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India has sufficient hydroxychloroquine stocks, says Centre  
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British Prime Minister Boris Johnson out of intensive care unit  
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## NEARBY



Sonia concerned over low COVID-19 testing

NEW DELHI  
Reviewing the Congress's efforts to provide relief to people hit by the COVID-19 lockdown, party president Sonia Gandhi on Friday expressed concern over the low testing and shortage of testing facilities. She agreed on a Corona Action Strategy that will seek to utilise the network of party workers.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 8

## 23 members of a family in Siwan test positive

PATNA  
As many as 23 members of a family in a village in Bihar's Siwan district have tested positive for COVID-19, taking the total number of cases in the district to 29. The borders of Siwan, Begusarai and Nawada districts have been sealed by the State administration.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 9

## Bengal Chemicals gets COVID-19 drug boost

KOLKATA  
In an overnight decision, Bengal Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals Ltd. was issued a licence to manufacture hydroxychloroquine, an anti-malarial drug that is being used in the treatment of COVID-19, on Friday.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 11

# No evidence of community transmission: Health Ministry

States cite surge to extend lockdown; death toll across country climbs to 206

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The Union Health Ministry on Friday denied evidence of community transmission (CT) of COVID-19 while reporting at least 700 new cases since Thursday evening. The nationwide death toll from the epidemic touched 206, and the Ministry confirmed 6,761 positive cases.

The Ministry's response follows an Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) report on Thursday of nearly month-long surveillance of 5,911 randomly chosen samples of patients who exhibited Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI), whom 104 tested positive for COVID-19.

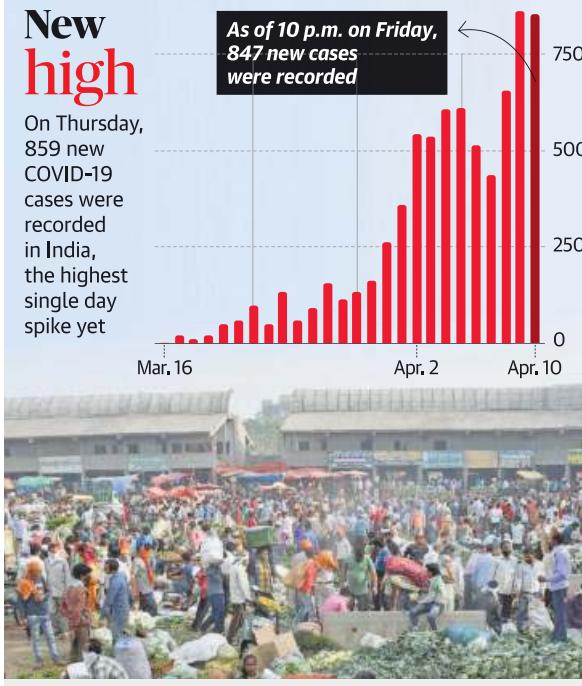
### COVID-19

All but two were tested between March 21-April 2 and 40 had no history of international travel or contact with someone with travel history but had picked up the infection, indicating community transmission, the ICMR said.

Over the last few weeks, there have been reports from several States of people testing positive but who were unable to explain the possible source of the infection. However, the Health Ministry has consistently

### New high

On Thursday, 859 new COVID-19 cases were recorded in India, the highest single day spike yet



No distancing: A jostling crowd at the Keshpur vegetable market in West Delhi on Friday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

maintained that this was not evidence for CT.

Health Ministry spokesperson Lav Agrawal said all of the cases of SARI were from districts where there were confirmed cases of the disease and that travel histories of those SARI patients were being investigated. "We'll be the first ones to tell if you if such transmission has begun," he said.

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STAGE FRIGHT ▶ EDITORIAL

MORE REPORTS ON PAGES ▶ 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 12

### Have enough facilities, says Harsh Vardhan

India is unlikely to face an "unmanageable crisis" from COVID-19, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said at an online conference in New Delhi. Should matters deteriorate, India had enough infrastructure to tide over, he said. "We have 500 dedicated COVID hospitals, 2,00,000 beds across hospitals and 50,000 ICU beds." ▶ PAGE 9

### 70 health staff in Bhopal test positive

As many as 20 health workers, including two doctors, tested positive for COVID-19 in Bhopal on Friday, taking the number of the affected staff in all to 70 in the city, according to the district administration. On the day, the patients' tally in Bhopal soared to 119 as 24 fresh cases were reported. Health workers make up 59% of the cases in the city. ▶ PAGE 9

# + India pounds LoC terror launchpads, Pak. Army sites

Villagers forced to flee firing, despite COVID-19 lockdown

### PEERZADA ASHIQ SRINAGAR

The Army on Friday said it had inflicted heavy damage on the Pakistani army's gun areas and terrorist launchpads after unprovoked ceasefire violation by the "enemy side" in two areas along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir.

A defence spokesperson said the Army retaliated "effectively and strongly" to the ceasefire violation in Keran sector in Kupwara district in the afternoon.

Police officials said Pakistan had violated the ceasefire in Uri area of Baramulla district as well.

The heavy exchange of fire amid the ongoing lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic forced scores of villagers living along the LoC



On guard: BSF jawans at the international border near Jammu on Friday. ■ PTI

in Kupwara to shift their families to safer locations.

Nazir Ahmad Khatana, a resident of Panzgam, said he had to shift his family to Kupwara town after artillery shells and bullets hit his village in the morning.

"The whole world is battling the coronavirus. This is the time to allow people to be safe in their houses rather than sending them in hordes looking for shelters," he said. Following the firing, Internet was suspended in Kupwara district.

### 'Bid to disrupt peace'

Director General of Police (DGP), Kashmir, Dilbag Singh said it was condemnable that when the entire world was coming together to fight the pandemic, Pakistan and its sponsored terrorists were making attempts to disrupt peace.

The shelling comes days after a gunfight between the Army and infiltrators resulted in the death of five elite paratroopers and an equal number of infiltrators.

A worker spraying disinfectant on a street in Dilshad Garden. ■ FILE PHOTO

Out of the 11 points that lead to the sector of Dilshad Garden which reported most cases, nine were completely shut with police barricades. Neither vehicles nor pedestrians were allowed, including for essential services.

Each of the 123 medical teams surveyed around 50 homes and asked a set of questions.

Any person who met the patient zero's family was quarantined or shifted to the GTB hospital for medical treatment and testing.

In a massive operation by the Delhi government jointly with Delhi Police, all the people who came in touch with the area's 'patient zero' were traced and quarantined, and curfew was imposed in Dilshad Garden and Old Seemabpuri after a Mohalla Clinic doctor who had come in contact with the patient tested positive.

First SHIELD spot  
"I feared a massive COVID-19 outbreak in the Dilshad Garden area after seven persons were found positive. It was transmitted from an infected woman who had returned from Saudi Arabia. Thereafter Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal issued instructions for the implementation of Oper-



A worker spraying disinfectant on a street in Dilshad Garden. ■ FILE PHOTO

nounced by the government recently, which went up to 30 on Friday.

### First SHIELD spot

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ation SHIELD. Dilshad Garden was the first area where it was rolled out," said Health Minister Satyendar Jain.

"As many as 123 medical teams screened more than 15,000 people living in 4,032 houses. The hard work of the health officials and the successful implementation of Operation SHIELD made Dilshad Garden coronavirus-free," he said.

### Sealing, contact tracing

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Sharing tasks  
At just 43, Yachang Tacho of Salang village in Upper Subansiri district, Arunachal Pradesh, is a rare exception. "The population of

the 'containment zones' an-

### Field day



New threat: Pigeons hovering over a wheat field on the outskirts of Mohali in Punjab on Friday. These birds feast on the crop, which is yet to be harvested owing to shortage of farm workers due to the COVID-19 lockdown. ■ AKHILESH KUMAR

### Ready to help Indians return: UAE

#### KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE SUHASINI HAIDAR NEW DELHI

Responding to India's concerns, the United Arab Emirates has offered to fly stranded Indian nationals who want to return home in view of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ambassador Ahmed Al Banna told *The Hindu* on Friday that the government of UAE has decided to help all countries fly their citizens home after the completion of the necessary medical tests.

"We have reached out to all foreign governments to repatriate their nationals including testing them before they leave and if found positive to treat them here. A note verbale to all embassies was sent seeking the help of all governments," said Dr. Al Banna.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

# 'Not one case from Dilshad Garden in 10 days'

Delhi govt. claims to have halted community spread of COVID-19 in the area

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

"Operation SHIELD", announced by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday to counter the community spread of the novel coronavirus, has succeeded in its objective in north-east Delhi's Dilshad Garden, the State government has claimed a day later.

There have been no cases reported from the Dilshad Garden area in the last 10 days, the AAP government said in a statement, terming it the first instance of "successful implementation" of the initiative based on sealing, home quarantine, isolation and tracking, ensuring supply of essentials, local sanitisation and door-to-door checking.

At least four pockets in Dilshad Garden were among the 'containment zones' an-

tion SHIELD. Dilshad Garden was the first area where it was rolled out," said Health Minister Satyendar Jain.

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At just 43, Yachang Tacho of Salang village in Upper Subansiri district, Arunachal Pradesh, is a rare exception. "The population of

# Red army keeps virus at bay in northeast

Unmindful of risks, village elders work with govt.

### RAHUL KARMAKAR GUWAHATI

A 'red army' of wise old men and women are helping villages across some hill States in the northeast keep the novel coronavirus away.

Though a majority of those felled by the COVID-19 pandemic are aged 60 years or more, this hasn't stopped the *gaon buras* (male village elder) and *gaon buris* (female village elder) – usually referred to as GBs – from following their predecessors in forming a shield between the villages and the enemy – in this case, the virus.

The village elders across the States are distinguished by their red coats provided by the government, which also pays them a stipend of ₹1,500 per month.



In charge: Village elders putting up a barricade at Salang village in Arunachal Pradesh. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

"The villagers look up to us in times of crisis as well as happiness. It is our duty to ensure their safety and liaise with the government agencies for guidelines and in maintaining order," said Tanim Mibang, one of the three GBs of Lileng village in Arunachal Pradesh's Siang district.

GBs are appointed, prescribes the 35-60 age slab. A majority of Arunachal Pradesh's estimated 9,500 GBs are 60 or more. A head *gaon bura*, who supervises five GBs, is usually older. Talom Tamut, who Mr. Mibang reports to, is 80 years old.

### Sharing tasks

Mr. Mibang is 64, although the Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation of 1945, under which

a village decides the number of GBs. During epidemics and disasters, we put our heads together to decide what is best for the villagers and share the responsibilities," he told *The Hindu*.

Imnakumba Longchar, 59, of Khensu village in Mokokchung district of Nagaland, plays a similar role. "Keeping everyone calm is a major challenge," he said.

Assisting the GBs in Nagaland are the *dobashi*, the custodians of Naga customary laws who also wear red coats. They have been salaried government employees since 1842 when the British appointed the



**Same city, different faces:** St. James Church at Kashmere Gate wears a deserted look on Good Friday as prayers were not conducted due to the ongoing lockdown; people flock to Keshopur Subzi Mandi on Friday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA / SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

## IN BRIEF

### Losses led to lay-offs, says NY-based company

GURUGRAM  
In response to a report by *The Hindu* on retrenchment of hundreds of its employees in India, Fareportal, a New York-based online travel agency, on Friday said the company had suffered huge losses due to COVID-19 that led to lay-offs.

### Greater synergy among stakeholders crucial: CAIT

NEW DELHI  
Traders' body CAIT on Friday called for the need for coordination among stakeholders of essential commodities to ensure uninterrupted supply of essential goods. It said that a broad-base effort with the participation of stakeholders like wholesale traders, retailers, manufacturers, transporters, raw material producers and other intermediaries is crucial.

### Containment zone order: residents call for review

ASHOK KUMAR  
GURUGRAM

Less than 24 hours after the district administration declared nine places as 'containment zones' here, the Nirvana Country Resident Welfare Association (RWA) has sought the review of the order, saying the township had no fresh case since almost three weeks.

Two persons had tested positive for COVID-19 before March 19 in the apartments and both have now recovered. There have been no fresh cases since then. So the decision to declare the township a 'containment zone' came as a surprise. We have approached the offices of Deputy Commissioner and the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram Commissioner to seek review," said Nirvana Country RWA president Alok Bansal.

## Online delivery platforms go on a hiring spree to meet rising demand

Grofers and BigBasket are planning to add 15,000 people to their workforce

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Online grocery delivery platforms, Grofers and BigBasket, are ramping up their workforce as demand went "off the charts" during the 21-day nation-wide lockdown. The two companies together plan to hire about 15,000 people for delivery as well as for working at their warehouses.

"The last three weeks have been hectic for all of us here at Grofers. For starters, we saw demand go off the charts. We are very proud that over the last three weeks we have been able to deliver essential groceries to over 1 million households in 22 cities," Abinder Dhindsa, CEO at Grofers said in a blog.

While the company has already hired about 2,000 people from industries that have been impacted by the current crisis such as textile, manufacturing, and services, Mr. Dhindsa said they are looking to hire 5,000 more



An employee of an online platform delivering goods to a customer in the city. ■ REUTERS

people over the next two weeks.

Likewise, BigBasket is looking to hire about 10,000 more people as delivery executives and to work at their warehouses. "BigBasket continues to see a large increase in demand. However, the company is facing a shortage of warehouse and delivery staff to service this demand. Therefore, BigBasket is stepping up its recruiting efforts for delivery executives and warehouse staff so that it can

serve more customers while also providing employment to people," it said.

### Employment to needy

Tanuja Tewari, Vice President-Human Resources, BigBasket, pointed out, "...with many workers staying home or going back to their villages and towns, we now require people to service this demand. This is why we are hiring delivery and warehouse personnel, and this will work two ways. We will be able to

While we will try our hardest, I don't think we will be able to serve 100 million urban households in the immediate future

ABINDER DHINDSA  
CEO at Grofers

service more customers and also provide employment to those who need it the most at the moment."

As per Mr. Dhindsa, online grocery is only about 0.2% of the overall retail market and by the end of this crisis will probably reach 0.5%, but that is still an insignificant share. "While we will try our hardest, I don't think we will be able to serve 100 million urban households in the immediate future," he said.

He added that everyday Grofers application is seeing over 1.5 million people trying to order. However, given the constraints, they are able to serve one out of eight customers.

## 2 sanitisation tunnels installed at gates of Azadpur Mandi

More such units will be set up depending on success: Rai

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The Delhi government on Friday installed two sanitisation tunnels at the gates of Azadpur Mandi, Asia's largest wholesale market, to contain the spread of COVID-19.

Every person entering the market will have to go through the tunnel and get sanitised in the process. Development Minister Gopal Rai said such machines would be installed at all the *mandis* of Delhi depending on the success of the system at Azadpur.

"The Azadpur Mandi is functional as it supplies essential items to the entire Delhi. The Delhi government has installed two full-body sanitisation machines at the gates of the *mandi*. Every person entering and exiting the *mandi* will have to pass through these machines. This will protect the people from COVID-19 infection," Mr. Rai said.

"The machines have been



A man walks through a sanitisation tunnel at Azadpur Mandi on Friday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

### COVID-19

employed there wore masks. Measures were also being put in place to educate and sensitise people at the market and to ensure that they are not hungry. "I have instructed all labourers and traders to wear masks. The Delhi government is distributing masks among people here. To sensitise the workers here, we are distributing pamphlets and disinfectants are being sprayed at the *mandi* daily. We are also providing morning and evening meals to the drivers and labourers," he said.

### Other measures

Mr. Rai said that special attention will be given to cleanliness at the market apart from ensuring that those visiting the *mandi* or

## Jamia forms panel on mental health

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Vice-Chancellor of Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) Najma Akhtar has constituted a Mental Health and Counselling Committee (MHCC) to facilitate the mental health and well-being of students.

The committee will provide psycho-social support to the students staying on campus or outside during and after COVID-19 outbreak.

The 13-member panel will meet for weekly face-to-face or online consultation till the COVID-19 threat persists.

## AICCTU getting over a dozen calls on job loss

'They are mostly from IT firms'

### ASHOK KUMAR GURUGRAM

Just a little over two weeks in lockdown due to Coronavirus scare, the All-India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU) office at Delhi has been getting more than a dozen calls on job losses daily.

"I got calls from Chennai and Noida on Friday. There was another call from a man sacked from a company in Gurugram's Udyog Vihar. He had been working with the company for almost ten years," said Mr. Prakash, adding the employees were being terminated in tens and hundreds. He said that State units of the AICCTU had also been receiving similar calls.

Saying that it could just be a tip of the iceberg, Mr. Prakash, an advocate, said that in most of the cases the employees were being forced to tender resignations with the threat of poor remarks in their relieving letters.

## 13 out of 37 ration shops found closed: DRAA report

6 shops claimed to have run out of stock

### STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

A report published by the Delhi Rozi Roti Adhikar Abhiyan on Friday said that 13 out of 37 ration shops inspected by volunteers were found closed during working hours while six of the shops claimed to have run out of stock.

"Around 35% of the ration shops were closed when we visited during the working hours. Only 18 out of the 24 shops which were open were found to be distributing grains to ration

cardholders. The remaining shops stated that they had finished their stock," the DRAA said in its report.

Stating that the issue of shops claiming that stocks are over needed investigation by the Food Department, the report said, "For some of the shops which stated that stocks were over, we could locate cardholders who had not yet received their ration even though the online website shows their ration had been dispatched to the shops."

Colleges were called upon

## DU asks colleges to prepare for admissions

Focus on making it completely online; colleges told to declare category-wise seats

### STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

Principals of Delhi University colleges were on Thursday called upon to make preparations for admissions to the academic year 2020-21, with a focus on efforts to make the process entirely online, given the current situation.

In a letter to principals, the admissions branch noted that it was working towards ensuring the smooth conduct of the common entrance examination, DUET2020, and for student-friendly merit-based admissions in the university.

Colleges were called upon



to make various preparations, including, uploading all necessary information pertaining to the college, on its website, constituting a "strong admission team", to come out with a comprehensive list of frequently asked questions (FAQs) related to the college and various

courses offered by it, along with a list of general electives made available and to form a team of student volunteers who could remain available during the admissions to help answer queries pertaining to it.

The letter also highlighted that the university had implemented the first phase of expansion on account of 10% reservation for EWS seats in the academic session 2019-2020 and that the second phase of this would be carried out in the upcoming academic session. To cater to this, the university has asked colleges to declare the cate-

gory-wise seats in each course on its website.

While the university has attempted to minimise student visits for verification of documents during admissions, it said that in the current scenario, efforts had to be made to have the complete admission process take place online.

Meanwhile, on Thursday, DU postponed all university exams, including theory and practicals for students of Regular Colleges, School of Open Learning, Non-Collegiate Women Education Board and Ex-Students, until further notice.

## Sports off his mind, world no. 3 para-shuttler is busy containing virus

As Gautam Buddha Nagar DM, Suhas L.Y.'s priorities are to stop transmission of COVID-19 and give best facilities to affected

### UTHRA GANESAN NEW DELHI

Sportspersons across the world are trying to stay fit in uncertain times. Suhas Lalnaker Yathiraj, though, has no time to think about the Olympics.

The world no. 3 para-shuttler in SL4 category has his hands full as the newly-appointed District Magistrate (DM) of Gautam Buddha (GB) Nagar, a hotspot of COVID-19 and comprising areas including Noida, Greater Noida and Dadri, many of which have now been sealed.

"You can say energy and enthusiasm are common factors in my two roles but sports is not even in the remotest corner of my mind. Right now, I am only concentrating on what I



Suhas L.Y.  
Engineering – to use.

### Tech-savvy

"I was not much into social media but being tech-savvy is important. It is important to communicate to people not only information but also efforts that all officers put in. We now have over 600 beds available even

though the cases are not that high. We also have a dedicated call centre in association with HCL, probably the best in any district across the country with 30 hunting lines and trained professionals. There

is a dedicated team for containment and awareness. I am planning to get my personal twitter handle for the first time today for better communication," he revealed.

There are other experiences he has been drawing from, including the Kumbh Mela last year. As then DM of Prayagraj, Mr. Suhas had come in for praise from all quarters for handling the massive exercise. "To be honest, that experience actually helps a lot. The only difference is that we had time then, now time is not on our side. But in terms of scale, preparing for disaster management and decisions we have to take on the go – the Kumbh Mela has given a lot of

learning points. "You are working amidst unpredictability which is same in Kumbh Mela and here. Although we wish and hope everything will be fine, we don't know what will happen tomorrow. The situation is always fluid. There also you had to get work done from the team, here also. Most importantly, just like Kumbh Mela is not only hosted by the administration but is a people-centric event, here also the fight is not by the DM but has to be fought by every single citizen."

"Then again, every challenge is unique. Wisdom is to know what you don't know. Every day is a new match and needs to be handled as such," he explained.

job losses. He said these calls were besides the large number of calls about job loss at the lower level.

"I got calls from Chennai and Noida on Friday. There was another call from a man sacked from a company in Gurugram's Udyog Vihar. He had been working with the company for almost ten years," said Mr. Prakash, adding the employees were being terminated in tens and hundreds. He said that State units of the AICCTU had also been receiving similar calls.

Saying that it could just be a tip of the iceberg, Mr. Prakash, an advocate, said that in most of the cases the employees were being forced to tender resignations with the threat of poor remarks in their relieving letters.

**Timings**

DELHI

SATURDAY, APR. 11
RISE 06:00 SET 18:45
RISE 22:31 SET 08:28
SUNDAY, APR. 12
RISE 05:59 SET 18:46
RISE 23:35 SET 09:18
MONDAY, APR. 13
RISE 05:58 SET 18:46
RISE 00:00 SET 10:10

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	36	17
Safdarjung	36	17
Palam	37	18

**Delhi Palam Today**  
36°C A dry and warm weather with mainly clear sky to prevail during the day. Night will be pleasant.

**Delhi Palam Tomorrow**  
38°C A dry and warm weather with mainly clear sky to prevail during the day. Night will be pleasant.

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**THE HINDU**

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Air quality of Delhi-NCR		
Delhi 118	Gurugram 104	
Ghaziabad 115	Faridabad 117	
Noida 93	Greater Noida 101	
Good 0-50	Satisfactory 51-100	Moderate 101-200
Poor 201-300	Very poor 301-400	Severe >401
AIR QUALITY INDEX AT 4 P.M. YESTERDAY (AVERAGE OF PAST 24 HOURS) [SOURCE: CPCB]		

**IN BRIEF****Wanted criminals held after exchange of fire**

NEW DELHI Two persons, who were wanted in 12 criminal cases, including murder and armed robbery, have been arrested after an exchange of fire in Outer Delhi's Narela on Thursday night, the police said on Friday. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer) Dr. A. Koan said the accused have been identified as Pankaj Dabas alias Chitta (25) and Ajay alias Mota (30).

**Tiwari discusses ration distribution with AAP MP**  
NEW DELHI The BJP state chief Manoj Tiwari on Friday discussed alleged issues related to the distribution of ration to citizens who fall below the poverty line with AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh. There are millions of people in Delhi who fall below the poverty line who have applied for ration cards in the last 5 years but still have not got their ration card, Mr. Tiwari claimed.

**HC tells govt. to release undertrial prisoners**

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI The Delhi High Court has ordered the city government to release undertrial prisoners (UTPs), who are unable to furnish surety bond, on their furnishing a personal bond to decongest jails during COVID-19 lockdown.

An HC Bench gave the order taking into consideration recommendation of a High Powered Committee (HPC). The D.G. (Prisons) had apprised the HPC that there are large number of UTPs who have been granted bail by different Sessions Courts and Courts of Magistrates, but they are still in jail, for want of sureties owing to the restriction in movement due to the lockdown.

"In consonance with the recommendation of the HPC, we further clarify that this order should not be construed as changing any other condition if any imposed in the bail orders aforesaid passed by this Court or by any Court subordinate to it," the Bench said.

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# Govt. plans for pan-city containment

Eight more areas have been sealed across the city; two more deaths and 183 new cases reported

JATIN ANAND  
NEW DELHI

Two deaths and 183 new COVID-19 cases were reported in Delhi on Friday, taking the toll to 14 and total cases to 903. This is the largest single-day jump in cases since April 2 when 141 cases were reported.

Meanwhile, sources said that the Delhi government is working on a plan to enforce pan-city containment in case there is community spread of COVID-19.

According to the Delhi government, the city is still seeing local infections.



Security personnel patrolling the street of a containment zone in east Delhi on Friday.

• SANDEEP SAXENA

**Thirty zones**

In the evening, the Delhi government added eight more areas to the list of containment zones, including Zakir Nagar, Nabi Karim and Chandni Mahal. There are now a total of 30 such zones in the Capital.

Chief Secretary Vijay Dev on Friday reviewed the situation at 22 containment

zones, including stretches in Malviya Nagar, Nizamuddin, Dwarka, Jahangirpuri, Moti Bagh and Bengali Market.

"Multiple agencies are involved in the containment process and a standard operating procedure is being chalked out for several possibilities revolving around the epidemic and community

spreading - both in parts of the city as well as all across the Capital," said a government source.

According to the government, Delhi Police has been directed to ensure containment in the areas through adequate barricading and deployment to prevent any "unauthorised movement of

persons." The police are also being assisted by Civil Defence volunteers.

Surveillance of these containment zones will be carried out by a dedicated team with the help of the Surveillance App, which has been developed for real-time monitoring of residents.

A dedicated helpline for

## Govt. releases ₹3.6 crore for construction workers

Over 7,000 get assistance of ₹5,000 each

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

NEW DELHI

The Delhi government has released assistance of ₹5,000 for 7,242 construction workers engaged in the city, who had applied for registration but their applications were pending with the Delhi Labour Welfare Board in the second phase, it said on Friday.

In this regard, the government claimed to have released ₹3.6 crore. A week ago, it had given the assistance amount to 32,358 registered construction workers. The money is being transferred directly to the account of these labourers.

Amid the surge in cases of the COVID-19 in Delhi, Chief

**Minister Arvind Kejriwal**

had announced several measures, including doubling pension under various pension schemes of the government, free ration for 71 lakh beneficiaries and free food in the night shelters across the city.

**'Double the pension'**

The government has also decided to double the pension under the widow pension scheme for 2.5 lakh beneficiaries, the old-age pension scheme for 5 lakh beneficiaries and disability pension scheme for 1 lakh beneficiaries. The beneficiaries have already started getting the amount that is their due, the government added.

## COVID-19 victims to get Waqf Board graveyard

Board CEO writes to govt. on the matter

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

NEW DELHI

The Delhi Waqf Board on Thursday designated one of its graveyards to bury those who die from COVID-19. The Board's Chief Executive Officer, SM Ali, wrote to the Delhi government in this regard.

According to the Board, the Jaded Qurstaan graveyard near Millennium Park has been earmarked for burying COVID-19 patients which has been designated the "COVID-19 graveyard".

**'A hard time'**  
"As you are aware that we are facing a hard time due to the spread of COVID-19

and its effects...one major problem faced by the public is to pay the last rights if COVID victims. It has been reported that due to the lack of information the general public is not allowing burial of the victim of Corona in graveyards of Delhi, which is unfortunate [sic]," he wrote.

"In order to facilitate the last right of COVID victim the office of DBW is pleased to designate one of its graveyard as 'COVID-19 graveyard' [SIC]," he ADDED.

According to government sources, however, no such arrangements have been made for, or at, cremation grounds so far.

## DDA has tough time maintaining parks in city

**STAFF REPORTER**

NEW DELHI

With the nationwide lockdown having been imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) said it was having certain issues with maintenance of parks as only the gardeners and security staff living in close proximity to the parks were able to carry out the work.

While access to all parks under the urban body have been closed in a bid to prevent people from gathering there, senior DDA officials said that the threat of plants dying continued as all were not being taken care of regularly.

The security guards and a couple of gardeners stay in close proximity to some of the parks. So they are the ones who are looking after the parks these days. No deployment as such has been done for this purpose," said a senior DDA official.

The official added that restrictions on transport was resulting in several of the staff not being able to reach the designated parks.

"The gardeners, who were trying to reach the parks, have been stopped by policemen on several occasions. Then we arranged for letters which mentioned they are associated with essential services, under relevant clauses. We are also not forcing anyone to come. All payments will be made. The plants, however, will be at a risk of dying, if not maintained regularly," the official added.



A video grab from a drone in Old Delhi. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

said.  
In Shahdara district, DCP D.K. Gupta said three drones were used in five sealed areas, including Pratap Khand, Dilshad Garden and GTB Enclave, for surveillance and to ensure that residents don't step out without a mask or roam around.

"Koi bhi shaks bina kisi zaroorat ke apne gharon se bahar na nikle kyunki ye poori colony seal kardi gaya hai... agar koi bahar nazar aaya to uske khilaaf sakte se karwahi ki jaegi [No one should step out of their house because the colony has been sealed. If anyone steps out, strict action will be taken]," the drones announced.

"In all these areas, 12 per-

sons were found to have tested positive for COVID-19. Ten teams are working round the clock to ensure people follow sealing guidelines and 12 pickets have also been put up. In the district, FIRs have been registered against 14 people for roaming around and not wearing masks," Mr. Gupta said.

**In other districts**

In other districts of Delhi as well, drones were used for surveillance and police said a total of 137 cases were registered against persons for not wearing masks in different districts and only one case was registered against a person in connection with Shab-e-Baraat in South Delhi's Mehrauli.

## FIR against man for violating quarantine

He, his family tested positive for COVID-19

**STAFF REPORTER**

NEW DELHI

The police have registered an FIR against a man who allegedly attended a religious gathering in the city last month and hid his travel history. The village in west Delhi where he stays has been declared a containment zone, officials said on Friday.

The man, his wife and son have been hospitalised after testing positive for COVID-19, officials said, adding that the man was a former councillor while his wife is a councillor.

During physical verification of home-quarantined people, a man who was supposed to keep at his house was not present at his residence, said officials.

**Went to religious event**  
A senior police officer said that upon further questioning and analysing call de-

tails it was discovered that he had visited a religious event.

Even during repeated medical and police enquiry, he withheld this fact and did not disclose it to the authorities, he added.

The man jeopardised the health of his local community and family members. Due to this, the village has been declared a containment zone.

A case under Sections 188 (for disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) and 269 (negligent act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life) of the Indian Penal Code, and relevant sections of Epidemic Diseases Act has been registered at the Chhawla police station.

**COVID-19**

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grievance redressal is also being set up.

Officials from the Department of Food and Supply have been mandated to ensure smooth supply of essential goods and services to the residents while the civic bodies have been asked to undertake cleaning and sanitisation of the entire area.

The Chief District Medical Officer of the area has been directed to enforce medical regulations, check residents as per protocol, conduct medical tests, quarantine suspected people and carry out house-to-house surveillance of suspected cases, according to the office of the Chief Secretary. The containment plan will be reviewed based on experience and field inputs, officials from Mr. Dev's office said.

Meanwhile, the Delhi government has prohibited all gatherings and processions, especially religious ones, during festivals in April to curb outbreak of COVID-19.

## Life in containment zone tough for residents of rural areas, slums

**COVID-19 toll rises to 11 in Punjab**

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHANDIGARH

One more COVID-19 patient died in Punjab on Friday, taking the tally to 11, according to a State government statement.

The health department said one patient, hailing from Jalandhar, who tested positive, died on April 10. As many as 21 new cases were reported from the State, taking the total of COVID-19 positive cases to 151, it added.

The government, meanwhile, has made it mandatory for the people to wear masks in public places to check the spread of the virus.

Health Director Avneet Kaur said anyone coming out of their homes for official or other essential work would have to wear a cloth or triple-layer mask, violation of which would be punishable under the law.

## Rajasthan announces financial assistance for 'corona warriors'

The Centre had announced a ₹50 lakh insurance cover for front-line health workers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
JAIPUR

In a major decision to help out "corona warriors", the Congress government in Rajasthan on Friday announced a financial assistance of ₹50 lakh to the next of kin on the death of an employee performing the duties for controlling the COVID-19 pandemic. The Centre had earlier announced a ₹50 lakh insurance cover solely for the frontline health workers.

Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot said the State government had expanded the purview of assistance to include regular and contractual employees as well as those getting honorarium for their work. The provision will cover all municipal and health workers, home guards, civil



A medical team in curfew-bound Walled City of Jaipur on Friday. • ROHIT JAIN PARAS

defence staff, Anganwadi centre workers and accredited social health activists.

Mr. Gehlot said at a video-conferencing with trade and industry representatives here that the State government would take an "appropriate decision" on lifting the lockdown while taking into account the issue of sav-

ing people's lives. He said traders were playing an important role in maintaining the supply chain of essential commodities.

The State government also imposed a ban on spitting at public places after chewing of betel leaf, gutka and tobacco products to contain the spread of COVID-19. A

notification of Medical & Health Department stated that this act would invite penal action under Section 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) of Indian Penal Code.

Additional Chief Secretary (Medical & Health) Rohit Kumar Singh said police officers performing duty in the curfew-bound areas, where COVID-19 positive cases had been detected, would be given measured doses of hydroxychloroquine for protection against infection. This had been recommended by the National Task Force for COVID-19, he said.

The number of COVID-19 positive cases in the State soared to 520 on Friday with 57 more cases detected in eight districts as well the Army's facilities.

Introducing Dogra mo-

narch Maharaja Gulab Singh in 1872, the 'Durbar move' would see shifting of the Civil Secretariat in summers from Jammu to Srinagar and in winters from Srinagar to Jammu. In January 1987, the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had asked then Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah to stop the practice. However, the 'Durbar move' was continued to allow it to at as a bridge between two diverse cultures of the Kashmir Valley and the Jammu region.

**Sanitation drive**  
Meanwhile, the Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) has been directed to carry out extensive sanitation and fumigation drives in the Civil Secretariat in Srinagar, where the offices will open after six month break on May 4.

The J&K administration de-

cision to halt the 'Durbar Move' comes as COVID-19 cases shows an upward trend in the Union Territory. Jammu & Kashmir on Friday crossed the 200 mark, with 23 more samples testing positive.

"The total positive cases in J&K is 207, as 23 more cases were reported. Jammu has 39 and Kashmir 168 such cases," said J&K government spokesperson Rohit Kansal.

Among the fresh cases are seven non-local members of the Tablighi Jamaat, who were in touch with a Chattabali man who has already tested positive for COVID-19.

Deputy Commissioner, Srinagar, Shahid Iqbal Choudhary said that detection of eight more positive cases in Srinagar should not panic locals. "This is a classic tracing success story," he said.

## Virus halts J&K's 'Durbar move' for the first time in 144 years

23 new cases reported in the Union Territory on Friday

PEERZADA ASHIQ  
SRINAGAR

For the first time in 144 years, the J&K administration has decided to halt the annual shifting of the capital, called 'Durbar move', from Jammu to Srinagar in J&K due to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, as 23 fresh positive cases pushed the total in the Union Territory to 207.

"In view of the extraordinary circumstances due to COVID-19 pandemic, the Civil Secretariat at Jammu shall continue to remain functional and the 'Durbar move' employees shall work on 'as is where is' basis. It will allow Kashmir-based staff to work from Srinagar and Jammu-based staff shall work from Jammu," said an order issued by the General Administra-

tion Department in Jammu. Introducing Dogra mo-

## 'Not all soldiers carry weapons, some carry stethoscopes'

Dealing with COVID-19 has brought back the nobility of the profession, say doctors in Indore

SIDHARTH YADAV  
BHOJPAL

Just before entering the COVID-19 ward, Gaurav Jain double checks his personal protective equipment (PPE) – the mask is set, check. The gloves are in place, check. The face shield is intact, check.

"Of course at some level we are scared too," said Dr. Jain, a second-year junior resident of the Department of Respiratory Medicine at the Sri Aurobindo Medical College and Postgraduate Institute, Indore, one of the COVID-19 hospitals treating 125 patients. "Doctors may run out of equipment, but we are never going to run out of love and compassion we are receiving from everyone now."



Doctors at the Sri Aurobindo Medical College and Postgraduate Institute, Indore. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

When the stream of cases trickled in around March-end, the department's doctors, including junior residents, were caught unawares. "We didn't expect it. Many of us don't have that kind of skill. We are learning

every day," said Dr. Jain, who belongs to Gwalior district. He felt insecure. "We didn't know how to handle it."

The junior most resident, Jyoti Jaiswal, 26, was thrilled to take on a greater responsibility of being at the front-

dine. "Seniors have my back. They've said if I have doubts during night duty, when there are no consultants, I could call them any time," said Dr. Jaiswal.

Eventually, as different departments of the hospital teamed up and divided responsibilities, it eased some pressure. Others can screen patients, start treatment based on the protocol and check oxygen levels.

"Whereas we can guide treatment. Even minuscule contributions count. It's teamwork after all. Not all soldiers carry weapons, some carry stethoscope," said Dr. Jain.

"Dealing with COVID-19 has brought back the nobility of the profession which

was clouded in professionalism. It has given back the profession its lost charm. We are getting to fulfil our dream of serving humanity," said Ravi Dosi, 39, who heads the department, and is faced with an employee refusing to return to hospital fearing infection these days.

**'Scared for our families'**  
Dr. Dosi admitted not a single day went by when he wasn't scared, but not for himself. "We are more scared for our families. At times, you see patients pass away on ventilators in seconds and have nightmares of the same happening to you. How devastating it will be for our families. But we have to remain optimistic."

## Odisha to scale up testing

Advanced facility will test about 1,000 samples per day

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
BHUBANESWAR

Odisha is all set to scale up COVID-19 testing with the Regional Medical Research Centre (RMRC), Bhubaneswar, readying an advanced testing facility to test about 1,000 samples a day.

The machine - Cobas 6800 - is a high-throughput machine having automated platform to carry out faster and effective testing of samples to detect COVID-19, according to Sanghamitra Pati, Director of RMRC.

"RMRC, Bhubaneswar, is one of the two centres in the country to have this testing equipment. With this, we can increase our testing capacity from current 300 to 1,000 samples per day by next

week," Dr. Pati said on Friday.

With the Cobas 6800 set to be used for testing, the Odisha government has announced it will screen about two lakh people, including a large number of migrant labourers who would return to the State in future, said State Director of Medical Education and Training C.B.K. Mohanty.

### Migrant workers

"We are concerned about the migrant workers who are under tremendous mental stress to reach their homes. The government wants them to be with their families instead of sending them to quarantine facilities," said Dr. Mohanty.

"The faster screening will dispel mistrust in the mind of their fellow villagers. Those who will be found negative in testing will be allowed to enter their villages," he added.

The government was strictly following the guidelines specified by the Indian Council of Medical Research to enhance COVID-19 testing, clarified Sanjay Kumar Singh, Secretary, Information & Public Relations Department.

At present, RMRC, Bhubaneswar, AIIMS Bhubaneswar and SCB Medical College & Hospital at Cuttack are carrying out COVID-19 tests. MKCG Medical College & Hospital, Berhampur, and Institute of Life Sciences, Bhubaneswar, have already been authorised to commence testing soon.

## With the passing of Shanti Hiranand, the Begum Akhtar era is formally over

She was our last tangible link to the legendary artiste

SALEEM KIDWAI

With the passing of singer Shanti Hiranand (1932-2020), early on Friday morning after a brief illness, an era, first shaken to its core by the passing of Begum Akhtar in 1974, finally comes to an end. For nearly five decades, almost single-handedly Shanti Hiranand kept the music of her legendary Ustad alive. With her gone, so has our last tangible link to Begum Akhtar. For nearly five decades Shanti performed and recorded ghazals, dadras and thumris in the tradition of Begum Akhtar but also diligently taught it to many who wanted to be a part of the great singer's tra-



dition. Shantiji taught music almost until the last months of her life.

Shanti was born in Lucknow into a forward-looking business family which encouraged education and did not frown on her interest in music and even enrolled her in Bhakthande Music Institute at the age of six or seven. She moved to Lahore briefly with her parents where she first recorded for radio. After Partition, she returned to

she could learn from Begum Akhtar. In her memoir *Begum Akhtar: The Story of My Ammi*, Shanti recalls this first meeting. Without an appointment, she had taken a rickshaw and turned up at Begum Akhtar's house and after a brief wait was granted an audience where a harmonium was forwarded towards her for an impromptu audition. She sang a bhajan in

raag pilu.

She admits, "I had no idea what raag pilu was. I had just learnt the bhajan as one would learn any filmi song. Since I was performing on the radio at the time, I was used to the radio station sending me a song set to a particular tune and I would just go and record them. I also did a lot of choral singing. I had a high-pitched voice and I could sing loudly." Begum Akhtar complimented her and asked her what she wanted to learn from her. Shanti didn't know what to say because as she admits, "I had no idea about her music or what I wanted to learn from her."

This fortuitous meeting led

to classes from the next day onwards. Soon she had practically moved in with her teacher because Begum Akhtar, whimsical as she was,

would teach only when she was in the mood. Soon Shanti was an appendage of the family. She was joined by another student, Anjali Banerji, and Begum Akhtar did what no other female artiste had done before - marked them as formal students and herself as a formal Ustad by conducting a ganda-bandh ceremony.

Begum Akhtar, being the tempestuous person she was, tested this guru-shishya relationship hard and it goes to Shanti's credit that she was never found wanting and stayed unquestionably loyal to her Ammi till her end. She never said a word that could be considered disrespectful of her Ustad though there is still today an audience hungry for salacious details of her Ustad's life, and many egged her to tell tales.

The Begum Akhtar era is formally over. As Shanti sang in her first recording, a Shaheed Badayuni ghazal:

*Fasana e shab e ghram kham hone wala hai*

*'Shakeel' chand sitaron men ji nahin lagta.*

(The story of the night of grief is about to end)

'Shakeel', the heart is no longer distracted by the moon or the stars.)

*Saleem Kidwai is a Lucknow-based historian and author.*

## HC order on vehicle use partially modified

Relief for senior citizens, doctors

CORRESPONDENT  
CUTTACK

In a partial modification of its Thursday's order on the use of two-wheelers during the ongoing nationwide lockdown, the Orissa High Court on Friday made it clear that only "senior citizens" and "handicapped persons" are allowed to use their vehicles to go to marketplaces for the purchase of essential items like vegetables, fruits, groceries items and medicines.

"The police authorities shall also give relaxation in mobility of doctors and health workers on production of their identification and certificates," said a Division Bench of the High Court comprising acting Chief Justice Kumari Sanju Panda and Justice Biswanath Rath on Friday following an appeal made by the State government seeking a clarification on the High Court's Thursday order.

The High Court on Thursday had diluted the government's blanket ban on use of vehicles, saying that the government should first come out with a composite plan on availability of essential commodities locally before imposing a ban on the use of vehicles.

The court had also restrained the police from collecting fines from vehicle users until the third count of default.

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## Institutions offer emotional support to youngsters

They are coming up with helpline facilities so that the affected can reach out to experts on time

BISHWANATH GHOSH  
KOLKATA

Recognising that the lockdown due to COVID-19 could be taking an emotional toll on youngsters and children, institutions in West Bengal are coming up with helpline facilities so that the affected can reach out to experts.

The University of Calcutta, West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights and Maheshtala College are some of the institutions that have roped in mental health professionals and counsellors to address problems of the young in the face of an unprecedented global crisis.

"My students and their parents are extremely anxious about the future. They come from economically disadvantaged background and they are unable to comprehend what's going on. One girl asked me the other day, 'Ma'am, are we all going to die?' Another girl asked me, 'Will life ever be normal again

for us?' They are undergoing immense stress and it is important we talk to them," said Dr. Rumpa Das, principal of Maheshtala College.

The college has not only formed a core team to counsel students, parents and non-teaching staff but has also tied up with an organisation called Samabhyati Emotional Support Group to extend help to the needy.

On Wednesday, the University of Calcutta also issued a notification that the departments of psychology and applied psychology would provide free counselling services to all students of the university. It listed the names and numbers of the professors who could be reached at a specified time in a day or week.

But it is the children that are probably among the worst-hit by the nationwide lockdown, unable to comprehend why their routines have suddenly been disrupted and why there is restriction on going out of home.

The West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights has offered helpline numbers so that parents can reach out to experts about guidance on how to deal with children undergoing stress due to the lockdown. Last week, it circulated a list of 17 experts - including psychiatrists, paediatricians and counsellors - who can be reached at specified times of the day.

"Small children are unable to understand what exactly is the matter - why are they not going to school, why they cannot go out to play? They can sense something is the matter but they don't know what exactly it is. In such situations children can turn cranky and need attention," said Dr. Nilanjana Sanyal, a practising psychoanalyst who is on the panel of experts. "Normally, this time of the



Children hold a picture of Jesus Christ on the occasion of Good Friday in Kolkata on Friday. • PTI

year adults can be overheard planning holidays, but this year there is no such planning - everything looks uncertain. This is likely to add to the stress," said Dr. Sanyal.

"The idea behind the helpline numbers," she said, "is to create awareness among parents. First of all, they must take [the lockdown] as an opportunity to spend more time with their children, which

# Southern States focus on containment

With 49 new cases, A.P., Telangana, Kerala and Karnataka continue tracing and tracking of contacts

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/  
HYDERABAD/VIJAYAWADA/  
BENGALURU

Seven more cases of COVID-19 were reported in Kerala on Friday, taking the State total to 364. Three were from Kasaragod, and two cases each were from Kannur and Malappuram.

The Malappuram cases are linked to the Nizamuddin meet, while the rest are contacts of imported cases. On Friday, 27 persons under treatment tested negative.

So far, 124 patients have tested negative and been discharged. These include eight foreign nationals touring Kerala. They were admitted to Ernakulam and Thiruvananthapuram Medical College hospitals. There are 238 people under treatment.

The number under surveillance dropped to 1,29,751. Of these, 730 were in isolation wards in hospitals, and the rest in home quarantine.

**16 more Telangana cases**

The number of people test-

## On guard

Police personnel have a tough time making people adhere to rules to prevent the spread of virus during the lockdown



**Patient wait:** People standing in a long queue to collect food at Journalist Colony in Bengaluru on Friday.

■ V. SREENIVASA MURTHY

State	Total number of cases	Active cases	Number of those cured	Deaths
Andhra Pradesh	381	365	10	6
Karnataka	207	167	34	6
Kerala	364	238	124	2
Tamil Nadu	911	858	44	9
Telangana	487	430	45	12

ing positive for coronavirus in Telangana was less than 20 for the second consecutive day on Friday, giving the State government a breather.

discharged and the death toll stood unchanged at 12.

Nizamabad, with 49 cases including two reported on Friday, stood next to Hyderabad (179) followed by Rangareddy (27), Warangal Urban (23) and Medchal (21). The case load was up in Nirmal district, with 15 and Jogulambha Gadwal district (19) while 10 cases each were reported from Mahabubnagar and Kamareddy districts.

Public Health and Family Welfare Director, G. Srinivas Rao, said there was no evidence of community transmission in the State and the government had identified 101 hotspots. Containment activity was taken up in all districts with cases.

Efforts to trace and track primary and secondary contacts of Delhi returnees continued on Friday.

## 16 more in A.P.

The addition of 16 new COVID-19 positive cases raised Andhra Pradesh's total to 381. Fresh cases emerged after day-long testing on Friday.

Of the other five cases,

two are from the greater Bengaluru area, two from Bengaluru Rural, and one from Kalaburgi.

Guntur reported seven cases, East Godavari five and Kurnool and Prakasam districts, two each.

Ten individuals were discharged after recovery, and six succumbed to the virus.

## COVID-19

Also, 365 were under treatment. In all, 133 clusters were identified as COVID-19 red zones in 13 districts. The highest number of cluster red zones are in Nellore district (30).

## Tally crosses 200

With 10 new cases detected on Friday, Karnataka's case number touched 207. Five cases were from Mysuru. On the brighter side, the first person who tested positive, from a pharma company in Mysuru was discharged on Friday.

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two are from the greater Bengaluru area, two from Bengaluru Rural, and one from Kalaburgi.

# Tougher norms likely for public transportation

Protocol chalked out for post-lockdown situation in Kerala

S. ANIL RADHAKRISHNAN  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Restricting the number of persons travelling in cars, buses and on bikes, increasing the working hours, a five-day week, and the odd-even system to restrict vehicles have been spelled out in a protocol chalked out for public transportation post-lockdown in Kerala.

The protocol also calls for developing an app or software to track the movement of inter-state rail and bus commuters.

## Easing restrictions

■ Motorcycle travel will be limited to one person per seat in other vehicles

■ Motorcyclists will have to use full-face helmet with visor

■ Commuters will not be allowed to stand and travel in public transport modes

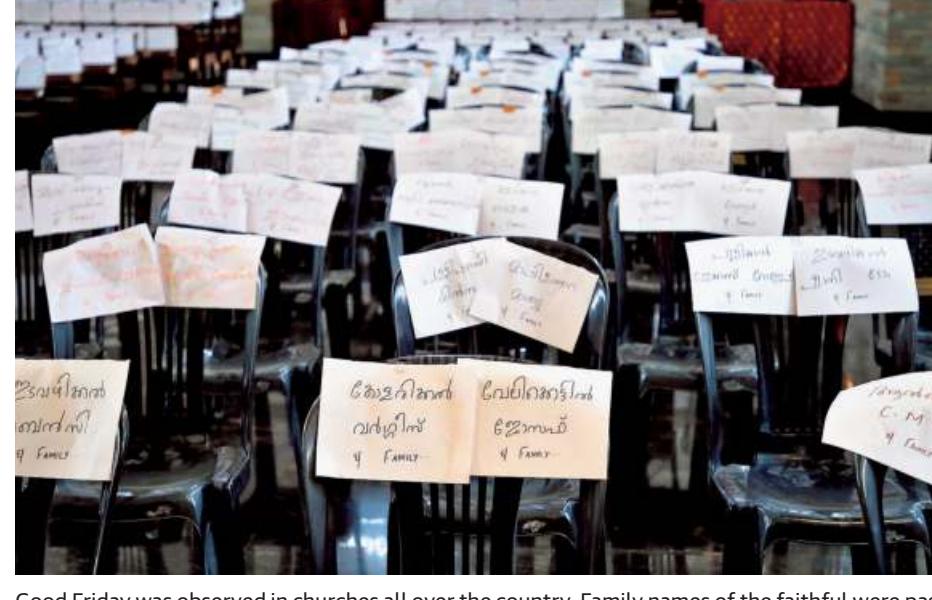
■ All commuters will have to enter the bus through the rear door and exit via the front door

for those travelling.

All vehicles used for public transport, including taxies and autorickshaws, will have to be sanitised. Drivers falling under the high risk category will have to use masks.

The protocol, worked out by the Motor Vehicles Department, is awaiting approval. Those flouting the rules will be fined and termination of the journey will also be considered.

## Prayer time



Good Friday was observed in churches all over the country. Family names of the faithful were pasted on empty chairs to signify their presence at a church in Kochi, and right, the Archbishop of Hyderabad distributing food and masks to the needy on Friday. ■ PTI & REUTERS

## IN BRIEF



### 'A vicious design to remove incumbent SEC'

With the A.P. government reportedly issuing an ordinance on Friday reducing the tenure of the State Election Commissioner, TDP president N. Chandrababu Naidu wrote a letter to Governor Biswa Bhushan Harichandan, urging him to intervene to "uphold the rule of law". Mr. Naidu said the government had amended Section 200 of the A.P. PR Act with a "vicious design to remove the present SEC".

### Tourism sector stares at 50% job loss

The tourism and hospitality sector is staring at a potential job loss of around 38 million, which is around 70% of the workforce, leading accounting and audit firm KPMG says. The tourism and aviation sector was the first industry to take a hit. Many believe this crisis is a greater threat than the earlier ones, such as 9/11 and the financial meltdown of 2008-09, KPMG pointed out in a report "Potential impact of COVID-19 on the Indian economy."

### Maldivian nationals to be flown back today

The Maldivian nationals stranded in Kerala for the last three weeks will be evacuated on Saturday on two flights to the island nation. Maldivian, the country's national airline, will operate the first flight Q2 6702 at 10.20 a.m. from the Thiruvananthapuram international airport. The Dash 8-300 aircraft can accommodate 50 passengers. The second flight Q2 6700 from here to Male is scheduled for departure at 12.45 p.m.

## Social media posts land 6 in trouble in Karnataka

They had put out hate messages

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MANGALURU/MANDYA

The Dakshina Kannada police have registered five cases against six persons for their alleged social media hate posts relating to the Muslim community.

While three cases by the Bantwal Town police have been registered against Santosh Gowda of Nandavaraya, a case has been registered by the Dharmastala police against Muralidhar and three others of Ujire.

The four cases were registered on Monday. A case was registered by the Bellare police on April 4 against Kusumadhar.

In a statement, Dakshina Kannada Superintendent of Police B.M. Laxmi Prasad said stringent action would be taken against those who try to create communal hatred. In another development, two persons at Ankanahalli in Ramanagaram district have been booked for asking villagers to prevent the entry of Muslims, blaming the community members for the spread of COVID-19.

It is said that a member of Kailancha Gram Panchayat had hired an elderly man to alert the villagers against allowing Muslims to enter the village.

This was videographed by a person and the clip was shared on social media.

Meanwhile, K.R. Pet tahsildar M. Shivamurthy has drawn the ire of social activists for stating that three people who were roaming around with quarantine seals on their hands were Muslims, while they did not belong to the community.

## 'Concern over my son's safety made me ride 1,400 kilometres'

Teacher goes on a solo rescue mission on a scooter

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NIZAMABAD

At first thought it sounds like mission impossible. But the 1,400 km distance did not deter doting mother Rajia Begum from travelling on her scooter to bring back her younger son Nizamuddin, stranded in Rahamatnagar in Nellore, following the lockdown.

He had gone to Nellore on March 12 to drop his friend from a NEET coaching institute in Hyderabad and got stuck there.

Fearing she would be dissuaded from her mission if she revealed her idea, Rajia Begum set out with a pack of rotis and a 5 litre petrol can on the morning of April 6 and reached Nellore the following day.

She travelled all alone

and from the Mandal Parishad Primary School in Salampad for several years made the teacher a seasoned rider.

Armed with a letter from ACP Jaipal Reddy and a Google map, she hit the highway. "I had to undergo problems en route as food was not available. I took only fruits and relaxed for a few minutes intermittently. I managed to reach Nellore early on April 7. On the return, I dared to travel at night as my son was with me. So, we started our journey at 4 p.m. and reached Bodhan on Wednesday around 3 p.m."

"My story has gone viral on social media after one of my colleagues posted it on WhatsApp. On the way back home, mediapersons at Kamareddy hosted lunch for us," she said.

Her daily drive of 25 km to

## Kerala girl sketches Spanish street, wins hearts



**Play on:** The pencil sketch of a Spanish street during the COVID-19 epidemic drawn by Shehana Fathima.

Work depicted an 'eerie' locality during the pandemic

M.P. PRAVEEN  
KOCHI

For Shehana Fathima, a 20-year-old engineering student from Thrissurakara, the evening of March 24 will always be memorable.

Just an hour before the Prime Minister announced a 21-day nationwide lockdown, the budding artist posted on Instagram a pencil sketch that portrayed two artists serenading an eerily empty Spanish street from their balconies even as quarantined neighbours emerged on their balconies to enjoy the music.

The video of noted Spanish pianist Alberto Gestoso and saxophone player Alex Lebron Torrent performing

replicated the scene from the video," said Ms. Shehana, a self-taught painter who is still basking in the glory of completely unexpected adulations.

Hoping to go further in the world of arts, she is now using the lockdown period to master digital drawing tools.

Later, the partner of one of the artists also personally messaged her.

"The video was going around for a while, and that inspired me. It took me a day to complete the picture. Actually, I don't know how to draw buildings, and I simply

## WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 19.00 HRS)

**Forecast for Saturday:** Thunderstorm with lightning and gust likely at isolated places over Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, West Bengal, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Bihar, Odisha and Maharashtra.

CITY RAIN MAX MIN CITY RAIN MAX MIN

Agartala ..... -37.2 ..... 23.2 Kozhikode ..... 10.0 ..... 36.5 ..... 24.9

Ahmedabad ..... -40.6 ..... 24.4 Kurnool ..... -40.1 ..... 23.4

Aizawl ..... -33.8 ..... 18.0 Lucknow ..... -36.0 ..... 18.3

Altafgarh ..... -40.6 ..... 19.2 Madurai ..... 2.9 ..... 37.8 ..... 22.2

Bengaluru ..... 33.2 ..... 33.4 ..... 18.6 Mangaluru ..... 35.6 ..... 25.2

Bhopal ..... -36.0 ..... 22.1 Mumbai ..... 33.8 ..... 24.0

Bhubaneswar ..... -36.8 ..... 24.6 Patna ..... 7.3 ..... 21.6

Chandigarh ..... -34.0 ..... 16.8 New Delhi ..... 36.2 ..... 17.0

Chennai ..... 9.2 ..... 33.5 ..... 24.4 Port Blair ..... 32.7 ..... 24.7

Coimbatore ..... 0.8 ..... 33.8 ..... 21.2 Dehradun ..... 32.0 ..... 15.1

Gangtok ..... -25.6 ..... 10.3 Pune ..... 38.1 ..... 18.8

Goa ..... -34.4 ..... 24.3 Raipur ..... 36.8 ..... 21.2

Guwahati ..... 13.6 ..... 30.6 ..... 16.4 Ranchi ..... 35.7 ..... 21.0

Hubballi ..... -36.0 ..... 22.0 Shillong ..... 23.2 ..... 18.5

Hyderabad ..... 18.0 ..... 35.2 ..... 21.5 Shimla ..... 21.6 ..... 11.2

Imphal ..... -30.8 ..... 16.3 Srinagar ..... 20.5 ..... 6.8

Jaipur ..... -38.0 ..... 26.2 Thiruvananthapuram ..... 34.2 ..... 25.6

Kochi ..... -33.2 ..... 26.0 Tiruchi ..... 45.0 ..... 36.0 ..... 22.8

Kohima ..... 4.8 ..... 21.5 ..... 20.2 Vijayawada ..... 33.0 ..... 22.0

Kolkata ..... -36.5 ..... 26.2 Visakhapatnam ..... 32.0 ..... 25.6

Kollam ..... -38.0 ..... 22.0



## Lives and livelihoods

Centre must spend more, forego tax revenues to protect livelihoods during lockdown

The government is in the process of applying its mind on whether it should extend or lift in phases the 21-day lockdown that ends next week. The choice for Prime Minister Narendra Modi now, as when he decided to impose the lockdown on March 24, is the same – between saving lives and ensuring livelihoods. He rightly privileged the former over the latter then. But as India nears the end of the lockdown period, the serious damage to the economy and livelihoods is beginning to make itself apparent. There is tremendous pressure from industry bodies to opt for a nuanced policy that will help economic activity to restart as they fear a collapse if activity is stopped for another fortnight. Lives could be lost to hunger and livelihoods sacrificed in the lockdown. One way to sidestep this existential dilemma is by bringing on a second round of an economic relief package that goes well beyond the first both in terms of the financial commitment and the spread. Out-of-the-box ideas for delivering support and also for raising the required funds might be required. For starters, it is clear that the government should consign fiscal conservatism to the cupboard for now and go all out to spend and support the economy. Economists are unanimous that there is little option now but to print money and spend. That is exactly what the developed countries are doing.

The ₹1.7-lakh crore package announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on March 26 was a good start but barely accounted for 1% of GDP. India should spend at least 5% of GDP for now – about ₹10-lakh crore. The cash transfers to the poor should be hiked to at least ₹3,000 a month for the next three months. This should be in addition to free rations and cooking gas, as was announced earlier. In the harvest season, farmers need logistical support for moving their produce to markets. Lenders, including NBFCS, should be granted freedom to reschedule their loan accounts so that borrowers are not under pressure to repay for fear of turning delinquent. A credit guarantee fund that will support non-delinquent borrowers for the next six months will be a good option. Such a fund can be financed through a domestic bond offering. The bankruptcy code should be suspended for the next six months, at least for SMEs. And why not a GST holiday for the next three months? The loss of revenue will be ₹3-lakh crore at worst, but in reality will be much lower than that because economic activity is at a standstill now. Such a move will ease cash flows for business and also obviate the need for statutory compliances at a time when the focus will have to be on getting businesses back on track. The crisis now is without precedent and the solutions cannot be conservative. Generous support from the government, and quickly delivered, is the need of the hour.

## Stage fright

Limiting transmission in hotspots depends on a wider tracing and testing strategy

Even after the Health Ministry on March 28 acknowledged on its website that there was “limited community transmission”, India’s national taskforce for COVID-19 continues to deny it. Now, a paper in the *Indian Journal of Medical Research*, by ICMR and Health Ministry researchers, provides evidence of community transmission in 36 districts in 15 States. The study is based on sentinel surveillance undertaken by the task force among severe acute respiratory infections (SARI) patients who have been hospitalised in public sector institutions to identify the spread and the extent of transmission of COVID-19 disease in the community. If there were 1.9% (two of 106) SARI cases positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus by the end of March third week, the number increased to 104 by April 2. Of the 102 coronavirus positive SARI cases tested between March 22 and April 2, 40 (39%) had no travel history or contact with a positive case; data on exposure were not available for 59 (58%) cases. If more than 1% of SARI patients tested positive for the virus in 15 States, at 21 (3.8%), Maharashtra had the most number of coronavirus positive SARI cases in eight districts followed by Delhi (14 cases; 5.1%), Gujarat (13 cases; 1.6%), and West Bengal (9 cases; 3.5%). Kerala had just one SARI patient testing positive. The authors point out that antibody-based testing carried out in those testing negative for molecular test could have helped identify more positive cases.

With community transmission, or the third stage, now being confirmed in 36 districts, an expansion and change in testing strategy has become imperative in the high focus areas for the lockdown to be more meaningful. Though the taskforce has not openly declared community transmission, it is reassuring to note that the ICMR has already initiated changes in the testing strategy in response to the change in the pattern of community spread. On April 9, the ICMR revised the testing strategy for hotspots/clusters and large migration gatherings/evacuees centres. While the criteria for testing across India remain the same, the testing norms for the high focus areas will now include people with influenza-like illness (ILI) with certain symptoms. Antibody testing should be carried out whenever molecular tests on these patients turn out negative. It is important to include antibody testing along with molecular testing when necessary in the high focus areas. Together with containment measures, this approach will help in snapping the transmission chain. Syndromic surveillance of all SARI and ILI patients along with quick and effective tracing, quarantining and testing of their contacts should be the way forward now. How well India responds now will determine whether the spread is contained quickly or leads to more cases and deaths.

# Against Trump, and the Democratic machine

Democrat voters did not want to risk voting for Bernie Sanders, but Joe Biden is a flawed candidate



GARY YOUNGE

**A**t 11.30 on Monday morning, there was a queue of cars, two vehicles deep and several miles long, for the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank in Duquesne, Pennsylvania, waiting for the two boxes of food offered when it opens at noon. Every week the lines get longer.

Two days later, Bernie Sanders, the left-wing challenger for the Democratic presidential nomination, withdrew from the race and vowed to back the presumptive nominee, former Vice-President Joe Biden.

### America on the edge

The coronavirus has made the case for universal health care, a welfare state and tackling inequalities in a manner that Mr. Sanders was unable to. Even before the pandemic struck, a significant portion of the country was on the brink: four in ten American adults could not withstand an unexpected \$400 expense. Now they have been pushed over the edge.

The trouble, for Mr. Sanders, is the lesson came too late and too few people believed that he was either capable of defeating President Donald Trump or getting his agenda through Congress or both. Put bluntly, in a moment when progressives believe American democracy is in peril at the hands of an egomaniacal right-wing demagogue, too many liberals thought it was too great a risk to stand a septuagenarian Jewish socialist from Vermont who had a heart attack six months earlier.

That concern was not entirely justified. Throughout February, Mr. Sanders led Mr. Trump in every poll by between 2% and 8%. The early States he performed well in – Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada – were all the kind of swing States Democrats need to win in November.

But the more he won among Democrats and threatened to break the mould the more those who had been set in that mould, insisted he would lose against Mr. Trump. The confidence in his un-electability sat somewhere between a script and an incantation, recited dutifully and earnestly by the media and political establishments, most of whom had insisted that Mr. Trump could never win the presidency.

If he won the nomination not only would he be running against Mr. Trump but the Democratic machine. After he won Nevada and it looked like no clear contender had yet emerged, Matt Bennett, of the moderate group, Third Way, told *Politico*: “It’s this incredible sense that we’re hurtling to the abyss. I also think we could lose the House. And if we do, there would be absolutely no way to stop [Trump]. Today is the most depressed I’ve ever been in politics.”

### Cornerstone constituency

There was no justification for this bed-wetting. But concerns about his electability were not entirely unjustified either. Despite considerable and concerted efforts, he failed to convince African Americans that his candidacy was viable. That is no small thing. African Americans are the cornerstone of the Democratic coalition: the party has only won the presidency with the white vote alone once – in 1964 – since the Second World War.



It was not his programme they did not like. African Americans were more likely to support universal health care and free college tuition than any other ethnic groups. It was either him or his capacity to achieve those goals, they were unconvinced by.

“I think African Americans, particularly older ones, have learned not to expect too much from Democratic politicians,” explains Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, a Princeton professor in African American studies. “Because that’s what they usually get.”

His other key vulnerability was younger voters, who did back him – including, it should be noted, younger African Americans – but did not turn up in sufficient numbers to make a difference. Mr. Sanders had predicated his potential on his ability to change the electorate by galvanising non-voters. If they were not going to show up then a crucial part of his coalition would be missing.

In this sense, Mr. Sanders’ precariousness was, at its root, similar to that of his counterpart in the United Kingdom, the former left-wing leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn.

Their ascent was disorganized. They did not emerge from a deeper movement seeking electoral representation that could sustain them, but were, instead, the product of a broad, amorphous, alienated sentiment that sought electoral remedy through them

but had no infrastructure to make that happen. Given his agenda, Mr. Sanders’ appeal was considerable: but it did not take sufficient root beyond his base.

His prospects went south when the voting went South. The first state in the former Confederacy to vote, South Carolina, was the first in which the African American vote was decisive. Mr. Biden won handily. Democratic grandees would have settled for anyone but Mr. Sanders. The trouble is, until South Carolina, they did not have anyone.

As Mr. Biden rose, other centrist candidates – some of whom had been outperforming him – pulled out and endorsed him. After Super Tuesday, when, apart from the big prize of California, Mr. Sanders won little else, his candidacy was effectively over.

But the political questions it raised are more pertinent than ever. That line in Duquesne, which is more than five times bigger than it was at the start of the pandemic, illustrates the transformative nature of this crisis. The day after Mr. Sanders withdrew, unemployment rose by 6.6 million bringing the number who have lost their jobs in the last three weeks to 16 million. Recovering from the global economic depression, we are about to experience demands of a thoroughgoing structural alternative to neo-liberalism. That is what Mr. Sanders was suggesting: that is why the establishment was so desperate for him to lose.

**On Biden**  
Clearly, that alternative is by no means the only scenario; Mr. Trump could win and things can get even worse.

But a Biden candidacy is by no means a risk-free proposition. Far from it. There is a reason why South Carolina was the first State

he has won in the three times he has run for the presidency in 32 years (1988, 2008, 2020). At the best of times he is a terrible candidate. On the stump he rambles hopelessly, losing himself in mid-sentence, wandering into rhetorical cul-de-sacs and is overly tactile with women. He told a crowd in Houston he was looking forward to Super Thursday and once confided his wife and his sister, who were both on the stage with him.

And these are not the best of times. The trouble is not just his performance but his politics. He was an enthusiastic backer of the North American Free Trade Agreement, the Iraq war, deregulation and social security freezes, which does not leave him with much to take on Mr. Trump with.

And so it is that after three-and-a-half years that have seen the largest demonstrations in U.S. history, including two women’s marches and a youth-led protest against gun control, we end up with a 77-year-old man who is to the right of Hillary Clinton.

Mr. Biden won the nomination by not being Sanders; but not being Trump may not be enough to seal the deal in November. A poll two weeks ago showed he attracted the lowest recorded amount of ‘strong enthusiasm’ among his own supporters for any Democratic presidential hopeful in the 20 years of polling. Mr. Trump’s base remains fired up.

Coronavirus has made a volatile electorate and a fragile political culture even more unpredictable. Anything could happen. Both Mr. Biden and Mr. Sanders represented a risk. But Mr. Sanders was a risk worth taking; Mr. Biden is the risk we are now stuck with.

*Gary Younge is a professor of Sociology at Manchester University and the former U.S. correspondent for The Guardian*

## Team India and winning the pandemic battle

The ability to quell the epidemic is linked to political will and professional skill shaping a multi-sectoral response



K. SRINATH REDDY

**W**hen will we move COVID-19 from a tense present to past tense? That question hangs perplexingly and lies posed before an embattled world and an anxious India. As we look to the possible end of the 21-day national lockdown, what next? Is there an early timeline for return to normalcy or will we have to wait for years to regain the vigour and the vitality of life as before a reconnected world?

### Self-reliance is the way

India has to chart its own strategy, whether it is in planning a staged release from the lockdown or in developing domestic capacity for medical equipment. There will be a need for scientific and economic cooperation with the rest of the world, but self-reliance is the rudder that must steer our ship as we sail through these rough seas. Globalisation lies shredded as we read of French and German officials protesting at the Americans seizing shipments of masks that they had ordered from China, in what is being called “guerre des masques” (war of the masks).

For charting our course ahead, we have to answer several questions. Did the lockdown benefit us

and will we gain further by extending it fully or partially? Will we be in a position to gear up the capacity of our health system for effective public health and health-care responses across the country within the next few weeks if there is a surge in cases? How can we triage our response strategies to best use our limited resources? Are there favourable factors which suggest that India will have a less extensive spread or a milder manifestation of illness? What kind of partnerships need to be mobilised in the country to develop and deliver an effective response?

### Moving forward

The impact of a three-week lockdown on reducing infectivity cannot be gauged well till the third week because the virus has an incubation period that can extend up to 14 days, though the vast majority of cases clinically emerge by 11 days. Whether there are already infected cases that will spread outdoors after the lockdown will be gauged by clinical criteria (syndromic surveillance) and testing (using viral or antibody tests as indicated). House-to-house surveillance being implemented in Andhra Pradesh, even during the lockdown, involves accredited village and block level volunteers partnering front line health workers to identify symptomatic persons for later visits by medical teams. The involvement of designated volunteers and community-based organisations can greatly enhance case detection, isolation,



counselling, severity-based care and social support. Potentially favourable factors for India are the younger age profile and a higher rural proportion of our population compared to China, Europe, the United States or other highly affected countries whose populations are older, urban and highly mobile. However, this enjoins us to energetically protect the elderly and rural segments of our population.

Restricting urban to rural movement to essential goods and essential needs, for at least six weeks after the lockdown ends, will help. The health, nutrition and financial security of the poor must be ensured. Elderly persons too should observe social distancing and limit visits outside home for this period. Essential economic activity can be resumed in stages.

We would be entering June by this time. By then, we should have a better picture of the spread and severity of the epidemic in different parts of the country. That would need a greater level of testing to detect both asymptomatic and symptomatic persons who have been infected, through random population sampling in different parts of the country. We

should quickly gear up our testing capacity to meet this mapping mandate. Hotspots should be identified, based on numbers of self-referred symptomatic cases, persons identified on home visits and population survey results. These should be ring fenced, with intense search for contacts and active spreaders, with further localised lockdown as needed.

The height of summer in June may also give us some respite, if not full relief. There is some evidence that this virus too, like other coronaviruses, is likely to wane in hot weather. Other suggestions, of protection from malaria endemicity and past BCG vaccination, are speculative and based on correlation studies which do not qualify for inference of causation. Crowded living conditions and propensity to have myriad mass gatherings, for political, religious or social reasons, can be our undoing if we do not enforce discipline.

Even if some factors favour us, our ability to quell the epidemic will depend on how well political will and professional skill can shape a coherent, countrywide multi-sectoral response. Think of it as a game of cricket. Even if the pitch conditions favour us, we still have to play well to win. If COVID-19 is the batsman scoring freely, the health system is the bowler trying to tie him down and get him out. Full support is needed from the other sections of the government who form the close-in field and the citizens who are guarding the out-field. Everyone has to be

on their toes, avoiding a poor health system response (loose balls), supply chain delays (dropped catches) and social distancing violations (misfields). No huddles please!

**Focus on health services**  
We also need to make sure that our health-care system provides timely and competent care to all who need it. Primary health-care facilities, district hospitals, public and private tertiary care institutions have to gear up with equipment and augment human resources drawn both from trainees and retirees. Considering the higher risk to older health-care providers, the first line of care should be formed by younger staff members who will have milder effects even if infected. The older staff members can provide supervisory support. This will prevent attrition of the health workforce due to exhaustion or illness. Temporary hospitals for treatment and isolation facilities for persons on quarantine may need to be set up at short notice. Industry must produce essential medical equipment and drugs to meet our needs and, if capacity permits, assist other countries.

This has to be our game plan, with flexibility to change the field settings and bowling options as we reassess the situation periodically. Let us get going, to win this match as Team India.

*Dr. K. Srinath Reddy is President, Public Health Foundation of India. The views expressed are personal*

## 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.

**Managing the pandemic**  
With much of the world in the grip of the pandemic, there is growing apprehension about the extent of devastation the virus will leave behind (“World” page, “Half a billion people face poverty due to virus”, April 10). What the globe is experiencing today is an extraordinary situation where even most of the developed world is reeling under the viral onslaught. Their sheer helplessness in not having anything ready off the shelf to deal with the virus medically has only aggravated their desperation. The impact of the ongoing disruptions to their economies can never be assessed until normalcy returns, but it would be on an unprecedented scale.

When they face so much disruption, it would be naive to expect them to reach out to the developing countries to the level expected of them.  
**KAMAL LADDHA,  
Bengaluru**

■ The Indian government will have to act fast with relief measures to bring about some semblance of sanity in various critical areas such as health, infrastructure and employment. Countries hitherto adopting a give-and-take policy could be forced to adopt protectionism in a more strident manner. Our exports may get impacted. We may have to pay a higher price for import of raw materials not indigenously manufactured. Our dependence on China for raw materials required in the

pharmaceutical and electrical fields could cost us dear. The return of expatriates due to job losses is going to hit us hard, when we are struggling with an employment crisis. The idea of globalisation in the present environment may look far fetched when the globe is under a recessionary trend. Instead of waiting for COVID-19 to abate, the government should set up a high-level task force straightaway – made up of financial experts and representatives from various industries – to handle the economy. ‘Make in India’, now in slumber, needs to be given a new lease of life (OpEd page, ‘Parley’ – ‘Will COVID-19 affect the course of globalisation?’, April 10). There are also attempts by private and public organisations to make cheaper ventilators. The government needs to bring all such organisations under one umbrella and provide its support.

V. SUBRAMANIAN,  
Chennai

■ There appear to be differences of opinion among State governments and the Centre on many issues related to the COVID-19 containment strategy such as the lockdown period and ensuring social welfare. The time has come to act in tandem. Having different sets of lockdowns will only result in confusion and increase the risk of the virus spreading. There needs to be a clear message on this (Page 1, “Odisha becomes first State to extend lockdown till April 30”, April 10). There are also attempts by informers such as neighbours and shopkeepers. The identity of patient and informer must be kept secret. Awareness of COVID-19 is important – the ground reality can shock a person – so a mass campaign on every possible platform is a must. The message of self-isolation, quarantine, hygiene should be conveyed in an easy to understand way and in a number of local languages.

RISHIN PAL,  
New Delhi

some resistance to self-declaration in some parts of India. Insurance companies may be asked to roll out a COVID insurance model. Another step would be to reward those who call the health authorities on their own with some incentive. The award can also be given to neighbours and shopkeepers. The identity of patient and informer must be kept secret. Awareness of COVID-19 is important – the ground reality can shock a person – so a mass campaign on every possible platform is a must. The message of self-isolation, quarantine, hygiene should be conveyed in an easy to understand way and in a number of local languages.

■ It is sad that the iconic dabbawallas of Mumbai are staring at starvation due to the 21-day nationwide lockdown (Page 1, “Lockdown robs Mumbai’s dabbawallas of lunch”, April 10). The 5,000-odd dabbawallas have been a symbol of Mumbai’s resilience to any crisis, man-made or natural, and it would certainly have been a difficult decision to make as they have never stopped their service.

It is all the more painful that these committed men have now been left to struggle. Perhaps their services can be used in a better way as they form a vital link in the great city.

R. SIVAKUMAR,  
Chennai

To read more letters online, scan the QR code

# The story of India's largest COVID-19 cluster

Despite government orders prohibiting large gatherings, more than 4,500 people assembled at the Tablighi Jamaat Markaz in mid-March. **Saurabh Trivedi** recounts the events of the week when costly mistakes were made



On March 30, the evacuation exercise at the Tablighi Jamaat Markaz started with the help of the local police. (Below): People leave for hospitals from the Markaz at Nizamuddin after showing symptoms of COVID-19. • R.V. MOORTHY, PTI

**I**t was a letter that arrived sometime on March 25 evening that announced the beginning of a nightmare. The letter, which confirmed the Delhi authorities' worst fears, landed at New Delhi's South-East district administration from the district administration of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It stated that all the six patients who had tested positive for novel coronavirus in the islands had one thing in common: they had all returned from a gathering at the Markaz (Centre), the headquarters of the Tablighi Jamaat, a conservative Islamic organisation, in New Delhi. The six of them had attended a large convention with more than 4,500 people from the world over.

The nightmare for the authorities was that all the attendees and their contacts had to now be traced and quarantined to prevent further spread of the deadly virus. Until this information came, India's efforts in combating the COVID-19 pandemic were confined to screening travellers who had come from abroad.

#### Chalking out a plan

The Delhi police, the district administration, and the Delhi government's Health Department quickly huddled together for meeting. Their agenda was to chalk out a plan to trace everyone who had attended the convention at the Markaz between March 12 and March 22.

The attendees at the congregation had been divided into several groups.

Each group had attended a two-three day workshop. Many of them had left, but many of them continued to stay at the Markaz. This was because a day-long Janata Curfew on March 22 and the 21-day national lockdown announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi beginning March 24 had made it virtually impossible for the Jamaat members to leave the Markaz. So, quickly evacuating the premises, sanitising the building and placing the attendees in quarantine was also on the team's agenda. The occupants at the Markaz, all in close proximity in the building in the crowded area of Nizamuddin in the capital, were perhaps unaware of the presence of the invisible, malevolent virus in their midst.

The immediate plan was this: for five days, from March 26 to March 30, a team supervised by the Sub-Divisional Magistrate of Defence Colony, Vinod Kumar Yadav, would inspect the building. The team, in its report to the Deputy Commissioner of South-East Delhi, Harleen Kaur, flagged several concerns. It reported that there was no social (physical) distancing being maintained between the members of the Jamaat. They were not wearing face masks. And there were no sanitisers on the premises. By the time the evacuation process started on March 29, some members of the Jamaat were already coughing and complaining of having a headache and a fever. The fear was becoming real: they were all showing signs of SARS-CoV-2.

On March 29 night, at about 9 p.m., 34 people were immediately shifted to hos-

pitals from the premises. A medical camp was established outside the building for screening purposes.

#### Process of evacuation

With many members still inside, on March 30 morning, a white canopy tent was erected outside the Markaz. The evacuation process started with the help of the local police. They barricaded the entire area to prevent others in the neighbourhood from coming into contact with those emerging from the Markaz. The Health Department set up a help desk at the tent. Each person coming out of the Markaz was thermally screened. Their names, addresses and their duration of stay at the Markaz were noted. After their thermal screening was completed, attendees were asked to walk with their luggage towards the main road, about 50 metres away, through a barricaded corridor erected by the police to prevent the spread of infection in the locality. About 70 buses were arranged to transport the attendees from the Markaz to various hospitals or quarantine centres in the city. Bus drivers of the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) were provided hazmat suits and other protective gear that covered their faces. Each bus accommodated about 30 persons.

An officer with the Health Department said that the process of shifting the Jamaat members to hospitals and quarantine centres was an onerous task. "We had to save our own men from getting infected. We noted down the details of the attendees. We erected a tent outside the building and sanitised the entire area with the help of the Delhi Police. The DTC bus drivers also played an exemplary role in shifting people to the hospital. We did all this to the best of our ability," he said.

Even as these efforts were being taken, news broke late on the night on March 30 that six people who had returned from the Markaz at Nizamuddin had died after testing positive for COVID-19 in Telangana. Hearing this, the team in Delhi charged with evacuation developed cold feet, but nevertheless continued with their duty. They evacuated 2,361 people from the Markaz. When the last batch shuffled out of the premises on April 1, the team heaved a big sigh of relief.

#### Violating orders

As members of the Jamaat were being evacuated, questions piled up. How had so many people gathered at the Markaz when warnings had been issued about the serious threat posed by the deadly virus across the world? The recklessness of the Tablighi Jamaat aside, how had the Ministry of External Affairs granted visas to foreigners to attend the meeting? The gathering had included people from Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Afghanistan, France, Italy, Myanmar, Algeria, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the U.K., Singapore, Belgium, Tunisia, the U.S. and Kuwait. At the time, some of these countries were already witnessing a

surge in COVID-19 cases. And how did the Delhi Police, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Home Affairs, fail to detect the presence of such a large gathering? Did this not amount to a huge intelligence failure?

The Delhi government had passed two orders restricting the size of gatherings. The first order, passed on March 13, prohibited more than 200 people from assembling at one place. Another on March 16 prohibited gatherings of more than 50 people. Both orders were violated by the Jamaat members. The police too failed to enforce the orders.

When the Delhi Police were asked about their correspondence with the Jamaat, a senior official told *The Hindu* that the Delhi Police verbally informed the members about the Delhi government's order. "The Markaz is a huge building. It has five floors and two basements. The police never go inside it," he said. The police officer said the police had sent out letters to the office-bearers of the Markaz on March 19 and 24 asking them to come to the Nizamuddin Police Station on March 24 to meet with the SHO, Mukesh Walia. At the meeting, Walia asked them to clear the building at the earliest, he said. A video of the meeting was released by the Delhi Police after questions were raised over the role of the local police in allowing the gathering.

Maulana Yousuf from the Markaz wrote to the police on March 25 stating that they had vacated 1,500 people. However, 1,000 people remained in the premises, he said. "We still have more than 1,000 people from different States in the building. As per your direction, we contacted [the respective] SDMs [Sub-Divisional Magistrates] for vehicle passes so that we can send the remaining people to their respective places," the letter said. "You [the police] are therefore requested to kindly approach the SDM for early action. We are ready to comply [with] all your directions." In the March 25 letter, Yousuf also informed the area SHO that they were trying to shut down the Markaz as directed by him the previous day.

On March 28, the Assistant Commissioner of Police (Lajpat Nagar), Atul Kumar, wrote to the Tablighi Jamaat that

despite the lockdown, "many persons have gathered at the centre in Nizamuddin". He warned of legal action.

In another letter to the police on March 29, Yousuf said that further efforts to vacate the premises had been stopped due to the lockdown announced by the Prime Minister.

On March 30, the Delhi government asked the Delhi Police to register an FIR against Maulana Mohammed Saad, the Delhi head of the Markaz. A Delhi Police officer said that the Tablighi Jamaat Markaz had applied for passes for only 12 vehicles, and all public transport to the Markaz had been banned. How could they evacuate 1,500 people using only 12 vehicles, he asked.

On March 31, the Delhi Police registered an FIR against Maulana Mohammed Saad and six other office-bearers charging them with "deliberately and wilfully" allowing a huge gathering on the premises, an act that posed a threat to many lives.

In his complaint, the SHO of Nizamuddin Police Station said that on March 21, the Delhi Police contacted the authorities of the Markaz and reminded them about the Delhi government's March 16 order. The Jamaat was directed to send the foreign delegates back to their respective countries, and the Indians to their respective cities and towns. On March 24, a meeting was held between the SHO and the officer-bearers of Tablighi Jamaat, the FIR stated.

The FIR also referred to an alleged audio recording, purportedly of Maulana Saad, in circulation on WhatsApp on March 21, in which the speaker is heard asking his followers to defy "the lockdown" and social distancing and instead attend religious gatherings of the organisation.

A Delhi government official, who was part of the evacuation team, said, "If you put 2,000 people in a closed building, everyone is bound to test positive. It was bad timing for faith and a pandemic to clash."

In order to decongest the Markaz, many of the occupants were shifted to various mosques in the National Capital Region. In a joint operation, the Delhi Police, Special Branch, and the Delhi go-

vernment quarantined 275 foreign nationals in various mosques. All of them had attended the Tablighi Jamaat event.

How were they given visas? A senior officer with the Foreigner Regional Registration Office said that most of the foreign nationals visiting India as a part of the Prime Minister announced a Janata Curfew to be held on March 22. "However, due to the sudden cancellation of rail services across the country on March 21, 2020, a large group of visitors who had to depart by way of railways got stuck on the Markaz premises," it said.

said the officer.

In a press release issued on March 31, the Tablighi Jamaat said that the programme at the Nizamuddin Markaz was discontinued immediately after the Prime Minister announced a Janata Curfew to be held on March 22. "However, due to the sudden cancellation of rail services across the country on March 21, 2020, a large group of visitors who had to depart by way of railways got stuck on the Markaz premises," it said.

#### A communal colour

Away from the Delhi hotspot, and spread across half-a-dozen districts of Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, the Mewat region, predominantly inhabited by Meo Muslims, is the birthplace of the Tablighi Jamaat. The region has been divided into 18 blocks for the purpose of the activities of the 94-year-old religious organisation. While Mewat has lost its pre-eminent stature to Delhi, Sadar Shura Majlis Ilaka Mewat, Mufti Mohammad Zahid Hussain, told *The Hindu* that the region was preferred to other regions for hosting the congregation of the Jamaat workers, known as "Jod".

The last Jod was held from December 21 to 23 at the Nuh Idgah. It saw the participation of several thousand workers. "Only dedicated Jamaatis with more than four months of association with the organisation are allowed to participate in the Jod," said Hussain.

Besides the 275 foreign nationals, 1,744 asymptomatic people were moved to quarantine centres in Narela, Wazirabad, Dwarka, Jharoda Kalan and other places, and were closely monitored.

Delhi's Education Minister and Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia requested all those who attended the Markaz in March to report to the authorities. "If you do not come forward or if you are ill and are hiding it, then action will be taken against you," he said. In Tamil Nadu, the Health Secretary issued a humanitarian appeal as the number of those testing positive for COVID-19 and had attended the event in March began to spiral in the State. "You are patients and we will treat you like that. Please voluntarily report," she said. Many came forward.

#### Preventing spread of the virus

On April 2, the Nizamuddin area was declared as a containment zone, after many positive cases of COVID-19 were found. In order to prevent further spread of the virus, movement restrictions were put in place. To prevent infection, 12 policemen of the Nizamuddin Police Station, who were part of the evacuation operation, said they shaved their heads. A policeman said that this was their attempt to keep themselves safe as they were closely involved in the evacuation operation. Every corner of the police station was sanitised by a team of the Delhi Fire Services (DFS) and the 50-metre passage used by the occupants of the Markaz was washed with disinfectant.

A day after a team of the DFS went inside the Markaz and disinfected the premises, a team of the Health Department inspected it. "The Markaz teaches to obey the rule and law made by the government of the state. It [the gathering]

was never intentional but it is unfortunate that this happened," said a Maulana who did not wish to be named.

A Delhi Police officer said extensive data mining has been carried out to identify each individual who attended the religious congregation or stayed in the building. "We are preparing lists of their contacts. We are preparing the profile of each individual and sharing it with the concerned State police. Most of the people who attended the congregation went back either by bus or train,"

Following the identification of the cluster, Tablighi Jamaat members have become an easy target on social media. They have been accused of "spreading the virus" and being "careless". With social media and some TV channels fuelling hatred against Muslims, the Chief Ministers of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana, Kerala and Maharashtra have warned people against communalising the issue and painting one community as the perpetrator.

Hussain agreed. "It is an injustice to give this event a communal colour. It is against democracy," he said.

*With inputs from Ashok Kumar*



FROM PAGE ONE

## No proof of community transmission: Ministry

Reports from State Health Departments put the death toll at 252 with 6618 active cases. Maharashtra reported 197 fresh cases even as the death toll in the State climbed to 110.

The ICMR had randomly tested samples from laboratories in 52 districts in 20 states. As of now, nearly 280 districts have reported confirmed cases.

Independent epidemiologists said the ICMR still had too few surveillance sites to detect CT evidence and ought to be expanding it manifold.

"Sentinel site surveillance of all SARI (or-at-least all X-ray positive pneumonia) is essential for getting an idea about the spread of COVID-19. All cases report-

ing to these sites have to be tested. At least 10-20 sites in every district have to be selected and sample collection facilities have to be arranged there. Sites will have to be increased in a locality if community transmission occurs," Dr. Type Joseph, an epidemiologist at the Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Biotechnology in Thiruvananthapuram, told *The Hindu*.

At the daily media briefing, Mr. Agrawal said India needed about 1 crore hydroxychloroquine tablets and had stocks nearly three times that.

"Arrangements for additional two-three crore tablets have been made and through private sector two crore tablets had been sent to the field," he added.

## Scarcity of drugs, devices imminent, govt. told

Citing multiple factors responsible for the impasse at several pharma units in the country, the letter has identified the unavailability of labour, transport and courier services as the biggest problems, along with the closure of ancillary industries that are not being considered essential by local administrations and the police despite the Home Ministry's directions.

**Constraints on labour**  
Reverse migration of labour and local workers not reporting to work due to lack of public transport options and the fear of police action, combined with family and local community pressure, has made it difficult to operate factories even at lower than normal capacity, the department says.

The letter urged the Home Ministry to allow the pharma industry to "ferry back their contractual workers from their native places" and make courier services "fully functional" in metro cities as well as Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities. Courier services are "crucial in ensuring movement of medicines and medical devices... is not adversely affected during the lockdown," Mr. Vaghela noted.

**Truckers' troubles**  
State and district administrations need to be sensitised and nudged to be proactive to fulfil the need for pharma units to function fully, the Pharma Secretary said, noting that drivers with commercial licences be allowed to move with or without a vehicle by treating it as a 'pass' during the lockdown.

"Many drivers... have left

their vehicles on highways or *dhabas* and returned to their native places. Unless they are allowed to reach their vehicles, those vehicles will be left stranded and thus would be out of circulation," the letter pointed out.

Even drivers who are not stranded in between trips are unwilling to take up work due to the "fear of ill treatment by the police, stoppage of vehicles on State, district and city borders, and lack of food and diesel on the route" the letter noted.

"There is a dire need to not only address the apprehensions of these drivers but also to motivate/incentivise them (with insurance, etc.)," it said.

The Department of Pharmaceuticals, entrusted with ensuring the seamless production and distribution of critical life-saving medicines in the wake of the lockdown to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, also reiterated its concerns about ancillary industries that it had raised in an earlier April 3 letter to the Home Ministry.

"Ancillary suppliers of inputs, including packaging material, excipients (required for tablets and capsules manufacturing), utility consumables like briquettes/gases (required to run boilers) and spare parts are not able to operate/supply..." the letter had said.

Apart from directives from the Home Ministry and the Pharma Department to State governments on the issue, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) had also written to all State Chief Secretaries on March 26 after it learnt of the problems facing pharma firms.

## UAE offers to help stranded Indians return

The repatriation offer would be available only to those citizens unaffected by the viral outbreak, Dr. Al Banna said.

The assurance comes on a day when Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan sought the intervention of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to persuade the UAE to ensure that the large workforce of Keralites in that country was effectively insulated from the risk of exposure to COVID-19.

In a letter to Mr. Modi, Mr. Vijayan said Keralites, who made up the bulk of blue collar workers in the Emirates, lived in crowded facilities in cities such as Dubai and ran a high risk of contracting the infection.

Kerala was worried about the safety and well-being of its diaspora in the Gulf, the Chief Minister said, seeking Central intervention.

The Ministry of External Affairs has not yet responded to the UAE's offer. New Delhi has said there are at least 25,000 Indian citizens

consisting of travellers, students and stranded tourists in various parts of the globe who want to return home. It is believed that a substantial number of these citizens are in Dubai and Abu Dhabi as these are two prominent aviation hubs that serve India.

The Ambassador said the UAE has introduced one of the "most comprehensive programs" to diagnose the novel coronavirus infection and has tested more than half a million samples in the country to contain spread of the virus.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has so far held several rounds of telephone conversations with the regional heads of governments of the Gulf region since the COVID-19 pandemic. He spoke to Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi on March 26 during which the Crown Prince assured his government's support to the large Indian community in the country.

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## Choked supply lines to be cleared

Centre to consider truck movement, harvest while deciding on extending curbs

NISTULA HEBBAR  
NEW DELHI



Question of priority: Rural areas are likely to get priority during the phasing out of the lockdown. PTI

Stoppered supply lines with trucks waiting on highways, the ongoing harvest season and procurement of foodgrains in various parts of the country are some of the issues that will inform the kind of lockdown the country will continue to have post April 14.

Government sources said that smoothing the supply lines that have still to be seamless and the harvest and procurement season have complicated the decision on the kind of lockdown to have.

"Harvesting is very important, as is procurement as there are standing crops and they need to be taken care of. Mandis do not lend themselves to social distancing," said a government source. Various micro plans are being considered for various States and an overall advisory on how to go about enforcing the behaviour required for the prevention of

the spread of COVID-19 is likely to be sent out.

On Friday, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh said each district with groups of farmers would be given specific dates for bringing their crops to the mandis for procurement and the number of mandis would be increased from 1,900 to over 3,000 to make the operations smaller, leading to fewer crowds.

Such district specific plans are being sought from every State.

While Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to an-

ounce his decision on the continuation of the lockdown after consulting the Chief Ministers through a video conference on Saturday, harvesting and movement of trucks will be likely exempt.

At a meeting held by P.K. Mishra, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, with the empowered group of officials set up to tackle the COVID-19 crisis, on Friday, the issue of shelters being run for migrant workers and the homeless was also brought up.

Mr. Mishra emphasised that "data sanctity" be maintained to ensure the transfer of most economic activity at a standstill due to the lockdown, it appears that harvesting and procurement at least, will be exempted from it, while big urban areas will continue to be under strict lockdown.

## Punjab extends lockdown till May 1

CM to convey decision to Modi today

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHANDIGARH

Punjab on Friday extended the lockdown till May 1 amid apprehension of community spread of COVID-19.

On Thursday, Odisha extended the lockdown till April 30.

infrastructure was not burdened. There was general consensus in the medical community that the lockdown curbs would only delay the spread of the disease," he said.

**Role of private hospitals**

At the meeting, the Cabinet approved the Punjab Clinical Establishment (Registration and Regulation) Ordinance to make private hospitals join the battle against COVID-19. The Chief Minister was authorised to approve the final draft of the Bill.

The ordinance would provide for the registration and regulation of clinical establishments in a professional manner to ensure compliance of clinical standards and protocols and transparency in their functioning for fair and proper delivery of health services to the common man, said the statement.

## Sonia concerned over low number of tests

'Cong. ready to play its role in the fight'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Reviewing the Congress's efforts to provide relief to people hit by the three-week COVID-19 lockdown, party president Sonia Gandhi on Friday expressed concern over the low testing and shortage of testing facilities.

Ms. Gandhi agreed on a Corona Action Strategy that will seek to utilise the network of party workers nationwide. She also hoped that the Union government would come out with a plan to deal with the situation arising out of the prevailing lockdown.

Addressing Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) chiefs from across the country via videoconferencing, Ms. Gandhi said the party was ready to play its role in the country's fight against COVID-19.

She urged party colleagues to take it up with their State governments the need to ramp up testing, provide PPEs for the corona warriors, financial package for them and economic relief for the vulnerable sections.

"Due to the lockdown, the poor labourers left for their villages, and our workers got down to help them. Even today, all over the country, Congress workers from every district are engaged in this work," she said.

The Congress chief also mentioned that she and Rahul Gandhi had written to the government and made suggestions over the battle against the pandemic. "We hope that the government comes out with a plan to meet this challenge. The poor, farmers and labourers

The economy was already in crisis, and now it seems that difficulties will increase

SONIA GANDHI  
Congress president

are suffering the most," the Congress chief said.

"The lockdown is going to put a lot of burden on our economy. The economy was already in crisis, and now it seems that difficulties will increase. We have to be ready for it," she added.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, in an open letter, hailed accredited social health activists, auxiliary nurse and midwives and Anganwadi workers for their role in the fight against the pandemic and said "they are true patriots" who toil to keep communities safe in the midst of this grave crisis."

In another development, the Congress urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to impress upon the United States not to terminate the H-1B visas of Indians living in the country.

"The sword of H-1B visa job termination looms large on the heads of an estimated 75,000 Indians, with the United States giving them only a 60-day period to find a new job in case of a lay-off. There are 3,098 Indians working on H-1B visa," Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said.

## Pannun, SFJ booked for sedition

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHANDIGARH

The Punjab police on Friday booked Gurpatwant Singh Pannun and his banned group Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) for seditious automated calls aimed at instigating people against the State during the lockdown.

Cases have been registered under Section 124 A of IPC, and Sections 10 (a) and 13 (I) of Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, said Director General of Police Dinkar Gupta.

"Since the spread of the COVID-19, Pannun and his associates were found to be disseminating seditious content on social media to frustrate the already distressed masses of Punjab," a statement said.

## Lockdown alone won't help: Yechury

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

As the Union government mulls an extension of the lockdown to further contain the spread of COVID-19, CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury on Friday said that lockdown alone would not help unless it was backed by increased testing to identify and isolate hotspots.

"Merely extending the lockdown and thereby increasing the economic misery and chances of people losing their livelihood, can't be allowed to happen in order to contain the spread," he said at a press conference.

Mr. Yechury said that there had to be a staggered withdrawal of the lockdown by opening up clusters free of COVID-19 patients.

The letter, in Hindi, said, "South Korea, with a population of 6 crore, tested 6 out of every 1,000 persons and managed to prevent the

## Priyanka urges Adityanath to emulate Rajasthan example

Congress leader writes to Chief Minister on fight against virus

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has urged Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to increase testing for COVID-19 and cited the example of Rajasthan.

In a letter to Mr. Adityanath, dated April 9 and released by the Congress on Friday, she said, "It is essential to increase the rate of testing in Uttar Pradesh. In a State like U.P. with massive population, increased testing can prove to be an effective way to contain the spread of the virus."

The letter, in Hindi, said, "South Korea, with a population of 6 crore, tested 6 out of every 1,000 persons and managed to prevent the



Priyanka Gandhi Vadra

Along with increased testing, all those categorised as 'Mild to Moderate High Risk Cases' should be immediately treated to prevent any pressure on intensive care units of hospitals, she noted. Ms. Vadra also asked for improvement in isolation ward quarantine facilities, keeping in mind human dignity, as reports of poor hygiene from some of the facilities had come in.

With reports of community transmission coming in, the government should increase awareness among clusters, as people tended to hide their disease. "Please make sanitizers and masks available on a war-footing and inform the people as to how and where they will get them," she said.

The Congress chief also mentioned that she and Rahul Gandhi had written to the government and made suggestions over the battle against the pandemic. "We hope that the government comes out with a plan to meet this challenge. The poor, farmers and labourers

over 20 family members, were detained at Mahabaleshwar on April 8 despite the lockdown.

Mr. Wadhawan and his brother Dheeraj are DHFL promoters, and co-accused in a case of cheating and money laundering registered against Yes Bank co-founder Rana Kapoor. Late on Thursday night, both brothers, along with

On March 7, the CBI registered the case against the Wadhawans, former Yes Bank managing director and chief executive officer Rana Kapoor and others in connection with the lending of ₹3,700 crore to DHFL allegedly in lieu of ₹600 crore in investments in an entity linked to Rana Kapoor's family.

Kapil Wadhawan was named as the promoter-director of DHFL and Dheeraj Wadhawan as the director of RKW Developers Private Li-

## CBI asks officials not to free Wadhawans

They face warrants in Yes Bank case

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has asked the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police of Satara, Maharashtra, not to release Kapil and Dheeraj Wadhawan without its consent or a court order.

Non-bailable arrest warrants are pending against the Wadhawans in the Yes Bank case registered by the CBI in March.

"On April 9, we received information that the accused were located in Satara and were lodged at a government quarantine centre at Panchgani. Thereafter, an email was immediately sent to the District Magistrate and the

Superintendent of Police for not releasing them without a no-objection certificate from the CBI or a court order," a CBI official said.

The local administration has also been told to ensure that the accused do not flee. According to the CBI, the Wadhawan brothers have been absconding since the investigation started.

Kapil Wadhawan was

named as the promoter-director of DHFL and Dheeraj Wadhawan as the director of RKW Developers Private Li-

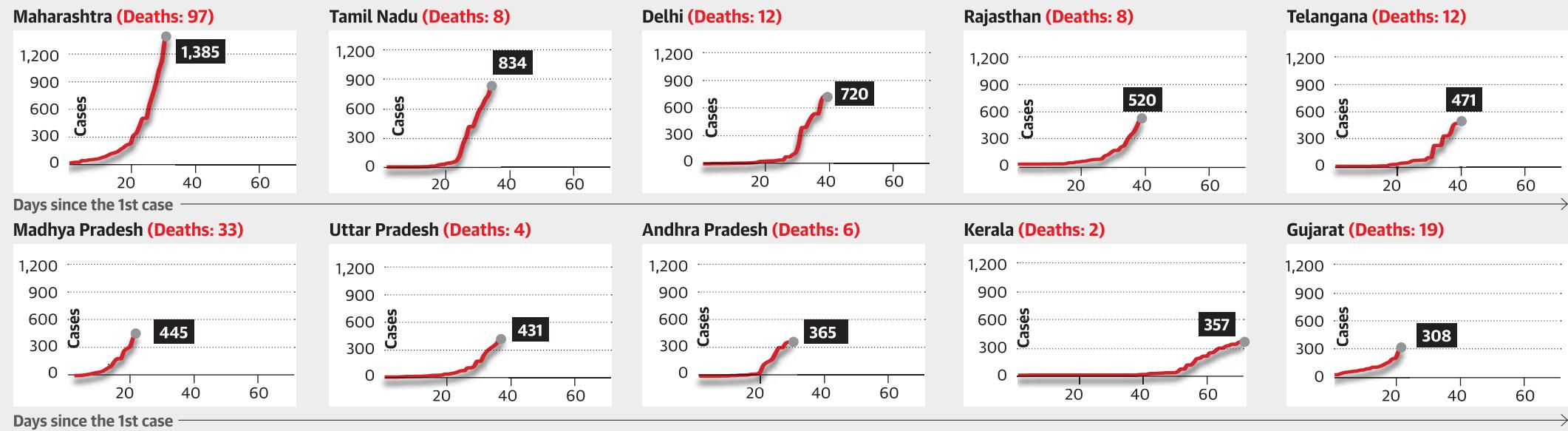
tion, notices under Section 41-A of the Code of Criminal Procedure were served on them. But they did not turn up," the official said.

A Mumbai special court issued non-bailable arrest warrants against the Wadhawan brothers on March 17. But they did not appear before either the CBI or the court, said the CBI.

CM YK

**Tracking the rise in States**

The charts show the progression of COVID-19 cases since the first case in 10 States/U.T. where maximum cases were confirmed. With 1,385 cases, Maharashtra had the highest number of cases. The data is as of 6:45 p.m. on Friday.

**IN BRIEF****Jallianwala Bagh memorial to remain shut**

NEW DELHI  
The Union Ministry of Culture said on Friday that the Jallianwala Bagh memorial in Amritsar would remain closed to the public till June 15, as planned renovation works had been affected by the coronavirus pandemic. The memorial has been closed since February 15 and was supposed to open on April 13, ending the year-long commemoration of the centenary of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. On April 13, 1919, British forces opened fire on unarmed Indians at Jallianwala Bagh, killing hundreds of people.

**Assam records first COVID-19 death**

GUWAHATI  
The local authorities on Friday declared a mosque in Guwahati a 'containment zone', hours after Assam recorded the first COVID-19 death from Hailakandi district. Officials said about 100 people, including eight who had returned from the Tablighi Jamaat in Delhi's Nizamuddin, had attended a congregation at the Athgaon Kabaristan Mosque on March 12. Two of the returnees had tested positive, as did another person who attended the congregation with them.

**18 went home from quarantine without check**

LUCKNOW  
A village pradhan was booked and a panchayat secretary and lekhpal were suspended in Uttar Pradesh's Sitapur district on Friday after 18 persons quarantined in a primary school building were allowed to leave without a medical inspection for COVID-19. The incident is the latest in a series of lapses reported from quarantine centres in rural areas of the State, where people, especially migrants who recently returned from other States, have escaped from quarantine before time.

**Maharashtra cases mount to 1,574**

13 new deaths reported across State

**STAFF REPORTER**  
PUNE

Maharashtra recorded a surge of over 200 new COVID-19 positive cases for the second consecutive day on Friday as the cumulative tally shot to 1,574, while the death toll rose to 110 with 13 new deaths being reported from across the State.

In a now-familiar pattern, Mumbai once again recorded the maximum deaths - 10 and the maximum cases - 132, of the 210 fresh cases as the city's tally itself exceeded 1,000 cases on Friday, standing at 1,008.

One death each was reported from Pune, Vasai-Virar and Panvel, said State health authorities.

About 85% among the 13 new deaths had high-risk comorbidities like diabetes, asthma and hypertension, said officials while 188 persons have recovered and discharged so far.

The tally of positive cases in Pune district continued to rise as well with more

## India well-equipped: Vardhan

Minister says country is unlikely to face an 'unmanageable crisis' from COVID-19

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

India is unlikely to face an "unmanageable crisis" from COVID-19, Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said at an online conference organised by the India Foundation. He was addressing international delegates, according to information on his official Twitter handle.

Were matters to deteriorate, India had enough infrastructure to tide over the crisis, he said.

"We have 500 dedicated COVID-19 hospitals, 200,000 beds across hospitals and 50,000 ICU beds. We have ordered everything in plenty. In the last two months, we have ensured adequate testing facilities. We started with one lab and today we have over 200. Over 150 are public labs."

**Multiple strategies**  
As on Friday, the Ministry has reported 6,761 cases and 206 deaths. Dr. Vardhan said India had multiple strategies



**Ready for challenge:** A municipal worker spraying disinfectant in a makeshift hospital in Mumbai. ■ AADESH CHAUDHARI

in place to contain the pandemic. For more than 15 cases in a district, we have a 'large outbreak' strategy and for less than 15, a cluster containment strategy, he said.

According to guidelines released by the ICMR this week, both strategies involve active surveillance for cases and contacts in an identified geographic zone, expanding testing to all at risk in these

places and improving hospital accommodation capacity.

"In another way, COVID-19 has come as a blessing in disguise," he remarked. Until now, India had largely relied on importing Personal Protective Equipment for health care workers. However, with rising local demand and shortages, the government had, via the Ministry of Textiles,

authorised 39 manufacturers to make such equipment locally.

"From next week, 10 lakh PPEs are expected, as well as 48,000 additional ventilators," he said.

**Hails health officials**

He also addressed a conference with health officials from various States and "congratulated them" for keeping the situation under control, according to a statement from the Press Information Bureau. He exhorted all States to establish at least one dedicated COVID-19 hospital in every district.

States ought not to be neglecting the treatment/medical needs of pregnant women, dialysis patients and those suffering from thalassemia and must improve access to mobile blood donation.

Everyone should download the Arogya app as it would help assess the risk of infection, the press statement added.

## 23 members of a family in Bihar's Siwan test positive

The borders of three districts have been sealed

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
PATNA

As many as 23 members of a family in a village in Bihar's Siwan district have tested positive for COVID-19, taking the total number of cases in the district to 29. The borders of Siwan, Begusarai and Nawada districts have been sealed by the State administration to prevent the spread of the disease.

In the village under Raghunathpur block of Siwan, a youth had returned from Oman on March 21 and had mingled freely with the residents, even playing cricket with friends. After his sample tested positive on April 4, 22 of the 28 members of his family, including several women and children, too were found infected. Six other people from different villages of the district too have tested positive.

With 29 positive cases out of the total 60 in the State, Siwan has become the hot-spot in Bihar. A sizeable population in the district belong to the minority community and nearly 60,000 work in Gulf countries. The village from where 23 members of a family tested positive has a population of over 5,000, with nearly 900 households. It is 31 km from the Siwan town and 5 km from Raghunathpur block.

The Siwan district administration has sealed the vil-



**Long wait:** Beneficiaries waiting to withdraw relief money from their bank accounts in Patna on Friday. ■ RANJEET KUMAR

lage and drones are monitoring the movement of people. One company of Bihar Military Police and State Disaster Response Force personnel too have been deployed to sanitize the area. The Divisional Commissioner of Saran, along with top district officials, is monitoring the situation in the village. The villagers have appealed that all of them be tested as the youth had moved around quite freely.

## Bhilwara breaks virus transmission chain

11-day-long 'all-down curfew' helped

**MOHAMMED IQBAL**  
JAIPUR

The "ruthless containment" model adopted in Bhilwara, which emerged last month as the worst-affected district in Rajasthan, has succeeded in breaking the chain of novel Coronavirus transmission. Among the 27 COVID-19 positive cases found earlier in the textile city, 25 patients have been cured of the infection and 15 discharged from hospital.

Bhilwara Collector Rajendra Bhatt said on Friday that the remaining 10 persons, who were under observation, would be discharged in a couple of days. The two elderly people who died after testing COVID-19 positive reportedly had co-morbidity and other medical complications, while one of them was also in a state of coma when he was tested.

Since April 3, when an aggressive 11-day-long "all-down curfew" started with even essential services being curtailed, only two new cases have been reported in the city of 4 lakh people.

Teams of health workers have screened a population of 24 lakh in the entire district with its borders being sealed, screening in the city and in rural areas, and sending the people showing symptoms to home quarantine and the confirmed patients to isolation wards. This was followed by a rigorous monitoring in the villages.



Of the 27 positive cases reported, 25 patients have been cured.

on Thursday. He has claimed that he had no travel or contact history.

Daulat Meena, a physician at the Mahatma Gandhi Government Hospital who treated some of the patients, told *The Hindu* that the regimen was decided after studying the contact and medical history of each of them. "The right combination of drugs and multiple testing at regular gaps ensured timely recovery of patients. Since most of them were staff members of a private hospital, they knew that the illness could be fatal if not managed properly."

The containment model involved some meticulous strategies adopted in several phases, including isolation of the district with its borders being sealed, screening in the city and in rural areas, and sending the people showing symptoms to home quarantine and the confirmed patients to isolation wards.

The only patient infected with Coronavirus and being treated in the district is a 47-year-old teacher, who was detected positive in the screening by a medical team

## Maharashtra cases mount to 1,574

13 new deaths reported across State

**STAFF REPORTER**  
PUNE

Maharashtra recorded a surge of over 200 new COVID-19 positive cases for the second consecutive day on Friday as the cumulative tally shot to 1,574, while the death toll rose to 110 with 13 new deaths being reported from across the State.

In a now-familiar pattern, Mumbai once again recorded the maximum deaths - 10 and the maximum cases - 132, of the 210 fresh cases as the city's tally itself exceeded 1,000 cases on Friday, standing at 1,008.

One death each was reported from Pune, Vasai-Virar and Panvel, said State health authorities.

About 85% among the 13 new deaths had high-risk comorbidities like diabetes, asthma and hypertension, said officials while 188 persons have recovered and discharged so far.

The tally of positive cases in Pune district continued to rise as well with more

## Gujarat records 116 positive COVID-19 cases and 2 deaths

The total number of positive cases has increased to 378

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
AHMEDABAD

In the largest single day spike, 116 new cases of the novel coronavirus infection and two deaths were recorded in Gujarat on Friday.

The total number of positive cases has increased to 378, and 19 persons have died so far.

Two persons died in Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar. Till Friday, Ahmedabad accounted for seven deaths and Surat four. So far, 33 infected persons have recovered and discharged from hospitals.

On Thursday and Friday, the State recorded 195 cases and three deaths.

**7,718 samples tested**

As per the details released by the Health Department, a total of 7,718 samples have been tested in the State and 378 of them have returned positive and 7,237 negative. The reports in respect of



**In full swing:** A worker spraying disinfectant in a residential complex in Ahmedabad on Friday. ■ VIJAY SONEJI

103 samples are pending.

Gujarat's Health Secretary Jayanti Ravi said the State had increased the number of testing, so more cases were coming out.

The infection has now covered 20 of the 33 districts. However, Ahmedabad remains the main hotspot, with 197 cases. Fifty-nine cases have been reported

## Tablighi members infected

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
AHMEDABAD

The novel coronavirus infection is spreading to more districts in Gujarat.

On Friday, seven cases were reported in Bharuch in the first occurrence of COVID-19 in the district.

They are all members of Tablighi Jamaat from Tamil Nadu and Haryana, who had arrived here for preaching in villages of Bharuch.

"Seven cases have been reported from a village in Bharuch. They are all Jamaat members, five from Tamil Nadu and two from Haryana," a top official from Bharuch told *The Hindu*.

He said they stayed in a mosque and were asked to undergo a test.

DGP Shivanand Jha said a total of 130 people had been identified in the State who had attended Tablighi Jamaat's congregation in Delhi in March. Of them, 13 tested positive, including one who died.

TAMIL NADU WATER SUPPLY AND DRAINAGE BOARD			
Tender Extension Notification No. IFB No. 29-1/F. Urapakkam/DOI/CE/VLR/2020/Dt : 09.04.2020			
Name of work : Setting up a water Distribution Station (WDS) to Cater the Needs of IT Companies and Neighbourhood Areas of Urapakkam in Chengalpattu District under MNP Fund - Execution period 9 months, Trial run period - 6 months and maintenance of the Scheme 12 months - 2nd call			
Ref :	09.03.2020	The tender for the above works have been called for in the reference cited is hereby extended as follows :	
Sl. No.	Description	Already given	Extended upto
1	The sale of Tender Schedule	Upto 5.45 PM on 09.04.2020	Upto 5.45 AM on 15.05.2020
2	The last date of receipt of tender	Upto 3.00 PM on 13.04.2020	Upto 3.00 PM on 18.05.2020
3	The date of tender opening	At 3.30 PM on 18.04.2020	At 3.30 PM on 18.05.2020
4	Pre Bid Meeting	At 11.00 AM on 27.03.2020	At 11.00 AM on 08.05.2020
The other terms and conditions specified in the tender documents for above works remain unaltered. Please Visit our Website <a href="http://www.tenders.tn.gov.in">www.tenders.tn.gov.in</a> and <a href="http://www.twabd.org.in">www.twabd.org.in</a> for further details.			
Chief Engineer (I/c), TWABD Board, Vellore - 6.			

## Mobile link must for PF withdrawal

**YUTHIKA BHARGAVA**  
NEW DELHI

Employees' Provident Fund account-holders who do not have a mobile number linked to Aadhaar may not be able to withdraw money immediately under a government scheme to mitigate the economic impact of the novel coronavirus outbreak.

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation accepts only online claims. A key requisite is an Aadhaar-linked mobile number on which the EPFO sends a one-time password (OTP). But online update of mobile numbers is not allowed for security reasons.

was a lot of resistance among the local people.

The Ministry has also asked the States to maintain "appropriate vigil on social media" against the circulation of objectionable content, the communication adds.

### Security review

Home Minister Amit Shah reviewed the border security arrangements along Pakistan and Bangladesh borders through video conferencing on Thursday. He spoke to around 50 officials in the field. A senior government official said the BSF had been asked to suspend all kind of passes given to people dwelling along the border and



Amit Shah

who cross the border gates or zero line to attend to their fields. Cultivation is allowed in the open area beyond the fences and up to the zero line or international boundary.

The topography in some

areas along the border is such that the zero line passes through the houses of villagers, one part in India and the other in Bangladesh. There are around 60 villages in North, South 24 Parganas and Nadia districts of South Bengal located right up to the zero line. Only 42% of the area is fenced owing to the riverine and complex land boundary.

"The district officials in West Bengal say they have not received any written communication from the State government, so they cannot issue any order. But to implement the Ministry's directions, we have moved the personnel right up to the border and are also sensitising

people to not let Bangladeshis enter their homes as they might be COVID carriers," a senior BSF official told *The Hindu*.

India had sealed all its land borders on March 23. India shares 4096.7 km border with Bangladesh and 3323 km border with Pakistan.

In the meeting with BSF officials, Mr. Shah directed that vigil on the border may be intensified.

In another communication, the Ministry directed the States and Union Territories to ensure strict compliance with lockdown measures and not to allow any social or religious gathering or procession.

## BSF told to suspend border passes

Home Ministry asks States not to allow social or religious gatherings or processions during lockdown

**VIJAYA SINGH**  
NEW DELHI

The Border Security Force (BSF) has been asked to suspend all passes given to farmers to tend to crops, especially along the densely populated Bangladesh border, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The border guarding force is in a fix as the West Bengal government is yet to issue guidelines restricting the movement of farmers as the harvest season is on.

Following the directions issued by the Union Home Ministry to "not allow a single Bangladeshi" to enter India, the BSF on Friday wrote to the State government to address the issue as there

was a lot of resistance among the local people.

The Ministry has also

asked the States to maintain

"appropriate vigil on social

media" against the circula-

tion of objectionable con-

tent, the communication adds.

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who cross the border gates or zero line to attend to their fields. Cultivation is allowed in the open area beyond the fences and up to the zero line or international boundary.

The topography in some

## India has enough stock of HCQ, says Centre

Countries that received clearances for import of the drug express gratitude to government

**SUHASINI HAIDAR**  
NEW DELHI

The Union government on Friday said India had "sufficient buffer" of the much-in-demand drug hydroxychloroquine (HCQ). Export of the drug to several countries had begun, it said.

Researchers believe there is a chance that the drug can treat coronavirus infection but it is yet to be clinically proven.

"A lot of requests of HCQ are already there and taking into view the domestic stock and requirement and keeping sufficient buffer, a decision was taken by the Group of Ministers to release some of the surplus medicine for export purposes," Health Ministry Joint Secretary Lav Agarwal said.

The government's move won it many expressions of gratitude from countries that received clearances for their



**In demand:** India has lifted the ban on the export of some drugs, including hydroxychloroquine. ■ AP

medical supplies, which had been held up for weeks after the Directorate General of Foreign Trade banned them for export.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the decision. "We have to jointly

fight this pandemic. India is ready to do whatever is possible to help our friends," Mr. Modi tweeted in reply to Mr. Netanyahu. "India is committed to contribute to humanity's fight against this pandemic," he tweeted to Mr. Bolsonaro. Acting British High Commissioner also thanked Mr. Modi for releasing

ing paracetamol stocks for his country.

Exports of HCQ and paracetamol were banned last week but the government overturned the ban on April 6, allowing the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Department of Pharmaceuticals to assess requests from various countries. Twenty-four other drugs that were put on a restricted list in March have been cleared for export as well.

### Domestic estimate

"In the next week, we will require one crore [10 million] HCQ tablets for domestic use. We have over 3.28 crore. [So] this will complete the entire month's requirement," Mr. Agarwal said, dismissing reports of domestic shortages of HCQ as a result of the decision. Another 2 crore were in production, he added.

However, Congress MP Shashi Tharoor criticised the government for the move. He alleged that it was not putting "India first".

External Affairs Ministry officials said exports were being cleared for more than a dozen countries in three categories: humanitarian aid, aid to neighbouring SAARC countries, and commercial orders to countries such as the U.S. and Brazil, who have pushed the most for the release of HCQ orders for which their companies had made payments. "We are in the process of providing humanitarian aid in the form of pharmaceutical and other items, including HCQ & paracetamol, to SAARC countries and to Mauritius and Seychelles. We would also be providing these items to some countries in Africa and Latin America," an MEA official told *The Hindu*.

## Ayushman listing for pvt. hospitals

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

The National Health Authority has launched express empanelment to bring a large number of private hospitals under Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY)

to ensure continued essential treatment for serious illnesses such as cancer and heart ailments.

With the launch of this new mechanism, Hospital Empanelment Module (HEM) Lite, patients suffering from serious illnesses such as cancer, cardiac issues and diabetes that require continuous treatment will be able to continue getting inpatient services without the fear of contracting the infection.

"The mechanism will also help in empanelling dedicated COVID-19 hospitals," noted a release.

every step," Arjun Dang, CEO, Dangs Labs, told *The Hindu* in an email.

"Private laboratories are barely able to recover costs at the government-mandated cost of ₹4,500. Also, the routine work of laboratories owing to the lockdown has reduced drastically and keeping this in mind we hope the government comes up with modalities so that testing in private units remains sustainable. We are currently following the SC's orders and doing the test free of cost while awaiting further clarity," he said.

Arokiaswamy Velumani, managing director of the Mumbai-headquartered Thyrocare Technologies, said his organisation had conducted some 20 free tests since Thursday. "The government ought to have immediately issued guidelines regarding reimbursement and compensation," he told *The Hindu*.

Of the 67 laboratories offering tests, at least 50 have licensed kits and diagnostics from international firms, which add to the costs.

The test being offered is the real-time reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction test (RT-PCR) that can detect the presence of the virus.

## INTERVIEW | DEREK O'BRIEN

## 'Any lockdown has to be humane'

Trinamool MP says West Bengal will never have a blanket closure of facilities

**SANDEEP PHUKAN**

**Derek O'Brien**, Trinamool Congress leader in the Rajya Sabha, has said that though the party had raised the red flag about COVID-19 in early March, it was not taken seriously. Edited excerpts of an interview done over phone.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said most State governments favour lifting the lockdown in a phased manner. What is the Bengal government's view of extending the lockdown?

■ The Chief Minister of Bengal will announce this in the next few days. The interpretation of the lockdown is important. It's not a lockdown where you shut everything down and you throw away the key. Mamata Banerjee is very clear: any closure has to be done in a humane manner. She is leading by example. Going to vegetable markets and drawing circles on the ground to communicate physical distancing. So Bengal will never have a blanket lockdown.

From Day 1, vegetable markets have been open, essentials available and compliant with physical distancing. It is all about striking the right balance.

Bengal has set up an Expert Committee with very distinguished names including Nobel Laureate Professor Abhijit Banerjee to formulate a response strategy. What exactly will this committee look at?

■ Let me tell you what the structure is in Bengal. The Chief Minister, who also happens to hold the Health and Home portfolios, is hands on. She has two groups advising her. One is the Global Advisory Board (GAB), which is led by Nobel Laureate Abhijit Vinayak Banerjee. This team of eight com-



We have three Task Forces headed by the State's senior bureaucrats

You have commented on Bengal getting personal protection equipment (PPE) for its doctors and healthcare workers. But we have seen viral videos of doctors in north Bengal and Howrah wearing raincoats as protection. How do you explain that?

■ This is a national health emergency. It is disappointing to see that the only people not self-quarantining themselves are members of the IT cell of the world's largest political party and are spreading misinformation even in times of distress. I would appeal to them: take a break. Spread public service messages. You will have enough time to play your dirty tricks.

Bengal, like a few other States, has to fend for itself. We were the first State to set up a ₹200-crore emergency fund. We were the first State to announce a 10 lakh insurance package which went beyond the ambit of health workers and included State or private employees of all essential services.

We must also thank Uddhab Thackeray, M.K. Stalin, Arvind Kejriwal and so many others from different State governments for their continued help in this time of crisis.

On the medical front, our policy is to separate CO-

ration to 8 crore people for six months. Can the State manage this given its huge debt backlog?

■ The Centre owes Bengal ₹61,000 crore, ₹36,000 crore of which is backlog. The Chief Minister has written to the Prime Minister for ₹25,000 crore. We have received nothing.

To marshal resources, we have suggested to increase the withdrawal limits for States under the FRBM Act – from the current three to five per cent.

While we are continuing to fund our operations from State reserves, the Centre must release funds to all States right now because this challenge has to be met at the State and local levels. The ₹1.7 lakh crore package or 2% of GDP won't work. We need at least 5% of GDP or roughly ₹8 lakh crore.

How badly has the State been hit in terms of revenue because of the lockdown and how do you plan to make good the losses?

■ Our first priority now is taking a humane approach to this crisis. We must curb the spread of COVID-19 and ensure the safety of our people. Of course the economy is important too and we have adopted a nuanced calibrated lockdown. Let me explain how.

Beedi workers in Murshidabad are working. Flower markets continue operations. Sweet shops are open for four hours a day as thousands of litres of milk were being wasted due to the lockdown. The Bengal government has also started a new programme, "Procheshta", where ₹1,000 is given as a cash grant to those in the unorganised sector including daily labourers, wage earners. About six million people, including domestic and migrant workers, will benefit.

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**Crucial move:** Following a Supreme Court court order, a few laboratories have started free testing. ■ AP

## Some private labs offering free tests

Guidelines on compensation awaited

**JACOB KOSHY**  
NEW DELHI

Some private laboratories have said they were offering free testing for COVID-19 following a Supreme Court directive on Wednesday. However, some of them noted that it was unsustainable unless the government stepped in soon with guidelines on how they could be compensated.

Every test costs the government ₹4,500 and 67 private laboratories authorised by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) across the country were charging the same until the Supreme Court issue the order. The court had directed the government to issue guidelines.

"We endorse the Supreme Court's judgment, which aims at increasing the accessibility to COVID-19 testing and to make it affordable for the common man. However for private laboratories, there are numerous costs such as reagents, consumables, skilled manpower and infrastructure specifics. The pandemic also calls for immense infection control measures like personal protective equipment, viral transport media and the need to keep sanitation and employee safety in mind at



THE HINDU GROUP

# New helpline to fight domestic violence

People can contact the National Commission for Women over WhatsApp during the lockdown

JAGRITI CHANDRA  
NEW DELHI

The National Commission for Women (NCW) on Friday launched a helpline number – 0721-7735372 – to enable those facing domestic violence to send a WhatsApp message to access help.

"Many women don't know how to send an e-mail, whereas WhatsApp is easy to use. That is why we decided to launch this initiative," NCW Chairperson Rekha Sharma told *The Hindu*. However, she added that the helpline was only a temporary facility being made available for the period of the lockdown.

In the first week after the lockdown, the NCW record-

  
**Many women don't know how to send an email, whereas WhatsApp is easy to use. That is why we decided to launch this initiative**  
REKHA SHARMA  
Chairperson, National Commission for Women

ed more than a two-fold increase in complaints of domestic violence and sexual assault as well as a three-fold rise in complaints of police apathy towards crimes against women.

The move comes days after Minister for Women and Child Development Smriti Irani held a web-conference with more than 1,000 participants from various institutions linked to her Ministry

on the issue of women's safety. The Minister sought to convey the message that the government was working for women in need of protection.

**Digital governance**

She urged her staff to take steps to encourage reporting of violence against women as well as use digital governance effectively to ensure their safety.

Ms. Sharma explained that when a person sends a message on the number seeking help, the NCW's complaints and legal cell will contact her and seek specific details about the intervention she requires. Following this, she will be linked with the local police team or a counsellor from a local NGO or a medical facility or relocated to a One Stop Centre temporarily.

The messaging facility will also help those women who cannot make a call because they may be overheard by the perpetrators of abuse.

The NCW has compiled a State-wise list of One Stop Centres as well as nodal police officers who can be con-

tacted immediately. It is also working on building a network of counsellors and has sought UN Women's help on this.

When asked how the NCW plans to popularise the new helpline, Ms. Sharma said it would use social media, news media, radio and NGOs to spread the word.

On why the NCW did not opt for an easier number to recall as a helpline, Ms. Sharma said, "To set up the facility in a short span, we are merely using a spare personal number we had with us, which will be discontinued after the lockdown. It is also difficult to get a new number because of the restrictions imposed."

1

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on Friday asked the Union Ministry of Home Affairs to address the concerns of the mentally ill on the streets during the lockdown to check the spread of the novel coronavirus.

The NHRC took cognisance of a complaint about the alleged violation of the human rights of such people and asked the Ministry to inform it, within two weeks, of the arrangements made for them.

"In the meantime, neces-

sary directions may be issued by them [the Ministry] to all the States and Union Territories to ensure that persons suffering from any kind of mental ailment under their jurisdiction are provided with proper counselling towards necessary precautions for their personal care and protection from the virus and not deprived of basic amenities like food, shelter and medical care etc.," a statement from the NHRC said.

The NHRC said that while the Central and State governments were trying to provide food and health ser-

vices during the crisis, some sections, like those suffering from mental illness, should be provided food, shelter and social security by the state.

**Dependent on charities**

It said the complaint highlighted the issue of mentally ill persons dependent for food and shelter on charities. "But the administration has not issued any specific guidelines for these people, and no arrangements for their survival during this period of crisis have been made," the NHRC said.

## Bengal Chemicals gets COVID-19 drug boost

PSU can make hydroxychloroquine

SHIV SAHAY SINGH  
KOLKATA

In an overnight decision, Bengal Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals Ltd. (BCPL) was issued a licence to manufacture hydroxychloroquine, an anti-malarial drug that is being used in the treatment of COVID-19, on Friday.

The decision comes in the wake of reports that the profit-making unit, despite being the only government undertaking to manufacture anti-malarial drugs in the country, did not have a licence to manufacture hydroxychloroquine. *The Hindu* reported on April 9 that the company was idling, awaiting orders to start producing hydroxychloroquine. The BCPL is reputed as India's first pharmaceutical company.

Friday's order from the Directorate of Drug Control, Government of West Bengal, allowed the BCPL to manufacture hydroxychloroquine tablets. The public sector undertaking has a facility to make tablets at Maniktala.

"We got the licence only a few hours ago from the Drugs Controller. Now, we can manufacture it subject to the availability of raw material," P.S. Chandraiah, Managing Director, BCPL, told *The Hindu* on Friday.

BCPL officials said a few pharma companies, such as Cadila and Ipcia, may have the API which is available with a few companies in India or is imported from China. Since it is not possible to import from China we are asking both the State and the Centre to help us procure it," Mr. Chandraiah said.

BCPL officials said a few pharma companies, such as Cadila and Ipcia, may have the API and the company was trying to source that. Mr. Chandraiah said with the API, the company could manufacture about 10 lakh tablets a day.

The company was manufacturing chloroquine phosphate and the management had assured that it could rise to the occasion and make hydroxychloroquine, which was just another formulation, if it got the licence and orders. After reports emerged of the company not using its optimum capacity, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee raised the issue. "What is Bengal Chemicals doing?" she asked on Thursday.

However, even with the li-



Bengal Chemicals, in Kolkata, can make 10 lakh tablets a day.

cence, BCPL does not have adequate raw materials for production.

### Not enough raw stock

"We do not have the active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) which is available with a few companies in India or is imported from China. Since it is not possible to import from China we are asking both the State and the Centre to help us procure it," Mr. Chandraiah said.

BCPL officials said a few pharma companies, such as Cadila and Ipcia, may have the API and the company was trying to source that. Mr. Chandraiah said with the API, the company could manufacture about 10 lakh tablets a day.

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While there has been talk of a strategic sale of the company, the PSU, with 300 employees, has posted profits for the past few years. In 2018-19, it made a profit of ₹25 crore.

## 'Ministry move weakens scrutiny of genetic labs'

AIDWA writes to Health Minister

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

A women's rights group has sent a memorandum to Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan asking the government to withdraw an order that could weaken the implementation of the law that bans pre-natal sex determination.

"The suspension of these rules throughout the country would mean that clinics and genetic labs can carry on functioning without any scrutiny. This is the only scrutiny that these labs are subjected to, to assess their adherence to the basic rules and to ensure that sex selection is not being carried out by them," the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) stated.

It was referring to a gazette notification issued by the Health Ministry on April 4, which suspended Rule 8, Rule 9(8) and Rule 18A(6) of

the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 1994.

The clauses deal with the process for renewal of registration of genetic and ultrasound clinic, responsibilities of labs in maintaining and preserving records of all tests, techniques and procedures as well as the duties of district authorities in sharing a quarterly progress report.

The Health Ministry has since issued a clarification through a press statement that its move was to only allow an extension of deadline for submitting these reports until June 30, but AIDWA has rejected this explanation.

Application for re-registration should not be postponed as it can be done online, AIDWA pointed out, adding that relevant records must be maintained as per the Act.

## Join duty, govt. tells Kannan Gopinathan

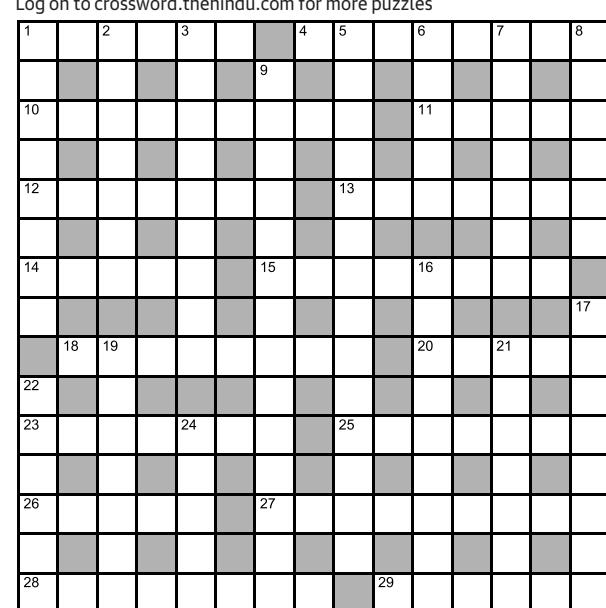
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
AHMEDABAD

The government has asked Kannan Gopinathan, who quit the Indian Administrative Service eight months ago "over denial of freedom to the people of Jammu and Kashmir", to join duty in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. But he has refused.

The government has asked him to join duty on the grounds that his resignation has not been accepted yet. Mr. Gopinathan said he was willing to volunteer during the COVID-19 crisis but not as an IAS officer.

## THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12907

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles



### ACROSS

- 1 Crush fruit (6)
- 4 Meditates in secret, about controlling conflict at heart (8)
- 10 After that, idiot carrying present reaches hotel (9)
- 12 Zulu chased by wild bear and another animal (5)
- 14
- 16
- 18
- 19
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- 28
- 29

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CMYK

## SUDOKU

6			5			1		
	1		8					
		7	9			2	4	
2	9						6	5
1	7		6	9		8	2	
8	3						7	9
5	1		6	7				
			3	8				
8			1		5			

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

### Solution to puzzle 12906

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

### Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

No.55489 | Distribution: www.mightyfingers.com

4 5 1 8 6 2 7 3 9  
6 3 8 9 7 5 1 4 2  
7 2 9 3 4 1 8 6 5  
3 6 7 2 8 4 9 5 1  
5 8 4 7 1 9 6 2 3  
1 9 2 6 5 3 4 8 7  
9 4 5 1 3 6 2 7 8  
2 7 6 5 9 8 3 1 4  
8 1 3 4 2 7 5 9 6

## FAITH

### Narasimha praised

One of the names by which Lord Mahavishnu is praised in the Vishnu Sahasranama is Sandhaata. This is a reference to His avatara as Narasimha, said M.A. Venkatakrishnan in a discourse. As Narasimha, He calls out to devotees like Prahlada, and keeps them beside Him. The next name is Sandhimaana. This means that not only does He draw His bhaktas to His side, but He also ensures that they are beside Him always, and are not separated from Him. Narasimha is Sthirah, which means that even if those who are with Him should err, while they are with Him, He willingly forgives them and overlooks their errors.

He is Ajah. This means that His birth is unusual. He suddenly sprang from a pillar. Vedanta Desika says that because of the Narasimha avatara, a pillar became Brahma's grandmother! Vishnu is the father of Brahma, and since Vishnu as Narasimha, appeared from a pillar, naturally, the pillar becomes Brahma's grandmother! Narasimha is Durmashanah, because enemies cannot face Him. He is Saasta, because He punished the wicked in a way they deserved. He is Visrudaatma. This indicates that the story of Narasimha is one that should be heard by everyone. He is Suraarisha, because He tore up the enemy of the celestials, namely Hiranyakasipu.

Ramanujacharya appointed 74 Simhasanadipathis to carry forward the Visishtadvaita philosophy, and for every one of them, Narasimha was the Aradhana murthi. Nammazhvar asks, will anyone study about anyone but Rama, for association with Him, even blades of grass were liberated? In the following verse, Nammazhvar extols the Krishna avatara. But he finally says knowledgeable persons will not want to learn anything except the glories of the Narasimha avatara.

## DEBORAH CORNELIOUS

Conan O'Brien's giant forehead is like a topographical map of Mars, all red and craggy. Also, Stephen Colbert thinks the extraterrestrial undulations on his face are only heightened, courtesy the local morgue's lighting. The two late night veterans are firing jabs aplenty on YouTube whilst socially distanced. Ever since production has halted, stars of late night television have been forced to develop stripped-down DIY adaptations of their regular offering. Sans studio lighting, live bands and a full-house audience to applaud and chortle at jokes, they've also thrown glamour out the window. Instead, they are the new 'it' YouTubers. In complying with the show must go on adage, these hosts with the most(s) have taken the challenge head on, whether it is to raise funds to fight the virus or simply just brighten someone's day.

## Peers and politics

While some late night heroes have outwitted their obstacles, others have buckled under the pressure. For instance, long before he swallowed Colbert's scathing remarks like a champ, O'Brien proved himself to be the king of web exclusive content, even branching out into the incredibly popular podcast, *Conan O'Brien Needs a Friend*. While, Team Coco's (his YouTube channel) videos get a few lakh views soon after release, it is his after-show that cruises into the millions. His latest shenanigan, shot by himself, includes checking in on staff member Jordan Schlansky, who is often accused by O'Brien of being a robot. This time it is Schlansky's alternatives to toilet paper that earns his boss' ridicule. Spoiler alert: Indians do it all the time! Plus, it sparked an intellectually stimulating debate on post-ablu-



# Quarantined monologues

Kids, pets, basement tours, podcasts — late night TV hosts are pulling out all the stops while filming from home

tion cleanliness in the comments, with gems like "shower gel or soap and just wash it like you would your underarms..."

Those that rely on political humour to snag those ratings continue with the usual monologue — these days it is mostly about a certain Cheeto's inability to handle a crisis. Colbert, who is high up on the political humour ranking,

pulls out all the stops: submerging himself suit-clad in a bathtub, and getting his kids to do his make-up as he cracks the jokes. Of course, now he's upped the game with a satellite truck and a minimal production crew, much to the envy of both O'Brien and *Last Week Tonight's* John Oliver.

## Pursuit of happiness

Meanwhile, Trevor Noah, now known as sweatshirt king, continues with his commentary on political affairs on the rechristened, *The Daily Social Distancing Show*. But he has also introduced something called 'Ray of Sunshine'. Good news in these dark times could include the clear sky New Delhi is enjoying, almost

like a makeover courtesy *Queer Eye's* Fab Five. With 17,31,475 views, it is safe to say he's doing something right.

Following suit is the ever-so-charming Seth Meyers, whose own 'The Kind of Story We Need Right Now' premiered the tale of The Industrious Spirit Company in Rhode Island. Their noble efforts include manufacturing and giving away hand sanitiser for free while continuing their production of vodka. "I'm so psyched... we do need both," quips Meyers.

In the deep sea of testosterone that rules late night television, Samantha Bee represents team oestrogen. Her *Little Show in the Big Woods*

— yes, she's so rich her backyard looks like a forest — is filmed by the safe minimal crew of her husband. Bee makes sure to tackle women's issues during the pandemic, like domestic abuse, abortion rights and mental labour. And finds time to chop wood and hunt animated bears with toilet paper.

## Family ties

Comedy and celebrity voyeurism, it seems, trumps information and politics. Humour, after all, is a



balm in crisis. But a peek into the lives of the rich and famous seems to be the clear winner of the quarantine culture war. The Jimmys of late night, who rely mostly on guests and games, now rope in their family to grab eyeballs. It is working and how. When Fallon's adorable girls aren't interrupting his show wanting gummy bears, he's telling the world about falling in love with his wife. Or he is whooshing down an indoor slide, artwork in hand, in lieu of opening credits.

Kimmel opts to play *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* — which he will host very soon — with his daughter Jane and son Billy. The questions are ridiculously cute: which animal eats a banana and what does an elephant have on its trunk. Meanwhile, guests like Ellen Degeneres (who stirred up controversy for comparing quarantine to being in jail) and the cast of *Modern Family* ahead of their series finale, rake in views totalling more than a lakh mere hours after release.

Not to be left behind, Hasan Minhaj and his newly-christened *Hasan from a Distance*, with his wife as camera person, has a book club with his daughter and cuddles with his newborn son. With no definitive end to the lockdown in sight, the new normal, it seems, is taking on a very homemade flavour.



## Stephen Colbert with Daniel Radcliffe

Due to technical glitches, Colbert couldn't hear the Harry Potter star for quite a bit. This resulted in him hilariously scrambling to make light of the situation including some primo miming.



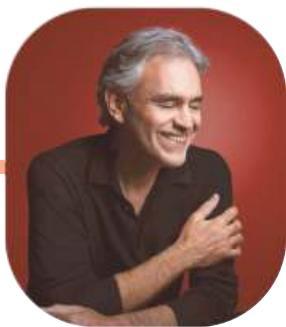
## Sam gets into survival mode

Samantha Bee becomes a cave woman and chops her own wood with a face full of make-up because the grocery stores ran out of the pre-cut kind.



## An impromptu tour of Conan O'Brien

Celebrities have earned the ire of people after showcasing their mansions online while ordinary folk have so little. Conan O'Brien then treats viewers to an impromptu video of his own simple and nice home. Hint: it is not nice or simple.



## Pick of the week

**Concerts, stand-up and other online events you just can't miss. The event preview and calendar will resume in a few weeks.**

**Books to the rescue**  
Our socials are filled with people rediscovering books. Today, Roli Books is hosting History Hour with Moin Mir and William Dalrymple. They will be talking about Indo-European love stories in the 18th and 19th centuries. At 5.30 pm on @rolibooks. For kids, actor Steve Carell reads *The Circus Ship* on @savewithstori, an initiative by Amy Adams and Jennifer Garner. And country singer Dolly Parton has launched a 10-week series of children's book readings called *Goodnight With Dolly* on imaginationlibrary.com.

**A Bocelli Easter**  
Most churchgoers won't be able to enter a place of worship this Easter Sunday. Except Italian opera singer Andrea Bocelli. Accompanied only by cathedral organist Emanuele Vianelli, the tenor will perform at the historic Duomo Cathedral in Milan, Italy — to empty pews, of course. Sacred pieces on the set list for the show, titled Bocelli: Music for Hope, include 'Ave Maria' and Mascagni's 'Sancta Maria.' Watch it live on his YouTube channel at 10.30 pm IST on Sunday, April 12.

**Lego and Covid-19**  
What started as a photo project activity for Zippora Madhukar's two sons, aged 10 and five, in Chennai, has turned into an awareness building exercise on Instagram. Using Lego characters and other toys as props, the images feature Spiderman doing a home workout, while Batman delivers groceries using a drone. More poignant topics — doctors who cannot be with their children right now, scientists who are trying to find a cure and the migrant worker exodus — are also covered. Follow @zipporamadhukar for more.

**Girl power**  
Girls' Night In, a self-care community and weekly newsletter, has put together a virtual social distancing care package called Stay Home, Take Care. Depending on what you want to do — feel comforted, be entertained, connect with others — there are many options. The Letter Project allows women to write letters to young girls who are going through a hard time. Dance Church offers a fun and inclusive approach to dancing, with a 90-minute live class on Wednesdays and Saturdays. On stayhometakecare.com

**Cooking in quarantine**  
A running joke during the lockdown is that everyone is either baking bread or becoming a masterchef. Isolation Cooks on Instagram is documenting recipes shared by followers to get an insight into how people are using cooking to cope with stress. And if you are just getting acquainted with the kitchen, join the Facebook open group 'Simple recipes for complicated times'. Seasoned cooks and newbies are sharing their daily recipes via posts, encouraging each other to try new dishes and reinvent old ones.

**Carnatic escape**  
Social media is the new concert stage, and Aalaap, the Chennai-based arts management company, has a lineup of artistes ready to keep the classics alive. Today, from 4 pm, vocalist Bharathi Ramasubban will explore the "landscape of language" with voice and thambura. @aalaap\_concepts Meanwhile, the YouTube channel, First Edition Arts, is a storehouse of Hindustani and Carnatic performances by stalwarts including TM Krishna, Rama Ravi, Poornima Kulkarni, Apoorva Gokhale and Raghunandan Pansikar.

**#LockdownWithWeekend**  
Continuing a series of Instagram Live sessions this weekend, we will be joined by Jishnu Dasgupta, bass guitarist of folk-fusion band Swarathma. He will talk about their new single, 'Mushkil Mein Jeena', a gentle reminder of how to deal with difficulties. At 6 pm today. On April 15, Dr Sheela Nambari, obstetrician and gynaecologist, will have an interactive session for expectant mothers. Send in your questions to weekend@thehindu.co.in and tune in at 6 pm on Wednesday @thehinduweekend.

## FOOD SPOT

# Revisiting a Bengali meal

It was a trip down memory lane with Homefoodi's Bangla food that captures the magic of the past



My mother — as I have often said — couldn't (or perhaps wouldn't) boil an egg. But she had friends who could not just boil eggs, but also turn them into various kinds of Bengali delicacies. One aunt, in particular, wielded magic in the kitchen. Sakti Mash's food was something to die for. Her vegetable dishes, cooked with just a sprinkling of spices, or her fish, with tangy mustard, would leave us licking our fingers.

I am reminded of her every time someone serves me good Bengali food. I developed a taste for the

cuisine rather late in my life, but now I am a lifetime member of the Bengali food lovers' club. I remember the time when you didn't get Bengali food anywhere outside of Bengali homes in Delhi. The few places that were there — such as Basu Lodge in Gole Market — were like pice hotels, serving wholesome but basic dishes.

With the Internet, all that has changed. There are Bengali takeaways and Bengali chefs who deliver on order. I had food delivered from one such outfit a few days ago. The food was outstanding, but first let me tell you about the platform that brings regional cuisine and patrons together.

It's called homefoodi (Homefoodi.com; telephone no: 9560107937). This site and app opens up the world of Indian regional food. Homefoodi has enlisted an army of home cooks who offer all kinds of delicious regional delicacies — Bengali, Maharashtra-



trian, Rajasthani, Tamil, among others. A team from Homefoodi tests out the chefs, taking particular interest in the cleanliness measures adopted by them. Right now, they only deliver to areas in Noida, Greater Noida and Indirapuram.

My food came from an outlet known as Kimbodonti Ranmaghar, run by a formidable chef called Sharmila Maity. These are trying times, for not every ingredient is easily available. Fresh fish is a problem, so I had a Bengali meal without any kind of fish. Instead, there was a dish of bottle gourd and shrimps, called *lau chingri* (₹150). I had asked for *chholar dal*, or *chana dal* (₹60) and *shukto* — a delicate dish of mixed vegetables (₹75). The chef sent me a steamed egg curry, fried pumpkin flower fritters, and a dessert that I am greatly fond of, *bhapa doi* (steamed, sweetened and flavoured hung curd; ₹90).

We had a great Bong meal, indeed. First the *dal*. The Bengali *chholar dal* is mildly sweet, a taste that I have grown to like. It also has bits of fried coconut in it, which I love. I had that with some rice, and then ate the *shukto* — brinjal, drumsticks, broad beans, radish, bitter gourd, and other such veggies, cooked with fried dal balls in a light, mildly bitter sauce. This was excellent, and set the tone for the next dish, the *lau chingri*.

The *lau chingri* in our house is rather nice, but this was different, and equally tasty, I thought. I had a feeling the bottle gourd had

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**Total recall** (Clockwise from left) A full meal; *chholar dal*

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

been cooked in a bit of milk, which gave it a creamy consistency. The egg dish — steamed omelette pieces in a tomato gravy — was interesting, and I ended the very satisfactory meal with a delicious bowl of *bhapa doi*. It was different from my mother-in-law's memorable version, but I enjoyed it. I thought it was almost like a cheesecake.

The meal opened up the floodgates of memory. I finished the last bit of the *bhapa doi*, and remembered the aunts. They are up there somewhere, tempering food with *panchi phoron*. And I guess my mother is looking at a boiled egg with considerable interest.

The writer is a seasoned food critic

## WATCH Talking point

Lady Gaga brings artistes together for advocacy organisation, Global Citizen. The TV special, featuring Paul McCartney, Stevie Wonder and Billie Eilish, is set to raise funds to help combat the spread of the coronavirus. Priyanka Chopra Jonas and Shah Rukh Khan, among others, are also on the list. Wonder who is going to go most viral from this show! On April 18. Stream live on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

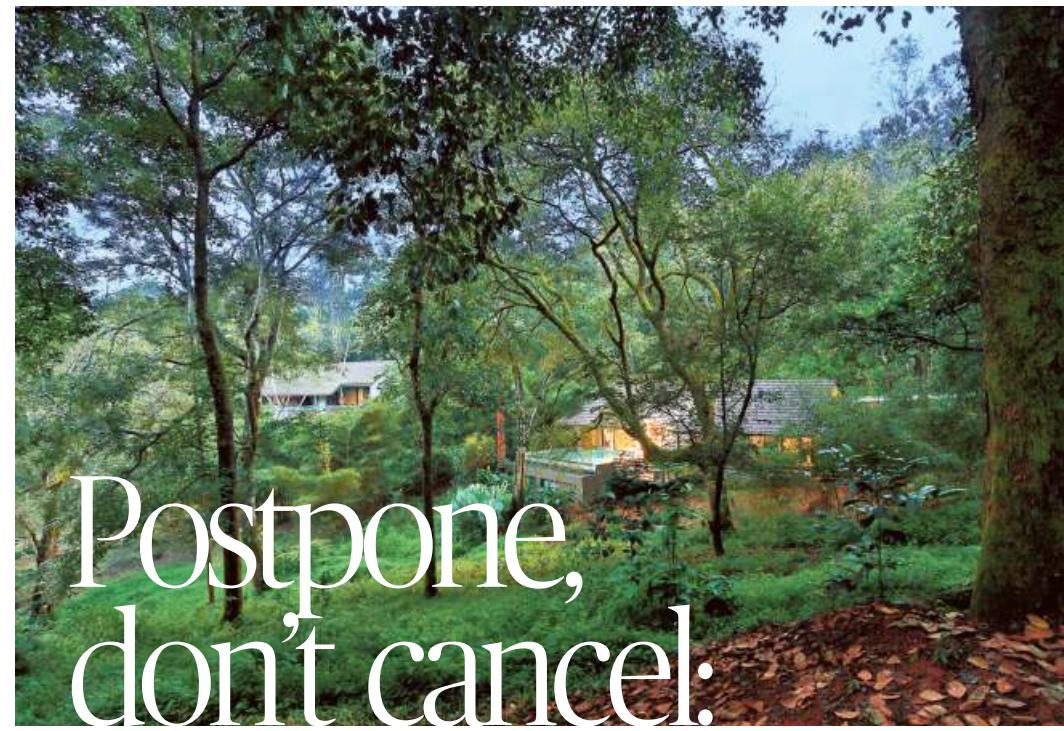


## Instapick



Last Easter weekend, Holland's "tulip belt" welcomed about 17 million tourists. In the rush to get the perfect picture for Instagram, too many people trampled the tulips. With the gardens closed till June this year, the flowers get a break. But we can still enjoy them from afar: the gardeners take us to their favourite spots in videos shared on their timeline. Follow @visitkeukenhof

Contact us at delhimetro@thehindu.co.in



# Postpone, don't cancel: how to save your favourite boutique hotel

SUBHA J RAO

You are at home, into the 18th day of lockdown, looking at a future devoid of getaway plans. Meanwhile, your favourite resort has called to let you know that your booking has been rescheduled and that you can either cancel or let them keep the advance for later.

As it turns out, the latter is one of the ways that you, the guest, can help a brand to stay afloat during these troubling times. The tourist season differs across the country. The hill stations in the East, North, West and South have a great run in the summer, with the beach resorts picking up at the fag end

(and when the Southwest monsoon sets in). While the future is unclear, there's an immediate crisis for smaller resorts that don't have huge cash reserves to dip into to support their eco-system: drivers, guides, cooks, cleaning staff. Most have disbursed salaries for March, but April is going to be a long haul.

**How are resorts coping?** From running a full house at the beginning of the season to sliding to zero income, properties across the country have taken a huge hit. "We are in the same position as those stranded in the desert with just a bottle of water," says Jose Dominic, co-founder and former CEO of Kerala-



From deferred credit notes and funding an employee to buying from their curio shops, there are many ways you can help out this season

based CGH Earth. "Sharing is the only way we can tide over this and survive. We've paid our March salaries, and in the hospitality industry salaries form 1/5th of our outlay. Going forward, we'll ensure every employee has food on the table and can sustain his/her family. This is a global phenomenon, so we all are in this together."

**Make an advance payment**  
If you've already paid for a holiday, request to defer it (unless you're badly off too and need a



(Clockwise from left) Jose Dominic, The Ibni, McIver Villa, The Ibni's KopiLuwak Pool Villa, and The Secret Garden



• SRAJ MAHBUBANI

## Travellers to the rescue

- Pre-book a holiday
- Agree to fund the livelihood of an employee
- Buy from the curio shops attached to small resorts; they are usually made in-house or locally
- Support a local enterprise in and around the resort, such as bamboo weaving or mat making

refund). At The Ibni Coorg, a deferred credit note has been given to guests. "We are looking at offering guests an advance booking window of six months that they can use [to book at prevailing rates] for future use," says Shreya Krishnan, CSR and Marketing Advisor. At present, the staff are drying turmeric and making paper bags and our home-made fig-based face packs and scrubs. Ibni also has the advantage of being "a three-six-hour driving distance" from cities such as Mysuru, Bengaluru and Mangaluru.

Serendipity runs three resorts in the Nilgiris, including 180 McIver Villa, where much of the Karan Johar-produced film, *Kapoor & Sons*, was shot. Owner Ambareen Junaid says that most of their guests are regulars. "They've been kind and told us to keep the advance because they will return sometime," she says, adding, "Resorts can't be abandoned. Someone has to stay back to oversee things. We cannot cut our staff; we are mutually dependent. For those who pre-book, we are looking at showing them our thanks in the form of giftables like high-grade tea and coffee or homemade jams."

### Shift in guest profile

Dominic of CGH Earth, which manages close to 20 resorts, knows first-hand the impact of the lockdown. The tourist who jumped quarantine at a Munnar

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resort and boarded an Emirates flight to Dubai from Kochi had initially stayed at a CGH property. "We sanitised the premises and our staff was quarantined. We took care of them," he says.

In fact, resorts in Kerala faced the initial brunt, as the State was an early actor and clamped down on foreign tourist arrivals. The CHG Earth Group handles about 300 rooms on an average, across its properties in Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. In some resorts, more than 60% of its bookings are by foreigners. "Our Marari Beach Resort is one such. It is almost like an alumni meet every year, with so many guests returning. But we will have to rethink our strategy whenever we open for business again. Of course, there will be fantastic deals offered. And we expect a paradigm shift in the way people see travel – I expect a lot more Indian guests than before."

### What the future holds

Helene Menezes of The Secret Garden, a quirky three-room ancestral homestay in Saligao, Goa, says she has not returned deposits, but has made them all redeemable for future use. She receives a mix of Indian and foreign tourists. Will deals be part of their future packages? "I don't see the benefit of slashing rates; our standards, including our staff, would inevitably suffer. It would not attract like-minded clientele who are in tune with our philosophy. However, offers for long-stays or midweek stays will definitely be on offer once things return to normal."

### Seven-month advantage

Hardip Paul, of Casa Da Praia, a B&B in Goa, isn't too crushed. "We are normally booked years in advance. Though I've lost a few weeks this season, about 70% of my bookings for the next year are in place. My situation is different because I open only for seven months."



### More road trips?

People may prefer to go local, when travel does come back on our agenda. And many small resorts believe driving holidays could pick up. "In such times, people will want to look at vacation options closer home and Karnataka has enough options, what with our beautiful coastline," says Krishnan.



### Mind the curator

Deepa Subramanian of Chennai's Shakti Holidays, is known for her curated trips. "This time, everyone has taken a hit. So when it comes to advances, I'd not want to deprive my client, but I also have to consider the artisans and guides in the hinterland. The hope is that I can get everyone to reschedule."



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## FILM REVIEW

# Canvas of a forbidden romance

*Portrait of a Lady on Fire* is a love story that brims over with passion, grace, and a resolute feminine gaze



NAMRATA JOSHI

If one were to describe *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (streaming on Mubi) in a very consciously poetic way, however cheesy it may sound, it would be a cinematic painting rife with a palette full of emotions. There's something overwhelmingly heartfelt about the love story between Heloise and Marianne, yet a certain artistic formalism and restraint which only multiplies its appeal.

Set in the 18th-century, on the island of Brittany in France, the film is about aristocrat Heloise (Adèle Haenel) and painter Marianne (Noémie Merlant).

The latter is commissioned by the Countess, to make Heloise's portrait on the sly, while pretending to be a companion during walks to the sea. Heloise is set to be married off to a no-

bleman in Milan.

The sexual frisson and tension between Heloise and Marianne is evident from the first frame itself. One unbending and haughty, the other limpid.

It's a slow and steady discovery of each other, a gradual peeling, layer by layer. Both enamoured by each other, mysteries and puzzles waiting to be solved, enigmas in need of being understood.

Celine Sciamma's world is one that is entirely populated by women as well as owned by

them. So is the gaze an overtly feminine one.

A woman painter looking at the object who also happens to be a woman and the object in turn looking back at her. "If you look at me, who do I look at?" Heloise asks Marianne rhetorically. And a web of intimacies and longing is spun between the observer and the observed in that one moment.

Add to that another layer; that both of them, in turn, are being looked at by a woman filmmaker from behind the camera. The film flows languorously within these womanly ways of seeing. Forbidden desires brim over and passions surge like the choppy seas or scalding flames but Sciamma frames them with her uniquely gentle and graceful eye. She renders something impeccable and measured yet profound to the feelings.

The protocols of love are gently negotiated. Away from the trap of marriage, is freedom

in being alone. But then, as He

loise states, in a most disarming and honest expression of love: "In solitariness, I feel liberty but I also feel your absence."

There are many such moments of tenderness that are held in time, to pause and ponder on.

Above it all, looms the story of Orpheus and Eurydice and the significance of the former turning around.

It's a film about being caught between being brave and docile, between resisting and giving in. How far is it possible to go? There's something oddly uplifting in the heartbreaking finale and the camera lingering on, on Haenel's face forever and ever. A moment when the actor gives it her all to bring out the boundless pain of the forbidden and deep unfulfilled desires.

*Portrait of a Lady on Fire* is drenched in romance, in the possibilities and impossibilities, the aches and pains and the pleasures and glory of glorious love.

# The Raikars, for slow-watching

Actors Atul Kulkarni and Neil Bhoopalam on their latest whodunit murder mystery and life in lockdown



Case files Still from the show • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

KARISHMA UPADHYAY

Over the years, many show creators in the West like Joss Whedon (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Firefly*) have talked about binging and how it takes away from the viewing experience. Closer home, actor Neil Bhoopalam echoes the thought. "I feel you miss the nuances of a show, especially if it is a drama. My favourite TV watching memories are of waiting a week for the next episode of *Doogie Howser MD* and *The Wonder Years*. I cannot binge-watch anything; it is an overload for my brain. I'd much rather take the time to mull over an episode before moving on to the next," says the actor, whose latest outing, *The Raikar Case*, might be the perfect series to slow-watch.

The show is set in Goa and revolves around a joint family that, on the surface, seems to be perfect, but dark secrets unravel after the youngest member takes his own life – and blames his family for it. Helmed by Aditya Saroptdar, the show stars Atul Kulkarni, Ashvini Bhave, Parul Gulati and Kunal Kapoor along with Bhoopalam. While Kulkarni plays the family patriarch, Bhoopalam is the cop investigating the case. "My character is the only outsider in the whole story," says the actor, who will next be seen in season two of *Four More Shots Please*.

His co-star Kulkarni's taste in murder mysteries veers towards classics like Hitchcock films and Sidney Shel-

don's books. "This is a genre that I gravitate towards as a viewer. I love Hitchcock's films because even though you knew who did it right at the beginning, he still kept the audience engaged till the last frame. Among books, one of my early favourites was Gurunath Naik, a Marathi novelist. His mysteries were very popular in the 70s."

A significant portion of the show was shot in Goa. A long outdoor schedule in the sunny State gave most of

the cast – who had not worked with each other before – a chance to bond. "When we were not shooting, we were either talking about what we had eaten or what we were going to eat! Everyone was on the hunt for the best food. Aditya knew of these little restaurants that few knew about," says Kulkarni.

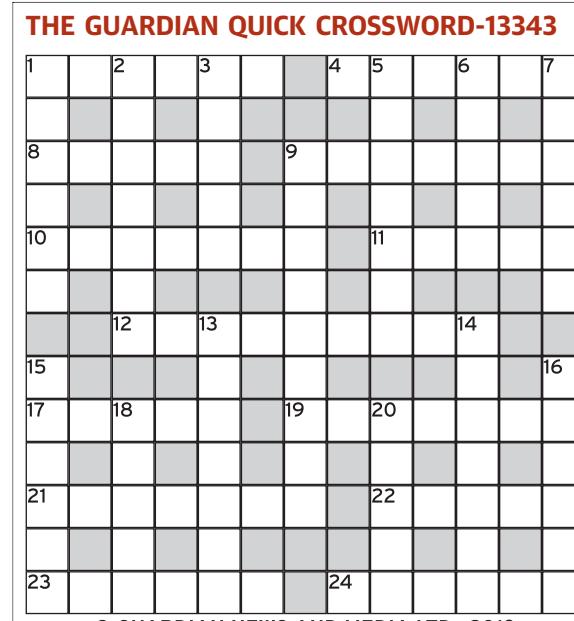
### Quarantine content

Shooting on palm-lined lanes and eating in restaurants are a thing of the past with the country in the third week of lockdown. At home with wife Nandini Shrikant, a casting director, and two-and-a-half-year-old son Fatah, Bhoopalam is spending quality time with his family and catching up on shows like *The Modern Family*, *The Twilight Zone* (2019) and the classic, *Star Trek Voyager*.

His co-star, meanwhile, is spending the time at his country home in Sonale, a village couple of hours from Mumbai. "This is where my NGO, Quality Education Support Trust operates from. We have over 3,000 teachers who work with around 95,000 children across Maharashtra. As their classes have stopped, teachers are conducting daily video meetings," says Kulkarni. The *Rang De Basanti* actor is also working on his farm, spending time in his gym, and playing with his pets.

Season 1 of *The Raikar Case* is now airing on Voot Select

## THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13343



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- Across**
- 1 Remove by applying friction (3,3)
  - 4 Fiery and passionate (6)
  - 8 Same as above (5)
  - 9 Furry pet (7)
  - 10 Bag – latches (anag.) (7)
  - 11 Vamp (5)
  - 12 Please do! (2,2,5)
  - 17 Mortal (5)
  - 19 Robot resembling 17 (7)
  - 21 Swimmer's breathing tube (7)
  - 22 Floral leaf (5)
  - 23 Prayer beads (6)
  - 24 Sculpted (6)
  - 25 Down
  - 1 Hottish salad plant (6)
  - 2 American body-washing facility (7)
  - 3 Foam (5)
  - 5 All together (2,5)
  - 6 Elector (5)
  - 7 Bold (6)
  - 9 Go, Hillary! (anag.) –



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

chalice used by Jesus at the Last Supper (4,5)

13 Nickname (7)

14 Ballroom dance (3-4)

15 Beer after whisky, say (or vice versa) (6)

16 (Of an egg) went bad (6)

18 Open heathlands (5)

20 Profundity (5)

The solution will appear on April 16, 2020.  
Solution No. 13342

CM YK

# British PM Boris Johnson out of intensive care

Hundreds of millions of people around the world to spend Easter holidays at home as COVID-19 death toll nears 1,00,000

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
LONDON/ROME

Prime Minister Boris Johnson was recovering in a hospital ward on Friday after ending three days in intensive care for COVID-19.

The 55-year-old leader left intensive care at London's St. Thomas' Hospital on Thursday evening and will now be monitored closely during what Downing Street called "the early phase of his recovery". "He is in extremely good spirits," a No. 10 spokesman said.

Mr. Johnson's improving condition came as the government continues to impose an unprecedented nationwide lockdown to try to stem the spread of the deadly coronavirus. It announced



**Mass burial:** Workers wearing personal protective equipment burying bodies in a trench on Hart Island, in the Bronx borough of New York on Thursday. •AP

navirus pandemic, with the global death toll rapidly approaching 1,00,000.

The U.S. is now emerging as the global hotspot of the virus. More than 1,700 people died on Thursday from almost 5,00,000 cases, bringing its total death toll to the second highest in the world after Italy. It also has the largest number of cases anywhere in the world by far.

More than 1.6 million infections have been recorded

globally, according to an AFP

hit country, saw its lowest day toll in 17 days, and Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said on Thursday the "fire started by the pandemic is starting to come under control".

France also reported that fewer people were in intensive care for COVID-19, the first fall since the pandemic broke out.

Anthony Fauci, the U.S. government's top pandemic expert, said the United States was "going in the right direc-

tion" after a slight drop in the daily death rate from Wednesday's record toll of 1,973.

In New York, the epicentre of the virus in the United States, the rate of hospital admissions fell on Thursday and Governor Andrew Cuomo said the actions taken in the state were "flattening the curve", referring to attempts to stabilise the death rate.

Easter pilgrimage sites across Europe and Asia

stood empty on Friday, shorn of the customary Easter holiday hustle. Even such hallowed traditions as the pope's Easter message are being revamped — Pope Francis will live-stream from the seclusion of his private library.

"We have to respond to our confinement with all our creativity," the pontiff said. "We can either get depressed and alienated... or we can get creative."

# Wear masks, Melania urges Americans

First Lady contradicts husband's stance

KATIE ROGERS  
WASHINGTON

In a message on Twitter accompanied by a picture of her face partly covered by a medical mask, Melania Trump, the First Lady, urged Americans on Thursday to protect themselves from the coronavirus by wearing face coverings in public, an image all the more striking because it contrasted with her husband's mixed messages on the subject.

"As the CDC continues to study the effectiveness of cloth face coverings, we encourage that people wear cloth face coverings in public settings where social distancing measures can be difficult to maintain. It is recommended to wash your hands frequently and avoid touching your face," she wrote.

Melania Trump posted a photo of herself wearing a mask on Twitter.

reporters that he would not be interested in wearing a mask unless he deemed it important. Instead, everyone who comes into close contact with Mr. Trump must now be tested for the virus, including journalists in the White House briefing room.

"I don't know, somehow sitting in the Oval Office behind that beautiful Resolute Desk," the President told reporters, "I think wearing a face mask as I greet Presidents, Prime Ministers, dictators, kings, queens, I don't know — somehow, I don't see it for myself. I just — I just don't. Maybe I'll change my mind, but this will pass, and hopefully it'll pass very quickly." NY TIMES

# Recovered patients test positive in South Korea

REUTERS  
SEOUL

South Korea on Friday reported that 91 patients thought to be cured of the new coronavirus had tested positive again.

Jeong Eun-kyeong, director of the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said the virus may have been "reactivated" rather than the patients being re-infected.

Health officials said it remains unclear what is

behind the trend, with epidemiological investigations under way.

Nearly 7,000 South Koreans have been reported as recovered from COVID-19.

False test results could also be at fault, other experts said, or remnants of the virus could still be in patients' systems but not be infectious or of danger to the host or others.

South Korea on Friday reported 27 new cases, taking the total to 10,450.

# War-torn Yemen reports its first case

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

DUBAI

Yemen reported its first case of COVID-19 on Friday in a southern government-controlled province, raising fears of an outbreak in the war-torn country as air strikes blamed on the Saudi-led coalition tested a unilateral truce.

The announcement came on the second day of the two-week ceasefire declared by the military coalition supporting the government in

what it said was a move to help fight the pandemic.

"The first confirmed case of coronavirus has been reported in Hadramaut province," Yemen's supreme national emergency committee for COVID-19 said on Twitter.

## Broken system

Aid groups have warned that when the coronavirus hits Yemen's broken healthcare system, the impact is likely to be catastrophic for a country already in the grip

of what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis. "This is a moment we all feared, and were hoping to avoid, because Yemen is critically under-equipped to face this virus," said Xavier Joubert, country director for Save the Children in Yemen.

"Only half of Yemen's health facilities are still fully functional. There are 700 intensive care unit beds, including 60 for children, and 500 ventilators for a population of about 30 million."

# Pakistan extends ban on flight operations

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan on Friday extended the ban on domestic and international flight operations up to April 21 as the country stepped up efforts to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus, which has infected more than 4,500 people in the country, authorities said.

The total number of cases

in Pakistan has sharply increased to 4,601, with more than 280 fresh infections, while the death toll reached 66, Health officials said on Friday.

The government has announced various measures to meet the challenge of COVID-19 pandemic, including cash payments to the most needy, which started on Thursday.

# EU strikes €500 billion rescue deal

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

WASHINGTON

After weeks of wrangling, EU member states on Thursday buried their differences and agreed to a 500-billion-euro (\$550 billion) emergency plan for a European economy knocked to its knees by the coronavirus outbreak.

EU Finance Ministers agreed in late-night talks to the rescue package aimed at reducing pain across the 27-nation bloc, especially hardest-hit Italy and Spain.

"Europe has decided and is ready to meet the gravity of the crisis," French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire tweeted after the talks.

He warned earlier in the day that France's economy is expected to shrink 6% this year, even with the country's own 100-billion-euro relief plan.

Ministers put aside proposals by France and Italy for pooled borrowing. The Netherlands relented and let

the deal come through after pushing hard for Italy and other affected countries to undertake economic reforms.

"Today we answered our citizens' call for a Europe that protects," Eurogroup chief Mario Centeno said.

"This response contains bold and ambitious proposals that didn't seem possible just weeks ago," added Mr. Centeno, who is also the Portuguese Finance Minister.

# Angry crowd destroys UN base in Central Africa

A road accident provoked the attack

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

BANGUI

Villagers in Central African Republic attacked a forward base used by UN peacekeepers after a civilian was killed in a road accident, the UN force said Friday.

The incident happened on Thursday in Beboura, in the northwest of the troubled country, said Vladimir Monteiro, spokesman for MINUSCA, the UN mission in the CAR.

"There was an accident involving a UN vehicle which led to the death of an individual. Local people then decided to attack the forward military post," he said.

"Between 10 and 20 (UN) troops were there at the time. We evacuated them. Two were injured," he said.

"While we regret this accidental death, which we will investigate thoroughly,

we condemn this reaction. It's not by destroying this base that people will be protected," Mr. Monteiro said.

Incidents of this kind involving MINUSCA, which deployed in the CAR in 2014, are rare, although the force is facing criticism from some politicians and the public at a time when the country is struggling to implement a February 2019 peace deal.

Deeply impoverished despite mineral wealth, the CAR has been in the grip of violence since 2013.

More than two-thirds of the former French colony lies in the hands of armed groups, who typically claim ethnic or religious affiliations and often fight over resources.

According to the UN, 1.6 million people out of a population of 4.7 million are "extremely vulnerable."

# Russia probe was started 'without basis'

Attorney-General Barr says it amounted to an effort to 'sabotage the presidency'

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

Attorney-General William Barr believes the Russia investigation that shadowed President Donald Trump for the first two years of his administration was started without any basis and amounted to an effort to "sabotage the presidency".

Mr. Barr offered no support for his assertion that the FBI lacked a basis for opening the investigation and made no mention of the fact that the bureau began its probe after a Trump campaign adviser purported to have early knowledge that Russia had dirt on Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton.

Mr. Barr, who has appointed a U.S. attorney to lead an investigation into the origins of the Russia probe, said the Justice Department has evi-

dence there was "something far more troubling" than just mistakes during the investigation that eventually morphed into special counsel Robert Mueller's probe.

"I think the President has every right to be frustrated, because I think what happened to him was one of the greatest travesties in American history," Mr. Barr said in the interview with Fox News.

The Attorney-General said the FBI launched its counter-intelligence investigation into ties between the Trump campaign and Russia "without any basis."

"Even more concerning, actually, is what happened after the campaign, a whole pattern of events while he was President," Mr. Barr said.

Mr. Barr offered no sup-

port for his assertion that the FBI lacked a basis for opening the investigation and made no mention of the fact that the bureau began its probe after a Trump campaign adviser purported to have early knowledge that Russia had dirt on Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton.

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gens of the Russia probe, said the Justice Department has evi-

to sabotage the presiden-

cy" — and I think that — or

workers are counting on dif-

ferent conclusions from the separate investigation led by John Durham, the U.S. attorney Mr. Barr selected to examine the early days of the Russia probe. Mr. Durham's investigation is going on.

Mr. Barr has been a loyal supporter of Mr. Trump since becoming Attorney-General, though their positive relationship showed signs of fraying earlier this year when Mr. Barr said in an interview that Mr. Trump's tweets about ongoing Justice Department cases made it "impossible" for him to do his job.

Mr. Mueller concluded that the Russian government interfered in the 2016 poll, but his probe didn't find sufficient evidence to establish a criminal conspiracy between Mr. Trump's campaign and Russia.

To sabotage the presiden-

# S. Korea goes to the polls despite virus

To make the voting run smoothly, govt. has mobilised armies of public servants

CHOE SANG-HUN

SEOUL

They came wearing masks and stood in line at 3-foot intervals. They were required to have their body temperatures taken, to rub their hands with sanitiser and to put on disposable plastic gloves handed out by officials. Then they entered the booths and voted, as South Korea pressed ahead with its first election in a time of epidemic.

The coronavirus pandemic is disrupting political calendars around the world, causing delays and triggering electoral chaos in the U.S. It has provoked voter ire in Wisconsin, where many absentee ballots failed to arrive in time and voters were afraid to put their health at risk by going out to cast their ballots. In South Korea, the

parliamentary election is proceeding relatively seamlessly so far. The government is trying to assure its 44 million eligible voters that it is safe to leave their homes to go to the polls. To make the voting run

smoothly, South Korea has mobilised armies of public servants. They have disinfected 14,000 voting stations across the country.

South Koreans were also allowed to vote in advance on Friday and Saturday at

any of the 3,500 polling stations opened for that purpose. Anyone showing temperature readings higher than 37.5 Celsius (99.5 Fahrenheit) would be stopped at the gates of polling stations and escorted to a separate area to vote. The voter would then be sent for testing and the voting booth disinfected.

Officially, the election for South Korea's 300-member National Assembly is scheduled to take place Wednesday. But nearly 5 million people cast ballots on Friday and more were expected to vote on Saturday. The advance voting system, introduced in 2013, is serving as a dress rehearsal of sorts for the extraordinary plan disease-control officials have designed for an epidemic-era election. NY TIMES



William Barr

at least have the effect of sa-

botaging the presidency."

**Security threat**

The Justice Department's In-

spector General found the

FBI was justified in opening

an investigation into ties be-

tween the Trump presiden-

cy and Russia — to protect

against a national securi-

ty threat — and found the

bureau didn't act with

political bias.

Mr. Trump and his sup-

porters are counting on dif-



**Vote of confidence:** Resident casting ballots during early voting at a polling station in Seoul on Friday. •AP



## Export sector may see 15 mn jobs go, NPAs rise: FIEO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

About 15 million people face job losses in India's exports' sector following cancellation of over half of the orders and a gloomy forecast for global trade due to the COVID-19 pandemic, exporters' body FIEO said.

Seeking immediate announcement of a relief package for exports, Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) President Sharad Kumar Saraf said fine balancing is required between life and livelihood, as opting for only one can be disastrous for the country.

He said that exporters were left with "very" few orders and if factories were not allowed to work with a minimum workforce, many of them will suffer "irreparable losses" which will bring them to the brink of closure as they were saddled with fixed costs that, in any case, had to be absorbed by them.

"With cancellation of over 50% of the orders and a gloomy forecast for the future, we expect 15 million job losses in exports and rising NPAs (non-performing assets) amongst exporting units, hitting the economy very badly," he said.

"We are losing markets to China. All orders are going to China as they have resumed work. It will be very late if we don't start our factories now," he said.

# Bank credit shot up just before lockdown

Loans grew by a whopping ₹2.31 lakh crore in the fortnight ended March 27, RBI data showed

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Bank loans grew by a whopping ₹2.31 lakh crore in the fortnight ended March 27, indicating robust loan demand just when a nationwide lockdown was imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19, according to the RBI.

This was probably the highest fortnightly loan growth recorded in financial year 2019-20. The lockdown, that paralysed the economic activity, came into effect on March 25.

Soumya Kanti Ghosh, group chief economic adviser, SBI, had said in a report that the banks have witnessed a healthy credit demand in the last seven days of the financial year 2019-20.

"The good thing is that banks have witnessed good traction in credit (term and

### Rising numbers

For fortnight ended	Variation (₹ cr.)	
	Credit	Deposit
Mar. 27, 2020	2,31,440	2,31,883
Mar. 13, 2020	35,627	12,871
Feb. 28, 2020	62,397	1,05,410
Feb. 14, 2020	-63,491	-88,464
Jan. 31, 2020	98,926	1,97,560
Jan. 17, 2020	-30,686	-83,893
Jan. 3, 2020	99,728	20,5578
Dec. 20, 2019	12,519	-97,401
Dec. 6, 2019	74,437	1,47,366
Nov. 22, 2019	14,541	-39,224
Nov. 8, 2019	6,954	20,505

Source: RBI

working capital requirements) in the last seven days of the year ending March 31, 2020," Mr. Ghosh said in the report. "It seems companies/corporates are preparing themselves for a surge in demand after the lockdown pe-

riod," he added.

### Incremental offtake

The report had estimated the incremental credit off-take would have been ₹2,10,000 crore in March of which agriculture demand

It seems companies are preparing for a surge in demand after the lockdown period

SOUMYA KANTI GHOSH  
Group CEA, SBI

ing the reporting fortnight was ₹2.31 lakh crore while the growth for the year was 7.9% compared with the 10% recorded in the previous year.

The central bank had also said that there were signs of growth picking up, in the monetary policy report released on Wednesday.

"Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, the outlook for growth for 2020-21 was looking up," the RBI said as it cited the bumper rabi harvest, transmission of monetary policy rates and reduction in GST rates.

"Clearly, the tide seemed to have turned as far as bank credit is concerned in March," the report said.

### Credit growth at nadir

Latest data released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) showed, credit growth for the year ended March 27 was 6.1%, one of the lowest in many years. Credit growth for the previous year was 13.3%. Deposit growth dur-

## Moratorium on repayment puts NBFCs in a spot

Institutions can't postpone repayments to banks: Crisil

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) may face a tough time following the Reserve Bank of India's recent directive on providing a moratorium on repayment.

This is because though these entities are providing moratorium to their customers, they still have to continue repaying banks and other borrowers. NBFCs are highly dependent on banks for funding.

"NBFCs face a double whammy because they are offering moratorium to customers despite not getting one themselves from their lender-banks. That will put a

significant pressure on the liquidity profiles of many NBFCs," Crisil said.

According to Crisil, liquidity pressure will increase for almost 25% of the Crisil-rated NBFCs if collections do not pick up by June 2020.

These NBFCs have ₹1.75 lakh crore of debt obligations maturing by then.

"With collections being minimal and the moratorium [applicable] only for their borrowers, raising fresh funds is critical, especially because NBFCs, unlike banks, do not have access to systemic sources of liquidity and depend significantly on wholesale funding," it said.

Crisil said while ₹1 lakh crore has been made available through the RBI's targeted long-term repo operations (TLTRO) window, only half of that is earmarked for primary issuances.

"Also, an expected scramble for funds means corporates and government-owned financiers will also be interested in this window. Consequently, only higher-rated NBFCs may end up benefiting," it said.

Crisil said while larger and better-rated NBFCs may still be able to manage the situation, smaller or lower-rated NBFCs, which have significant dependence on bank funding, will find the going extremely tough.

## Post-pandemic period will see turnaround in job market'

Healthcare, pharma, biotechnology will be 'sunrise' sectors

LALATENDU MISHRA

MUMBAI

Once the COVID-19 dust settles down, a new order will emerge in the job market, analysts say. Several new jobs in the field of health and hygiene and technology may come up.

According to HR firms, gaming, over-the-top (OTT) services, work-from-home virtual team, project management software, e-commerce and edutech segments would see a steady increase in business.

"There will be hot jobs in these sectors," Francis Padaman, senior director, RPO & BPS Practice, APAC, KellyOCG, said.

"Virtual medical tourism could take off to provide psychological aid and faster therapeutic healing to patients. Services and health

### COVID-19

Microbiology and biotechnology, as segments, are expected to take off, as every organisation would require the services of such people to advise and sensitise staff on microbes and how to deal with infections. Such people will also be required for research by pharmaceutical

## IT firms' Q4 profits likely to be impacted by virus

Billing, utilisation to see impact: MOFSL

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Fourth quarter (Q4) profits of leading Indian information technology (IT) firms are likely to be impacted due to the disruptions caused by the pandemic outbreak.

Motilal Oswal Financial Services said it expected IT firms' revenues to grow 6%, earnings before interest and tax to grow 4% and profits to fall by 2% in Q4.

"The second half of 4QFY20 witnessed varying levels of COVID-19 disruption across most of core markets of IT companies like the U.S. [and] Europe. Not all service offerings are amenable to be delivered from home for a variety of reasons. In conjunction

sectors will see a spike," he said. He said there will be increased demand for contract employees across delivery services, fulfilment centres and contact centres to manage and support disaster management activities, sanitisation and cleaning work. But companies will have full-time employees in their core areas and across IT digital skills, online marketing and content writing.

Jyoti Bowen Nath, managing partner, Claricent Partners said, "While start-ups and small to mid-sized companies have been badly hit by the crisis, the large cash-rich business houses are also facing the brunt."

However, pharma, medical equipment companies, and the whole digital and e-commerce segments are possibly the new 'sunrise' sectors as they are the need of the hour, she added.

Sashi Kumar, MD, Indeed India said, "As the job market slows down in the wake of a global pandemic, essential services such as medical and public health continue to drive demand. Despite the slump in the sector, healthcare continues to be one of the foremost drivers of economic growth."

## Union Bank reverses charges

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

State-run Union Bank of India has reversed the amount deducted by the bank due to non-maintenance of minimum balance by a migrant worker.

The lender reversed the funds after some users pointed out in social media that a seasonal migrant worker, having an account with Union Bank, was in need for funds and ₹800 was transferred to the person's account. However, the bank deducted most of the amount deposited under the category, 'general charges and recovery.'

"When the matter came to our notice, we reversed the money that was debited," a senior official from the bank said.



with lower productivity, both billing and utilisation in Q4 should witness impact," MOFSL said in a research note.

Jefferies equity research

said discussions were likely to be dominated by COVID-19 in the results season, though its impact on Q4 performance and bookings is likely to be limited in most cases.

## Merged banks get time on bancassurance agreements

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD

Insurance regulator IRDAI has allowed the four banks, emerging from the recent mega bank merger exercise, to continue for a year with existing bancassurance agreements of the lenders that amalgamated with them.

The acquiring bank may continue arrangement with more than three entities in each of the life, general and health categories of insurers for a period of 12 months from the date of merger by transfer of the existing insurance arrangements of the acquired banks to their name," the regulator said.

This exemption allows only for transfer of existing insurance arrangements of acquired banks to the acquiring banks and should not be construed as permission by the Authority to enter into new arrangements with other insurers, said a communication to heads of the banks concerned from IRDAI Member (Life) K.Ganesh.

The communication applies to Punjab National Bank, Canara Bank, Union Bank of India and Indian Bank that, on April 1, had a few banks merging with them as part of a government plan to create larger banks.

As per bancassurance regulations, a bank can only market three life, general and health insurance companies' products. The banks that have been merged with them also had bancassurance business.

The IRDAI eventually wants the acquiring bank to retain the existing certificate of registration to act as a corporate agent and surrender COR(s) held by acquired banks by submitting written request to the Authority.

## Saudi, Russia want oil cuts finalised at G20 talks

But, Mexico refuses to sign up in full

REUTERS

DUBAI/MOSCOW

Top oil nations were finalising a deal at G20 talks on Friday for big output cuts to lift prices slammed by the COVID-19 crisis with Russia and Saudi Arabia taking a lion's share and signs the United States might take unprecedented moves to help.

Riyadh, Moscow and its allies, which make up the informal OPEC+ group, had forged a pact to curb crude production by the equivalent of 10% of global supplies in marathon talks on Thursday and said they wanted others to cut a further 5%.

But efforts to conclude the OPEC+ deal hit the buffers when Mexico refused to sign up in full. However, the Mexican President said Do-



nald Trump had told him he might make cuts on Mexico's behalf, even though the U.S. President has given no public indication Washington would join in the cuts and has instead threatened Saudi Arabia with tariffs and other measures if it did not resolve the oil market crisis.

Major oil markets were closed on Friday as the G20 energy minister held a video conference, hosted by Saudi Arabia, but prices failed to rally after Thursday's cuts.

## Removal of tariff ceiling may revive investment in renewables

Solar energy producers to get leeway to factor in higher risks

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Avenue Supermarts, which owns and operates retail chain D-mart, said operations of half of its stores are closed, following the directions issued by authorities amid the lockdown.

The

company

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# Olympics in doubt even in 2021: Tokyo CEO

Don't know if it is going to be possible to get the virus under control by next July, says Muto

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
TOKYO

As the coronavirus spreads in Japan, the chief executive of the Tokyo Games said on Friday he wouldn't be able to guarantee that the postponed Olympics will be staged next year – even with a 16-month delay.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe issued an emergency declaration this week to battle the virus, putting the country under restrictions after it couldn't avoid the spread.

"I don't think anyone would be able to say if it is going to be possible to get it under control by next July or not," Tokyo organising committee CEO Toshiro Muto said, speaking through an interpreter at a news conference conducted remotely. "We certainly are not in a position to give you a clear answer."

The Olympics was post-

poned last month with a new opening set for July 23, 2021, followed by the Paralympics on Aug. 24.

**The flame**  
He was also asked about the Olympic flame, which was taken off public display this week in Fukushima prefecture. Muto had an away-from-the-microphone talk with Tokyo spokesman Masa Takaya before talking about the flame.

"After the Olympic torch relay was cancelled, the Olympic flame was put under the management of Tokyo 2020," Muto said.

There are suggestions the International Olympic Committee is thinking of taking the flame on a world tour, hoping to use it as a symbol of the battle against the virus. However, any tour would be impossible until travel restrictions are lifted.

Taking the flame away from Japan could also upset the hosts.

"But whether the postponement of the Games

qualifies as an event that is covered is not clear yet."



Around the world in solidarity: The Olympic flame, which was taken off public display this week, could go on a world tour – as a symbol of the battle against the virus – if travel restrictions are lifted. ■ AFP

## 'I want to play in next Candidates'

World No. 23 Vidit has been busy with online games

### CHESS

P.K. AJITH KUMAR

Vidit Gujrathi may be paranoid if he thought he wouldn't be too busy after the coronavirus crisis forced him to cancel his flight tickets to Europe and the United States.

But the strongest Indian chess player after Viswanathan Anand (World No. 15), Vidit (No. 23) has been playing one online event after the other from his home in Nashik.

#### Fund-raiser

On Saturday, the 25-year-old will take on around 20 players from across the world, at the same time on chess.com, in a fund-raising programme for India's fight against the virus.

Anand, P. Harikrishna, B. Adhiban, Koneru Humpy and D. Harika will also be making their moves. The donations from the participants will go to the PM-CARES fund.

"I am really looking forward to the event and it is the first time I am giving a simultaneous exhibition online," Vidit told *The Hindu*. "I have been part of such events physically, though. Two years ago, I had played against 60 in Rajasthan, and won all the games."

His career in chess had begun in a simultaneous display by a Grandmaster. "I was seven when I played that



The goal: Vidit Gujrathi says he wants to break into the world's top 10. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

I think I will be peaking as a player in two years when the Candidates is held

■ On Saturday, Vidit will take on around 20 players simultaneously, on chess.com, in a fund-raising event for India's fight against the virus

■ V. Anand, P. Harikrishna, B. Adhiban, Koneru Humpy and D. Harika will also be making their moves

event against Abhijit Kunte," he said. "I had drawn that game and Kunte went on to become my coach."

He said he was happy to be part of the chess.com event. "It is great that all the top six Indian players are joining for this noble cause," he said. "I am told the response from the chess fans has been excellent."

**Dual role**  
"I enjoyed it as well; I was giving commentary on my own live games," he said. "I was also part of the commentary team for the recent Candidates tournament in Russia."

### IN BRIEF



Tendulkar to help feed 5000 people

The All India Football Federation is in discussion with world body FIFA to retain the original age criteria of the participating players and finalise new dates for the U-17 Women's World Cup, AIFF president Praful Patel said on Friday.

Scheduled to be held in India in November, the event was postponed by FIFA last week. "I am happy to share that we are working with FIFA to choose a new and earliest possible timeline to host the U-17 Women's World Cup. The LOC [Local Organising Committee] and FIFA are working to finalise new dates keeping health and safety a priority," Patel tweeted.

"We are also in discussions with #FIFA to keep the age criteria of U-17 Women's World Cup the same, so that all the players who have been working very hard to prepare for the tournament, do not miss an opportunity to play due to the postponement," Patel added.

#### Milan eDerby today

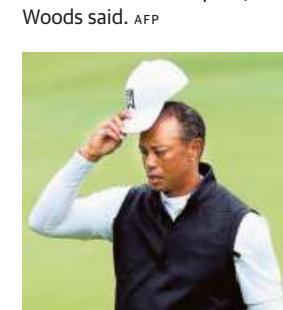
MILAN

Italian giants AC Milan and Inter Milan are set to face off in a video game derby as the football-mad country remains in lockdown. AC Milan's Portuguese striker Rafael Leao will take on Inter's Sebastiano Esposito on Saturday at 6 p.m. IST on eFootball Pro Evolution Soccer. The Milan eDerby will be available live on Inter and AC Milan's official channels. "Being a derby there is always the desire to win. But the main objective is to be close to our fans in this complicated time," said Leao. ■ AFP

#### Woods recovers from injury, but...

MIAMI

Tiger Woods says he has recovered from a sore back that hindered his preparations for the now-postponed Masters but is missing the Augusta showdown. "I feel a little edgy. I want to get out there. I want to compete," Woods said. ■ AFP



#### No match worth risking a life: FIFA boss Infantino

ZURICH

FIFA president Gianni Infantino on Friday said "no match" is worth "risking a single human life" and that world football's governing body would be able to help financially national federations during the coronavirus pandemic. "Our first priority, our principle, the one we will use for our competitions and encourage everyone to follow is that health comes first," he said in a video message. "No match, no competition, no league is worth risking a single human life." ■ AFP

## Online blitz event raises nearly ₹2.40 lakh

'Let's Fight Corona Together' attracts 180 players, including 17 GMs

RAKESH RAO  
NEW DELHI

The online-friendly nature of chess played its part perfectly as Chessbase India organised a one-day event that helped raise ₹2,39,742 towards PM-CARES fund.

Titled, "Let's Fight Corona Together", this online blitz chess event attracted 180 players including 17 GMs, with India No. 2 Vidit Gujrathi being the top seed.

For the record, Kerala's rising star Nihal Sarin won the title, ahead of Aravindh Chithambaram and Vidit.

The trio tallied eight points each from nine rounds but Nihal was adjudged champion on super-

prior tie-break score. There was no entry fee, but each participant was expected to donate a minimum of ₹100 and a maximum of whatever he/she was comfortable with.

#### Live streaming

Interestingly, Vidit also did live streaming of his games that raised ₹37,028 in two hours.

Out of this, a donation of ₹25,000 came from a generous Coimbatore-based chess lover, C. Vinita.

Among players, notable was the contribution of 16-year-old GM Arjun Erigasi who gave ₹25,000 a day before the event.

Seasoned GMs Dibyendu Barua, K. Sasikiran and Neelotpal Das contributed ₹20,000 each.

Nihal, the eventual champion who was a last-minute entry, pitched in with ₹7,500. GMs Magesh Chandran, Arun Prasad, M.S. Thej Kumar, N. Srinath and Ankit Rajpara contributed ₹5,000 each.

GM R.R. Laxman not only chipped in with ₹4,500, but also encouraged many to play the event. GM Diptayan Ghosh donated ₹3,000.

Interestingly, Sasikiran, Arun and Thej were among those who contributed without playing the fund-raiser. Likewise, the trio of S. Vi-

jayalakshmi, Sriram Jha and S. Meenakshi donated ₹7000.

#### Unknown contributor

Shiv Shome, 13, chose to shell out ₹2,500 while an unknown contributor, who did not play, donated ₹10,000.

IM Sagar Shah and FIDE instructor Niklesh Jain are holding online classes since the beginning of the lockdown to raise funds.

Shah, also the co-founder and CEO of Chessbase India, said, "We have raised an additional ₹74,179 in the last 16 days through online classes. More importantly every day close to 500 people learn chess live."

## HNZ cancels India tour

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

After the suspension of matches in the Europe leg of the Pro League, the Indian men's hockey team's home games against New Zealand have also been cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The New Zealand men were scheduled to play back-to-back games on May 23 and 24 in Bhubaneswar.

"Following the New Zealand government's travel restrictions and lockdown, combined with the medical advice of team doctors and in the interests of the health, safety and well-being of our players and support staff, the decision has been made by Hockey New Zealand to cancel our tour of India (men) and China (women) at this present time," HNZ chief executive Ian Francis said in a statement.

While expressing disappointment, Hockey India accepted that the situation was not conducive. "It is disappointing that the matches need to be cancelled, but these are unavoidable circumstances and we support Hockey New Zealand's decision. Safety of players and their support staff is a top priority. We hope to host them again soon once the situation improves," HI CEO Elena Norman said, adding that tickets already bought for the same will be refunded.

## Idea was to win back fans: Pat Cummins

Rejects Clarke's contentious IPL contracts claim

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MELBOURNE

The Australian cricket team's low-key aggression against India during the 2018-19 Test series was more about winning back fans rather than protecting their IPL contracts, said pace spearhead Pat Cummins, rejecting former skipper Michael Clarke's contentious claims.

#### Overall criticism

The India series was only the second Test series after the ball-tampering controversy that led to Steve Smith and

David Warner's suspensions and an overall criticism of their 'win at all cost' mentality.

"I think probably a bigger factor was six months before leading into that Indian series, the media and everyone commenting on the Aussie cricket team were pretty clear in their direction in the way they wanted the Aussies team to go."

"And that was playing a little bit less aggressively out on the field," Cummins, who was supposed to be IPL's highest paid overseas player

at ₹15.5 crore, told the BBC.

However, he didn't rule out that some players might have harboured thoughts about they went soft on Indian skipper Virat Kohli in fear of losing out on IPL pay-checks.

"I'd say that would have been a bigger factor than trying to win or lose friends out on the cricket field. But you never know, that might have been a factor for some players."

Australia skipper Tim Paine had also rubbished Clarke's claims.



Virat Kohli and Tim Paine. ■ FILE PHOTO

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