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NEARBY



635 new COVID-19 cases; Minister's staff infected

NEW DELHI
Delhi reported 635 new COVID-19 cases in the past 24 hours, taking the total to 14,053, said a government health bulletin. A person working at Health Minister Satyendar Jain's camp office has tested positive.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

North India reels under intense heatwave

NEW DELHI
Several parts of north India reeled under an intense heatwave with many districts in Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh posting temperatures over 45 degrees Celsius.

NORTH & EAST ▶ PAGE 4

Heavy rain hits five Assam districts

GUWAHATI
Heavy rain has affected more than 30,000 people in five districts of Assam. Goalpara is the worst affected with 89 villages inundated. Other flood-hit districts are Darrang, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 11

Deliberations on to end LAC tensions

+ India and China deploy more troops

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

Deliberations are continuing on a daily basis between military commanders of India and China on the ground, in addition to other channels of communication, to resolve the situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), official sources said on Monday.

The other area that continues to see major tensions is the Galwan Nalah area with tensions at two to three points. A road branching from the 255 km Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldi road towards the Galwan Nalah seems to be the reason for Chinese objections. "This stand of China is not tenable as the Galwan area has never been a point of contention earlier," multiple sources said. This amounted to a change in the status quo and would not be acceptable to India, they said.

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Discussions were on daily at different levels on the ground, including at the Brigade Commander and Division Commander levels, the sources said. However, tensions continue at various places along the LAC with both sides digging in with reinforcements, and a wait and watch situation was unfolding, the sources stated.

The green top hill above the finger area of Pangong Tso (lake) seems to be the latest friction point, with re-

ports stating that 18 Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) personnel from a larger patrol party were detained by Chinese soldiers. However, the Indian Army on Sunday denied any such "detention".

They tied the knot late on Saturday (May 23) night beside a check-gate at Sagolia on the Assam-West Bengal border.

It was a minimalist ceremony. About 20 persons, including priests from both sides, were present along with local MLA Ashwini Ray Sarkar.

The couple's parents had thought of deferring the marriage. But the horoscope came in the way; priests said it would be now or never.

"Besides, there was no certainty when normal life would return to organise the marriage at home as we



Safe journey: Passengers coming out of the airport in New Delhi on Monday. ■ V.V. KRISHNAN

Rower & West Bengal from 28 May, these numbers are all set to increase further," Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Puri tweeted on Monday.

Wary passengers
However, in a possible sign of reluctance among passengers to travel in the times of

COVID-19, occupancy was sparse with just 25%-50% seats filled. This has come as a surprise to the airlines as it was felt that there might be pent-up demand for travel, especially from people stranded in different States.

But many of those who did decide to fly despite the

tough protocols and health guidelines were hard hit by last-minute changes and cancellations. Airlines had their hands full reworking flight schedules and facing passenger cancellations.

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EDITORIAL ▶ PAGE 6

Working away the blues



Employees busy at work in a small-scale unit at the SIDCO Industrial Estate in Coimbatore on Monday. Factories are operating with curtailed staff strength amid the continuing COVID-19 lockdown. ■ M. PERIASAMY

A marriage midway on the Assam-West Bengal border

Groom travels 175 km and bride 55 km for minimalist wedding beside an entry check-gate

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

Assam's Kajol and West Bengal's Om Prakash expected a routine union when their marriage was fixed six months ago. But the lockdown literally turned it into an event on the edge.

They tied the knot late on Saturday (May 23) night beside a check-gate at Sagolia on the Assam-West Bengal border.

It was a minimalist ceremony. About 20 persons, including priests from both sides, were present along with local MLA Ashwini Ray Sarkar.

The couple's parents had thought of deferring the marriage. But the horoscope came in the way; priests said it would be now or never. "Besides, there was no certainty when normal life would return to organise the marriage at home as we



Two States: Kajol and Om Prakash with MLA Ashwini Ray Sarkar, right, after the wedding.

• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

would have liked," said Ms. Kajol's father Mahesh Sha, a resident of Dhubri town, about 280 km west of Guwahati.

Assam bars entry
A marriage devoid of the usual gloss could have been organised at the bride's

home. But the Assam government on May 8 barred the entry of people from West Bengal, except for patients, after two persons from that State tested positive.

"The family sought a way out. The administration of Dhubri district and

Jalpaiguri district [West Bengal] coordinated for the marriage to happen while the local police helped out," Mr. Sarkar, who represents the BJP from the Golakganj Assembly adjoining West Bengal, told *The Hindu* on Monday.

On Saturday, the groom

and half-a-dozen people travelled about 175 km from Nagrakata Station Para, while the bride and her family members travelled 55 km to meet at Sagolia.

MLA witness
The police cleared a spot beside the Sagolia check-gate for the marriage.

"The parents of the bride and groom requested me to witness the wedding. I returned from the border on Sunday after blessing the couple," Mr. Sarkar said.

Dhubri district officials said the couple were driven to a quarantine centre in Jalpaiguri district where they are expected to spend 14 days before going to the house of the groom's father, Lal Dev Sha. "They will probably never forget their marriage anniversary and lockdown honeymoon," said an official of the Golakganj Block in Dhubri district.

On Saturday, the groom

Priyanka questions Yogi's claim on infection among migrant workers

75% of Maharashtra returnees were infected, said U.P. CM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

LUCKNOW

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Monday asked Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to explain on what basis he had claimed that 75% of the migrant workers who returned from Maharashtra and 50% from Delhi were infected with the novel coronavirus.

While interacting with presspersons on Sunday through videoconferencing, Mr. Adityanath had given these figures and said that the high number of migrant workers having COVID-19 was posing a challenge to Uttar Pradesh.

"This is a challenge for us. But our teams are working strongly," he said. Mr. Adityanath, however, did not provide any data to back up his numbers. Maharashtra and Delhi are ruled by non-

BJP governments.

'Unverified figures'

Taking to Twitter, Ms. Vadra asked Mr. Adityanath from where did he derive the figures about his claim, dubbing it "unverified and irresponsible". "If so [true], then why is the testing so low?" she asked.

Given that over 23 lakh migrant workers have officially returned to Uttar Pradesh during the lockdown, Ms. Vadra asked whether ov-

er 10 lakh people were really infected.

The Congress leader demanded that the government reveal to the public the testing data and other preparations against COVID-19.

As per the State government data on Monday, the total COVID-19-positive cases in Uttar Pradesh are 6,497, while the active cases stand at 2,668. So far, 1,663 migrant workers who returned from other States have tested positive.



Where did he derive the figures about his claim... If so [true], then why is the testing so low?

PRIYANKA GANDHI
CONGRESS GENERAL SECRETARY

Testing up in States seeing massive return of migrants

Country records 6,125 new cases and 151 deaths

NISTULA HEBBAR
BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN
NEW DELHI

The Union Health Ministry has admitted that Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Odisha, currently witnessing a large-scale return of migrant workers, and remote areas need aggressive COVID-19 testing capacity scale-up to clear any backlog.

The admission comes at a time when the country is among the top 10 hotspots of COVID-19 worldwide, adding

COVID-19

approximately over 6,000 cases every 24 hours in the fourth phase of the national lockdown.

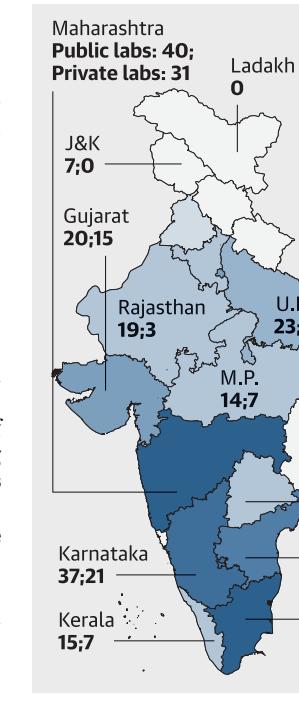
On Monday, the State health departments reported 6,125 cases and 151 deaths. This takes the total COVID-19 tally to 14,465 cases, including 79,959 active ones. The total death toll stands at 4,170.

"The heavy influx of migrant workers into States like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Odisha has

forced the Indian Council of Medical Research to scale up its testing laboratories. So far, we have scaled up with 15 testing laboratories in Bihar, 17 in Odisha, 28 in Uttar Pradesh and 36 in West Bengal. This has been paired with supplies of testing materials to all the States and

the UTs. We are using indigenous vendors and manufacturers to produce swabs for sample collection, RNA extraction kits and RT-PCR diagnostic material," said a senior official.

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MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 8 & 10



Ramping up
Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu have the highest number of COVID-19 testing labs in the country. The States are coloured based on the number of labs. Darker the shade, more the labs

AAP, BJP trade barbs over mishandling of epidemic

They attack each other over lack of effort

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI
The BJP and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Monday hurled accusations at one another over the handling of the COVID-19 outbreak.

While the BJP accused Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal of "serving a new lie" about the pandemic at press briefings every day, the AAP attacked the BJP on COVID-19 management in Gujarat and also hit out at BJP Delhi chief Manoj Tiwari for playing cricket in another State and violating the rules of the lockdown.

Leader of Opposition Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said that Mr. Kejriwal had become "a machine of lies, as he seeks to hide the failures of the Delhi Health Department". "Mr. Kejriwal should answer when the Delhi government will stop playing with statistics? How long will the Delhi government continue to harass the people of Delhi with data on infections?" he said.

Rohini MLA Vijender Gupta alleged that the health system of Delhi had collapsed and the pandemic had reached unauthorised settlements as well as slums.

Meanwhile, AAP MP Sanjay Singh accused the BJP of being insensitive to the plight of the poor and stranded migrants and attacked Mr. Tiwari for playing



Sanjay Singh

cricket in another State.

"Every day thousands of poor migrants are walking on the streets of India. Many of them have lost their lives due to road accidents. But ignoring such a humanitarian crisis, how can an elected public representative go to another State to play cricket? How can a public representative be so insensitive?"

Gujarat has failed: AAP

Alleging mismanagement of the virus outbreak in BJP-led Gujarat, Mr. Singh said that the High Court there had said that the condition of State civil hospital were as good as a dungeon.

"Around 865 people have died in Gujarat due to the virus and the number of deaths in the State is the highest in India. It is crystal clear that the health infrastructure of Gujarat has completely failed," the AAP MP added.

2 Pinjra Tod activists rearrested moments after getting bail

JNU students have been sent to two days' police custody

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Two Pinjra Tod activists, who were on Sunday granted bail in connection with anti-CAA protests in Jairabbad, were rearrested moments later in a case of rioting and murder related to the north-east Delhi riots.

Natasha Narwal and Devangana Kalita were initially arrested on Saturday in relation with an FIR lodged on February 24 over a sit-in protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, at Jairabbad metro station. The police had sought two-days custody stating that the women were "active in anti-India activities".

Metropolitan Magistrate Ajeet Narayan, however, rejected the plea of the Delhi police and granted bail to the two women in the first FIR.

The activists were, however, immediately arrested by the Crime Branch in connection with a separate FIR lodged in connection with the north-east Delhi riots under charges of Sections 147 (rioting), 353 (using criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of his duty), 307 (attempt to murder), 302 (murder), among others.

The FIR also named relevant sections of the Arms Act and the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act.

They were produced before the same judge, and the Crime Branch sought 14-day remand. The investigating officer said that the accused have to be thoroughly interrogated to 'uncover conspiracy behind the riots and identity co-accused'.

The activists have been

remanded to two days' police custody.

Release demanded

The Communist Party of India as well as the Communist Party of India (Marxist) have condemned the arrest of the activists, who are JNU students, and demanded their release. "Arrest of student activists, and human rights and civil rights activists are really attacks on the Constitution and our democratic polity," the CPI said.

"It is evident that the Centre is using the police to create an opportunity to crush political resistance. Serious cases like UAPA have been registered against several students," the CPI(M) said.

Meanwhile, the Delhi State Committee of CPI(M) cautioned the Delhi police not to become a political puppet.

Over 445 Delhi police personnel infected

CP reviews health status of policemen

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Over 445 Delhi police personnel have been found infected with the COVID-19 that include four SHOs and an Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police-rank officer, a senior police officer said on Monday.

The officer added that in a meeting, Commissioner of Police (CP) S.N. Shrivastava reviewed the health status of police personnel. He reviewed the trend of cases reported in different units and directed all the Deputy Commissioners of Police (DCPs) to personally visit all the police stations/units and ensure that all the health-related protocols are maintained properly. He said circulars had been issued in this regard to all district DCPs.

In the meeting, after Mr. Shrivastava was informed that the number of containment zones were increasing, he said that joint CPs and district DCPs should take up the matter with the authorities concerned to reduce the size of containment zones so that they could be covered effectively.

There were reports re-

garding police stations barring entry of PCR and traffic staff to access barracks in police stations as the staff fear outbreak of COVID-19 at police stations.

After the matter was brought to the notice of senior police officers, a fresh set of instructions were passed to all police stations ensuring access to traffic and police control room unit staffers to use barracks but it was mentioned that there should be social distancing and regular sanitisation.

Mr. Shrivastava also reviewed the health status of infected policemen. He said that Joint CPs should share the list of panel of doctors with all concerned so that the services of these doctors may be utilised for briefing and counselling of police staff who required medical advice.

Isolation facility

Mr. Shrivastava was also informed that a place had been arranged in South district for keeping asymptomatic policemen under isolation who have been permitted by doctors to stay at home.

Heatwave continues to scorch Capital

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Heatwave continued in several parts of the national capital on Monday with the maximum temperature at Safdarjung, the official reading of city, settling four notches above normal at 44 degrees Celsius. The minimum was recorded at 27.2 degrees, which was one notch above normal.

The weather station at Palam recorded a maximum of 46.2 degrees, while the Lodhi Road station and Ayanagar recorded maximums of 44 and 45.6 degrees respectively. Dry winds blew across Delhi with humidity hovering between 18% and 52%.

According to forecast, Tuesday is likely to get hotter. The forecast read: "Mainly clear sky with strong surface winds during the day. Heatwave conditions at few places. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be around 45 and 28 degrees respectively. Met department said some relief is expected on Thursday as there is a possibility of thunder development which may bring down temperatures by a few notches."

635 new COVID-19 cases; Minister's staff infected

Second highest single-day jump in cases; death toll at 276

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The city registered 635 new COVID-19 cases in the past 24 hours, taking the total to 14,053. This is the second-biggest single-day jump in cases so far.

A record 660 new cases were registered on May 22, as per the government's health bulletin.

Also, 15 more deaths have been added to the toll, which now stands at 276. But all the deaths did not happen in the past 24 hours.

Of the 14,053 cases, 6,771 people have recovered and there are 7,006 active cases.

Delhi Secretariat

It has emerged that a person working at Health Minister Satyendar Jain's camp office has tested positive for COVID-19.

"He was tested positive on Sunday and has been quarantined. Also, the Minister's offices have been sanitised," a Delhi government source said, adding that the patient is the Minister's personal staff and used to come to the Delhi Secretariat also.

The Delhi government spokesperson did not respond to multiple calls and messages seeking comment.

Earlier, a driver working for the Health and Family Welfare Department at the

Virus spread

Total number of COVID-19 cases	14,053
Total deaths	276
New cases in the past 24 hours	635
New deaths	15

SOURCE: DELHI GOVERNMENT HEALTH BULLETIN

Delhi Secretariat had tested positive for the virus.

Medical staff recover

Around 100 healthcare workers of Delhi government's Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Hospital, who had been infected, have recovered, said hospital officials.

"Almost all of them have joined the hospital," a hospital official said.

Three more healthcare workers of the hospital, including a sanitation worker, tested positive on Monday, taking the total number of workers infected to 117.

Meanwhile, doctors work-

ing in city hospitals on Monday halted their on-going protest against the government's decision to cancel 14-day quarantine for all healthcare workers, after they work on COVID-19 duty for the same number of days.

On Sunday, the Chief District Medical Officer (north-west) had issued an order that healthcare workers staying in hotels or bhawans in the district can stay "beyond 14 days of duty", but up to "only 21 days".

"Healthcare workers, after doing their duties for 14 days, are at a risk to their families," the order noted.

Seven days of quarantine

"They have allowed us seven days of quarantine after 14 days of duty. We have halted the protest as we are awaiting official communication on it from the union and Delhi government," said Shivaji Dev Barman, president of Federation of Resident Doctors' Association India.

Meanwhile, doctors work-

COVID-19 outbreak in city under control: CM

'We are prepared for surge in cases'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

pened, but there is no need to worry," he said.

The situation will get worse in two cases: if there is a steady rise in the death rate and if the cases are so severe that it leads to the collapse of our health-care system," he added.

He, however, added that the government was prepared for a possible upsurge in cases even as, according to him, most patients of the disease were seen to be exhibiting "mild symptoms".

COVID-19

Since the curbs were eased, Mr. Kejriwal said there had been around 3,500 new cases, and around 2,500 patients had recovered. He added that around 2,000 new beds have been reserved in 117 private hospitals, along with 2,500 beds that are currently available in government hospitals.

"We are also preparing around 1,500 beds in GTB Hospital," said the CM.

"It has been a week since some relaxations were given. After a period of one week, I can say that the situation is under control and there is no need to worry. We had expected a sudden rise in cases after the relaxations and that has hap-

Zee office building in Noida sealed

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NOIDA

The Zee Media Corporation Limited building in Noida's Sector 16 has been sealed for sanitisation and access to it will be allowed only after the health team issues a fitness certificate, the District Surveillance Officer of Gautam Buddha Nagar said in a statement on Monday.

The statement said the building was sealed after the second employee and six more people, who were in contact with the first employee of the organisation, tested positive for COVID-19.

The first employee had tested positive on May 15. The closure process was undertaken under the supervision of the district's Chief Medical Officer.

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THE HINDU
India's National Newspaper



Punjab Government

led by

Chief Minister

Capt. Amarinder Singh

pays homage to

the 5th Sikh Guru

SRI GURU ARJAN DEV JI

on his

414th Martyrdom Day

for his supreme sacrifice

and

remembers his contribution towards
the compilation of
Adi Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji and the
construction of Sri Harmandir Sahib at
Amritsar





Early take-off

With no consensus on health monitoring of passengers among States, travel remains risky

Enough after long negotiations with States, and with a truncated schedule, the Centre has found it difficult to relaunch domestic flights. Several were cancelled on the first day services were resumed after being frozen on March 25. Some Chief Ministers, notably Uddhav Thackeray in Maharashtra and Edappadi Palaniswami in Tamil Nadu expressed apprehension about a premature resumption of civil aviation, as the spread of COVID-19 is unrelenting, and quarantine monitoring has its limits. The experience of flight cancellations, passenger frustration and low capacity among States to track thousands of passengers should prompt a rethink on scheduled flights. Access to emergency air travel in a large country is a legitimate expectation, and a targeted programme run efficiently can meet that need, without induced demand produced by commercial flights. Going back to the drawing board to draft a plan for emergency travel, using documentation and aggregation of such passengers may be the short-term option. The risks associated with domestic aviation have multiplied due to early missteps in several States: mass gatherings, political events and consumer crowding for panic buying have resulted in major transmission clusters. The trajectory of fresh COVID-19 cases shows that this was aggravated by the bungled response to the concerns of migrant labour, exposing thousands of workers and their communities to infection. Understandably, States, which have denied the presence of community transmission, want to reduce the pace at which they must monitor newly arriving individuals.

Enabling scheduled travel through national policy, whether by air or rail, could be seen as a reasonable effort only when State governments are fully prepared, and adopt a uniform code of practice. Within the lockdown, the virus crisis has snowballed only in States such as Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat, and in Delhi, but that picture could change with the operation of daily flights, a couple of hundred scheduled trains from June 1 and the large number of promised Shramik Special trains for migrant workers. It is essential, therefore, for States to adopt a coordinated approach on quarantine and testing. Travel choices, in the present phase, should be designed to discourage optional journeys. Moreover, passengers on all flights, including relief flights, could have a lower risk if airlines and the government keep the middle seats vacant as decided on March 23 by the DGCA. There is no reason to think that the pandemic has begun to wane. The global aviation map shows that even market economies placing great emphasis on individual freedoms have severely limited travel, making exceptions only for returning citizens. Relaxing travel must be preceded by focused containment measures and an agreed protocol for States.

Batting for free speech

Reckless filing of criminal defamation cases against the press must end

A feature of public life in Tamil Nadu in the last three decades has been the indiscriminate institution of criminal defamation proceedings against Opposition leaders and the media. It is no surprise, then, that the most comprehensive judgment on the limits of the State's power to prosecute members of the press for defamation should come from the Madras High Court. The verdict of Justice Abdul Quddhose, quashing a series of defamation complaints filed since 2011-12, is remarkable for applying a set of principles that would firmly deter the hasty and ill-advised resort to State-funded prosecution on behalf of public servants. The first principle is that the State should not impulsively invoke provisions in the CrPC to get its public prosecutor to file defamation complaints in response to every report that contains criticism. The court deems such impulsive actions as amounting to throttling democracy. It advises the government to have a higher threshold for invoking defamation provisions. It notes that each time a public servant feels defamed by a press report, it does not automatically give rise to a cause for asking the public prosecutor to initiate proceedings on her behalf. The statutory distinction between defaming a public servant as a person and as the State itself being defamed has to be maintained.

Justice Quddhose goes on to fault the government for according sanction to the initiation of cases through the prosecutors without explaining how the State has been defamed. He cautions prosecutors against acting like a post office, noting that their role is to scrutinise the material independently to see if the offence has been made out, and if so, whether it relates to a public servant's conduct in the course of discharging official functions or not before filing a complaint. So, the court finds that many were cases in which public servants ought to have filed individual cases. An earlier Madras High Court ruling noted that an essential ingredient of criminal defamation must be that an imputation was actuated by malice, or with reckless disregard for the truth. A recent judgment by Justice G.R. Swaminathan enunciated what is known in the United States as the 'Sullivan' rule of 'actual malice'. While quashing a private complaint against a journalist and a newspaper, the judge said two of the exceptions to defamation given in Section 499 pertained to 'public conduct of public servants' and 'conduct of any person on any public question'. This implied that the legislature itself believed that unless it is demonstrated that reporting on a public servant's conduct or on a public question was vitiated by malice, the question of defamation does not arise and that even inaccuracies in reporting need not occasion a prosecution for defamation. Within a matter of days, the HC has struck two blows for free speech and press freedom.

The problem with the liquidity push

Even if partially successful, it will culminate in eventual default; the crisis is only likely to intensify



C.P. CHANDRASEKHAR

The present government's much-hyped, post-COVID-19 relief and recovery package has disappointed many. It provides little by way of additional budgetary resources to halt and reverse the economic and social collapse that the pandemic and the response to it has triggered. Most estimates place the additional fiscal allocation implicit in the proposals at about a tenth of the size of the package, which the government claims amounts to around 10% of GDP.

In its effort to tote up a 10% of GDP relief-cum-stimulus figure, the government has relied heavily on measures aimed at pushing credit to banks, non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) and businesses big and small, which are expected to use borrowed funds to lend to others, make payments falling due, compensate employees even while under lockdown, and otherwise spend even while not earning. The thrust is to get the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and other public financial institutions to infuse liquidity and increase lending by the financial system, by offering the latter capital for longer periods at a repo or policy interest rate that has been cut by more than a percentage point to 4%.

The fourth 'P'

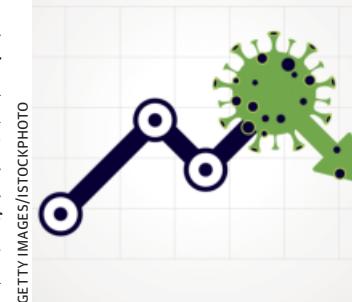
There was a hint that this would be the thrust when the Prime Minister in his speech calling for a "self-reliant India" identified, besides land, labour and laws, "liquidity" as among the areas of focus of the package. In economic and busi-

ness parlance, liquidity refers to ease of access to cash – a liquid asset is one that can be easily sold for or replaced with cash, and a liquid firm or agent is a holder of cash, a line providing access to cash, or assets that can be easily and quickly converted to cash without significant loss of value. In periods of crisis, individuals, small businesses, firms, financial institutions and even governments tend to experience a liquidity crunch. Relaxing that crunch is a focus of the government's crisis-response package. In keeping with that perspective, it gives a much larger role to enhancing liquidity than it does either to direct transfers to the poor and precariously employed workers devastated by the crisis, or to spending to ensure that micro- and small businesses would remain viable and along with medium and big businesses, would ride a demand revival when the lockdown ends.

Focus on NBFCs

The main intermediaries being enlisted for the task of transmitting liquidity are the banks, with NBFCs constituting a second tier. Among the first steps taken by the RBI was the launch of special and 'targeted' long term repo operations (TLTROS), which allowed banks to access liquidity at the repo rate to lend to specified clients. One round of such operations, which was relatively more successful, called for investment of the cheaper capital in higher quality investment grade corporate bonds, commercial paper, and non-convertible debentures. That funding allowed big business, varying from Reliance and L&T to financial major HDFC, to access cheap capital to substitute for past high-cost debt or finance ongoing projects. There is little evidence that this is triggering new investment decisions.

The second round was geared



to saving NBFCs, whose balance sheets were under severe stress even before the COVID-19 strike, because they were finding it difficult to roll over the short-term debt they had incurred to finance longer term projects, including lending to small and medium businesses, housing and real estate. Banks were wary about lending to these NBFCs, because of fears that their clients could default in amounts that would bring the viability of these institutions into question. Those fears were confirmed when Franklin Templeton announced that it was shutting down six of its funds, setting off redemption requests across the NBFC sector, as investors rushed to take back their money, at a time when the ability of these institutions to mobilise funds to meet these demands had been impaired. Not surprisingly, banks were unwilling to respond when liquidity was infused to target lending to the NBFCs.

Building on these initial liquidity infusion efforts, the COVID-19 package identified more intermediaries (such as the Small Industries Development Bank of India, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, and the National Housing Bank) that could refinance lending by the banks to different sections, with targeted lending amounts providing figures to fatten the "stimulus". To persuade the banks and other intermediaries to take up these offers when the clients they must lend to

(micro, small and medium enterprises, street vendors, marginal farmers, etc.) are themselves stressed, in some instances the government offered them partial or full credit guarantees in case their clients defaulted. The government also sought to persuade the RBI to lend directly to NBFCs against their paper.

These measures, which are only marginally effective even in the best of times, will not work during this crisis. Consider a bank or NBFC lending to small business. With economic activity either at a complete stop or at a fraction of the normal, those who can access credit would either not borrow or only do so to protect themselves and not use the funds either to pay their workers or buy and stock inputs. Even after the lockdown is lifted, the compression of demand resulting from the loss of employment and incomes would be considerable. It would be aggravated by the fact that spending by a fiscally conservative government would fall sharply because of a collapse in revenue collections. Faced with sluggish demand, firms are unlikely to meet past and current payments commitments and help the revival effort, just because they have access to credit. This would mean that credit flow would actually not revive. This danger is even greater because the government has been mealy with its guarantees, not wanting to accumulate even contingent liabilities that do not immediately affect the fiscal deficit.

On disposable income

Another component of the "liquidity" push is the measures that temporarily increase the disposable income of different sections. Advance access to savings like provident fund contributions, lower tax deduction at source, reduced provident fund contributions and moratoriums on debt service pay-

ments for a few months, are expected to provide access to cash inflows and reduce cash outflows, to induce agents to meet overdue payments or just spend to enhance the incomes of others. These are marginal in scope, if relevant at all. They have been combined with non-measures like adding on pending payments such as income tax refunds to spike "liquidity provision".

Overall, the "transmission" of the supply side push from these monetary policy initiatives for relief and revival is bound to be weak. Given the circumstances, the liquidity push, even if partially successful, would only culminate in eventual default, as borrowers use the debt to just stay afloat in the absence of new revenues. The measures are only likely to intensify the crisis, rather than resolve it.

Think new transfers

What is needed now is government support in the form of new and additional transfers to people in cash and kind, and measures such as wage subsidies, equity support and spending on employment programmes. That, as many have acknowledged, would require debt-financed spending by the government, with borrowing at low interest rates from the central bank or a "monetisation" of the deficit. Unfortunately, obsessed as it is with fiscal conservatism and tax forbearance, the Narendra Modi government is unwilling to take that route. Abjuring that option, the government's "self-reliance package" calls on citizens to rely only on themselves, aided by an uncertain offer of temporary access to credit. That path can only have devastating consequences for lives and livelihoods.

C.P. Chandrasekhar is former Professor at the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

The Centre's Kashmir policy and a heavy price to pay

India will have to face mounting security threats and the people of Jammu and Kashmir the systematic denial of rights



RADHA KUMAR

While public attention is focused on COVID-19, Jammu and Kashmir suffers twin lockdowns, rising violence and unilateral government actions, all at the same time. In the 12 months since the Narendra Modi administration returned to office, their Kashmir policy has comprised measures that are perceived as disasters in the Valley, garner mixed reactions in Jammu and Ladakh, and are welcomed by some in the rest of India.

A clear bias

The latest of these actions is the new domicile rules, notified on May 18, 2020. Based on the Home Ministry's order of March 31, these rules seek to replace the Jammu and Kashmir State subjects law, recognised under Article 35A of the Indian Constitution, which entitled permanent residents of the State to free education along with reservation of government jobs, and sole rights to land ownership.

The new domicile rules entitle anyone who has worked or lived in the State for 15 years, or studied there for seven years, to receive a domicile certificate and the benefits previously reserved for permanent

residents. Curiously, they also entitle Union government officials who have served in the State for 10 years to domicile, along with their non-resident children, and list the categories of those eligible: members of the Indian Administrative Services (including those working in statutory bodies), public sector units and banks, central universities and 'recognised research institutes of the Central government (sic)'.

The clear bias to favour not only Union government officials but also their children smacks of instating privileges that many State and Union governments began to do away with as civil service salaries rose in the early 2000s, and the demographic pressure on urban spaces mounted. That this bias continues to exist in some parts of the country is shameful for any democracy; that it has been imposed on Jammu and Kashmir without the acquiescence of its elected leaders is an absolute violation.

Ill-founded argument

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) spokesmen argue that the new domicile rules were necessary since many marginalised groups were denied their rights under the State subject law, such as refugees from west Pakistan. The argument is ill-founded. What prevented the Modi administration from expanding the permanent resident category to include these groups, without doing away with it altogether? How can it possibly be necessary



for 12 million people to reapply for domicile when the groups to benefit number a few lakhs?

Ruling party spokesmen ask what the fuss is about, when their intent was stated in the party manifesto and followed through by the President and Parliament of India. They ignore the fact that the presidential orders and Reorganisation Act of August 2019, including all actions that follow from them, are under constitutional challenge in the Supreme Court. A democratic government that upholds the rule of law would freeze implementation until the court rules, but the Modi administration proceeded to build facts on the ground with astonishing rapidity.

Within months of the August announcements, separate committees were set up to divide Jammu and Kashmir's assets between the two new Union Territories. The State police was put under direct rule by the Union Home Ministry. The Upper House of the Assembly was abolished. Land was requisitioned for sale to industry, national tourist conglomerates

were invited to take over what was a flourishing local industry, and mining rights were sold to non-Kashmiri contractors. All the former State's statutory bodies were dissolved, including the State Human Rights Commission. Power was concentrated in the hands of the Lieutenant-Governor and his advisers, all but one of whom were from outside the former State.

The Jammu and Kashmir Legislature remains dissolved, many of its political leaders remain under detention and forbidden to speak, a ban remains in force on all public gatherings and the media are intimidated. Even so, protest against the new domicile rules has been voiced by all political parties in Jammu and Kashmir, except the BJP. Indications are that their protests will be ignored. BJP General-Secretary Ram Madhav calls the new domicile rules a done deal, implying that the Modi administration will not review them (*Indian Express*, "It is time to allow J&K full-fledged political activity", May 21, 2020).

Fall of the last bastion

Most people in Jammu and Kashmir saw Article 35A and the State subject law as the last remaining bastion of the State's internal autonomy, guaranteed under the instrument of accession signed by Maharaja Hari Singh. Successive Union governments chipped away at the former State's powers, but none touched Article 35A or the

State subject law. Gradually the two grew to be inextricably tied to Kashmiri identity and, equally importantly, Kashmiri empowerment through education and employment. As armed insurgency rose in the 1990s, many Kashmiri political leaders raised fears of an Indian intention to alter the demography of the Muslim-majority Valley and several Jammu districts.

Until 2019, these fears seemed a bogey to intensify Kashmiri alienation. However, the August 2019 nullification of autonomy and division of the State, which overrode the constitution of Jammu and Kashmir and dismissed Article 35A, turned the bogey into an immediate threat which the domicile rules have now actualised.

With the fall of this last bastion, disaffection has exponentially multiplied in Jammu and Kashmir. Armed encounters are on the rise and the security situation is extremely fragile. Blaming it on Pakistan is futile. Pakistan has always taken advantage of disaffection in the Valley, indeed China is now doing so too. As a result of the Modi administration's Kashmir policy, India will have to face mounting security threats on its western front, and the people of Jammu and Kashmir the systematic denial of their rights. Are we really ready to pay this price for a mere ideological shibboleth?

Radha Kumar's latest book is *'Paradise at War: A Political History of Kashmir'*

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.

NREGA to the rescue

With lakhs of migrant workers rushing back to their home States due to the lockdown, MGNREGA appears to be the only scalable programme of rural employment that can come to their rescue (Editorial page, "The need for a million worksites now", May 25). In addition, there is a strong case for increasing the daily wage to at least ₹300 at least for a period of next six months, so that their food and other basic needs are taken care of. With regard to awareness about NREGA works and filling up of work application forms, school teachers may be requisitioned – with extra payment for this work – to visit workers' colonies,

educate them about the availability of work and fill up their applications, if necessary. This would be more honourable work for teachers when compared to stationing them as a State did, at liquor shops for crowd control. To expand works under NREGA, seasonal agricultural work may be included in the list of works that can be taken up under NREGA in rural areas. Further, the government should think in terms of launching an urban employment programme on the lines of MGNREGA to provide employment to the urban poor and migrant workers who have not yet returned to their home States.

KOSARAJU CHANDRAMOULI,
Hyderabad

Border face-off
Border skirmishes are nothing new as far as the two Asian giants, India and China, are concerned, as the border dispute between them has remained unresolved for several decades. The tension between the soldiers of India and China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) has only upped the "stand-off", with the trading of barbs and charges by each side, in turn accusing the other of trying to alter the status quo along the LAC. It is evident that a lack of clarity and consensus between the two countries over the LAC is one of the reasons behind the sudden flare-up. China's territorial ambitions, fuelled by its military might

and economic clout, are well known. As responsible rising powers of the world, the leadership in both countries have the onus now to attempt a renewed push at diplomacy and dialogue to resolve the lingering border dispute once and for all ("Aggressive PLA flouts protocols", May 25).
M. JAYARAM,
Sholavandan, Tamil Nadu

■ Senior American official Alice Wells has done well by terming the Sino-Indian border dispute as an example of provocative behaviour. Perhaps this is what has prompted a Chinese spokesperson to attempt a conciliatory approach. It will be in the mutual interest of both

nations to ensure that the situation at the border does not escalate and is resolved as in established protocols. N.A. JOSEPH,
Ettumanoor, Kottayam, Kerala

■ The present flare-up could well be a part of China's projection of its "sharp power". From the South China Sea to the Mekong river flows, to the Senkaku islands with Japan and the Taiwan Straits, there is

evidence of its quest for hegemony. Does it believe that with the world focused on COVID-19, now is the time to flex its muscles? China should not overlook the fact that in the event of a cold war, or the trade and diplomatic war with the U.S., it would need a helping hand from its Asian neighbours.

H.N. RAMAKRISHNA,
Bengaluru

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

In the Sport/Life page anchor story titled "Fresh leaks of personal details detected on dark web" (May 25, 2020), the second deck headline mentioned a figure 18 million job seekers. It should have been 18 lakh residents of Madhya Pradesh. The second paragraph of the text referred to a figure of 18 million. It should have been 18 lakh.

In the last paragraph of "Results on vaccine likely in autumn" (May 25, 2020) there was a reference to *Wealth* Health Organisation. It should be World Health Organisation.

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A well-balanced stimulus package

It will minimise the human cost of the COVID-19 crisis and also pave the path for structural reforms



RAJIV KUMAR

Cut your coat according to your cloth is a useful dictum to set policy priorities. Not all economies are bestowed with the unlimited resources of the U.S. whose currency, the dollar, still enjoys the enviable status of being the global reserve currency. This affords the U.S. the ultimate luxury to issue debt without any thought of its consequences on its macroeconomic balances. India does not have these many degrees of freedom. Cognisant of its constraints and compulsions, the government adopted a twin mantra for shaping its stimulus package, rolled out in five phases plus one earlier phase.

The first strand has been to first ensure that the human cost of the COVID-19 crisis is minimised, especially for those at the bottom of the pyramid. The second has been to convert this crisis into an opportunity by implementing bold structural reforms, which have been pending for a while. Shaped by these two priorities, the stimulus is a carefully crafted, well-balanced, yet bold package that will, in the coming days, achieve both objectives.

Lifting demand and supply

It is widely recognised that the present crisis has seriously impacted both the supply and demand side of the economy. The stimulus package effectively addresses both these aspects. Several measures have been announced to lift the sagging demand in the economy. It is important to point out that total effective demand is made up of demand for consumption, investment and intermediate goods. This has to be taken note of by those who consider only the cash in hand of consumers as the sole means for reversing the declining demand in the economy. Therefore, additional credit lines provided to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) or to street vendors or to farmers (additional credit of ₹2 trillion) will also surely contribute to the strengthening of aggregate demand in the economy.



"Indian farmers will get the much-needed freedoms, flexibility and financial strength to propel India's economic recovery in the post-COVID-19 period." A farmer in Darangiri village, west of Guwahati, Assam on April 20, 2020. ■ AP

Measures announced for ramping up consumption demand directly included: ₹1.73 lakh crore for improving the incomes and welfare of the most vulnerable, including the 20 crore female Jan Dhan account holders who will receive monies directly into their bank accounts (announced in the first package); ₹50,000 crore additional incomes in the hands of those whose TDS and TCS were reduced by 25%; ₹40,000 crore additional allocation for MNREGA which will provide jobs and succour to those returning to their villages from metros and cities; ₹30,000 crore for construction workers; ₹7,800 crore transferred to 12 crore farmers; and ₹13,000 crore transferred to States to finance the costs of running quarantine homes and shelters for migrant workers. These measures will trigger demand, which is of course the necessary condition for triggering recovery in economic activity.

On the supply side, the govern-

ment's response has been four-fold. The first was to ensure that the nation's food security as also farmers' incomes were not impaired. The government declared agriculture and all related activities as essential services immediately upon announcing the lockdown. This permitted the successful harvesting and efficient procurement of the critical Rabi crop. Procurement operations pumped in ₹78,000 crore as new purchasing power in the hands of the farmers.

The second was to prevent the pressing cash/liquidity crunch from converting to insolvencies and bankruptcies. A moratorium was announced for all businesses for their debt servicing obligations to commercial banks. MSMEs were given an additional credit line of ₹3 trillion without any fresh collateral to further reinforce their access to credit. MSMEs could also avail of new equity from the ₹50,000 crore fund of

Rajiv Kumar is Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog. Views are personal

funds. These measures provided some succour to a large number of businesses, especially those in the services sectors like hospitality, entertainment, retail etc. which have suffered a near complete loss of revenues during the lockdown. A whopping ₹90,000 crore credit package has been extended to state electricity utilities to enable them to clear their dues to private sector power producers.

Higher self-reliance

The third set of measures were directed to significantly improve the ecosystem for private producers and investors, both in agriculture and manufacturing. Farmers now have the much-needed freedom to choose their clients. Freed from the age-old tyranny of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, traders and exporters of agro-products can maintain necessary stocks to meet export obligations. With further liberalisation in the defence production sector, India will achieve higher self-reliance in this strategic sector and also emerge as an exporter. Private businesses can now operate in sectors hitherto monopolised or dominated by the public sector enterprises. Finally, in a measure that touches the lives and livelihoods of more than 50 lakh families, street vendors all over the country have been given a credit of ₹10,000 each for re-stocking. Thus, the 'package' has guaranteed the survival of existing production capacities and laid strong grounds for attracting fresh investment to bolster growth.

The size of the stimulus at ₹20.97 trillion is larger than the promise made by the Prime Minister in his address on May 12. At more than 10% of the GDP, it compares favourably with packages announced by other emerging economies. Indian farmers will get the much-needed freedoms, flexibility and financial strength to propel India's economic recovery in the post-COVID-19 period. And buoyed by the stimulus, Indian firms will operate in an ecosystem that will help them become 'Glocal', thereby helping Indian brands command a larger share in global markets and participate successfully in global value chains.

An unprecedent amount of data are being collected by tech giants. The data need to be used towards the welfare of society, but the sharing of data presents many challenges to human rights. COVID-19 is a good example of this. Are we not doing injustice to people by not sharing data in a timely fashion mere-

Moving beyond geopolitics

In the post-COVID world, countries and tech giants should be obligated to share data in the larger interest of mankind



ANIL TANEJA & GULSHAN RAI

ly due to geopolitical reasons? It is the right of every human being to benefit from the collective data to which he or she contributes.

The current data system is one where the incentives align with the creation and spread of technological innovations but not their governance (think of Cambridge Analytica). Restrictions on the flow of data have increased significantly in the last 7-8 years. Across the world, data protection laws, requirements of data localisation, laws related to weakening of encryption keys and data retention requirements are by and large patchwork. These frameworks are not interoperable. They focus on protection of personal data and privacy and give little thought to the broader impact of data on mobility and social aspects. Data protection frameworks such as the General Data Protection Regulation of the EU and the CLOUD Act of the U.S. are aimed at putting users in control of their data. But they have issues relating to data localisation and cross-border flow of information. These frameworks have not solved the issues of data sharing. Even the UN has not succeeded in bringing consensus in the preparation of a framework on the norms of behaviour in cyberspace. With data flow set to become more important over time, we need government regulations and standard and inter-operable frameworks to govern issues and address risks emerging from these technological innovations.

Data in the post-COVID world

The post-COVID-19 world is expected to be different. Digital equity will require frameworks relating to governance of technology and data that look beyond geopolitical considerations. We need to distinguish individual data from large global data sets. We cannot extrapolate the current human rights framework to human rights in the digital and biological domain. The current concept of privacy and cross-border flow of information may require significant change. There is a dire need to impose obligations for data flow on countries and tech giants in the larger interest of mankind. We need to establish a baseline of global norms of data governance that go beyond privacy and geopolitical considerations. These norms must focus on mechanisms to leverage data to solve problems and ensure consistency, interoperability, privacy and security. It is the right time for a Parliament select committee to look at the data protection framework. At the same time we need to identify an international body to evolve global norms on data governance.

Anil Taneja is an MBA candidate at the Harvard Business School and Gulshan Rai is former National Cyber Security Coordinator, PMO India

Battling a virus with masks

Mask use, mask etiquette, and mask maintenance can go a long way in our fight against COVID-19

NIKITA MEHRA

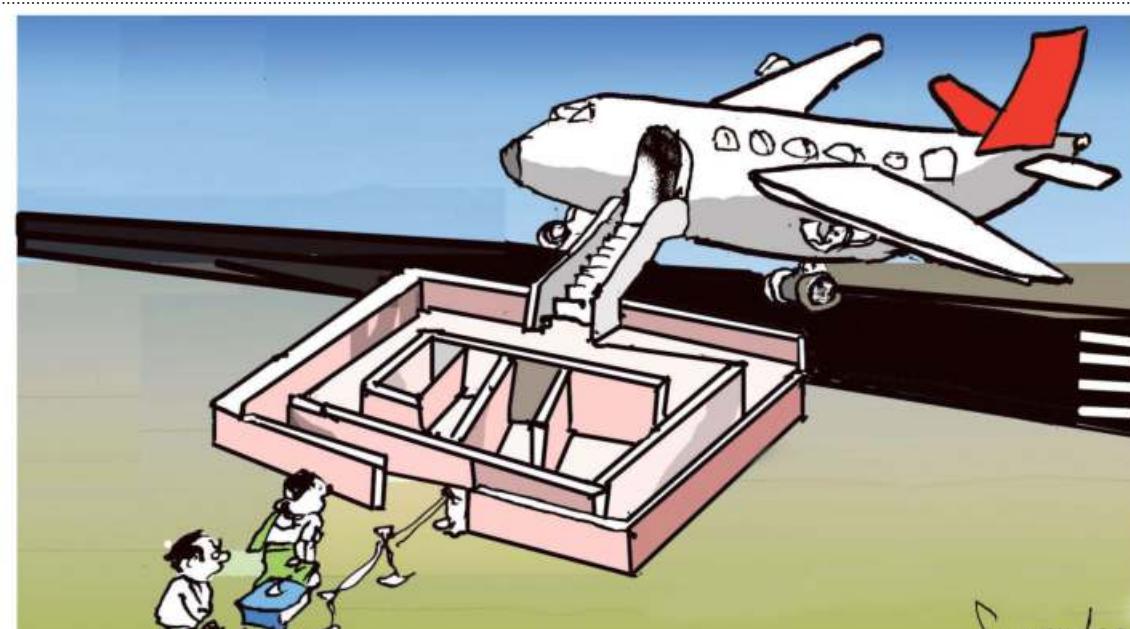
Information about SARS-CoV-2 is now being disseminated widely, if somewhat haphazardly. Concerns over the impact on our health, and the health of our loved ones, continue to dominate our thoughts and headlines. These concerns are of course justified; at the time of publishing this, India has recorded 1,39,868 confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Adopting best practices
Rather than worry about studies around the virus and its ability to remain on masks, we must embrace this opportunity to adopt the best practices available right now for mask maintenance. It is crucial to wash your cloth mask every day with detergent in a washing machine set to at least 60°C. If that is not possible, the cloth mask must be scrubbed by hand with soap for 30 seconds, while ensuring it soaks for at least 15 minutes before being rinsed in hot water. Attention should be paid to the duration of soaking. A study in *The Lancet* reported that the virus continued to be detected when the soaking time was reduced from 15 minutes to five minutes. It would be ideal, but not compulsory, to replace cloth masks after around 20 washes due to the reducing filtration capacity of cloth masks over time.

To obtain the best protection from your mask, ensure that it covers the mouth and nose and as much as possible, avoiding gaps between the face and the mask. Avoid touching your mask once you have worn it. While removing your mask, do not touch the front of it; the mask must be untied from behind. Before and after removing your mask, clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash with soap and water. During use, if the mask becomes damp/moist, change it immediately. Mask use, mask etiquette, and mask maintenance can go a long way in our fight against COVID-19. As responsible citizens we should help our government in this battle against the virus.

In a study published by *The Lancet*, the virus was found to remain viable on surfaces for up to seven days, with the longest viability being noted on plastic and stainless steel surfaces. The question arises as to the ability of the virus to remain viable on masks. A study in *The Lancet*

Nikita Mehra is an Assistant Professor of Medical Oncology & Researcher in Molecular Oncology at Adyar Cancer Institute. Views are personal

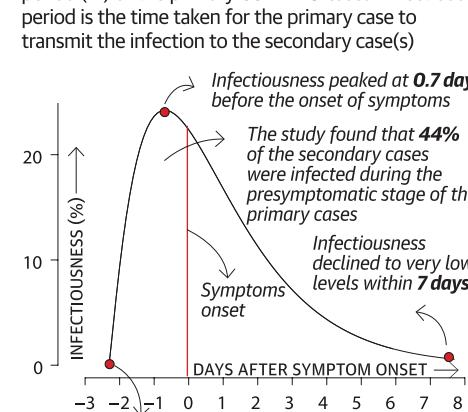


DATA POINT

About symptoms and the ability to infect

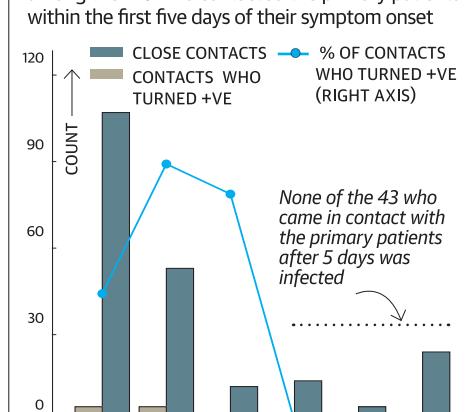
Patient data from southeast Asian nations show that a significant share of COVID-19 patients passed on the infection to others when they were not showing any symptoms (during the pre-symptomatic period). Also, the ability of a symptomatic patient to transmit the infection drops to very low levels just a week after the onset of symptoms. However, they may continue to test positive for the disease. By **The Hindu Data Team**

■ INFECTION PERIOD | In China, 77 infector-infectee pairs (or primary case-secondary case pairs) were studied to measure the infectious period (IP) of the primary COVID-19 cases. Infectious period is the time taken for the primary case to transmit the infection to the secondary case(s)



■ NEGATIVE RESULT | Analysis of 766 COVID-19 patients in Singapore shows that 30% tested negative (by nasopharyngeal swab) by day 15, 68% by day 21, 88% by day 28 and 95% by day 33. Thus, some patients may continue to test positive even after a month of illness. However, the above graphs show that their ability to transmit the infection drops to low levels a week after the onset of symptoms

■ CONTACT HISTORY | In Taiwan, 100 primary patients and their 219 family contacts were studied. Only 11 contacts turned positive. All the 11 were among the 176 who contacted the primary patients within the first five days of their symptom onset



LAST WORD | As the patients' ability to transmit the virus drops to low levels after a week of the onset of symptoms, they may be discharged early. This will significantly distress the hospital sector.
■ Testing and isolating pre-symptomatic patients sooner may significantly reduce the disease spread

OBSERVATIONS
■ The first chart shows that isolating only symptomatic patients will not be effective. Contact tracing secondary infections well before symptom onset is important
■ The second chart shows that after just 5 days of the onset of symptoms in primary contacts, the transmission of infection approaches 0%

Sources: "Period of Infectivity...COVID-19 Patients", Academy of Singapore; "Temporal dynamics...of COVID-19", Xi He et al.; "Contact Tracing...After Symptom Onset", Hao-Yuan Cheng et al.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 26, 1970

Unrest in Pakistan
(From an editorial)

As always, there was strong criticism in Pakistan of the recent communal rioting in Maharashtra and an attempt was made to take the matter to the United Nations. No notice is taken of the steady flow of Hindu refugees to West Bengal under pressure of the Muslim majority in East Pakistan. However, the most significant development inside Pakistan has been the spurt in labour disputes, strikes and demonstrations. It is reported that during the past half-year the loss suffered by textile mills in Karachi amounted to over Rs. 3 crores. Several mills are still paralysed by labour disputes. This is, of course, a consequence of the liberal attitude adopted by the Yahya Khan regime towards organised labour, which now has the freedom to demand better wages and living conditions. Politicians of all types have been complaining about high prices and the scarcity of some commodities like edible oil, pulses, sugar, kerosene, etc.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 26, 1920.

Silently gagging the media.
(From an editorial)

We note from the Lahore Tribune that the reprehensible practice of high Government officials sending for newspaper editors for the purpose of samjoing and humiliating them on the pretext of their having published anything which had in some way, however remote or insignificant, to do with Government or individual officers and which turned out to be exaggerated, unauthorised or inaccurate in part, is still continued by the Punjab. This practice of silently and contemptuously gagging the Press, it is well-known, was a detested characteristic of the O'Dwyerian regime and we shall be very much surprised indeed if it has the approval of an administrator so different in outlook and ideals from Sir Michael O'Dwyer as Sir Edward MacLagan. The Tribune states that an incident, in the nature of a revival of this practice, took place a few days ago. The matter was a very simple one, and the Government had already issued its contradiction which the papers, or most of them, published on that very day. In the circumstances, as the Tribune says, unless the administration only wanted to display its authority which none disputed, it was absolutely unnecessary to adopt a procedure which could be justified, if at all, only in the worst of circumstances.

Technophobia: a silent reaction

Sudarshan Sreeram is just 17, but he has experience many developers would envy. He developed a simple and interactive version of the classic two-player game, Tic Tac Toe, using Swift Playgrounds, and even penned an opinion paper titled 'Artificial Intelligence and Jobs of the Future: Adaptability Is Key for Human Evolution', which was published in January 2019 in the journal *AI Matters*, after his stint at WWDC 2018.

He says that after the lockdowns lift, "The world would certainly see an increased reliance on technology and online services, and I think that there would be an increased emphasis on tackling problems in the areas of cyber-security and data privacy."

In fact, he predicts a wave of new reactions to technology after the pandemic, explaining, "Technophobia is a silent, natural reaction. Take personal computers for example: when they were first introduced in the early 1980s, computerphobia was commonplace. Forty years later, our society is technologically dependent; it's hard to think of how life would be without access to the internet or an internet-connected device." He further explains that the key takeaway here is that any radical change would initially be met with a sense of scepticism, but would gradually lead to the creation of a new, widely-adapted norm until the next change arrives.

**A ray of hope**

For Swapnil Dhol, being able to produce something out of thin air and running it on the powerful devices we carry in our pocket is super rewarding. He is the mind behind gradient-adjusting app Neon and comic viewer XKCD. "Human interaction is a big part of WWDC, since developers can interact with Apple Engineers, get their code reviewed, and ask any questions that they might have. Also, WWDC is a place to make new friends, meet like-minded people. I've met some of my closest friends, who continuously push the boundaries of what is possible with technology," he comments.

He believes the lockdown proved that technology does shape human life for the better. "Being able to order essential items from the comfort of one's home and attend meetings on the other side of the planet, is nothing short of amazing and this trend will continue even after the lockdown ends. I think people will finally understand the potential of these technologies. The lockdown has affected nearly all aspects of our daily life, but students are still able to submit assignments and teachers are still able to teach."

"The power of technology is amazing and it is great to see that in a time of crisis, technology turns out to be a ray of hope."

TECH-A-BYTE**Thinking ahead**

Texas-based cybersecurity firm Forcepoint unveiled *The C-Suite Report: The Current and Future State of Cybersecurity* featuring new research on global business leaders' cybersecurity priorities. According to the report, 76% of leaders are losing sleep over the prospect of becoming the next headline-grabbing security breach, despite an 87% believing that their security team is consistently ahead of cybersecurity threats. Cybersecurity strategies are seen by 85% of executives as a major driver for digital transformation, yet 66% recognise the increased organisational exposure to cyber-threats because of digitisation. Only 46% of leaders regularly review their cybersecurity strategies.

**Contactless coffee**

In an effort to continue social distancing, Gurugram-based commerce and fintech platform DotPe onboarded the chain of espresso bars Barista, to offer digital takeaway ordering and payment service, with bare minimum human touch. By deploying DotPe's 'Scan-Order-Pay' feature, Barista outlets in Gurugram can take orders and payments through the customer's phone.

How does it work? Customers can simply scan a QR code placed outside the takeaway window and the entire menu of Barista will pop up on the user's mobile phone browser. The customers can then place an order by adding items from the digital menu and pay using regular online payment methods. Once their order is ready, Barista pings the order details to the customers on their WhatsApp number and they can pick it up from the takeaway counter with zero manual intervention. Coffee's up!

Please send your feedback to Wireless stories to techknow@thehindu.co.in

CM YK

A virtual code of arms



With Apple's WWDC 2020 going digital this June, we speak to some of the past scholarship winners from India about the future of tech once the lockdown lifts

DIVYA KALA BHAVANI

As the lockdown powers through, more people have taken on coding as a new passion, with many hoping to integrate this in their careers. It is safe to say that one is never 'done' learning coding; the language keeps changing, as does the adaptability to keep up with the ever-emerging technologies we surround ourselves with. More importantly, the networks of coders and developers has taken on a more abstract shape, many going the virtual route rather than straight out cancelling the event.

So, Apple announced that Worldwide Developers Conference 2020, which is now in its 31st year, would be taking on a new virtual format due to the pandemic. The upcoming conference has more than 23 million registered developers in more than 155 countries and regions. Having hosted thousands of students since its genesis, the conference last year saw more than 75% of the attendee students as first-timers, speaking to the adoption of Swift and the Everyone Can Code curriculum, and its expansion.

We caught up with past WWDC scholarship winners who are, in fact, excited about the new format. The young developers chat about the misconceptions as well as their predictions of technology post-lockdown while assuring that coding and development can start right at home.

Immense prominence

Vidit Bhargava, the co-founder of Squircle Apps, is known for his app LookUp, a visual dictionary, which was named Best New App in the App Store in 2014 and 2017.

He explains that people will realise that they can do a whole lot more with technology after the lockdowns lift, adding, "The lockdown has forced people to think on their feet and adapt to a new way of doing things, and technology is coming to the rescue in innovative ways. People are spending more time with their gadgets in the lockdown, and that will definitely make them more savvy and comfortable with them than they previously were."

He also says there is a strong future for automation and robotics where many thought it was not necessary. "These two are vital in reducing human contact, and if it helps people stay safe in the pandemic,

they will appreciate it. Similarly their experience in learning online will define how they see that technology in the future. If your online class keeps 'disconnecting' frequently, you are far more likely to want to go back and sit in a traditional environment for learning. The technology that is helping us get through the pandemic, needs to work as intended to be able to win the respect of the people. It is gaining prominence in society because it is the best way to get things done right now, but it will only last long if people have a good experience with it."

Vidit advises those new to coding not to be intimidated, especially because many tend to look at the complicated syntax, and try to grasp it all at once. He explains, "In its essence, programming is just a set of steps you tell a computer to perform. And if you were to look at it like that, it is not very different from Lego."

New respect

Brothers Tarun and Aman Jain, both WWDC scholars in 2016, put their heads together to run a small games startup called Digital Hole, with the first game released being Ringo. "The relationship between users and technologies around the globe is definitely going to change post lockdown. Online social gaming, e-learning, and OTT content streaming are some of the sectors that have seen a massive jump in usage and people would love to continue all these things post lockdown as well," they explain. After the lockdown, they say people will look at technology with "new respect".

They add, "All the technical advancements and achievements are helping us overcome these challenging days, and people definitely have noticed the significance of technology in their day-to-day life."

Having recently launched an app for children called Storyio - For Kids, they see that Machine Learning and Augmented Reality are, "A few of the technologies that we think are going to change the education industry, and we are constantly exploring new possibilities in those areas... We are currently exploring ways to implement these technologies in the app, to help educate children better and in more efficient ways."

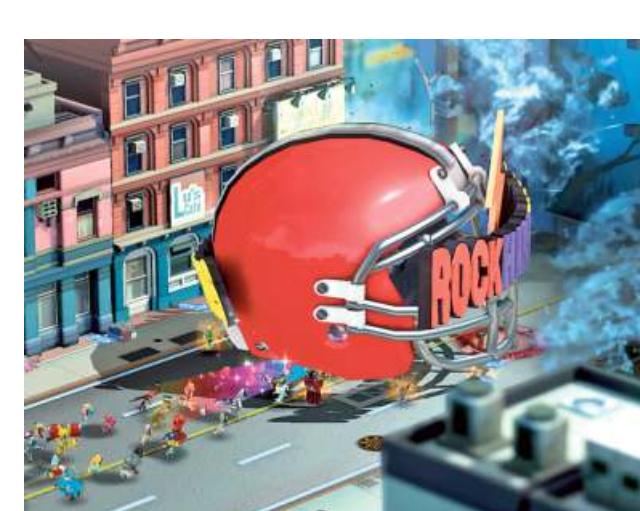


JULIAN ALMEIDA

Sandwiched between the successful Nintendo Wii (of the early 2000s) and the peppy handheld hybrid Switch of today, there was the ill-fated Wii U. An extension of the Wii, while it had some interesting ideas, the console faded into obscurity. Even though it had several excellent games. The most noteworthy of them is PlatinumGames' *The Wonderful 101*, created as a Wii U exclusive and played by just a handful of gamers. Created by the directors that brought you *Okami* and *Viewtiful Joe*, *101* was a spiritual continuation of the latter. It was also a concept game, from a studio that was already known for its outrageous explorations into action games. While *101* was a brave and unique concept put into motion, it is not an experience that is meant for everyone.

Why play as one superhero, when you can play as an entire team of a hundred and one, at the same time? In the wake of an invasion by aliens known as the GEATHJERK Federation,

One of the best games on the Wii U gets some remastered love and a second chance to shine and be *Wonderful 101*



Colourful overload Screenshots from the game by PlatinumGames ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

GAMESPOT

Crowd control

you play a mild-mannered teacher who transforms into Wonder-Red, the newest Federation hero in *The 100*. Inspired by Japanese *tokusatsu*, special effect-heavy television drama genres such as Super Sentai, *sentai* meaning task-force or squadron, was a sub-genre in the superhero pop culture that inspired Power Rangers. It involves teams that fight together and occasionally combine forces for some sort of mega move. The *Wonderful 101* encapsulates the genre perfectly, also tying in nicely into the *Viewtiful* sort of superhero style Platinum has been creating.

Most of the frustrations creep in when you have to execute the Unite Morph abilities

what Platinum has learned so far – sort of like Lemmings meets Streets of Rage-like beat-em-up.

The remaster of *Wonderful 101* is more of a re-release, with the graphics largely remaining the same, with just a boost in colour and framerate. While it is great to take on-the-go, the tiny lemmings-like characters and the appropriate fighting pyrotechnics get a bit messy on the small screen, so either the PC or PlayStation 4 is advisable. With director Hideki Kamiya's new game in the *Viewtiful* series coming out – Project GG – focusing on the *kaiju*-beating superhero sub-genre, *101*'s remaster comes at a good time.

Despite its issues, *The Wonderful 101* is undoubtedly a lot of fun, especially if you enjoyed *Okami* and *Viewtiful Joe*. Though if you did play the original and found a lot of issues, you may want to skip the remaster. For newcomers interested in something different, check out gameplay videos to see if the action is worth financing a buy.

The writer is a tech and gaming enthusiast who hopes to one day finish his sci-fi novel



A tug on the heartstrings

Filmmaker Todd Bogin explains why his award-winning short film *Modulation Nowhere*, is centred around a violin

DIVYA KALA BHAVANI

Imagine waking up one morning and finding the most valuable thing you own, stolen.

Todd Bogin's short film *Modulation Nowhere*, currently playing on ShortsTV as Editor's Choice, takes that simple plot and enhances it with multitudes of the unusual, with added doses of Berlin-esque quirk.

The film follows Sofia, a deeply devoted violinist, who meets newly-single and seemingly reclusive Karl. The two spend the night together, but when Sofia wakes up alone, she finds Karl has taken her beloved violin with him. A jarring plot for a film of just over 10 minutes.

Todd, who lived in Brooklyn, USA, for most of his life, actually filmed the short in Berlin, where



he lived for a few years. To make the most of the US \$4,000 budget, Todd took on the roles of producer, director and casting director, and posted the call for actors on Crew United. A main bar scene in the short has extras in the background, and Todd admits everyone is a crew member, or a cousin, friend or sibling doing the filmmaker a favour. The resulting film ended up winning a Special Jury Award at the 2019 Portugal International Film Festival, while making it to several other international film festivals.

Over the phone from his home in Brooklyn, Todd recalls the shooting experience of *Modulation*

Nowhere, including the serendipitous casting experience. "Jessica Bröslieke came into auditions with questions on the character, even creating a backstory for the character. I hadn't had a name for her at that point, but Jessica did," points out Todd.

Also part of the film is Christian Harting, who is not an unknown name in Berlin; he starred in Hungarian drama *Son of Saul*, which won the Grand Prix du Jury at the Cannes Film Festival, and Best Foreign Language Film at the Academy Awards in 2016. In the film, Christian portrays a Nazi guard who is somewhat sympathetic to his prisoners. Todd explains,

Inner melodies A still from *Modulation Nowhere*, (below) director Todd Bogin
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

"When I got in contact with Christian, he was down to do *Modulation Nowhere*, and it was a no-brainer for me because he is so mysterious-looking."

Emotive layers

Trust is a prevalent theme in *Modulation Nowhere*, and Todd agrees that with Sofia, the trust is almost blind, owing to her innocence.

"First you see her playing outside in Berlin, with no fear of being robbed or approached. Berlin is safe but you can see her trusting there, it's almost dream-like. Then she is in the bar, trusting Karl who is a stranger," explains Todd, adding, "And you see Karl's previous relationship ending, but we don't know why. And when we see him at the bar with Sofia, the new opportunity to trust comes along, but he isn't able to handle that. I look at his actions as being hurt in the past, not actively seeking out to hurt. His breaking Sofia's trust, is a part of that."

Interestingly, Sofia does not speak until the bar scene, which does help build empathy while highlighting her love for her violin, states Todd.

Music plays a big part in *Modulation Nowhere*. Created by cross-genre violinist, violist, and composer Josh Henderson, the score packs an emotional punch.

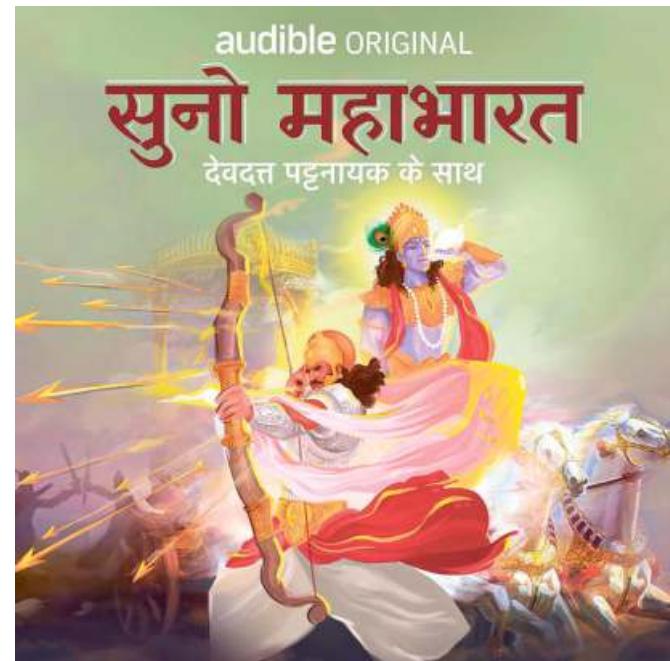
As close friends, Todd had long been collaborating with Josh, who has played on Beyoncé's records and even for President Barrack Obama at the White House. This is where the central idea of the violin came into play, infers Todd. "The violin, for me, represents identity and possession. The object in the film could have been a baseball bat or a camera, but I asked Josh 'what can I do to get you in on this score where it becomes an interactive score?' and he said exactly that. Plus, Jessica also knows some violin too, so that helps a lot!"

Modulation Nowhere is available to watch on ShortsTV

Time and again
This is not Pattanaik's first tryst with oral storytelling
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

As spoken for centuries

Devdutt Pattanaik has once again traded his pen for his voice, creating a six-hour oral narration of *The Mahabharata*



MEGHNA MAJUMDAR

ideas of kinship: that is what is important". The author does not agree with the "line of thinking" followed in versions of the epic available in the market today. "People say there are many interpretations of the story; there are not. It is about *dharma sthana*: whether people with privilege and power share that privilege and power with those who don't have it. That's all. The only reason it seems complicated is because we don't want to share and care with our poorer cousins. And therefore, like a lawyer tries to twist his way out of an awkward situation, this is about people finding complicated ways of not doing the simple and right thing."

Penmanship lessons

It is not only the ideas and ideals that Pattanaik finds worth noting; *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* have a lot to teach today's budding writers, about classical Indian narrative structures as well. Particularly in terms of character arc.

"In Western storytelling, there is always a central character who goes through transformation. In *The Mahabharata* there is no one central character. This idea of central characters like Rama and Krishna not going through transformation is not there in Western storytelling at all. For them, it is the hero who transforms from Point A to Point B and the Gods who are troublemakers."

In Indian stories, the peripheral characters are the ones who might transform, but not always. Most characters behave according to their personal characteristics, that do not change: "Even Arjun, who goes through changes, does not experience any major transformation. He is not a noble person at the end of the story." Pattanaik explains this with a contemporary example: In a Rajinikanth film, "Rajini would not go through any change; the people around him will. Similarly, a Salman Khan, in the first and the last scene, is the same."

Suno Mahabharata Devdutt Pattanaik ke Saath can be heard free of cost on the Audible Stuno app on Android devices.

Theatre on your screen

Staged@RS on YouTube features six plays for children by Bengaluru's Ranga Shankara theatre

For two more days, Bengaluru's Ranga Shankara theatre will continue to regale children with online streams of their old stage productions. *Staged@RS* kicked off on May 22 with plays that have been staged under Ranga Shankara's acclaimed AHA! - Theatre for Children. Six plays were set to be streamed, from May 22 till 27 May at 5 pm, on Ranga Shankara's YouTube channel. They will remain there for a week after premiering.

The plays have been chosen carefully to ensure the viewers get a variety in terms of age, language and format. "We have always recorded our plays with one camera positioned in the fourth row. In these times of lockdown, we thought it was a good idea to share these. We hope our viewers enjoy these while we all wait to get back to real theatre!" says Arundhati Nag, Artistic Advisor of Ranga Shankara.

The plays are *Fish Tree Moon*, *Circle of Life*, *Chippi the Chipkali*, *The Zapperdockel*



and the *Wock*, *Robinson and Crusoe* and *The Garbage Mouse*. Here is a sneak peek into a few:

Fish Tree Moon is an Indo-Korean production developed and presented in partnership with InKo Centre. Inspired by Indian and Korean folk tales and folk painting traditions such as Madhubani, *Fish Tree Moon* follows

an odd group of creatures – an old fish, a spirited girl, an eager boy, an ascetic and a Deer tree – making a long journey to the top of Mount Kailash so they can have their wishes granted.

Chippi The Chipkali is based on an Indian folk tale and tells the story of Chippi, a baby lizard who loses her tail and embarks on a long journey to find it.

Robinson and Crusoe is a tale of friendship. Two soldiers, Robinson and Crusoe get stuck on an island and discover that they are from opposing war camps, with only one roof to share, the ocean all around and no common language to communicate in.

The Garbage Mouse follows the story of Mullmaus, a little mouse, who suddenly finds herself homeless. With all her ingenuity and imagination, she creates a new life and lives happily until the scary and mysterious Picture Book Cat makes an entrance. How will Mullmaus face this battle?



Myriad takeaways over the years aside, Pattanaik says he is sticking to the version in the scriptures, for this particular project. His process also involves going back to the Upanishads, "to try and structure the story based on the historical period in which it was written. At that time, it had tried to portray

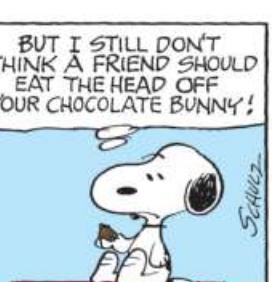
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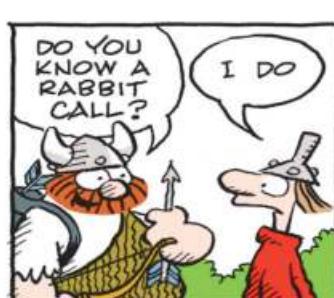
WELL THEN WHO PLAYS THE PART OF THE RABBIT?



PEANUTS



HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



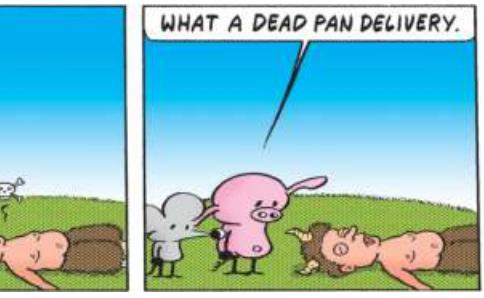
CALVIN AND HOBBES



TIGER



PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



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