



# Life in a hostel

SUNALINI MATHEW  
SHINJINI GHOSH  
NEW DELHI

**W**here college campuses should have seen hectic end-of-year activity - farewells, exams, parties - these once bustling spaces are now mostly empty. The lockdown has meant that academics have gone online, friends don't meet, and there's a general sense of uncertainty. The few students who remain in hostels across Delhi-NCR, speak of how they cope with long silences and short bursts of online engagement.

Hostellers have a double burden of being away from family and not having friends around either. "Currently, there are 35 out of 600 people in our particular hostel and we are not really familiar with each other. So for our free time, I either depend on walks with a friend from a different hostel or end up speaking to my parents back home," says Salma Wasi, a second-year Ph.D scholar of modern history at Jawaharlal Nehru University. Her parents in Samastipur, Bihar, were initially very worried about how she would manage, but are now reassured because there's regular food, despite a limited menu, she says.

#### Quiet spaces

At Saureesh Namagiri's hostel in Shiv Nadar University, Greater Noida, there are a little over 100 students, mostly boys and some girls. "The college never really reopened after the mid-semester break in mid-March," he says of the period that was too short for him to go back home to Madurai, where his parents and sister live. "Some people chose not to come back, and some took the opportunity to leave, sensing that there may be a problem."

Mr. Namagiri, who will soon enter his

third year in management studies, says the initial weeks were tough, because Gautam Buddha Nagar, where the university is, was declared a hotspot. A week or so ago though, students were offered the option of leaving in State transport buses, but most preferred to stay on campus. Families aren't comfortable with students taking trains back home either, fearing the quarantine process or the possibility of contracting the virus on the journey. "The university has made it clear that we can stay back and stay comfortable here," says Mr. Namagiri.

Traditional teaching methods have evolved into Microsoft Teams sessions, projects, and presentations, which he finds are all learning experiences. He is comfortable in the non-air-conditioned room he chose, and says the 286-acre campus, with its greenery, a lake, even a biodiversity park, gives students the space to move around. With bicycles provided to ride around, strong WiFi, and clubs active on social media, he says, "It's better to be on campus than home... All this time away from people is helping me get a better perspective on life."

It hasn't been this easy for everyone though. For Ms. Wasi, there are no online classes as her coursework is over, which means she must be completely self-reliant for her work. "It is proving to be very difficult to focus on academics and I am ending up watching some movies or series on the various online platforms. Even though we are in touch with our supervisors and keep them updated with our progress, it is a challenge to concentrate under the current circumstances," she says.

Staying up at night is a recurring theme. Circadian rhythms have gone for a toss with a lack of physical activity, binge-watching, and OD-ing on screen time, considering many classes are held online and social interac-

tions are also via Facetime or WhatsApp calls. Kiki Sakhile from Swaziland, a second-year psychology student at Delhi University's Zakir Hussain College, says she has developed an inconsistent sleep pattern, sometimes staying up through the night, at other times sleeping through the day. "There's not much that we can do, except roam around the garden [of the International Students' Hostel]. Most of us sit around with each other or watch Netflix."

#### Helplines that connect

Sensing there would be a need for more robust mental health services than before, Arvinder J

Singh, director, Ashoka Centre for Well-Being, Sonipat, says that as soon as the lockdown was declared, she set up a peer support system. This group of students she trained could reach out to others via personal emails or just by drawing them out of their rooms for a meal at the canteen, for instance. All counselling services moved online and a helpline was launched.

"There's a sense of loss - of choice, of decision-making, of control. But the biggest is the loss of social connection - it's just not the same when you're waving at people from a distance," she says, adding that it is especially hard for those who already have anxiety, and for fo-



**Keeping busy:** (clockwise from above) Students at a men's PG hostel in Delhi University; Salma Wasi; Kiki Sakhile; students on the Shiv Nadar University campus; students at Ashoka University working in the kitchen garden • SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA, SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

reign students because they are worried about loved ones at home and vice versa.

Ms. Sakhile, who is the youngest of three siblings, says it is true that in the initial days there was a great deal of worry.

"We were a bit concerned because we didn't know if we would be told to vacate hostel. There was also uncertainty because of the exams. I didn't want to go back home and then have to return almost immediately," she says. For many, with the long hot summer ahead, there's still no clear plan.

Some students had to make harder choices though in the suddenness of the lockdown announcement. Cindy, at one of Delhi University's North Campus hostels, has a father with diabetes and a brother under palliative care, in Imphal, Manipur. "I had a long conversation with my family, especially my mother. We thought it best that I stay put here as their immunity is low," says the second-year, post-graduate student of philosophy.

#### The doers

In order to keep themselves occupied, students are finding ways to engage with each other and the spaces they're in. In Ashoka University, those in hostel have offered to work in the kitchen garden.

"We are currently harvesting and planting," says Geo Cyril Podipara from Kottayam, Kerala, who works in the student life office. "They're also using the vegetables to cook. We had a sale, and the pay-as-you-like proceeds will go to maintaining the garden," he says, of some of the approximately 140 students on

campus.

Food has become a point of coming together. At night, Mr. Namagiri (who heads the cuisine club) and those in the hostel will often assemble in the pantry that has an induction stove and a microwave. "We cook something - last night it was pakoras at about 3.30."

They are also making a short film about the life on campus.

It's a time to look at the lives of the support staff as well, some of whom may not have a choice about living on campus. Mr. Podipara talks of a woman guard who is using the opportunity to learn cycling, while another colleague takes long walks as she speaks on the phone to a loved one.

"I spend my free time cleaning my room, as it is therapeutic for me," says Ms. Cindy. "We even play badminton at times to keep ourselves engaged. It is a difficult situation that everyone is in right now," she says.

She is on the verge of finishing college, but is hopeful for the future. "I want to join the government services once my course is over," she says. She will be studying for the civil services examination. "I want to work on women empowerment and education for children, and I feel the civil services will be the best option for me."

She is aware that with private sector job market shrinking, there will probably be more takers for government jobs, but, "I can only hope for the best. I have not really thought about Plan B yet, but if UPSC doesn't work out I will probably look for some other government job," says Ms. Cindy. Hope seems to be what the future is hinged on.



'Taking online exams tough for J&K students'

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Students in Jammu and Kashmir would face severe difficulties taking online examinations as proposed by Delhi University, since they have access to only 2G services, a student from the Union Territory has written to the Lieutenant-Governor of J&K, appealing to look into the matter.

"We are a group of about 100 students from J&K presently doing our studies from DU," wrote Hitesh Panotra. Writing on their behalf, he highlighted that given the limited access to the internet, students were not even able to attend online classes.

Given DU's recent decision to conduct online examinations for students in the final semester, Mr. Panotra wrote that it would be impossible for students from J&K to take part in the exams, which would consequently affect their "academic performance and mental health".

He said that appeals had been made to the Dean of Examinations as well as the Vice-Chancellor, but in vain.

## Driven by penalty-fear, hostellers of DDU pay maintenance charges

Several students facing financial crisis, say almost all vacated hostel before April

SIDHARTH RAVI  
NEW DELHI

Hostellers of the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya College *The Hindu* spoke to said that they were facing financial difficulties in paying hostel maintenance charges demanded by the college for the months of April, May and June. However, threatened with penalties and fearing backlash, they said, they hardly had a choice but to pay.

While the college authorities defended the move, students complained that it was unfair as most hostellers had vacated the premises before the beginning of April.

"My father has taken a loan to pay the fees" said Sanjay\*, a second-year student from U.P. whose family's hardware store has been

**G** My father has taken a loan to pay the fees... I did not want to be thrown out

SANJAY  
Second-year student

shut since the beginning of the lockdown. "If not for the hostel, my father would not let me study in Delhi... I did not want to be thrown out," he said.

#### Relaxation appeal

Following a notice to hostellers on April 7, asking them to pay ₹19,500 as part of the fourth quarter fee, which includes electricity, water, housekeeping and mess charges, students had written to the college principal, appealing for a relaxation. With mess charges removed, students were asked

to pay a revised amount of ₹7,500, payable by May 11, failing which they were informed that they would be charged ₹50 per day as penalty for non-payment.

Sagar\*, a second-year student, whose father had not been paid his salary for the last two months and is expecting a salary cut, said that he wrote to the college authority, asking for some relaxation, but was told to pay the fees and that reimbursement would be made at a later date.

Others such as third-year student Mohan\*, son of a wheat farmer, said that he had written to the college but did not receive any reply. "We have paid our annual rent and developmental charges... on what basis are they asking for electricity and water charges?" he

said. Gopal\* father, a production manager at a notebook factory, has not received his salary either. "My parents are saying they will arrange the money somehow. But why are they [college] doing this when almost no one has been living in the hostel?" he asked.

College Principal Hemachand Jain said that a sanitation worker is employed at the hostel and since at least eight students have stayed back, the charges for electricity, water and cleaning need to be paid. He said if people were facing financial crisis, the matter would be looked into before extending any relaxation, stressing that it could not be extended to all.

\*names changed to protect identity

## Bring back 56 pregnant nurses stranded abroad'

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

The United Nurses Association has approached the Delhi High Court seeking direction to bring back 55 pregnant nurses stranded in Saudi Arabia and one in Kuwait due to the lockdown.

The association said all the 56 pregnant nurses have serious medical issues as most of them are in the 3rd trimester of their pregnancy.

cy and are staying alone. The petition claimed that even though most of the nurses were duly registered with the Indian Embassy at Saudi Arabia for prioritised repatriation in the first phase of 'Vande Bharat Mission', they were not considered by the Centre.

The plea said since the nurses are healthcare workers, they are exposed to hazards that put them at risk of infection.

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

A 24-year-old student of Jamia Millia Islamia was arrested in connection with riots here last December, officials said on Sunday.

The accused, Asif Iqbal Tanha, is a resident of Abdul Fazal Enclave Thokar, Shaheen Bagh, they said. He is a third-year student of B.A. Persian language. He is also an active member of Students Islamic Organisation,

the police said.

"He has been arrested in connection with a case which was registered at Jamia police station on December 16, 2019, related to riots in the Jamia area in which he is named an accused," a senior police officer said.

He was produced before Metropolitan Magistrate Saket court. He was remanded to judicial custody till May 31, he said.

## On foot for food



People queue up to collect food and ration in New Delhi on Sunday. • SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

## 'We are labourers, but we too have some self-respect'

Bus ferrying workers from Panipat to U.P. takes U-turn

ASHOK KUMAR  
GURUGRAM

"We are labourers, but we too have some self-respect," said Monu, recalling his "embarrassing" experience. After leaving to his home in U.P. from Haryana's Panipat in a State bus on Sunday morning along with fellow labourers, he was forced to return to his rented accommodation.

More than two months after the lockdown and after running from pillar to post for the past 48 hours to seek permission to go back to their home towns, 40-odd labourers, mostly daily-wagers in textile industry, boarded a State bus to U.P., but it stopped after travelling around 10 km and then returned a few hours later to drop them back at their rented houses.

"The landlord allowed us

inside. But we too have some self-respect," said Monu.

He recalled that the labourers staying in different areas of Panipat received calls from officials late on Saturday and were asked to reach the local bus stand around 5 a.m. to board a bus to their home towns.

"We walked several km with luggage to reach the bus stand. It was after seven hours of wait that they finally allotted us a bus around noon. But after travelling around 10 km towards Karnal, the bus stopped. Four more buses were parked there. We were told that the service will soon resume," said Monu.

After waiting for a couple of hours, the labourers decided to walk with the luggage. "At this point, the driver started the bus and told us

to stay inside. But they took a U-turn from under the flyover and returned to Panipat," said the 25-year-old resident of Lakhimpur in U.P.

RTI activist P.P. Kapoor said it was a cruel joke on the labourers. He said the government had failed to arrange food for them and now was not able to even send them back home with dignity.

**Law and order issue'**  
Deputy Commissioner Hema Sharma said the buses carrying around 200 migrants had to return from Karnal after the police received a message regarding some law and order issue in U.P. She said the State buses went to Shamli, but were not allowed towards Saharanpur. Ms. Sharma added that the workers would go on Monday.

Timings

DELHI

MONDAY, MAY. 18	
RISE 05:29	SET 19:07
RISE 03:08	SET 15:18
TUESDAY, MAY. 19	
RISE 05:29	SET 19:08
RISE 03:37	SET 16:09
WEDNESDAY, MAY. 20	
RISE 05:28	SET 19:08
RISE 04:07	SET 17:02

Delhi Weather max min  
Delhi City 41 24  
Safdarjung 41 24  
Palam 42 24

Delhi Palam Today  
43°C A dry and hot weather with partly cloudy to continue. Night will be comfortable.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow  
44°C Rise in temperature. Dry and hot weather with clear sky to continue. Heat wave like condition may occur.

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Air Quality of Delhi-NCR

Delhi	200	Gurugram	158
Ghaziabad	208	Faridabad	000
Noida	160	Greater Noida	154
Good	51-100	Moderate	101-200
Poor	201-300	Very Poor	301-400
Severe	>400		

Air Quality Index at 4 p.m., yesterday  
(Average of past 24 hours) | Source: CPCB

THE HINDU  
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Man stable after shooting incident

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Two days after a 27-year-old man allegedly shot at himself after his friend refused his proposal in Outer North Delhi's Narela, he is said to be stable.

A senior police officer said that the man, a resident of Kotla Mubarakpur, is undergoing treatment but is out of danger.

On Friday, the man went to his friend's house and proposed to her. He also asked her to come with him. However, when she refused, he shot himself in the chest. He was rushed to hospital. The woman is married and her husband is lodged in jail, the police said.

The police have registered a case under relevant sections and is probing the matter.

The headline of our report in the Saturday edition had erroneously said 'Man found dead in Narela'. The error is regretted.

## I regret coming to quarantine centre'

Man who recently tested positive alleges unhygienic conditions at facility

ASHOK KUMAR  
GURUGRAM

Less than 48 hours into a quarantine centre here, with allegedly unhygienic conditions and lack of proper care, a 30-year-old bank official regrets having informed the authorities about his COVID-19 status. Inmates have earlier complained of poor facilities at other centres in the city.

"I didn't know earlier that patients with mild symptoms could be quarantined at home, else I would have never come here. More than two days after I tested positive, I have no symptoms. But I fear catching some infection while staying at this centre. Already, I have a sore throat since morning," said the man, talking to *The Hindu* over phone from the centre running from a medical college.

No one to contact  
With 50 more people in the centre, some of them just suspects, he rued being locked up at the centre for

## Centre's guidelines in line with proposal sent by Delhi govt.: CM

Kejriwal to announce detailed plan on relaxation of restrictions in city today

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday said the Centre's guidelines for the fourth phase of the lockdown are largely in line with the proposal sent by the Delhi government. The proposal, he said, was based on suggestions of lakhs of Delhiites.

"We have used the lockdown period to prepare our healthcare system if COVID-19 cases increase but it is now time to relax the restrictions to some extent," Mr. Kejriwal said.

He added that the government will prepare the detailed plan for Delhi based on the Centre's guidelines and announce them on May 18.

Mr. Kejriwal welcomed the easing of lockdown restrictions on a day when the Capital reported 422 new COVID-19 cases taking the total number of cases to 9,755, according to a health bulletin released by the Delhi government.



A scene at one of the hotspot areas in Jahangirpuri in New Delhi on Sunday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Virus spread	
Total number of COVID-19 cases	9,755
Total deaths	148*
New cases in the past 24 hours	422
New deaths in the past 24 hours	0

\*8 added to toll based on reports by audit panel  
SOURCE: DELHI GOVERNMENT HEALTH BULLETIN

No new deaths were reported in the last 24 hours.

The total number of deaths stands at 148, accord-

ing to reports from the Death Audit Committee. The bulletin also stated that 276 people have recovered and there are currently 5,405 active cases.

**Death records**  
Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain said all hospitals here have submitted a summary of their death records and the Death Audit Committee was in the process of compiling the reports – which would be done in two-three days.

The committee has been revising the death toll over the past week after reports came in that the number of COVID-19 deaths were being under-reported.

Mr. Jain added that at present, the doubling rate of COVID-19 stands at 11 days and while the number of Containment Zones was not increasing, there are many doctors, nurses, police and BSF jawans testing positive.

The government also issued an order for all healthcare facilities operating in Delhi to follow guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for rationale use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in accordance with the risk involved.

**Type of PPE kits**  
The guideline has listed the type of PPE kits to be used by healthcare workers according to the activity they perform, the risk associated with the task and which department of the hospital they work at.

## Is it a crime to serve the poor: Delhi Cong. chief

FIR against Kumar for violating orders

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Delhi Congress Chief Ch. Anil Kumar said a policeman arrived at his residence on Sunday morning without any written order and prevented him from stepping out of his house, which he alleged was a violation of his human rights.

The police said an FIR has been registered against him under relevant sections of the IPC for violating lockdown orders in east Delhi.

Mr. Kumar blamed the BJP and AAP governments for the police action and said he had been working along with other party workers to provide cooked food to thousands of homeless people.

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Speaking to *The Hindu*, he said: "Is it a crime to serve poor labourers during the lockdown? I am only doing the work that the BJP and AAP governments have failed to do." He added that if service to humanity was a



A policeman at Anil Kumar's house on Sunday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

crime, he would commit the crime again and go to jail.

The police said on Saturday they got information that Mr. Kumar went to Ghazipur where he promised migrant workers that he will arrange transportation for them to go to their hometowns in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

Following this, five other policemen, who came in contact with the officer, have been quarantined as a precautionary measure.

The ACP developed symptoms on May 13 following which he was tested and isolated.

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ACP deployed at Rashtrapati Bhavan tests positive

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

A 58-year-old Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) of the Delhi Police posted at Rashtrapati Bhavan Police Lines has been tested positive for COVID-19, said officials on Sunday.

Following this, five other

policemen, who came in contact with the officer, have been quarantined as a precautionary measure.

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# Inhuman to send bodies by trucks, Soren tells Adityanath

Jharkhand CM lashes out at his U.P. counterpart, urges Nitish to arrange ambulances

SATYASUNDAR BARIK  
BHUBANESWAR

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren on Sunday lashed out at Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for the 'inhuman treatment' meted out to migrant workers who died in a road accident in U.P.'s Auraiya district on Saturday.

Taking strong exception to the migrant workers' bodies being transported by trucks, Mr. Soren tweeted, "Heartless to see @UPGovt led by @myogiadityanath ji could not even arrange for ambulance to transport the bodies of migrant workers to their families. I request @NitishKumarji to arrange ambulance for remaining journey to Bokaro and accord them some dignity in death."



Hemant Soren. ■ FILE PHOTO

However, he deleted it later and tweeted again.

"This inhumane treatment of our migrant workers could possibly be avoided. I request @UPGovt and Office of @NitishKumarji to arrange suitable transportation of the deceased bodies till Jharkhand border and we will ensure adequate dignified arrangements to their homes in Bokaro," says Jharkhand CM's Twitter mes-

sage. He also announced ₹4 lakh ex gratia to the next of kin of all the 11 people killed and ₹50,000 to those injured.

On Saturday early morning, 25 migrant workers, including 11 from Jharkhand, were killed when a trailer they were travelling in rammed a supply lorry near Auraiya in Uttar Pradesh.

Referring to the photos of a truck in which some bodies were dumped, she said the persons seen along with the bodies were those who had been discharged after treatment.

Apparently disturbed over the incident, Mr. Soren took to the social networking site putting out information for several times on Sunday.

Meanwhile, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and Bokaro district administration gave rice and ₹25,000 cash to the family of the deceased.

When drawn attention on

## Treatment for injured

Terming the situation inhuman and very insensitive, Mr. Soren directed Bokaro Deputy Commissioner and Jharkhand Police to give immediate treatment to the injured as soon as they enter the State. The officials were asked to take the bodies to their respective homes with dignity.

When drawn attention on

the migrants' bodies transported by trucks, Auraiya Superintendent of Police Suniti said different vehicles, in some cases ambulances and trucks, were arranged to transport the dead back to their native places.

# Amarinder blames Centre, BJP States for migrant crisis

Punjab CM flays Sitharaman's remarks about Sonia, Rahul

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Sunday accused the Bharatiya Janata Party governments at the Centre and in States for aggravating the migrant crisis and politicising such a grave issue.

"The entire Congress party, including all party-led States, were working day and night to support the migrant labourers in this hour of crisis, with my own government having already arranged 149 trains to ferry 178,909 migrants to their native States till May 16," said the Chief Minister, adding that the process of facilitating the labourers to go to their homes was still continuing in Punjab.

Reacting strongly to Nirmla Sitharaman's com-



Captain Amarinder Singh

ment that Congress president Sonia Gandhi should have asked her Chief Ministers to help the migrants, Captain Amarinder said the Congress chief had been holding regular interactions with the party Chief Ministers on this and other critical Covid-19 and lockdown relates issues.

The Punjab Chief Minis-

ter also flayed Ms. Sitharaman's remarks that former Congress president Rahul Gandhi should have walked with the migrants when he met them, terming it highly frivolous and totally unbecoming of a senior Central Minister.

## Entry of buses

"Instead of ridiculing Rahul, who came out on the roads to extend support and compassion to the migrants, Nirmla should have spoken to the Chief Minister of the BJP-led U.P. government to allow entry to the buses arranged by Priyanka Gandhi to transport migrants," he said, referring to the buses that were stranded at the Delhi-U.P. border on account of the Uttar Pradesh administration's refusal to let them enter the State.

## 18 new cases reported in Punjab

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHANDIGARH

Punjab recorded 18 fresh COVID-19 cases on Sunday and reported three more deaths taking the toll to 35, according to an official statement.

The number of positive cases has reached 1,964. Of the three deaths, two were from Gurdaspur while one was from Ludhiana district. The Health department said the major chunk of the new cases were reported from Amritsar and Ludhiana districts respectively. The active cases are 563, it added.

Health Minister Balbir Sidhu said that in the wake of COVID-19, all civil surgeons in the State have been directed to ensure the supply of hypertension and diabetes medicines, which are two major co-morbid conditions contributing to higher risk of acquiring COVID-19 infection.

## U.P. migrant walking home dies of 'hunger'

OMAR RASHID  
LUCKNOW

A migrant worker who had returned from Mumbai on a truck allegedly died of hunger in Kannauj while he was walking back home to Hardoi district, officials said.

The migrant worker, Vinod, and 26 others had boarded a truck from Mumbai towards U.P. on May 14.

The last time he ate proper food was on May 15, said Shailesh Kumar Singh, SDM Kannauj.

Early on Saturday, around 3 a.m., the truck carrying 27 passengers reached Kannauj. Seventeen workers belonging to Hardoi got off at the bypass. "They had barely walked for half a km when one of them died. He had been lagging behind the others," said Mr. Singh on Sunday.

The preliminary reason behind the death as per the accounts of the relatives who came with him was hunger, hinted the official.

"During the journey, he drank water and ate biscuits but maybe he did not eat any food on the way," said Mr. Singh.

"He didn't get anything to eat on the way," said Ram Kumar, the victim's brother.

## Take me home



Migrant labourers wait in queues for screening before leaving for their homes, in Lucknow on Sunday. ■ PTI

## Rajasthan HC issues directions to control COVID-19 infection in jails

The court said it was concerned that 128 people, including convicts and jail officials, had tested positive during last 48 hours

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
JAIPUR

Taking cognisance of the spread of COVID-19 infection in the district jail in Jaipur, where over 100 inmates have tested positive, the Rajasthan High Court on Sunday gave a slew of directions to control the disease in prisons across the State by incorporating new provisions in the standard operating procedure (SOP).

A Division Bench of the High Court took suo motu cognisance of the matter and

registered a public interest litigation which it heard at a special sitting held at the residence of Chief Justice Indrajit Mahanty here. The court said it was concerned over reports that 128 persons, including the convicts, undertrial prisoners and jail officials, had tested COVID-19 positive during the last 48 hours.

The court summoned Additional Chief Secretary (Home), Rajeev Swarup, and Director General (Prisons), N.R.K. Reddy, to the Chief Justice's residence for explaining

the action being taken by the State government. Besides the Chief Justice, the Bench comprised Justice Ashok Kumar Gaur.

## Isolation wards

Mr. Swarup informed the court that special isolation wards had been created in all district and central jails, where an accused or prisoner, on his first admission, was required to spend 21 days. Such prisoners are shifted to the general wards of jails only if they are found to have no

symptoms of virus infection after completing the isolation period.

In its directions, the court asked the State government to incorporate a requirement in the SOP for mandatory testing of an accused by the local medical authorities for COVID-19. "The accused person should be allowed to be remanded in judicial or police custody only if he/she is found negative."

As regards the isolation period of 21 days, the court directed the jail authorities to

once again present the prisoner before the medical authorities at the end of isolation for check-up to verify if he or she had developed any symptoms of virus infection.

The RT-PCR test should be carried out to cover asymptomatic prisoners before being shifted to the general ward, the court said.

"The jail authorities who are in direct contact with the prisoners in isolation also require special attention to ensure that the virus is not transmitted to them or their

families," the court said. It gave directions for conducting tests of jail staff and their family members on a regular and random basis, at least once in every fortnight.

The medical officers in each district will inspect the isolation wards in the jails and give suggestions to the jail authorities to take steps for maintaining cleanliness and sanitisation. Besides, the jail doctors must be made available for general check-up of prisoners in isolation wards everyday, the court said.

## Sharp spike in Odisha cases

STAFF REPORTER  
BHUBANESWAR

Odisha on Sunday registered a sharp rise in COVID-19 cases with 91 persons testing positive. With this, the State's total count has now touched 828.

The government, which had earlier reported two new deaths, backtracked saying test result did not confirm to be COVID-19 positive in one case. Hence, the death-toll stands at 4.

Now, the number of active cases in the State is 604.

## Punjab farmers' to go for direct seeding of rice

They are shifting from traditional sowing method because of labour shortage



The DSR technique will save irrigation water, labour and power in contrast to the traditional method. ■ FILE PHOTO: AFP

scale at farmers' fields. It helps in saving irrigation water, there's lesser weed problem, besides there is reduced incidence of nutrient deficiency, especially iron, owing to lesser leaching of nutrients and deeper root development," said Makhan Singh Bhullar, principal agronomist at the Ludhiana-based Punjab Agricultural University.

Mr. Bhullar said that the

technology has a wider adaptability as it is suitable for me-

straw, for the timely sowing of next wheat crop. Results from research trials and farmers' field survey have also indicated that wheat grain yield, after DSR, is 1.0-1.2 quintal per acre higher than puddle transplanted rice," said Mr. Bhullar.

"As the DSR involves more precision in timing and greater accuracy in operations compared to conventional transplanted rice. It gives best yield and quality when sowing is done in the month of June," said Mr. Bhullar.

Bhartiya Kisan Union (Lakhowal) general secretary Harinder Singh, said there's absolutely no doubt that sowing with DSR will increase this year. "I am myself all set to sow paddy with the new technique. It's cheap, less time consuming and save water as well. Besides, this year we are facing labour shortage as many migrant labourers have gone back to their native places. So, at such a time the DSR is a viable option for me," he said.

## COVID-19 cases see sudden jump in NE

9-year-old youngest case in Assam

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI

The number of COVID-19 positive cases in the Northeast has almost quadrupled in a little more than a fortnight since May 2.

What has intrigued doctors and officials is that many of the new cases do not have any travel history besides maintaining minimum or no contact with people who had tested positive.

The total number of cases in the region was 61 till May 1 midnight. By Sunday, the figure increased to 287, three of whom – two in Assam and one in Meghalaya – died.

Assam Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday said a 9-year-old boy who returned from Delhi with his parents tested positive and was being treated at the Jorhat Medi-

cal College and Hospital. He is the youngest to have tested positive in the State after two 16-year-old girls, one of whom died.

The boy's case, along with that of a 28-year-old who came from Chennai to Cachar district, took the total number of COVID-19 positive cases in Assam to 97. But Tripura led the table with 167 cases while Meghalaya and Manipur took the third and fourth spots with 13 and seven cases respectively.

The bulk (159) of Tripura's cases were reported from two Border Security Force battalions headquartered in the state.

The region, according to data provided by the Health ministries of the affected States, has 159 active cases – 101 in Tripura, 52 in Assam, five in Manipur and one in Meghalaya.

"The DSR technique is less time consuming and labour intensive than the conventional practice. The DSR technique called 'tar-wattar DSR' has been developed and successfully tested on a good

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# Reach out to migrants, says Jagan

There should not be any dearth of facilities and food to workers, officials told

**STAFF REPORTER**  
VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Sunday asked officials to extend all help to migrant workers on humanitarian grounds.

Speaking to the officials over telephone, the Chief Minister said, "There should not be any dearth of facilities and food to the workers who are walking to their native places. This is the time to show sympathy and help them generously. Don't step back on expenditure involved."

## Relief centres

He asked officials to arrange buses for the workers walking on the highway and to shift them to the nearest relief centres.

The officials told Mr. Jagan Mohan Reddy that 4,661 migrant workers were stopped at various checkposts and



In protest: Migrants from West Bengal in Vijayawada seeking transportation to their State. ■ K.V.S. GIRI

shifted to 62 relief centres in the last three days. Of them, 485 were heading to various districts in the State. The remaining were walking towards Odisha, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh.

Chief Secretary Nilam Sawhney spoke to her Odisha counterpart on the issue, following which the neighbouring State agreed to receive the migrant workers

from that State at Ganjam with prior intimation.

Following the agreement, 902 Odisha workers – 470 from Prakasam, 410 from Krishna and 22 from Srikakulam districts – were sent to that State on Saturday night.

Another 450 workers from Guntur district would be sent on Sunday. Already, 31 Shramik Specials are being operated from Andhra Pradesh to ferry 39,000 people

## Migrant killed, another injured in road mishap

VIJAYAWADA  
A migrant worker, Sk. Minarul, 23, died and another was injured in a road accident on the outskirts of the city on Sunday. The mishap occurred when a private bus carrying migrant workers from Chennai to West Bengal hit a stationary lorry at Gannavaram around 4.30 a.m. The deceased, a native of West Bengal, was working in Tamil Nadu.

to various destinations. Another 22 trains are being planned during this week to ferry 33,000 people. Officials are pursuing the issue of obtaining NoCs from the receiving States.

Officials said checkposts were provided with staff from the Revenue Department to counsel the workers to visit the relief centres with a promise to send them by the special trains.

# 588 Indians reach Kochi from Maldives

This is the second trip by INS Jalashwa; AI flight evacuates 181 from Gulf

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
KOCHEE

INS Jalashwa arrived at the Kochi port here on Sunday from the Maldives with 588 Indians stranded in the island country following the COVID-19 lockdown.

This is the second trip by INS Jalashwa, which had earlier reached Kochi with 698 Indians from the Maldives on May 10. Naval vessel INS Magar too had evacuated 300 Indians stranded in the Maldives and brought them to Kochi on May 12 as part of the ongoing Samudra Setu mission to evacuate by sea Indians stranded in different parts of the world.

Of the 588 passengers, 487 are from Kerala, said a communication from the Public Relations Department.



Warm welcome: Indians who were stranded in Maldives deboarding INS Jalashwa in Kochi on Sunday. ■ SARATH A.S.

Three persons who showed COVID-19 symptoms were admitted to the Karuveppillai Taluk Hospital. They hail from Kollam, Thiruvananthapuram and Palakkad districts.

Forty-seven others have

been sent to various centres for observation, the communication added.

A communication from the Cochin Port Trust said it had facilitated the safe transit of 1,488 Indian expatriates. The disembarkation

and clearance procedures were coordinated by the Kerala police.

Meanwhile, an evacuation flight (Air India Express IX 434) from Dubai brought 181 Indians from the Gulf on Saturday night. The evacuees comprised 57 men and 124 women. Of them, 32 were children below the age of 10 and 70 of the women were pregnant.

A person with symptoms of COVID-19 and hailing from Thrissur was admitted to the Ernakulam Medical College Hospital. Of the others, 34 had been sent to different COVID-19 care centres, while 146 had been sent to their houses but would be under observation, said a communication from the district administration here.

The Health Department, which had converted Victoria Hospital into a COVID-19 hospital, was working on an exit plan to resume non-COVID activities there.

Andhra Pradesh reported only 25 new cases, the lowest daily tally in the past one

## Two die of infection in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka; Kerala records 14 cases

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
BENGALURU

Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka reported one COVID-19 death each on Sunday, while Tamil Nadu recorded four deaths.

In Karnataka, cases linked to Maharashtra continued to surface in several districts. On Sunday, 40 returnees from Mumbai and Kolhapur – 18 of whom were in Mandya and the rest in Hassan, Kalaburgi, Yadgiri and Shivamogga – tested positive.

## COVID-19

The fatality in the State took the toll to 37, and 55 new cases were detected, raising the tally to 1,147. This included 37 COVID-19 deaths, one non-COVID death and 509 discharges.

A 54-year-old male resident of Udupi with cardiac issues was admitted to a private hospital in Udupi District and died due to cardiac arrest on May 14. His samples tested positive for COVID-19 on May 16. Seventeen of the new cases were women and nine were children.

Also, 22 of the new cases were from Mandya. Of these, except four with a contact history, the remaining 18 had a travel history to Maharashtra. While ten cases were reported from Kalaburgi, six were from Hassan, four from Dharwad, three each from Yadgiri and Kolar, two each from Dakshina Kannada and Shivamogga and one each from Udupi, Bhatkal in Uttara Kannada and Vijayapura.

The Health Department, which had converted Victoria Hospital into a COVID-19 hospital, was working on an exit plan to resume non-COVID activities there.

Andhra Pradesh reported only 25 new cases, the lowest daily tally in the past one

## Act of Kindness

With the imposition of the lockdown across the country, many citizens have come forward to help those affected.



Small steps: A woman in Vijayawada distributing footwear to migrants walking to their native States on Sunday. ■ K.V.S. GIRI

month that witnessed 1,846

continued run of COVID-19 cases with 42 more reported on Sunday, taking the total to 1,147.

A Health Department bulletin said, the tally had risen to 2,380, including 150 immigrants, while the toll was 50.

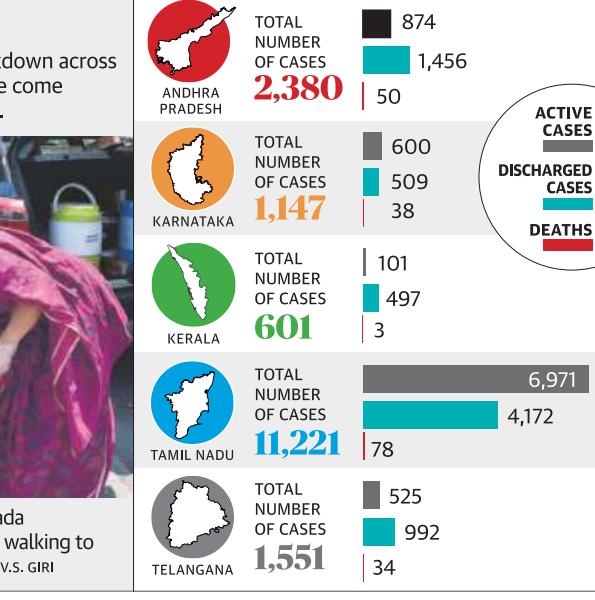
With 103 fresh recoveries, active cases came down to 874. A total of 1,456 patients had recovered, with a recovery rate of 61%, against a mortality rate of 2.1%.

Among cases involving migrants, 23 patients had recovered in Anantapur.

The new cases were in Srikrakulam (7), Chittoor (4), Guntur (4), Kurnool (3), Prakasam (3), Visakhapatnam (3) and Nellore (1). All new cases in Prakasam and one case each in Chittoor and Kurnool were linked to Koyambudu market.

Over a 24-hour period ending Sunday, 9,880 tests were done and a total of 2.38 lakh samples tested in the State, representing 4,780 tests per million.

Telangana witnessed a



la had received 60,612 non-resident Keralites, of whom 3,467 came through various airports, 1,033 through sea ports, 55,086 through border check posts and 1,026 by trains. The number of persons under surveillance rose from 48,825 to 62,529 overnight, 61,855 being quarantined at home.

Tamil Nadu's COVID-19 tally crossed 11,000 on Sunday with the State adding 639 cases – exceeding the 500 mark after three days – including 81 returnees from other parts of the country. While four patients died, the overall COVID-19 numbers touched 11,224 of which 6,971 were active cases.

Of the 639 persons who tested positive, 558 were from within the State and the rest included 73 from Maharashtra, three from Telangana, two each from Karnataka and Rajasthan and one from Andhra Pradesh.

The State recorded four deaths taking the toll to 78.

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

## IN BRIEF



Rahul to give away 1,300 dialysis kits in Wayanad

MALAPPURAM

Congress leader Lok Sabha member from Wayanad Rahul Gandhi will give away 1,300 dialysis kits to kidney and liver patients in his constituency. The kits, containing vital medicines and dialysis components, were being readied for distribution. They would reach the patients across the constituency within a week, said A.P. Anil Kumar, MLA. Mr. Kumar said 1,300 patients were chosen after inviting applications from the needy in the Wayanad Lok Sabha constituency.

### TDP slams A.P. govt. for attack on doctor

VIJAYAWADA

The TDP came down on the Andhra Pradesh government for the alleged stripping and beating of Dr. Sudhakar, who is placed under suspension allegedly for pointing out that the government was not supplying N95 masks to doctors, by the Visakhapatnam police. In a series of tweets on Sunday, TDP national president N. Chandrababu Naidu said the Dalit doctor who had asked for an N-95 mask was not a thief and the government should explain why the doctor was being threatened.

### T.V. serials to resume production from May 25

BENGALURU

Kannada television serials, presently off air due to the lockdown, are likely to resume from mid-June. After a break of over a month, shooting is set resume from May 25. However, though the Kannada Television Association (KTA) has secured permission from the State government, a section of television producers are wary of the move and are unlikely to resume production anytime soon.

# Cong. uses Moideen to target Kerala govt.

He visited a quarantine centre on May 8



G. ANAND  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The public foray of Minister for Local Self-Government A.C. Moideen during the COVID-19 lockdown appeared to have come as an opportunity for the Congress to put the LDF government on the defensive.

The party has attempted to make an issue out of Mr. Moideen's televised appearance at a quarantine centre for Non-Resident Keralites in Thrissur on May 8. It has accused the Minister of having attempted to reap political dividends by giving short shrift to precautions.

Mr. Moideen represents Kunnamkulam in the district from where several of the arrivals hailed. Five of them later tested positive for SARS-CoV-2.

The party's political affairs committee, which met

here on Saturday, took umbrage at the decision of the health authorities to waive quarantine for Mr. Moideen in what it described as a partisan move to avoid any embarrassment to the government.

It said this decision contrasted with the government's insistence that the Congress leaders, who had visited the Walayar checkpost in Palakkad to highlight the plight of stranded Keralites, go into quarantine.

They also sent personalised greeting cards to healthcare workers across the country showing their support and encouragement to their fight against the virus. Sravya is a fourth grade student at the Hanover Hills Elementary School in Hanover, Maryland.

"Everyone can do something is what our team believed," said Sravya,

# Operation to trap tiger to begin today

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MYSURU

The Karnataka Forest Department is trying to trap two tigers and tranquillize them to reduce a conflict situation around Bandipur in Chamarajanagar district and in the Virajpet territorial division of Kodagu district.

The operation to trap the elusive tiger in Bandipur will commence on Monday, while the department has been on the tiger's trail in Virajpet since almost a fortnight without much success.

T. Balachandra, Director, Bandipur National Park, said they had secured permission to begin the operation to capture the tiger. Based on pug marks and camera trap images, they had identified the tiger operating in a 1,000-hectare area outside the Kundakere range.

Stating that the focus should be on filling all mi-

# 'Complete Kaleshwaram work on a war-footing'

Telangana CM leads marathon meeting

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD

Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao has asked irrigation engineers to take up the works pertaining to the lifting of three tmcft of water from the Kaleshwaram project so that it can be diverted to needy areas during the next flood season itself.

In a marathon meeting with Ministers of districts in the Godavari Basin, officials and engineers of the Irrigation Department, which went on for nearly eight hours on Sunday, the Chief Minister told the engineers to begin impounding lakes and ponds as soon as the projects start receiving fresh water.

For the purpose, the required distributory canals and off-take sluices should be taken up and completed, he said.

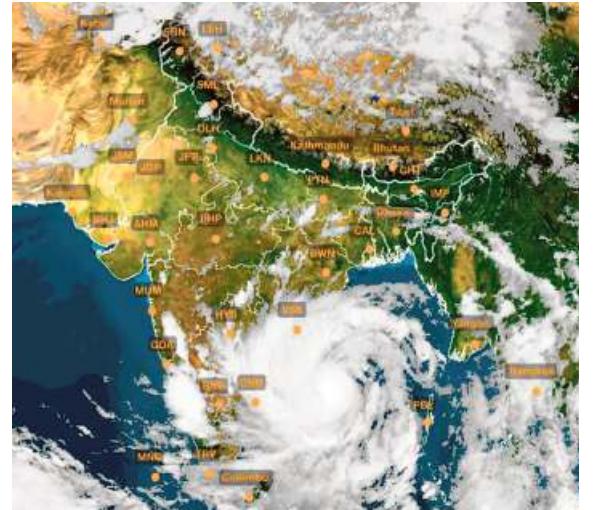
Stating that the focus

nor irrigation tanks, lakes and ponds, the CM said district-wise meetings would be held over the next two to three days so that the hurdles in filling the tanks could be discussed. Before that, irrigation engineers should encourage farmers to take the silt from tank beds voluntarily and dump it in their fields to improve soil fertility, Mr. Rao said.

The Chief Minister instructed the Committee of Engineers-in-Chief to decide whether it was possible to improve the carrying capacity of the canal from the Lower Manair Dam from the existing 6,000 cusecs to 9,000 cusecs, or whether a parallel canal system was needed to take more water to the areas below the project. Officials can reorganise the Irrigation Department based on present and future requirements, he suggested.

## WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD; POLLUTION DATA: CPCB; MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.00 HRS)

**Forecast for Monday:** Thunderstorm accompanied by lightning and gusty winds very likely at isolated places over Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, coastal and south interior Karnataka and Kerala and with lightning at isolated places over Jharkhand and Arunachal Pradesh.

CITY
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## Peaking

Despite the extended lockdown, the steady rise in cases is a cause for worry

In 106 days since the first laboratory-confirmed novel coronavirus case was reported on January 30, India surpassed China's tally of 84,038. As on May 15, India had over 85,500 cases and the death toll stood at 2,752, as against 4,633 in China. There are only 10 other countries that have more cases than India. At the same time, the toll in the U.S. alone went past the total number of cases in China, while the total case load crossed 1.4 million. On March 18, when China reported zero fresh cases, India had just 162 cases and three deaths. Despite the country being under lockdown since almost end-March, the number of fresh cases and deaths reported each day has continued to rise steadily – on average, over 3,600 cases have been reported daily since May 8. This is of serious concern as contrary to the advice of WHO, India has not fully utilised the precious lockdown period to increase manifold the number of tests carried out daily while simultaneously tracing, isolating and treating COVID-19 patients. That even during the lockdown India has witnessed the shortest time, of 13 days, for cases to double compared with 14 other countries that have the most cases reported is testimony to the wide spread of the virus. A reason for this could be that cases in other countries, barring Russia and Brazil, have already peaked or are about to. Unfortunately, even as the number of cases has crossed 94,700, India is yet to begin investigating community transmission despite the strongly suggestive findings of sentinel surveillance among those hospitalised for severe acute respiratory infections. Given the high rate of asymptomatic transmission, high viral resurgence is inevitable when the lockdown is lifted.

With over 11,200 cases, Tamil Nadu has the second highest number of cases next to Maharashtra (over 33,000). But with over 4,000 tests per million, TN is testing nearly two times more than Maharashtra. It is not the States that report more cases that is a cause for concern, but those that have reported fewer. Active case finding and testing of most people with a travel history early during the lockdown could be one reason why Karnataka has reported fewer cases. Similarly, surveillance and case finding of those with a travel history early on have been good in Andhra Pradesh and could be a reason why it has reported fewer than 2,400 cases so far. Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal have reported high case positivity. This could either be due to good surveillance, which is unlikely, or wider spread of the virus in the community, at least in specific regions. If the latter be the case, India can expect huge numbers to be reported in the coming weeks. No State, including Kerala, can thus be complacent.

## Farm gate in focus

Move to amend the Essential Commodities Act is fraught with risks

The Centre's objective of using the COVID-19 crisis to usher in an Atmanirbhar Bharat saw Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman focus Friday's tranche of announcements on farm sector reforms. The centrepiece was a ₹1-lakh crore fund to finance agriculture infrastructure projects at the farm gate and produce aggregation points. Given that the lack of adequate cold-storage facilities continues to extract a high price on farmers and the agrarian economy by way of post-harvest losses, especially in perishables, the targeted outlay is a welcome step. The decision to channel the funds to agricultural cooperatives, farmer producer organisations, rural entrepreneurs and start-ups is also encouraging as it lays the onus of creating the appropriate infrastructure or logistics solution largely on the principal beneficiaries, the farmers themselves. The Minister also unveiled a ₹10,000 crore scheme to promote the formalisation of micro food enterprises. Suggesting a cluster approach focused in different regions on signature produce, Ms. Sitharaman said the goal was to assist unorganised enterprises in scaling up food safety standards to earn the products certification and build brand value. The package, though, may be more beneficial in the longer term than providing any immediate relief from the lockdown-exacerbated distress in the rural hinterland.

Crucially, the Minister also announced three reform proposals that are ostensibly aimed at enabling better price realisation for farmers by removing restrictions and facilitating enhanced marketing freedom. These include amendments to the 1955-vintage Essential Commodities Act that would effectively hollow out the legislation by deregulating cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onions and potato. While the Economic Survey, in January, had recommended jettisoning the "anachronistic" Act, the law has nonetheless remained a vital tool in the government's armoury for protecting consumers from irrational volatility in the prices of essentials by tamping down on black marketeers and hoarders. While the Act's provisions do have scope for an overzealous bureaucracy to harass even an honest exporter, who may have paid a fair price to the farmer and stocked produce for shipment overseas, total deregulation for foodgrains is fraught with the risk of future inflationary food price spikes. The other two proposals are also of concern. While one seeks to bypass the APMC regime through a central law that would allow farmers the freedom to sell across State borders, the other proposes a framework for farmers to enter into pre-sowing contracts that would purportedly help assure them of offtake volumes and prices. Both the changes, once enacted, could privilege market forces without necessarily safeguarding food security. Surely, it would be in no one's interest to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

# Getting India back to the Afghan high table

New Delhi's Afghan policy needs changes and must include openly talking to the Taliban and all other political groups



VIVEK KATJU

If India's foreign and security policy planners had anticipated developments in Afghanistan they would have pursued nimble approaches, seeking to establish open connections with all its political groups, including with those perceived to be in Pakistan's pocket. Instead, they continued to rigidly cling to Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani even as his equities diminished with each passing month. This, despite his becoming the winner of the presidential elections held in September last year but whose contested results were declared five months later.

### Cut to the quick

Inexplicably, Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Mr. Ghani for winning the elections, in December 2019. At that stage, the Afghanistan election commission had only announced the preliminary results and most countries maintained a discreet silence. It took the commission two months more to declare Mr. Ghani as President-elect, a result that was rejected by Mr. Ghani's main rival, Abdullah Abdullah. It led to two simultaneous swearing-ins; both Mr. Ghani and Mr. Abdullah took oath as President. It is true that the international community ultimately supported Mr. Ghani but qualified it with an insistence that he enters into a real power-sharing agreement with Mr. Abdullah. That agreement has just been reached. It will inevitably further weaken Mr. Ghani.

How has Mr. Ghani reciprocated

India's such unqualified backing? His clear and public response came last month in a manner. It could only have been disappointing to Indian decision makers. The United Nations Secretariat organised a meeting on Afghanistan where it invited the six current physical neighbours of Afghanistan—China, Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. In addition, invitations were extended to the United States, Russia and the Ghani government. Obviously, Mr. Ghani did not condition his participation on India's inclusion. He should have done so if only for the constructive role New Delhi has played in Afghanistan's reconstruction since the Taliban were ousted from the country in 2001-2002 after 9/11. Also, for consistently supporting him.

If Indian policymakers had adequately pondered on Mr. Ghani's stance they would have recalled his position on India in the immediate aftermath of assuming the leadership of the National Unity Government brokered by the Americans in September 2014. He had then relegated India to the fourth concentric circle of five in importance to Afghan interests. Hence, it is not surprising that he did not bat adequately for India to become part of the meeting called by the UN. Indeed, if all his fine words of India's importance to Afghanistan were actually true, he would have lobbied and ensured India's participation.

### Point man's blunt talk

So much for Mr. Ghani. What truly cut India more to the quick was the U.S. going along with India's absence. So much for the personal chemistry of the leaders of the two countries. The day after the meeting, Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. point man on Afghanistan and the architect of the Taliban deal, spoke to India's External Affairs



Minister S. Jaishankar to assuage hurt sentiments. But the balm of good words cannot obscure the basic fact that the U.S. acts to promote its interests in Afghanistan. It obviously expects that if in doing so Indian interests are exposed, India will protect them as best as it can.

The fine diplomate of the Ministry of External Affairs statement of the conversation between Mr. Khalilzad and Mr. Jaishankar and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval in Delhi on May 7 cannot override the blunt message conveyed by the U.S. official in his interview to this newspaper, "India should talk directly to Taliban, discuss terror concerns directly," (*The Hindu*, Inside pages, 'Interview, Zalmay Khalilzad', May 9, 2020). He noted that despite India's contributions to Afghanistan's economic development – and these are undeniably significant covering large parts of the country, and are popular – as well as its long history of contacts with that country, it does not have a place in international diplomacy on Afghanistan. As Mr. Khalilzad put it: "But when it comes to international efforts, India yet does not have a role that it could." He patronisingly added that the U.S. wants India to have a more active role in the peace process.

Clearly, as the most significant power in the region, India should have ensured that it had a place on the table and should have devised

ways to achieve that end. This is especially so because Afghanistan impacts on India's interests, especially its security concerns. The question that India's security and foreign policy decision makers should therefore ask themselves is this: why did the powers not consider India's participation vital to the present peace-making efforts, especially when the U.S.-Taliban deal was concluded leading to a possible new stage in Afghanistan's evolution?

### The Taliban and Pakistan

Mr. Khalilzad offered first a clue. He followed it up with what is the obvious reason. He said, "I do think engagement between India and all the key players in Afghanistan, not only in terms of the government but also in terms of the political forces, society and the Afghan body politic is appropriate...." Responding to a question of groups in Afghanistan targeting India he said, "I believe that dialogue between India and the Taliban are important, and it would be important that issues of concerns like this [terrorism] are raised directly." Taking Mr. Khalilzad's views in their entirety, it is clear that he feels that by avoiding open contacts with the Taliban, India has reduced its role in international diplomatic efforts.

That the U.S. is currently crucially dependent on Pakistan for the successful implementation of its Taliban deal aimed at securing as orderly a withdrawal as possible from what is a major strategic reverse for the world's pre-eminent power is not in doubt. Mr. Khalilzad's positive words for Pakistan make it clear. More significant is his comment, "Our strong position is that there shouldn't be [terror] sanctuaries on either side of the Afghan-Pakistan border..." This is in sharp contrast to U.S. President Donald Trump's earlier

focus only on Taliban sanctuaries in Pakistan.

In such a situation, it was essential for India to have maintained its strong links with the Afghan government, built and supported its traditional Afghan allies – perhaps this was discreetly resumed – but also establish open lines of communication with the Taliban. This was especially because they were informally conveying that India should not consider them as Pakistan's puppets and also because they had gained international recognition. Contacts and discussions do not mean acceptance of their ways or that their professions of not being Pakistan's stooges should not have been tested.

### Echo from the past

It is sad that despite all that India has done in Afghanistan over the past 18 years since the Taliban were ousted from Kabul in 2001, it finds itself on the margins of international diplomacy on Afghanistan. It is reminiscent of the time in the 1990s when, at Pakistan's insistence, India was considered a problem and kept out of crucial global forums on Afghanistan. It did not matter then because along with Iran and Russia, it kept the resistance to the Taliban going through Ahmed Shah Masood. Mr. Ghani is no Masood and there are no countries on the horizon which are really opposed to the Taliban acquiring a major place in the Afghanistan's formal power structures.

India needs to take corrective diplomatic action even at this late stage, and even in the time of COVID-19. It must begin openly talking to the Taliban and with all political groups in the country. It must realise that its Afghan policy needs changes.

Vivek Katju is a former Indian Ambassador to Afghanistan

## Labour rights are in free fall

By suspending labour laws, States are exploiting the unique opportunity provided by the national lockdown



ANAMITRA ROYCHOWDHURY

As India slowly attempts to lift its nationwide lockdown, under compulsion of reviving the economy, labour rights are disappearing at an astonishing pace. Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, which are States ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party, took the lead in suspending crucial labour laws for varying lengths of time.

**Undemocratic introduction**  
This strategy visualises effecting an economic turnaround through improvement of India's rank in the "ease of doing business" index, thereby attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) and enthusing domestic private capital. Flexible labour and environmental laws are key instruments through which improvement in ranking is sought (incidentally, India's rank jumped from 130 in 2016 to 63 in 2019).

Such thinking forms the core of the 'Make in India' programme; therefore, elements of labour law dilution are already visible in the four labour codes aimed at consolidating 44 central labour laws (these are on wages, industrial relations, social security and occupational safety, health and working conditions). However, what is surprising is the undemocratic manner, by promulgating ordi-

nances and notifying rules, in which labour rights are suspended without tripartite discussion.

The continuity in direction of policy, although more vigorously pursued now, is obvious: for instance, consider the extension of a work day up to 12 hours. It is argued that this would address the problem of labour shortages at a time when social distancing is the norm. Interestingly, draft rules on the Code on Wages, 2019 already proposed extension of a workday by one hour (from eight to nine hours) when the novel coronavirus pandemic was nowhere on the horizon. Further, even though working hours are extended, there is no provision for overtime pay in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat (although such provisions are available in Uttarakhand, Haryana, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh).

**Shades of an agenda**  
Next, take the U.P. ordinance that shockingly exempts employers from complying with the Minimum Wages Act 1948. However, the Code on Wages, 2019 makes a distinction between national minimum wage (calculated on the basis of an objective formula) and national floor wage (without providing a methodology to calculate it). This was done on purpose, for the minimum wage calculated by a government-appointed committee in 2018 was ₹375 per day, whereas, the national floor wage in the same year was a mere ₹176 per day; however, State governments, under the wages code, are directed to set their minimum wages only above the national floor wage. Thus, States, vying for private invest-

ments, would essentially consider the national floor wage, and this in effect would dilute the idea of minimum wage.

Additionally, the U.P. ordinance also exempts employers from complying with the Industrial Disputes Act 1947. Therefore, employers can hire and fire workers at will; however, employers even now are allowed to offer "fixed-term" employment without any restrictions on the number of renewals. Hence, firms hardly face any problem in adjusting their workforce.

Now check the M.P. ordinance which exempted factories employing less than 50 workers from regular inspections and allowed third-party inspections. Again the wages code severely eroded the inspection mechanism by snatching away the power of inspectors to conduct surprise checks. Even when violations in law are detected, they are mandated to advise, provide information and facilitate employers to comply with the law; in fact, they are now called inspector-cum-facilitator.

The M.P. ordinance further states that for new establishments, provisions guiding industrial dispute resolution, strikes/lockouts and trade unions would cease to

operate. This is in line with the Industrial Relations Code, 2019, which proposes to raise the membership threshold of a trade union from 15% to 75% of the workforce in an establishment, for it to be recognised as the negotiating union.

Therefore, it seems the novel coronavirus pandemic simply provided a window to aggressively fulfil the long-term agenda of diluting labour rights. This becomes evident from the length of suspension of these labour rights – which vary from 1,000 days (M.P.) to three years (U.P.). Surely there is no basis to expect that the impact of the lockdown will stretch for so long and it appears that State governments are competing to project themselves to be investor-friendly.

But will such suspension of labour rights, aimed at reducing labour cost, stimulate private investment and ensure recovery? Past experience does not inspire confidence. The Reserve Bank of India, for some time now, has single-mindedly designed policies that reduce the cost of borrowing capital, but this has clearly failed to unleash animal spirits. Further, reductions in corporate tax in September 2019 made no impact in boosting private capital and reviving growth in subsequent quarters. Actually, banking on private investment for economic recovery when the economy is wrapped in acute uncertainty is essentially futile. This is easy to understand: for example, home buyers, once uncertain about completion of a housing project, will never evince interest even if flats are offered at dirt-cheap rates accompanied by

additional benefits. Private agents wait and watch for a predictable environment before committing their money and, therefore, cannot be the principal agent for guiding an economy caught in a downward spiral.

### Issue of timing

Finally, consider the timing of labour rights suspension. Although industry associations and government are projecting these changes as necessary for enticing FDI relocating from China, this is only a cover for the unique opportunity provided by the lockdown. In other times, such a violent attack on the fundamental rights of workers would lead to widespread protests and massive strikes. Both instruments are toothless now; protests are prohibited by lockdown rules and strikes are meaningless when production days are lost anyway. However, this exposes the authoritarian nature of the state, and every section of society must come together to protect the rights of workers. This is essential for destroying the rights of one section of society makes the rights of other sections of society vulnerable as well. For example, the plight of migrant workers will now spread to the working class as a whole, and industrial accidents such as the ones in Bhopal and Vishakapatnam could engulf larger sections of society. It is time we see these interconnections and resist united.

Anamitra Roychowdhury teaches at the Jawaharlal Nehru University and is the author of the book, 'Labour Law Reforms in India: All in the Name of Jobs'



REUTERS

migrants, would essentially consider the national floor wage, and this in effect would dilute the idea of minimum wage.

A 'package' out of sync?  
One fails to understand in the immediate situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, how allowing greater private participation in the coal and space sectors will provide relief to Indians, especially the poor (Page 1, "Govt. throws open defence production and coal sectors", May 17). The fourth "tranche of economic stimulus" can at best be classified as long-term reforms and should be done through the legislation route and not through the ordinance route. Moreover, including the fourth tranche in the ₹20-lakh crore package is again odd. Even when the

package was announced, it already took into account half the earlier

expenditure. The need of the hour is to provide short-term relief in the form of cash transfers, loan waivers and compensation to the needy. Is anyone listening? SHABANA PARVEZ, Roorkee, Uttarakhand

The hefty stimulus package announced by the Centre will only dampen the hopes of migrant workers. The huge scheme has largely offered them food grains and nothing more. The mega-package has failed to focus on the plight of those worst affected; they have not only lost their livelihoods but are



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also losing their lives in their valiant attempts to reunite with their families. The narrative of their arduous journey amidst scarcity of food and the often ruthless behaviour of State officials is saddening. The "smart attempt" to boost the economy by handing out loans, privatisation and space exploration ventures is not going to help this important section of India. A large chunk of the Finance Minister's announcements are applicable and relevant only in a normal, post-pandemic world.

DEEPIKA JAIN, New Delhi

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

**En route home**  
In the midst of a national lockdown that seems to be stretching out, the condition of hungry and homesick migrant workers caught between a situation of 'no employment, no earnings' and their dire necessity to sustain themselves has become most heart rending. It becomes an emotive issue if one considers that these workers have to cross a divide of thousands of kilometres in order to get back to some sort of security and the comfort of home (Inside pages, May 17).

In the face of impediments such as language, culture,

the absence of family and the worry of unemployment, to say that they are suffering would be an understatement. How they are keeping themselves alive with no idea of where the next meal will come from is moving. In the lockdown situation, they have hardly anyone to fall back on. And with public transport suspended, their state of physical discomfort and emotional shock increases. In such circumstances, their return home should have been arranged with all stops pulled out. When many of us are silenced and moved to tears by the images of suffering and also

R. SAMPATH,  
Chennai

# Where is health in the stimulus package?

A part of the relief funding must be used to improve the country's health infrastructure



A.K. SHIVA KUMAR

India can pause and breathe a sigh of relief in its efforts to contain the spread of the coronavirus. Though the situation varies across States, at the end of the first innings, the country seems to have an advantage.

Our bowlers have done well to limit the COVID-19 score and flatten the curve. Credit for containing the spread of the virus should go to our frontline medical and health workers in government who literally rushed in where angels fear to tread to save people's lives. Putting aside threats to personal safety, family interests, and stigma, selfless government health workers across the country are the ones who are leading the charge.

We shouldn't however forget that the pitch conditions aren't favourable to the Indian players. Even before COVID-19, India was staring at a serious economic slowdown. India's GDP growth for 2019-20 was lowered to 4.1% from 5% projected by several agencies before the outbreak of the virus. Recent reports predict that the impact of COVID-19 might reduce GDP growth rate to 1.1% or even lower in the current financial year. Unemployment has been growing since January 2020 when the first cases of coronavirus emerged. According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, India's unemployment rate at the end of May 16, 2020 was staggeringly high at around 24%.

The second reason why the pitch isn't in India's favour is because our healthcare delivery system in most States is extremely fragile. One wonders, for instance, whether Bihar can handle the consequences if the virus begins to spread with the return of millions of migrant workers back to the State. Many other States also face a similar plight given the poor state of primary healthcare facilities.

**Restoring livelihoods**  
During this innings break, discussions on the strategy to win the match have been focusing on ending the lockdown, reviving economic ac-



"The pandemic has brought into focus India's low spending on public health." Healthcare workers in Mumbai in April. •REUTERS

tivities, restoring livelihoods, addressing concerns of hunger and starvation, stimulating small and medium enterprises, and enhancing farm incomes. The package of ₹20-lakh crore, equivalent to about 10% of India's GDP, announced by the Prime Minister on May 12, is expected to restore the livelihoods of millions of migrants and other workers who have lost their jobs and also enable entrepreneurs and businesses to get re-started.

Some elements of the stimulus package have been announced. Others might follow. While it is too early to comment on the impact of these announcements, one should not forget that the fear factor in reviving employment and business is real. Economic desperation might leave poor workers with no choice but to return to work. But many of them are truly worried about getting infected. Businesses are also genuinely concerned about the collapse of demand and shutting down of retail outlets. Equally disconcerting for them are the difficulties in and consequences of not adhering to conditions set by the government. They are worried about the unpredictability of government's actions and policy revisions. This could well be a reason why, according to recent reports, in the midst of the long-term structural shift from China, companies prefer to relocate manufacturing to countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region, and not India.

In all this, the silence around health is disturbing. While economic stimulus packages are essential, the match cannot be won without urgently and immediately stepping up investments in health.

## Strengthening public health

Dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic has brought out the critical importance of the public sector in health provisioning. However, stuck at around 1.15% of GDP for well over a decade, the low level of public spending on health is both a cause and an exacerbating factor accounting for the poor quality, limited reach and insufficient public provisioning of healthcare. Despite this, the public health system has risen to the challenge so far. The Union and State governments seem to have found the financial resources to provide an emergency response to deal with the pandemic. With agility and speed, orders have been placed for PPEs, ventilators, testing kits, and other supplies needed to detect and treat COVID-19 patients. It is possible that resources allocated for other health programmes are being diverted to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. The opportunity cost of such diversion of funds could be high. Media reports point out, for instance, that people's access to routine maternal and child health as well as family planning services in parts of the country has been negatively impacted. Also, many States are simply not in a position to deal with a second

wave of infections. The pandemic has exposed a hard truth: most private healthcare providers seem to be incapable of and unwilling to help even during a national crisis. And India's private sector in health is sizable. According to recent figures, the private sector accounts for 93% of all hospitals, 64% of all hospital beds, and 80-85% of all doctors. Rapidly declining revenues and sharply eroding profits are leading to the closure of many private hospitals. Only a few private providers have come forward to extend support to the government.

Not addressing weaknesses in the public health delivery system can thwart all efforts at reviving the economy. State governments need to be prepared as the worst maybe yet to come.

This is the time then to seize the opportunity and invest in universal health coverage (UHC) by reversing the financial neglect of public healthcare. Nearly every country in the world that has achieved anything like UHC has done it through the public assurance of primary healthcare.

Announcing a new 'health investment plan' (as part of the stimulus package) is the urgent need of the hour. At least 1% of GDP out of the stimulus package should be earmarked for improving the country's health infrastructure and strengthening public health service delivery. And up to 70% of the additional expenditures should be ring-fenced for primary healthcare and further strengthening health and wellness centres, primary health centres and community health centres. Only then can State governments be better prepared to face a second round of the pandemic. Investing in health, apart from improving people's well-being, is also essential for accelerating and sustaining India's economic growth.

If cricket is a game of chance, so is the match against COVID-19. What the immediate future holds for India in terms of the spread of the virus is not known. As is said of matches, 'it ain't over till it's over.' There is only one way to win this match and establish a self-reliant and prosperous India: seize the opportunity and step up investments in public health across the country.

A.K. Shiva Kumar is a Delhi-based development economist

## Licensed to beat, abuse and kill

Police brutality, a colonial legacy, has tenaciously clung on to the mantle of law enforcement personnel

M.P. NATHANAEL

On April 16, Mohammed Rizwan, 19, a resident of Chhajapur village, Uttar Pradesh, ventured out of his home to buy biscuits. He was beaten with rifle butts and *lathis* by the police, while other residents purchased their groceries from the shop. In a battered condition, he managed to reach home. After some home remedies did not work, he was admitted to the local hospital where he died in the wee hours of April 18.

There was nothing unusual in this incident or similar acts of brutality committed by the police as migrant workers, taking an arduous inter-State journey, attempted to return to their respective villages. In several places, elderly people were ruthlessly beaten. The high-handedness shown by the police during the various phases of the ongoing lockdown even led to a petition being filed with the State Human Rights Commission of Tamil Nadu. The petition called for the institution of a grievance redressal mechanism to inquire into the excesses committed by law enforcement personnel.

Taking a serious view of police brutality, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative in March issued a set of guidelines for police, in no uncertain terms prohibiting them from using force on persons violating the lockdown regulations. In this regard, the Bengaluru Police later set an example by divesting the policemen of batons and instead engaging in the use of persuasive methods to seriously implement the lockdown.

**Trained to be fierce**  
A legacy of the British rulers, brutality has been a tenacious characteristic of the Indian police and precious little has been done to eradicate it. Most policemen are made to believe from their very training days that brutality is inherent in the very role to be performed by them, to instil a certain degree of fear in the citizens. This attitude is reinforced by training instructors, who abuse and even manhandle errant trainees. Unfortunately, posting to police training institutions is considered a punishment. Having picked up the traits and

armed with the power to take anyone to task, policemen exercise their unbridled power to beat, abuse and even kill after they have donned the *khakis*.

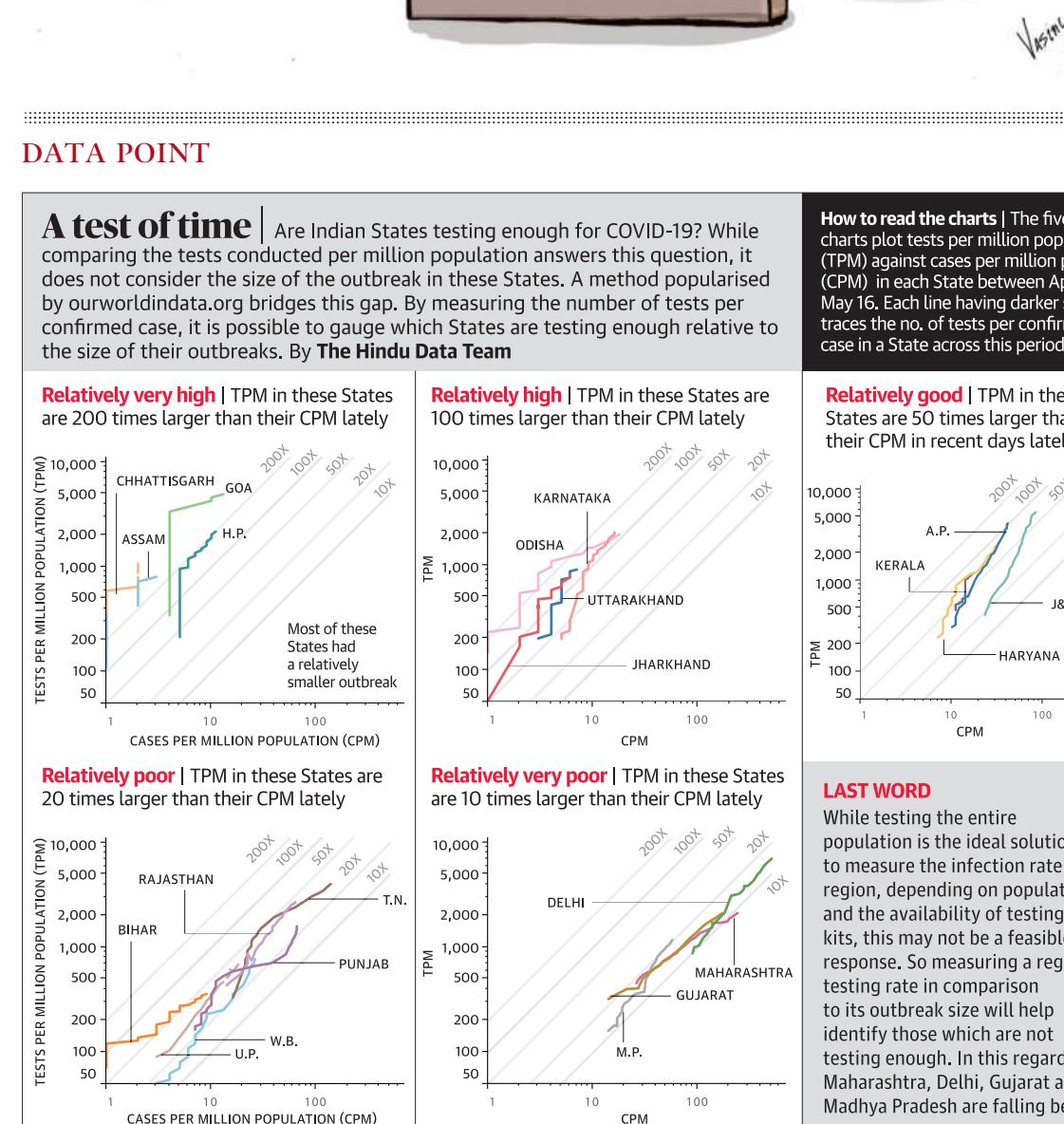
Application of force is definitely a legal requirement and it is justified by arming policemen with *lathis*, pistols, rifles and other modern weapons. But the mere issue of *lathis* and weapons in no way justifies their indiscriminate use on innocents or even the accused. Prudence demands that these weapons be used in a just manner. Though the subject of human rights is a part of training curriculum in training institutions, no seriousness is attached to it. Those who violate human rights are seldom taken to task. By virtue of being from the same fraternity, most superiors overlook instances of brutality as they consider it an innate demand of the job of policing. True, there are officers who brook no unjustified use of force but their numbers are few.

To make matters worse, seldom are senior officers seen on the spot when their junior-ranking personnel are on duty. Presence of senior officers with their personnel in the field not only will be conducive in building up a spirit of camaraderie with them, it will also serve as an opportunity to brief the personnel and deter them from any wrongdoing.

**Difficult working conditions**  
On the other hand, it is true that long duty hours tend to test the patience of policemen. Working under tremendous pressure without any respite for relaxation, some of them are constantly on a short fuse and tend to vent their ire on innocent victims.

Large vacancies in police forces are also responsible for this state. Against the UN recommendations of 222 police personnel for a population of one lakh, most States in our country have around 100 personnel only. Proper planning in recruitment, training, in-service courses and close supervision by senior officers can go a long way in reducing, if not eradicating, brutality by policemen.

M.P. Nathanael is a retired Inspector General of Police, CRPF



FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

## Can Facebook's self-regulation ensure information hygiene?

The tech giant has launched a content oversight board



A.S. PANNEERSELVAN

the harvesting of personal data by Cambridge Analytica and the mindless censoring of the Pulitzer Prize winning photograph of the "Napalm girl" that spoke about the barbarity of war. People from other regions have their own lists of failures of the platform.

### Dealing with localised propaganda

Second, there is a huge gap between the magnitude of Facebook's size, reach, linguistic diversity and influence on one hand, and the limitation of the oversight board to look into localised propaganda on the other. As of the first quarter of 2020, Facebook has 2.6 billion monthly active users and the number surpasses 3 billion people a month if one includes the other popular products of the company such as WhatsApp, Instagram and Messenger. It is available in 101 languages.

For instance, how will the oversight board handle a toxic posting in Tamil? I have noticed a growth in bigotry, hate and abuse in Tamil-language postings. These do not reveal their true colour if they are subjected to mechanical translation without providing adequate context. What are the mechanisms to capture the gravity of the polarising content that fills cyberspace? Problematic posts should be removed on a war footing because there is a political dividend for inciting hate.

We must remember that the grim images broadcast by the killer in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand could not be controlled or moderated by the social media giants despite the conscious and collective decision to take down the offensive video. There seems to be no mechanism to prevent reposting of offensive content, which was taken down.

Rebecca MacKinnon, a fellow with the University of California National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement and co-founder of Global Voices, is convinced that the oversight board "cannot stop the exploitative collection and sharing of user data, or stop the company from deploying opaque algorithms that prioritize inflammatory content to maximize engagement." I tend to agree with her. In print and broadcast organisations, there is a shared value system between all the stakeholders which makes self-regulation an effective mechanism. But there is no unifying objective between Mark Zuckerberg, his hand-picked corporate board, Facebook's nearly 2.5 billion users and the oversight board, despite the individual credentials of its members.

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The Hindu

### FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 18, 1970

#### 'Task Force' for Peace in Cambodia

The 11-nation Asian and Pacific conference on Cambodia ended today (May 17, Jakarta) with the setting up of a "task force" of the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia and Japan to initiate action by the United Nations and other countries for an effective solution to the Cambodian situation. The conference, attended by Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Laos, South Vietnam, the Philippines, South Korea, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, besides Indonesia, urged in a joint communique that "all foreign troops be withdrawn from Cambodia and hostilities be stopped" and also that all parties respect the sovereignty, neutrality and territorial integrity of Cambodia. Towards this end the members of the 1954 Geneva conference and all interested parties were urged to hold talks to convene an early international conference "to find a just, peaceful and effective solution" to the Cambodian situation. The Foreign Ministers who participated in the conference decided to place their views before the United Nations and apprise all UN members of the gravity of the situation.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 18, 1920

#### The Dyerites.

(From second editorial)

After deep cogitation – and perhaps a little anxious waiting to see which way the wind blows – the *Madras Times* has come to the conclusion that General Dyer's action was perfectly justified. Its reason for this remarkable conclusion is not less remarkable, being based on the analogy of the battlefields. Now, what are the facts? At a time when order had been restored after a period of mob rule, a meeting, the prohibition of which was imperfectly known, was held. It was attended by a large number of country people down for the Baisakhi fair. There were a number of women and children also present. General Dyer heard of the meeting, he proceeded thither to make an example, and immediately on arrival opened fire and continued firing. In his evidence, he has clearly shown that he did not think the meeting was a rebellious one except on the technical ground that it was held in defiance of the prohibition. *Fiat Justicia*, says the *Madras Times*. If the justice of General Dyer is typical of British justice, we should prefer the justice of the Germans in Belgium, the Bulgarians in Macedonia, or the Belgians in the Congo. There is so much less of sickening hypocrisy, less of pharisaical divergence between practice and profession in the latter.

## FROM PAGE ONE

### States to decide on infection zones

"With a view to ensure safety in offices and work places, employers on best effort basis should ensure that the application is installed by all employees having compatible mobile phones. District authorities have been asked to advise individuals to install the Aarogya Setu application on compatible mobile phones and regularly update their health status on the App. This will facilitate timely provision of medical attention to those individuals who are at risk," MHA said.

The MHA guidelines said inter-State movement of vehicles and buses has been allowed with mutual consent of the concerned States and Union Territories. States could decide on movement of vehicles within its boundaries.

The guidelines said, "local authorities should ensure that shops and markets open with staggered timings, so as to ensure social distancing. All shops shall also have to ensure six feet distance among customers and also not allow more than five persons at one time."

MHA said the fresh guidelines allow States to delineate Red, Green and Orange zones following the parameters set by the Health

### Govt. hikes borrowing limits for States by 5%

Some analysts felt that this amounted to double counting as the credit guarantee schemes to support small companies and non-banking finance companies would also tap into the RBI's measures.

The final picture shows that of the ₹20.97 lakh crore stimulus package – which amounts to 9.8% of GDP – only ₹2.2 lakh crore can be traced as direct additional budgetary cost to the Central exchequer, while another ₹1.55 lakh crore relates to already budgeted expenditures," said Ernst and Young chief policy adviser D.K. Srivastava, who is also on the Advisory Council for the 15th Finance Commission.

The remaining 85% comes from the RBI's liquidity announcements, credit guarantee schemes and insurance schemes, apart from the structural reforms which are not really stimulus or relief measures."

The decision to allocate ₹40,000 crore to the MGNREGA scheme in addition to the ₹61,000 crore allocated in the Budget was widely welcomed, as a measure that will support rural livelihoods at a time when returning migrants swell unemployment in the villages.

However, given that States account for 40% of MGNREGA expenditure, including most upfront costs, they will also have to be willing to spend on the scheme.

State governments have been given more fiscal room in the current crisis with the hiking of their borrowing limits from 3% to 5% of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), which is particularly important as GSDPs are likely to contract, further shrinking possible borrowing at a time when States are at the frontline of containment and relief operations. However, the hiked limits will be conditional on States implementing reforms related to ration portability, ease of doing business, power distribution, and urban local bodies. The Finance Minister, said

Ministry.

MHA said only essential activities shall be allowed in the containment zones.

"Strict perimeter control shall be maintained, and no movement of persons would be allowed across the zones, except for medical emergencies and for maintaining supply of essential goods and services. Buffer zones are areas adjoining the containment zones, where new cases are more likely to appear. In the buffer zones, more caution needs to be exercised," MHA said.

Schools, colleges, educational institutions, hotels, restaurants except canteens at bus depots, railway stations and airports will remain shut.

Places of large public gatherings such as cinemas, shopping malls, gyms, entertainment parks and all kinds of social, political, cultural and religious congregations remain prohibited.

Restaurants will be allowed to operate kitchens for home delivery of food items. "Sports complexes and stadia will be permitted to open only for sports activities. However, spectators will not be allowed in these complexes," the MHA said.

The guidelines said, "local authorities should ensure that shops and markets open with staggered timings, so as to ensure social distancing. All shops shall also have to ensure six feet distance among customers and also not allow more than five persons at one time."

MHA said the fresh guidelines allow States to delineate Red, Green and Orange zones following the parameters set by the Health

both Central and State finances were stressed, which is why GST compensation has not been paid to any States since December, and estimated that the increase in borrowing limits would make extra resources worth ₹4.28 lakh crore available to States.

While she noted that the States have so far only borrowed 14% of their already authorised limits, analysts pointed out that this limit is meant for the entire year, and nine States have already advanced their borrowing calendars even at a time when the interest on their bonds has shot up to 9%.

"States are paying a high cost for market borrowings, while the Centre's cost is lower at about 6%. It would have been better for the Centre to borrow from the market and transfer to the States," said economist Pranab Sen, who is also a former Chief Statistician of India.

He was also critical of the new Public Sector Enterprise Policy as part of a stimulus package, noting that privatising PSUs would find fewer buyers at a time of global recession, while any potential buyer would be spending money which could have gone into fresh investment on a financial transfer instead, effectively contracting demand.

Announcing far-reaching changes, Ms. Sitharaman had said the new policy will notify specific strategic sectors in which at least one PSU will remain, although private companies will also be allowed. PSUs in all other sectors will be privatised. Even in the strategic sectors, no more than four PSUs will be allowed, with the rest being privatised, merged or brought under holding companies.

For the health sector, the Finance Minister promised increased public expenditure including infectious disease hospital blocks in every district and public laboratories in every block, without mentioning any specific financial outlay.

The Finance Minister, said

### Maharashtra cases surge by 2,347

The average number of new cases per day from May 10-16 has risen to 3,989, compared to a daily average of 3,675 from May 8-14. Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said on Sunday that the country's fatality rate had fallen to 3.1% and the recovery rate had improved to

37.5%. He added that there were 3.1% patients in ICU, 0.45% on ventilators and 2.7% on oxygen support. India's testing capacity had increased to 1,00,000 tests per day through 373 government laboratories and 152 private laboratories, the government said.

SRINAGAR

One militant and a soldier were killed in an operation by the security forces in Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday.

A police spokesman said the militant, identified as Tahir Ahmed Bhat, was encircled during a search operation launched on Saturday

night at Khotra in the Chenab Valley. A police spokesman said Bhat was a close associate of the slain Hizbul Mujahideen commander Riyaz Naikoo. He hailed from Pulwama in south Kashmir and joined militancy last year. He was also a confidante of the current Hizbul Mujahideen commander Saifullah.

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## IN BRIEF



## Mumbai reports highest single-day surge

Maharashtra reported its highest single-day surge yet on Sunday, with 2,347 new COVID-19 cases, as the total breached the 33,000-mark to soar to 33,053 cases. With 63 new fatalities, the death toll shot up to 1,198. Mumbai city, which recorded a staggering 1,595 of these new cases to post its highest day-surge as well, breached the 20,000-case mark to rise to 20,150 cases.

## Discharged COVID-19 patient found dead

AHMEDABAD  
The body of a 67-year-old COVID-19 patient was found at a bus stand here in Gujarat on Friday, a day after he was discharged from the Civil Hospital. The incident caused outrage prompting Chief Minister Vijay Rupani to order a probe. "He was discharged since he had mild symptoms and was asked to be under home quarantine," said Dr. M.M. Prabhakar, OSD at the hospital.

## Migrant worker dies of exhaustion in Odisha

BERHAMPUR  
A 28-year-old migrant worker, who had returned from Andhra Pradesh, died in Odisha's Ganjam district on Saturday, just a few hours away from home, owing to exhaustion and summer heat. Bimal Sahu, 28, who hails from Nayagarh district, used to work at a dhaba in A.P. After the lockdown was announced, he initially started walking and then managed to board a truck.

**Ahmedabad remains main COVID-19 cluster**

AHMEDABAD  
Gujarat's COVID-19 curve continues to see a sharp rise with 391 new infections and 34 deaths occurring on Sunday, increasing the State's cumulative figures to 11,380 and 659. Gujarat has the second largest number of fatalities after Maharashtra. Ahmedabad remains the main cluster with 31 deaths and 276 cases on Sunday. The city's tally for both cases and fatalities has climbed — to 8,420 cases and 524 deaths.

## Pandemic brings Uttarakhand's 'ghost' hamlets to life

State govt. is hoping to retain migrant workers

ANUJ KUMAR  
GHAZIABAD

"*Aapada main avsar* (opportunity in disaster)"— Tribhuvan Oniyal has latched on to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's phrase to turn the pandemic into a possibility to inject life into the ghost villages of Pauri Garhwal in Uttarakhand.

Every day, the social activist and journalist gets calls from people who have left the villages in Pauri Garhwal for a better life in the cities.

"Every day, I get five-six calls from residents who migrated many years back for better prospects. These are not exactly from abandoned villages but those which still

have half a dozen families," says Mr. Oniyal, who lives in Sangaura village with his father Vidyadutt Sharma.

Mr. Sharma incidentally is the protagonist of Nirmal Chander's documentary *Moiti Bagh*, which was nominated for the 92nd Academy Awards and captures life in the hills of Pauri Garhwal, the district with the highest number of abandoned villages in the State.

## Harsh life

"I know it won't be easy. Out of 10 families returning, only two or three will stay back. Some of them who settled in western Uttar Pradesh decades back are for a picnic; some will not be able to cope with the harsh life of hills and return once the pandemic subsides," he says.

Rajendra Singh, who was



A family back home in Pauri. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

in a marketing job in Delhi, returned to his village, Thampla, in mid-March to make arrangements for his mother's *barsi* (a ritual performed a year after the death of a person). "After the lockdown, my family somehow

reached here a few days back and are quarantined in our four-room house," Mr. Singh said.

The two months have given him an opportunity to return to farming. "I grew vegetables and *chaulai* (Hima-

layan Amaranth), enough to feed a few families. So hunger will not be an issue. As for education, I can send my daughter to Pauri, 18 km away. If government provides some support, I won't return," he says.

But returning to abandoned houses is not always a pleasant experience. "In Asnoli village, a family returned after five years to find that their house was not habitable. So we had to quarantine them in a school," says Mohd Mujtaba Khan, district information officer.

A total of 23,423 migrants had reached 1,121 gram panchayats of Pauri till May 16, according to the District Information Office.

Dhiraj Singh, district magistrate, Pauri Garhwal, says many returning workers would be engaged in horticulture, poultry and apiculture activities. "The government wants them to stay back and is making efforts to that end."

Mr. Oniyal says he is trying to train people in the cultivation of cash crops, pisciculture and poultry farming.

## Case surge disproves prediction of decline

NITI Aayog member V.K. Paul had said that the number of active cases would dip to zero by May 16

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The number of COVID-19 positive cases in India nearing the six-digit mark has improved an assessment by V.K. Paul, NITI Aayog member and head of a government-empowered committee on medical management.

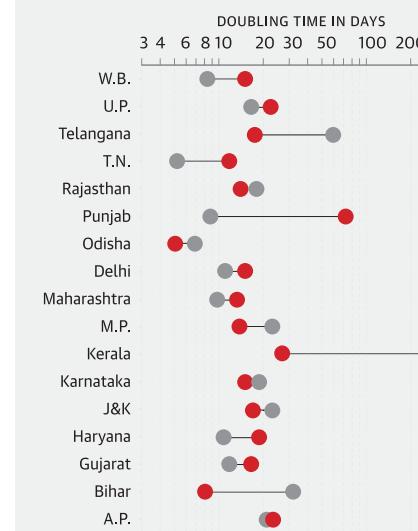
On April 24, Mr. Paul, an internationally acclaimed paediatrician, made a detailed presentation at the daily Health Ministry briefing, detailing how the lockdown helped to curtail the spread of the novel coronavirus. His presentation suggested that the first lockdown had prevented India from seeing a 1,00,000 cases in April. It had also slowed the rate of transmission and increased the doubling time, the period it took for cases to double, to about 10 days.

However, included in this was a PowerPoint slide that projected the benefits from "extending the lockdown" beyond April 15. This had a curve showing the number of active cases plummeting to zero by May 16.

From May 3, India would hit its peak in adding daily new cases at a little above

**Case file |** Maharashtra leads in infections and deaths with cases continuing to double quicker there in comparison to most other States. Cases are doubling\* quicker in Madhya Pradesh (with relatively high infections), Odisha, Bihar and Kerala (with lower numbers)

Fresh cases in Kerala have led to a lowering in doubling time. Chart compares doubling times between this (●) and previous week (○)



\*This refers to the estimated time taken for cases to double based on data in the past week (States with >500 cases alone)

State	Cases	Tests per million	Deaths
Maharashtra	33,053	2,147.3	1,198
Gujarat	11,380	2,135.8	659
T.N.	11,224	4,063.9	78
Delhi	9,755	7,073.4	148
Rajasthan	5,083	2,744.6	128
M.P.	4,977	1,188.8	248
U.P.	4,464	691	112
W.B.	2,677	783.4	238
A.P.	2,380	4,291.3	50
Punjab	1,964	1,605.8	35
Telangana	1,551	589.5	34
Bihar	1,251	363.2	8
Karnataka	1,146	2,084.4	37
J&K	1,121	5,657.1	13
Haryana	887	3,019	13
Odisha	828	1,989.1	5
Kerala	601	1,195.7	4

said, there will have to be a flattening in new cases that lasted over two weeks in key States such as Gujarat, Maharashtra and West Bengal that were fuelling the rise in numbers. "So far, there is no such evidence of a decline. So I don't know the basis of that forecast. We are planning, in terms of keeping ventilators, beds, ICU facilities ready on the assumption that this will last much longer," a member had then told *The Hindu*.

**Steady increase**  
Since April 27, there has not been a day when India has posted fewer than 1,500 cases, and the number has steadily increased to over 3,000 a day. On Sunday, India reported nearly 5,000 cases over a 24-hour period. To be sure, doubling time has improved and testing rates, too, have significantly increased, with Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan claiming that India is now testing nearly 1,00,000 samples a day. India's test positivity rate remains at around 4%, meaning 4 of 100 samples are turning up positive. However, this varies within the States.

When his febrile friend was dumped along the highway in Kolaras of Shivpuri district in Madhya Pradesh on Friday by a truck headed for Uttar Pradesh, Mr. Mohammed disembarked, too. "I couldn't leave him alone in that condition. Other workers in the truck felt he carried the coronavirus, but he was my friend. They refused to call for medical help," he recalled.

Alongside the Mumbai-Agra highway, before the ambulance arrived, Mr. Mohammed cushioned his friend's head on his lap and sprinkled water to keep him from sinking.

The same night, Ramcharan's temperature shot up to 105 degrees and he was put



Yaqoob Mohammad trying to help his friend Amrit Ramcharan. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

## On unforgiving road, till death did them part

Truck ditches ill man, friend stays back

STAFF REPORTER  
SHIVPURI

Reaching home a couple of days late was all right for Yaqoob Mohammad but not returning to his village alone, without his friend Amrit Ramcharan. "Both our parents are waiting. We had left home together to work in Surat and decided to return together," said Mr. Mohammed.

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Alongside the Mumbai-Agra highway, before the ambulance arrived, Mr. Mohammed cushioned his friend's head on his lap and sprinkled water to keep him from sinking.

Mr. Mohammed is now at an isolation facility at the district hospital. Their samples have been collected for COVID-19 test.

## Commercial sex work may spike cases'

Researchers feel red light areas should remain closed even after lockdown

JACOB KOSHY  
NEW DELHI

Allowing commercial sex work to commence immediately after lockdown in India's red light areas could lead to a rapid rise in cases that could overwhelm hospitals, says a modelling study from researchers at the Yale School of Medicine and Harvard Medical School. Though these findings have been "shared" with the State governments, these are still being peer-reviewed.

As per the study, if red light areas are kept closed following the lifting of lockdown, there can be a delay in the peak of COVID-19 cases by up to 12 days in Mumbai, 17 days in New Delhi, 29



Workers disinfecting a red light area in Mumbai. ■ VIVEK BENDRE

COVID-19 cases by 21% in Mumbai, 27% in Pune, 31% in New Delhi, 56% in Nagpur, and 66% in Kolkata in a 45-day period, the study finds.

Deaths can be reduced by 63% in India, 28% in Mumbai, 38% in New Delhi, 43% in Pune, 61% in Nagpur and 66% in Kolkata in the first 60 days, it says. These numbers are based on the prevalent reproduction number (RO) of 2.0, meaning that every infected person spreads the disease to two others. Experts say that an epidemic starts to cease when the RO dips below 1.

There are close to 6,37,500 sex workers in India as per the National AIDS Control Organisation (NA-

CO), and over 5 lakh customers visit red light areas.

The study relied on data from Census figures on sex worker populations and interviews in red light areas.

"Our study findings show there is a strong effect of the red light area closures, especially immediately following the lockdown," study co-author Dr. Jeffery Townsend, Professor of Biostatistics, Yale School of Medicine, said in a statement. The other authors are Alison Galvani, Director, Center for Infectious Disease Modelling & Analysis, Yale University; and Dr. Sudhakar Nuti, Department of Medicine, Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School.

that the curve was only meant to show a "trend", but he has never explained the rationale behind the assessment. He has not responded to repeated requests by *The Hindu* for comment.

For a decline in the national average, experts have



## INTEGRAL COACH FACTORY

The following e-tenders are published in IREPS website. Firms are requested to login to [www.reps.gov.in](http://www.reps.gov.in) and quote against these tenders. Manual Quotations will not be entertained for these tenders. Hindi Translation of Display Advertisement available in the website [www.icf.indianrailways.gov.in](http://www.icf.indianrailways.gov.in)

Closing and Opening Time for all tenders are 10.30 Hrs. and 11.00 Hrs. respectively.

Sl. No.	Open Tender No.	Short Description of Work	Approx. Value	Date of Tender
1	EW/1070	Complete disinfection of Shell, Furnishing and LHB factories of ICF	₹ 71.45 Lakhs	29-05-2020 29-05-2020

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**TRU:PPM:05:2020-21 13.05.2020**

## TENDER FOR HIRING OF MILK TANKERS

Sealed tenders are invited from registered owners of Road Milk tankers for hiring of milk tankers for transportation of Milk from outside State. Bidding document can be downloaded from the website [www.milmatrcmu.com](http://www.milmatrcmu.com) and submit along with prescribed EMD. Last date of submission 05.06.2020 at 11 AM.

Managing Director

## Rampukar's tears shock humanity

He was stuck in Delhi for three days and could not see his son who died in Bihar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

Rampukar Pandit, who became a snapshot of India's migrant tragedy with his photograph sobbing by a road in Delhi, is back in Bihar, broken at not being able to see his son before he died.

"We labourers have no life, we are just a cog in the wheel, spinning continuously until we run out of life," the 38-year-old said.

The construction labourer, who worked at a cinema hall site in Delhi, was spotted weeping as he talked on the phone by the side of the Nizamuddin Bridge in Delhi by PTI photographer Atul Yadav on May 11. The powerful image of the distraught man, struggling to reach home in



Face of a tragedy: The photo of Rampukar Pandit weeping by a road in Delhi was widely shared across all media. ■ PTI

grieved at the thought that he might not get home on time to see his baby. Shortly after the photo was taken, his son, who had not yet turned one, died. "I pleaded to the police to let me go home but none helped," he said.

When the photograph was taken, he said he was an-



There is no better time than now for Indian educational institutions to experiment and move to remote-learning models. But are they?

■ G SRINIVAS AND SALIL S

The immediate impact of COVID-19 is ubiquitous. Though colleges and universities have shut down, exams postponed, events cancelled, and regular classes suspended, learning is not on hold everywhere. Online learning and offerings of education technology providers get broader and deeper among some sections of society. The pandemic points out our educational capabilities, gaps, and few learning residuals.

Using alternative modes of educational delivery in the coronavirus season can be the most massive experiment in remote-learning Indian education.

#### Institutional responses

Even if there has been a market drive and regulatory thrust on online learning and educational technologies for long, many institutions do not have the necessary mechanisms in place to meet such emergencies. Some are slow in incorporating the tools and methods. Yet, there are significant efforts from many responsive institutions. We can see four levels of responses in addressing the COVID-19 emergency in the sphere of teaching and learning.

At the bottom, all educational activities have deferred and the downtime period becomes a proxy vacation. At the second, videos are uploaded, mostly on YouTube, and assign-

ments collected through emails, which cannot be equivalent to active remote learning. At the third level, a combination of tools incorporates learning management systems (like Moodle or Google Classroom), conferencing tools (like Skype or Zoom), extensive use of MOOCs (like Swayam, Coursera or Edx) and assessment tools (like Quizlet and peer evaluation tools). At the fourth level, classes are conducted as per the timetable, but in synchronous online mode aided by Learning Management Systems with high levels of functionality of all the tools in the third level.

#### Tools

Obviously, most of our institutions fall under the first and second categories, and the challenge is to push them to the next levels. It is not hard to do so by selecting the right tools and co-creating with the students. The UGC has circulated more than two dozen resources to the academic community for online learning and self-paced learning.

#### Digital imbalance

Many national institutions and international schools have shifted entirely to online mode because of their preparedness and pre-existing privileges. Students from affluent backgrounds and premier institutions have a distinct advantage



**Online learning and offerings of education technology providers get broader and deeper among some sections of the society. The pandemic points out our educational capabilities, gaps, and few learning residuals.**

in learning even during this crisis.

The inequity in real education is reflected in the digital space as well. It may be ironic but true that, to bridge this digital imbalance, the cure may come from technology itself. Popularisation of low-cost devices like Raspberry and technologies like blockchain may allow the implementation of digital

certificates, validation of educational content, and credentials with better transparency and control. However, more research is required in these areas, with a particular focus on instructional delivery.

#### The inevitable transition

The emergency transition to remote learning is mostly by force. And there are debates that online learning cannot replace face-to-face learning.

Yet, online learning, being an umbrella term, offers a possibility to shift and extend our understanding and practice from video classes to online interactive exercises. Non-'Google'-able assignments and learning exten-

sions are the new necessary reality of instructional design in the mainstream.

If one of the objectives of higher education is to prepare our students for the future, an emergency is the right time to rise up to the challenges of learning continuity.

#### Remote learning is not a distant future

Remote work and education are not reserved for emergencies but, in challenging times, the pandemic is a powerful reminder to reassess our modes of delivery and a wake-up call to overcome the vulnerability of academia. If flexible delivery and close social interfaces are the future of higher education,

the period of lock-down is not a short-time to rethink and develop new teaching and learning models.

To make the shift happen, each institution can create a transition schedule in which expectations from tech support and pedagogical spaces are defined.

COVID-19 demands us to imagine a collective educational future, which was unimaginable a few months back. Once the willingness and the basics of the educational change are correct, we can keep calm and carry on.

G Srinivas is the Joint Secretary and Salil S is the Education Officer with the University Grants Commission.

While digital learning platforms are currently substituting for regular learning methods, they can complement the traditional in the future as well

■ KUNCHERIA P ISAAC

The COVID-19 outbreak has led educational institutions to adopt several of the following digital technologies:

**Record video lectures** of teachers and upload them on YouTube or similar platforms for students to view and listen at their own pace.

**Provide notes** and content related to the courses to students through email, WhatsApp, and so on.

**Lectures delivered on digital platforms** at scheduled slots when students join to listen and interact. These are called live lectures or webinars.

Ideally, the platform should have the following facilities to achieve the feeling of a face-to-face classroom environment.

- (i) Provision to see each other.
- (ii) Presentation of slides and content.
- (iii) Use of white board.
- (iv) Discussion forum.
- (v) Marking attendance.
- (vi) Conduct of assignment and assessment.

(vii) Conduct of laboratory sessions.

#### Some concerns

The first and foremost is the non-availability of desktop/laptop to participate in the online lecture. The percentage of students using Android mobile in the online classes is 75%. It is also appropriate for AICTE to think of a shift in the policy of insisting on a minimum number of computers in the institution.

The second concern is transparency in conducting assessments online for which we should go by the "honour-code" way or limit the time for closed book examination or encourage open book examination.

The entire education system in the country is moving to Outcome-Based Education and the Blooms Taxonomy levels of Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyse, Evaluate and Create are applied to learning outcomes.

Several other innovative techniques can be used to assess learning outcomes. The open book examination system of short duration and reports/projects requiring longer duration could make the assessment transparent and improve the knowledge and skills of the learners required by Industry 4.0.

The writer is Vice Chancellor, Hindustan Institute of Technology, Chennai (former Member Secretary, AICTE and founder Vice Chancellor of APJ Abdul Kalam Technological University)

## Traditional vs virtual

It is important to shift the focus of the traditional vs online classrooms debate to concentrate on what benefits students

■ ADYA SHARMA

Time and again, a narrative comes up that predicts the end of traditional college degrees. This became more common in the last decade with the entry of massive open online courses. While online courses have become a force to reckon with, the value of the traditional degree is still as strong as ever.

Should we really be comparing the two and predict the success of one at the cost of the failure of another? Shouldn't a comparison be done between two similar objects? This that takes us to the core question: are traditional degrees and online courses competitors or can they complement each other?

#### A comparison

Traditional classrooms have an advantage when it comes to discipline and motivation. The structured schedule of attending classes and routine face-to-face interactions with instructors helps students develop social skills, discipline and routine. In contrast, an online classroom allows you a flexible schedule as one can study from anywhere.

While an instructor in a traditional classroom can act as your mentor and guide, social interaction in online courses is mainly through discussion boards or video chat. Another crucial difference is the cost with online courses being cheaper than traditional courses.

#### Individual choices

For a working professional, an online course provides much-needed flexibility. They would like to increase their qualifications to enhance career opportunities but may not find the time to attend regular classes. So, an online class may be more convenient, as it saves time, money, and energy.

Many students studying in traditional classrooms also enrol in online courses to complement their degree. In fact, in many institutes, online courses are a part of the curriculum. If a good course is available online, institutes encourage students to enrol for the same.

One pedagogy that can be used is the flipped classroom or blended learning. Online content can be used for passive learning, which can then be discussed in the classroom to make the interaction more active and engaging. This helps the student understand and grasp difficult topics and, at the same time, clear their concepts with the faculty.

The debate should not be about which is better, as both have their plus and minus points. This debate needs to be seen against a bigger picture of how both can complement each other so that the biggest gainer is the student.

The writer is Director, Symbiosis Centre for Management Studies, Pune

#### E- LEARNING

The ongoing COVID-19 lockdown has paved the way for several institutions going online to conduct classes. Will this change the course of education?

■ RAJIV AGARWAL

Education institutions have been among the hardest hit by the current COVID-19 lockdown. Overnight, they were forced to consider a new medium, which had been supposedly only an experimental endeavour till then. In the typical higher education model, classes are held in a physical environment, usually through case studies, lectures or group work.

The lecture mode is usually used in highly technical subjects where the professor explains detailed concepts or theory. This is augmented by a Q&A as part of the session, where students can get their queries clarified.

#### Lecture vs Study

On the other hand, most business schools use the case meth-

## Online learning: The medium of tomorrow



od, pioneered at the Harvard Business School, as a teaching method. The richness of a case discussion comes from participants' contributions, and the professor's ability to evoke responses and have discussions guided into the intended areas, to bring about learning for participants. The basic assumption is that by learning how decisions were made in the past, one can train one's self to evaluate between multiple choices in the given context, usually with limited information. This will help

train the thinking process more than the pursuit of what is the "right" answer.

Now lecture-based sessions have gradually moved online, with some fairly good results. Sure, there are a limited number of courses available online, on various platforms such as Coursera, Udemy, Edx, and so on. But I found a higher focus on IT-related courses.

The online teaching method is not supposed to be conducive for teaching cases. The typical objections were that there is no

personal contact and there can

not be a classroom discussion. This may have been true earlier, but the current tools available largely serve this purpose. Breakout rooms in Zoom allow small-sized groups to be formed, with the instructor being able to visit each of these rooms. Newer tools are being designed by which the instructor can cold call, even on video conferences, or participants can be invited to contribute.

The most important part is to realise that this is a new medium and we are now in the early stages.

#### Experiments vs learning

The lockdown has forced institutions to go online, without any warning or preparation, and consequently, learn fast.

There is a lot of experimenting going on as there is scarce experience in this area. The faculty have had to learn the medium and then understand how to use it effectively in class. Juggling between various controls, chat windows, allowing people electronically into the class, watching online videos, or switching between various windows, or drawing on a separate digital pad or on-screen, could become overwhelming for most faculty. But there is really no choice but to learn. Many faculty have stepped up to the task, for this is the medium of tomorrow.

On the other hand, students are in a familiar and comforta-

ble home environment, but perhaps face challenges that anyone running a home office would face – that of balancing home responsibilities with the rigours of being in a classroom..

However, the online world has the advantage of flexibility, along with reduced commuting time. Additionally, societies and business are moving to a largely online presence. The basic objection that there is less interaction in an online space, is redundant, if one considers the constant attention to WhatsApp chats. These have now been augmented by Zoom, Google or Skype calls for socialising. Once this becomes the accepted norm, online education will become more acceptable.

Institutions will realise that this method allows them to retain their best faculty, offering them better control over their schedules. Faculty will soon get over the learning curve and begin to appreciate the enhanced capabilities of the digital medium. They will be able to reach out to a wider range of students who need not come to campus all the time, and students who were earlier sitting in classes will prefer operating from homes or internet cafes.

In short, things are not going to be the same again. The question is, how prepared are we?

The writer is Professor, Strategy and Family Business, at Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan's S.P.Jain Institute of Management & Research

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##### Dean's International Excellence Award - Postgraduate Taught: Humanities and Social Sciences

**INSTITUTION:** University of Strathclyde

**NUMBER OF SCHOLARSHIPS:** 50

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**DEADLINE:** May 31

**HELP WITH:** Tuition fees

**DURATION:** One year

**ELIGIBILITY:** Candidates must have an offer of study for a full-time,

postgraduate, Humanities and Social Sciences programme at the University of Strathclyde, and must have paid the tuition fee deposit before May 31.

Contact [hass-pg-enquiries@strath.ac.uk](mailto:hass-pg-enquiries@strath.ac.uk)

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**ELIGIBILITY:** Those who have passed or will appear for the qualifying exams under the higher secondary (10+2) from any recognised Board of education such as AISSE/IB/ ICSE, or equivalents. All eligible candidates will have to undergo an entrance exam, which comprises a written test and personal interview. Qualifying candidates will be required to carry their portfolio. Admission is based on the marks obtained in qualifying exam and the performance in written test and personal interview.

**DEADLINE:** July

<http://imsnoida.com/> <http://imsnoida.in/>

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Website: [www.rgip.ac.in](http://www.rgip.ac.in)

### M. Tech. & Ph.D. Admission Notice- 2020

Applications are invited for admission to M. Tech. and Ph.D. programmes at RGIFT, Jais (Amethi) and Bangalore Energy Institute, Bengaluru (A PG centre of RGIFT) for the Odd (July) Semester, Academic Year 2020-21. RGIFT is a centrally funded technical institution established by Government of India for teaching and research in the domain areas of Petroleum & Energy. For more information on programme structure and eligibility, please visit admission web page [https://rgip.ac.in/en/page/postgraduate-admission](http://rgip.ac.in/en/page/postgraduate-admission)

Last date: 30-06-2020

CM YK

HARIKUMAR JS

Piyush Gugale, and his wife, Neha, were blessed with a baby boy on April 23. However, Piyush, doing his DNB at a hospital in Pune, has not yet been able to cuddle his son and be with Neha, both of whom are otherwise doing well about 130 kilometres away in Ahmednagar, Maharashtra. "Inter-district travel is out of the question now. Moreover, given the risk of Coronavirus exposure, I don't want to take a chance though the choice is so hard," says the young father.

Anant Mehra and Shubhra Mittal from New Delhi welcomed their first child, Mira Achala Mehra, in February. They heave a sigh of relief over finally putting behind the sheer "dread" of being in a hospital. "But the uncertainties didn't end there. I realised that some baby products that were in fact essential for us were not categorised as essential items, rendering it difficult to procure," he says.

Further South in Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala, software engineer Praveen LR recollects how he had to plead with the police to let him go when he was out on his motorbike during the lockdown. "While my wife, Sheryl, was still in the hospital, I often had to travel home and back to bring food and other essentials," he says. The couple has been blessed with a girl.

**Parents' fear**

It's easy to imagine how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the "welcoming plans" of many new parents and expectant couples, but some feel tougher times are ahead. Bringing a child into a world beset by unprecedented strictures is hard enough; the anxiety, fear and doubt about raising them up in a post-COVID-19 world, make it harder still.

"The top priority, of course, is health and safety. Then it's about helping them build good immunity," says Abirami Thiagarajan from a family of industrialists in Madurai who recently welcomed her second child, a girl. "My (elder) son will soon turn two. I feel there will be a lot of restrictions, especially on travel, in the coming months, if not a few years. This may have a negative impact on the emotional and intellectual growth of children," she says.

Anant, who runs an online design brand Krita and Penna (meaning 'chalk and pencil' in Swedish), talks about "multi-pronged stressors" young parents face today. "As a parent, questions of stability and sustainability as a self-employed person concern me now, though I prefer to stay optimistic and take things

**All is well**

Psychologists advise parents to stay cautious and careful, rather than being anxious; some of the cartoons by Anant Mehra • GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK, ANANT MEHRA AND SHAJU JOHN

# Mom, dad, is the world scary?

The pandemic has added one more layer to regular anxieties that parents with new-borns face, but experts say there are ways to fulfil our aspirations



one at a time. For instance, since the lockdown, our domestic help has stopped coming. So we have to take care of our baby and get all the household chores done as well, in addition to making sure the business is kept

afloat. Multi-tasking is inevitable. Also, with the ongoing pandemic, there just can't be any let-up about cleanliness and hygiene," says Anant, who has been posting quirky anecdotal cartoons on social media on parenting.

With the economy in a tailspin, pay cuts, lay-offs and retrenchments hound many young parents, casting a shadow on the family's aspirations and "plans" for their kids. Sravani Vinod from Chennai, who recently had another boy, explains the differing circumstances in which the family welcomed the two kids. "The COVID-19 situation was unexpected. I'm a homemaker and my husband, Vinod Reddy, runs a lorry transportation service, which has greatly suffered due to the lockdown. Financial insecurity apart, right now, we are more concerned about hospital visits

we may have to make. You never know," she says.

**Some reassurance**

Psychologists advise parents to stay cautious and careful, rather than being anxious and panicky. "The ideal thing is to continue having a healthy life and lifestyle within the four walls of the home. One way of helping kids get used to certain realities is by slowly integrating preparedness into the set of values," he says. "Anxiety may only make parents more edgy, inadvertently driving them in incorrect directions, like being overprotective or turning into helicopter parents. This may create a vicious cycle of anxiety," says Dr Deepak Gupta, Child Psychiatrist, Centre for Child and Adolescent Well Being, Delhi.

It is in such times that the mutual support of partners is paramount, especially in nuclear families that may lack a support system. "Be there for

each other and try not to let stress and frustration crack you up. Make expressions of affection, appreciation, kindness, and warmth a part of life," he explains, pointing out the importance of developing a certain "mental immunity" as well.

A good way of battling the stress of multi-tasking as a parent is to "adapt", aided by careful planning. "In having to navigate by multi-tasking through hectic schedules at the pace of technology, some may lose their emotional anchors. It helps to schedule reminders to briefly tune in to one's own rhythm – our breath, our heartbeat and even to the rhythm of Nature. These can help us modify our pace and stay emotionally stable. Then, physical exercises and practices such as yoga and meditation are also helpful," says Dr M Nithya Poornima, Assistant Professor, Department of Clinical Psychology, National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), Bengaluru.

She adds that it also helps to understand that perhaps what's "normal" is also changing. "Acknowledgement and acceptance of the new normal can help parents decide what is essential now and how that can be accomplished effectively. Focussing on the essentials and differentiating them from the optional helps consider obligations and options with an open mind and less worry and fear, particularly with sudden financial insecurities," says Dr Poornima.

Ironic, but one notable "positive" of the pandemic is a drop in air pollution levels worldwide, though it's certain to bounce back once the old ways resume, and may only get worse in the scramble to make up for the losses. This weighs on the minds of many parents, especially those residing in cities prone to the more immediate effects of pollution.

"Environmental pollutants and toxins are scientifically proven to have an impact on the cognitive development of children though more in-depth research is on," says Dr Gupta. He suggests some precautions on an individual level, such as adopting an eco-friendly lifestyle as much as possible. Minimising plastic at home, eating home-cooked food, spending more time together rather than on individual screens, are things we have control over.

**Q&A**

**I am a 34-year-old man. Over the last 10 years I have got a severe pulsating headache in the left eye region. I used to be very athletic, but due to personal reasons (persistent fights in the family) I am almost on the verge of clinical depression. Please help.**

■ It seems like you are undergoing a lot of stress due to the conflicts in the family. Each of us deals with stress differently. Some people share their feelings and some internalise their feelings. Human beings need support and understanding, specially during difficult times. I recommend you and your family undergo family therapy to resolve issues. This will help you feel less stressed. If you are having a low mood and are anxious, it would be helpful to seek both medical and therapeutic interventions. Please consult a therapist who will help you understand your situation and suggest the next few steps.

**I recently broke up with someone, but can't leave my thoughts behind. I can't sleep normally and my mind is preoccupied. What should I do?**

■ Break-up or loss is very painful and one goes through a grieving process. The process will take time and it's natural to go through various stages of anger, denial, sadness, and having repetitive thoughts. Keeping a journal and writing down all your varying thoughts and feelings will help you express and articulate the pain. Being in the company of near and loved ones will also help.

*Anna Chandy is Chairperson - The Live Love Laugh Foundation (TLLF), an NGO that works in the area of mental health. Nothing in this column is intended to be, and is not, a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Please seek independent advice from a licensed practitioner if you have any questions regarding a medical condition. Email us your questions at mp\_health@thehindu.co.in*

**CONVERSATIONS WITH SELF**

## When needs override wants

Can we live with greater compassion and sensitivity towards one another post the lockdown?



TT SRINATH

Post the quarantine I was asked to serve out, on returning from overseas, I had to remain in Delhi, in continued confinement and wait out the lockdown period. I do believe we can, as responsible citizens, recognise that if we do not adhere to the norms of healthcare being recommended, the virus, which does not discriminate between those who have and have not will truly consume us.

Staying at a hotel, barely occupied, and with a few staff members to minister to the needs of the few guests, I had occasion to speak to some of the staff. Like us, they too had to remain in the hotel. Brijesh, a staff member, shared with me what the lockdown and the virus is teaching him about life, and given that he, like I, is impacted, his sharing is truly poignant.

"I have realised that today I can live with much less than I ever imagined," he said. "My meals and those of my family and even for the guests in the hotel have become simple. Wants that I have had are no longer relevant and what I need is more significant than what I want. I am lonely, missing people who matter and



• GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

whom perhaps I have never ever told. It is so for all our guests too, who have to remain at the hotel. Anxiety, worry and fear is no different for me as it is for you and the guests at the hotel. Good health is all that matters."

These are not homilies being uttered by one we would think is beyond the pale of human needs, but the words of a human being such as you and I, with whom we probably all share the same emotions and feelings. A possible awakening is being made available to each of us. Can we embrace it and look forward to living with greater compassion, sensitivity towards one another and mindfulness than we have lived so far, or will we return to an existence of ostentation and opulence, lacking humane values, which might cut us off from one another? A question begging for introspection.

**The art of 'timepass'**

'Shooting the breeze'. 'Hanging out'. 'Chilling'. The English language has many synonyms for the Indian idea of 'timepass'. Sitting around with your friends, doing nothing is a cultural phenomenon common all over the world. Nupur points out the importance of being around company: "Humans are social animals, and they need to have the possibility of contact and communication, even if they aren't actively engaging with them all the time," she says. Digital forms of communication are not a replacement, though it is not for a lack of trying. People have been working together, working out together, cooking together, and even watching movies together, all the while connected via a video call. Not really talking, but basking in the knowledge that someone else is doing exactly what they are, right this moment.

**Open fields and skies**

Times when we could hop, skip and jump to our parks and beaches or go on long rides to mountaintops seem so far away right now. Not all of us living in cramped cities and towns have the luxury to afford green spaces around our homes; windows of buildings open up to more buildings. The benefits of being around Nature for our mental health are so widely accepted that it has led to the development of a recent field of applied psychology: ecotherapy. The lockdown has given us greater appreciation and affection for the few trees that we do have in our vicinity, and prompted many to try their hands at kitchen and terrace gardening.

The writer is an organisational and behavioural consultant. He can be contacted at ttsrinath@gmail.com

# Lost and Found

SWETA AKUNDI

**Human touch**

A hug, a pat on the back, close dancing, mock-wrestling, pulling someone's cheek, making love. There are infinite forms of the human touch that many living alone through this period of lockdown have accepted as a non-possibility, for at least a couple more months in the future. And that has only made us value it more. "Touch is the earliest sensory modality which develops in human beings and is important for the development of secure attachment and intense bonds," says psychologist Nupur Dhakephalkar, founder of Center for Mental Health, Pune. It is why new parents are advised skin-to-skin contact. The reduction of stress response, though seen most in children, is not age-limited. "Touch is related to increased oxytocin (bonding hormone) levels in the brain. When you have anxiety, there is increased activity in the sympathetic nervous system. This reduces our touch response," she says. So those of us who are living with families, or friends, let us not take them for granted, and maybe at least hug them good night.



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**Eating local**

It took for all major fast food chains and restaurants to be shut for a while, to force us into buying local, seasonal foods from the nearby store. Cooking our own food has made us take a good look at the ingredients we are using, and what goes into our bodies. We began to enjoy and appreciate food for its taste, as opposed to treating dinner as an activity that accompanies TV-viewing. It's not as if we are glad we don't eat outside anymore, or as if we have given up on junk food for life. It's just that we now know what goes into it, and at what cost it comes.

**Relationships, old and new**

At the Center for Mental Health, many calls that Nupur gets are about people living in crowded homes, with no space for themselves. Yet, she acknowledges that this period has been fruitful for relationship building. Not just between family members living together, but also with old friends. "When there is a state of calamity, it makes us reach out to people that we did not before," she says. It starts off as a simple message to check in on the situation at the other person's end, but makes way for actual conversations that you could have been procrastinating for whatever reason. "Constantly reaching out to, and keeping in touch with all the people in our lives is also a coping mechanism for some," she says. During the first phase of social distancing, back in early March, apps like QuarantineChat, and dating apps like Bumble, Tinder and OkCupid reported a spike in users, as we collectively hoped to replicate our offline interactions in the online world and meet new people. But now, the emphasis is more on strengthening existing bonds.

**The sound of silence**

For the first time in many years, we have not been woken up to the sound of traffic blaring outside. This period has taught us how to be okay with silence seeping into most of our days. On a normal basis, "people are constantly surrounded by sound, which leads to cluttering in the mind," says Nupur. We would turn to meditation and yoga to give us a break from the noise, but what if a slower, less buzzing routine became a part of our lifestyle? The downtime will help us listen to ourselves, make space for new ideas to emerge, and be more productive when we do work. If we allow ourselves that, of course, and not fill this vacuum with texting, scrolling and other content consumption. Habits can be formed with some practice and commitment.



• GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

# Musical notes in lockdown times

Nirali Kartik, a classical vocalist, on how live streaming has become a medium for musicians coping with lockdown

MADHUR TANKHA

Online streaming provides a way of relaxing and also gives us something to look forward to during life in the lockdown, feels Nirali Kartik, a Hindustani classical vocalist, who is currently practising new ragas like Shahana Kanada and Bilaskhani Toodi at her home in Mumbai.

"Though the experience of a live concert can never be replaced by online streaming, the good thing about it is that the audience can still listen to their favourite artists from within the comfort of their homes," she says.

However, the challenge is to offer the best possible sound and video quality. "And that too with li-



Bracing for the challenge: Nirali Kartik ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

mited equipment. But the artistes are trying their best to provide a wholesome musical experience."

During the lockdown, Nirali is using Skype to receive online sessions from her Guru Pandit Sanjeev Abhyankar.

Excerpts from an interview:

#### As a performer what are the challenges you have faced during the lockdown?

In the olden days, artistes did *chilla* (the spiritual practice of penance in Sufism that extended to 40 days). They went within themselves to reflect on the learnings and also to refine their art. This was done by confining themselves in a room for days together. The lockdown is like a compulsory *chilla*.

#### Are there any new music genres you have discovered during the lockdown?

This has been a time of creating new songs and practising new ragas. I have a fusion band Maati Baani, and we released a song, *Karpur Gauram* where we have re-imagined an ancient Sanskrit chant, with upto 17 different musicians from nine countries. The song has gone viral over the internet.

#### With online musical events being free in India, when and how can we think of making

Nirali Kartik will perform on the HCL Concerts Baithak platform on May 25 which will be live-streamed on Facebook.com/HCLConcerts at 7 p.m.

#### them a viable commercial proposition in India?

Now that the Coronavirus seems here to stay, the artistes should charge a fee from organisers. Corporates can also invite performers into their online meetings or sessions to perform. Not only will the meetings be livened up, but it can also help musicians.

#### The feedback is different in a hall and online. Can you tell us a little about this.

It's different but you can always get an overall picture of what the general feedback is, irrespective of the platform. If something has touched the audience, it gets its way across.

#### What can the Government do to ensure that artistes have work and payment?

The livelihood of musicians is impacted in the current scenario. The Government should reach out to artistes directly. It can also get corporates to help under their CSR programmes. There are a lot of artistes whose livelihood depends only on live concerts. Since these have stopped, artistes are wondering what can they do. The Government, NGOs and artistes have to come together to find a concrete solution.



GOWRI S

Titled simply as 'People Matching with Artworks', this series of photographs, is slowly garnering global attention for the very reason that it is unusual. But we find that it is only one of the many unusual and seemingly bizarre ideas that the photographer has been following.

Among the Gauguins and Monets at Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris, he would wait. Multiple revisions too, would follow, for the perfect frame.

Sometimes, people wearing colours that instantly match the artwork walk in; sometimes, the same person that Stefan had seen years ago would walk in and peer at the very same painting. Sometimes, he would catch as many as 10 such occurrences within 90-odd minutes of waiting. And none of these frames are orchestrated or posed for.

About the inception of the idea, Stefan writes to us from Ber-

## When life imitates art

On International Museum Day, meet the photographer who spends hours in galleries and museums, observing people who end up matching with the artworks



lin, "Before I had started working on this series, I never liked to see people in front of artworks in galleries, as it takes away from the experience of viewing a piece. It is, in fact, still unpleasant. For instance, when I visited the Vermeer Exhibition in Louvre, we were never allowed more than two seconds in front of each painting."

But his dislike gave way to an artistic project solely built on observations of mundane activities. It was in 2015 that Stefan decided to document the many sights that often go unnoticed in museums and galleries.

Over years, and after multiple visits and long intervals of waiting, he has shot about 1,200 such frames, till date. However, in the past two months, he had not been able to visit museums and galleries due to the lockdown.

Stefan's favourite experience working on this series was when



#### Colourful coincidences

Stefan has captured 1,200 such frames since 2015

■ STEFAN DRASCHAN

he spotted the same person in the same gallery, whom he shot 30 months before. "He was in front of the same painting as well. I had, in fact, predicted that he would come in front of the painting again, some day," says the

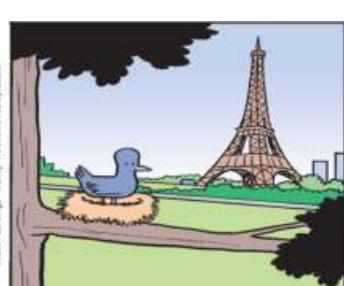
photographer. There have also been times when his efforts went futile. "If there's no frame to catch, I stand there and study the artworks myself. I feel that the oil paintings breathe more when there's no one around," he says.

Apart from photographing people matching with artworks, Stefan had also been catching some light-hearted, funny sights – people sleeping in museums and libraries is one! In fact, this is also an entire series in itself. "Interestingly, I have also found people arguing with the artworks at times," he recalls.

How has the lockdown been treating his artistic practice? "I had been in museums for a total of 1,500 days in the last five years so I think it's okay to stay home and look back at the work I have produced," he concludes.

View Stefan Draschan's work on Instagram (@stefandraschan)

### POOCH CAFE



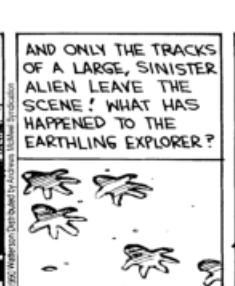
### PEANUTS



### HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



### CALVIN AND HOBBES



### TIGER



### PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



### HOMING IN

Your weekly **Live Gigs** schedule features a mix of DJs, the opera, and some much-loved familiar indie-rock

MEGHNA MAJUMDAR



### Bob Sinclar

Yes, Bob Sinclar. Right from his home, every single day. The House music icon and DJ of international repute has been going live on Facebook for more than 55 days now. He even collaborated with French, Italian and Danish DJs like Michael Calfan, Anfisa Letyago and Morten live last week, in a session that was watched by over nine lakh people. As far as Tuesday nights go, that one was pretty memorable.



### Vienna State Opera

The performances may not be live, but the streaming certainly is. The historic Vienna State Opera is digging into its vast archive of recorded opera and ballet performances, and streaming one of them at a time. Its Home Streams page

www.staatsoperlive.com has a calendar of productions that include classics like *The Nutcracker* and *Don Giovanni*. Streams have been scheduled till May 26, so this is your chance to soak up some fine European culture, at home in your pyjamas.

We would love to know how you are keeping busy at home. Tell us who you are watching live at metro@thehindu.co.in

# China expert warns of a second wave

The majority of Chinese at the moment are still susceptible to the COVID-19 infection: Zhong Nanshan

REUTERS

BEIJING

Mainland China reported five new confirmed COVID-19 cases for May 16, down from eight the previous day, the National Health Commission (NHC) said in a statement on Sunday.

Two of the five confirmed cases were so-called imported infections, while three were locally transmitted in the northeastern Chinese city of Jilin.

The number of confirmed cases in the mainland now stands at 82,947 and the death toll at 4,634. China does not include people who have been tested and found

**COVID-19**

to be asymptomatic carriers in its tally of confirmed cases.

The three domestically-transmitted cases are related to a district in Jilin city called Fengman, which has been classified by Chinese officials as a high-risk area for COVID-19.

Heightened disease control measures in the district include allowing only one person from a family to go out and purchase daily necessities each day, according to the district's official post on WeChat.

**'Big challenge'**

Zhong Nanshan, the Chinese government's senior medical adviser told CNN on Saturday



Potential risk: Youngsters buying snacks from an eatery on a pedestrian shopping street in Beijing on Saturday. ■ AP

## 'Spraying disinfectants can be harmful'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
GENEVA

pathogens because disinfectant is inactivated by dirt and debris," said the WHO in a document.

The WHO said that streets and pavements are not considered as "reservoirs of infection" of COVID-19, adding that spraying disinfectants can be "dangerous for human health".

It added that spraying individuals with disinfectants is "not recommended under any circumstances". "This

could be physically and psychologically harmful and would not reduce an infected person's ability to spread the virus," said the document. Spraying chlorine or toxic chemicals on people can cause eye and skin irritation, bronchospasm and gastrointestinal effects.

"If disinfectants are to be applied, this should be done with a cloth or wipe that has been soaked in disinfectant," it said.

day that the danger of a second wave of infections is looming large.

"The majority of... Chinese at the moment are still

susceptible to COVID-19 infection because (of) a lack of immunity," Mr. Zhong said as quoted in the CNN report. "We are facing (a) big chal-

lenge, it's not better than the foreign countries I think at the moment."

Mr. Zhong acknowledged that the number of infections

is "not recommended under any circumstances". "This

is why things are so screwed up," he said.

**Absolute disaster'**

Mr. Obama did not name President Donald Trump or any other federal or state officials in either of his appearances. But earlier this

month, he harshly criticized Mr. Trump's handling of the pandemic as an "absolute chaotic disaster".

This is the latest sign that Mr. Obama intends to play an increasingly active role in the coming election. He has generally kept a low profile in the years since he left office, even as Mr. Trump has disparaged him. Mr. Obama told supporters on the call that he would be "spending as much time as necessary and campaigning as hard as I can" for Joe Biden, who served as his Vice-President.

Later on Saturday, during

Barack Obama criticises U.S. virus response

Leaders aren't even pretending to be in charge, he tells graduating students

Barack Obama

Edition," a two-hour event for students graduating from historically black colleges and universities broadcast on YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. His remarks were unexpectedly political, given the venue, and touched on current events beyond the virus and its social and economic impacts.

"More than anything, this pandemic has fully, finally torn back the curtain on the

coming government should apply Israeli sovereignty over West Bank settlements.

"It's time to apply the Israeli law and write another glorious chapter in the history of Zionism," Mr. Netanya-

nearly three million Palestinians and some 400,000 Israelis living in settlements considered illegal under international law.

Netanyahu told the chamber that annexation "won't distance us from peace, it will bring us closer".

Israel's unity government starts work amid the coronavirus pandemic and after a political crisis that saw three inconclusive elections and left the country in political limbo for more than 500 days.

The coalition government was agreed last month between veteran right-wing leader Netanyahu and the centrist Gantz, a former army chief.

The announcement came after Trump told House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi late Friday that he planned to dismiss State Department Inspector General Steve Linick.

It was Mr. Trump's third abrupt dismissal of an offi-

cial tasked with monitoring governmental misconduct and abuse since April, and drew criticism even from members of his own party.

The firings of multiple Inspectors General is unprecedented; doing so without good cause chills the independence essential to their purpose," tweeted Republican Mitt Romney.

"It is a threat to accountable democracy and a fissure in the constitutional balance of power," Mr. Romney continued.

The lawmakers said Mr. Linick had apparently "opened an investigation in

the dismissal of State Department official, who was investigating Pompeo, politically motivated

and had recommended the firing and hand-picked Stephen Akard, a former aide to Vice President Mike Pence, to succeed Mr. Linick.

By law, the administration must give Congress 30 days' notice of its plans to terminate an inspector general, in theory giving lawmakers time to study the move – and maybe if warranted.

"A general lack of confidence simply is not sufficient detail to satisfy Congress," warned Republican senator Chuck Grassley.

But previous such firings have gone through unimpeded.

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## ASK US

N. SREEKANTH

**Q.** With reference to the latest Budget, I want a clarification about exemptions to senior citizens. Currently, senior citizens are taxed starting from ₹3 lakh and super senior citizens from ₹5 lakh. They are exempt from paying advance tax quarterly. I want to know if the exemptions continue in new tax regime

PARAMASIVA CHARI

**A.** If the senior citizen opts for the old regime, the taxability of seniors and super seniors shall continue as mentioned in the query. With effect from April 1, 2020, if a senior citizen opts to pay tax as per rates of the new regime, he/she shall not enjoy the special basic exemption limits as per the old regime.

The senior citizen, based on his income level and sources of income, may choose whichever regime is most beneficial at the time of filing the return. For those assessee having business income, the choice is available only once. Senior citizens having no business income do not have to pay advance tax under the new regime as well.

**Q.** I had taken an early retirement from a corporate job before attaining 60. The last EPF contribution made by my employer was in August, 2018.

Subsequently, I withdrew the entire corpus of accumulated PF (excluding pension) in April 2019. It included the interest for FY 2018-19 also. How do I compute the tax payable for the period when there was no contribution? There was no TDS on withdrawal.

SANDEEP SAHA

**A.** It is assumed that your retirement from employment was in August 2018. Withdrawal of the entire corpus of accumulated PF is not taxable if you had completed 5 years of continuous employment, including your period of service with your previous employers, if any. If this condition is not satisfied, then the withdrawal is taxable based on your respective tax slab rates wherein employer's share will be taxed as "Income from Salaries" while employee's share is taxed under "Income from Other Sources".

Interest accrued on the contributions from both employee and employer at the time of employment is tax exempt if withdrawal was done after completion of 5 years of continuous employment, if not, interest will be taxed under the above-mentioned heads of income.

However, if the corpus has not been withdrawn immediately on retirement, the interest accruing post retirement is chargeable to tax. IATR ruling of Bengaluru bench in the case of AGIT V Dilip Ranjrekar, 2017, held that the interest accrued since retirement to complete withdrawal of the entire corpus to be taxable under "Income from Other Sources".

**Q.** I am a retired senior citizen aged 72. My wife is a home maker aged 69. My tax consultant says interest on SB account is to be divided into two and be shown in each of our IT returns. Also, please clarify if any deduction is allowed for FD interest income.

MARIADoss JOSEPH

**A.** Interest derived from FD/RD/SB etc. with any bank, co-operative society engaged in banking activities and post office in the hands of senior citizens amounting up to ₹ 50,000 can be claimed as deduction. Hence, ₹50,000 can be claimed as maximum deduction in case interest derived is higher than ₹50,000. For individual bank accounts held separately in the names of yourself and your wife, respective interest credits are to be considered in your respective ITRs and each of you can claim the deduction of up to ₹50,000. In case of joint account maintained only for the purpose of easy operation and the funds relate to only one person, then the SB interest needs to be shown only in the ITR of the person whose money is lying in the SB account.

On the contrary, if the SB account has funds of both the persons, interest derived on such funds is to be divided in the hands of the respective depositors i.e. yourself and your wife. Therefore it is suggested to follow the advise of your consultant as the source of the money into the concerned bank account is known to him.

(The author is partner, GSS Associates, Chartered Accountants, Chennai)

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

## MIND YOUR MONEY

## Don't borrow TROUBLE

Paying off loans and investing in SIPs will equip one to deal with financial turbulence

GAURAV MASHRUWALA

There was an interview conducted by an anchor on television. She was interviewing a demon. The conversation went something like this...

**Anchor:** What is the cruellest thing you have done in life?

**Demon:** (laughs) Doing cruel things is my job. That is what I do always.

**Anchor:** Tell our viewers something cruel that you would do which would send shivers down their spines.

**Demon:** I make children orphans, I spread epidemics in which lots of people die, I created world wars; holocaust.

**Anchor:** Can you tell us something in which you, as demon, takes pride in. Which according to you is a feather in your cap?

**Demon:** (thinks and later, with a mild smile on

face says) I introduced credit cards.

Credit card as a payment mechanism is not bad if the full bill is settled. However, if the bill is only paid in part, with the rest to be settled over a period of time, the demon will celebrate as it will make one's life miserable.

All kinds of loans cause obstacles in wealth creation. This does not mean we should not borrow. Instead of staying in a rented house and paying rent, it is better to go for a home loan and pay monthly instalments in the form of EMIs. Similarly, if someone is ill in our family and there isn't sufficient health cover, we have to borrow.

Borrowing for funding daughter or son's education is also justifiable, but having borrowed, pay off the loan at the earliest. **Demon:** So many times we ob-

serve people having a fixed deposit in bank which is giving 6% and a home loan on which they are paying 8% interest. This does not make sense.

generated 18% returns.

If the equity market drops by 7%, they would lose 7% plus 12%, which is the interest paid on borrowed funds.

Their gains would be less and losses more than the other investors.

In the year 2008, Radha and Pankaj, a young couple in their early thirties, wrote to me. They had a query.

They had a home loan on which they were paying instalments on time. They had surplus funds which they wanted to invest.

Year 2008 was the year when there was a massive equity market rally and everybody was generating

abnormal returns on their investment.

When I suggested that instead of investing, they should pay back home loan, they did not like my advice.

After a few years, they contacted me again. They had gone through financial turbulence. While I had forgotten about the interaction, they reminded me about the conversation. Instead of paying back the loan in 2008, they invested in equity mutual fund. In 2009, when there was fall in overall economy, Pankaj lost his job for a while and later had to settle for an employment which was pay-

ing less.

The value of their equity mutual fund had dropped substantially while the rate of interest on the housing loan had gone up.

An almost similar situation, or probably even more severe, is being observed right now, except that this time round we are also dealing with a pandemic and an economy in a slowdown mode than what it was in 2009.

If possible, get out of the loan. Trust me, individuals and families without EMI burden will be able to deal with most financial turbulences such as income loss, job loss, pay

cuts, erosion in investment value etc. significantly better vis-a-vis those who have to service EMIs.

The best way is to pay back loan and use the money saved from paying instalments in investing.

Start SIP of an amount equivalent to the instalments. Every instalment we pay has an interest component which is someone else's income.

However, every SIP leads to nourishing our wealth. Therefore, pay off the loan at the earliest and use the amount to nurture your wealth.

(The writer is a financial planner and author of 'Yogic Wealth')

## THINK INVESTOR

## It pays to continue with SIP in equity

Investors have to navigate their way through various options on the table

VENKATESH BANGARUSWAMY

Your portfolio is down 20% since March 2020. You are concerned whether you can recover the losses in time to achieve your goal three years hence. If this is your story, you are not alone. While it is hardly comforting to know that many like you are suffering from significant portfolio losses, the question remains: What should you do now? In this article, we show why you have limited choices to repair your portfolio. Yet, you do not have to be overly worried about not achieving your life goal!

Suppose you sell your loss-making equity investments now and invest the proceeds in fixed deposits, earning, say, 5% post-tax returns. What if you have to earn 8% to accumulate the money required to achieve your goal? Investing in fixed deposits is a sure way to fail in achieving your objective!

Alternatively, you may be tempted to invest in gold, given the handsome returns it has generated in the recent times. But, gold typically rises when there is world crisis. What if the world economy revives over the next three years and gold underperforms the stock market? Your decision to switch to gold could lead to regret.

There is, of course, another alternative. You can increase your monthly savings



With each investment option having its own positives and negatives, investors can go for equity SIPs. ■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

over the next three years, invest in bank deposits and make-up for the existing losses in your equity investments. But can you? Several have lost their jobs, and many have taken a salary cut. During these uncertain times, expecting to increase savings may be difficult.

So, what should you do? Your optimal course of action is to continue your existing systematic investment plan (SIP) in equity. But what if the stock market does not recover in time to achieve your goal?

And, if the market does not recover in time to achieve your goal, you may still find ways to bridge the gap in your portfolio three years hence. Maybe, your income levels will go up then and you can confidently bor-

would feel if you win a lottery a year hence, you will overestimate your future happiness. It is the same for negative events, including failing to achieve goals!

That means, despite what you believe today, you may suffer less regret even if your equity investments do not recover existing losses and generate handsome returns.

But without equity investments, you have small chance of achieving your goal for reasons mentioned earlier.

And, if the market does not recover in time to achieve your goal, you may still find ways to bridge the gap in your portfolio three years hence. Maybe, your income levels will go up then and you can confidently bor-

row to bridge the shortfall. Or, perhaps, you will use your self-occupied house as collateral to raise the required amount.

The more gainfully occupied you are in the present, the less you are likely to be worried about the future.

Therefore, continue your SIPs in equity, unless your income is volatile because of the current economic conditions. If so, invest only in bonds till such time your income becomes stable.

Finally, should you, based on expert opinion, continually switch between equity and bonds in the hope of recovering your existing losses and improving your investment returns? As Neils Bohr said, "Prediction is difficult, especially if it is about the future!" Do not let experts' predictions about the economy, the stock market and gold drive your investment decisions.

Some did correctly predict the 2020 pandemic and the 2008 sub-prime crisis. But were those same individuals successful with all other predictions? It is difficult to consistently, successfully predict market movements and economic events. For your part, continue your existing SIPs in equity.

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

## BLACKBOARD - SOVEREIGN GOLD BOND

## This really is paper gold

Sovereign gold bonds are issued by the govt.

ASHISH RUKHAIYAR

What is a sovereign gold bond (SGB)?

■ Sovereign gold bond is a substitute for holding physical gold. The bonds are issued by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on behalf of the government and is a bond denominated in gold. The government issues such bonds in tranches at a fixed price that investors can buy through banks, post offices and also in the secondary markets through the stock exchange platform.



The latest tranche, which closed for subscription last week, was priced at ₹4,590 per gram

the India Bullion and Jewellers Association for the last three business days of the week preceding the subscription period. At the time of redemption, cash equivalent to the number of units multiplied by the then prevailing price would be credited to the bank account of the investor.

How was the latest tranche priced?

■ The latest tranche, which closed for subscription last week, was priced at ₹4,590 per gram. Those who apply online were eligible for a discount of ₹50 per gram. Reports suggest that RBI will again issue such bonds in June, July, August and September.

Are there any risks in investing in SGB?

Capital loss is a risk since the bond prices would reflect any change in gold prices. If gold prices fall, the principal investment would fall proportionately.

## Bank fixed deposit rates

Bank Name	Highest Slab	1-year tenure	3-year tenure	5-year tenure	Interest Rates (%)
<b>SMALL FINANCE BANKS</b>					
Utkarsh Small Finance Bank	9.00	8.20	8.00	8.35	
Fincare Small Finance Bank	9.00	7.25	8.50	7.50	
Suryoday Small Finance Bank	9.00	7.25	7.50	9.00	
Jana Small Finance Bank	8.25	8.00	7.75	8.00	
Equitas Small Finance Bank	8.00	7.75	7.55	6.75	
North East Small Finance Bank	8.00	7.50	7.00	6.50	
Ujjivan Small Finance Bank	7.50	7.50	7.25	6.75	
ESAF Small Finance Bank	7.50	7.50	7.00	6.50	
AU Small Finance Bank	7.53	6.75	7.53	7.25	
Capital Small Finance Bank	7.00	6.60	6.60	6.50	
<b>PRIVATE SECTOR BANKS</b>					
RBL Bank	7.50	7.20	7.00	7.15	
DCB Bank	7.35	6.75	7.35	7.35	
IDFC First Bank	7.25	7.25	7.25	7.25	
Lakshmi Vilas Bank	7.25	6.50	6.25	6.25	
IndusInd Bank	7.00	7.00	6.75	6.75	
Nainital Bank	7.00	6.00	6.10	6.10	
Bandhan Bank	6.50	6.50	6.35	6.25	
Tamilnad Mercantile Bank	6.40	6.30	6.25	6.25	
Dhanlaxmi Bank	6.40	6.25	6.25	6.15	
South Indian Bank	6.30	6.30	6.25	6.25	
Federal Bank	6.25	6.00	6.25	6.25	
Karur Vysya Bank	6.25	6.00	6.05	6.05	
Axis Bank	6.10	6.00	6.10	6.10	
CSB Bank	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	
City Union Bank	6.00	6.00	5.50	5.50	
<b>FOREIGN BANKS</b>					

# Govt. nod for re-opening sports complexes

However, no spectators will be allowed; doubts remain over resumption of competitive action

UTHRA GANESAN  
NEW DELHI

The latest guidelines on the extension of lockdown from the central government have finally opened up the spectre of training for athletes across the country, with caveats. "Sports complexes and stadia will be permitted to open only for sports activities."

"However, spectators will not be allowed," the MHA noted on Sunday said.

This would allow athletes – stuck in various Sports Authority of India centres across the country – to resume their practice.

While this would allow non-contact sports to start training almost immediately, those with full or partial contact would be looking for further clarity. "We still need to clarify if all sports complexes are open or only



**Back to life:** A semblance of normalcy will be restored once the athletes resume training in the now silent stadiums. ■ FILE PHOTO: K. MURALI KUMAR

training centres? The SAI centres are in any case not open to general public but every sport is different, so let us wait a day to know the

details," IOA president Naininder Batra said. The restrictions, however, mean only training facilities are likely to begin at the moment.

There is also uncertainty on the complexes that can be opened up, since a lot of them also belong to various State governments.

However, the MHA guideline also says "all social / political / sports / entertainment / academic / cultural / religious functions / other gatherings and large congregations" are still prohibited, thereby casting a doubt on the resumption of sport.

Meanwhile, the National Sports Federations (NSFs) preferred to wait before deciding on their future course of action.

## BCCI reacts

Taking into the account the restrictions on air travel and movement of people till May 31, the BCCI has announced that it will wait before organising a skill-based training camp for its contracted players. It added that it will work in sync with the State Associations to chalk out a programme for skill-based training at a local level.

# 'My father showed me the right way'

Kohli talks about his biggest influence in a chat with Chhetri

ASHWIN ACHAL  
BENGALURU

India's cricket captain Virat Kohli recalled how his late father Prem instilled values and principles in him that have helped shape his successful career.

On the Instagram live chat show *Eleven On Ten* hosted by football star Sunil Chhetri, Kohli reminisced about an incident from his junior cricket days when his father stood tall as a role model.

"In my home State (Delhi), sometimes things happen which are not fair. On one occasion, a certain someone did not play by the rules when it came to selection criteria.

## There is merit, but...

"He told my father that while I had the merit to be selected, a little extra (possibly a bribe) was needed to confirm my selection," Kohli



Sunil Chhetri and Virat Kohli.

said. "My father – an honest middle-class man who had worked hard all his life to become a successful lawyer – did not even understand what 'little extra' meant. My father simply said, 'If you want to select Virat, then let it be purely on merit. I will give you nothing extra'."

"I didn't get selected. I cried a lot; I was broken. But that incident taught me a lot. I realised that I had to be ex-

traordinary to become successful, and that I had to achieve this purely through my own effort and hard work. My father showed me the right way, through action and not merely words."

Prem passed away when Kohli was 18.

"In fact, I went and batted in a Ranji Trophy match the day after he died. His death made me realise that I had to make something of my life. I think about how nice it would be if I could have given my father the peaceful retired life that he deserved," Kohli said.

Chhetri said he was a big fan of Sachin Tendulkar and stopped watching cricket after the latter retired. "I started watching cricket again only after Kohli emerged on the scene, hitting century after century. He is the most-loved sports personality in the country," Chhetri said.

## There will be hesitancy when sport resumes, says Dravid

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

Rahul Dravid reckons there could be "a sense of doubt, hesitancy and fear" initially in the minds of athletes as well as people in general when sport resumes in the post-COVID-19 pandemic world.

**Sense of doubt or fear**  
"For a short period there may be a sense of doubt or fear about certain things, I am sure there will be a certain hesitancy when we get back in, also there will be certain hesitancy in terms of people," said Dravid on Sunday, speaking alongside Olympic champion shooter Abhinav Bindra

and badminton legend Prakash Padukone in the 'Staying Ahead of the Curve-The Power of Trust' show on Facebook Live.

### Fitness issues

"(Regaining) match fitness, game fitness, I think that will take a little bit of time before people can confidently trust themselves and go all out... and that needs to be factored in, to give athletes enough time to be able to regain match fitness."

Dravid felt players will not forget their skills by the time activities resume and said sportspersons will quickly get their mojo back as they are used to facing challenges.

## Chess Gurukul beats Superkids to title

Karthikeyan does the star turn, Praggnanandhaa lends finishing touch

RAKESH RAO  
NEW DELHI

Two-time National champion Murali Karthikeyan did the star turn for Chess Gurukul before teammate R. Praggnanandhaa put the finishing touches to a 4-3 triumph against Superkids in the Superfinal of the inaugural Sukoon Resorts Indian Chess.com League on Sunday.

With only a few seconds remaining of his allotted time, Praggnanandhaa defended brilliantly to hold Nihal Sarin and take Chess Gurukul to the title. The draw meant Gurukul's top player Aravindh Chithambaram was not required to play.

Kartikeyan, modest as ever, said, "I'm happy, I could contribute to my



**Reason to smile:** Star of the day Murali Karthikeyan, left, with teammates Aravindh Chithambaram and R. Praggnanandhaa. ■ RAKESH RAO

team's success. I'm glad I could play some very strong moves."

Gurukul skipper R.B. Ramesh hailed his players for holding their nerve. "We, at Chess Gurukul, enjoy and try to be creative and not go

after results. That's the reason our board order went by ratings, without trying to be clever about it," he said. "Kartikeyan played very well after coming in when we were down by two points," he added.

This left Gurukul's No. 2 Praggnanandhaa needing only a draw against Nihal Sarin to decide the title.

### The results:

**Superfinal:** Chess Gurukul bt Superkids 4-3 (R. Vaishali lost to Divya Deshmukh; Aditya Mittal lost to Divya; M. Karthikeyan bt Divya; Karthikeyan bt N. Srinath; Karthikeyan bt Raunak Sadhwani; Karthikeyan drew with Arjun Ergais; R. Praggnanandhaa drew with Nihal Sarin).

## IN BRIEF



**Park is first post-virus golf champion**

SEOUL

Park Hyun-kyung won the world's first big-purse post-coronavirus golf tournament in Yangju on Sunday. The Korean LPGA Championship – featuring three of the world's top 10 women players – was marked by a ban on spectators and tight safety measures. AFP

### Cologne, Mainz in a draw

**COLOGNE**  
Cologne had to sweat to rescue a point in a 2-2 draw with visitors Mainz 05 in the Bundesliga on Sunday. On Saturday, Monchengladbach beat Eintracht Frankfurt 3-1. **The results:** Cologne 2 (Uth 6-pen, Kainz 53) drew with Mainz 2 (Awoniyi 61, Kunde 72). **Saturday:** Frankfurt 1 (Silva 81) lost to Monchengladbach 3 (Plea 1, Thuram 7, Bensebaini 73-pen).

### Stefanidi triumphs

**PARIS**  
Olympic pole vault champion Katerina Stefanidi of Greece beat American Katie Nageotte and Canadian Alysha Newman in the 'Ultimate Garden Clash' on Saturday. AFP



### Ankita, Divij to be nominated for Arjuna

NEW DELHI

The All India Tennis Association is set to nominate Ankita Raina and Divij Sharan for the Arjuna Award and coach Nandan Bal for the Dhyanchand honour. PTI

## Pranjala making the most of Australia sojourn

The young tennis star working on regaining fitness under ATP DMS Paul Ness

KAMESH SRINIVASAN  
NEW DELHI

Y. Pranjala is in Australia under lockdown, but using the time to regain physical fitness and iron out health issues, with the full attention of ATP Director of Medical Services Paul Ness.

"I arrived in Australia on February 23, on a three-month visa. The visa expired on May 13, and the process of extending it is on," said Pranjala in an Instagram conversation with the tennis fraternity.

**Hands-on training**  
"Paul has 23 years of experience at the Australian Open, and working with top players. He has put no restrictions on my movements. He works out with me every day, even beats me in the



**Home away from home!** In Stacey Ness, Pranjala has found the ideal friend to beat lockdown blues. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

best physiotherapists in the world.

Winning back-to-back singles titles in \$25,000 ITF women's tournaments in Lagos in 2018 has been the high point of her career so far, and Pranjala thanked coach Stephen Koon for her progress – physically, technically and mentally.

### Good advice

"I started thinking better on court. I begged him to let me play doubles, but he said no. I am glad I listened to him," said Pranjala, who rose to a career-best rank of 265.

For the record, she was ranked No. 15 among juniors, won the Asian junior title and also made the doubles quarterfinals of junior Grand Slams in Melbourne and Paris.

sprints. It is a lot of fun. He picks me up from my place and drops me back," said Pranjala, quite grateful to Ness and his wife Stacey.

Pranjala even had a memorable birthday this year despite being away from home, thanks to Stacey.

Hitting against the wall to

## Documenting the struggles of women

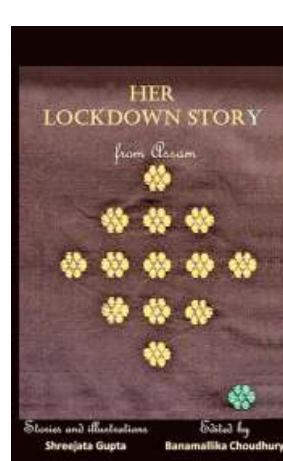
Assam NGO collects testimonials from lower-income groups in *Her Lockdown Story*

SUVJIT BAGCHI  
KOLKATA

Sulema, a middle-aged mother, has always had a tough life. Her husband died young and her in-laws kept her child but pushed her out to retain ownership of her husband's stake in the family property. She fought an arduous legal battle to retain the three-year-old boy's custody but lost any claim to the land.

"Still, she could hang on as she worked as a housekeeper for a wealthy family in Tezpur," said Asma Khatun, a social activist, who has been in touch with Ms. Sulema.

Since the beginning of the lockdown, Ms. Sulema was unable to go to her workplace. Facing destitution and realising that she could not feed her child, she reached out to the employers she had served for three years. Such testimonials – about 200 in number – from work-



organisation's executive director Banamalika Choudhury, who edited *Her Lockdown Story*.

The stories have been written and illustrated by U.K.-based scientist Shreeja Gupta.

### More stories

"The plan now is to make the book more comprehensive, mainly focusing on working women, and to make our workers, like Asma, write the stories in multiple languages, with translation into English. Finally, [we want to] to take it to the government so that some notification is issued to release the salaries," Ms. Choudhury said.

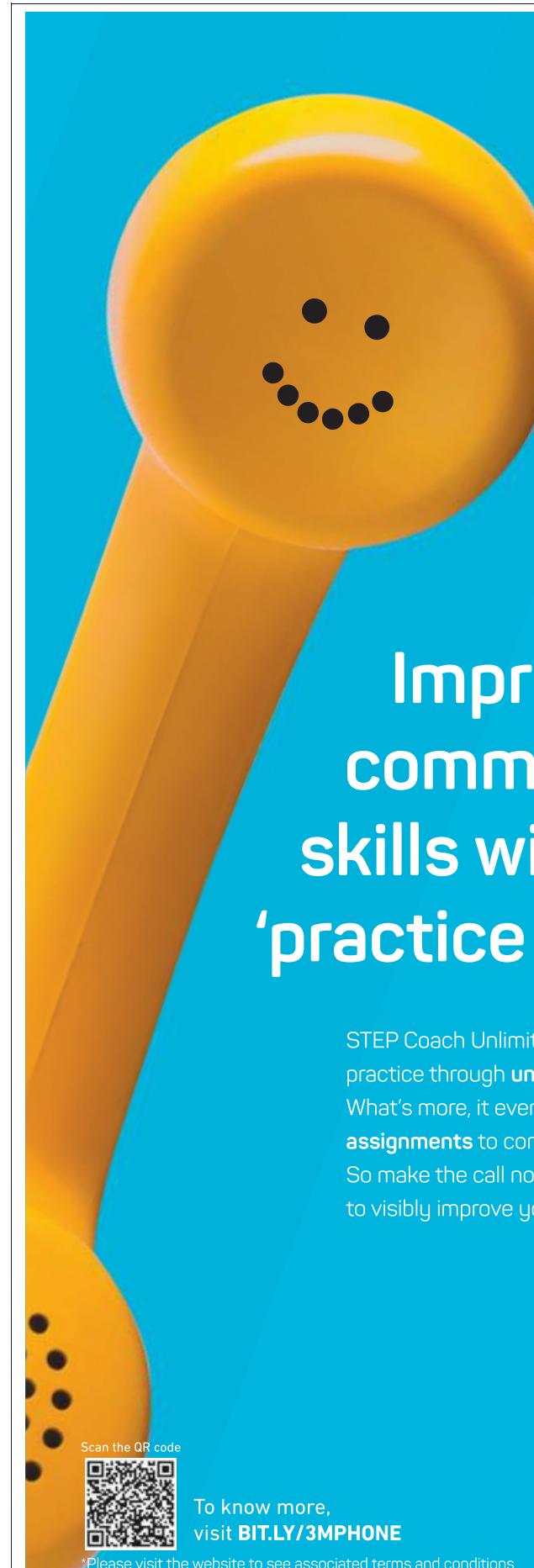
In the next phase, Ms. Khatun and her colleagues will collect stories of working women in tea gardens, factories, households and farms.

"Maybe we will ask Sulema to write for us now," said Ms. Khatun.

How Ms. Sulema, who allowed WLTC to use her name in the book, is surviving the lockdown with her child to care for is another story, said Ms. Khatun.

WLTC has plans to collect about 1,000 stories, said the

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