of content, as nobody has the time to wade through hours of shows. We have features such as '#MindBlown', which is a curated destination featuring learning focused collections of kids-friendly

science and wildlife content, and 'Shorts' that will feature hundreds of free short-form videos that will satisfy the emerging Indian mobile user looking for infotainment on the go."

The offerings are spread across 40-plus genres, including Science, Adventure, Food and Lifestyle, in 8 languages including Hindi, English, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Bengali and Marathi. The content will be curated from brands such as Discovery Channel, Animal Planet, BBC, TLC, Discovery Science, Discovery Turbo, ID, Food Network, HGTV, Cooking Channel, Travel Channel, DIY Network, MotorTrend and VICE.

John also says, "We put in about two months of user research, another two-and-a-half-months to design the architecture, and then another eight months of coding before we finalised the app. We also didn't want the price point to be a barrier for the Indian user, and came up with a figure that is economical and among the cheapest when we compare it to other platforms."

The line-up for Discovery Plus' premium content across all key

A different outing
Rajinikanth and Bear Grylls during the shoot ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

genres includes its much-anticipated *Into the Wild with Bear Grylls and Rajinikanth, Coronavirus: The Silent Killer, MythBusters, Wild Karnatka* and *Project Runway* among others. In fact, Rajinikanth's TV debut show will be launched first on Discovery Plus at 6 am on March 23 much before the television premiere which is at 8 pm. Discovery Plus will also have exclusive videos including *Behind The Scenes* for the Superstar's fans.

"After the unprecedented response to PM Narendra Modi's episode with Bear Grylls, we were looking for other big names to participate in this adventure. We reached out to Kavithalaya to collaborate with Rajinikanth sir," says Tata. He agreed to the proposal immediately, a television debut for him after 43 years. "What an absolute trooper he was! The episode will speak volumes about his commitment to his craft of entertaining people, a never-before seen avatar."

HOMING IN



Staying indoors for a while? We have you covered. For your weekly **Watching List**, actor Kalyani Priyadarshan shares the list of films and TV series that she re-watches every year for comfort, a tradition formed over the last six years. "Every year I binge-watch until the entire series is over. Then I start the next. I'm the kind of person that would re-watch any of these than try my luck with a new film or series no matter how many people recommend," she laughs.

PRADEEP KUMAR



The Office (US TV series)

Watching *The Office* is a tradition for me and my best friend in America. He can quote every line from every episode though.

Ocean's trilogy films

The first time I watched *Ocean's* was with all my friends when I was very young. Why I love watching it has to do with the fact that the first few times I watched it were all great memories. It was at great points of my life.



Seinfeld

I love to rewatch *Seinfeld* because it reminds me of my time in New York, and I seriously miss it so much. If I knew this (COVID-19) would happen, I'd have waited and watched. So annoyed now!

PRADIP KUMAR

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Harry Potter franchise

This one is for obvious reasons. The Harry Potter films made me fall in love with cinema. Once my dad (filmmaker Priyadarshan) went to shoot in France and brought back a full series Blu Ray set. It was the first time Blu Ray had come out. My brother and I binge-watched it, and since then, we do it every year.

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



PRODUCTS

Saree story

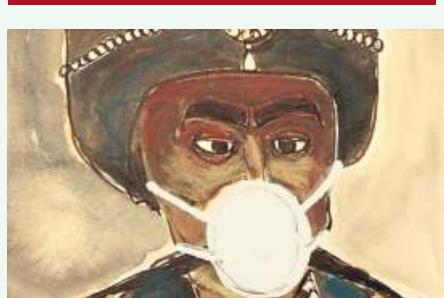


Label Earthen has introduced its latest collection of saris, called Theatre, inspired by the different moods and emotions that come up on stage. The colour palette ranges from white and pastels to jewel tones and black. Silk, organza, Chanderi, Mangalgiri, and velvet are some of the fabrics used, with Zardozi, gotta, foil, and appliqués as some of the embellishments.

Available on Instagram @labelearthen; ₹16,900

Contact us at delhimetro@thehindu.co.in

5 EVENTS WORTH YOUR WHILE



EXHIBITION

Solo art
The ongoing art show titled *Reminiscence of India, Past and Present*, showcases the recent works of French artist Michel Testard. The show presents various themes Michel has explored, such as portraits of people, forts and ruins, Indian music, landscapes, all rendered in figurative and abstract styles.

VENUE: Art Indus Gallery, Chanakyapuri

TIME: 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.



FOOD

Sushi menu

Youmee, an Asian cuisine restaurant inspired by Food Manga, is celebrating a Cherry Blossom Festival with a special Sushi menu. On till 31st March and curated by chef Rattan Kumar, the menu promises dishes such as Mushroom Truffle, Crunchy Misaki with Salmon and Tuna Cream Cheese, and Teriyaki Chicken Rolls.

VENUE: M-27, Ground Floor, Greater Kailash II

TIME: 11 a.m. - 11:30 p.m.



THEATRE

Comic act

Dribble Cafe in Gurugram is hosting *Rakh Usko*, a Hinglish stand-up comedy show by Keshwan Vishal tonight. A chartered accountant, Keshwan has been practising as a full-time comedian for the past three years. His jokes are child-friendly and he will present freshly written as well as work-in-progress material.

VENUE: DLF Phase 3, Sector 24

TIME: 7:30 p.m. - 9 p.m.



F&B

Asian special

RYU, an Asian-themed bar and diner in Gurugram has introduced 50 signature cocktails with its Asian street food menu. Inspired by the food culture of Japan, China and Malaysia, the menu offers Asian delights such as Mongolian Crispy Chicken, Crispy Lamb Sesame, Kappa Maki Sushi, Spicy Pork Dimsums and Indonesian Lamb Curry.

VENUE: National Highway 8, Sector 15

TIME: 12 noon - 12 midnight



EXHIBITION

Group show

DAG's group art show called *The Fifties Show: Works of Indian Modernism*, revisits a period when the best and brightest in the Indian art world created some of their most magnificent masterpieces. The exhibit features the work of artists like Nandalal Bose, M. F. Husain, S. H. Raza, F. N. Souza, G. R. Santosh and K. K. Hebbar.

VENUE: Claridges, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam Road

TIME: 11 a.m. - 7:30 p.m.

House of sparrows

With social distancing now the norm, a Delhi artist is taking her work to social media

MADHUR TANKHA

With public areas shutting down in the wake of the Coronavirus spread, and people staying home, artists are using social media like they would a gallery space. There are the stills being streamed of course, but also short yet informative videos, with an emphasis on educating people about the arts.

Today, on World Sparrow Day, Rupa Samaria, a sparrow lover who operates from her Shahpur Jat studio, will showcase her acrylic-on-canvas paintings on Instagram (@rupasamaria) and a short film on Facebook (look for A Bird Call).

"Today's generation may not be as familiar with the house sparrow, fondly called *chidiya* by Delhi-wallahs who grew up in 1970s and 1980s. Sadly, with rapid urbanization, these tiny house guests have vanished from our lives. The sparrow is not just a bird but a sentiment attached to the place we call home. To recreate this sentiment, I am showcasing five of my best sparrows on social media," says Rupa. Her paintings have touch sensors that play the bird sound via a tiny speaker, which she will demonstrate online.

With a heavy heart, Rupa cancelled her second solo show, A Bird Call, to take place at the Visual Arts Gallery of India Habitat Centre hours after the Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's announcement that no social event with more than 50 people would be allowed.

Rupa feels that people can forge



C The sparrow is not just a bird but a sentiment attached to the place we call home

connection with her paintings as they have been inspired from real life experience of watching house sparrows building nests on fans of her home at Patna's Boring Canal Road. When she moved to Delhi in 1993, wondering what the new city would have in store for her, she was pleasantly surprised when she was greeted by sparrows in the morning hours. "Those days I was at Greater Kailash. This hide and seek with sparrows continued for 10 years."

The bird was declared Delhi's state bird in 2012 by then Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit.

Her interest in birds was kindled when, as a teacher at the American Embassy School in Delhi, she accompanied students of Class V to Ranthambore for four years in a row. She took a number of photographs during these trips. This exposure drove her to bring alive birds on canvas.



Bird art (Clockwise from left) Painting of a house sparrow, female and male sparrows, Rupa Samaria
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ICONIC RESTAURANT

Juicy kebabs, since 1955

At Delhi's Amar Jyoti, everything is refreshingly old-fashioned: business ethics, the ambience, and good-old Punjabi favourites like *seekh kebab* and *dal tadka*



SANGEETA KHANNA

the restaurant was established on the same spot a decade later.

Swarn Kaur is over 90 now; back then, she was the one who cooked, while her husband served the guests and handled the cash counter. Her husband worked at a big hotel in Pakistan before Partition and they got into the food business once they came to Delhi. They soon earned enough money to own the whole space and open a restaurant with 30 seats. Government employees living in colonies around the market were their regular customers, and would pay for meals on a monthly basis. This arrangement went on till the mid-1980s. Tanmeet's father, Sardar Surjit Singh Arora, tells me that Amar Jyoti is the only restaurant that has been there from the early days of the market.

As I settled down, I noticed a family of four, who at a table loaded with dishes, were talking about how they had been craving the mutton masala, *seekh kebab* and *dal tadka*. So naturally, I ordered the same, with tandoori *rotis*. I spotted *gurde kapoore* at yet another table, and ordered that as well. Everything is rustic, and yet refined in terms of flavours.

It is this rustic nature, and the presence of such old-fashioned dishes like *gurde kapoore* and *magaz masala* along with the roadside dhaba-style *dal tadka*, that defines this place.

Amar Jyoti is in its third generation; more than 50 decades old. Their Punjabi menu has not changed since the beginning.

They did expand twice, and the menu was tweaked a couple of years ago to include a few Indo-Chinese dishes to cater to present-day Sarojini Nagar shoppers, but their USP has always been Punjabi home-style food. In fact, some of the offal-based dishes on the menu have become so rare to find in other places, that it's worth doing the trek to the market just for these. There's also kebabs, mutton *masala*, butter chicken, and tandoori fish *tikka* to choose from.

I meet Tanmeet Singh Arora, the third generation proprietor of the restaurant. According to him, the restaurant was started by his grandfather, the late Sardar Mohinder Singh and his grandmother Sardarni Swarn Kaur. The couple set up a brazier and *tawa* counter in 1955, and

The restaurant has maintained consistency in quality and affordability, and in the mid-1990s, added 13 more seats, with a more efficient kitchen and additional staff members, most of whom have worked here for a long time.

In fact, all their recipes have been perfected by Swarn Kaur, who used to cook and supervise actively until three decades ago. She has trained the cooks herself. Sardar Surjit Singh says Swarn Kaur was a purist in terms of recipes and cooking methods. The family still procures the spices, lentils and grains from the same vendor, as they have grown to trust him over the years. This old-fashioned business ethic is evident in the way the food tastes and how it is served at Amar Jyoti. The *rotis* and *parathas* are still made with stone-milled whole wheat flour, the spice blends are freshly made at home in bulk and then brought to the kitchen.

Now, the next time you go to Delhi and want a real good Punjabi meal of *dal tadka*, tandoori *rotis* and *botis*, do step into Amar Jyoti, and be sure to be transported to a different era.

In this column, we take a look at some of the most iconic restaurants

POOCH CAFE



PEANUTS



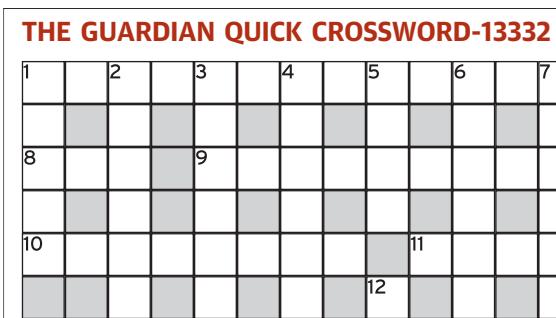
HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



CALVIN AND HOBBES



TIGER



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

Liguria region of Italy (7)

12 Potency (8)

13 Arm bone (7)

15 Dog – tooth (6)

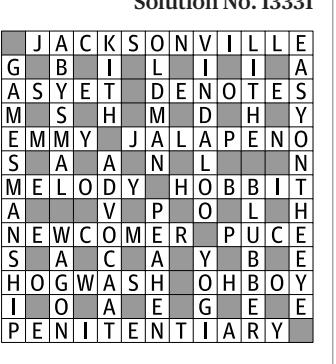
18 Type of duck (5)

19 Liquid food (4)

The solution will appear on March 21, 2020.

Solution No. 13331

WUMO



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■ Across

1 Japanese professional

sport – mustering owls

(anag) (4,9)

8 Pro (3)

9 Before league games

begin (9)

10 Norwegian polar

explorer, d. 1928 (8)

11 Hurt (4)

13 Keep silent (4,2)

14 Walkout (6)

16 Appearance (4)

17 Gob (informal) (8)

20 Logic (9)

21 Eccentric (3)

22 Horse that jumps

(13)

■ Down

1 Bulgarian capital (5)

2 French libertine, d.

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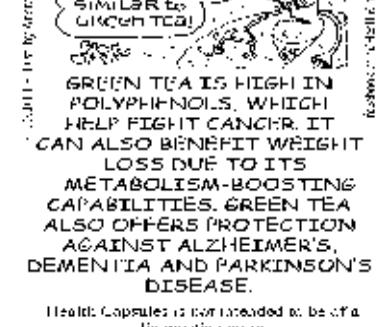
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PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



Health Capsules is contributed by Brian Smith, a registered dietitian.

Olympic flame handed over to Japan

Ceremony staged inside an empty stadium; IOC insists Games will go ahead as planned

TOKYO 2020

REUTERS
ATHENS

Tokyo 2020 organisers received the Olympic flame in a scaled-down handover ceremony in the Greek capital on Thursday, amid the coronavirus spread that has cast doubt on the global, multi-billion dollar event.

In a brief ceremony closed to spectators in Athens' Panathenaic Stadium, site of the first modern Games in 1896, the torch was received by Tokyo Games representative Naoko Imoto.

Greece's Olympic Committee chief Spyros Capralos handed over the lit torch to the Japanese former Olympic swimmer Imoto in front of empty stands inside the vast 50,000-capacity horseshoe-shaped marble stadium.

Only a few dozen officials were allowed into the central Athens stadium as the country has imposed strict measures to contain the spread of the virus.

The flame was then transferred into a small receptacle to travel to Japan aboard a special aircraft named "Tokyo 2020 Go."



Solemn ceremony: Tokyo 2020 representative Naoko Imoto, right, receives the Olympic flame from Greek sports minister Spyros Capralos in the Panathenaic Stadium. ■ REUTERS

Domestic relay
The flame will arrive in Japan on Friday and kick off a domestic relay on March 26, with the Games set to take place from July 24-Aug. 9.

The relay will start from Fukushima Prefecture, site of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, and will last for 121

days. It is planned to end at the Games' opening ceremony with the lighting of the Olympic cauldron.

A six-day torch relay through Greece was cancelled last week, with the country largely in lockdown having recorded 418 cases of the virus and five deaths.

The eerie mood during the ceremony, which nor-

mally attracts thousands of Athenians and visitors, reflected the problems facing Tokyo 2020, with athletes and national Olympic committees questioning whether the Games should be held this year.

The scale of the spreading coronavirus, which has infected more than 200,000 people and killed more than

8,700 across the world, has forced the cancellation of numerous sporting events, raising concerns about whether the Olympics will be able to open as planned.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Japanese government, however, have insisted the Games will go ahead and have publicly rejected any talk of cancellation or postponement. Despite the IOC's commitment to the Games, several athletes have cast doubt on the quality of competitions in Tokyo, given that thousands cannot train at the moment due to restrictions placed upon them in many countries.

Lifting the spirits

Tokyo Games chief Yoshiro Mori said in a video message he hoped the flame's arrival would help lift Japan's spirits.

"Tokyo 2020 commits to be in readiness for the Games as planned..." Mori said. "The concept of the Tokyo relay is 'Hope lights our way'."

"I hope that the light will shine on the hearts of people all over Japan and that will shake off the dark clouds hanging over the earth."

Tokyo Games could be delayed: Coe

World Athletics chief says postponing to 2021 could present problems

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LAUSANNE

World Athletics chief Sebastian Coe admitted on Thursday that the Tokyo Olympics could be moved to later in the year by the coronavirus outbreak, but said it was too early to make a definitive decision.

Olympic bosses acknowledged on Wednesday there was no "ideal" solution as a growing number of athletes expressed concern.

International Olympic Committee chairman Thomas Bach said earlier this week that starting on schedule on July 24 remained the organisation's goal.

But Coe, who is a member of the Tokyo Olympics Games Coordination Commission, conceded in an interview with the BBC that a delay was possible.

"That is possible, anything is possible at the moment," said Coe when asked whether the Games could be postponed to September or October.

"But I think the position that sport has certainly ta-



Sebastian Coe. ■ FILE PHOTO

ken, and it was certainly the temperature of the room in the conversation I had the other day with the IOC and our other federations, is that nobody is saying we will be going to the Games come what may."

"But it isn't a decision that has to be made at this moment."

Coe said postponing the Games until 2021 could present problems.

"That seems on the surface of it an easy proposition, but member federations actually avoid Olympic years often to have their World championships," he said.

Indian GP cancelled

STAN RAYAN
KOCHI

The Indian Grand Prix, the season-opener scheduled to be held in Patiala on Friday, has been cancelled. Surprisingly, the Athletics Federation of India officially went into silent mode about it.

The Government's note on Thursday, advising against holding any sports events till April 15, could be the reason for the cancellation. It means all the three Indian GP legs and the Federation Cup are either cancelled or postponed.

Another letter from the Sports Authority of India, dated March 18, to the AFI on the three IGP legs, to be held at the SAI-NIS centre in Patiala, virtually shut the door on the events.

Apart from mentioning that no competition will take place at the SAI, it also states that the SAI will not allow any outsiders (including technical officials) into the campus for the purpose of conducting the Grands Prix in order to protect the athletes.

Despite repeated attempts, AFI president Adile Sumariwalla could not be contacted for his comments.

COVID-19 IMPACT

Better if Olympics is postponed: Gopi Chand

NEW DELHI

Badminton coach P. Gopi Chand believes that the Tokyo Olympics should be postponed given the unprecedented crisis that the world is facing due to COVID-19. "I think, with the health scare and all the travel restrictions, it is a tough time. Given the situation, it will be better if the Olympics are postponed," said Gopi Chand. PTI



Dutch, Spanish and Monaco F1 GPs put off

PARIS

The Dutch, Spanish and Monaco Formula One Grand Prix races were on Thursday postponed due to the global spread of coronavirus, officials announced. The triple postponements follow the cancellation of the season-opening Australian GP last week, and the postponement of the Chinese, Bahrain and Vietnam GPs. AFP



Warne's gin company to make hand sanitisers

SYDNEY

Spin legend Shane Warne has stated that his gin distillery, SevenZeroEight, has decided to produce hand sanitisers for hospitals, amid the growing mayhem caused by COVID-19. "Shane Warne and his founders, which included 2 prominent WA surgical specialists, decided to stop production of their award-winning SevenZeroEight gin to shift to producing medical grade 70 per cent alcohol hand sanitiser until further notice," said the press release, shared by Warne on his Instagram page. IANS

English football extends shutdown till April 30

LONDON

England's Premier League and Football League postponed the current season until at least April 30, following a video conference meeting on Thursday. The FA, Premier League, EFL and women's professional game bodies, along with players and managers associations, agreed to extend the formal end-date for the 2019/2020 season "indefinitely" in a bid to try to complete the campaign. IANS

must not panic and fall in the trap of fake news in its battle to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, urging people to follow WHO guidelines to stay safe. "We currently face a big battle against an opponent that is spreading its reach across the globe."

"At times like this, it's most important that we each play our part in the community and ensure we contribute to a healthy society," the tennis player tweeted. "Let's be responsible citizens, and beat this together," he said. PTI

Affected Olympic preparation, the minister said, "nobody should raise a question about the Olympics at the moment as nobody knows what the situation will be in three months' time. However, we have to respond to an emerging situation as per the directions of the international bodies and respective sovereign governments."

He noted that at the moment nothing was more important than a sportsperson's health.

Silver defends NBA over virus tests

LOS ANGELES

NBA commissioner Adam Silver defended the league's swift testing of players for the new coronavirus on Wednesday as the vast majority of Americans face long waits to be tested for the disease. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio slammed NBA teams for being able to access COVID-19 tests. Silver defended the decision to test players, saying the NBA was acting on the advice of public health authorities. He added that the league had acted

swiftly after the initial cluster of positive cases. "I honestly don't have a sense of how long a period this is going to be," he said when asked about the league's hiatus. AFP



No ATP and WTA tournaments until June 7

WASHINGTON

All men's and women's professional tennis tournaments through June 7 are being called off because of the coronavirus pandemic. The ATP and WTA announced that the entire clay-court circuit "will not be held as scheduled." The Tours had said last week they would suspend play until late April or early May. The tournaments affected include combined men's and women's events in Madrid and Rome, and the French Open, among others. AP

Nobody should raise a question about Olympics'

Government suspends all sporting events till April 15

VIJAY LOKAPALLY
NEW DELHI

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government on Thursday directed all sports organisations and their affiliate units against holding any events, including competitions or selection trials till April 15.

Athletes preparing for the Olympics may be exempt, subject to the following restrictions: no exposure to athlete be allowed from outside in the campus where training is underway and no coach,



Kiren Rijiju. ■ PTI

technical/support staff, athlete etc. presently in the training camp and not staying in the training

campus be allowed to interact or mingle with trainee athletes without following the quarantine protocols.

Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju said that any athlete arriving from outside India, having visited a country falling in a high-risk zone for the virus, will have to stay in quarantine as per provisions. Athletes coming from abroad outside this zone will have to self-isolate themselves, Rijiju declared.

Speaking on how the current situation has

Alexander Grischuk splitting the point.

That left Caruana, Wang, Nepomniachtchi and Vachier-Lagrave as the early leaders, with 1.5 points each.

Twelve rounds remain. The winner of this eight-player tournament will become eligible to challenge World champion Magnus Carlsen later in the year.

The results (second round):

Fabiano Caruana (US) 1.5 bt Kirill Alekseenko (Rus) 0.5; Ian Nepomniachtchi (Rus) 1.5 drew with Alexander Grischuk (Rus) 1; Wang Hao (Chn) 1.5 drew with Anish Giri (Ned) 0.5.

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (Fra) 1.5 bt Ding Liren (Chn) 0.

Vachier-Lagrave hands Ding another defeat

Second setback for the No. 2 seed from China

CANDIDATES CHESS

SPORTS BUREAU
YEKATERINBURG



Caught off-guard: Ding Liren, right, could not match a coldly calculative Maxime Vachier-Lagrave's moves. ■ FIDE

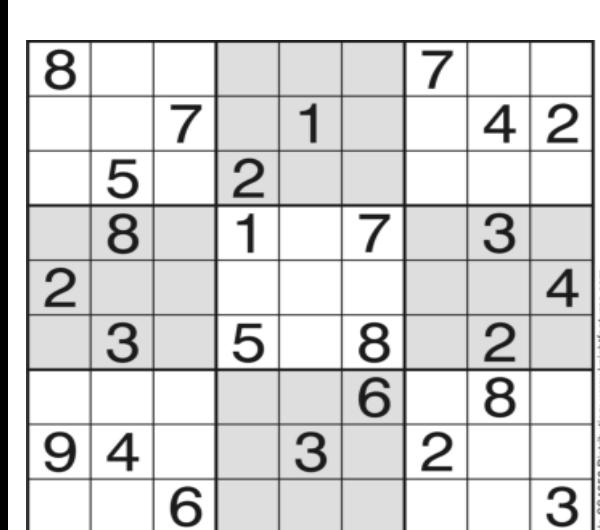
interesting games saw Anish Giri of the Netherlands showing superb fighting spirit against Wang.

The Dutchman drew from

a difficult position, thus avoiding what would have been a second straight loss.

The day also saw Russians Ian Nepomniachtchi and

SUDOKU



Solution to puzzle 12887

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All beings are overwhelmed by the appearance of the world that appeals to them in many ways. Early in life, the tendency to yield to individual likes and dislikes takes root to such an extent that many have no time to contemplate other issues. The Gita states that this engagement with raga and dvesha builds continuous stress in one's life, and keeps one away from enjoying the benefits of peace of mind which is each one's entitlement. In a discourse, Swami Nirvishesananda drew attention to the fact that it should be understood that detaching from likes and dislikes is not going to confer anything like eternal happiness in this world. But when one does not cling to what he likes and does not hate what he dislikes, he can gradually gain the freedom to enjoy stress free life.

One may think that marrying the partner of one's choice or getting established in a reputed workplace is the greatest attainment. At best domestic harmony may prevail or one may earn an attractive salary or gain name or fame from his vocation. Still, one continues to live in this same world, with the same set of senses that tend to seek the sense objects. For neither the work one does, nor the world around can confer happiness.

Ab

Foreign participation rule may be tweaked

Proposed formula for domestic competition to be widely discussed: Kushal Das



New horizon beckons: I-League champion Mohun Bagan has earned a slot in the AFC Cup for three years. ■ FILE PHOTO

FOOTBALL

NANDAKUMAR MARAR
MUMBAI

Professional Indian football clubs entering Asian Football Confederation (AFC) tournaments next year is a privilege that comes with the need to bring about changes in step with rules and regulations in force at regional competitions.

3+1 formula

AFC follows the 3+1 formula when it comes to number of foreign players – four in the playing squad, one of whom should be from an AFC affiliate association.

This is different from AIFF's 'five foreigners' rule.

Reducing one foreign player each will automatically bring more Indians in to play – four foreign + seven Indian in place of the current five + six ratio.

The impact of foreign players on Indian football

became a topic of discussion after National chief coach Igor Stimac raised the issue of the absence of quality strikers to step into Sunil Chhetri's boots, when the latter retires.

AIFF general secretary Kushal Das replies to questions on the foreigners issue in an exclusive email interaction. Excerpts:

On three Indian clubs (FC Goa, ATK-Mohun Bagan, Chennaiyin FC) competing in Asian club football from 2021 It is a wonderful chance for Indian clubs to make a mark and improve India's Asian ranking.

I hope the clubs take advantage and prepare diligently. India is currently ranked 20th in Asia, down from 10th in 2019 because of the indifferent performance of Indian clubs in AFC competitions.

It is important that clubs prioritise performances in Asian events.

On AFC's 3+1 stipulation

The super trio

■ ISL Season-six league topper FC Goa gets direct slot into AFC Champions League 2021 group stage

■ I-League champion ATK-Mohun Bagan in AFC Cup as special dispensation for three years

■ ISL Season-six finalist Chennaiyin FC makes AFC Cup play-offs

We are in discussions to find the right mix for home tournaments.

It would be ideal to follow the AFC rule, but certain considerations like quality of play, fan engagement, attendances and TV viewership need to be kept in mind.

We (AIFF) will discuss the issue with all stakeholders and come up with an appropriate rule before the beginning of the next season.

(Reliance and Star India

are co-promoters of the league, supported by the national federation).

Shouldn't the AIFF take the lead and nudge the ISL organising body into introducing the 3+1 rule?

The ISL's six seasons have been very beneficial for Indian football.

We need to have detailed discussions to find the right structure. We plan to do it before the next season and whatever is decided will be applicable to all top level club football in India.

How will reducing the number of foreigners in the playing XI affect the quality of club recruits?

I think that should be quite obvious. Having fewer, but better, foreign players will not only raise the standard of play but also help Indians develop, get more opportunities and game time.

These are all part of discussions we plan to have with the stakeholders.

Bhavani returns after WC in Belgium is cancelled

She could have sealed a place for the Tokyo Olympics

FENCING

S. DIPAK RAGAV
CHENNAI

Indian fencer Bhavani Devi could have sealed a place for the Tokyo Olympics had the scheduled World Cup event in Belgium gone ahead this weekend.

But the event was cancelled because of the Coronavirus pandemic and the fencer returned to Chennai just in time before restrictions on travel from the European Union came into force.

Bhavani, ranked World No. 45 in the Sabre category, is now in the second spot in the Adjusted Official Rankings category from Asia with a fairly comfortable cushion over her closest competitor Aigerim Sarybay of Kazakhstan.

In good position
With most of the team ranking spots sealed, she is in a good position and a decent result in Belgium would have been enough.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, the Chennai-born fencer said, "If things are frozen here now, I will qualify for the Olympics, which will be great. We don't know when the tournaments will resume."

If the Belgium event happens and her results are not enough, she will have another opportunity at the Asian continental qualifiers that is supposed to be held in April.

The 26-year-old has been based out of Italy, working



Bhavani Devi.
■ FILE PHOTO: B. VELANKANNI RAJ

under coach Nicola Zanotti in Livorno, and was contemplating returning to base from Belgium where she was having a camp before the tournament.

However, after Italy went into a lockdown she had no option but to return home even though the place she is based in is not affected much by the pandemic.

With very basic facilities for fencing in India, Bhavani has to focus on doing some fitness and rehab exercises until she is here.

"Right now I can't do much with everything shut till March 31 and I am isolating myself inside my house as a precaution."

"Also, I don't have enough sparring partners here with most of them only kids. I can focus on my fitness and some footwork practise but you can't do that for more than an hour."

"It is not ideal preparation in an Olympic year but at the same time it is pretty much the same for every athlete across the world."

KARNATAKA POWER CORPORATION LIMITED (RAICHUR THERMAL POWER STATION)

TENDER NOTIFICATION

(Two Cover System) (Through e-Procurement Portal only)

Tenders through e-procurement portal mode are invited from the contractors/agencies that are reputed individuals/ Company and having past experience for the following works at RTPS.

Sl. No.	NIT No.	Name of the Works	Amount put to tender
1.	KPCL/2019/20-PS/WORK_INDENT 9612	Overhauling of air pre-heater and rectification of flue gas ducts from eco outlet to AFPH inlet of 1X250 MW Unit # 8 Boilers for the year 2019-20 (OH-1).	₹15,24,130/- EMD: ₹38,500/-
2.	KPCL/2019/20-PS/WORK_INDENT 9673	Overhauling of ID fans, FD fans, PA fans, Scanner air fans & hoists of 1 X250 MW Unit # 8 Boiler for the year 2019-20 (OH-2).	₹9,45,244/- EMD: ₹24,000/-
3.	KPCL/2019/20-PS/WORK_INDENT 9674	Overhauling & servicing of high pressure valves, Overhauling & assisting in floating of safety valves, Overhauling of boiler drum & other expander/storage tanks of boilers of 1X250 MW Unit # 8 Boiler for the year 2019-20 (OH-3).	₹13,27,616/- EMD: ₹33,500/-
4.	KPCL/2019/20-PS/WORK_INDENT 9675	Overhauling of Electrostatic Precipitator s and flue gas duct from APV outlet to chimney inlet, Cleaning/recitation of air ducts and servicing/repairs of Guillotine gates, Hot air shut off gates, Cold air shut off gates, Cold and Hot air dampers of 1 X250 MW Unit # 8 Boiler for the year 2019-20.	₹12,68,131/- EMD: ₹32,000/-
5.	KPCL/2019/20-PS/WORK_INDENT 9677	Overhauling of coal and oil firing equipments and reconditioning of eroded coal nozzle tips & coal nozzle castings of 1 X250 MW Unit # 8 Boiler for the year 2019-20 (OH-5).	₹15,14,103/- EMD: ₹38,000/-
6.	KPCL/2019/20-PS/WORK_INDENT 9679	D Meter survey of boiler tubes/bends and replacement of eroded tubes/bends in first pass of 1 X250 MW Unit # 8 Boiler for the year 2019-20 (OH-6).	₹18,45,514/- EMD: ₹46,500/-
7.	KPCL/2019/20-PS/WORK_INDENT 9680	D Meter survey of boiler tubes/bends, replacement of eroded tubes/bends, inspection/recitation/ replacement of shroudings/ cassette baffles of tubes/bends in second pass of 1 X250 MW Unit # 8 Boiler for the year 2019-20 (OH-7).	₹8,63,151/- EMD: ₹22,000/-
8.	KPCL/2019/20-PS/WORK_INDENT 9682	Repairs to Refractory, replacement of damaged insulation & Repairs/ Replacement of SS wire mesh at the bottom of the Furnace (Inside the bottom ash hopper) of 1 X250 MW Unit # 8 Boiler for the year 2019-20 (OH-8).	₹9,87,438/- EMD: ₹25,000/-
9.	KPCL/2019/20-PS/WORK_INDENT 9685	Erection, operation and dismantling after completion of work of sky climbers & hydraulic lifting of 1 X250 MW Unit # 8 Boiler for the year 2019-20 (OH-9).	₹6,65,132/- EMD: ₹17,000/-
10.	KPCL/2019/20-PS/WORK_INDENT 9686	Overhauling of wall de-slaggerms LRSBs, FPTs, Overhauling /servicing of auxiliary water pumps, Cold setting & servicing of hangers, buck stay beams; Ash/ dust cleaning & removal of scrap of 1 X250 MW Unit # 8 Boiler for the year 2019-20 (OH-10).	₹7,07,041/- EMD: ₹18,000/-

Last date for submission of Bids: 24.03.2020, 16.00 Hrs. Date of Opening of Technical Bid: 26.03.2020, 16.30 Hrs. Date of Opening of Price Bid: 27.03.2020, 16.30 Hrs. Interested bidders may submit the bids through e-Tendering website: www.eproc.karnataka.gov.in only. The detailed notification regarding subject enquiry in the e-procurement process can be obtained by logging on to Gok e-procurement website: https://eproc.karnataka.gov.in. Further details can be had from the office of the Executive Engineer (BM-2) RTPS, KPCL, Shaktinagar-584 170,Raichur (District). Mob: +91 94495 97973.

Govt. hikes cash awards for medallists

Coaches' rewards also increased; AISCD welcomes move

DEAFOLYMPICS

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

and ₹15 lakh respectively for deaf athletes.

Achievements

Over the years, there have been remarkable achievements in the Deaflympics by Indian athletes.

In the last Deaflympics held in Samsun, Turkey, Viresh Singh won the men's 74 kg wrestling gold. Diksha Dagar won the golf silver, while wrestlers Ajay Kumar and Sumit Dahiya had won the bronze medals.

It has been a long-standing demand of the All India Sports Council of the Deaf to treat the achievement of its athletes on par with sportspersons who compete in the Olympics and Paralympics.

As per the circular dated March 11, the gold, silver and bronze medals in the Deaflympics will be awarded ₹75 lakh, ₹50 lakh and ₹25 lakh respectively.

Moreover, World Championship medals, for events held in the four-year cycle, will fetch ₹40 lakh, ₹25 lakh

and ₹15 lakh respectively for deaf athletes.

ment. I am applying for the cash award for my medal," said Prithvi, who trains in Chennai with coach Suresh Kumar Sonachalam.

Prithvi also noted that the Asian championships had not yet been listed for the cash awards for deaf athletes.

Incidentally, wrestler Viresh Singh had won two golds and a bronze in the earlier editions of the Deaflympics from 2005.

He had also won gold, silver and bronze medals in the World championships.

The AISCD had also sought in the past, the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna award for athlete P.K. Jaison of Tamil Nadu who had won a gold and two silvers in long jump and triple jump in the Deaflympics in Bulgaria in 1993 and in Denmark in 1997.

Coaches at the grassroots, developmental and elite levels would also be given cash

awards, at the rate of 30% to 40%.

The cash award for the coaches would be 50% of the cash award for the athlete, for individual medals.

However, the government order categorically states that spouse, father, mother, brother and sister of sportspersons would not be eligible for cash awards, as coach.

Avoiding delay

To avoid delay, the Sports Authority of India will accept applications directly from the medal-winning sportspersons in the prescribed format, along with attested copies of certificates wherever available apart from bank account details for money transfer.

For coaches, applications will be forwarded by National Sports Federations to the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.

We need to wait and watch: Jinson Johnson

Middle-distance runner's Olympic qualification still up in the air

V.S. ARAVIND
CHENNAI

and trained under Scott Simons.

He later returned to India and began rehab at HN Reliance Foundation hospital in Mumbai. Jinson is currently training at the Sports Authority of India (SAI) complex in Bengaluru.

"My training hasn't been affected much and despite the outbreak and growing concerns, I am still adhering to my routine. It's difficult as there is no clarity when the qualification will happen but at the same time, I cannot afford to relax," he said.

"I am really worried about my qualification but we really cannot do anything in this hour. We need to wait and watch," Jinson told *Sportstar* from Bengaluru on Thursday.

Having suffered an injury to his Achilles heel tendon last year, the Asian Games gold medallist travelled to Colorado Springs in the USA



Jinson Johnson. ■ FILE PHOTO

hopeful of participating in invitational tournaments and qualify from there. Middle-distance running is all about fitness and in middle-distance I know how to pace my race. I am training hard and SAI is taking care of us really well with excellent facilities. "I just hope life returns to normalcy soon and the Games happen," he said.

If all the meets are cancelled, the last option available for qualification is through the rankings, which will determine who gets to

compete in the Games. However, with no events happening, the chances of participating in additional meets to improve the ranking are bleak. "I know my ranking is not that great and I am hopeful I will get a chance to qualify," said Jinson.

The qualification cut-off for Tokyo is 3:35.00s and Jinson's personal best is 3:35.34s.

"I know I am a tad short of the mark but I am confident of qualifying. Athletics is all about fitness and in middle-distance I know how to pace my race. I am training hard and SAI is taking care of us really well with excellent facilities. "I just hope life returns to normalcy soon and the Games happen," he said.

SOUTHERN RAILWAY CONSTRUCTION ORGANISATION

E-TENDER NOTICE No. E148-CN-TPJ-TF-026 Date: 17-03-2020

For and on behalf of President of India, the Deputy Chief Electrical Engineer (General), Construction, Southern Railway, Egmore, Chennai - 600028 invites e-tender for the work of Nagappattinam - Tirurapuundi New BG Line - Electrification of station buildings, Platforms and LC gate lodges including power supply arrangements etc in the Nagappattinam (Exc) and Tirurapuundi (Exc) - Works Contract with the above tender notice. Date of tender opening of the tender is 11.30 Hrs of 15.04.2020. All other details of this tender are available in www.reps.gov.in website.

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With an intent to celebrate excellence in writing, and in an effort to remain undeterred despite challenging times, *The Hindu Lit for Life* is readying to announce the winners of *The Hindu Prize 2019* for Fiction and Non Fiction. Economic challenges made it near impossible for *The Hindu Lit for Life* to see light of day this year. But, we are already prepping up to emerge stronger, and deliver for you, an unforgettable experience at *Lit for Life 2021*. Meanwhile, stay tuned and watch this space as we recap the Shortlists for *The Hindu Prize 2019*, and introduce you to its winners, thereafter!

