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Donald Trump says peak U.S. death rate likely in two weeks
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New investors flock to market as stocks fall to multi-year lows
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Olympics to be held between July 23 & August 8 next year
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NEARBY



25 new COVID-19 cases in Delhi in one day

NEW DELHI

Twenty-five new COVID-19 cases were reported in Delhi on Monday, taking the total number to 97, according to the Delhi government. This is the biggest single-day jump in the number of cases in the city so far.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

AIIMS Trauma Centre is city's COVID-19 hospital

NEW DELHI

The Trauma Centre of AIIMS, Delhi, has been designated as the city's COVID-19 hospital with the administration now looking at augmenting the bed strength from 242 to 260. The move comes following Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba's direction for dedicated COVID-19 hospitals in every State.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

Bhilwara screens 24 lakh people over nine days

JAIPUR

After screening as many as 24 lakh people for COVID-19 symptoms by deploying 650 teams of health workers over a nine-day period, the administration in Rajasthan's Bhilwara district has readied facilities to quarantine 15,000 persons to meet an emergency situation. Bhilwara has been the State's worst-hit area in the ongoing crisis after the infection spread in a private hospital.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 9

India still in local transmission: govt.

Health Ministry says implementation of early lockdown is proving to be a step in the right direction

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN
NEW DELHI

Reiterating that India continues to be in the local transmission phase despite the country registering a spike from 100 to 1,000 cases in 12 days, the Union Health Ministry on Monday said India's precautionary and early lockdown is proving to be a step in the right direction.

India registered more than 60 new cases and four deaths in the past 24 hours, with a total of 1,071 cases and 29 deaths so far, the Ministry said, clarifying that no orders had been passed to "conduct large scale disinfection of people but protocol has been put in place for sanitising large public spaces, etc."

Joint Secretary in the Ministry Lav Agrawal told the

Rising numbers

India is among the 41 countries which crossed the 1,000 COVID-19 cases mark as of Sunday. But among these countries, the rise in cases in India has been relatively slower



BPL card holders waiting in a queue to collect essentials from a PDS shop in Delhi's Vishwas Nagar on Monday. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

1 As many as 176 countries have registered at least one COVID-19 case

2 Among these, 103 countries registered at least 100 cases

3 Of them, 41 countries registered at least 1,000 cases. India is among them

single individual can put us back," he said.

According to reports from State Health Departments, there are 1,284 confirmed cases nationwide, with 1,139 active cases.

The number of deaths rose to 37 on Monday, with two fatalities reported from Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra and one each from West Bengal and Punjab. Kerala added 32 new cases in its tally of 234; 12 new cases went Maharashtra's tally to 215.

With seven evacuees from Iran testing positive, the

number of cases in Rajasthan rose to 69. Tamil Nadu saw a sharp spike with 17 new cases.

Local transmission

When asked about a government document that said "India in the current phase of COVID-19 pandemic is showing local transmission and limited community transmission," Mr. Agrawal said, "We should use the word community in a limited context. In fact, the government will be the first to announce that the infection has entered the next phase

Relatively not rapid, yet

- The more number of days it takes to register a certain number of cases, the better it is for the country. In India, 100 cases were recorded on March 14. It took 14 days from then for the cases to cross the 1,000 mark
- Of the 41 nations where at least 1,000 cases were reported, only in three was the mark reached in more days: Japan (29 days), Iceland (17) and Greece (15)
- Only Finland and Philippines registered the 1,000 mark in 14 days, the same as India

However, it is important to note that India's COVID-19 test rate (tests per million people) has been among the lowest in the world

because we would need a heightened level of preparation and cooperation from the general public. Technically, we continue to be in the local transmission phase." He, however, confirmed that India is seeing "a small percentage of asymptomatic individuals".

Mr. Agrawal, however, refused to answer a question about a possible extension of the 21-day lockdown.

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'TESTING AND QUARANTINES HELPED DEFEAT VIRUS' ▶ PAGE 10

'No extension in lockdown'

Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba has denied that the Centre had plans to extend the three-week lockdown, which is scheduled to end on April 14. "There are rumours & media reports, claiming that the government will extend the #Lockdown21 when it expires. The Cabinet Secretary has denied these reports, and stated that they are baseless," a tweet from the official Press Information Bureau handle said on Monday.

'Emergency reports fake'

The Army has described as "absolutely fake" messages circulating on social media about the "likely declaration" of a state of Emergency in April. "Fake and malicious messages are circulating on social media about likely declaration of Emergency in mid-April and employment of

#IndianArmy, #Veterans, NCC and NSS to assist the civil administration. It is clarified that this is absolutely FAKE," the Army's official Twitter handle clarified on Monday.

Tablighi Jamaat in the Nizamuddin area of south Delhi earlier this month. While many returned home, others stayed back at the mosque. The persons evacuated were staying in the Markaz, the officer said.

Speaking to the media, Joint Secretary in the Union Health Ministry Lav Agarwal said, "In all such cases, a set protocol is put in place where our team goes in to collect samples, trace contacts and recommend quarantine and basic precautions. The same has been done for this area."

Cases of COVID-19 have surfaced in several States in persons linked to the Nizamuddin gathering. On Friday, six persons who had attended the Delhi meet, tested positive in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8



Safety check: People walking to board a bus to a quarantine facility in the Nizamuddin area of Delhi. ■ REUTERS

200 evacuated from Nizamuddin area

They developed COVID-19 symptoms

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

Around 150 people were evacuated by district authorities from the Nizamuddin area in New Delhi to various hospitals after they developed symptoms of COVID-19, a police officer said on Monday. On Sunday, 34 persons from the same area had been moved to hospitals.

The Delhi police have cordoned off the area around the Markaz Masjid, located around 100 m from the Nizamuddin dargah. Drones have been deployed in the area to ensure strict implementation of lockdown orders, the officer said.

Around 8,000 people from across the country as well as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Saudi Arabia attended a gathering at Alami Markaz Banglewali Masjid, the headquarters of the

Migrant workers given mass disinfectant bath in Bareilly

Action ordered against officials; those exposed to chemical to be examined

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

Tests or temperature?

However, while warmer and humid countries such as Singapore, Australia, Taiwan and Qatar had comparatively fewer infections – attributable to higher testing – it was possible that warmer temperatures retarded the spread of the virus, the authors – Qasim Bukhari and Yusuf Jameel – contend.

The study isn't yet peer-reviewed and is available at the open access repository Social Science Research Network.

United States and several European countries that are inundated by COVID-19 infections.

Coronaviruses are sensitive to humidity and are less likely to thrive at moderate levels of humidity, a series of experimental studies over the years have shown.

Earlier this month, a study by researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the United States said that regions experiencing a monsoon might see a slowing – but not a stop – to the transmission of the virus and, therefore, could help mitigation strategies in tropical countries such as India.

The maximum number of cases were reported in regions with an average humidity range of 3.9 g/cubic metre, which comprised the

eyes, telling them that the solution affects the face.

The nodal officer for COVID-19 control in Bareilly, Ashok Gautam, said the administration did spray the migrants with liquid disinfectant, but insisted it was not a chemical solution. He said the administration had taken the step following the arrival of several hundred migrants. "We tried to keep them safe; asked them to shut their eyes," he said.

Following the incident, District Magistrate Nitish Kumar ordered action against the officials concerned. The district chief medical officer was asked to conduct a medical check of persons exposed to the liquid.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8



Hosed down: Healthcare workers spraying disinfectants on migrant workers in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, on Monday. ■ PTI

Moderate humidity may deter coronavirus

Monsoon could slow down spread

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

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CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Gautam Buddha Nagar DM transferred after leave request

B.N. Singh's move was prompted by angry outburst from CM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GAZIABAD

Gautam Buddha Nagar District Magistrate B.N. Singh was transferred to Lucknow and attached to the Board of Revenue on Monday after he sought to proceed on three-month leave on a day the number of COVID-19-positive persons in the district touched 38, the highest in Uttar Pradesh. Mr. Singh's move was prompted by an angry outburst from Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, who reprimanded district officials for passing the buck to each other over rising cases in the State.

A leave application he wrote on Monday to Chief Secretary R.K. Tiwari citing "personal reasons" was rejected by the State govern-

ment, which initiated a departmental inquiry against Mr. Singh and replaced him in Gautam Buddha Nagar with Suhas L.Y., a 2007-batch IAS officer who has served as DM in Prayagraj and Azamgarh.

In the letter, Mr. Singh, who has been in charge of the district for the last three years, said, "In the present scenario when there should be no administrative slackness, I request that some other officer be given the charge."

Viral video

In a short video that has gone viral, the Chief Minister can be seen telling the officials that due process was not followed in checking the rise in the number of cases

that have been linked to the fire security firm whose British auditor allegedly passed on the infection. So far, 23 cases have been found to be linked to the firm.

At one point Mr. Adityanath can be heard shouting, "Apni bakwas band karo (Stop your nonsense)." He said the districts were alerted two months ago but suitable action was not taken to isolate foreign nationals.

Mr. Singh pleaded that he had been working 18 hours a day, but the Chief Minister was apparently in no mood to listen. Sources said Mr. Adityanath also took Chief Medical Officer Anurag Bhargav to task.

MAKESHIFT CAMP NEAR FI
RACE TRACK ▶ PAGE 2

Rabi harvest to be affected for want of farm workers

Farmers also worry about govt. procurement and the ability to sell crops as markets are still closed

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ
NEW DELHI

The lakhs of migrant workers streaming to their home villages due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown have left many farmers across the country bereft of agricultural labour just before the crucial harvesting season of the rabi or winter crop.

Farmers also worry about government procurement and their ability to sell their crops, given that many mandis or agricultural markets are still closed, despite fresh Home Ministry orders to exempt all such farming activities from the shutdown.

Wheat, mustard, rabi paddy, maize, chickpeas and soyabean are amongst the major crops harvested during this season.

Crucial link: Farm workers harvesting chilli in Rachapudi village of Andhra Pradesh. ■ KOMMURI SRINIVAS

"Most of the agricultural workers in Haryana and Punjab come from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and will not be there for this harvesting season. For the wheat harvest, farmers may be able to use mechanical combine harvesters. But Punjab's mandis alone employ 3.5 lakh agricultural workers during this season, to load, weigh, clean and bag the produce. How is procurement going to be possible without them?" asked Ramandeep Singh Mann, a Haryana-based farmer activist.

He noted that many of the

mechanical combine harvesters owned by Punjab and Haryana farmers are also stuck in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat, which harvest their wheat earlier than the northern States.

"They have been caught by the lockdown, usually with four or five workers accompanying them. Now they have to cross multiple State lines to return, so it is unclear how many will make it on time, leading to shortages," he added. "At the end of the day, harvesting cannot be postponed beyond 7 or 8 days, or the grain will shatter."

Both northern States have delayed wheat procurement to April 15, in the hopes that the lockdown will be over by then. Haryana

na has written to the Central Food Ministry, asking for incentives to farmers in a bid to stagger the procurement process and prevent congestion at mandis in late April. It wants to offer an additional ₹50 per quintal for those able to store their crops and wait to sell until May 5, and ₹25 for those willing to hold on till June.

Relief on crop loans

On Monday, the Centre offered some relief on crop loans up to ₹3 lakh which are due for repayment between March and May, by deciding to extend 2% interest subvention to banks and 3% prompt repayment incentive to all farmers up to May 31, 2020.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Timings

DELHI
TUESDAY, MAR. 31
RISE 06:12 SET 18:39
RISE 10:37 SET 00:00
WEDNESDAY, APR. 01
RISE 06:11 SET 18:39
RISE 11:29 SET 00:55
THURSDAY, APR. 02
RISE 06:10 SET 18:40
RISE 12:26 SET 01:50

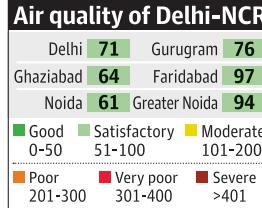
Delhi Weather	max min
Delhi City	31 16
Safdarjung	31 16
Palam	31 17

Delhi Palarm Today
32°C A spell of dust storm or thundershower is likely in parts. A partly cloudy sky and warm day is likely.

Delhi Palarm Tomorrow
31°C A comfortable morning is likely. A mainly sunny sky and warm day would continue.

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THE HINDU
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**IN BRIEF****HC PIL seeks medical cover for media persons**

NEW DELHI
A public interest litigation (PIL) moved before the Delhi High Court on Monday sought to provide medical insurance cover to media persons whether contractual, ad-hoc or permanent, who are reporting on COVID-19. The court Joint Registrar said the case will be taken up only after the ongoing lockdown to contain the COVID-19 outbreak is relaxed.

Do not evict advocates from rented homes: BCD

NEW DELHI
The Bar Council of Delhi on Monday urged the Delhi HC to issue direction to the Centre, government and police to ensure no advocate is shunted out of rented homes due to failure to pay monthly rent amid the lockdown due to COVID-19.

North body uses drones to spray disinfectant

NEW DELHI
Drones were used to spray sodium hypochlorite to disinfect parts of North Delhi in a pilot project by the area municipal corporation on Monday. These are being deployed so as to help cover a wider area in a shorter period of time. The machines are able to reach narrow lanes, said area deputy commissioner Ira Singh.

Accident after man spills alcohol-based sanitiser

NEW DELHI
A man from Haryana was brought to Sir Ganga Ram Hospital on Sunday with 35% burn injury due to use of alcohol-based sanitiser, said hospital authorities. "He was cleaning things in the kitchen when he spilled sanitiser on himself and the fumes from it reached the gas and his kurta caught fire," said a doctor.

Makeshift camp near F1 race track for migrant workers

Move comes after Central government asks States to seal district and inter-State borders

VIAJITA SINGH

NEW DELHI
A makeshift camp at the periphery of a plush housing society, which includes an F1 race track on the Yamuna Expressway at Greater Noida in Uttar Pradesh is being readied as a relief camp for migrants headed home as 21-day lockdown is enforced in wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

After Centre asked State governments to strictly enforce the lockdown mea-

Out of work, slum dwellers in the city start losing savings

Many of them from, Basai Darapur and Sudhama Puri slums, face employers' neglect; for most, food during lockdown remains a daily struggle

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

At Basai Darapur and Sudhama Puri - slums that are mostly inhabited by daily wage labourers, domestic help and rickshaw pullers - families are finding it difficult to survive. They are out of work, feeling neglected, and trying hard to access basic necessities.

Sangeeta from Sudhama Puri, who worked as a house help, said she is six months pregnant and is concerned over the money required for her child's birth. "When she [employer] needed me, she used to make so many calls. Now, she hasn't even asked me how I am managing, whether I am alive or not. She deducted money for 10 days and when I asked for her help, she did not even open the door and treated me like an untouchable," said Sangeeta. She last went



Slum dwellers in west Delhi's Sudhama Puri on Monday. ■ HEMANI BHANDARI

to work on March 22. "Jab waqt aata hai to koi madad nahi karta [When needed, no one helps]."

Sangeeta said her husband, a rickshaw puller, is also out of work.

'Out of money'
A 25-year-old man, Sajjan Singh from Uttar Pradesh's

Unnao, a rickshaw puller said he walked 17 km from his jhuggi in the hope of getting a bus home but was stopped by the police.

"There is no work. I had savings that lasted for four-five days. I ran out of money and wanted to go back to the village where my family stays but couldn't. I will have

to now wait for the curfew to end," he said. When asked how he will manage food, he said: "Yahi log khila rahe hain [The people here are feeding me]."

He said he has been in Delhi for over 12 years and "have never faced a situation like this".

With buffalo-litter and garbage around him, the re-

slum dwellers. A majority of us don't even own masks because they are so expensive," said Nitu, a house help.

A few meters ahead, in the slums of Basai Darapur, many daily wage labourers were seen waiting for their employers to give them money, which has been due for sometime. Shivam (19), Raju Kumar (20) and Manglu (34), all from Uttar Pradesh, were seen discussing how they will manage the next month's rent if they are stuck in the city. These labourers mostly pick bricks for a living.

"Wapas jaane ke liye bhi to paisa chahiye. Vo bhi nahin hai. Uske liye hi baitha hain yahan [We need money to go back. That too we don't have and that is why we are sitting here]," said Shivam, adding that there is no point walking home or going in ov-

er-crowded buses.

Manglu said: "I have not heard of any poor person being diagnosed with COVID-19. It's for the rich, but the worst hit are poor."

While everyone in Basai Darapur shared their fear of running out of food and money, Nisha, a househelp, said she is most hurt by the treatment meted out to her by her employer. "Usne kaha jab bimari khatam hogi tab aa jana. Pata nahin kahan se aate ho tum log. Main ghar main nahin aane dungi ab [She said come when the epidemic is over. I don't know where you come from. I won't let you in]," she said.

Right opposite Nisha's residence, is Badlu Ram's jhuggi. With just a kitchen and a washing space inside, nine persons live in that house. "We are worried that where will the next meal come from?" the gardener said.

Wait for food, but no ration cards

PDS stores witness long queues, many worried about 'next meal'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The extra ration provided by the government has been beneficial especially at the end of the month, said several people who lined up outside the Public Distribution System (PDS) stores in the city. However, those who queued up without ration cards remain concerned about their next meal.

Manita (40) and Laxmi (60), who work as maids, have been coming to ration distribution point, reportedly run by the area MLA, next to a ration store in Govindpuri for the last three days. "They [officials] took down our names, numbers and addresses and told us that they would send food but nothing has come," said Laxmi.

Without a source of income, she is unsure whether she will be allowed to continue at her rented jhuggi but



People queue up in front of a PDS shop in east Delhi on Monday. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

more importantly how she would arrange for the next meal. The women said they are not sure if their employers would pay them.

Suresh Chand, whose source of income is a room that he rents to a maid, said: "I won't ask rent from her now...how can I? She won't be able to pay anyway."

Chand, who too does not have a ration card, stood outside the free distribution point hoping to get some rations for home. For meals, he has been leaning on nearby centres run by various NGOs and religious organisations.

CM order

In this regard, CM Arvind Kejriwal on Monday said arrangements are being made so that people who do not have ration cards can get goods from government stores. He assured that an order to this effect would be passed soon.

While some in the bureaucracy argued the move was not only "unprecedented" but "very unfair" and questioned why the buck did not stop with the politicians whose "orders were being carried out" by the suspended lot - among them "very senior and capable bureaucrats" with "impeccable career and records", MHA

sources claimed action was taken against officials who "chose to sit in air-conditioned rooms" instead of ensuring "better management" and "proper implementation" of these very decisions on the ground.

Suspended officials

Renu Sharma, additional Chief Secretary, Transport Department and Rajiv Verma, Principal Secretary, Finance were suspended while Satya Gopal, additional Chief Secretary, Home and Land Buildings Departments, and Ajay Kumar Arora, SDM Seelampur, were served show-cause notices.

"There are videos being circulated in the public domain showing announcements being made to migrant workers to reach the

women among the migrants – but these did not materialise on the ground," the source argued.

In the run-up to the exodus over the weekend, the source claimed, the suspended officials had "chosen to sit in their offices" instead of ensuring that the situation did not transform into the crisis.

Personal grudge
"This is the first time that such senior bureaucrats have been axed without any explanation or underlying reason," a bureaucrat argued.

"This may not only have been inspired by some sort of personal grudge against them but may also be an exercise in public relations so the people do not question the politicians who actually sat in their offices to escape public ire," the official said.

Axed officials chose to sit in their offices'

Bureaucracy questions suspension move, calls it 'unprecedented and very unfair'

VIAJITA SINGH
JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI

A day after two senior IAS officials were suspended and another was issued a show-cause notice along with a DANICS officer by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) for alleged dereliction of duty for not being able to contain the exodus of migrant workers from Delhi, sources in the MHA claimed this was done in response to their alleged failure in this respect on multiple counts.

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"There are videos being circulated in the public domain showing announcements being made to migrant workers to reach the

inter-State bus terminal at Anand Vihar where arrangements to ferry them to Uttar Pradesh were being made. At whose behest were these made?" the MHA source said.

"After these announcements, which were instrumental in triggering the exodus, were made, instructions were issued to ensure floodlights, tents and urinals – especially for the

Stranded non-Delhi residents struggle to return

The affected are reaching out to cab and hearse van drivers to drop them

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

After public transport services not available and borders sealed during the lockdown, non-Delhi residents who are stranded in the city are reaching out to cab and hearse van drivers to drop them at their respective cities in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Aarti Singh, who came to Delhi for a job interview is trapped at her friend's house said that the landlord has stopped meal services and her family back in Lucknow are worried about her. "My family want me back in Lucknow at any cost. Through a contact, I reached out to a cab driver who agreed to drop me, but he will charge ₹7,000 per seat with a condition that if they get caught at borders then no money will be refunded," said Ms. Aarti.

On condition
She added that she has agreed but she has to wait till



Police personnel check identity of motorists at a barricade over the Yamuna in Delhi on Monday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

he gets three other passengers.

In another case, Phool Devi, who went to visit her relative, admitted at AIIMS, is also trapped at a hostel.

"It is just a single room and we are five persons sleeping in one room. My children are worried at my home town in Rampur. My relative got me connected to a hearse van driver who will drop me to my town on Tues-

day," said Ms. Devi. She added that she will pay ₹5,000 for the drive. The driver said the hearse van is allowed to move in lockdown and it will not be stopped.

Similar was the case with Mahesh Singh, who has come to visit his son who is studying at a college in North Campus. "I am a farmer and I have to go back to my farms for harvest time. If I failed to go then I will suffer a huge loss. I will walk till the Haryana border and will arrange some transport from there," said Mr. Mahesh.

Pickets arranged

The police have directed his

personnel to stop the movement of the migrant population, trying to leave the city, by increasing the number of pickets across the city and the border areas with the help of additional forces.

When asked if the tin tene-

ments will cause discomfort to the occupants amid rising heat, the official said, "The inside of these tents are layered with plywood sheets. It will absorb the heat. This is an ideal location as social distancing norms can be followed here."

The camp is surrounded by iron gates on all sides. The administration was making arrangements to prepare and serve food to the inmates there.

When asked if the tin tene-

ments will be taken care of. He added that they are on a hunger strike.

In another video from cell number 15 in Mandoli jail, an inmate said there is no medical facility and the food being served "is worse than what is fed to animals". He alleged that they are not provided with masks and sanitizers. "If someone suffers from cold and we inform the authorities, we are asked to keep mum and threatened that action will be taken against us," he said.

An inmate said: "Release us on



People waiting in queue in front of a mohalla clinic at New Seemapuri; migrant workers on their way home resting on the Ring Road near Basai Darapur in New Delhi on Monday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY, SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Students up to Class VIII to get promotion without exams

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Education Minister Manish Sisodia on Monday announced that according to the 'no detention policy' under the Right To Education Act, all students from Nursery to Class VIII will be promoted to the next class irrespective of whether they have been assessed or not.

The exams in several cases, could not be conducted due to the recent violence in north-east Delhi, followed by the outbreak of COVID-19.

"Students will be assigned activities through SMS or IVR which they will have to do and maintain in a notebook. After the schools reopen, these activities will be used in internal assessment of the students," he said.

He also said that online classes for students of Class XII will begin from first week of April and that students who cannot afford internet data packs will be given funds for purchasing them, adding that online classes for Class X would also start soon.

IN BRIEF

Bail granted to three Shaheen Bagh protesters

A Delhi Court has granted bail to three men who were arrested from Shaheen Bagh protest site here for allegedly disobeying directions of the government and the police related to restrictions imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19. The court directed the men, Syed Taseer Ahmed, Shan Mohammed and Syed Masood Ahmad, not to visit the protest site for "purpose of any protest".

Doctors to be accommodated at hotel

The doctors treating COVID-19 patients at Lok Nayak and GBP hospitals will be accommodated at Lalit Hotel in central Delhi on city government's expense, said an order from the Delhi Health Department. PTI

SDMC procures protective gear

NEW DELHI
The SDMC procured 14,000 nitrile gloves for its field staff which would last longer, it said on Monday. Apart from about 3,500 such gloves, it will also distribute about 20,000 triple-layer masks in each of its zones.

Hospital discharges 3 with travel history to U.K.

GURUGRAM
Three persons with travel history to the UK have been discharged from Fortis Memorial Research Institute here. While two patients were discharged on March 29, one was discharged on Monday. Two of them were siblings. They tested negative for COVID-19. The third patient was a 29-year-old man.

AIIMS Trauma Centre to be dedicated COVID-19 hospital

'102 ambulances' should not be used for infected patients, says Health Ministry

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN
NEW DELHI

The Trauma Centre of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi, has been designated the city's COVID-19 hospital with the administration now looking at augmenting the bed strength from 242 to 260.

The move comes following Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba's direction for dedicated COVID-19 hospitals in every State.

The Ministry has also identified the National Cancer Institute under AIIMS for COVID-19 treatment. It is a 800-bed hospital in Haryana's Jhajjar.

Existing patients at the Trauma Centre have been shifted to the main hospital. "All emergency cases will be directed to the main hospital. Only COVID-19 patients will be housed in the centre to avoid cross-infection. So far, the hospital has not received any COVID-19 patient," said a senior physician at the Trauma Centre.

HELPLINE NUMBERS
COMMON HELPLINE +91-11-23978046
DELHI — 011-22307145
GHAZIABAD — 010-4186453
NOIDA — 8076623612/6396776904
GURUGRAM — 108/0124-2322412/
9911519296/7015523417/9654231756

tients will be housed in the centre to avoid cross-infection. So far, the hospital has not received any COVID-19 patient," said a senior physician at the Trauma Centre.

Team in quarantine

Meanwhile, a team of 14 medical employees, including doctors and nurses, that was treating COVID-19 patients at the Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital has been sent into home quarantine and their samples are being tested, official sources said on

Monday.

One of the nurses had a fever on Sunday evening, so the entire team has been asked to quarantine themselves, said a source.

The Union Health Ministry said that set protocol regarding exposure is being followed.

In an attempt to bolster readiness, AIIMS-Delhi is training doctors and nurses through online classes and has set up a 24X7 call facility for doctors to seek guidance on clinical care of COVID-19

patients. AIIMS had shut its OPD services on March 23 and had also issued an advisory to OPD patients, requesting them to postpone their appointments. The hospital also postponed all elective surgeries from March 20. Safdarjung Hospital is already admitting and treating COVID-9 patients.

Several private hospitals have also offered to convert dedicated COVID-19 treatment facilities. The Union Health Ministry has also said that '102 ambulances' should not be used for COVID-19 patients as they are needed to transport only pregnant women or sick infants. It added that all medical technicians in the ambulance as well as the driver must wear protective equipment when handling COVID-19 suspect or patients.

For the homeless, govt. releases digital map of relief camps

Most of the people on the streets unaware of provisions

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

With a majority of people cooped up in their homes for the 21-day lockdown, the only people seen roaming the streets are migrant workers and the homeless who are still unaware of the Delhi government's scheme providing shelter and hot food at various locations across the city.

To help guide the homeless to the camps, the Delhi government has released a customised Google Maps link which shows the locations of the facilities. But with no access to technology, the homeless remain unaware of such provisions.

Most of the people The Hindu talked to on Monday asked to be directed towards a location where they could get some assistance. The Delhi government has said that it has made arrangements to serve four lakh meals daily, distribute extra ration and provide accommodation at night shelters and schools.

Ranjan, a construction worker from Etawah in Uttar Pradesh, who along with his wife and children had spent

all of Sunday trying to reach the Delhi border to find some transport to reach home, was huddled under a flyover near Lajpat Nagar on Monday.

"I tried to reach home but the police did not let us go any further. I was working at a construction site but it has been closed. I do not have a roof over my head and we do not have food," he said, unaware that there were two schools in Andrews Ganj nearby that were providing free food.

Dharam Pal, another migrant worker who was sent back from the border, said that the police stopped him and asked him to head home but nobody informed him about the night shelters or where they were located.

Several non-migrant workers also said that they did not know that the Delhi government was providing accommodation at schools. Mohammad Mitoo a rickshaw driver living on the pavement opposite Lodhi Hotel, said: "I used to make ₹300-₹400 everyday but for the past week I have not made a penny and have been living here with my wife and three children. I have ₹1,500 in savings and some rice and dal which I hope will last me till I can work again."

He said that he prefers to live on the street as the night shelter across the road is being used by the 'regulars' and it has no space for him and his family. He was unaware that there were four relief centres nearby.

Haryana police seal inter-State borders

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GURUGRAM

The Haryana police on Monday sealed all its inter-State borders to prevent migration of workers to effectively control the spread of COVID-19. The move came days after the restriction of non-essential services triggered the mass exodus of the migrant workers to their houses in adjoining districts from across the State.

Besides, 610 FIRs have been registered in Haryana for violating lockdown guidelines, 745 persons arrested and 3,407 vehicles impounded.

Additional Director General of Police (Law and Order) Navdeep Singh Virk said that the Haryana police had made arrangements to ensure lockdown in the State. The movement of migrant labourers had been contained by persuading them to move to any of the 461 shelters set up for their stay.

The food at these shelters is being provided with the help of NGOs, social workers and the local administration.

With 25 fresh COVID-19 cases, city sees biggest single-day jump

City has 89 active cases, 5 have been discharged and 2 died

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Twenty-five new COVID-19 cases were reported in Delhi on Monday, taking the total number of cases to 97, according to the Delhi government.

This is the biggest single-day jump in the number of cases in the city so far.

Sunday and Saturday had also recorded the biggest single-day jumps till then, with 23 and nine new cases respectively.

There have been two deaths due to the disease so far in the city, but there was no death reported on Monday.

Though 97 cases of COVID-19 have been reported so far, there are 89 active cases and five people have been discharged.

According to the government, 2,168 samples have been sent for testing for COVID-19 till date in the city, of which 322 results are awaited.

About 19,989 people who are contacts of people tested positive for COVID-19 are currently under home quarantine in the city.

Also, 1,137 people are under institutional quarantine in the city and 4,200 passengers are under home quarantine.

"Crisis Support and Counselling Centre [CSCC] at IHBAS is operational from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on all seven days for COVID-19 epidemic. Video conference facility for counselling at the CSCC, IHBAS is also available [Skype ID - CSCCIBHAS]," an official said.

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hi Police to register an FIR against the Maulana of the 'markaz' at Nizamuddin.

The State government said that a restriction was imposed of non-essential services in the entire country India on March 24 and it was the duty of every owner and administrator of every hotel, guest house, hostel and similar establishment to ensure people maintain social distancing, adding that it seemed that social distancing and quarantine protocols was not practised in Nizamuddin.

"It has come to our knowledge that the administrators violated guidelines and several people who were present at the Nizamuddin" event tested positive for COVID-19. Strong action will be taken against those in charge of this establishment. By this gross act of negligence, many lives have been endangered. It was the responsibility of every citizen to proactively avoid such gathering... this is nothing but a criminal act," the government said.

The Delhi government said that after the Centre informed it about the first COVID-19 patient and requested assistance, all symptomatic patients were moved to our medical facilities and as a safety precaution, all non-symptomatic contacts were moved to quarantine centres.

Meanwhile, the Delhi government on Monday wrote to the Sports Authority of India to hand over the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in Lodi Road to the district administration, to turn it into a quarantine facility.

People out on roads without reason to be sent to shelter homes

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Lieutenant-Governor Anil Baijal on Monday told officials to send people, found roaming on roads here without any valid reason, to shelter homes.

"If people are found on roads without curfew passes, they shall be picked up and sent to nearest shelters for quarantine purpose," an official statement said.

Officials, such persons will be sent to the nearest school, which has been turned into a shelter home for migrant workers and the homeless.

"This is not new and is according to an advisory sent by the Ministry of Home Affairs on March 28," an official said. Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and De-

puty Chief Minister Manish Sisodia were also part of the meeting.

The L-G also told officials that no movement of people or migrant workers should take place in any area and on the borders of Delhi.

"Social distancing should be maintained under all circumstances," a direction by the L-G stated.

Ghaziabad couple kept socialising after testing positive'

Noida firm they work for is under the scanner

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GHAZIABAD

Officials of the Ghaziabad health department were left shocked upon learning that a couple who had tested positive for COVID-19 by a private lab

drove from the Government Institute of Medical Sciences (GIMS) in Greater Noida to the MMG district hospital here in their private vehicle instead of an ambulance.

The couple was referred to Ghaziabad but before the ambulance could be ready, they left the premises, GIMS director Dr. (Brig.) Rakesh Gupta said, adding that the incident

will have to be investigated.

Twelve in isolation ward

Ghaziabad Chief Medical Officer (CMO) N.K. Gupta said, "The woman did not disclose information about where she worked and did not quarantine herself. Her husband also kept socialising. We have prepared a list of 90-odd people whom the couple

came in contact with. A total of 12 have been admitted to the isolation ward of MMG district hospital."

With the couple testing positive, Ghaziabad has reported seven COVID-19 cases so far, including two who have recovered.

The woman works for a firm which has been under the scanner for withholding information about a U.K.-based auditor who

had visited the company and stayed in Noida for three days.

So far 23 cases, directly or indirectly, are linked to the firm, said a health department official.

The company also returned from the U.K. on March 1 and remained asymptomatic for a while. He got himself tested by a private firm and has been found positive. His contact history is being traced," said Dr. Bhargav.

According to the district health department, a list of 161 employees of the company has been prepared for screening.

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THE HINDU

India's National Newspaper

An unending journey for the migrants

Those who reached Bihar after walking for days are confined to quarantine facilities in Patna

AMARNATH TEWARY

PATNA

At 11 a.m. on Monday, 15-year-old Balmiki Kumar is sitting on a wooden bench under a tree on the campus of the Patna High School in the Gardanibagh locality.

His tattered black backpack is bloated with things he packed for the journey. He is unwilling to go inside the vacant rooms of the school to rest. "I want to go to my home in Sitamarhi district as soon as possible and be with my family," he says. He wants to say more, but is exhausted after his long journey of over 1,000 km from Delhi's Noida.

For the last five months Balmiki was staying in Sector-12, Noida, where his elder brother Rakesh Kumar works as a tailor. Both the brothers were living in a room they rented for ₹2,000 a month and were earning around ₹15,000 on an average. Their father, Hari Kishore Mahto, is

a marginal farmer in Dhanush village in Sitamarhi district of Bihar. Their youngest brother, Rishi Kumar, stays with father at the village.

When Balmiki, a school dropout, saw people leaving for their home States in hordes in the third week of March, he didn't understand what was happening. "I didn't realise the gravity of the situation even when my elder brother told me an unknown virus is killing people and everything is going to be shut soon. I chose to stay back while my brother left with the others," he says.

Asked to vacate room

When his landlord asked him to vacate the room and it became increasingly difficult to get food, he too decided to leave. "I stuffed some clothes and packed flattened rice and some snacks in my bag and set off on my journey on March 25 with only with



Balmiki Kumar, a migrant worker in Patna. ■

₹1,000 in my pocket," he says. "I survived on water and the flattened rice for five days."

How did he find his way on the road? "Using GPS on my mobile," he says, pulling out a big-screen phone from his pocket. "What option did I have? I walked all day and through the night, only resting briefly by the roadside," Balmiki says, holding up his worn-out rubber slippers.

When he crossed the Uttar Pradesh border at Kaimur and reached Danapur near Patna early on March 30, the district officials took him to

the Patna High School campus – one of the four places in the city where arrangements have been made for food and shelter for migrants.

Robbed on train

K. Raju, 50, was not so lucky. Resting in a corner classroom on the first floor of the school, he says all his belongings, including mobile phone and Aadhaar card, were stolen on the train. "Now I am an identity-less Indian," he says. He is from Vijaywada in Andhra Pradesh and worked in a hotel in Secunderabad in Telangana. "When the lockdown was declared, everyone was leaving for their homes. I too boarded a train but it brought me to Danapur station near Patna on March 28. From there, some officials dropped me here at the school and now I have no money, no phone, nothing at all to go anywhere or connect with anyone," he says.

Mr. Raju has an elder brother who is stuck in Mumbai. Clad in a lungi and a half-sleeve shirt, his only belongings are a polythene bag and a towel.

Most of the school's 30 rooms the district administration has taken under its control are empty. Some local social activists are helping with the food. Hardly five-six people are staying here. Most of them have left for their villages," says social activist Raj Shekhar Gupta. A policeman is stationed on the campus and an official maintains a logbook. A large room is cluttered with cooking gas cylinders, beds and cots. Under a tent in one corner, food is being served. "Most of those in the queue are poor people from nearby areas. How can we deny food to anyone in such difficult times," says Mr. Gupta. Bihar, so far, has had one COVID-19 death and 15 positive cases.

While the man from Indore died at 3 a.m. on Monday, the Ujjain resident had died on March 27, but his sample tested positive for the disease on Monday.

"A 41-year-old man from Indore has died," confirmed Rahul Rokde of the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Medical College, Indore. He was first admitted to a private hospital on March 23, his sample tested positive on March 26, and he was then admitted to the government-run MRTB Hospital on Saturday at 9 p.m..

"The patient didn't have a travel or contact history," Dr. Rokde confirmed.

Meanwhile, a 38-year-old man from Ujjain who had died on March 27 while undergoing treatment for chest pain at a hospital tested positive for COVID-19.

"He came with chest pain and was admitted to the hospital, and died soon after. We had taken a sample while he underwent treatment," said A.G. Sinha, Chief Medical Health Officer, Ujjain.

After the patient was admitted at 7.50 p.m., doctors had sent swab samples to

the college, which tested them positive at Monday noon. The patient died at 9 p.m..

"The patient was obese and asthmatic and had hypertension too," said Ujjain isolation ward nodal officer H.P. Sonaniya.

"It appears to be a case of comorbidity, as the immuno compromised patient contracted the virus easily and died of cardiac arrest. Therefore, the death can be partly attributed to COVID-19."

Earlier, two patients from Ujjain and Indore each had succumbed to the illness. Madhya Pradesh has recorded 48 cases so far, with Indore, the most populous city in the State, registering 27 cases alone.

To seek assistance, call the State control room at 181 or 0755-2527133.

Two COVID-19 deaths take toll to four in Madhya Pradesh

Sample of man from Ujjain tests positive after his death

Patient came with chest pain and soon after died, later his test came out positive for COVID-19

DR. A.G. SINHA

Chief Medical Health Officer, Ujjain

travel or contact history," Dr. Rokde confirmed.

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Jails being decongested in J&K

700 lockdown violators were held, kept together for hours

PEERZADA ASHIQ

SRINAGAR

The J&K administration has started decongesting jails and lock-ups only after rounding up around 700 "violators" of the lockdown and huddling them in police stations and exposing them to the dangers of contracting COVID-19.

In a major step to decongest the prisons, the J&K administration revoked the Public Safety Act, a law dealing with preventive detention, on 31 prisoners. "Eleven of those to be released are lodged in Kotbalwal jail, 14 in Srinagar jail, four in a Rajouri jail and two in Kathua," an official said.

However, at least 700 civilians, who were designated as violators by the police and booked for their movement on the roads, were detained for hours together in police stations and many were detained for several days.

Police sources said Block Development Council chair-



A policeman checking people in Srinagar on Monday. ■ AFP

man Muhammad Yasin Sheikh from Handwara's Dolipora was arrested and detained for at least three days for his movement in Dolipora and arguing with the policemen". He was lodged at the Vilgam police station, Handwara, and booked under Section 353 and 506.

The Vilgam police detained 15 "violators" on March 24 and huddled them into the police station. A total of 35 civilians were arrested in the whole of Handwara area that day.

Valley's Bandipora, Handwara and Ganderbal districts top in detention of "violators" and lodging them in lock-ups and police stations. In the past two days, over 50 "violators" have been detained in these districts.

After a video went viral of a father-son entering into an argument with the police and later exchanging blows on March 27, the duo, identified as Azad Wani and Suhal Ahmed Wani, were booked under Sections 269 and 353 (non-bailable offence with two years to five jail) of the Indian Penal Code and arrested by the Delina police station.

Duo released
A police officer said the father-son duo was released on Monday.

Meanwhile, in a fresh drive on Monday, a police spokesman said 44 civilians were booked in Handwara and Sopore "for violating the prohibitory orders".

Chandigarh police step in to prevent migration of workers

Personnel convincing those on the move to return, making arrangements for them in shelters

VIKAS VASUDEVA

ZIRAKPUR/CHANDIGARH

On his way to Mathura in Uttar Pradesh, after walking from a town in Himachal Pradesh, Lachman Singh – a truck driver – reached Chandigarh on Monday morning where the police stopped him.

He along with a few others were asked to go back even as they said that they hardly have any money left.

"They (police) took my details and asked me to return from where I had come. I don't have any option but to go back. I hardly have any money left. I don't know how will I return," said Mr. Singh, who claimed that he was stuck near a village in Himachal Pradesh's Swarghat town, 78 km from here.

"I had taken my truck to deliver bitumen mixture at a plant near Swarghat from Bathinda. After the lockdown was announced, I couldn't go anywhere. I had

around ₹3,500 with me and almost all of it was spent in my stay over there. I was sleeping in the truck. As I ran out of money, I decided to leave my truck and head to my home town," he said.

"No one stopped me in Punjab or Himachal... since morning I have just had a cup of tea and biscuit that the police here has offered," he added.

Pradeep Kumar, an operator at a rice mill based in Mandi Kharar in Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar district, said he wants to reach Moradabad in U.P. He was among those who were stopped by the police at the (Punjab-Chandigarh) border in Sector 48.

"They have directed me to go back. I don't have much money left now. Since, the lockdown, the mill has been shut and workers like me were asked to make travel and food arrangements ourselves. They cleared my dues



Migrants in Chandigarh's Manimajra area who were asked by a tavern owner to vacate premises. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

till the lockdown date," he said.

Chandigarh police have been on its toes. The police on Monday shifted 72 migrant labourers, who were about to leave Chandigarh for their native places, to their current place of stay and a few others to a shelter home in Maloya.

Also, a case has been registered under Sections 188, 269, 270 of the IPC at Manimajra against Mahesh Kumar, of Panchkula (Haryana),

who forced labourers working in his tavern to leave. Chandigarh police spokesperson Charanjeet Singh Virk said the labourers, who were stopped at Sector 48 border, were persuaded by the police to stay at the local shelter, but they opted to go back.

In neighbouring Mohali, at a construction site in the aero city, visibly distressed Shankar Mandal, a daily waggoner, said he was running out of ration. "I and my brother had come from Bihar's Araia a few days ago. We earned around ₹400 daily but since the lockdown we haven't been paid anything by the contractor," he said.

In Punjab's Jalandhar cantonment, around 40 people have sought assistance. "We want the government to arrange transport for us to our village in Supaul district in Bihar. Otherwise, arrange food for us," said Mohammed Sheraj,

Second death due to virus in West Bengal

The force is providing rations to the needy, feeding stray dogs

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA

West Bengal recorded its second death from COVID-19 on Monday, when a 44-year-old woman passed away at North Bengal Medical College and Hospital.

"She passed away early morning. We are trying to isolate the doctors and medical staff who treated her. Attempts are also being made to isolate the patient's relatives who seem to spread across north Bengal," P.K. Deb, principal of the medical college and hospital told *The Hindu*.

The lady hailed from Kamimpung town in West Bengal's Darjeeling district and was admitted to hospital almost a week ago. On Saturday tests reports confirmed that she was infected with COVID-19.

Lockdown: Assam police lauded for adopting 'soft' policing practices
The Assam police is documenting the best practices by its personnel in handling people during the lockdown to be used as templates for epidemics and social crises in the future.

COVID-19

"Thank you very much for your help. TPF will always remember the cooperation extended by the Assam police," said the message from TPF founder Indira Amma, accompanying photos of police personnel feeding stray dogs.

The patience of some policemen with people unable or reluctant to understand the gravity of the threat from COVID-19 has been appre-

ciated. For instance, a constable took almost 15 minutes convincing an elderly woman in Majuli that staying at home was a safer option for her.

Elsewhere, policemen delivered food grains to villagers who ran out of provisions.

On Friday, the police in north-eastern Assam's Biswanath district dropped an 80-year-old home at Laluk in the adjoining Lakhimpur district from a hospital in Biswanath Chariali town. The octogenarian, Khagen Baruah, had been exhausted after walking from a place 100 km away. Mr. Baruah had been stranded as the lockdown was declared the night before he was supposed to board a bus home.

"Our farmers face a combined average loss of ₹12 lakh per day with production

Dairy and vegetable farmers count losses

They are unable to transport their produce to markets because of restrictions

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GUWAHATI

Inability to transport their produce because of lockdown has made small dairy farmers in Assam throw away hundreds of litres of milk while vegetable growers are letting their crop rot or dump nearby for animals.

Some 1,500 members of Sijajakhal Dugdha Utpadak Samabadi Samiti Ltd in Morigaon district dumped about 10,000 litres of milk in rivers and streams during the first two days of lockdown. This was because the milk could not be consumed locally after efforts to transport them to the urban centres failed.

The milk processing plant of the 58-year-old cooperative society is situated about 65 km east of Guwahati.

"The milk processing plant of the 58-year-old cooperative society is situated about 65 km east of Guwahati.



Workers carry potatoes to a market in Guwahati. ■ PTI

dropping from the daily mark of 20,000 litres before the lockdown. But the main problem is availability of cattle feed, which is procured primarily from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal," said Ranjib Sharma, the society's chairman.

Smaller cooperative societies at Jorabat and Rangiya

near Guwahati have been facing similar problems. A major reason, said milk trader Dilip Chhetri of Jorabat, is the closure of all hotels, restaurants and sweetmeat shops that were the bulk buyers.

District authorities claimed they have streamlined the supply of milk after the initial hiccups as dairy and milk products and shops selling animal fodder fall under essential services according to the Union Home Ministry's guidelines.

But small dairy farmers said this has benefited major firms and a State government-run dairy unit who have massive refrigeration units to store milk not offloaded for two-three days.

At Singimari in Kamrup district, Mukulma in Nalbari district and Kharupetia in Darrang district, most vegetable farmers have not been

able to find transporters to market their produce. These places are considered the vegetable bowls of Assam.

"Officials are saying the government has relaxed restrictions on farming activities, but I lost more than 50 kg of tomatoes and other vegetables because of this bandh (lockdown). I hope the government compensates some of my loss," said Ramzan Ali, a farmer of Bechimari area near Kharupetia.

Minister's assurance
Assam's Agriculture Minister Atul Bora said district officials have been told to assist farmers in marketing their produce while ensuring social distancing.

NGOs have also been allowed to deliver vegetables and other perishables through telemarketing and e-marketing, officials said.

Cauvery and its tributaries look cleaner as pandemic puts a halt to pollution

Release of industrial effluents, dumping of clothes and waste has temporarily stopped due to the lockdown

M.T. SHIVA KUMAR
MANDYA

The strict enforcement of 21-day lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic has turned out to be a boon for the Cauvery and other rivers in the old Mysuru region as the prohibition of industrial and religious activities has helped reduce the pollution level in river waters.

According to Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB), the quality of water in Cauvery and tributaries like Kabini, Hemavati, Shimsha and Lakshmanathirtha is back to what it used to be decades ago.

While some industries were discharging untreated effluents/chemicals into Cauvery, pilgrims were dumping tonnes of waste materials, including clothes every day.

Hazardous elements

The fate of other rivers is not very different. Untreated sewage from residential areas; pollutants from industries; religious waste materials from pilgrims and construction debris had been polluting the rivers. Waters of these rivers contained hazardous elements such as lead, fluoride, faecal

coliform and some suspended solids in highly dangerous quantities.

It is evident that the lockdown has significantly brought down the pollution level in rivers, said the sources in KSPCB. However, the board will shortly test water samples at the Regional Laboratory in Mysuru under the national programme, "Monitoring of Indian National Aquatic Resources and the Global Environmental Monitoring Scheme," said the sources.

Seventy-year-old Marigowda at Karighatta said he had not seen such "clear



Blessing in disguise: The temporary stoppage of industrial and religious activities has helped reduce the pollution levels in the Cauvery. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

and pure water" in the Cauvery in the last three decades. According to Nanjamma of Mandya Koppal, the colour of water used to be greenish-black at some places and bluish-black at some others till March 22.

Residents of Agrahara, Maragalagala, Doddi Palya, Doddapalya, Chikka Palya, Chinnavanakana Halli and Mahadevapura on the Cauvery course near Srirangapatna wished something could

be done to preserve the quality of its Cauvery water after the withdrawal of lockdown.

The decreasing pollution level in Cauvery has also enthused senior revenue officials in Srirangapatna. V.R. Shailaja, Assistant Commissioner, Revenue, Pandavapura subdivision, told *The Hindu* that her department would initiate pragmatic measures to ensure the river flows with clean water in future too.

Srirangapatna Tahsildar M.V. Roopa said she would initiate measures to curb pollutants entering the Cauvery. "We will put up caution boards at pilgrimage centres along the Cauvery, initiate measures to prevent

people from leaving religious waste in water and take legal actions against industries if they discharge untreated effluents," she told *The Hindu*.

Waste from rituals

Priests at Paschima Vahini, Gosai Ghat and Sangam on the banks of the river perform a variety of rituals for the dead.

According to an estimate, at least 3,000 people visit these places and temples in Srirangapatna every day and dump tonnes of plantain leaves, garlands, clay pots, coconuts, photos of deities, clothes, polythene covers, leftover food and other puja material in Cauvery.

'Lift Karnataka blockade to avert crisis'

Kerala MP tells SC that the move is 'ill-planned and dangerous'

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL

NEW DELHI
Kerala MP Rajmohan Unnithan on Monday urged the Supreme Court to direct Karnataka to forthwith open its borders with Kerala for the safe passage of ambulances and other emergency vehicles and trucks carrying essential and non-essential supplies in order to avert a humanitarian crisis during the COVID-19 outbreak.

The parliamentarian, represented by advocates Harris Haris Beera and Pallavi Pratap, sought the court to issue an ex parte stay on the operation of the blockade imposed by Karnataka with its border States.

Mr. Unnithan, who represents Kasaragod, said Karnataka's blockade was "ill-planned and dangerous" and had led to loss of lives. Two patients from Kerala, in need



Border row: A toll plaza on the Karnataka-Kerala border on NH-66 is deserted due to the lockdown. ■ ANIL KUMAR SAstry

of urgent medical care, died after their ambulances were denied entry at the border by the Karnataka authorities. One of them was a 70-year-old woman.

"Imposition of such a blockade at a time when supply of commodities is itself hit hard and when a medical emergency has plagued the entire country is a clear violation of Articles 21 and 19(d) of the Constitution," the petition said.

Kasaragod is the northernmost district of Kerala, and closest to Karnataka.

Address the issue, HC tells Centre, States

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

KOCHI

A Division Bench of the Kerala High Court on Monday asked the Centre and the Kerala and Karnataka governments to address the issue of blockade put up by Karnataka on roads bordering Kerala, preventing free movement of vehicles carrying essential commodities and ambulances.

The Bench, comprising Justices A.K. Jayasankaran Nambari and Shaji P. Chali, was hearing a public interest litigation seeking to ensure safety of citizens during the lockdown period. The Bench said the Centre and the State governments concerned must address the issue without delay. This was more so because human lives were at stake.

Truck carrying vegetables attacked

STAFF REPORTER

KASARAGOD

On Sunday, a group of people in Karnataka allegedly prevented workers from unloading a consignment of vegetables at Kannadithodu near the Kerala-Karnataka border.

A trader in Kasaragod had ordered the consignment from Mysuru. Workers were transferring vegetables from the truck to another one on the Kerala side at Kannadithodu. A group of people came on bikes and threatened the workers and forced the driver to turn back.

Satish, a trader, said the gang followed the truck and blocked it at Korichal in Karnataka. They not only looted the consignment but also destroyed it. The gang also assaulted the driver and the workers.

Contractors may be behind migrant workers' stir: police

Eight middlemen under the scanner for Kottayam protest

G. ANAND

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Sunday's protest by migrant workers at Payippad in Kottayam is unlikely to be the consequence of a conspiracy by any political party or religious group, according to the Kerala police. A preliminary probe suggests that some labour contractors could have instigated the workers to protest and seek transport facilities to return to their home States.

The police say the protest occurred a few days after the taluk authorities summoned the contractors and advised them to help the migrants employed by them.

"They may have felt it is a losing proposition to spend on the wages, stay and food of the labourers during the lockdown," a senior police officer told *The Hindu*. They could have tried to shrug off their accountability by insti-



Patient hearing: Police personnel trying to reassure the migrant workers protesting in Kottayam on Sunday. ■ TPI

gating them to return home.

The police said eight middlemen were under scanner. Investigators said the mass movement of migrants from New Delhi in government-arranged buses may have also stoked the stir at Payippad.

Youth Cong. men held

In Malappuram, the police arrested two Youth Congress

workers for allegedly spreading false information that transport facility had been arranged for migrant workers to go home.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan had alleged that "one or more devious forces" were behind the Payippad episode.

(With inputs from Malappuram)

IN BRIEF



Kerala High Court grants bail to undertrials

KOCHI

A Full Bench of the Kerala High Court on Monday granted interim bail to all undertrial/remanded prisoners who have been accused of committing offences, which are punishable up to seven years or less with or without fine in view of the countrywide lockdown. The court, however, made it clear that the order would not apply to prisoners with criminal antecedents and previous convictions.

Foreign tourists stranded in Kerala to be evacuated

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Air India and the Kerala Tourism Department will facilitate the return of 250 foreign tourists stranded in the State after the lockdown to Germany and other countries in the European Union on Tuesday. Air India will operate a Boeing 777 from the Thiruvananthapuram international airport at 9.30 a.m. for them. The tourists, who were staying at yoga and ayurvedic centres and resorts, were screened and issued the COVID-19 negative certificate.

Suspected COVID patient dies of heart attack

NIZAMABAD

A suspected COVID-19 patient, who was admitted to the isolation ward of the Government General Hospital here in Telangana, died of heart attack on Monday. His family members attempted to attack the doctors, accusing them of negligence. The 62-year-old was in contact with a retired employee who had arrived from New Delhi recently. "We were waiting for his blood test results. Probably the patient died of fear," said Dr. J. Tirupati Rao, nodal officer, GHG.

Unavailability of alcohol sends addicts to hospital

From a maximum of five patients a day, the number has increased to 90

K SHIVA SHANKER

HYDERABAD

The number of people visiting the Institute of Mental Health (IMH), Erragadda, with severe alcohol withdrawal effects has seen a dramatic increase after the lockdown in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Usually, a maximum of five persons suffering from withdrawal effects visit IMH. However, the number touched 16 on Saturday, 25 on Sunday and 90 on Monday.

Along with other commercial establishments, liquor shops too have been shut for over a week as part of efforts to contain the spread of the virus.

Severe effects

Deprived of their regular dose of alcohol, addicts are suffering from seizures and delirium.



as restlessness and trembling, to severe effects such as seizures and delirium. Though people have been holding on to the hope that exemption might be made for chronic alcoholics if a doctor prescribes daily con-

sultation of certain amount of alcohol, psychiatrists debunked the idea. They said no doctor will prescribe alcohol to patients, even as little as two or three pegs, as the body will only demand more.

Detoxification process

When a person walks in with the problem, his blood pressure, pulse rate and respiration are checked. As chronic alcoholics do not eat on time, they suffer from hypoglycemia. Dehydration and weakness too are observed.

Fluids and detoxifying agents are given as part of treatment. People suffering from delirium and seizures are admitted.

Dr. Uma Shankar said the detoxification process lasts eight to 10 days. "Time for de-addiction treatment depends on whether the patient cooperates, and if there is family support," he said.

people," Dr. Uma Shankar said. Psychiatrists at IMH said they were also seeing people who were hallucinating in the past few days.

Excise CI held for 'looting' liquor outlet

Excise CI held for 'looting' liquor outlet

STAFF REPORTER

KAKINADA

Excise Department Circle Inspector Reddi Trinath was suspended from service on Monday on charges of looting liquor from a government outlet at Pedaparthi under Rajamahendravaram excise division in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh.

On Sunday, locals reportedly spotted the Excise Circle Inspector and his three aides transporting nearly 40 bottles of liquor in two vehicles.

Deputy Commissioner B. Aruna Rao said, "Mr. Trinath has been suspended from service after he was arrested for his involvement in allegedly looting the government liquor outlet". The outlet was shut as part of the lockdown.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD; POLLUTION DATA: CPCB; MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 1800 HRS)

Forecast for Tuesday: Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning, hail and gusty winds very likely at isolated places over Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab and Delhi; with lightning and gusty winds at isolated places over west Uttar Pradesh and north Rajasthan and with lightning at isolated places over Odisha.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	...36.2...	20.1	...	Kozhikode	...37.2...	27.6	...
Ahmedabad	...35.8...	25.1	...	Kurnool	...38.6...	25.1	...
Aizawl	...—	28.1	...	Lucknow	...32.8...	15.8	...
Altahabad	...34.3...	17.3	...	Madurai	...38.6...	24.3	...
Bengaluru	...35.6...	21.4	...	Mangalore	...35.8...	26.3	...
Bhopal	...17.4...	12.7	...	Mumbai	...31.6...	24.5	...
Bhubaneswar	...30.8...	22.4	...	Mysuru	...—	20.0	...
Chandigarh	...28.0...	15.0	...	New Delhi	...31.2...	16.2	...
Chennai	...33.0...	24.3	...	Patna	...34.0...	19.8	...
Coimbatore	...37.7...	23.8	...	Port Blair	...31.3...	23.7	...
Dehradun	...29.0...	12.7	...	Puducherry	...33.4...	23.6	...
Gangtok	...20.6...	11.7	...	Pune	...32.3...	21.4	...
Goa	...33.5...	25.2	...	Raipur	...8.4...	21.5	...
Guwahati	...35.8...	18.4	...	Ranchi	...33.4...	20.5	...
Hubballi	...37.0...	21.0	...	Shillong	...—	18.1	...
Hyderabad	...37.2...	23.6	...	Shimla	...18.7...	8.2	...
Imphal	...30.8...	16.7	...	Srinagar	...11.1...	5.2	...
Jaipur							



Short end of the stick

Migrant workers, who simply cannot fend for themselves, need urgent state assistance

It has been nearly a week since the Centre's lockdown measures to slow down the spread of SARS-CoV-2 came into force. But what was done as a means to address a public health challenge has now transformed itself into a humanitarian crisis for many among the poorer segments of India's urban population. The most affected section has been the inter-State migrant worker community, thousands of whom have been leaving cities such as Delhi, even on foot, for their towns in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and elsewhere. Their plight was not unexpected. With a lockdown, migrant workers dependent upon casual and daily wage labour, unorganised retail and other such jobs, were severely affected and sought the comfort of the social net in their towns over the uncertainty of employment, and therefore of money and resources to fend for themselves over the 21 days. Physical distancing in a country where most people are involved in unorganised labour, and who are dependent upon fragile livelihoods defined in daily and even hourly wage earnings, was always going to be problematic. That the Central government announced the lockdown on March 24, with just a four-hour notice, made it even harder for these people to figure out ways to weather the challenge. Their exodus, by foot along highways finally compelled some authorities to start bus services, but these were abruptly halted. The Home Ministry issued notices to States to open highway relief camps while observing physical distancing norms. Later on Sunday, the Ministry directed State and Union Territory governments to enforce the lockdown strictly and prevent migrants from leaving cities; instead, there are to be temporary shelters with essentials for the stranded poor.

These belated steps can only work if implemented in a humane manner. Herding the families of the migrant workers into ill-equipped quarantine camps will only incentivise others to leave for their native States. Governments must use schools and college hostels for the migrants to stay and also utilise the Public Distribution System to provide food. All said, the suffering of the migrant worker is an indictment of the unpreparedness of governments to deal with the COVID-19 crisis. The first infected Indian in the country was detected in late January. The severity of the disease as it spread outside China and affected countries such as Italy was evident a little later, but there was enough time for the government to be prepared for the impending spread in India. Better coordination with the States and a more transparent approach would have helped people prepare for the lockdown. As infections have slowly begun to rise, there is little time to be lost in addressing both the public health problem and the lockdown's economic impact. Much could have been done better, but the focus now must be on what can be done.

Unusually inept

The U.S. can still pull itself out of the virus crisis, but not without tougher steps

The U.S. has surpassed mainland China as the country with the most number of novel coronavirus cases. On March 27, it recorded 85,486 infections; On March 30, it had nearly 75% (1,43,527) more cases than China (82,198). Even as Italy and Spain have reported large numbers, the daily increase in new cases has slowed down in Europe even while accelerating in America, thus shifting the pandemic epicentre to the U.S. However, unlike in China and a few other countries, America is yet to institute large-scale mitigation measures such as shutting down the three major hotspots—New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. On Saturday, U.S. President Trump backtracked on the possibility of imposing travel quarantine in these hotspots after a pushback from the New York Governor. New York has the most number of cases in the country—over 53,000, as on March 29. According to the CDC, residents in these hotspots are now “urged” to refrain from non-essential travel for the next 14 days. It is true that Singapore, Hong Kong and South Korea managed to contain the spread without having to undertake stringent measures such as those seen in China, Italy, and even India. That is because these countries acted early, enforcing strong containment measures together with large-scale testing; this is not the case with America.

Though South Korea and the U.S. reported their first case on January 20, it was only by end-February that the U.S. had a reliable test kit, unlike South Korea, which had the tests by February first week. While South Korea was testing thousands each day after the wave of cases came up in a hospital and among members of a religious sect, the U.S. began large-scale testing only in early March. America thus remained largely oblivious to the looming threat. There were just about 100 tests done each day till end-February. If the tests developed by the CDC were faulty, the testing criteria remained narrow and there was little surveillance for community spread. The FDA's public health emergency, on January 31, did not make things easy for labs wanting to develop tests. Independent labs and hospitals could start testing using tests developed by private players only by February 27. As on March 28, hardly 1,22,000 tests had been done in the U.S. Instead of decisive actions, Mr. Trump made the situation worse with his dismissive attitude, this despite knowing that the virus was crippling China's health-care system and had killed a few thousands. If agencies such as CDC, which are known to act swiftly especially in the face of a pandemic, were found wanting this time, the government's priorities too were misplaced. The deadly combination is now playing out. But knowing how the U.S. can act, there is still hope of virus control. Tough steps need to be in place soon.

Stopping the spread, caring for lives

Karnataka's approach to fighting the coronavirus pandemic is on a war-footing



B.S. YEDIYURAPPA

When the World Health Organization (WHO) Executive Director, WHO Health Emergencies Programme, Dr. Michael Ryan, said, “India has a tremendous capacity to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic”, we must prove the assessment right before the international community at all cost. Dr. Ryan also said, “There are no easy answers. It is exceptionally important that countries like India show the way to the world as they have done before.”

As India enters the seventh day of a lockdown, 37 deaths and 1,284 COVID-19 positive cases have been reported in India; there are 88 cases in Karnataka (as on March 30, 9.45 pm).

Currently, we have two main challenges at hand. First of all, to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus and second, to care for people's lives during the 21-day lockdown. I can say, confidently, that we are addressing both the challenges effectively. The Central Government, under the leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is overseeing every step. We extend unflinching support to the Prime Minister.

Friends, we must strictly quarantine ourselves for 21 days until April 14 to contain the spread of the coronavirus. The lockdown, unprecedented in our lifetime, may cause inconvenience to our social life, but the decision is a bold move. We must realise that the lockdown is for our well-being, for our safety.

My government has devised a multi-pronged strategy to win the battle against the scourge of the coronavirus. Technical strategy, humanitarian approach, economic/financial assistance and medical support are in place to handle the crisis.

Technical strategy

We have, in the first of its kind in India, high-tech war rooms to monitor, exchange information, and to keep a tab on the spread of the coronavirus. Officials are en-

gaged in the management of the crisis at Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagar Palike (BBMP), Labour Department and Information Department war rooms.

BBMP war room: The BBMP has surveillance data of people in an eight-kilometre radius around a confirmed patient, where he was first found to reside. The BBMP tracks the mobile phones of quarantined people through their GPS location.

If they are going beyond the containment zone, we will call them and ask them to go back home. The police will send the BBMP their names and tracking details. The general control room numbers and WhatsApp numbers are working for COVID-19 too. Also, Karnataka has developed ‘Corona Watch App’ mobile applications for monitoring people under quarantine and inform their contacts about the same to check the spread of the coronavirus.

Information Department: Friends, being anxious is not a solution to the problem. To clarify your doubts, please join the largest Telegram group in India on the coronavirus - ‘COVID-19 Karnataka: Sahaya Group’, a team of doctors from the ESI Directorate are working 24x7 in responding to queries from citizens. In a week, about 21,000 people have joined and got answers for every query on COVID-19.

After the coronavirus outbreak, the Janasnehi team of the Department of Information and Public Relations (DIPR) began getting a huge number of queries from the public on the disease. There was panic, rumours and fake news spreading rapidly. The DIPR realised we needed to kill the fake news and give out the right information so that people will not panic.

The DIPR Janasnehi team started operating like a COVID Awareness and Response centre for the general public giving the right information and spreading awareness to people apart from debunking fake news through its Twitter handle.

A team of 3,000 volunteers has been set up, with four volunteers in each taluk on field, monitored by the DIPR and the Red Cross, to stop fake news from the field.

I am in touch with District Collectors through a video conferencing facility, and the highlights of



the meetings are updated on my Twitter account @CMofKarnataka for your convenience.

Labour Department: The Labour Department is already running a 24x7 helpline, called the ‘Dasoha line’ (155214) and a war room, in association with the DIPR which receives the demand for food (both dry ration and cooked food) from all over the State and then channels them into the other departments, BBMP, etc in real time.

The helpline receives about 3,000 calls per day and is increasing. The calls are attended and the citizens are either directed to the nearest food centre or ration/cooked food is being arranged to reach near them.

Eager to stall migration, Karnataka has launched the hunger helpline. A coordinated ‘Dasoha’ scheme will ensure that everybody is covered under the scheme and nobody in Karnataka goes to bed without food. Also, the government has directed Deputy Commissioners to take over one convention centre or wedding hall in every ward within municipal corporation limits to house construction labourers and migrant workers.

On Instagram: Of late, the Department of Medical Education and the Government of Karnataka are active on Instagram – ‘Karnataka Kills Corona’ – to spread awareness on the coronavirus.

Medical support

The State Health Minister B. Srinivasa, Medical Education Minister Dr. K. Sudhakar, and Information Department of the State government are working with exceptional co-ordination throughout the State to fight the menace.

I appeal to you all to cooperate in following the measures announced by the Centre and State governments.

In Bengaluru, several hospitals

have been listed as ‘designated first response hospitals’ for COVID-19. For instance, in Victoria Hospital alone, around 1,700 beds have been set up.

I sincerely request you all to please not to pay heed to fake news doing the rounds on social media platforms. The government will be updating the relevant numbers, measures, and instructions every day about the issue.

Also, new COVID-19 helpline numbers (080-46848600 and 080-66692000) are now functional apart from the existing helpline number 104. In both these helpline numbers, a senior doctor and two post-graduate medical students are available throughout the day to assist volunteers in answering the queries of citizens more knowledgeably. I have appealed to people not to rush to hospitals; call the helpline if symptoms aggravate. The best medical care and isolation facilities are just one call away.

It is at this moment that only sick and patients requiring emergency care might visit hospitals for treatment at medical college hospitals/district hospitals/super-specialty hospitals and autonomous institutions. To avoid overcrowding and halt the spread of COVID-19, private hospitals have been instructed to take similar steps.

Economic assistance

During the crisis, it is the utmost duty of the government to take care of the vulnerable sections of society. In this direction, the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, have made a timely intervention to address the problems of the livelihood of labourers. The rolling out of the Garib Kalyan Yojana scheme, of ₹1.7-lakh crore, when the country is struggling hard to fight the coronavirus menace has brought relief in this hour of crisis.

The most striking feature of the Garib Kalyan Yojana is a supply of five kilogram rice or wheat and one kilogram pulses to 80 crore people. People living below the poverty line will not be hungry when they remain indoors during the lockdown period.

Likewise, the Karnataka government will release social security pension of two months in advance for the poor, additional working days amount will be released in ad-

vance under the Mahatma Gandhi Employment Guarantee Act scheme and two months ration will be supplied immediately. Also, 21 lakh construction workers will be paid ₹1,000 per person. Under the Badavara Bandhu (interest-free loan to roadside vendors) scheme, we have decided to waive ₹13.20 crore loans. This includes ₹9.10 crore in 2018-19 benefiting 15,120 people, and ₹5.16 crore in 2019-20, benefiting 6,500 people.

Also, my Cabinet has already earmarked a corpus fund of ₹200 crore as “immediate expenses” to fight the outbreak.

Humanitarian approach

As a part of the humane approach, the State-run Indira Canteens will provide food packets free of cost to the poor and needy in the wake of the lockdown. The canteens will operate in three schedules: from 7.30 a.m. to 10 a.m., 12.30 p.m. to 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m. to 9 p.m. Streetside vendors, labourers and hawkers in their area and surroundings.

I hope you are convinced that our approach to fighting the coronavirus pandemic is on a war-footing. I request the ever generous people of the State to contribute to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund Covid-19. Or you can send your cheque or DD to Chief Minister's Relief Fund, Vidhana Soudha.

Leaders across the political spectrum are with the people of Karnataka in these testing times. I acknowledge and appreciate the relentless service of the ‘health warriors’ who are attending the call of duty round the clock. I am overwhelmed by your messages on social media expressing gratitude to our health warriors. Similarly, please do cooperate with police personnel in your area. Our ‘Khaki warriors’ are discharging their duty in every corner of the State to ensure a stringent lockdown.

Friends, your patience and cooperation are crucial to fight the COVID-19 menace. With concerted efforts, we will overcome the challenge.

B.S. Yediyurappa is the Chief Minister of Karnataka

The hunt for a cure begins with telling the truth

In the pandemic fight, India must uphold the principle of truth and responsibility, starting at the highest levels



ANNIE ZAIIDI

Staring into the unblinking eyes of a global pandemic, many of us are re-discovering the importance of truth. Indians who travelled abroad in recent weeks hid their travel histories. Some went to the extent of taking paracetamol to lower their body temperature, thereby bypassing tests at airports. We were shocked that bureaucrats, even doctors, helped relatives evade quarantine. Now things are at a pass that journalists are being threatened for revealing the truth about how ill-equipped doctors and health workers are, or how ill-organised the state response is. We fret about the dishonesty – of individuals and of governments – since our lives are at stake. Yet, what were we expecting? An overnight transformation of the nation's soul?

A receding of truth

Truth is often mocked as an inconvenience, as the domain of fools or saints. ‘Mahatma’ Gandhi finds few takers. We use his tools, demonstrations, fasts, marches, but we shun his core principles. Gand-

hi called for ‘Satyagrah’, for resistance via truth, and for truth-telling itself becoming an article of faith. After Gandhiji's assassination, however, truth began to recede from public discourse. Eventually, it became entirely dispensable. Matters have come to such a pass now that politicians can shrug off falsehoods uttered in public as ‘chunaavi jumla’, a tale told to win elections. Thus, elections have been degraded to a tall tale telling contest.

Meanwhile, peace activists are labelled terrorists. Doctors are imprisoned for months, despite having devoted themselves to the care of some of the most vulnerable among us. Businessmen form shell companies to take loans from banks. Forest and environmental clearances are a different kind of brazen lie.

When was the last time there was a massive public uproar about our leaders concealing truth, or flip-flopping on facts presented in court, or lying in Parliament? Assuming falsehoods were based on faulty information, when was the last time our leaders apologised for misleading us?

Far from seeing it as a ‘sin’, as a symptom of moral degradation with life-and-death consequences for us, we have grown inured to falsehood. I have lost count of the number of times I have heard admiration in the voices of fellow ci-

tizens when they comment upon politicians' penchant for endlessly, inventively, lying to the nation. How then, in the middle of a terrifying pandemic, do we suddenly expect honesty?

The building of public character takes generations. It requires leaders who uphold the principle of honesty, who urge us to re-examine our intimate and perceived reality. Here is one such nugget of reality: India spends only 1.28% of its GDP on health. Here is another: over 55 million Indians were pushed below the poverty line in 2011-12 because of out-of-pocket health expenses. And another: in 2014-15, the government led by Prime Minister Modi slashed an already pitiful health budget by 20%. And this: despite warnings from the World Health Organization, despite COVID-19 deaths being reported in China and Italy, India continued to export protective medical equipment.

There are many more truths to confront. Sanitation workers are not given any protective equip-

ment but are not allowed to stay home. They are expected to handle infected masks with their bare hands. Nor are they given soap and water on the spot. Do we really believe that the government intends to control the pandemic?

On the lockdown

A lockdown is useless unless all citizens are guaranteed food and shelter and medical aid on call. A government that announces a lockdown without making arrangements for the poor, the elderly, the already ailing, is simply adding to the body count. That is another truth. The spectre of a miserable, lonely death confronts us. But for us to resist such deaths, we must reject all the lies and obfuscations that lead up to it. There have been concerted attempts to deflect responsibility there. Listening to certain media commentators, one would imagine that the current Prime Minister is a composite of Jawaharlal Nehru, Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, rather than the incumbent Narendra Modi.

The crisis staring us in the face requires quick, empathetic, creative decision-making. Health workers are begging the government for adequate protective equipment. Diverting existing factories and resources to this cause could have been an overnight decision two weeks ago. The Prime Minister's relief fund had thousands of

crores of rupees sitting in it. Food, transport and sanitation for migrant workers could have been organised. It should have taken two minutes to issue an order. We still do not know if and when the order was issued.

The argument that governments can only do so much has collapsed. Truth is, we do expect the government to pull out all the stops when our own lives are threatened. It is also clear that highly subsidised universities are necessary. We need doctors, scientists, social scientists, gender researchers, and journalists working in collaboration. We all need health care, water, electricity, Internet access. We do not need detention centres. We certainly do not need to spend one paisa on re-fashioning the Parliament building.

Those of us who have access to diverse news outlets have watched the way Kerala, Cuba and South Korea responded to the pandemic. The simple truth is, systems work best when they work for all. It is also clear that we can have such systems, but the first necessary step is to surrender caste, class and religious biases. We must decide now whether we want to pull together into a universal safety net, or be devoured by the virus of falsehood.

Annie Zaidi is a writer and film-maker

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

The pandemic fight
In a midst of news that the pandemic is wreaking havoc, it is gratifying that some industrial houses and startups are looking for ways to mitigate shortages of much-needed personal protective equipment. However, what is praiseworthy is that some women fashion designers, small-time tailors and students of Jammu and Kashmir are pitching in (Page 1, “Women warriors

join battle against virus”, March 30). What brings cheer is the fact that besides demonstrating keen business acumen, they are tapping their immense potential to the fullest by innovating on design and preparing PPEs that are different from the routine supply.

NALINI VIJAYARAGHAVAN,
Thiruvananthapuram

■ A number of opinion writers have started a new

line of attacking the government. Can we just stop inculpating the government for its policies against the deadly virus to save humanity? The government has not been trained to deal with such large-scale, unprecedented situations and it is a trial and error learning process, for even the best practices elsewhere could not necessarily apply to the Indian scenario. Nobody could have ever imagined the

world being stuck by such a nightmare. All that we could do now is to stay strong, give up despondency and support the government.

D. DEEPTHI,
Hyderabad

■ Until last month the world was boastful about its breakthroughs in terms of technology. Artificial Intelligence, machine learning, Big Data science, analytics, and automation, which promised answers to

FROM PAGE ONE

India still in local transmission: govt.

Globally, the COVID-19 numbers have surpassed 634,000, and the death toll is close to 30,000, according to the World Health Organisation.

Speaking about hot-spots in India, Mr. Agarwal refused to name specific locations and only listed the protocol to create a buffer zone and conduct house-to-house checks.

Giving details of the number of samples tested so far Head of Epidemiology and Communicable diseases at Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) R. Gangakhedkar, said, "So far 48,432

tests have been conducted; 115 ICMR labs are functional and 47 private labs approved. 1,334 people have been tested in three days."

Speaking about the case of a doctor's death after taking hydroxychloroquine as prophylactic, Dr. Gangakhedkar said, "This is a very difficult proposition that he had a heart attack after two doses."

Joint secretary in the Home Ministry Punya Saini Srivastava said the migrant workers status was now stable and all States are making provisions for food and shelter.

200 evacuated from Nizamuddin area

They had returned to Port Blair via Kolkata on Tuesday, said a senior officer. A 65-year-old man, who died of COVID-19 at a hospital in Srinagar on Thursday, had also attended the Nizamuddin congregation and returned to Kashmir by train.

A medical camp has been operational in the area for the last one week, collecting samples from people. A World Health Organisation (WHO) team also visited the Markaz.

"We are coordinating with other authorities to

track down people who went back to their towns after attending the congregation," said the officer.

"As per the recommendations of medical team, more people have been shifted to quarantine or hospitals. We are cooperating with authorities and people have been shifted from Markaz," said Dr. Mohammad Shoib, spokesperson of the Markaz.

Resident Welfare Association (RWA) said the Markaz was closed when the lockdown was ordered.

'Moderate humidity likely to deter virus'

A 2018 study in the peer-reviewed *Applied and Environment Microbiology* concluded that influenza and coronaviruses thrived when the relative humidity (RH) exceeded 85% or dipped below 60%. RH is the proportion of water vapour in the air compared to what's the maximum possible. There is a "significant decrease in infectivity at mid-range RHs (60 to 85%)," the paper notes.

It is important to note that these studies didn't study actual coronaviruses but a bacteriophage Phi6, which

is considered a safer surrogate.

A similar experiment reported in the same journal in 2010, that tested the ability of viruses to survive on stainless steel surfaces, found that at 4°C, infectious viruses persisted for as long as 28 days, and the lowest level of inactivation occurred at 20% RH.

Inactivation was quicker at 20°C than at 4°C at all humidity levels; the viruses persisted for 5 to 28 days, and the "slowest inactivation" occurred at low levels of RH.

Migrant workers given disinfectant bath

He added that it was necessary to stem the spread of the disease. "It's natural they will get wet. It was our attempt to get the clothes wet as it would be better so that whatever signs of virus possibly on [clothes] will get destroyed," he told *The Hindu*. "It's more important to save them... getting wet does not mean much."

Ashutosh Parashari, Medical Officer, Bareilly, said sodium hypochlorite solution was sprayed on the migrants. "It does not have such hazards...that's why it was used," he claimed.

Chief Fire Officer Chandra Mohan Sharma said so-

dium hypochlorite was used to sanitise places in the districts, including the bus stand, where migrants were given a mass bath. He admitted that sodium hypochlorite was harmful to human bodies.

"It is strictly prohibited to be sprayed on human bodies. We have directions to spray it on metal surfaces and walls," he said.

U.P. Additional Secretary Home Aravish Awasthi said action would be taken against the municipal corporation workers but also insisted that no chemical was used, even as he justified such measures.

Rabi harvest to be hit for want of workers

A senior Punjab agriculture official said the State government was struggling to deal with the health crisis and did not plan to address the agricultural concerns till the end of the month. "The response has been slow, and the State does not have the budget to spend on incentives," he admitted.

"We have received the Haryana proposal, but are yet to take a decision," Food Secretary Ravi Kant told *The Hindu*. He said Madhya Pradesh would begin wheat procurement on April 1 itself, as they have local labourers, but acknowledged that the process would be difficult in States that de-

pend on migrant workers, especially if the lockdown is extended further. It is up to States to facilitate procurement, he added.

The Telangana government has announced that it will procure all non-perishable crops at the village level itself, freeing the farmer of the responsibility of finding storage or transport to the mandis.

Late on Friday, the Home Ministry issued an addendum to its lockdown guidelines, exempting all farming activities, after an uproar by the agricultural community.

However, farmer groups say implementation on the ground is still patchy.

Why PM CARES, asks Cong.

Party leaders point to the existing National Relief Fund to deal with pandemic

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Congress leaders on Monday questioned the setting up of the PM CARES Fund to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic by Prime Minister Narendra Modi when the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF) is already in existence.

COVID-19

Lok Sabha member Shashi Tharoor on Twitter, commenting on another tweet about PM CARES, asked: "Why not simply rename PMNRF as PM-CARES, given the PM's penchant for catchy acronyms, instead of creating a separate Public Charitable Trust whose rules

The PM's National Relief Fund (PMNRF) has an unspent balance of ₹3,800 crore [as of December 16, 2019]. Why couldn't #COVID19 donations go to PMNRF? Why was PM CARE created?

SALMAN SOZ, Congress spokesperson

& expenditure are totally opaque?"

"@PMOIndia you owe the country an explanation for this highly unusual step," Mr. Tharoor added.

On March 28, the government had set up the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund' (PM CARES Fund)

to deal with the un-



precedent situation arising out of the COVID-19 outbreak where citizens can make voluntary contributions.

However, some critics including Congress leaders pointed out that money was lying 'unspent' in the PMNRF.

"The PM's National Relief Fund (PMNRF) has an un-

spent balance of ₹3,800 crore [as of December 16, 2019]. Why couldn't #COVID19 donations go to PMNRF? Why was PM CARE created?" asked Congress spokesperson Salman Soz.

Noted historian Ramchandra Guha too targeted the government over PM CARES Fund.

"This is a very important thread. Why a new fund when a Prime Minister's National Relief Fund already exists? And why the self-aggrandizing name, PM-CARES? Must a colossal national tragedy also be (mis) used to enhance the cult of personality?" he asked.

the next three days, there will be four flights from Mumbai.

Air India is scheduled to first evacuate German nationals from different parts of the country, including Goa, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Chennai, and Thiruvananthapuram and bring them to Delhi or Mumbai before the flight to Frankfurt.

Officials also said there was a request to operate charters to London to enable U.K. citizens in India to return to their homes. A British High Commission spokesperson said, "The Foreign Secretary has spoken with the Indian External Affairs Minister and we are working urgently on a plan to get our people back."

Germany, U.K. to hire flights to evacuate citizens

Nine flights to Frankfurt from March 31

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Germany and the United Kingdom have approached the Indian government to charter Air India flights for the return of their nationals stranded in India following travel restrictions to curb the spread of COVID-19, several government officials said.

Following the requests, between March 31 and April 3, Air India will operate nine flights to Frankfurt with its 256-seater Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner aircraft. These special flights come even as India has banned all commercial flights until April 14.

On March 31, four flights will leave from Mumbai and one from New Delhi. Over

Pay 70% of MSMEs' wage bill for next three months: Cong.

Party asks Centre to come up with ₹1 lakh crore package

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Monday asked the Union government to pay 70% of the wage bill of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) for next three months and make it mandatory for the employers not to retrench their employees.

Party president Sonia Gandhi also formed a central control room at Congress headquarters to monitor the ground situation with regard to the spread of the COVID-19.

In a series of tweets, form-

er Finance Minister P. Chidambaram demanded a bold new Financial Assistance Package immediately.

Addressing an online press conference, Congress spokesperson Prof. Gourav Vallabh said there are 4.25 crore MSMEs that contribute around 29% to India's GDP and employ about 45 crore people. "One month of the wage bill is around ₹50,000 crore and for three months, it will be around ₹1.50 lakh crore. So, 70% of the same works out to approximately ₹1 lakh crore," said Prof. Vallabh.

Talking about the exodus of workers leaving cities, he said, "Central government should form a law stating that there shall be no retrenchment in any sector or company whatsoever for the next 6 months, applicable to every company/enterprise."

The Congress spokesperson also suggested that truck drivers be given advance payment to ensure that the supply of essentials are not affected. "There are approximately 30 lakh truck drivers in our country whose burden will be around ₹25,000 crore," he said.

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The NTA, an autonomous body under the Human Resource Development Ministry set up to conduct such examinations, issued a notice on the extension on Monday.

The last date to submit application forms to attempt the admission tests for Jawaharlal Nehru University, Indira Gandhi National Open University, the Indian Council for Agricultural Research and the National Council for Hotel Management have all been revised from the end of March to April 30, 2020.

The deadline to apply for the National Eligibility Test of the University Grants Commission (UGC-NET), used to select assistant professors and junior research fellows, has been extended to May 16.

The application deadline for the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research National Eligibility Test (CSIR-NET) has also been revised to May 15.

With regard to the All India Ayush Postgraduate Entrance Test, the window for applications will now close on May 31.

The NTA notice did not specify whether the examinations themselves would be postponed. It said a detailed schedule with revised dates would be posted on its website after April 15, after assessing the situation.

PSU banks ask branches to work full hours

Full staffing advised to help banks cope with pay day rush, DBT withdrawals in rural areas

MANOJIT SAHA
MUMBAI

After being prodded by the Finance Ministry, state-owned banks have directed their branches to ensure that the staff are present in full strength from Tuesday and that the branches remain open for regular business hours in anticipation of the higher footfall this week, especially in rural and semi-urban branches where digital banking facilities are not being availed extensively.

Bankers are anticipating a rush in their branches in rural and semi-urban areas as more customers are expected to queue up to withdraw cash after the government transfers ₹500 to Jan Dhan

account holders as part of the COVID-19 economic relief package announced by the Centre. In addition, there would be the usual increase in banking activity that typically happens at the beginning of a month due to salary disbursements and pension payments.

Bankers said this week could prove to be challenging for the branch staff, especially to ensure compliance with physical distancing norms.

Some of the lenders have already withdrawn earlier instructions for rotation of duty on alternate days, effective from March 31. All staff members have been asked to report for duty.

Following the nationwide lockdown to fight the spread of COVID-19, public sector banks were operating on the basis of truncated working hours with limited staffing and had been providing basic banking services.

However, this had irked the Ministry which had reportedly sought an explanation from the banks on why many branches were closed.

In a videoconference with bank chiefs on Saturday, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had reviewed banks' functioning during the lockdown, even while maintaining social distancing.

All banks are ensuring their branches are kept open, ATMs filled up and are working. Banking correspondents are active. Social distancing is respected and sanitizers are provided where necessary," Ms. Sitharaman tweeted on Monday.

"There is a big risk for the bank staff and customers inside the premises in large numbers and would go totally against the objective of social distancing," C. H. Venkatachalam, general secretary, All India Bank Employees' Association, wrote to the Ministry.

Diplomats return from Afghanistan

India decides to temporarily close its consulates in Jalalabad and Herat

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

Thirty-one Indian nationals, including 26 security force personnel of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and four diplomats from the Indian consulate in Jalalabad, returned here from Afghanistan on Monday, after the government decided to temporarily close its consulates in Jalalabad and Herat over COVID-19 fears and growing security threats.

All the personnel, who were brought in on a special Kam Airlines flight from Kabul organised by the Afghan Embassy to fly out Afghans, were taken directly to the ITBP special facility in Chhawla for 14 days of quarantine, the ITBP spokesperson said. Another group of External Affairs Ministry and ITBP officials from the consulate in Herat, near the Iranian border, are expected to return on Thursday.

Their last rites are expected to be held on Tuesday, amid growing concerns over the safety of minorities in Afghanistan.

In the past few days, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh and Cabinet Minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal have called for the government to relocate Sikhs from Afghanistan, given the worsening security situation. Twenty-five Sikhs including a six-year-old child were killed during the attack claimed by the Islamic State Khorasan Province group (ISKP), which has been targeting minorities in the country, including two deadly attacks in Kabul this month.

Bodies flown in
The widow of one of the victims in the March 25 Kabul gurdwara attack was flown back, accompanying the bodies of three men killed: Delhi resident Tians Singh and Ludhiana residents Shankar Singh and Jiwan Singh. In an exclusive interview to *The Hindu*, Afghanistan's Charge D'affaires Tahir Qadri said that while his government understood the con-

cerns, Sikhs and Hindus remained an "integral part" of Afghan society, and added that President Ashraf Ghani was "personally monitoring" investigations. "As a nation, our minorities adorn our diverse character. And that is why various programmes have been implemented to safeguard the rights and uplift the status of our Hindu and Sikh population. In a recent decree, the President facilitated the provision of identity cards through our Embassy to all Afghan Sikhs and Hindus born in India. There's also a provision of reservation for Hindus and Sikhs in our Parliament," he added.

Asked about the impact of the recent U.S.-Taliban deal on the security situation, Mr. Qadri said the Kabul attacks "warrant the pertinence of an enduring and perennial ceasefire, and the same has been stressed in the deal." He said the Ghani government had announced an all-inclusive negotiating team to begin talks with the Taliban, which were due on March 12 but have run into trouble over prisoner releases.

Mr. Modi lauded them for their work among the needy and emphasised that their reach was required at a time when the country was combating COVID-19. He said the country needed their full-time and part-time volunteers, any medical facilities they had in combating superstition, rumours and fears around the disease.

Pitch in, PM tells welfare organisations

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Keeping with his series of interactions with all stakeholders in the fight against COVID-19, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday met leaders of social welfare organisations via videoconferencing.

The group included Sri Sri Ravishankar, Jaggi Vasudev, Paul Caritas (Christian Health Coalition), RSS second in command Bhaiyyaji Joshi, Yogi Guru Swami Ramdev; Qai Bjohar, brother of the Syedna of the Dawoodi Bohra community; Syed Nasiruddin Chishti of Ajmer Shareef; Dr. Pandya of the Gayatri Parivar; and the Jathedar of Patna Sahib, Giani Ranjit Singh.

Mr. Modi lauded them for their work among the needy and emphasised that their reach was required at a time when the country was combating COVID-19. He said the country needed their full-time and part-time volunteers, any medical facilities they had in combating superstition, rumours and fears around the disease.



At a distance: Indian nationals being sent for a 14-day quarantine to the ITBP facility at Chhawla in New Delhi. •PTI



Hard times: Migrant workers walking with their belongings on National Highway 9 near the Akshardham temple in New Delhi on Monday; the Jammu and Kashmir police distributing essentials at the Kothibagh police station in Srinagar; members of the Sikh community from the Ganeshpeeth Gurdwara preparing meals for the homeless in Pune, Maharashtra; and migrant labourers boarding a bus to Bhagalpur in Patna. ■ R.V. MOORTHY, NISSAR AHMAD, JIGNESH MISTRY & RANJEET KUMAR



90,000 volunteers join NDMA to fight COVID-19

NEW DELHI
Close to 90,000 individuals and over 3,700 organisations have so far registered with the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) for the fight against COVID-19. While 366 donation requests were initiated by 7.30 p.m. on Monday, more than 8.86 lakh items were on offer for assistance to the needy. The registrations are being done through a link given in the NDMA website. Volunteers have been sought for contributions in the areas of health, communication, entrepreneurship and essential services.

90 migrant workers arrested after clashes

AHMEDABAD
Over 90 migrant workers have been arrested in Gujarat's Surat after they clashed with the police on Sunday. The workers had gathered in large numbers to demand for transportation to go to their hometowns amid the lockdown. The situation became tense at Ganesh Nagar and Tirupati Nagar late on Sunday after nearly 500 migrant workers residing there came to the roads, officials said. Police fired 30 tear gas shells to control the situation. A few were arrested on Sunday and the remaining were arrested on Monday.

Telcos extend validity of prepaid packs

NEW DELHI
Bharti Airtel, along with the two state-owned telcos, BSNL and MTNL, on Monday extended the validity of their prepaid packs and also committed to credit an additional talk time of ₹10 to such accounts in view of the 21-day lockdown. While BSNL and MTNL have extended the validity of prepaid packs till April 20, Bharti Airtel has done so till April 17. This means that incoming facility will not be stopped on the number even after their plan validity is exhausted.

With nil hopes at Zero Point, migrants face police batons

Amid strict enforcement of lockdown, with nobody to guide them to shelters, these hapless labourers are left to fend for themselves

JATIN ANAND
GREATER NOIDA

The police resumed "strict enforcement" of the lockdown to contain the spread of COVID-19 after two days when the workers were allowed to return to their homes across Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Bihar.

Turned away

Those who were unsuccessful in doing so over the weekend, like Ram Kumar and his family of seven, which included four children, sought to try their luck at the "Zero Point" on the expressway, but were turned away. It later transpired that in addition to the "strict enforcement" of the lockdown, the reason for such police action was a proposed visit by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to Gautam Buddha University in the area.

"I was engaged at a factory



Long way home: Migrant workers, including Ram Kumar (in red) and his family, waiting for transport at the Zero Point on the Yamuna Expressway on Monday. ■ JATIN ANAND

in Gurugram and couldn't make it in time till here on Sunday. We reached only this morning; the police hit us twice with their sticks and asked us to find some camp

which they have set up for us. They didn't tell us where exactly it is, though," Mr. Kumar of Firozabad, near Agra, said.

He and his family were

among a dozen people who had, somehow, made their way to the shelter which they mumbled while confronting us is," he said.

Below the "Zero Point",

the same police personnel confronted Satbir Singh and Anil Singh, who were hoping to travel to Mathura. "We tried to go back day before yesterday and the day prior to that, but there were no

buses available or there was no space on those which were plying. So we thought we will try to go back again today. We didn't know the lockdown was back in place," Mr. Satbir, now an out-of-work factory hand, said.

Anil, Mr. Satbir's colleague at the same factory, said the police personnel who confronted them merely pointed towards the opposite end of the highway and asked them to "go to the shelter".

"They didn't even tell us where to go. Who do we ask where we are supposed to go without being beaten up," he asked.

When asked where they were supposed to go, one of the police personnel told this correspondent, "There are camps which are being set up. These people will find them themselves."

5,000 train coaches to turn isolation wards

Railway hospitals brace for exigencies

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Railways has begun work to convert 5,000 passenger coaches into isolation wards, while preparing 70 of its 125 hospitals to deal across all the zones under the supervision of the general managers and medical professionals of the Indian Railways," an official statement said.

and space for paramedics.

"In case need be, more coaches can be modified... These coaches would be prepared zone-wise... The preparations are being done across all the zones under the supervision of the general managers and medical professionals of the Indian Railways," an official statement said.

"Efforts are being made to designate dedicated COVID wards or floors in the [railway] hospitals. Approximately 6,500 hospital beds are being made ready to meet the possible needs of patients," it said.



Fighting a pandemic: NDRF personnel helping migrants near the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border. ■ PTI

Following an alert, the NDRF officials deployed along the U.P.-Bihar border joined the district administration and the police.

"Three teams deployed at each of the entry points in Bihar's Buxar, Kaimur and Gopal Ganj have been providing sanitizers to the migrants since Saturday evening. Arrangements for their medical check-up, temporary shelter and food are being made by the district administration," another official said.

As part of the awareness drive, the official said, the NDRF is informing the migrant workers about the importance of physical distancing and the need for mandatory 14-day quarantine to stop the spread of virus, as directed by the government. "They are cooperating with us," the official added.

NDRF teams have also been deployed at Nalanda, Siwan and Patna in Bihar. "They will be activated as and when required. Through video conferencing, we have been training the State and district administrations in the handling of suspected cases of COVID-19 and in taking preventive measures as per the standard protocol," the official said.

ers were also given to the bus drivers," an NDRF official said. Through the public address systems, the NDRF officials informed the large number of stranded persons

about the precautions, such as physical distancing, to be taken to prevent COVID-19. "Wherever possible, we are also arranging food for the needy," the official said.

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By walk and wheel, thousands make it to M.P.

They endure hunger and cover hundreds of kilometres by foot to reach their hometowns

SIDHARTH YADAV
BHOPAL

After enduring hunger for two days, Buddh Singh, a construction worker, set out from Gurugram at 9 p.m. on March 26 on a 580-km journey back to Chhatarpur in Madhya Pradesh, with no transport in sight because of the lockdown.

Carrying two pairs of shirts and pants in a backpack, the 19-year-old, along with three others, walked 204 km through four States. And like them, 34,500 construction and agricultural labourers returned home in the north-western districts of Madhya Pradesh from Ha-



For hungry stomachs: Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan distributing food packets in Bhopal. ■ PTI

rana, the National Capital Region and Uttar Pradesh, walking and riding on lorries and buses.

Mr. Singh's group reached

Chhatarpur on Sunday night after a four-day ordeal. At the outset, they walked from Gurugram to Badshahpur, from where they

reached Palwal in Haryana by van. After walking 87 km to Mathura, they got a truck to Agra. A Uttar Pradesh government bus dropped them at the district borders, from where they walked 40 km towards Gwalior, before boarding another truck. Again, they walked 20 km towards Jhansi, boarded a pick-up truck, which broke down within 10 km, and after walking for some more distance, got a bus which left them 20 km from Chhatarpur, where Mr. Singh's sister lives.

Charitable restaurants and shopkeepers fed biscuits and meals to them and thousands of others returning to

Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh on the same route till Agra. "After the lockdown was imposed, the work was suspended, our landlord asked us to leave, the contractor stopped taking calls, and we had to return," says Mr. Singh, who made ₹300 a day for plastering walls.

"More than 8,000 workers have returned mostly from Uttar Pradesh and the NCR since the beginning of March," said Himanshu Chandra, CEO, Zilla Pancharayat, Chhatarpur. "We are not allowing anyone to leave the district, and have made arrangements for everyone's food and stay here."

These rooms will be pooled from Lemon Tree, Ginger and Oyo Rooms at a discount, while Zomato will provide food delivery service, HUL and SBI will pitch in with funds to make some of these rooms available free of cost, and Apollo Hospitals will provide medical supervision.

"Project Stay I is an initiative to strengthen the bulwark against COVID-19 by creating isolation rooms in hotels with light medical supervision for quarantine and creating a barrier to ensure people recover without spreading the virus," Dr. Sangita Reddy, joint managing director, Apollo Hospitals Group, said. This will also ensure that people who don't need hospital beds are not using the scarce resource if they are not critically sick, she said.

A guest who wishes to book a room under Stay-I

will need to visit www.as-

kapollo.com or call hel-

pline number 18605000202.

Apollo ties up with hotels to ready rooms

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Apollo Hospitals on Monday said it has partnered with a number of corporates such as Hindustan Unilever, the State Bank of India, Deutsche Bank, Oyo Rooms, Lemon Tree, Ginger hotels and Zomato, to launch an initiative – Project STAY I – wherein it aims to make 5,000 isolation rooms available across the country to combat COVID-19.

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GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH APEWIDC, VIZHYAWADA

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B. NIT No : 51 Painting work: Estimated cost of the work Rs.346.00 Crores tenders invited from 30.03.2020 up to 13.04.2020.

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U.S. virus crisis will get worse: Trump

Restrictions extended until April 30; Moscow imposes lockdown as situation in Europe remains grim

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump has extended emergency coronavirus restrictions for the U.S., where his top scientist warned up to 2,00,000 people could die, as the Russian capital and Africa's biggest city readied to go into lockdown on Monday.

The reassessment by Mr. Trump, who had previously said he wanted the country back to work in mid-April, came as Britain and hard-hit Italy warned measures to prevent the spread of the disease would be in place for months to come. COVID-19 has already killed more than 33,000 people worldwide, with the number of cases nearing 7,00,000.

COVID-19

As of Sunday, more than 3.38 billion people were asked or ordered to follow confinement measures, according to an AFP database, as the virus infects every sphere of life – wiping out millions of jobs, postponing elections and clearing the sporting calendar.

Mr. Trump warned that the crisis, which has seen a doubling of infections in two days, would continue to get worse. "The modelling estimates that the peak in death rate is likely to hit in two weeks," he said, announcing an extension of social distancing guidelines until April 30. "Nothing would be worse than declaring victory before the victory is won."

More deaths

The President was speaking after Anthony Fauci, who leads research into infectious diseases at the National Institutes of Health, said he believed 1,00,000 to



Working from prison: Minors serving prison sentences sewing masks at a juvenile centre in Guatemala City earlier this month. • AFP

2,00,000 Americans could die from the disease, and millions could be infected.

Mr. Trump's re-evaluation of a back-to-normal timeline came as Europe's situation continued to worsen. British officials said life may not return to usual for six months.

In Italy, which has logged a third of global deaths, the government warned citizens should be ready for a lengthy lockdown that would only be lifted gradually. "We are in a very long battle," said government medical adviser Luca Richeldi.

Moscow became the latest European city to tell people to stay indoors. Citizens will only be allowed to leave their homes in a medical emergency, to travel to jobs judged essential by the authorities, and to shop for food or medicines.

Africa's biggest city, Lagos, was due to join the global stay-at-home from Monday, with Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari ordering a two-week lockdown for its 20 million people.

Spain overtakes China in number of infections

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MADRID

Spain confirmed another 812 deaths in 24 hours from COVID-19 on Monday, a slight decline on the previous day's toll, bringing the total number of deaths to 7,340.

The country, which has the world's second most deadly outbreak after Italy, recorded 838 deaths from the pandemic on Sunday, its third straight daily record for virus deaths. The percentage increase in the number of deaths on Monday over the previous day was 12.4%, less than half the increase of 27% recorded on Wednesday.

The growth in the number of new confirmed cases also slowed, posting a one-day rise of 8% to 85,195, according to the Health Ministry, compared

to a 20 % rise on Wednesday. However, Spain has now joined the U.S. and Italy in having more cases than China, where the virus first appeared in December and which had confirmed 81,439 cases as of Sunday evening. Spain's healthcare system struggling to cope with the surge of seriously ill patients all at once, with hotels and conference centres being used as temporary clinics and Madrid's largest ice rink turned into a provisional morgue.

The outbreak is also taking its toll on healthcare personnel, who complain of a lack of masks and other protective material.

As of Monday, over 12,200 medical staff were infected, up from around 9,500 on Friday, according to the Health Ministry.

FB offers grant to news media

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

Facebook said on Monday that it was donating \$100 million to support news organisations globally hurting from the COVID-19 pandemic, citing the need for reliable information about the crisis.

The new funding includes \$25 million in emergency grants for local news through the Facebook Journalism Project, and \$75 million for additional marketing efforts "to move money over to news organizations around the world," according to a statement.

Facebook said it will offer grants "to publishers most in need in the hardest hit countries."

Jair Bolsonaro's tweets removed

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SAO PAULO

Two tweets by Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro in which he questioned quarantine measures aimed at containing the virus were removed on Sunday, on the grounds that they violated the social network's rules.

Mr. Bolsonaro had posted videos in which he flouted his government's social distancing guidelines by mixing with supporters on the streets of Brasilia and urging them to keep the economy going. Two of the posts were removed and replaced with a notice explaining why they had been taken down.

'Testing and mass quarantines helped Wuhan defeat virus'

Doctor from the city explains how China battled COVID-19

ANANTH KRISHNAN



Dr. Gong Zuojiong. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

When was the 'turning point' achieved?

■ We reached the 'turning point' at the end of February, when the numbers of new confirmed and suspected cases dramatically decreased. Now, we are reporting zero cases.

Besides lockdown, what do you see as the most important measures in tackling the spread?

■ At present, COVID-19 has been brought under control through two months of prevention and management in Wuhan and Hubei province. No new patient has been diagnosed right now. However, we are still continuing strict monitoring.

What was your experience during the peak of the crisis?

■ At the beginning, there were too many patients that needed to be confirmed. The hospital did not have so many beds for the patients' hospitalisation. We had a shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE). Our hospital dedicated a separate campus, our east campus, as a designated hospital to receive severe and critical patients.

Can you explain why centralised quarantine and isolation was followed on such a large scale, as opposed to just home

isolation for mild cases?

■ Quarantine and home isolation depends on different countries' conditions. In China and India, because we have such a large population, one family may have several members. Cross-infection occurs commonly. For mild and moderate type confirmed cases, the ark hospital is a good quarantine and isolation place, and this helps avoid cross-infection and breaks down the transmission.

What was the scale of testing done in Wuhan?

■ I don't know exactly the scale of testing in the whole of Wuhan city. By the middle of January, when PCR reagents (nucleic acid testing) became available, our hospital alone tested around 1,000 samples daily. Right now, all samples can be examined because the supply of testing materials is enough. Testing for COVID-19 plays an important, even central role, because we want to find new cases and suspected cases as quickly as possible. Only then can we isolate patients and break down the transmission.

In a large population with limited resources, do you see alternatives to widespread testing?

■ For testing, scientists have different techniques. For example, antibodies detection and different (modified PCR) methods for nucleic acid detection could also be used. And an experienced radiologist could diagnose the suspected cases based on the CT scans.

Opposition urges Sri Lankan govt. to reconvene Parliament

President can't approve funds to fight COVID-19 after April 30'

Trump, Putin discuss oil prices, virus

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday discussed closer cooperation on COVID-19 with U.S. President Donald Trump, with the two agreeing on "consultations" about oil prices, the Kremlin said. They "discussed closer cooperation between the two countries" on the COVID-19 response, the Kremlin said said, without giving details.

Mr. Trump and Mr. Putin also "exchanged opinions on the current state of the global oil market. They arranged for Russia-U.S. consultations on this subject".

The oil prices crashed earlier this month after a collapse of talks between Saudi-led OPEC and Moscow, unleashing a price war. Mr. Trump earlier said he was also expecting Mr. Putin to request the lifting of U.S. sanctions.

Nearly a month after President Gotabaya Rajapaksa dissolved Parliament and called for elections, the Opposition's calls for reconvening the legislature have grown louder in Sri Lanka.

Former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has noted that the President cannot approve any expenses towards COVID-19 after April 30. "Funds have been allocated for the government through the Vote on Account until the 30th of April. From that day onwards until the new Parliament is convened again, the President does not have powers to approve additional expenses. We cannot predict as to when the new Parliament would be convened. This is a crisis," he said in a recent statement.

Sri Lanka Muslim Con-

gress Leader Rauff Hakeem had made the point at the all-party leaders' meeting convened by Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa on March 24. "I had to point out the need to re-summon Parliament to show the nation that we are united in this hour of national emergency," Mr. Hakeem said.

Former Finance Minister Mangala Samaraweera pointed to Section 70 (7) of the Constitution, which empowers the President to convene Parliament in an emergency and said it existed "precisely for such an eventuality."

However, government spokesman Keheliya Ramabukwella said the necessity to reconvene Parliament "hasn't arisen yet." Whether there is parliament or not, everything is moving...things can't be smoother," he said in a recent statement.

To help members get used to the software and iron out any technical issues, "a rehearsal of the online Parliament" was held on

COVID-19: Maldives Parliament meets online, discusses strategies

Govt. to support sectors like fishing that can 'bounce back'



Mohamed Nasheed

sinesses which will "bounce back", like fishing and not the otherwise vital tourism sector that has taken a big hit due to the global pandemic.

"The sentiment was that the government must focus on a way out, into prosperity again," Mr. Nasheed told *The Hindu* from Male via phone. "The MPs took to the online session like fish to water."

The Maldives currently has two COVID-19 positive patients, who returned from the U.K., undergoing treatment. The 13 cases detected earlier this month have been cured, says government spokesman Mabrook Azeez.

Monday's discussion centred on the Indian Ocean island nation's response to COVID-19, according to the Speaker. Members' interventions underlined the need for the Maldivian government to back only those bu-

ELSEWHERE



Netanyahu, aides placed under quarantine

ISRAEL JERUSALEM
Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his aides have been placed under precautionary quarantine after a staffer in his office tested positive for COVID-19, the Premier's office said on Monday. Mr. Netanyahu's office made clear that the quarantine decision was purely precautionary as he had not been in recent contact with the staffer. AFP

24 policemen, fighters killed in Taliban attacks

KUNDUZ
The Taliban has killed about two dozen Afghan police and pro-government fighters, officials said on Monday, in two attacks. In one of the incidents late on Sunday, the insurgents killed at least six soldiers and 13 police and pro-government militiamen at outposts near a police building in Takhar, said police spokesman Khalil Assir. AFP

Greek resistance hero Glezos passes away

He remained an activist even in old age



Manolis Glezos, who died Monday at the age of 97, was a Greek resistance hero who tore down the Nazi swastika flag from the Acropolis during the Second World War, survived two death sentences and remained an activist even in old age.

State TV ERT said he had died in an Athens hospital. Mr. Glezos was a loud voice on the Greek left throughout a life that saw him participate in a Communist plot that almost killed Winston Churchill and also saw him become the European Parliament's oldest deputy at the age of 91.

He opposed his government's austerity measures in the wake of the financial

N. Korea hits out at Pompeo over remarks

REUTERS
SEOUL

North Korea said on Monday that U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo undermined its willingness to restart stalled denuclearisation talks, criticising his recent remarks on sanctions.

Mr. Pompeo had said after a teleconference with G7 Foreign Ministers last week that all nations must remain united in calling for North Korea to return to negotiations and applying pressure over its missile programmes.

That comment highlighted the United States cannot reverse its hostile policy toward North Korea "no matter how excellent and firm the relationship" their two leaders have, state media KCNA said.

Virus halts N. Korean ships that sailed through sanctions



Trafficking halted: Satellite image of Nampo, a vital port region on North Korea's western coast, on March 13. • NYT

sation, and a review of additional satellite imagery by *The New York Times*, many North Korean commercial vessels that once carried sanctioned material to and from China – or transferred them illicitly ship-to-ship at sea – are now idled in their home ports.

The change, seen after North Korea sought to seal itself off two months ago as

Nampo, a vital port on North Korea's western coast.

A draft of the forthcoming annual report from a U.N. panel states that North Korea "continued to flout UNSC resolutions through illicit maritime exports of commodities, notably coal and sand."

Such sales provide a revenue stream that has historically contributed to its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes."

The report covers the time frame up to early February, and does not account for the impact of the pandemic. The Royal United Services Institute satellite analysis shows that on March 3, 139 ships were idled in the Nampo area, up from 50 ships a month earlier. The fleet includes vessels previously implicated in sanc-

tions evasion operations.

The recall of ships is part of North Korea's border closures, which started on January 22, the same time the Chinese authorities announced the shutdown of the city of Wuhan, the epicentre of the outbreak.

Economy will take a hit'
Park Jong-chol, professor at the Department of Social Studies Education at South Korea's Gyeongsang National University, said the economic impact on North Korea from idling so many ships is severe. The long-term disruptions to North Korea's economy remain unclear. But analysts say it was reasonable to assume damage has been done to North Korean agriculture, industry and the overall economy. NY TIMES

MARKET WATCH

	PRICE	CHANGE
Sensex	28440	-4.61
US Dollar	75.59	-0.93
Brent oil	22.44	-9.55

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	251.65	0.35
Asian Paints	1594.95	-9.20
Axis Bank	368.15	8.40
Bajaj Auto	1986.70	-66.75
Bajaj Finserv	4661.15	+29.45
Bajaj Finance	2242.10	-300.20
Bharti Airtel	431.05	-17.90
BPCL	274.75	-4.00
Britannia Ind	2473.75	-55.50
Cipla	431.75	-24.10
Coal India	133.15	1.45
Dr Reddy's Lab	2994.25	-77.75
Eicher Motors	13333.10	-986.70
GAIL (India)	70.85	1.35
Grasim Ind	450.50	-10.40
HCL Tech	419.00	-11.65
HDFC	1558.75	-195.25
HDFC Bank	831.65	-72.80
Hero MotoCorp	1553.50	-107.70
Hindalco	88.80	-2.75
Hind Unilever	2184.35	-43.80
ICICI Bank	313.40	-26.45
IndusInd Bank	413.40	-2.30
Bharti Infratech	155.10	-1.70
Infosys	626.70	-26.00
Indian Oil Corp	76.80	-0.10
ITC	159.20	-4.00
JSW Steel	142.40	-9.05
Kotak Bank	1293.70	-105.40
L&T	798.65	-38.40
M&M	274.40	-20.10
Maruti Suzuki	4328.45	-317.65
Nestle India Ltd.	15658.65	-550.05
NTPC	81.75	-1.25
ONGC	63.35	-1.10
PowerGrid Corp	155.65	-4.35
Reliance Ind	1030.45	-35.15
State Bank	186.90	-9.05
Shree Cement	16935.45	-730.80
Sun Pharma	332.70	-5.55
Tata Motors	68.15	-2.55
Tata Steel	254.05	-23.20
TCS	1778.50	-46.00
Tech Mahindra	526.80	-22.70
Titan	943.65	6.60
UltraTech Cement	3085.90	-57.70
UPL	308.45	-13.75
Vedanta	61.55	-2.20
Wipro	184.15	0.65
Zee Entertainment	125.65	-2.40

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	75.41	75.73
Euro	83.38	83.76
British Pound	93.74	94.15
Japanese Yen (100)	69.85	70.15
Chinese Yuan	10.63	10.67
Swiss Franc	78.83	79.17
Singapore Dollar	52.86	53.10
Canadian Dollar	53.31	53.54
Malaysian Ringgit	17.40	17.51

Source: Indian Bank

IN BRIEF



Business not hit by virus, says HCL Technologies
NEW DELHI
IT services firm HCL Technologies on Monday said it did not expect any significant impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on its business in the ongoing quarter, adding that booking during the January-March period had largely been on track as a significant part of the closures happened in January.

Contributions to PM CARES Fund

Company	Amount, ₹ cr.
Reliance Industries	500
NMDC	150
L&T	150
Hero Group	50
TVS Group	25
Patanjali Ayurved	25
IIFL Group	5
SJVN	5

The cost of the lockdown is pegged at about \$120 billion

Complete stop would put over 45 mn migrant daily wage earners out of work; government needs to do more to rescue industry and services if they're to protect jobs



R. GANAPATHI
The complete 21-day COVID-19 shutdown of most economic activity has created new roadblocks, causing severe disruptive impact on both demand and supply side elements across sectors. The cost of the lockdown is pegged at around \$120 billion (approximately ₹ 9 lakh crore) or 4% of the GDP.

Further, 90% of India's workforce is employed in the unorganised sector and this lockdown will effectively put over 45 million migrants living off daily earnings out of work. Sectors like construction projects, mobility services, housekeeping and other informal sector

New investors flock to market amid fall

With stocks falling like ninepins, brokerages see surge in new clients looking to strike gold

ASHISH RUKHAIYAR
MUMBAI

The equity markets may well be witnessing their sharpest and quickest falls, but that is not deterring new investors from dabbling in stocks.

Brokerages have seen a spurt in new client additions as many investors want to buy stocks that are currently available at multi-year lows with the benchmarks having lost more than 30% from the record highs touched in January. "We have seen about 1.5 lakh new client additions this month, which is double the average monthly numbers seen in most months last year," said Nithin Kamath, CEO, Zerodha.

"The trend is unique to this fall and the fact that people are working from home and so have more time to monitor and invest, is fuelling

March 'ing' forward



ing the trend. Having said that, if the fall continues for a longer tenure, then the opportunity might turn into pessimism," added Mr. Kamath.

SEBI relaxes debt default norms, raters can go easy

Lockdown, RBI moratorium cited

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has temporarily relaxed the norms related to debt default on account of the ongoing COVID-19 lockdown and the moratorium permitted by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

The capital markets regulator has said that if a default takes place solely due to the lockdown or the moratorium, then credit rating agencies (CRAs) need not recognise it as default.

Operational challenges
"... based on its assessment, if the CRA is of the view that the delay in payment of in-

terest/principal has arisen solely due to the lockdown conditions, creating temporary operational challenges in servicing debt, including due to procedural delays in approval of moratorium on loans by the lending institutions, CRAs may not consider the same as a default event and/or recognise default," stated a SEBI circular issued on Monday.

This would also be applicable on any rescheduling in payment of debt obligation done by the issuer, prior to the due date, with the approval of the investors/ lenders and the relaxation will be extended till the period of the RBI moratorium, it added.

NRIs can now invest in specified govt. bonds

There will be no investment ceiling

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has introduced a separate channel, namely 'Fully Accessible Route' (FAR), to enable non-residents to invest in specified government bonds with effect from April 1.

The move follows the Union Budget announcement that certain specified categories of government bonds would be opened fully for non-resident investors without any restrictions.

"Eligible investors can invest in specified government securities without being subject to any investment ceilings. This scheme shall operate along with the two existing routes, viz., the Medium Term Fra-



mework (MTF) and the Voluntary Retention Route (VRR)," the RBI said.

"This will substantially ease access of non-residents to Indian government securities and facilitate inclusion in global bond indices. This would facilitate inflow of stable foreign investment in government bonds," the Finance Ministry tweeted.

MFI collection to be hit most by lockdown'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Rating agency Crisil has said the nationwide lockdown due to COVID-19 will have near-term impact on collections and fresh-loan disbursements of non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) and micro finance institutions (MFIs), in particular.

The agency said MFIs will be the most impacted because collection of repayments involves visit to households and such borrowers typically have weak credit profiles; their income generation activities would have been disrupted. Home loans will be less affected as a majority of the borrowers are salaried and collections are via auto-debit instructions.

Employers think about hiring and jobs in linear terms, but unfortunately the virus works in non-linear terms. With regard to exist-

ing firms' apps. "We are seeing about 80% higher client addition in March compared with the average monthly additions and are likely to add around 60,000 clients or more this month," said Prajkash Gagdani, CEO, 5Paisa, another discount brokerage firm.

Seizing the opportunity
"Most of the people opening accounts are first-timers

Discount broker Zerodha added 1.5 lakh new clients

5Paisa likely to add about 60,000 clients

smallcase sees a 1.5-times increase in new investors

Upstox says March client additions greater than the 1-lakh added in December

Discount broking firms, that are largely technology firms, seem to be benefiting the most as bulk of their clients are retail investors trading through the broking

dented increase in demand for new accounts and while the brokerage saw a record addition of one lakh new accounts in December 2019, this month, it would be significantly higher.

Market volatility
"The growth is due to unprecedented levels of market volatility that we have seen recently, as well as a lot of new customers that are looking at this as the right opportunity to start investing due to attractive stock prices," said Mr. Kumar.

smallcase Technologies, an investment platform, has also seen a 1.5-times increase in new investors in March compared with the previous month. Further, it has also witnessed a 3.5-times surge in new account leads on a month-on-month basis.

Monday blues

Banking and financial service sector stocks were among the worst hit, driving the Sensex down by more than 1,375 points



Bulls catch COVID-19, bears come out of it

Benchmarks plunge over 4% each

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

COVID-19 pandemic concerns continued to grip the equity markets on Monday with the benchmark indices shedding more than 4% as the number of virus cases in India neared the 1,300 mark.

The 30-share Sensex plunged 1,375.27 points, or 4.61%, to close at 28,440.32. The broader Nifty settled at 8,281.10, shedding 379.15 points, or 4.38%.

The selling on Monday was led by banking and automobile majors with stocks such as Bajaj Finance, HDFC, ICICI Bank, M&M, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Maruti Suzuki India, Hero Motocorp and State Bank of India (SBI) leading the declines in the Sensex.

The investor pessimism was reflected in the weak market breadth as almost 1,400 stocks declined on BSE as against only 881 gainers. Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) continued to sell Indian equities with Monday's net selling pegged at ₹4,364 crore.

Elsewhere in Asia, the benchmarks of Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea, Indonesia, Taiwan, China, Malaysia, Singapore and Philippines all ended in the red in Monday.

MCA to waive firms' late filing charges

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

To provide respite to companies and Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs) in the wake of COVID-19, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs has introduced the 'Companies Fresh Start Scheme, 2020' and revised the 'LLP Settlement Scheme, 2020'.

They both allow for a one-time waiver of additional filing fees for delayed filings by companies or LLPs with the Registrar of Companies between April 1 and September 30, 2020. The schemes significantly reduce the related financial burden on these entities, especially for those with long-standing defaults, thereby allowing them a 'fresh start'.

High Network Individuals should be encouraged to do likewise. Additional tax concessions may be looked at for this sector. Women's Self-Help Groups and the informal sector should be asked to produce masks, hand sanitizers, among others in a big way. Banks should be asked to fund these activities and State governments should arrange for the

Rescheduled Olympic Games to begin on July 23, 2021

No qualification events to be scheduled until further notice; World athletics championships moved to 2022

TOKYO 2020

UTHRA GANESAN
NEW DELHI

The Tokyo Olympics will be held from July 23 to August 8, 2021, almost exactly a year after the Games were to commence this year.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) on Monday confirmed the new dates for the 32nd edition of the Games with details on handling the logistics necessitated by the decision. The Paralympics was also confirmed from August 24-September 5 next year.

The decision came after extensive discussions with all NOCs, International Federations (IFs) and the Tokyo Organising Committee. "This decision is in line with the many comments and requests we received. I hope you will appreciate that, given the many constraints, we had to take this decision without consulting you directly again," IOC president Thomas Bach said in a communique.

Tokyo 2020 president Yoshiro Mori confirmed the decision in Tokyo. "A certain amount of time is required for the selection and qualification of athletes and for their training and preparation, and the consensus was that staging the rescheduled Games during the summer vacation in Japan would be preferable," Mori said.

Good news
The IOC also reiterated the revised qualification systems and timelines, confirming that athletes/NOCs already



Taking note: A passer-by takes photos of a countdown clock showing the adjusted days and time for the start of the postponed Olympic Games next year. ■ REUTERS

qualified would retain their places while the remaining qualifiers and qualification spots would be finalised soon.

"We will continue to work closely with each IF on the necessary revisions of Tokyo 2020 qualification systems. To facilitate these adaptations, and reflecting the postponement of the Games, we are making necessary modifications to the qualification system principles to include, for example, the relaxation of

the maximum two-year period and amendments to the qualification deadlines," IOC said.

The IOC also confirmed that no further qualification events would be scheduled until further notice and announced the formation of a Task Force to look into the operational and logistical changes required, including securing sports venues, Olympic Village and hotels. Deadlines for ticketing and accreditations have also been

pushed back with already purchased tickets likely to remain valid.

The decision, however, has forced several IFs to reschedule their calendar with World Athletics confirming the 2021 World Championships would now be held in 2022.

"Everyone needs to be flexible and compromise, and to that end we are now working with organisers in Oregon on new dates in 2022 for our World athletics champion-

ships. We are also in discussions with the Commonwealth Games Federation and the European Championships," World Athletics said in a statement.

World swimming

The 2021 World swimming championships, scheduled for July 16-August 1 in Fukuoka, would also be pushed back, although the International Swimming Federation has ruled out postponing the competition to 2022.

Tokyo 2020's bumpy road

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TOKYO

2015: Logo dropped:
The logo for the Games was ditched in September 2015 after accusations of plagiarism.

2018: Boxing blues:
The IOC stripped AIBA of the right to run the boxing competition at the Games over various allegations.

2019: French charges:
French investigating magistrates in January 2019 charged the former head of Japan's Olympic Committee, Tsunekazu Takeda, as they probed two payments totalling \$2.3 million made before and after the Japanese capital was chosen.

2019: Budget blowout:
Organisers unveiled the final version of their budget in December, with the Games expected to cost \$12.6 billion.

2019: Russian ban:
Russia's participation in

the Games was thrown into question in December, when anti-doping agency WADA banned the country's athletes for four years from global events.

2020: Cancellation 'unthinkable': By late March, the coronavirus outbreak had been declared a pandemic causing more than 325,000 infections and over 14,400 deaths. Tokyo governor Koike called cancellation of the Games due to COVID-19 "unthinkable".

2020: Historic postponement:
The IOC and Japan eventually bow to the inevitable and postpone the Olympics in a historic decision.
Less than week later, the new date for the opening ceremony is announced: July 23, 2021.

IOA asks NSFs to start planning

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

ning structure for preparation for Tokyo 2021 and for Paris 2024," IOA president Narinder Batra said in a release.

Soon after the new dates were announced, IOA secretary general Rajeev Mehta said, "Indian Olympic Association along with the National Sports Federations welcome and support the new dates for the Tokyo

2020 Olympic Games, which will be held from 23 July to 8 August, 2021."

Two days ago, the IOA chief had asked the NSFs to share the calendar of their athletes' preparations.

Nearly 80 Indian athletes have so far qualified for the Tokyo Olympics in seven sports – athletics, archery, boxing, equestrian, hockey, shooting and wrestling.

Wimbledon will be cancelled, says German official

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS

The vice-president of the German tennis federation has predicted that Wimbledon will be cancelled on Wednesday, and slammed the French Tennis Federation for moving the French Open to the autumn.

Dirk Hordorff told French sports daily *L'Equipe* that he expects Wimbledon, scheduled for June 29-July 12, to be scrapped due to the coronavirus pandemic. "This is not a rumour, they will announce that they are cancelling Wimbledon," he said.

In a move that surprised the tennis world, French Open organisers have already postponed their tournament and moved it to start on September 20, instead of May 24.

"You could reorganise Roland Garros for September or October, but not Wimbledon. The grass would be too damp"

You could reorganise Roland Garros for September or October, but not Wimbledon. The grass would be too damp

DIRK HORDORFF

Hordorff hit out at FFT president Bernard Giudicelli for his handling of the rescheduling of Roland Garros, the claycourt Grand Slam.

"What president Bernard Giudicelli did is a disgrace, for tennis and for France," Hordorff said.

In a move that surprised the tennis world, French Open organisers have already postponed their tournament and moved it to start on September 20, instead of May 24.

"You could reorganise Roland Garros for September or October, but not Wimbledon, the grass would be too damp," Hordorff said.

Anil Chaudhary feeling at home in the field

Forced to stay back in his village, umpire rediscovers farming skills

GENERAL

VIJAY LOKAPALLY
NEW DELHI

Cricket took him away from Dangarol, a village in District Shamli. The lockdown has now transported him back to his childhood days when he would spend time in the sugarcane fields owned by his family.

"The India-South Africa series ended abruptly (on March 13) and I came to the village on the 16th to fetch grains and jaggery. I brought my sons (Aryan and Akshat) along, leaving my wife (Meeta) and mother (Kamla) back in Delhi. Then the lockdown happened. We decided to stay put in the village," ICC panel umpire Anil Chaudhary told *The Hindu*.

In the village, Chaudhary has used the "opportunity" to rediscover his farming skills. "We are farmers. I used to stay in this village till my 10th standard and help in the fields. I found the labourers here had left. So I plunged into ploughing the fields (su-

"We are farmers. I used to stay in this village till my 10th standard and help in the fields. I found the labourers here had left. So I plunged into ploughing the fields (su-

"There is no gathering of people anymore in Dangarol. We also never had this cul-

ture of shaking hands and we greet each other with a 'Ram, Ram,'" he said.

On the experience of staying in the village, Chaudhary said, "I have been enjoying working in the fields. Feels like my childhood days have returned. Every morning I drive the tractor for three hours, but it can be tiring. I have discovered new muscles in the body (laughs)."

Chaudhary recalled his younger days. "My family has always been in the village. Some of my uncles and cousins graduated in agriculture and stayed on. (Brother) Harendra and I would spend months in the village. Cricket took us away from the village where the bonding among people is amazing. I have never spent so much time at a stretch with my sons," he said.

Set routine

The daily routine is well set. "We go around the fields in the morning. Not in groups. We distribute the work. Eat early and sleep early. By 9 p.m. you are asleep. A melo-

dious *aarti* from a nearby temple wakes us at 5 in the morning. Villagers are basically nice, gentle, selfless people. I have learned so much during this lockdown."

A couple of 80-year-olds in the village, revealed Chaudhary, talk of this "unprecedented development".

Bit of advice

"But they insist 'we shall overcome. It is a test of our will power'. Follow guidelines, accept the gravity of the situation," is the advice from the 55-year-old, who sometimes has to climb trees to catch the internet signal in his village.

"I miss my cricket, the packed stadiums, the travelling, the challenges of umpiring, but there is life outside cricket, too. It's great fun here in the village. The sky is clear - blue during the day and starlit at night."

"No man to be seen for miles. Nature has shown mankind its place. Even if forced to stay indoors, I have learnt new ways to live life," he signed off.



Silver lining: Anil Chaudhary says he has learnt new ways to live life. ■ FILE PHOTO: AP

COVID-19 IMPACT



Messi confirms pay cut for Barca players

MADRID

Lionel Messi confirmed on Monday that Barcelona's players will take a 70% pay cut and make financial contributions to ensure the club's other employees are paid in full. "We want to clarify that our desire has always been to apply a drop in salary because we fully understand that this is an exceptional situation and we are the first ones who have

ALWAYS helped the club when asked...therefore, it never ceases to amaze us that from within the club there were those who tried to put us under the magnifying glass and tried to add pressure to do something that we always knew we would do," AFP

Bhutia offers shelter to migrant workers

KOLKATA

Indian football icon Bhaichung Bhutia on Monday offered shelter to migrant workers of Sikkim. "The people who are affected the most during the lockdown are migrant workers. I've a new unfinished building in Gangtok (Lumsey, Tadong). It should accommodate about 100 people. We will also provide some basic

Rashford helps feed children during shutdown

LONDON

Manchester United forward Marcus Rashford is working to get food to children who rely on free school meals after the coronavirus shutdown. The 22-year-old England international, who has teamed up with charity FareShare to help children in the Manchester area after schools were closed, said a fundraising had gone well. "We have got to the



ration. I'm also working with the local authorities to see how it can be done. We can support and work together," said Bhutia. PTI

Scrap season if it can't be finished by June: Kane

LONDON

Tottenham striker and England captain Harry Kane said the Premier League season should be cancelled if it cannot be completed by the end of June. "I think, for me, we do need to try to finish the season. But there needs to be a point where enough is enough. Probably the limit for me is the end of June. If the season's not completed

Mercedes F1 team helps to develop breathing aid

LONDON

F1 team Mercedes has helped to develop a breathing aid that could keep coronavirus patients out of intensive care. Mercedes worked with University College London engineers and University College London Hospital clinicians to adapt and improve a device that bridges the gap between an oxygen mask and the need for full ventilation. PTI



£100,000 (\$124,000) mark, which means we get to feed 400,000 children so it's been very positive." AFP

COVID-AID

MARY KOM donates a month's salary

NEW DELHI

Six-time world champion boxer M.C. Mary Kom on Monday said she will donate her one month's salary as Rajya Sabha MP, amounting to ₹1 lakh, to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund to combat the pandemic in the country. The Commonwealth and Asian Games champion became a MP in 2016. PTI

Shooter Manu Bhaker contributes ₹1 lakh

NEW DELHI

Shooter Manu Bhaker on Monday donated ₹1 lakh to the Haryana government. "This is the time when only lives of people matter to the country and to save them we need to do whatever we can. I am donating ₹1 lakh to the Haryana Corona Cases fund from my savings," Bhaker tweeted. PTI

TT star Sathiyan pledges to donate ₹1.25 lakh

CHENNAI

Table tennis player G. Sathiyan on Monday pledged to donate ₹1.25 lakh to the PM's relief fund. PTI



lakh to fight against the pandemic. Sathiyan will contribute ₹1 lakh to the Chief Minister's public relief fund and ₹25,000 to the PM's relief fund. PTI



Sachin my pick to bat in any conditions: Warne

Backs Lara to chase down huge targets on the last day

CRICKET

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MELBOURNE

Spin great Shane Warne on Monday picked his fierce rival Sachin Tendulkar as the batsman to bat in any conditions, and called his former skipper Steve Waugh a match-saver rather than a match-winner.

One of the greatest spinners to have played the game, Warne was engaged in an Instagram live session with his fans.

When the discussion turned to the best batsman in his time, the 50-year-old Warne said, "If I have to choose any batsman to bat in any conditions, it is a real toss-up between Tendulkar and Lara, but I would just choose Tendulkar."

"If we have to chase 400 runs on the last day, I would definitely pick Lara," added the leg-spinner who ended his illustrious career with over 700 Test wickets.

Daylight

"There were these two guys, then there was daylight and after that, the rest of the batsmen came."

Tendulkar played a world record 200 Tests and amassed 15,921 runs with an average 53.78 while in 463 ODIs, he tallied 18,426 runs at 44.83. Lara played 131 Tests and scored 11,953 runs at 52.88. In 299 ODIs he accumulated 10,405 runs.

When asked about his former captain Waugh, who is known for his solid temperament and dogged approach to batting, Warne said he was someone who



Legends: Warne says that Tendulkar and Lara were way ahead of the rest of the batsmen. ■REUTERS

could bail the team out of a precarious situation.

"Steve was more of a match saver than a match-winner," Warne said about Waugh whom he included in his all-time Australian Test XI to be led by Allan Border.

Waugh played 168 Tests for Australia in which he scored 10,927 runs, including 32 centuries and 50 fifties.

Warner misses out

About his team, Warne said: "I am only picking players

that I played with, that is why David Warner is not going to be a part of the side, he is one of the greatest Australian openers."

Warne's team comprised Matthew Hayden and Michael Slater as openers, followed by Ricky Ponting, Mark Waugh, Border and Steve. He chose Adam Gilchrist as the wicketkeeper with Glenn McGrath, Jason Gillespie and Bruce Reid as the fast bowlers and Tim May as the spinner.

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM
HYDERABAD

Former India off-spinner and ex-president of BCCI N. Shivlal Yadav felt testing times were ahead for the governing bodies of sports across the world even after the coronavirus pandemic comes to an end.

"It is a very sad situation now. The impact will be very severe and the BCCI may incur huge losses because it will take a long time for the economy to get back on the rails," Shivlal said in an exclusive chat with *The Hindu* on Monday.

Sponsors won't desert
"I won't say the sponsors will desert the BCCI completely but they would be hard-pressed to invest with

I do workouts given to us by the trainers. That's how I manage my time and keep myself busy"

SHAYAN ACHARYA
MUMBAI

These days Jemimah Rodrigues has a fixed routine. She wakes up, finishes her prayers, enjoys some homemade breakfast, watches films and then starts training under the watchful eyes of her father and coach Ivan Rodrigues.

As the country witnesses a 21-day lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic, there is no way one can step out of home. "I have scheduled a practice time – I do drills and knocking at home with dad. I do some batting drills and knocking at around 4.30 p.m. At 6.30 p.m., I do wor-

kouts given to us by the trainers. That's how I manage my time and keep myself busy," Jemimah told *Sportstar*.

Playing ludo

However, it's not all work and no fun for the 20-year-old! "I play ludo with my brothers (Enoch and Eli). It's a tough competition," she said.

Jemimah loves watching films – a habit she has developed recently. "I actually don't watch a lot of movies because I hardly get time. I am not a movie fan or TV series fan. I have started watching quite a few movies and TV series," she said with a smile.

These are challenging times. Had it not been for



Jemimah. ■ VIJAY BATE

COVID-19, India's senior players would have now been busy with the Challengers Trophy. But with all cricketing activities coming to a standstill, there's not much to look forward to.

Jemimah has a message for her fans: "It's a difficult time for all of us. Nobody likes to be at home, there could be so many negatives in the situation. But we need to look out for the positives. You can make the most of it. You can work on yourself, just sit back and get your thoughts together."

She also believes that such 'breaks' are actually an opportunity to strengthen fa-

mily bonding.

"Spend quality time with your family, that way you can develop the relationships. And also, follow the government's guidelines because that's for our welfare. They care for us, that's why they are doing so much," she said.

"It's like a cricket match, you can't win a game just by one person playing. You need all the eleven guys to contribute to win the game. It's the same case here."

"If all of us contribute to this initiative, we can definitely beat the virus and save many lives."

BCCI may incur huge losses: Shivlal Yadav

'It is a very sad situation now and the impact will be very severe'

Bengal sportspersons contribute

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Various sports organisations and sportspersons from West Bengal have contributed generously for the fight against COVID-19 outbreak.

Shukla, a minister in the state, also joined hands with Eden Gardens' curator Sujan Mukherjee to arrange rice and pulses for groundsmen. Mukherjee also requested the CAB to donate his one month's salary to the fund.

While Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) has made a donation of ₹ 25 lakh, Mohun Bagan decided to give ₹ 20 lakh to the West Bengal State Emergency Relief Fund.

The West Bengal Weight-lifting Association pledged ₹ 1,001. The West Bengal Athletics Association, West Bengal Badminton Association, West Bengal Volleyball Association and Bengal Tennis Association have contributed ₹ 1 lakh each.

Big contribution
CAB Finance Committee member Sanjay Gupta pledged ₹ 1 crore through his company Captain Steel India Ltd. Many units affiliated to the CAB also made donations. Aryan Club (2 lakh), representative of Mohammedan Sporting Club Dipak Singh (2 lakh), Balak Sangha (1 lakh), Richa Ghosh (1 lakh),

Deepti Sharma (50,000), Mithu Mukherjee (25,000) and Shubh Shankar Paul (25,000), have supported this cause.

lakh), Tollygunge Agragami (1 lakh), Cricket Club of Dha-kuria (50,000), Vijay Sports Club (50,000) and Cricket Club of Bhowanipore (50,000) were among the leading donors.

Match observers, scorers, coaches, curators and other officials associated with the game also chipped in. Significantly, match observers pooled in ₹ 1.5 lakh, while the scorers contributed a day's pay to make up an amount of ₹ 77,420.

BCCI president Sourav Ganguly, who hails from the city, along with Lal Baba Rice came forward to provide rice worth ₹ 50 lakh to the poor people.

Three ATK footballers, Pritam Kotal, Prabir Das and Pranoy Halder, also made contributions.

With donations continuing, the sports fraternity of the state is expected to lend solid support to the state government in the fight against coronavirus.

Gukesh has been forced to slow down

+ The 13-year-old was just hitting good form when the pandemic struck

CHESS

S. DIPAK RAGAV
CHENNAI

Last year, at the Delhi International Open GMs chess tournament, D. Gukesh became the world's second youngest Grandmaster at 12 years, seven months and 17 days.

The youngster reached the summit, but the rest of 2019 wasn't great for him. He had to wait until February 2020 to get his first tournament win – the Hillerod Chess Club open in Denmark – and followed it up with another win at the Cannes Open.

Just when he was hitting good form, the coronavirus pandemic scuppered his plans.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Gukesh said, "After last year, I did not play well for a year,



Gukesh. ■ FILE PHOTO: M. VEDHAN

G It was a different camp. For 10 days, through the day, I focused on openings. It came at the right time as well, since I was trying a different approach. So, it was very useful

nuary for young chess players in Chennai, organised by Microsense with chess legends Vladimir Kramnik and Boris Gelfand.

Speaking about the experience, Gukesh said, "It was a different camp. For 10 days, through the day, I focused on openings."

"It came at the right time as well since I was trying a different approach. So, it was very useful."

Another area that Gukesh said he improved was in dealing with time pressure.

He worked extensively on

the time taken for his opening with his coach Vishnu Prasanna.

Crucial wins

The wins in the last two events helped him pocket 20 points and take his Elo rating to 2563, and the 13-year-old targeted going past 2600 this year.

COVID-19, however, has forced the cancellation of tournaments in Germany and Iceland with no events likely to be held till the end of April.

Gukesh, who plays a lot of matches in a year, is not happy about this forced break.

"I would have loved to play more tournaments. I was doing well. I prefer playing a lot of tournaments, and we had planned quite a few as well. But for now, I am just playing some online tournaments conducted by Chessbase India and *Chess.com*."

ITTF rankings as of March 2020 stays

Paddlers await decision on points earned this month

K. KEERTHIVASAN
CHENNAI

The International Table Tennis Federation's (ITTF) decision on Sunday to freeze the rankings as of March 2020 (only points awarded for events held until February will be taken into consideration) due to COVID-19 has many paddlers questioning the fate of tournaments that took place this month.

The ITTF decided, among other things, on the "suspension of all currently planned events and activities that involve international travel until June 30 and freezing of ITTF rankings lists as of March 2020 and further evaluations of all implications related to the postponement of events, travel restrictions and other complications with scope for further decisions on potentially necessary adjustments."

Speaking to *The Hindu* here on Monday, Sharath said: "Will the ITTF add my Oman Open ranking points? [Indian paddler] G. Sathiyan believes they will. If the ITTF includes them, then he is hopeful that his 1100 points will be added when the rankings list is released.

his first title in a decade at the Oman Open ITTF Challenge Plus (March 11 to 15), is keeping his fingers crossed. The 37-year-old said he is hopeful that his 1100 points will be added when the rankings list is released.

Speaking to *The Hindu* here on Monday, Sharath said: "Will the ITTF add my Oman Open ranking points? [Indian paddler] G. Sathiyan believes they will. If the ITTF includes them, then he is hopeful that his 1100 points will be added when the rankings list is released.

With the Hong Kong Open and China Open in May being cancelled/postponed and the Korea Open and Australia Open not happening in June, Sharath said there was no clarity on when the rankings will be released.

"I hope I don't lose the points I got by winning the Oman Open," he said.

Harmeet Desai, the reigning Commonwealth champion who reached the semi-finals at Oman, is hoping against hope that he will get his 715 ranking points. "I hope we don't lose our points," he said.

In response to Harmeet's query about the points, ITTF World ranking manager Javier Angulo Luceron said: "The executive committee's decision was to freeze the ranking as it is due to complications we had in March events [some nations couldn't participate due to the pandemic, and the Polish Open Challenge Plus was suspended midway on March 13]. Nonetheless, the points achieved will be added and counted once a decision is made about what to do with the problematic events," he said.

Paartalu extends BFC contract

SPORTS REPORTER
BENGALURU

Bengaluru FC (BFC) midfielder Erik Paartalu has signed a two-year deal with BFC, the club announced on Monday.

The deal ensured that Paartalu will stay at BFC till the end of the 2021-22 season.



Erik Paartalu.
■ FILE PHOTO: K. MURALI KUMAR

SUDOKU

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9						6		
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Solution to puzzle 12896

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I	N	R	R	R	T	T</		



IN BRIEF
Prince Charles is out of isolation: royal officials

LONDON Prince Charles, the eldest son and heir of Queen Elizabeth II, is no longer in quarantine after he recovered from mild coronavirus symptoms, his office said on Monday. The 71-year-old had tested positive last Tuesday. AFP

Teen charged after 'coughing' on groceries

HOUSTON A 14-year-old boy was charged over a prank in which he coughed on produce at a grocery store in northwest Harris County in the U.S. amid the coronavirus scare, officials said on Sunday. The local sheriff said that the teen was charged with "tampering with consumer products" as he had done it intentionally for a prank. PTI

A novel air purifier to disinfect hospitals in COVID-19 fight

It helps check infections, clean air in a closed environment

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE

PUNE The Department of Science and Technology (DST) on Monday said that an air purifying technology developed by an incubated company of the Pune-based Science and Technology Park (STP or Scitech Park) could offer an effective solution to the country's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic by reducing the viral load in the infected areas.

The DST, in a release on Monday, said that it has released ₹1 crore to manufacture and scale up production of the new air purifier, named 'Scitech Airon', and

'Bag valve masks' pitched as alternatives to ventilators

IIT-Hyderabad scientists say the low-cost devices need to be manufactured on a war footing under the monitoring of a government task force

**AVADHANI R
SANGAREDDY**

B.S. Murty, Director of the Indian Institute of Technology - Hyderabad, has urged the government to consider the use of 'bag valve masks' as an alternative to meet any surge in demand for ventilators, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conventional ventilators are generally expensive, hard to produce and not portable, Prof. Murty said. He, along with V. Eswaran, Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, IIT-H, explained that 'bag valve masks' were small devices used to deliver breathing support in emergency situations. They are also known as 'ambu bags'.

The scientists said that 'bag valve masks' are currently hand-powered and therefore not suitable for

continuous use as a ventilator. But, they posited, this could easily be remedied by designing similar devices powered by an electrical source, which could be a car battery or conventional power supply. The devices would be made portable, and therefore easy to use in villages and other areas without

COVID-19

power supply and could be manufactured in bulk quite inexpensively.

"Our estimate is that it can be made for less than ₹5,000, or one-hundredth of the cost of a conventional machine. The cost is so low that it can be considered a single-use device that will be given over to a single patient, and never used again. It



Cheap and portable: Sample of a bag valve mask.

needs to be manufactured, however, on an industrial scale, in millions, within a short time of a few months. There have been several designs proposed within India itself, with IIT-H having at least one proposed design," Prof. Murty said.

The scientists said the idea was not new. In the past few weeks, many countries have

come up with the idea of manufacturing low-cost ventilators and have even initiated competitions where the winning design would be declared open-source. Several designs are already available for 3-D printing.

The scientists added a note of caution that some designs were untested and uncertified. They proposed that

How much do ventilators cost?

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

SANGAREDDY

A ventilator is a device designed to force breathable air into the lungs of patients who are unable to breathe for themselves.

Modern ventilators are expensive and sophisticated devices, which are generally found only in the ICUs

(intensive care units) of large hospitals.

The most sophisticated computer-controlled ventilators cost around ₹40 lakh while more modest ones cost around ₹15 lakh (made abroad) and Indian-made ventilators cost around ₹6 lakh each.

The Indian industry has a

manufacturing capacity of approximately 6,000 units per month, but even these devices use a lot of foreign-made parts whose availability is uncertain at a time when every country is focussed on its own ventilator production, scientists from IIT - Hyderabad said.

million patients would need the ventilators for around 21 days, thereby blocking that machine for at least that amount of time.

Even if the Indian industry was at peak production of ventilators, it could manufacture only another 60,000 machines in the next 10 months, at a cost of ₹3,600 crore, the scientists estimate.

the government (through the Department of Science and Technology or the Defence Research and Development Organisation or any other nodal organisation) constitute a task force, to oversee the production of low-cost devices within a limited time. The production rate would need to be of several lakh units per week, so the

preparation has to be done at a war-footing, under the scrutiny of the government.

High demand

The IIT scientists said that assuming a low 6% infection rate, 80 million people could get affected in India. Of these 80 million, at least 5% (4 million patients) would require ventilators. Each of these 4

Mizos stranded on bridge to Myanmar safe now

The group, including 11 children, had gone to the neighbouring country to visit relatives

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

Stranded in no man's land on a Bailey bridge between India and Myanmar for two nights, 28 inhabitants of Mizoram were brought back on Sunday night and quarantined.

The 50-foot bridge on the Tiau river connects Zokhawthar in Mizoram's Champhai district and Rih in Myanmar.

In August 2018, India opened an immigration checkpost at Zokhawthar, the State's second such facility along the border with Myanmar after Zorinpui in Lawngtlai district.

The 28 Mizos, including 11 children, had gone to Myanmar to visit relatives much before the border was sealed



Long ordeal: Families stranded on the Bailey bridge to Myanmar. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Affairs Department and Environment, Forest and Climate Change. "But the Assam Rifles personnel manning the border locked the Indian end of the gate too, forcing the men, women and children to spend two nights on the bridge with no food, shelter and toilet," Mr. Lalnuntluanga told *The Hindu* from Aizawl.

Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal and Home Minister Lalchandmnia intervened and let the Ministry of Home Affairs know "bringing the Mizo villagers was as important as flying resourceful Indians in from foreign lands".

The stranded group was released at 6 p.m. on Sunday and taken to a quarantine facility.

1971 war icon Chandan Singh is dead

The Air Vice Marshal was awarded a Maha Vir Chakra and a Vir Chakra

DINAKAR PERI

NEW DELHI Air Vice Marshal (AVM) Chandan Singh (retired), 95, who played a pivotal role in transport operations during the 1962 war between India and China, and who was instrumental in helicopter operations during the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh passed away on Sunday. He was decorated with a Maha Vir Chakra and a Vir Chakra.

"The man who flew us across the Meghna river in 1971 passed away at 12:00 hrs on Sunday at Jodhpur. With his passing away an icon to generations of officers has also departed, the like of whom only the fortunate can get to meet and know," said Major Chandrakant Singh, VrC, a decorated veteran of the 1971 war who knew AVM Singh very well and is the author of his upcoming biography.

"He also dropped AMX-13 tanks at Chushul in eastern Ladakh despite them being heavier than the carrying capacity of the AN-12 aircraft which slowed the advance of Chinese troops.

He was awarded Maha Vir Chakra for his role in the 1971 war when he was a Group Captain commanding an Air Force Station in the East.

He played a key role in helicopter operations to fer-

"How I wish he could have been there to see the release of his biography *A Cavalier in the Sky*, which has been scheduled for release in May," Maj. Singh said.

Vital supplies

AVM Singh was awarded the Vir Chakra for dropping vital supplies in the Chip Chap area in Ladakh during the 1962 war despite his aircraft being hit 19 times by enemy ground fire.



Air Vice Marshal Chandan Singh (retd.)

ry men and material, including over the pivotal Meghna river crossing which allowed the Indian Army to move swiftly to Dhaka.

The officer who was the brains behind all the helicopter and transport operations in the 1971 war in Bangladesh, including setting up the fledgling Bangladesh Air Force with one armed Chetak and an Otter. And the he-

li-lifts! Most important was jointmanship with Lt. Gen. Sagat Singh. Rest in Peace," AVM Manmohan Bahadur (retired), Additional Director, Centre for Air Power Studies, said on Twitter.

Aviation research

"After the 1962 war, AVM Singh helped raise the Aviation Research Centre (ARC) at Charbatia in Odisha from where secret missions were flown to Tibet," he stated.

AVM Singh was born on December 03, 1925 in Bagawas near Jodhpur and was commissioned as 2nd Lieutenant in the Jodhpur Lancers at the age of 16.

He fought in the Second World War with his regiment in Iraq, Persia, Egypt and Palestine and towards the end of the war, on the advice of Maharaja Umed Singh, he moved to the Royal Indian Air Force.

Van Gogh painting stolen in overnight raid

Thieves smashed a glass door to get into the museum in the Netherlands

ASSOCIATED PRESS

THE HAGUE A painting by Dutch master Vincent van Gogh was stolen in an overnight smash-and-grab raid on a museum that was closed to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, police and the museum said on Monday.

The painting has an estimated value of between €1 million to €6 million.

The Singer Laren Museum, based at Laren in the Netherlands, said that *The Parsonage Garden at Nuenen in Spring 1884* by the Dutch master was stolen in the early hours of Monday.

The museum's general director Evert van Os said the institution that houses the collection of American



Missing art: Vincent van Gogh's *Parsonage Garden at Nuenen in Spring*. ■ AFP/GRONINGER MUSEUM/MARTEN DE LEEUW

couple William and Anna Singer is "angry, shocked, sad" at the theft of the painting. The value of the work, which was on loan from the Groninger Museum in the northern Dutch city of Groningen, was not immediately known. Police are investigating the theft. "I'm shocked and

unbelievably annoyed that this has happened," said Singer Laren museum director Jan Rudolph de Lorm.

"It is very bad for the Groninger Museum, it is very bad for the Singer, but it is terrible for us all because art exists to be seen and shared by us, the

community, to enjoy to draw inspiration from and to draw comfort from, especially in these difficult times."

Police said in a statement that the thief or thieves smashed a glass door to get into the museum. That set off an alarm that sent officers rushing to the museum but by the time they got there the painting and whoever stole it was gone.

It is not the first high profile theft from the museum. In 2007, thieves stole seven works from its sculpture garden, including a bronze cast of *The Thinker* by Auguste Rodin. The famous sculpture was recovered a few days later, missing a leg.

CELEBRATING THE CHAMPS!

A BIG SHOUT OUT FOR THE REGIONAL WINNERS OF THE STEP ENGLISH OLYMPIAD 2019



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Grade	Rank	Name	School	Location
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	1 st Runner up	Arnav Modi	Shiv Nadar School	Faridabad
	2 nd Runner up	Samiddha Bhatia	Shiv Nadar School	Faridabad
4	Winner	Anjali Khartik	Gurukul Global School	Chandigarh
	1 st Runner up	Kavin Jindal	The Gurukul	Panchkula
	2 nd Runner up	Debangshi Dutta	Queen's Valley School	New Delhi
5	Winner	Sana Bose	Shiv Nadar School	Faridabad
	1 st Runner up	Nishka	Shiv Nadar School	Faridabad
	2 nd Runner up	Apoorva Singh	Fr. Agnel School	Gautam Buddha Nagar
6	Winner	Samaira G Singh	Sacred Heart Convent International School	Ludhiana
	1 st Runner up	Arjun Singh Kwatra	Sacred Heart Convent School	Ludhiana
	2 nd Runner up	Siya Saggi	Little Flower Convent School	Panchkula
7	Winner	Ananya Sinha	Shiv Nadar School	Gautam Buddha Nagar
	1 st Runner up	Rayirth Kundu	Shiv Nadar School	Faridabad
	2 nd Runner up	Agastya	Shiv Nadar School	Faridabad
8	Winner	Siddharth Shiv Kumar	Shiv Nadar School	Gautam Buddha Nagar
	1 st Runner up	Tvisha Raj	Shiv Nadar School	Gautam Buddha Nagar
	2 nd Runner up	Mrigank Bhatnagar	Fr. Agnel School	Gautam Buddha Nagar
9	Winner	Ayushi Aggarwal	Bal Bharati Public School	New Delhi
	1 st Runner up	Disha Pant	Shiv Nadar School	Gautam Buddha Nagar
	2 nd Runner up	Arvik Anand	Shiv Nadar School	Faridabad
10	Winner	Radhika Suresh	G D Goenka Signature School	Gurgaon
	1 st Runner up	Madhav Gupta	The Gurukul	Panchkula
	2 nd Runner up	Priyanshu Biswal	Pragyan School	Gautam Buddha Nagar

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