



Kerala nurse raring to return to duty after defeating COVID-19
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Father-daughter duo in Madhya Pradesh recover completely
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Life insurance policy holders get 30 more days to pay premium
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Pope opens Holy Week amid pandemic, says now is the time to serve
page 12

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NEARBY



Five militants, 3 soldiers dead in Kupwara strike
SRINAGAR
Five militants have been killed in an ongoing operation along the Line of Control in north Kashmir's Kupwara. Three soldiers were killed during the operation, said an Army spokesman.

NEWS ► PAGE 8

Some schools monitor lamp lighting by students

NEW DELHI
Parents cried foul on Sunday as several schools monitored whether their students lit diyas at 9 p.m., as urged by the Prime Minister, pressured by a letter from the Ministry of Human Resource Development asking for an action-taken report. The Ministry later clarified that no coercion was intended.

NEWS ► PAGE 8

Capital records 58 new cases, one death

NEW DELHI
The total number of COVID-19 cases in the Capital crossed 500 after 58 new cases were reported on Sunday, the Delhi government said. One person died taking the toll to seven. Of the new cases, 19 are connected to the Nizamuddin centre. In all, 503 cases have been reported in Delhi so far.

CITY ► PAGE 3

Cases doubled in 4.1 days due to Tablighi Jamaat event: govt.

We are chasing the virus, say officials as new cases rise in Maharashtra, T.N.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India's death toll from COVID-19 rose to 83 on Sunday, with 11 fatalities since Saturday. The number of confirmed infections across the country stood at 3,577 cases, with 505 new cases; 274 persons have recovered, the Union Health Ministry said.

"We are chasing the virus rather than the other way around and India's strategy continues to be preventive. We rather be over prepared," Joint Secretary in the Union Health Ministry Lav Agarwal said at Sunday's press briefing.

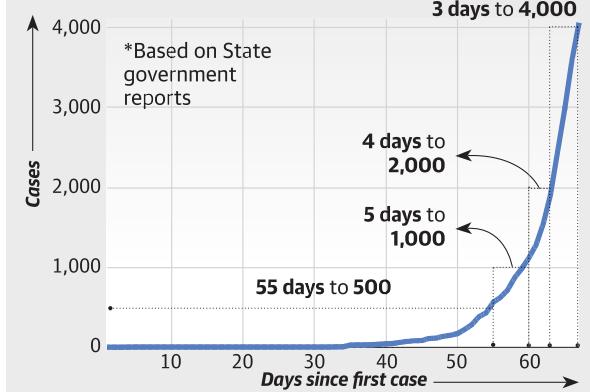
COVID-19

The Ministry maintained that last month's Tablighi Jamaat gathering in Delhi has pushed up the doubling rate of cases in India to 4.1 days from the estimated 7.4 days.

Reports from State Health Departments put the death toll across the country at 127, with 3,603 active cases. The maximum number of cases continued to be reported from Maharashtra at 748, with 13 fatalities in the past 24 hours. Tamil Nadu followed with 559 active cases, reporting two fatalities since Saturday.

Rapid increase

The number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in India crossed 4,000* on Sunday. While it took 55 days for 500 cases, it took only one day for it to jump from 3,500 to 4,000.



Stating that there is no evidence to suggest airborne transmission of the novel coronavirus, head of Epidemiology and Communicable Diseases with the Indian Council of Medical Research Raman Gangakhedkar said rapid antibody-based blood test for COVID-19 would be deployed by Wednesday for high prevalence areas and hotspots across India.

Asked about concerns raised by doctors of AIIMS, Delhi, and other cities on the shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE), Mr. Agarwal said the situation should ease in a few days.

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MORE REPORTS ON ► PAGES 2, 3, 4,
5, 8, 9, 10, 11
300 TABLIGHI JAMAAT MEMBERS
TEST POSITIVE IN PAK. ► PAGE 12

Ready to stop academic loss'

The government will take a decision on reopening schools and colleges on April 14 after reviewing the COVID-19 situation in the country, Union HRD Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal said. He added that the safety of students and teachers is of utmost importance and his Ministry is prepared to ensure that there is no academic loss if the lockdown is extended. ► PAGE 8

Puzzling cases in Karnataka

As 22 of the 151 positive cases in Karnataka don't have any foreign travel or contact history, State health officials are at a loss to understand how they could have contracted the infection. While the cases raise questions as to whether it is the beginning of community transmission, officials have been denying it. The patients have spread the infection to eight others. ► PAGE 5

PM lights lamp as nation joins hands against virus

Fireworks, conches join nine-minute event across country

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

People across the country switched off lights in their houses and lit lamps at their doors and balconies in solidarity with the rest of the country in combating COVID-19 at the call of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Mr. Modi had, in a video message last week, asked Indians to light a lamp or flash a torch from their mobile phone at 9 p.m. on Sunday for nine minutes. The Prime Minister lit a lamp at his official residence at 7 Lok Kalyan Marg and tweeted a Sanskrit verse, seeking health and prosperity for all and the defeat of all enemies.

Mr. Modi wore a white south Indian mundu (dhoti) and an Assamese gamucha (towel) and lit a traditional oil lamp from south India. This was to convey, sources said, solidarity with all corners of the country.

President Ram Nath Kovind and First Lady Savita Kovind also lit lamps as did Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu. Several political party leaders, including YSRCP chief and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Eddapadi Palaniswami, joined in.

Union Health Minister



United effort: Nurses of J.N. Ray Hospital in Kolkata expressing solidarity in the fight against the pandemic. ■ PTI

Harsh Vardhan lit a lamp along with AIIMS doctors and staff, whom he called "Corona warriors", on the Delhi campus.

The event passed off without any disruption to the national electricity grid after the government and utilities put in place elaborate plans to deal with the sudden drop and then a quick spurt in demand.

India has been on a 21-day lockdown from March 25 to check the spread of coronavirus pandemic that has claimed over 83 lives in the country and 65,000 globally, while more than 12,00,000 declared cases have been registered in 190 countries since the epidemic first emerged in China in December 2019.

(With PTI inputs)

Rapid antibody testing for hotspots first: ICMR

The rollout is likely on Wednesday

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) said the rapid antibody-based blood test for COVID-19 will be deployed by this Wednesday in clusters and hotspots showing high incidence of confirmed cases.

Raman R. Gangakhedkar, head of the Epidemiology and Communicable Diseases Division of the ICMR, explained that overall testing for COVID-19 using real-time reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR), a laboratory technique combining reverse transcription of RNA into DNA, is increasing and that India would be approaching full capacity soon.

"At the same time, we are expecting delivery of rapid test kits (blood-based) for use in response to COVID-19. CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 8

Free testing and treatment

The Centre has decided to provide free testing and treatment of COVID-19 under the Ayushman Bharat Scheme. The move will benefit more than 50 crore beneficiaries across India. ► PAGE 8

situation. By Wednesday, this should be up and running," he added.

The Health Ministry added that all States/UTs had been issued guidelines for implementing these tests and reports may be entered into the ICMR portal, similar to results of real-time RT PCR tests for COVID-19.

Delhi lab to offer 'drive-through test'

DDL to start sample collection at Punjabi Bagh centre today

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

To work around the challenges of home-based testing in the country, Dr. Dangs Lab (DDL) plans to offer 'drive-through test' for COVID-19.

The most common question asked by listeners was if the coronavirus could be transmitted by domestic animals or stray dogs.

Sibani Suar of Phulbani's Radio Muskan added: "We work in close coordination with the district administration. Awareness messages and warnings on health hazards are sourced from very authentic sources."

Community radio stations are operating in remote pockets of Puri, Jagatsinghpur, Bhadrak, Nayagarh, Kandhamal, Khordha, Nuapada, Balasore and Koraput districts.

would conform with the guidelines of the Indian Council of Medical Research that mandates only those who have a doctor's prescription to be offered a test.

"What we have seen so far is that many are uncomfortable with the home collection process. They are worried that lab personnel – despite being fully protected – may infect family members," Dr. Arjun told *The Hindu*.

Testing apprehensions

Navin Dang, president, DDL, said that some people are worried that lab personnel visiting home in full protective gear would scare the neighbours. "There are also instances when spouses of some of our own lab personnel have been told by their partners to live separately for a month. It's to address such concerns that we are offering

information," said Pradeepa Dutta, chairman of Radio Kisan which operates from Balipatna in Khordha district.

Pradeepa Dutta, chairman of Radio Kisan which operates from Balipatna in Khordha district.

The world in the number of tests per million to check for coronavirus infection and it has been able to do it, partly, by allowing those who feel sick to drive up to a test centre where nurses wearing protective gear collect a nose or throat sample from the car itself. Results are mailed or messaged in a day. This method of mass testing has allowed reduced contact between patients and healthcare workers, thereby lessening the chances of transmission.

"Inspired" by the South Korean approach, Arjun Dang, CEO, DDL, said the test

Sample survey



Watchful eyes: Doctors collecting samples of people having cold and cough for testing for COVID-19 at a clinic near the containment area of Ambavadi in Dahisar in the northern suburb of Mumbai on Sunday. ■ AADESH CHAUDHARY

+ U.P. lockdown to end in phases: Adityanath

CM seeks legislators' advice on plan

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

The lockdown imposed to stem the spread of COVID-19 will come to an end in Uttar Pradesh on April 15 but in phases, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has said.

"15 April se lockdown sampa hoga wala hai (The lockdown will come to an end on April 15)," Mr. Adityanath said while interacting with MLAs in the State through videoconferencing on Saturday.

Mr. Adityanath told the legislators that there is a need to fully defeat the virus by November-December.

He also connected with all MPs and Ministers in the State through videoconferencing and appealed to them to ensure that the common man standing on the last rung gets benefits of the State government's schemes.

The Chief Minister sought

the MLAs' suggestions in deciding which establishments should be opened first.

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The Chief Minister sought



Keeping informed: Villagers tuning in to a community radio station in Odisha. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

their travel history," said Mr. Ansari.

Villagers turn up the volume on radios for groups of listeners with emphasis on social distancing.

Verified information
"In the lockdown situation, the timings and location of

weekly markets, adhering to rules on safe distance, and the status of local ATMs are critical messages that community radio can disseminate effectively. When misinformation is flooded on social media, people get confused, but we broadcast verified

information," said Pradeepa Dutta, chairman of Radio Kisan which operates from Balipatna in Khordha district.

The most common question asked by listeners was if the coronavirus could be transmitted by domestic animals or stray dogs.

Sibani Suar of Phulbani's Radio Muskan added: "We work in close coordination with the district administration. Awareness messages and warnings on health hazards are sourced from very authentic sources."

Community radio stations are operating in remote pockets of Puri, Jagatsinghpur, Bhadrak, Nayagarh, Kandhamal, Khordha, Nuapada, Balasore and Koraput districts.

"Inspired" by the South Korean approach, Arjun Dang, CEO, DDL, said the test

Taking COVID-19 news to remote corners of Odisha

17 community radio networks are spreading awareness in rural areas with limited Internet access

SATYASUNDAR BARIK
BHUBANESWAR

At a time when people are keen on understanding the evolving COVID-19 pandemic, as many as 17 community radio networks are proving to be a refreshing tool for the customised dissemination of information to rural audiences in Odisha.

"Our experience shows that for more than 60% of the rural population, DTH (direct to home) and Internet-based media are still out of reach. Moreover, neither television nor any other source of information would provide them with news related to the small geographical area they live within," said N. A. Shah Ansari, founder of Radio Namaskar and president of

Odisha's Community Radio Association.

Urging labourers
The past one week has been very hectic for community radio operators. Apart from passing on the government's instructions, they kept prodding their target audiences, especially migrant labourers who had returned from outside the State, to inform their respective gram panchayats of their arrival.

"We deliberately did not utter the word quarantine as it causes panic. We just urged migrant labourers to go to panchayat offices and inform them of their arrival. Our approach clicked. According to the feedback we have received, most of them went and disclosed

information," said Pradeepa Dutta, chairman of Radio Kisan which operates from Balipatna in Khordha district.

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'In times of crisis, how can we not be part of the sewa?'

Prem, Mid-day meal server

Outside the Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya at Nehru Vihar, a makeshift arrangement has been made where women, in shifts, have been distributing food to the homeless, migrant workers and anyone who arrives there.

Food distribution started since the lockdown, said Prem, one of the four women on duty. "We are all associated with the school. We used to serve mid-day meals to children. Since the school is now closed, following the lockdown, we were asked to volunteer and distribute food among the needy," the 53-year-old,

who has been with the school for more than a decade, says.

Food is distributed twice a day, she informs. "Lots of people turn up throughout the day including people who live in nearby clusters and are unable to manage food. On a daily basis, we spend around 4-5 hours distributing food. Because I live in Wazirabad and come walking, I have opted for the morning shift. There are four others, who live in the vicinity. They

usually come for the evening shift," she says.

Prem describes her new duty as 'sewa'. "When the school authorities told me to be a part of the food distribution, I readily agreed. In times of crisis like this one, how can we not be part of the sewa? When everyone is participating in their own bit, this is our way of contributing," said

Shinjini Ghosh



Prem.



'No work, has to borrow money from relatives'

Kaushalya Devi, House-help

With no ration card or access to banks, the lockdown has left Kaushalya Devi, 'helpless'. The breadwinner of her family, which comprises five members including two children, she has to borrow money from her relatives to ensure meals.

"The three houses where I work pay my salary in cash so I never had to worry. But now I am unable to even reach their houses to collect the month's salary. They wanted to transfer the money to my account, but my branch is in Nehru Place and I cannot even walk [up] there. It will take me two hours, if not more," says the Madanpur Kha-

dar resident.

The 31-year-old adds that despite assurances from the State government, the ration shop she visited turned her away as she did not have a ration card. "The shop owners were distributing ration to only those who had a card and I am not aware of how to register for one. They said that the list of people who can claim the ration without a card will only come later and asked me to visit after April 10. But how will I sustain my family till then?" she asks.



While adding that the current situation has created an 'unending crisis', she elaborates: "My husband is differently abled and is unable to contribute a single penny. The current situation is only adding to my woes. I do not even know if there is any category for those who are differently abled so that we get some respite. I had to borrow money from relatives to buy basic vegetables but that also cannot be a solution for long. We are at a loss and have no idea how to come out of it," she sighs.

Shinjini Ghosh

Ground reality: destroyed but not defeated

The lockdown has affected most strata of society, each tugging with reality and moving along with their lives. A slice of life in the times of clampdown

Keeping track of the virus, round-the-clock



Dr. Sanjay Sagar, Head of District Surveillance Office (north district)

By January-end, the government had started monitoring people coming from China for possible COVID-19 infection. This is when work started getting hectic for Sanjay Sagar, who heads the District Surveillance Office (DSO) of the north district in Delhi, and his team.

The team's work is two-fold: home quarantining people and tracing contacts of those who test positive. For the last 10 days, his office has been functioning round-the-clock. "If anyone who is home quarantined develops symptoms, we will have to coordinate and move the person to a hospital immediately," he said.

In the last two months, he noticed a strange pattern. "It is easier to make people from middle class and lower middle class understand the threat of COVID-19 and home quarantine them. But it is a little difficult to convince people from affluent families," he said.

Dr. Sagar's work starts as soon as the immigration department files a list of flyers to the State Surveillance Office, which is then forwarded to his office. "We connect each of them [flyers] in our district to a Delhi government or MCD clinic and then ASHA workers, ANMs [Auxiliary Nurse Midwifery] keep a watch on them. They visit each of the home quarantined people twice a day and check for symptoms," he said.



The person is moved to a hospital if any symptom such as fever or dry cough appears. "The healthcare workers have been given gloves, masks and hand sanitisers. We have also trained them to maintain distance and abstain from socialising at the houses they visit," the doctor said.

"If a person tests positive, we talk to him and make a comprehensive list of his family members and the people he might have met. We trace them and they are also quarantined for 14 days," he said.

When asked about the problems they face, Dr. Sagar said, "The Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) kits are few. We get enough for our use. But still we need more PPE."

Nikhil M Babu

'It is risky, but duty comes first'

Dr. Priya Sharma, Eye specialist at Gurugram Civil Hospital

"Yes, risk is there. And there is a sense of fear at the back of the mind. But duty comes first," said Priya Sharma, currently working with the screening and sampling team which is running a flu OPD to screen COVID-19 suspects at Sector 10 Civil Hospital, since the outbreak of the epidemic early this month.

The 43-year-old eye specialist said she was extra cautious when she returned home from hospital every evening. "I avoid touching the door knobs, and the light switches. I ensure that while talking to my son and parents, I maintain a safe distance. I hardly enter their rooms after returning from hospital," said Dr. Sharma.

She said the entire team of doctors at the hospital had been working diligently since the outbreak, putting in extra hours



of works, under the leadership of Principal Medical Officer Dr. Deepa and the Chief Medical Officer J.S. Punia, who kept them in high spirits.

Dr. Sharma said many patients with symptoms of flu came to get themselves tested for COVID-19. Hence, they had to screen each and every patient carefully to identify the suspects and then

take their samples. "We also need to explain and counsel to the rest that every cough and cold symptom is not due to COVID-19. At times, counselling people becomes very difficult, but we try our best to allay the anxiety of the patients," Dr. Sharma said.

She said that at the same time it was very important for them to protect themselves since every patient was a potential COVID-19 suspect. "We take all the necessary precautions like wearing masks, caps, using sanitisers at frequent intervals and maintaining a proper distance from the patients. While collecting samples from the suspected cases, all necessary precautions are taken. We have sufficient supply of Personal Protective Equipment which we need to wear while taking samples to protect ourselves," said Dr. Sharma.

Ashok Kumar

'Transition was not easy'

Dr. Shubha Bansal, Eye Surgeon at Gurugram Civil Hospital

"Our jaws are guarding our borders. There is a sense of fear if one of them is killed. But, this does not mean that they run away from their duty. As a doctor, I took an oath to serve people, and this is the opportunity to fulfil it," said Shubha Bansal, when asked whether she was worried about herself and her family when told to collect samples of COVID-19 suspects.

Dr. Bansal, like her colleagues from orthopaedic and dental departments, was entrusted with the job of sample collection of the suspects for 24 hours at Sector 10 Civil Hospital. "Sample collection involves the maximum risk. However, we were provided with all

necessary protective gear, suits and equipment. You need to remain available for 24 hours and can be called at any time for sample collection," said 42-year-old Dr. Bansal. The transition was not easy for her.

She is grateful to her colleagues from the ENT department to come forward to help. She also watched YouTube videos to prepare herself for the job.

Now, she is involved in the screening of COVID-19 suspects based on their travel history and symptoms on a regular basis. She said that she wore a double-layered mask and the suspects also wore masks and were made to keep a

safe distance during screening. Leaves of all doctors had been cancelled, she said.

She, however, faced a bigger challenge at the household front with her domestic help not turning up for work due to lockdown. Dr. Bansal said her husband, Rahul Bhargava, director of bone marrow department, Fortis Hospital, had a very hectic schedule and was not able to help her in household chores. "I cannot ask him to do the dishes. He is so busy," chuckled Dr. Bansal. Her son, she said, was too young to help her.

Ashok Kumar

'Wanted: better protection gear, facilities for doctors'



Wanted: better protection gear, facilities for doctors

Dr. Deepankar Chaudhary, Doctor at Safdarjung Hospital

Deepankar Chaudhary, who works at the Safdarjung Hospital where COVID-19 patients and suspects are being treated, said his workload has increased. A lot of private hospitals from other cities and towns are also referring their patients to the hospital.

"A few days ago, I treated two patients who were referred from Moradabad. Uttar Pradesh has good hospitals, still the patients are being referred here," he said.

To reduce the workload and help them work more efficiently, he felt that the doctors should be provided better Personal Protection Equipment (PPE). "PPE should be of good quality. For instance, a proper PPE is one single piece and we do not have to connect the cap separately. This will give better protection," the 29-year-old doctor said.

Moreover, he pointed out that the shoe covers used by doctors in China and the U.K. are knee-high, but the one he uses comes up only till the ankle. "I am 5 feet 11 inches tall. So my ankle is exposed when I move. There is a risk of infection when I touch my shoe or shoe-lace," he said, observing that the PPE

at the ITBP quarantine facility in Chhawla, where he worked from February 27 till March 15, was better.

The challenges don't end here. "Some people hide their travel history, which increases the risk of spreading infection. People have to be more careful. I see many young people on the streets who are not serious about the disease."

Outlining his work, Dr. Chaudhary said patients with respiratory difficulties go through a primary screening, before prospective COVID-19 cases are referred to an Acute Respiratory Illness (ARI) unit on the sixth floor of the new emergency block called 'Ward A'. "We keep them in isolation for two days and send a sample for testing. If it turns out to be negative, we shift them to another ward and keep them in isolation until they test negative for a second time," he said.

Those patients who test positive are transferred to an isolated ward. As the number of both patients and doctors in the hospital is increasing, he demands more rooms for doctors. "Many of them do not want to go home and like to stay back at the hospital," said the doctor, who is cautious enough not to let anyone sit in his car for the fear of infection.

Nikhil M Babu

As demand for online essentials rise, firms devise new strategies

Some let you buy grocery from local stores, a few are partnering with other apps

SIDHARTH RAVI
NEW DELHI

The lockdown due to COVID-19 outbreak has hit life hard in the city and across the country but for online delivery firms, the situation presents a unique opportunity as more and more customers are avoiding public places for buying essential items.

"Across the country, due to the lockdown, there is a demand for essentials and in these extraordinary times, companies need to rise to the occasion," said a spokesperson for Dunzo, an e-commerce company, which provides delivery partners for all kinds of goods.

COVID-19

The company has reportedly trimmed its catalogue to sell only the ones mandated under the Essential Commodities Act, they added. The company has also been advising its partners on the types of goods they ought to store to meet the demand on the app. These include fruits and vegetables, grains and pulses, hygiene and sanitation products, and other basic necessities, Dunzo said.

It added that users across the platform are primarily looking for essentials and preventive healthcare items like sanitisers while also being extremely judicious



A food delivery agent during the lockdown in the Capital on Sunday. ■ V.V. KRISHNAN

about their shopping.

Hard approach

Online grocery company Grofers has also taken a "hard approach to hoarding of essential commodities". The company said: "To ensure supplies to genuine customers, we are proactively blocking people who are trying to game the system to acquire items. Promotions for essential commodities are being discontinued as well and excessive buying or multiple orders to bypass inventory limits can lead to order cancellations."

While the company is reportedly facing a warehouse-staff crunch, many are not turning up either due to the fear of contracting the virus or they had returned to their hometowns. Rohith Sharma, head of supply chain at the company, explained: "Currently, 65% of our warehouse staff is operational and we are hiring an additional

coming weeks. However, to meet the demand, it was also increasing the number of bikes, vans and manpower. The company has also partnered with cab aggregator Uber to deliver everyday essentials to consumers.

Focus on hygiene

The companies have also taken measures to limit the risk of transmission of the virus, with provisions for contactless delivery, temperature checks of delivery agents and other protocols for sanitisation. Grofers, for instance, said their warehouses were being disinfected and sanitised daily, there is mandatory temperature checks for staff, strict protocols on use of sanitisers, regular disinfection of crates and other measures. Big Basket said they were also following similar precautions, equipping personnel with gloves and encouraging digital payments among other measures.

Similarly, Zomato and Swiggy have given detailed instructions regarding various precautions they have been taking on their mobile applications. These include training drivers on safety precautions, ensuring restaurant safety practices, contactless delivery, with recommendations to leave a stool outside your door to allow agents to leave the package.

The brighter side of dark days

The 21-day lockdown is bringing about some major social changes, and all of them are not totally undesirable

BILLY CHATTERJEE

Let me start with a confession. I am probably one of the least affected by the nationwide lockdown.

Having worked for the jet-set corporate world for a lifetime, mine is now a SOHO (small-office-home-office) and my work can be best described by the quote from the chimney sweep in *Mary Poppins*: "I do what I likes, and I likes what I do."

COMMENT

Not only do I work from home, but I also take special pride in running the house, including cooking – which is one of my many passions. So staying indoors for three weeks is not a big challenge for me.

By now it is obvious to all that the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown would be huge.

The daily wage earners are already feeling the heat. Small, medium and even large business houses will be impacted by this like never before. Experts have not dared to predict the quantum of damage.

But this sudden change will also bring about some major social changes, and all of them may not be totally

undesirable.

The family unit

The urban middle class today is a combination of complicated sets of relationships. The man of the house is busy earning more to meet the growing demands of the family. He has very little time for home.

The erstwhile "housewife" is now a liberated working woman, yet struggling to balance work and home. Children, as it has been for generations, do not find much to talk about at home and are busy with their social life and social media.

Conversations within the family are monosyllabic and eating together is rare. That is what life was before March 25, 2020.

Today, they are all confined within the four walls of the house and bump into each other more often than desired.

Meals are served together and though one has the option of looking at one's smartphone while eating, stray conversations have started happening. Perhaps this may lead to an end to their obsession with mobile phones.

Who does what in the family was well defined. All undesirable and difficult house-

hold chores were delegated to the hired domestic help. It was a happy equilibrium. That has also changed now.

I called an old colleague the other day. He grudgingly said that he was washing utensils and would talk to me after some time. Another (male) friend shared his newly discovered knowledge that "you walk forward when you sweep and move backwards when you mop".

Environmentalists have been shouting from the rooftops for many decades to do so.

For the first time in 15 years I could see stars from my 12th-floor balcony. The sky was clear blue, something I had never seen before in Gurugram.

They say human behaviour can change in just 21 days. Ironically, we have a 21-day lockdown to do things that people have not done in a long, long time. Some of these changes will certainly be in a positive direction.

Billy Chatterjee has worked as a market research professional for more than three decades. For the last three years, he has been producing Bengali feature films.

I overheard a conversation

Who is to blame for virus going viral from Nizamuddin?

Tablighi Jamaat congregation attended by several thousands in city in March has led to a rise in COVID-19 cases across the nation

NIKHIL M BABU
SAURABH TRIVEDI
SIDHARTH RAVI
NEW DELHI

Government agencies are playing a passing-the-buck game on who was responsible for allowing the congregation at the Tablighi Jamaat centre in Nizamuddin, from where a large number of COVID-19 cases across the country have been traced, at a time orders were in place prohibiting large gatherings.

The Delhi Police, the local municipal corporation as well as the Delhi government, are yet to come clean on the issue and fix accountability on those responsible for Nizamuddin becoming the single largest source of COVID-19 infections in the country.

At a time when robust efforts are needed to fix accountability, there's little doubt that a common sense approach could have prompted the Tablighi Jamaat to cancel the March 13-15 *ijtema*, or congregation, given that the virus went viral from a similar February 28-March 1 gathering in Malaysia.

Delhi government

Since COVID-19 cases started appearing from the Tablighi Jamaat's Nizamuddin centre, many Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders blamed the city police for not enforcing Delhi government bans on large gatherings of people.

On March 13, Deputy Chief

Minister Manish Sisodia announced that "all sports gathering/conferences/seminars beyond 200 people" were prohibited in Delhi.

"We have told all Sub-Divisional Magistrates and District Magistrates that all orders from the Health Department on COVID-19 should be followed strictly and if anyone violates it, action will be taken immediately," Mr. Sisodia had said.

Again, on March 16, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, announcing a ban on any gathering of more than 50 people in Delhi had said, "If protesters or any other groups still continue to gather in large numbers then apt actions under the Epidemic Disease Act will be taken by the area DMs, SDMs."

Addressing the press on March 31, Mr. Kejriwal had said that action would be taken against officials if found negligent in the matter and no one would be spared. "Many people are saying that this letter was written to that officer on this date and he did not take any action, etc. If any officer is found to be negligent, he would not be spared," the Chief Minister had said.

But "action", if any, is not in the public domain.

On March 31, Mr. Kejriwal "ordered" the registration of an FIR against a cleric at the Tablighi Jamaat centre even though time and again he has pointed to the fact that the



The Tablighi Jamaat's headquarters in Nizamuddin has emerged as a COVID-19 hotspot. ■ PTI

Delhi Police reports to the Union Home Ministry and not the Delhi government. When contacted, a government spokesperson said that it was not aware of the religious congregation at the centre.

To a question about the enforcement of Delhi government orders banning large gatherings, the official said that it was primarily the duty of the police to enforce it. Commenting on the statements made by Mr. Kejriwal and Mr. Sisodia that SDMs and DMs should take action, the spokesperson said that the government would look into it.

"Right now, we are handling the cases that are coming from the Tablighi centre and testing is still not over. We will look into whether there was any neglect too,"

COVID-19

the official said. Deputy Commissioner (South-East) Harleen Kaur, and SDM (Defence Colony) Vinod Yadav did not respond to multiple calls and messages.

"It is not our duty to check what is going on in different parts of the city. Once the incident came to light and after getting orders, we helped in the evacuation of people from the Markaz (centre) with the help of police," a senior Delhi Health Department official said, when asked about actions taken by the department while people were still at the centre.

Delhi Police

The Delhi Police, for its part, has been unable to explain their role in implementing

March 16 Delhi government order over restrictions of more than 50 people for a religious or social purpose.

"From March 16 onwards, a police team from Hazrat Nizamuddin police station visited the centre and asked them to clear it and they assured us they would adhere to the Delhi government orders," said a police officer. By this time, of course, the congregation at the Nizamuddin centre was already over. Also, the Delhi government ban on gatherings of more than 200 people was issued on March 13, the day the congregation began.

Later, on March 24, a police officer said that a meeting was held with Tablighi Jamaat officials at the Hazrat Nizamuddin police station where the imposition of the lockdown and repercussions if they didn't follow were ex-

plained to them. The evacuation process from the centre began only after this.

It may be recalled that while Prime Minister Narendra Modi had called for a "janata curfew" for March 22, he announced the ongoing nationwide lockdown to tackle the spread of COVID-19 on 8 p.m. on March 24.

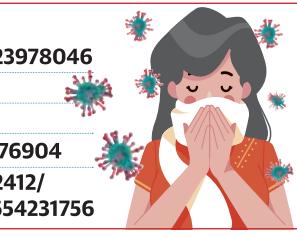
Local body

At a meeting convened by the Director General of Health Services (DGHS) on February 4, municipal corporations in the city had also been instructed to track all foreign tourists in their respective jurisdiction residing in hotels and guest houses and provide daily updates.

Senior South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) officials said that the foreigners residing at the Nizamuddin centre were not covered under this as they were residing at a religious centre and not in a guest house/hotel.

The municipal corporations compiled information on the foreign tourists in their jurisdiction by procuring details from the managers of hotels and guest houses registered with them, an official said.

As such, the responsibility of screening individuals coming from abroad was the responsibility of the authorities at the airport and the civic bodies were not involved in any screening activity, civic officials claimed.



Capital records 58 new cases, one death

Most cases linked to Nizamuddin event

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Among those who tested positive for the virus, include two nurses from Delhi State Cancer Institute [DSCI], two sanitation workers, an employee from AIIMS trauma centre and another staff from Charak Palika Hospital

Srinivas Rajkumar
general-secretary of AIIMS Resident Doctors' Association

clude two nurses from Delhi State Cancer Institute [DSCI], two sanitation workers, an employee from AIIMS trauma centre and another staff from Charak Palika Hospital, said Srinivas Rajkumar, general-secretary of AIIMS Resident Doctors' Association. The bulletin also stated that 6,567 samples have been collected so far, out of which 5,398 have tested negative and at least 667 are pending. These include samples tested at government as well as private hospitals.

Case filed after cartridge found near mosque

Delhi responds to Modi's appeal, lights up candles

In fight against COVID-19, many also burst crackers, play religious songs; a few refrain from taking part

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

At 9 p.m. on Sunday, lights went out in hundreds of households across Delhi as people gathered in their balconies to light candles and switch on flashlights for nine minutes straight, in response to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal asking citizens to demonstrate a collective will to fight against COVID-19 – the pandemic that has claimed thousands of lives worldwide.

In Gurugram, police spokesperson Subhash Boken said there were no eyewitnesses in the incident, but the case was registered after an empty cartridge was found at the spot. He said that forensics team was sent to the spot for examination.

Kherki Majra mosque Imam, Shahid

said that he searched around the mosque with the locals to find an empty cartridge and also spotted a hole in the building.

He then reported the matter to the police. He said that it was the act of miscreants.

Anitya Kumar, a resident of Laxmi Nagar, said: "My wife and I lit a lamp to show our support to the doctors,



Early Diwali: People bursting crackers, lighting up candles and flashing torchlights at 9 p.m. on Sunday in New Delhi. ■ V.V. KRISHNAN

police personnel and sanitation workers who are working round-the-clock. But I don't know why were people bursting crackers and causing pollution."

Architect couple – Sandal and Pritha – who reside in a colony in south Delhi, said they had kept three large candles in stock. "We are doing this as a symbol of our gratitude to the health workers, policemen and the government officials who have been at the frontline to fight the virus," the couple said, adding:

"We switched off all lights in our house, including television, but kept the fridge running while we were out for nine minutes in our balcony."

In Gurugram, Bharat Vikas Parishad president Vivekanand Tiwari, a resident of Sector 15, said he along with his family and neighbours, lit diyas and flashed lights at 9 p.m. He said it was one of the ways for the people of the country to show that they were united in their fight against the virus and stood firmly with the government and Mr. Modi. He said it was a reaffirmation of the people's resolve to emerge victorious from this "state of despair".

Former deputy director,

research and development at Doordarshan, Jagdish Kumar Mehta, said the call from Mr. Modi to light diyas for nine minutes at 9 p.m. had an astronomical significance and would undo the effect of "Raahu and Ketu", whose phase began in December last year.

He said he was a firm believer in astrology and he along with hundreds of residents of

I had permission to leave campus, says JNU student

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A Jawaharlal Nehru University student, Pranav Menon, responding to an FIR filed against him for allegedly not adhering to the lockdown guidelines on April 1, said the university was trying to malign his name.

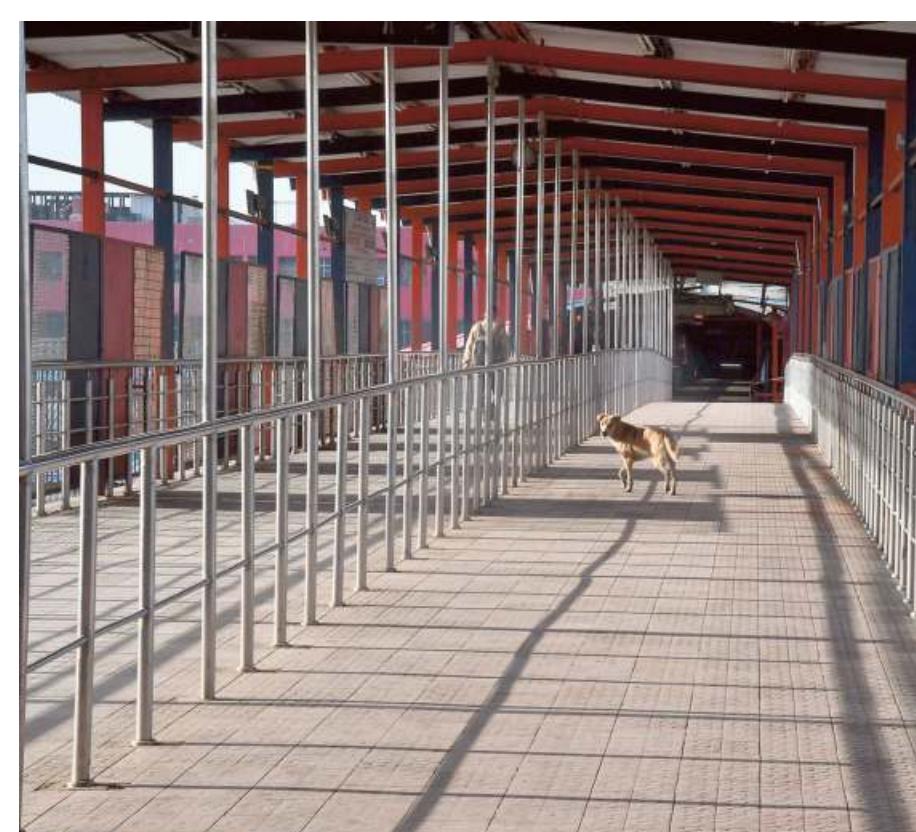
Mr. Menon, an M.Phil Student at the Centre for the Study of Law and Governance at the university, said he had permission to exit campus from the warden of Tapti hostel. "I made clear that I had no intention of returning in view of the lockdown and my respect and consideration for my fellow students on campus.

Electricity discom, Tata Power-DDL said a "meagre drop" of 157 MW took place during the lights off exercise, which was successfully managed by the company. Working closely with the load dispatch centre and other associated authorities, all adequate measures were taken to maintain grid stability, it said. Discom BSES said there was a reduction of 726 MW demand in areas covered by it Delhi.

"I was not a threat to any student and did not violate any protocol from March 18 till April 1 – when I was residing in JNU. I was merely asking to be let out as per procedure prescribed," he said, adding that the security guards confined him to their room and assaulted him. "Such actions were a grave threat to my life merely because I chose to call out this blatant bias exercised by the agency by denying me exit from campus despite the appropriate procedure followed by me," he said.

Mr. Menon said he is hopeful that the truth will come out.

Travel diaries



Barking lot: A stray dog on the deserted footover bridge at the Old Delhi railway station during a nationwide lockdown on Sunday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Ensure families of riot victims who lost ration cards get dry ration: HC

Medical kits for 275 families ready, govt. counsel tells court

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has asked the city government to ensure that families of the recent Delhi riots victims, who lost their ration cards, are provided the dry ration as per their entitlement.

A Bench of Justice Sanjeev Sachdeva and Justice Navin Chawla, which heard the case through videoconference, asked the nodal officer to provide dry ration if approached by such families.

The High Court's order came after it was informed that Mr. Kishan, Section Officer (Admin) in the Office of the District Magistrate, North East, has been appointed as the nodal officer to specifically deal with the 275 riot-hit families who are staying at relief camps.

Delhi government Standing Counsel Rahul Mehra



said Mr. Kishan is in touch with the representatives of the families and is looking after the issues of curfew passes and provision of food.

Two nodal officers
Mr. Mehra also submitted that in addition to Mr. Kishan, the Chief District Medical Officer has appointed two nodal officers, Dr. Surya Kant Singh and Dr. Abha Dhand, both medical officers, for providing medical help to the members of the said 275 families.

HELPLINE NUMBERS

| |
|---|
| COMMON HELPLINE – +91-11-23978046 |
| DELHI – 011-22307145 |
| GHAZIABAD – 0120 4186453 |
| NOIDA – 8076623612/6396776904 |
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THE HINDU

India's National Newspaper

Timings**DELHI**

| | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| MONDAY, APR. 06 | RISE 06:06 SET 18:42 |
| TUESDAY, APR. 07 | RISE 06:05 SET 18:43 |
| WEDNESDAY, APR. 08 | RISE 06:03 SET 18:43 |
| THURSDAY, APR. 09 | RISE 19:08 SET 06:21 |

Delhi Weather

max min

Delhi City 34 16

Safdarjung 34 16

Palam 34 17

Delhi Palam Today
33°C Dry and warm weather with moderate winds will prevail. Night will be pleasant.**Delhi Palam Tomorrow**
34°C A cloudy sky. Spell of duststorm and thundershower with strong winds is likely.© Copyright Skymet Weather 2019
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Man who held feast for 1,500 persons in Morena tests positive

11 of his relatives, including seven children, have contracted the disease too

SIDHARTH YADAV

Bhopal

Fourteen days after he returned from Dubai, a 40-year-old man from Morena tested positive for COVID-19 along with his wife on Thursday. And a day later, 10 of his relatives who had taken part in a feast thrown by him tested positive too.

More than 1,500 people who had attended the feast ceremony in honour of his mother, who had died on March 8, had been confined in quarantine and the locality where the venue was located had been sealed too, said District Chief Medical and Health Officer R.C Bandil.

Of the 23 persons whose samples had been taken, 10 relatives, including seven children, had tested positive, he added. The district administration had declared the house of the man, a restaur-



A deserted wholesale vegetable market in Bhopal on Sunday after a trader tested positive for COVID-19. •PTI

rant waiter who had returned from Dubai on March 17, as the "epicentre" and the area within its 3 km radius as the "containment area".

The children were aged between two and 14, whereas a 60-year-old woman had contracted the illness too, said Sapna M. Lovanshi, Additional Director, State Directorate of Health Services.

Curfew was imposed in the

area and all persons were being screened at its exit points and traffic was prohibited too, said district officials.

Primary contacts

"His own two children have tested positive. We are collecting samples of all their primary contacts now and those residing within the containment area who have symptoms, including cough

and cold," said Dr. Bandil. When the man landed in New Delhi, he was screened for illnesses but showed no symptoms until March-end, according to A.K. Gupta of the Morena district hospital.

"His wife told us she had caught a cold and cold even before her husband's return," he said. Still, even when the couple turned up at the hospital on March 29, the man did not declare his travel history. "However, he returned to the hospital on March 31 complaining of mild cough and cold that's when he declared he had returned from Dubai, and we took their samples," said Dr. Gupta.

"The ten members who had tested positive a day later didn't have any symptoms," said Pallavi Jain Govil, Principal Secretary, State Public Health and Family Welfare Department.

U.P. records its third death

Patient from Varanasi succumbs due to the viral infection

OMAR RASHID

LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh recorded its third death due to COVID-19 with a patient from Varanasi, which falls under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Lok Sabha constituency, succumbing to the virus.

The patient was admitted to the hospital in Banaras Hindu University on April 2 with acute respiratory syndrome, said Varanasi Commissioner Deepak Agarwal, adding that the patient died before the sample report was received.

The victim died late on April 3, said Amit Mohan Prasad, Principal Secretary (Health).

The patient did not come to any government hospital or medical college for timely treatment, Mr. Prasad said, pointing out negligence on behalf of the patient's kin.

The patient, who was also suffering from diabetes and blood pressure ailment, was getting treated by private doctors, said Mr. Prasad.



Policemen urge a shopkeeper to close his shop during lockdown in Lucknow on Sunday. •PTI

of positive cases in U.P. reached 278 till Sunday evening, with Noida (58), Agra (47), Meerut (33), Agra, Ghaziabad (23) and Lucknow (17) the worst affected, as per the State Directorate of Health Services.

The State has so far reported positive cases in 31 out of 75 districts and sent a total of 5,255 samples for testing and put 3,927 persons under institutional quarantine.

Police deny ruckus by Tablighi men

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GAZIABAD

Saharanpur Police has denied media reports suggesting that quarantined members of the Tablighi Jamaat in the district asked for non-vegetarian food and defecated in the open.

Senior Superintendent of Police Dinesh Kumar P. said some quarantined members littered the place after consuming food from the packet and were advised to use dustbin.

"There was no demand for non-vegetarian food and claims of open defecation could not be substantiated," he said. An official release said inspector of Rampur Maniharan was asked to probe the allegations. So far, 12 persons from a village of the district have tested positive in Lucknow.

Punjab villages self-isolate to fight COVID-19

Volunteers guarding entry-exit points to stop any outsider from entering villages



Volunteers guarding an entry-exit point of Sohana village in Punjab's Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar. •VIKAS VASUDEVA

Standing at the entry point of his village on Chandigarh-Landra road, 24-year-old Sarvan Kumar wouldn't let any outsider enter the village unless it's an emergency. The reason: to ensure that COVID-19 doesn't enter his village.

Sohna village in Punjab's Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar district has closed its door to outsiders and gone into 'self-quarantine' mode since March 31. "I am not literate but I understand that the virus is contagious and could be fatal. I understand that it can be prevented by staying at a safe distance. There are several others like me who are keeping a vigil," said Mr. Sarvan, a daily wage worker.

"We are trying to make people understand and convey that it [COVID-19] is not a

joke... people have been taking it lightly," he added.

Twenty-one-year-old Ram said several youths are guarding the village day and night so that no outsider can sneak in. "We want everyone in the village to be safe," he said.

Sohna's municipal councillor and former Sarpanch Parvinder Singh told *The*

Hindu that as many people were not taking the curfew seriously, it was decided that entry and exit should be restricted.

"We have deputed two to four volunteers at all the 22 entry-exit points. We request people to adhere to the curfew and if anyone doesn't, then we inform the local pol-

ice. We have made necessary arrangements to provide essentials to those in need. In case of a medical emergency, we ensure that transportation is provided. Our aim is to keep COVID-19 at bay and that no one is deprived of food," said Mr. Singh.

Sohna is not the only village which has gone into self-isolation mode. As many as 7,842 of the total 13,240 villages have isolated themselves.

Punjab DGP Dinkar Gupta said drug peddling has also reduced significantly due to the presence of village watchers.

The recently appointed Village Police Officers are playing a pivotal role in facilitating the self-isolation. "The VPOs have become the bridge between the villagers and the supply chain of essential items," he said.

SIX more cases of COVID-19 have come to light in Ghaziabad. Nine of them attended the Tablighi Jamaat event in Delhi. The district now has 24 cases.

After four people from the Masuri area tested positive on Friday, late on Saturday evening, four persons from Pasonda, three from Muradnagar and two from Loni were found to be infected with COVID-19, Chief Medical Officer N.K. Gupta said.

He said the number of cases linked to Tablighi Jamaat could go up as results of 80 more samples were awaited. One person from a housing society in Indirapuram also tested positive. Sources said he got himself tested at a private lab and had been admitted to a pri-

ate hospital in Delhi.

Contact tracing has started and areas within three kilometres of the localities were being sanitised, an official release said.

"A stringent lockdown has been imposed in the Masuri area where four persons have been found positive," said Superintendent of Police (Rural) Neeraj Jadaun. "It is a densely populated area. We are not taking any chances and are getting support from the community," he added.

15 booked

In a related incident, 10 Indonesians, including five women, with an alleged link with the Tablighi Jamaat were found to be staying in the Shaheed Nagar area since January. "Their samples have been sent for test-

Ten new cases in Ghaziabad

Nine of these attended the Tablighi Jamaat event in Delhi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GAZIABAD

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Fifth virus death in Rajasthan

39 new cases detected in Jaipur, State's tally goes up to 253

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

JAIPUR

An 82-year-old COVID-19-positive man, who was a resident of the curfew-bound Walled City of Jaipur, died at Sawai Man Singh Government Hospital here on Sunday. He was admitted to the hospital on Saturday. This was the fifth virus-related death in the State.

Two patients had earlier died in Bhilwara and one in Bikaner, while one person hailing from Alwar, who test-

ed positive, died in Jaipur on Thursday.

As many as 39 new COVID-19 positive cases, including the one who died, were detected in Jaipur on Sunday. Additional Chief Secretary (Medical & Health) Rohit Kumar Singh said the majority of them were already lodged in the National Institute of Medical Sciences, which is a private medical college situated on the Jaipur-Delhi national highway.

Elsewhere in the State,

All should unite to face COVID-19 menace: AMU teachers

'Irresponsible act by a section of Tablighi, but communalising the issue will only weaken the fight'

ANUJ KUMAR

GAZIABAD

Senior faculty members of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) have expressed deep concern over the irresponsible act of a section of Tablighi Jamaat by holding a congregation at its centre in Delhi's Nizamuddin.

The appeal signed by senior academicians said it was negligence to allow such a large gathering, knowing well that the dangerous COVID-19 virus had already spread its tentacles in different parts of the country.

The faculty members also took a strong exception to the attempts being made by certain sections to paint the entire Muslim community as a villain and to squarely

blame it for accentuating the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. They are of the considered opinion that the Nizamuddin episode was only an aberration as the Muslim community is religiously following all the instructions and directives of the Central government regarding social distancing, complete lockdown and maintaining personal hygiene, and is extending full cooperation to the authorities.

Fatwas against Sir Syed Rahat Abrar, Director of Urdu Academy, who has written extensively on Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, reminded how some orthodox clerics issued fatwas against Sir Syed for instilling the spirit of scientific

temper in Muslim society. "Sir Syed talked of striking a balance between ilm-e-din (knowledge of religion) and ilm-e-science," he said. Communalising the issue, he added, will only weaken the fight against the virus.

"AMU's Jawaharlal Nehru College is the

centre for testing COVID-19 samples in west U.P. So far, 736 samples have been tested of which 54 have been found positive," said Dr. Abrar, who is also the associate member-in-charge of Public Relations Department, AMU.

Deep concern

The faculty expressed deep concern over the campaign launched by certain vested interests to give a communal twist to this devastating human tragedy.

The AMU faculty appealed to all sections of society, including the Muslim community, that at a time when the entire human race faces a huge crisis, they should join hands and face the menace

unitedly and with full determination and follow all the directives of the government and advice of the doctors so as to win the battle against the deadly virus.

Those who have signed the appeal include Professor Shahid Siddiqui (Principal, JN Medical College), Prof. Ali Mohammad Naqvi (former Dean, Faculty of Theology), Prof. Mohammad Zaeerudin (former Dean, Faculty of Law), Prof. A.R. Kidwai (Director, UGC HRDC), Dr. Mohammad Shahid (Deputy Director, Sir Syed Academy), Prof. Asim Siddiqui (Department of English), Prof. Mohammad Sajjad (Department of History) and Prof. Asfar Ali Khan (Director, School Education, AMU).

Shower of flowers for worker

Honoured for reporting to duty despite COVID-19 threat

STAFF REPORTER

BERHAMPUR

A female sanitary worker of the local municipal corporation received a joyous surprise when she reached Bachuari Street in Odisha's Berhampur on Sunday for her regular visit even during the COVID-19 threat.

In the morning, inhabitants of the area, mostly women, greeted her with a shower of flowers. She was presented a new sari and also received a garland made of currency notes as financial assistance.

The sanitary worker sweeps and cleans the street every day.

Chakradhar, an inhabitant of Bachuari Street, said it was a token of their ap-



Sunday snapshots: Bishop Alex Vadakuthala arriving for the Palm Sunday prayer at the empty Holy Trinity Cathedral in Kannur on Sunday; a policewoman in Bengaluru inspecting vehicles seized for violating the lockdown restrictions; a sweet lime vendor taking rest at Khammam in Telangana; and residents barricading a road in Nuzvid town in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh. ■ S.K. MOHAN, PTI, G.N. RAO & K.V.S. GIRI



Concern over possible community spread

22 people in Karnataka had no foreign travel history

AFSHAN YASMEEN
BENGALURU

With 22 of the 151 positive cases, including the 75-year-old person who succumbed to the infection in Bagalkot on Friday, not having any foreign travel or contact history, Karnataka health officials are at a loss to understand how they could have contracted the infection.

While these 22 cases, whose detailed investigation is still under process, raise questions as to whether it is the beginning of community transmission in the State, officials have been continuously denying it. These 22 people have so far spread the infection to eight others. Also, as a precautionary measure, hundreds of their secondary contacts have been isolated in their homes.

For instance, despite detailed investigation, health officials have still been unable to find out the cause of infection in the Nanjangud case of a pharma company employee, who is the first of the 17 who tested positive

there. The 35-year-old person (patient number 52), who did not have any foreign travel or contact history, tested positive on March 26. Subsequently, 14 more employees from the same company got infected and tested positive "simultaneously".

While officials said that three of the 14 employees were in close contact with

COVID-19

patient 52, it is still not clear how the remaining 11, who were neither his contacts nor had any travel history, got the infection.

Patient 52 also spread the infection to three of his relatives. Last Thursday, two roommates of one of these 11 employees also tested positive.

On Saturday, two more persons from Mysuru with no foreign travel or contact history, tested positive too. Sources said Mysuru has now become a "cluster hotspot" and aggressive preventive

IN BRIEF



Traders booked in A.P. for fleecing customers

VIZIANAGARAM
Legal Metrology officials cracked down on traders who sold essential commodities at exorbitant prices in Vizianagaram, A.P. They registered five cases against the traders who sold pulses and other commodities at prices higher than the State stipulated rates. "Heavy fines will be imposed on traders if they fleece people during lockdown," an official said.

Four siblings fall into pond in Karnataka, die

BELAGAVI
Four siblings drowned in a farm pond in Ajanaknatak village near Gokak in Karnataka on Saturday. Farmer Karappa Jakkannanavar told the police that his children, Bhagavva, 6, Tayamma, 5, Malappa, 4, and Rajashree, 2, fell were going to their grandfather's farmhouse. Malappa was carrying a mobile phone which fell into the pond. The children tried to retrieve it and drowned, the farmer said.

Nurses move SC, say health staff ill-equipped

'There's no management protocol'

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A Kerala-based 3.8 lakh-strong nurses' association has approached the Supreme Court saying the government has not formulated a National Management Protocol for COVID-19 to address the serious concerns relating to imminent and extreme risks posed to the health and safety of medical personnel across the country.

Noting that the pandemic is seeing a "persisting and ever escalating spread" the United Nurses Association, represented by advocates Subhash Chandran and Biju P. Raman, pointed out that nurses and health workers who are pregnant, lactating or immune compromised are being forced to work.

The association also urged the court to direct the government to expand the scope of personal accident cover provided under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package for Health Workers Fighting COVID-19 to include all health care workers.



One-and-a-half-year-old Anvitha, who has been diagnosed with retinoblastoma, with her parents. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Kerala govt. facilitates child's travel for treatment

STAFF REPORTER
ALAPPUZHA

After days of uncertainty due to the COVID-19 lockdown, one-and-a-half-year-old Anvitha and her parents from Kerala left for Hyderabad for treatment on Sunday.

The child who is suffering from retinoblastoma (eye cancer that begins in the retina), has to reach L.V. Prasad Eye Institute, Hyderabad on April 7.

With the lockdown in progress, her parents Vijay and Gopika from Cherthala were a worried lot. The father recently

Why exclude us from meet, asks Owaisi

STAFF REPORTER

HYDERABAD

All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen president Asaduddin Owaisi on Sunday asked why his party was excluded from the Prime Minister's COVID-19 video conference of parliamentarians, and termed this a *tauheen* (insult) to the people of Hyderabad and Aurangabad, from where the party won.

According to a press release, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs Prahlad Joshi stated that Prime Minister Narendra Modi would interact with the floor leaders of parties with more than five representatives in both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

Taking to Twitter, Mr. Owaisi said, "As MPs it's our job to represent to you the misery of our people."

YSRCP seeking votes during aid disbursal

STAFF REPORTER

VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh BJP president Kanna Lakshminarayana has complained to State Election Commissioner (SEC) N. Ramesh Kumar that the YSRCP leaders are using the disbursement of ₹1,000 financial aid to the poor for their political ends by seeking votes for the ensuing local body elections.

Mr. Lakshminarayana alleged that the ward and village volunteers were advising the beneficiaries to vote for the YSRCP in the elections, which amounted to hijacking the occasion (of distributing relief) by the MLAs and YSRCP leaders for achieving their political ends. Trying to garner votes in the guise of disbursement of aid was unethical, he said.

Reshma was cured of COVID-19 and is now under home quarantine

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOTTAYAM

"I will leave this room within a week after defeating you," the nurse had vowed after contracting the coronavirus while attending to India's oldest COVID-19 survivor, expressing unflinching faith in Kerala's health care system.

Last Friday, Reshma Mohandas, 32, walked out to her home, where she is placed under 14-day quarantine, after she and the elderly



Nurse Reshma Mohandas leaving the Kottayam Medical College hospital.

undergoing treatment. "I posted that message in the WhatsApp group because I have full faith in Kerala's health system. It is world-class," she told PTI from her friends and colleagues while

The nurse, who took care of Thomas and Mariyamma since March 12, believes she contracted the virus as she was in close contact with and often talked to the couple, who did not wear masks, for they made them uncomfortable. She said she loved taking care of all their needs. "I was not tensed at all. I love taking care of elderly people. We used to talk a lot [in the Intensive Care Unit]," she said.

The warning sign came on the morning of March 23 when she had a throat infection. Reshma immediately alerted the head nurse, who informed the doctors. She was asked to visit the fever

clinic at the Medical College and was referred to the isolation facility where she took care of the elderly COVID-19 patients. Some 20 nurses who had come in contact with her were sent to home quarantine.

On March 24, she tested positive. "I did not have any other complications, barring headache and body pain," she said. Reshma said she was ready to serve in the isolation facility for COVID-19 patients after the home quarantine.

"I am ready to work again in the isolation facility when I return," said the nurse, whose husband is an engineer.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



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

Forecast for Monday: Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning and gusty winds likely at isolated places over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, east Rajasthan, south interior Karnataka; with lightning at isolated places over Telangana, coastal Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Karaikal, Kerala and Mahe.

| CITY | RAIN | MAX | MIN | CITY | RAIN | MAX | MIN |
|-------------|-------------|------|-----|-------------------|-------------|---------|------|
| Agartala | ... 36.5... | 22.4 | ... | Kozhikode | ... 37.2... | 27.6 | ... |
| Ahmedabad | ... 39.4... | 21.3 | ... | Kurnool | ... 39.7... | 27.2 | ... |
| Aizawl | ... 39.4... | 21.3 | ... | Lucknow | ... 34.4... | 16.8 | ... |
| Allahabad | ... 37.7... | 16.8 | ... | Madurai | 4.5... | 38.2... | 25.4 |
| Bengaluru | ... 36.0... | 22.3 | ... | Mangaluru | ... 36.6... | 26.9 | ... |
| Bhopal | ... 35.4... | 20.2 | ... | Mumbai | ... 33.0... | 23.8 | ... |
| Bhubaneswar | ... 32.7... | 25.9 | ... | Mysuru | ... 33.0... | 23.8 | ... |
| Chandigarh | ... 15.6 | 15.6 | ... | New Delhi | ... 34.6... | 16.8 | ... |
| Chennai | ... 34.0... | 28.3 | ... | Patna | ... 36.6... | 17.4 | ... |
| Coimbatore | 37.1... | 25.0 | ... | Port Blair | ... 33.4... | 24.9 | ... |
| Dehradun | ... 30.1... | 13.6 | ... | Puducherry | ... 34.5... | 26.8 | ... |
| Gangtok | ... 20.4... | 11.7 | ... | Pune | ... 35.8... | 21.8 | ... |
| Goa | ... 33.2... | 26.6 | ... | Raipur | ... 35.8... | 22.4 | ... |
| Guwahati | ... 35.2... | 16.1 | ... | Ranchi | ... 33.8... | 18.6 | ... |
| Hubballi | ... 36.0... | 22.3 | ... | Shillong | ... 27.7... | 17.3 | ... |
| Hyderabad | ... 21.7 | 15.6 | ... | Shimla | ... 19.2... | 8.6 | ... |
| Imphal | ... 31.2... | 12.5 | ... | Srinagar | ... 22.0... | 6.0 | ... |
| Jaipur | ... 35.0... | 18.0 | ... | Tiruvananthapuram | ... 35.2... | 26.7 | ... |
| Kochi | ... 33.0... | 27.0 | ... | Tiruchi | ... 38.5... | 27.4 | ... |
| Kohima | ... 23.2... | 12.8 | ... | Vijayawada | ... 22.0... | — | ... |
| Kolkata | ... 37.1... | 27.6 | ... | Visakhapatnam | ... 33.4... | 27.0 | ... |

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

| CITIES | SO ₂ | NO ₂ | CO | PM _{2.5} | PM ₁₀ | CODE |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|----|-------------------|------------------|------|
| Ahmedabad | 41 | 56 | 17 | 75 | 89 | ■ |
| Bengaluru | 12 | 20 | 38 | 55 | 78 | ■ |
| Chennai | 05 | 15 | 40 | 46 | — | ■ |
| Delhi | 25 | 23 | 24 | 11.7 | 122 | ■ |
| Hyderabad | 08 | 10 | 23 | 64 | 69 | ■ |
| Kolkata | 09 | 17 | 22 | 97 | 77 | ■ |
| Lucknow | 04 | 19 | 50 | 173 | — | ■ |
| Mumbai | 05 | 17 | 15 | 52 | 89 | ■ |
| Pune | 34 | 12 | 48 | 43 | 41 | ■ |
| Visakhapatnam | 06 | 38 | 06 | 38 | 52 | ■ |

In observation made at 6.00 p.m., Singrauli, Madhya Pradesh recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 248 indicating a dangerous level of pollution.

In contrast, Panchkula, Haryana recorded a healthy AQI score of 30.

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO_x: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM_{2.5} & PM₁₀: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease.

Kerala nurse raring to return after recovery

Reshma was cured of COVID-19 and is now under home quarantine

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Enemy at the gates

Kerala-Karnataka border issue poses questions on restrictions, relations during a pandemic

Kerala's grievance over Karnataka sealing its border to prevent the spread of COVID-19 has brought under focus the extent and the possible limits, of restrictions that may be imposed by the government to deal with a public health emergency. After the Kerala High Court directed the Centre to ensure free vehicular movement for those requiring urgent medical treatment on the national highway that connects Kasaragod in Kerala to Mangaluru in Karnataka, the Supreme Court has directed the Centre to confer with the States and formulate the norms for creating a passage at Talapadi, the border. An amicable solution is possibly round the corner, as there are reports of Kasaragod district suffering due to the highway closure. Many here depend on medical facilities in Mangaluru for emergencies, while others rely on inter-State movement for essential medicines to reach them. These include those battling endosulfan poisoning for many years. Karnataka's objection is based on the fact that Kasaragod has Kerala's largest number of positive cases. It has a reasonable apprehension that allowing vehicles might result in the disease spreading to its territory. However, it is clear that those who may travel across the border for urgent medical needs are patients other than those who are pandemic victims. A key question that has arisen is whether legal measures taken by the State to prevent the further spread of an epidemic can extend to a point where there is no exception even for medical needs.

The Kerala High Court took the view that denying emergency medical aid amounts to a violation of the right to life and liberty, and addressed jurisdictional objections from Karnataka by observing that its direction was to the Centre, as what was under closure was a national highway. There is significant irony in the Kerala point of view. Late last month, the Kerala Governor promulgated the 'Kerala Epidemic Diseases Ordinance, 2020' to arm itself with extraordinary powers to deal with the pandemic. One of its clauses says the State can seal its borders for such period as necessary, while another empowers it to restrict the duration of essential or emergency services, including health, food supply and fuel. Karnataka may have reason to believe that it is equally entitled to seal its borders and restrict essential services. It is a moot question whether Kerala's new law would weaken its case that its neighbour cannot shut down its border and deny medical access to its residents. Interestingly, inter-State migration and quarantine are under the Union List, while the prevention of infectious diseases moving from one State to another is under the Concurrent List. This can only mean that while States have the power to impose border restrictions, the responsibility to prevent a breakdown of inter-State relations over such disputes is on the Centre.

Mockery of justice

Pakistan's commitment to punishing those involved in terror acts remains suspect

Thursday's ruling by the Sindh High Court that overturned the conviction of Omar Saeed Sheikh, and three others, of murdering American journalist Daniel Pearl, for lack of evidence is scandalous in its utter disregard for criminal jurisprudence. The court observed that no evidence had been brought before it by the prosecution to link any of the four – the others being Fahad Saleem, Syed Salman Saqib and Sheikh Muhammad Adil, whose convictions were similarly overturned – to the killing of Pearl. This is sophistry at its best and speaks eloquently of the systematic way the case has been diluted from the beginning. Pearl, then South Asian Bureau Chief of *The Wall Street Journal*, was abducted in Karachi in January 2002, in an operation managed by Omar Sheikh, who had demonstrated links to, among others, Pakistani militant groups as well as to al-Qaeda. Pearl had been baited while investigating links between al-Qaeda and the British 'Shoe Bomber' Richard Reid, who tried, in mid-air on a flight, to light explosives in his shoes on December 21, 2001, just two months previously. Many ransom demands later, a video was handed over on February 21, 2002, wherein Pearl was shown being methodically beheaded with a knife. When the Americans began to squeeze Pakistan to go after the perpetrators, Omar Sheikh 'surrendered' to Ijaz Shah, a former Intelligence Chief, then Home Secretary of Punjab; he is now the country's Interior Minister. Even more curiously, it was after many days that Sheikh's arrest was shown.

The Sindh government has extended Sheikh's detention and the provincial prosecutor has said that the High Court ruling will be appealed in the Supreme Court. But these moves could be aimed at blunting growing international opprobrium, including at the FATF, the global money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog, that has already put Pakistan on its 'grey list', and where India has said it will bring this matter for discussion. It is likely that once the pressure eases, Sheikh and his cohorts will be let off as has happened with others before them. Pakistan's record of leniency on this has been as consistent as it has been alarming. In 2015, Zakir Rehman Lakhvi, who supervised the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, was released from detention, and remains free. Just last month, Pakistan's Economic Affairs Minister Hammad Azhar revealed that Jaish-e-Mohammed chief Masood Azhar had conveniently gone "missing" along with his family. Masood Azhar, Omar Sheikh, and Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar had been released in exchange for hostages of Flight IC 814 in December 1999 into Taliban/ISI custody in Kandahar. Pakistan needs to be persuaded to move beyond tokenism and demonstrate a much higher order of commitment to deal with such terrorists than it has hitherto shown.

A niggardliness that is economically unwarranted

The Centre can afford to step up its COVID-19 assistance to a higher scale; fiscal deficit is no worry



PRABHAT PATNAIK

The three-week long lockdown imposed on the country, it can be argued, was an over-reaction. More widespread testing of possible cases, "social distancing", self-quarantine by the elderly, and selective lockdown of sensitive areas (as the Chinese government did in Wuhan) might have been quite adequate. But while this can be debated, what cannot be is the utter thoughtlessness that has accompanied the actual lockdown.

Ameliorative steps made necessary by it should have been announced simultaneously, to prevent the mass exodus of migrant workers which occurred not because of any "Fake-News"-induced panic, as the government claimed before the Supreme Court, but out of sheer desperation. Instead, some steps were announced by the Finance Minister a full 36 hours into the lockdown; and they were minuscule.

A comparison

Indeed, India stands out among all the countries of the world as much for the scale of the draconian measure it has imposed as for the extent of unconcern it has displayed for the working poor affected by it. In the United States, for instance, where the lockdown has raised the number of persons filing unemployment claims from 2.8 lakh to 6.6 million in a matter of days, those affected can fall back on unemployment benefit; and the government has approved a package of ameliorative steps costing

roughly 10% of that country's GDP to cope with the crisis. In India by contrast, the Finance Minister's package comes to less than 1% of its GDP; and much of it is just a repackaging of already existing schemes. New expenditure comes to just a little over half of the ₹1.7-lakh crore earmarked for the package.

Besides, none of the steps will help the migrant workers; not even the larger foodgrain ration which in principle could, because most of them would have ration cards back home rather than in the places where they stay. But much has already been written on all this, and I need not repeat it here.

What can be done

What I wish to argue here is that this niggardliness is totally unwarranted on economic grounds. Many economists and civil society activists had suggested a cash transfer of ₹7,000 per month for a two-month period to the bottom 80% of households to tide over the crisis, in addition to enhanced rations of foodgrains and the inclusion of certain other essential commodities within the ration basket. The cost of their proposed cash transfers alone would come to ₹3.66-lakh crore, which is more than 10 times the cash transfers provided in the Finance Minister's package. Providing assistance on the scale proposed by civil society organisations is necessary; it will no doubt pose logistical problems, but not financial problems.

Even if all of it is financed through a fiscal deficit for the time being, the economic implications of such an enlarged deficit would not be forbidding. These implications can manifest themselves in two ways: one is through inflation, and the other by precipitating a balance of payments problem. Let

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO



us consider each of these.

As long as supplies of essential commodities are plentiful and these are made available through the Public Distribution System to the vast majority of the people, so that they are insulated against the effects of inflation, any inflation per se should not be a matter of great concern. This is the case in India at present.

Foodgrains aplenty

The supply of the most essential of goods, foodgrains, is plentiful. Currently there are 58 million tonnes of foodgrain stocks with the government, of which no more than about 21 million tonnes are required as buffer-cum-operational stocks. This leaves a surplus of 37 million tonnes which can be used for distribution as enhanced ration, or for providing a cushion against inflation.

The rabi crop is supposed to be good; as long as it is safely harvested, this would further boost the government's foodstocks. There are some reports of labour shortage holding up harvesting. This may be a temporary problem that would disappear once the lockdown eases; but if necessary Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act work can be extended to cover harvesting operations in areas experiencing labour shortage.

Likewise, the supplies of other

essential commodities which consist of manufactured goods and where output has been demand-constrained all along, will get boosted in response to higher demand; and in special cases, imports may have to be resorted to. There is short no reason to think that inflation of a worrisome magnitude will follow if the fiscal deficit is increased.

There is an additional factor here. The increase in total demand caused by an initial increase in demand, which is financed by a fiscal deficit, is a multiple of the latter. Now in a situation like the present, when even if the lockdown is lifted social distancing and restrictions on social activities will continue, the value of the multiplier will be lower than usual. People in short would hold on to purchasing power to a much greater extent than usual because of the continuing restrictions on demand, which would act as an automatic anti-inflationary factor.

Of course there will be shortages of some less essential commodities and also hoarding on account of such shortages. But since these shortages will be expected to be temporary, a result of the pandemic unlikely to last long, there will be a damper on hoarding.

Issue of deficit

True, if inflationary expectations are strong and persistent, then the prices of non-rationed commodities may rise sharply for speculative reasons; but the government can prevent such expectations by adopting measures such as bringing down petro-product prices, taking advantage of the collapse of world oil prices. A larger fiscal deficit, therefore, need not cause disquiet on account of inflation.

On the balance of payments front, the worry associated with a larger fiscal deficit is financial

flight caused by frightened investors. Some financial flight is already happening, with the rupee taking a fall. This flight is not because of our fiscal deficit but because, whenever there is panic in financial markets, the tendency is to rush to dollars, even though the cause of the panic may lie in the United States itself.

But India has close to half a trillion dollars of foreign exchange reserves. These can be used, up to a point, to check the flight from the rupee to the dollar. If the flight nonetheless persists, then India will have a legitimate reason for putting restrictions on capital outflows in the context of the pandemic.

We are currently in a bizarre situation where cross-border movement of people is virtually barred, while cross-border movement of finance is freely allowed. If the hardships of the people caused by the pandemic, and the lockdown it has created, are not ameliorated through larger government expenditure, because of the fear that the larger fiscal deficit required for it would frighten finance into fleeing, then the privileging of finance over people would have reached its acme.

This must not be allowed. The Centre must not worry about its fiscal deficit; and since the State governments will bear a substantial expenditure burden on account of the pandemic, the Centre must make more resources available to them. It should raise their borrowing limits, perhaps double their current limits as a general rule, apart from negotiating the magnitude of fiscal transfers it should make towards them.

Prabhat Patnaik is Professor Emeritus, Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

The criticality of community engagement

It has a pivotal role in ensuring the success of India's anti-coronavirus campaign



SOHAM D. BHADURI

A highly significant observation arising out of a pioneering health-care initiative led by a doctor couple in Ahmednagar, Maharashtra in the 1970s greatly inspired primary health-care delivery, both within and outside the country. This observation was that a significant cultural gap existed between health-care personnel such as auxiliary nurse midwives and rural and tribal beneficiaries, significantly impeding delivery of preventive and promotive health care. It was realised that a cadre of health workers recruited by and from within the community, and also accountable to the community, would have greater affinity with people, thus ensuring greater community participation in care delivery. Soon, a series of community health worker schemes followed, the latest being the accredited social health activist (ASHA) programme.

Ground reality

The recent attack on an ASHA worker conducting a COVID-19 survey, due to an alleged suspicion that she was a government National Register of Citizens agent betrays the faltering of our community health worker programmes in a

way. Over time, they have become de-facto public health employees rather than being community representatives enjoying the unswerving confidence of people as originally envisaged.

Two things remain common to the sporadic incidents of non-cooperation with our anti-coronavirus campaign, from the Tablighi Jamaat fiasco to migrants escaping quarantine and allegedly unleashing violence against the police. First, that a strong felt need for coronavirus control remains absent due to deficient threat perception. Second, that deficient threat perception has resulted in strict control measures such as quarantine to be perceived as high-handed government instruments. What this signifies is that government messaging of the coronavirus threat will alone not suffice, and that a willingness to cooperate can only be engendered from deep within the community.

Key strategy

Community engagement is a prerequisite for risk communication, which entails effectively communicating the threat due to the virus, instilling the right practices and etiquette, and combating rumours and stigma. Till date, the government's machinery to communicate risk has served a thin upper- and middle-class segment quite well. However, with COVID-19 moving briskly towards slums and rural hinterlands, one should not be surprised if such incidents of non-cooperation start surfacing at



a brisk pace too.

Rural awareness generation and community engagement has until now comprised mainly of engaging with local panchayats, disseminating publicity material in local vernacular, and calling on the participation of civil society organisations. For our anti-coronavirus campaign to be a success, community engagement has to ensue on a war-footing, much akin to the production of ventilators and masks. Like the Antyodaya approach, it has to embrace the remotest community stalwart who enjoys the community's confidence and is perceived as an impartial non-state agent.

One may say that we are too far into the pandemic to focus on risk communication. But community engagement is more than just risk communication. It is the bedrock of community participation, the need for which will only be felt even more acutely as the epidemic worsens. Contact tracing activities will have to pick up as COVID-19 increasingly percolates to rural areas. Enhancing testing for SARS-CoV-2 and concomitant expansion of quarantine, isolation, and treat-

ment activities along vast expanses will tremendously strain our thin public health machinery. This will not be possible without community participation at every step.

Further, mitigation activities in case of considerable rural penetration of COVID-19 will require efforts of dreadful, phenomenal proportions. Imagine a primary health centre equipped with one doctor and a nurse catering to 20-odd villages spread across miles of difficult terrain.

Even attending to the mildest cases and referring severe ones will not just be infeasible but highly risk-laden too. Strongly involving the nearly 2.5 million informal health-care providers would become crucial for a range of activities. Makeshift arrangements for transportation and care, such as motorcycle ambulances and mobile medical units, will need to be made. Further, initiatives such as community kitchens of Kerala will assume tremendous importance in cases of a stringent and prolonged lockdown. These, along with simply a strict adherence to social distancing throughout the pandemic, cannot be conceived without full community participation.

Crucial factors

The criticality of community engagement on a war-footing is underscored by a set of factors. First, a concoction of local culture, values and beliefs can lead to blithe disregard of the coronavirus threat and gravely endanger contain-

ment and mitigation efforts. Second, threatened livelihoods due to lockdowns and a resultant downplaying of the coronavirus risk can instil indignation and non-cooperation, as witnessed in the case of many migrants. With our weak social support system, we cannot afford quarantine allowances like in Sweden and Singapore; even the entitled modest relief could get delayed.

Third, there is increased likelihood of repeat lockdowns due to the virus likely to bounce back, which will greatly test public patience and co-operation. Lastly, we also need to remember the trust deficit between health workers and the public that has lingered on since decades, given our unsatisfactory public and profiteering private health care. One may say that these challenges are not completely mitigable through community engagement, but that is undoubtedly the best shot we have.

Urgent reinforcing and galvanising of community engagement activities will largely decide the trajectory COVID-19 undertakes in India. Recruiting a medical workforce, augmenting infrastructure, and manufacturing personal protective equipment on a war footing – unless these go hand-in-hand with the former, will result in undermining of both.

Dr. Soham D. Bhaduri is a Mumbai-based doctor, health-care commentator, and editor of the journal, 'The Indian Practitioner'

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

The pandemic battle
Amid the outbreak of the global novel coronavirus pandemic and the subsequent imposition of a pan-India lockdown, people are divided based on two opinions regarding revocation of the lockdown. A section, economically disadvantaged, unquestionably demands that it be revoked after 21 days irrespective of the situation, while the other, largely the middle class and government employees, wants its continuation until a satisfactory result. A majority of those opposing the lockdown are those facing extreme poverty. The lockdown poses a threat to their lives. I wonder what would happen if such a lockdown

continues beyond the date. It is sad to see people who have fixed income being indifferent to others' sufferings especially those who have lost employment. An educated Indian is likely to stand by the government's side but it is simultaneously a must that he or she shows equal empathy for others who are not similarly situated and extend aid if possible.

SHAYAN DAS,
Gobardanga, West Bengal

■ At a time when over 180 countries are engaged in an all-out struggle to derail the march of the novel coronavirus, with India being no exception, India's top leader should be advocating scientific knowledge on how to contain and prevent the spread of the virus among

his people (Editorial page, "Only through the prism of science", April 4). Had he appeared on television while addressing the nation wearing a protective mask – even for a second – the message that symbolism would have been louder and clearer. Unfortunately, these appearances have only created leeway for his many admirers to peddle pseudo-scientific concoctions. This amounts to trivialising the grim situation the country is in. One cannot possibly fight superstition and the coronavirus outbreak simultaneously. If all of us strictly adhere to and scrupulously follow the precautionary measures suggested and guidelines issued by the scientific

community and the medical fraternity, there is a greater chance of stopping the silent microbe.

ABDUL ASSIS P.A.,
Thrissur, Kerala

■ Natural disasters and pandemics are not fought by governments and their machinery alone. It requires the seeding and nurturing of private institutions and even, more importantly, non-governmental institutions (NGOs). There are a number of them engaged in health services, covering health education and awareness, dedicated groups for the elderly, etc. In its drive to weed out NGOs, apparently out of sync with the government's social policies and tenets, there has been a drive to bring in tighter regulations on their funding

and compliance. There can be no quarrel with this, yet the summary approach may have dampened the functioning of key NGOs. We may be missing the organised and trained contribution of these entities. The time that we review the role of voluntary organisations and work out a more pragmatic architecture for their participation has come as they do largely provide last-mile delivery.

R. NARAYANAN,
Navi Mumbai

How to use masks
In these trying times around the world, many have started to use surgical or other masks to stave off the possibility of contracting coronavirus infection. But, in India, and especially in Kerala – this includes the

medical and health-care fraternity – many can be seen practising improper use of the mask. One critical point missed seems to the fact that many are not maintaining the double-layer or triple-layer arrangement of the mask cloth to ensure protection. By stretching the cloth/fibre material of the mask and extending it below the chin, not much protection can be expected by wearing the mask this way. We must remember that the size of the virus is smaller than the pore of the cloth used in masks and an extra layer or two obviously heightens user protection. This has to be highlighted.

Dr. JAYASEKHARAN V.P.,
Payyanur, Kannur, Kerala

To read more letters online, scan the QR code



Reducing farm distress during a pandemic

The government has an opportunity to help farmers who are battling declining demand and lower prices



HIMANSHU



"In the short run, we will likely witness a breakdown of supply chains of agricultural produce with no facilities for transportation of produce." A scene from Delhi during the lockdown. ■ GETTY IMAGES

Social distancing and living under a lockdown appear to be the only effective ways of dealing with the pandemic. As India lacks the resources to significantly ramp up testing, imposing a lockdown was the government's preferred option. Although there is limited evidence to suggest that this strategy may be working in containing the spread of the virus, its after-effects on thousands of migrant workers are already out in the open. Distrustful of the government's promise of providing support, most migrant workers decided to walk back to their home States despite efforts by the state machinery to prevent them from moving out.

Impact on agricultural income
Migrants are not the only ones who are facing the after-effects of the lockdown. With the economy coming to a complete halt in most of the informal and formal enterprises in urban areas, the lockdown is also likely to affect the large population in rural areas, a majority of whom are dependent on agriculture. At a time when the rural economy was witnessing declining incomes, both for casual workers and self-employed workers, even before the pandemic broke out, this lockdown is only going to hurt the agricultural economy further. Even before the lockdown, rural wages were declining in real terms but there were hopes for agricultural incomes rising with food prices rising until January 2020. However, recent data on prices suggest that the trend is reversing with the decline in agricultural prices in most markets.

In the short run, we will likely witness a breakdown of supply chains of agricultural produce with no facilities for transportation of produce. This is likely to hurt those engaged in the production of fruits and vegetables, which are perishable goods and cannot be stored. With horticultural production exceeding foodgrain production in the last decade, many farmers are likely to face uncertain or no markets for their produce. Me-

dia reports have already confirmed that farmers are finding it difficult to dispose horticultural produce. Some of them have taken the extreme step of destroying their produce. There will also be short-term impacts on foodgrains and other rabi crops that were ready to be harvested at the beginning of April. In some cases, harvesting may be postponed but it is difficult to do so beyond a week or a fortnight. While the government has exempted operation of agricultural markets and mandis from the lockdown, it will be difficult for farmers to harvest the agricultural produce in the surplus States of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh in the absence of migrant labourers. Even if standing crop is harvested, April is the labour-intensive month. Labourers are required for packing, processing, transporting and selling the produce. This year is expected to register a record in the production of cereals, pulses, cotton and oilseeds. Most of these are labour-intensive crops and the absence of working labourers during the harvest and post-harvest season is likely to affect the prospect of higher incomes in agriculture.

Some of the short-term impacts may affect price realisation by farmers but the real worry for farmers is going to be the decline in prices for the majority of agricultural produce. There are already signs of a collapse in agricultural prices, which predates the outbreak of the pandemic. Political expediency and fiscal concerns led the government to stock up foodgrains, with the Food Corpora-

What the government can do

While it is clear that agriculture will be affected due to short-term disruptions and the long-term economic impact of the pandemic, there is an opportunity for the government to help farmers through state support.

Political expediency and fiscal concerns led the government to stock up foodgrains, with the Food Corpora-

tion of India (FCI) reporting 77 million tonnes of cereals in stocks as against the buffer requirement of 21 million tonnes as on April 1. However, with the lockdown forcing a humanitarian crisis and with most migrants heading back to the rural areas, it is also time for the government to release the food stocks through the public distribution system. The Central government has already announced that for the next three months, 5 kg of free grains will be distributed in addition to what people are entitled to under the National Food Security Act, but this has not yet reached the State governments due to the lockdown. While this may free up FCI godowns to some extent, it will be prudent to extend the scheme to all residents, particularly migrants who may not be able to avail of free grain in urban areas.

While raising procurements is desirable and may be necessary for the forthcoming rabi crops, the state is also expected to intervene and assure remunerative incomes to farmers. One way of ensuring this is to reduce the input costs through existing schemes of subsidies such as the fertilizer subsidy and through price reduction in petrol/diesel meant for agricultural purposes. But for the immediate short-term, farmers need to be compensated for the loss of income and the best way to do it is through the PM-KISAN scheme. Unfortunately, the only announcement in this regard is the disbursal of the first installment of the transfer which is due in April. However, the scheme only used two-thirds of its budget allocation for 2019, so efforts should be made to not only enhance the coverage monetarily but also include tenant farmers and wage labourers who are as much dependent on agriculture as the land-owning cultivators. Such a step is necessary not just for the survival of the agricultural sector but also for the overall economy which is expected to see a sharp slowdown and decline in demand. While income transfers may not be the best way of supporting the agricultural sector at times like these, they are the best available instruments to raise rural incomes and create demand.

Himanshu is Associate Professor, Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, School of Social Sciences, JNU, New Delhi

FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

Shooting the messenger

The COVID-19 outbreak cannot be used as an excuse by a government to undermine hard-won democratic rights



A. S. PANNEERSELVAN

fake news and deliberate misleading of the public happens from the top, and often through people who wield power. This fact was established in studies on fake news conducted by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford.

Claims by the AYUSH Ministry

Let's look at how the Ministry of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy) has performed during this crisis. Early last week, the Minister of State for AYUSH, Shripad Naik, said that Ayurveda and Homeopathy medicines cured the U.K.'s Prince Charles of SARS-CoV-2 and asserted that his recovery only "validates our age-old practice since thousands of years". But the Prince's spokesperson rejected the claim. In an e-mail to *The Indian Express*, the Clarence House spokesperson said, "This information is incorrect. The Prince of Wales followed the medical advice of the NHS (National Health Service) in the U.K. and nothing more."

The Press Council of India issued a statement soon after this, which read: "The Press Council of India advises the print media to stop publicity and advertisement of AYUSH-related claims for COVID-19 treatment in order to prevent dissemination of misleading information about AYUSH drugs and services in view of the emerging threat in the country due to the pandemic."

In this context we should remind the government and the apex court some considered views about a free press. Nearly three decades ago, Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen emphatically said that "in the terrible history of famines in the world, no substantial famine has ever occurred in any independent and democratic country with a relatively free press." A study by UNESCO says, "Press freedom and good governance are not mutually exclusive. They support each other while promoting a country's economic and human development."

The Ground Zero report in this newspaper, "The long march to uncertainty" (April 4), reveals the hollowness of the Government of India's submission to the Supreme Court and documents the plight of migrant labourers, who are the backbone of the Indian economy. The hope is that the courts recognise that during a crisis such as a pandemic, a government cannot be permitted to undermine hard-won democratic rights and that a free and independent media is a basic need in a democracy.

readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

Why everyone should wear masks

The pandemic can be slowed only by a lockdown as well as by ensuring universal mask use

T. JACOB JOHN

Flattening the epidemic curve (case distribution curve) is the need of the day. On the curve, Y axis and X axis represent case numbers and time, respectively. A normal epidemic curve is bell-shaped, with an early ascending slope (first phase), a peak (second phase) and a declining slope (third phase). The area under the curve represents the total number of cases. India is now in the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A rapid increase in cases will demand far more healthcare facilities than now available. Healthcare facilities were not created in anticipation of a pandemic and are grossly inadequate for India to tackle the first phase.

A flattening of the curve will reduce the demand on beds in intensive care units, respirators, and specialists to manage acute respiratory distress syndrome. The peak will be dwarfed and come after some breathing time; the pressure will be eased. However, the area under the curve, the total number of cases, whether the curve is bell-shaped or flattened, will be the same. This crucial information in the epidemiology of the epidemic must be taken into account for planning a response.

Flattening the curve

There are two ways of flattening the curve: imposing a strict lockdown for a number of weeks or use of face masks all the time when outside our homes. A lockdown physically distances families from each other. The disadvantage is that family members may not be able to keep a physical distance of two metres from one another all the time. As a result, intra-familial spread occurs and more people are infected at the end of the lockdown than at the beginning. But during a lockdown community transmission is prevented.

There are four reasons for the universal use of masks. First, any infected person will not infect others because the droplets of fluids that we let out during conversations, coughing or sneezing will be blocked by the mask. Remember, most infectious people don't have symptoms, or have mild symptoms, and are unaware that they are infected. Second, unin-

fected people will have some protection from droplet infection during interactions with others. For those who wear eyeglasses, there is additional protection from droplets falling on the conjunctiva. When both parties wear masks, the probability of transmission is virtually zero. Third, the mask-wearers will avoid inserting their fingertips into their nostrils or mouths. Viruses deposited on surfaces may be carried by hand if we touch such surfaces; if we do not touch our eyes, nostrils or mouth, this mode of transmission is prevented. Fourth, everyone will be reminded all the time that these are abnormal days.

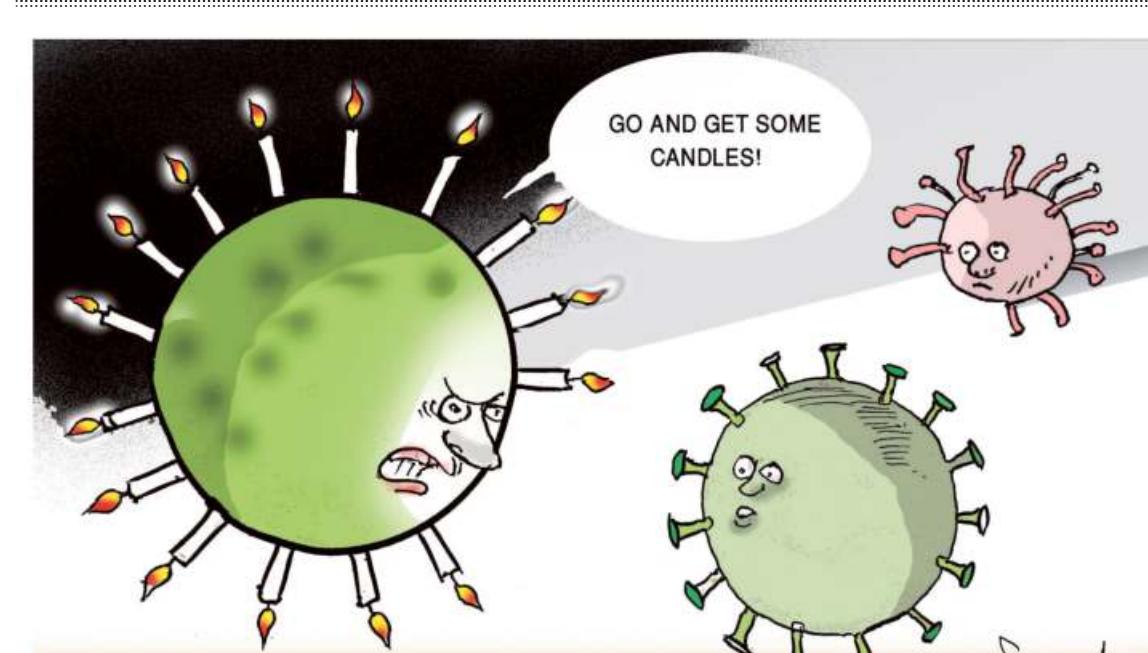
In overcrowded areas such as slums, a lockdown will not be efficient in slowing down transmission. In such places, universal mask use is a simple way to slow down transmission. In India the wise choice would have been to ensure universal mask use in slums, bazaars, shops selling essential commodities, etc. before the lockdown. But then, wisdom, proverbially, is slower than adventure.

Making your own mask

Taiwan and the Czech Republic depended primarily on universal mask use and slowed down the epidemic. In the Czech Republic, people made their own masks. Cotton pieces, preferably coarse, three layers, stitched with two straps, make masks of sufficient quality. These masks should cover the nose from just below the eye level and reach and cover the chin. All adults, and children who are old enough to wear masks, should wear them. At the end of the day, cotton masks can be washed in soapy water and hung to dry for re-use.

COVID-19 mortality is due to three reasons. Virus virulence is the given and cannot be altered. Co-morbidity (diabetes, chronic diseases) is already prevalent. Then there is low-quality healthcare. Slowing down the epidemic by imposing a lockdown and ensuring universal mask use gives us the chance to protect people from infection and improve healthcare quality; wherever that was done, the mortality was less than 1%.

T. Jacob John is retired Professor of Virology in the Christian Medical College, Vellore



DATA POINT

Lockdown effect

RETAIL AND RECREATION: Visits to restaurants, shopping centres and movie theatres dropped 77% between Feb. 16 and Mar. 29 compared to the period between Jan. 3 and Feb. 6

GROCERY AND PHARMACY: Visits to grocery shops, markets and pharmacies fell 65%

PARKS: Visits to national parks, beaches and public gardens reduced by 57%

At guard: Police personnel walking down a path outside a locked church in Kochi on Sunday. ■ H. VIBHU

Due to restrictions, including the imposition of a lockdown in many countries, public mobility has declined sharply, a Google report finds. In India, retail and recreational places saw the steepest fall in the presence of people between February 16 and March 29 compared to the traffic between January 3 and February 6. Phone traffic from residences saw a considerable increase, indicating that more people were staying at home.

■ The charts uses anonymised location data from phones to show how visits and length of stay at different places change compared to a baseline

■ The baseline is the median value for the corresponding day of the week during the 5-week period (January 3–February 6)

TRANSIT STATIONS: Use of public transport facilities such as buses and trains dropped 71% between Feb. 16 and Mar. 29 compared to the period between Jan. 3 and Feb. 6

WORKPLACES: Visits to workplaces fell 47% as many people have been instructed to work from home

PLACES OF RESIDENCE: People stayed at home 22% more than they did in the period between Jan. 3 and Feb. 6

SOURCE: GOOGLE'S COVID-19 COMMUNITY MOBILITY REPORTS

The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 6, 1970

Hijacked Plane Back in Tokyo

After five anxious and tension-packed days, a happy ending was written here (Tokyo) this morning (April 5) to the most bizarre and longest airliner hijacking case in history with the return to Tokyo of the Japan Airlines plane "Yodo" with its three crew members and hostage, Transport Vice-Minister Mr. Yamamura. All of them were no worse for the experience than being somewhat shaken up. It was a satisfactory conclusion to all parties involved because hijacking leftist radicals could reach their desired destination of North Korea, its over 100 passengers were safely let off and the crew and hostage were able to go to North Korea and return home without a scratch. The episode, however, is believed to have cost Japan hundreds of millions of yen in terms of money spent by Government and Japan Airlines in securing the early release of the plane and passengers, potential revenue lost by the airline due to the plane being tied up for five days and chartering of other planes and colossal amount of advertising space and time sacrificed by newspapers and radio and television stations in giving saturation coverage.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 6, 1920.

The Asiatic question.

(Third editorial)

The temper of the Whites in South Africa can be seen from the way in which a Unionist candidate was heckled at an election campaign meeting. Here is the report of the incident as given in "Indian Opinion": Capt. W.C. Halford, Unionist candidate for the Greyville Division, addressing a meeting in the Inands Hall recently is reported to have said in regard to the Asiatic question that he was not prepared to recommend the repatriation of Indians who were born in this country, but was against further immigration. Several questions were put to Capt. Halford after his speech. In reply to one question regarding Asiatics, he said he was in favour of cessation of Asiatic encroachment, provided it was done with justice. He wanted to see justice to every section in the country. (Applause). To another question put to him if he was in favour of equal political rights to workers of all colours, Capt. Halford said: "I do not want to see any extension of the Native franchise, or the extension of the vote to aliens in this country who were not prepared to become British." But he did not mention a word about the Indians who were already British.

AN-ND-NDE

FROM PAGE ONE

'Cases doubling due to Tablighi Jamaat event'

"... [the] allotment done by us is based on cases reported in States. We have advocated for rational use of PPEs. We are also making an effort to see how procurement can be further enhanced. We have discussed this with all health secretaries and other officials," he said.

He explained that initially a component of the PPE was being imported so there was some shortage but now domestic manufacturers have started producing and procuring them from whichever country has them.

Mr. Agarwal quoted Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan as saying that till a drug or vaccine is found, social distancing and lockdown are the only available and effective

vaccines against SARS-CoV-2.

Doctors at the All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS) in Delhi have opposed a circular calling for mandatory donations from salaries to the PM CARES fund. They also expressed concern about lack of PPEs, difficulties in travel faced by health care workers, and lack of sanitation and urged that funds collected be used locally instead of transferring it to the PM CARES. The Health Ministry issued a clarification on Sunday night stating that a fake notification was doing the rounds asserting that five days salary of employees under Health Ministry would be remitted to the PM CARES fund.

According to government sources, Mr. Modi dialled former Presidents Pranab Mukherjee and Pratibha Patil as well as former Prime Ministers H.D. Deve Gowda and Manmohan Singh on Sunday. "He also called up Congress president Sonia Gandhi, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, West Bengal leaders Mamata Banerjee, Telangana Samithi chief and Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao, Samajwadi Party leaders Mayawati Singh and



Reaching out: Mr. Modi talked to among others, Congress president Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh. ■ V. SUDESHAN

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Telangana Samithi chief and Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao, Samajwadi Party leaders Mayawati Singh and

In his call with Mr. Stalin,

Mr. Modi also enquired about the health of his mother Dayalu Ammal. "The calls all pertained to the challenge that the COVID-19 pandemic presents before us as a country and the need to be united to combat it," a source said.

Mr. Modi has called for a video conference on April 8 with floor leaders of political parties whose combined strength in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha number up to five MPs. The Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress had, however, declared that it would not be attending the meeting. Sunday's calls are being seen as an attempt to make up for any feelings of neglect the Opposition parties may have to such an outreach.

spokesperson Sushmita Dev said.

"Sitting at home alone under a lockdown won't help till there are enough tests done. Out of 135 crore people we have only tested a little over 75,000 persons. South Korea, which has managed to halt the virus, tests 10,000 persons every day," Ms. Dev said.

The Congress also rejected the government's latest announcement making the COVID-19 testing free, under the Ayushman Bharat Yojana saying the policy has a limited reach.

Pointing to the lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) kits for health workers, she said: "There are about 3.3 lakh PPE kits while the actual requirement is more than 62 lakh."

Rapid antibody testing for hotspots first: ICMR

Explaining about who to test and the scale of testing the Health Ministry has said that testing has to be focused and judiciously done, even when scaled-up.

It added that contact-tracing is vital for this and is now greatly enabled by the AarogyaSetu App. "RT-PCR test detects the virus and the antibody tests, which use blood, detect the body's response to the virus. A positive result tells that the body was exposed to the virus. The antibody tests, even when used for screening, must be used with care, as with all tests, and interpreted by a professional. As of now, when so used, they can inform how groups of people have been exposed," noted the Ministry.

Experts point out that individual-level interpretation also needs to be done by a professional, who can take a comprehensive assessment. When combined with nu-

merous acid tests, the antibody tests can give a complete status.

HIV experience

Meanwhile a study on pooled sampling, said that pooled COVID-19 tests could help scale up testing and identify and contain disease hotspots. The study was conducted by Center for Disease Dynamics, Economics & Policy among other. "Testing samples from multiple patients with a single PCR test (pooled sampling) has been used previously in the early stages of the HIV epidemic. We found that the use of the strategy could reduce the time, cost, and resources required whilst identifying infected people and estimating the infection rate. Allowing us to identify community clusters for targeted public health interventions," said Ramanan Laxminarayan, study author and CDDEP Director.

Many women from T.N. attended Tablighi meet

S. VIJAY KUMAR
CHENNAI

Intelligence agencies have issued an alert about a group of women Islamic preachers, including many from Tamil Nadu, belonging to the women's wing of the Tablighi Jamaat — the Mastoorat Jamaat — who had attended last month's congregation in Delhi.

The women travelled to several States and also within Tamil Nadu 15 days ago, the agencies said.

The instruction to identify the delegates comes even as efforts are on to lo-

cate and quarantine members of the Tablighi Jamaat, who attended the Delhi conference.

The women's group, which included some foreign nationals, did not visit any mosque but stayed as guests in Muslim households to preach Islamic values, the police said.

The delegates stayed for many days and mingled with families. However, there has been no specific input of any member reporting sick with symptoms of COVID-19 so far.

More than 50 crore beneficiaries can get free services in designated private hospitals across India

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN
NEW DELHI

The Central government has decided to provide free testing and treatment of COVID-19 under the Ayushman Bharat Scheme.

This, it notes, will help more than 50 crore Ayushman beneficiaries to get free testing and treatment in designated private hospitals across India.

COVID-19

Confirming this, Indu Bhushan, CEO of Ayushman Bharat, said this would allow beneficiaries to get timely and standard treatment.

The announcement comes after India registered



Expanding coverage: States are in the process of enlisting private hospitals to be converted. ■ AADESH CHAUDHARI

an increase of 302 cases in the 12 hours to Sunday morning. The total number of positive cases has risen to 3,374 in India (including 3,030 active cases, 267 cured/discharged/migrated people and 77 deaths), ac-

cording to the Health Ministry.

Giving details, Dr. Bhushan said: "The empanelled hospitals can use their own authorised testing facilities or tie up with an authorised testing facility for the

scheme. These tests would be carried out as per the protocol set by Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) and by private labs approved/registered by the ICMR. Similarly, treatment of COVID-19 by private hospitals will be covered under AB-PMJAY."

The objective of the decision was to increase the supply of testing and treatment facilities and increase access by roping in the private sector through AB-PMJAY scheme as per the ICMR guidelines, he said.

Private sector

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said that "in this unprecedented crisis we have to very actively involve

the private sector as a key partner and stakeholder in the fight against COVID-19. Making testing and treatment available under Ayushman Bharat PMJAY will significantly expand our capacities by including private sector hospitals and labs and mitigate the adverse impact of this catastrophic illness on the poor."

He added that States were in the process of enlisting private sector hospitals that could be converted into COVID-19 only hospitals.

Information on symptoms, testing and treatment for the disease can be accessed from the website of the Health Ministry and by calling the national COVID-19 helpline 1075.

Himachal CM asks Tablighis to get tested

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SHIMLA

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur on Sunday asked all members of the Tablighi Jamaat who had attended the group's congregation in Delhi's Nizamuddin, a COVID-19 hotspot, to come forward for testing by 5 p.m., failing which action would be taken against them.

Three of the seven persons who tested positive for COVID-19 in the State on Saturday were members of the Islamic organisation, he said.

Earlier in the day, the State's Director General of Police had issued a similar warning to the district heads of the Jamaat.

Probe against ex-Tripura Cong. chief

SYED SAJJAD ALI
AGARTALA

The Tripura police have launched a probe into forgery and criminal conspiracy charges against former State Congress president Gopal Chandra Roy after an FIR was lodged in a city police station on Sunday.

A lawyer, Arabinda Deb, submitted a complaint in the New Capital Complex (NCC) police station alleging that Mr. Roy, former MLA, has been spreading canards against Chief Minister Biplob Kumar Deb through statements written in his letterhead that contains the emblem of 'Ashok Stambh'.

The complainant claimed that the opposition leader was not authorised to use the national emblem and by doing so he committed an offence of forgery. The advocate also claimed that the allegations against the Chief Minister were tantamount to criminal conspiracy.

Look into issue of parole for PSA cases: J&K HC

HPC told to urgently implement rules

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

The J&K High Court has asked the High Powered Committee (HPC), convened to de-congest jails by releasing prisoners on parole in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, to examine the allegations that no detainee booked under the Public Safety Act (PSA) was being considered for any parole.

Chief Justice Gita Mittal and Justice Rajesh Oswal passed these orders on Saturday while hearing a Public Interest Litigation on the COVID-19 outbreak and the response given by the J&K administration.

"Let the rules be urgently implemented and steps for grant of special parole to prisoners as is envisaged therein be taken on priority," observed the division Bench.

The Bench directed advocate Salih Pirzada to place his submissions by e-mail

before the HPC, comprising Justice Rajesh Bindal, chairman and executive chairperson of the JKSLSA; Shaleen Kabra, Secretary, Home; B.K. Singh, DGP (Prisons) and M.K. Sharma, Member Secretary of the JKSLSA.

The direction came after advocate Pirzada informed the court that the HPC has overlooked the aspect of detenus who have been detained under the PSA. "The order of the Supreme Court makes a reference only to prisoners without specifying the provision of law under which they may have been imprisoned."

In his letter, Mr. Pirzada indicated that there was vulnerability [of catching the virus] in jails in the context of health, hygiene and sanitation.

There is a sizeable number of detainees detained under the PSA and are equally exposed to the hazards of the viral disease in J&K and outside jails."

Parrikar's biography details tense eve of surgical strikes

Former Defence Minister was desperate to ease nerves

NISTULA HEBBAR
NEW DELHI

A new book on former Defence Minister and Goa Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar reveals just what went on, on the eve of the surgical strikes against Pakistan (announced on September 29, 2016) after the Uri attack that killed 18 Indian soldiers and left more than 30 injured.

The biography of Parrikar, *An Extraordinary Life* (Penguin Random House) by Sadguru Patil and Mayabhushan Nagarkar, describes in great detail the events of the evening the surgical strikes were supposed to take place.

Quoting Milind Karmarkar, a Sangh swayamsevak, considered close to the then Defence Minister, the authors say Parrikar was "desperate to speak to someone" that evening, in order to calm his nerves.

Manohar Parrikar

"Manohar told me that he was desperately in need of a friend he could speak to that night. He wanted to ease the tension, which was developing as his team closely monitored the progress of the strike," the book quotes Mr. Karmarkar.

Journalist calls
He also goes on to reveal that during the course of the evening, Parrikar received at least three calls from a journalist friend, and says: "Had

the mediaperson called even one more time he would have invited him over."

Once he was informed about the successful completion of the mission and the return of the Indian commandos, Parrikar "desperately" tried reaching his son Utpal, who was on a business visit to Japan.

Pakistan knocked off'
"He could not get through despite several calls, but when he did, his first two words to his son were: *Pakistan udayo* (Pakistan has been knocked off)," says the book.

This is just one incident in a well-researched look at the storied career of Mr. Parrikar who rose from the ranks of being an RSS volunteer to being the Defence Minister of India. The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed back the book's release, scheduled for the end of March.

to infiltrate across the LoC taking advantage of the bad weather," said a Srinagar-based Army spokesman.

"Operation is still in progress," said the spokesman. Sources said the militants sneaked into this side of the LoC five days ago through the Jumgand area in Kupwara district.

They were later spotted in theTeen Bahak area, which is surrounded by a mountain range. "The militants managed to run around because of snow and rain in the area," said an official.

On guard: Army jawans patrolling the snow-covered border area of Kupwara district. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

Five militants, 3 soldiers dead in Kupwara strike

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

Five militants have been killed in an ongoing operation along the Line of Control (LoC) in north Kashmir's Kupwara.

Three soldiers were killed during the operation, according to an Army spokesman.

"In another ongoing anti-infiltration operation in Kieran sector of North Kashmir, alert troops braving inclement weather and hostile terrain have so far eliminated five terrorists attempting



to infiltrate across the LoC taking advantage of the bad weather," said a Srinagar-based Army spokesman.

"Operation is still in progress," said the spokesman. Sources said the militants sneaked into this side of the LoC five days ago through the Jumgand area in Kupwara district. They were later spotted in theTeen Bahak area, which is surrounded by a mountain range. "The militants managed to run around because of snow and rain in the area," said an official.

Police, forensic teams visit Nizamuddin

Members in full protective gear map the Tablighi Jamaat centre, seize documents

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A team each of the Delhi police Crime Branch and the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) went inside the Tablighi Jamaat centre at Nizamuddin on Sunday.

A joint team in full protective gear remained inside the centre for around six hours during which they mapped the entire building. They videographed the entire premises, including two basements of the centre, where the attendees used to stay during their visit to the building. The building was disinfected for two days and got clearance from the Health Department before the joint team entered in it.

Full survey

"We have obtained a few documents from an office inside the building and surveyed the entire building. If required, we will revisit the building. We have asked the building manager to provide



Keep up the fight: Firefighters spraying disinfectants at a locality near the Nizamuddin mosque in New Delhi. ■ PTI

the CCTVs [footage] of

March. We also talked to the Maulanas who are part of the management committee of the centre, and all documents were seized in their presence," said the police officer.

After and before the 10 members of the team en-

tered and left the building, they were thoroughly checked by a team of the Health Department at the main gate of the centre.

The officer said the Crime Branch was working in various dimensions in the case and they were following procedures and legal opinion

before initiating any step because it was a sensitive case.

According to Deepa Verma, Director of FSL, Rohini, members from the Cyber Forensics Unit biology, chemistry, physics and photo divisions visited the spot and collected exhibits.

The forensic team was in

Hazmat suit and is likely to be sent for home quarantine, sources said.

The officer said the building had five floors and two basements and several shoe racks were found inside the building.

Dump data analysis

Meanwhile, the police said they were identifying visitors to the centre with the help of dump data analysis. They are identifying who all visited and stayed in the centre for more than eight hours in the past one month. A Defence service man who was sent to quarantine was identified with the help of dump data analysis.

"We are identifying people after scrutinising more than one lakh cellphones. We are sending report to the States concerned after identifying the people who were the part of the religious gathering at the centre and later went back to their native places," said the officer.

"We are identifying people after scrutinising more than one lakh cellphones. We are sending report to the States concerned after identifying the people who were the part of the religious gathering at the centre and later went back to their native places," said the officer.

18 Malaysian nationals stopped from flying back

10 detained at the Chennai airport, eight in Delhi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI/CHENNAI

Eight Malaysian nationals have been sent to quarantine after they were stopped from boarding a special flight to Malaysia at the Delhi airport, an Immigration official said on Sunday.

It was found that they figured in a list of foreign nationals who attended the religious congregation at the Tablighi Jamaat centre in Nizamuddin. Their credentials are being verified with the Malaysian Embassy.

The official said the eight wanted to board a special flight to Malaysia when they were stopped by Immigration personnel.

A Delhi police official confirmed that the eight Malaysian nationals had been handed over to them by the Immigration Department. Later, they were sent for medical examination.

"All Malaysian nationals have been shifted to a quarantine centre after their samples were taken by the Health department", a senior police officer said.

With Crime Branch

In another development, Immigration authorities at the Chennai International Airport on Sunday detained 10 Malaysian nationals who had arrived in the country on a tourist visa and attended the Tablighi Jamaat meeting in New Delhi. They were handed over to the Central Crime Branch (CCB) and later placed under quarantine in Poonamallee.

Police sources said the foreign nationals were involved in the Jamaat's activities in Tenkasi district from March 14 to 26, they visited different mosques in Tenkasi, Courtallam and Vallam in connection with the Jamaat's activities, along with two locals – Moulana Hamid and Moulana Moideen, a police officer said. On Sunday, they reached the Chennai airport along with 127 other Malaysian nationals from different parts of the State.

They were supposed to fly back on a Malindo Air flight, arranged by the Malaysian government.

COVID-19 work stress gets to officer

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

An officer of the Papum Pare District Disaster Management Department in Arunachal Pradesh was found dead at her residence in Itanagar on Friday night. The COVID-19 pandemic-related work stress is believed to have been the cause of the death of 38-year-old Tsering Youngzam.

The police said a case of unnatural death was lodged after her body was recovered from the bathroom of her residence. The Superintendent of Police of Capital Complex said Ms. Youngzam had asked her driver to come late on Saturday as she had been too exhausted because of COVID-19 duties.

Migrants in Arunachal caught unaware

Local authorities are ensuring relief is provided in camps after arduous trek over steep hills

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI



Migrant workers at a relief camp in Boleng, Arunachal Pradesh. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT.

It took nine hours for Dipu Sonowal and 24 other construction workers to trek 23 km from a remote rural road project site to a checkpoint between Boleng, the headquarters of Siang district in Arunachal Pradesh and Panigam town, on Saturday afternoon.

They would have walked another 80 km to their villages around Jonai in Assam's Dhemaji district had a police team not caught them. The police took them uphill to a relief camp in Boleng where they found 66 other migrant workers, some of whom walked from their project sites 56 km away.

"We got to know about the

lockdown belatedly because of network issues at Ibuk village where we were engaged in a PMGSY (Prime Minister's Gram Sadak Yojana) project.

But we thought we could finish off a culvert and retaining walls until the contractor ran

out of material and we ran out of food," said Mr. Sonowal, from Sonowal Kathoni village in Assam.

Prabin Boro, from Bahirjali village in Assam, had to spend a night in the jungle with six others from their

PMGSY project further uphill. "People here are generally helpful, but villages along the way were not letting strangers enter because of fear of getting some disease," he said.

Siang Deputy Commissioner Rajeev Takuk said most of the projects, including the 3 mW Subbung hydro-electric project, are at an average altitude of 500 m, although the district has places at 2,000 m. He agreed that walking 30-50 km across steep hills was similar to making 150 km on foot in the plains.

"Unless people use jungle tracks, they have to take the only road from the district to Assam. They were thus brought to the relief camp where they are being provided food items despite the

hardships we are facing," Mr. Takuk told *The Hindu*, adding the migrant workers would be sent back home at an appropriate time.

District Disaster Management Officer Karik Mize said they expected more migrant labourers to come from other project sites. "Boleng only has a rural bank with low cash and most of the labourers do not have accounts. We have had to tweak the procedures to provide cash to those who did not opt for food items," he said.

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Coronavirus chatbot sees 2 crore users

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The government's dedicated WhatsApp chatbot MyGov Corona Helpdesk, aimed at providing timely updates and helping citizens clear their questions on COVID-19, has been used by more than 2 crore users.

Artificial Intelligence chatbot company Haptik Infotech Pvt. Ltd., which is 87% owned by Reliance Jio, developed the MyGov Corona Helpdesk. According to Haptik, more than 55 million messages have been sent by over 20 million users since the chatbot was launched by the government on March 20.

"Misinformation & rumours are the primary outlets of panic. The @reliancejio & @haptik powered official @mygovindia coronavirus chatbot has helped eliminate these outlets for millions. Whatsapp +919013151515 for your queries," Haptik tweeted.

In two weeks since its launch, the helpdesk chatbot has been used by more than 2 crore people in India. "The MyGov Corona Helpdesk has already processed over 28 million conversations on WhatsApp from users across the country, while more than 20 million users have taken their queries to the chatbot within the 13 days since its launch," Haptik CEO Aakrit Vaish told PTI.



Amber signal: If it is a selective lifting of lockdown, trains will run only in virus-free areas. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Railways mulls post-lockdown protocols

Officials say the focus will be on routes catering to migrant workers and avoiding hotspots

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

From making passengers wear masks to using the Arogya Setu app to check their health status before allowing them to travel and encouraging physical distancing on board are a few proposals that the Railways is mulling over as it prepares to gear for the end of the 21-day lockdown on April 14.

While no decision has yet been taken on when the passenger services will be resumed, officials said it is likely to be done in a phased manner.

A decision, officials said, is likely to be taken in the coming week on how to restore services. The Railways, officials said, had discussed

the option of resuming services only on specific approval of each train from the Railway Board. Suggestions for phase-wise resumption of services have to be provided by the zone to the board. "These are sensitive times

and we are not looking in terms of revenue generation for now. The focus is on passenger safety and to ensure that the disease does not spread. Trains will run in due course, once the government gives us the green signal.

However, as of now, we have not taken any decision yet," said a senior officer.

In the zones, officials are also identifying trains and routes which can be resumed with the approval of the board. The focus, says officials, is to see if routes catering to migrant workers can be resumed initially and also those that are not travelling through or had halts at COVID-19 hotspots.

COVID-19

Officials added the Railways also have to factor in how the lockdown is eventually opened. If it is selective, then trains will only run in areas where the lockdown zones to ensure the security of coaches parked in depots.

"We are thinking of requesting passengers to wear masks as per the Health Ministry advisory. We are also thinking of using the Arogya app to check wellness of patients and allow only healthy passengers, an official said.

The Railways has also asked zones to ensure the security of coaches parked in depots.

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30 more days to pay life insurance premium

Applies to policies due this month

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has allowed an additional 30-day grace period for policyholders to pay premium on life insurance policies whose renewal due date falls in April.

It had earlier provided a similar grace period for those policies whose premium was due for payment in March.



IRDAI may offer settlement options for maturity payout of unit-linked policies.

may offer settlement options for maturity payout of unit-linked policies. Settlement option is a facility extended to ULIP holders to receive the maturity proceeds in instalments.

Regulatory returns

"Where unit-linked policies mature and fund value is to be paid in lump sum, life insurers may offer settlement options. This one-time option is regardless of whether such option exists or not in the specific product," the circular said.

In doing so, life insurers have to "exercise all due care and diligence to explain clearly the possible downside risk of continued fluctuation of fund value based on daily NAV and clear consent has to be obtained from the policyholder. This is allowed for unit-linked policies maturing up to May 31," the circular said.

IRDAI has given more time for insurers to file regulatory returns – 15 days for monthly returns; and 30 days for quarterly, half-yearly and yearly returns as well for Cybersecurity Audit. The additional time for filing regulatory returns is as on March 31, another circular said.

Empowered group joins forces with private sector, UN & NGOs

Panel opens dialogue on production of health gear and PPEs

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) will accept the date of birth recorded in Aadhaar as a valid proof for those applying for changing the date, as long as the difference is less than three years, on EPFO records, a statement from the Union Labour and Employment Ministry said on Sunday.

"This will enable EPFO to validate the date of birth of members online with UIDAI instantaneously, thus authenticating and reducing the processing time of change requests," the Ministry said.

Following Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's announcement on March 26 that EPFO members could now withdraw non-refundable advance amounts, the Ministry had notified the amended scheme on March 27.

On Sunday, the Ministry reiterated that EPFO had "instructed field offices to expedite disposal of online requests for availing non refundable advance."



Amitabh Kant

government in identifying hotspots, deputing volunteers and care givers to deliver services to the elderly, persons with disabilities, children, transgender persons and other vulnerable groups and create awareness about prevention and combating stigma. He has also requested them to provide shelter to homeless, daily wage workers and urban poor families and set up community kitchens for migrants.

"The committee has opened up cross-sectoral dialogue within the private sector and start-ups to encourage collaboration among them to produce health equipment and PPEs," the release said.

response, their plans for the coming weeks and the issues they are facing, and their expectations from the government".

Since March 30, the panel has conducted six meetings.

Mr. Kant has also reached out to over 92,000 NGOs/civil society organisations, appealing to them to assist the

EPFO to accept Aadhaar date of birth as proof

Facility for members to change date

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
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U.K. to evacuate 20,000 citizens starting this week

The elderly and the most vulnerable will be the first to leave

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The United Kingdom will operate seven charter flights during this week to evacuate stranded British nationals from Goa, Mumbai and Delhi, its High Commission said on Sunday. Around 20,000 citizens will leave in a weeks-long operation that the U.K. envoy to India described as 'huge'.

Around 35,000 U.K. citizens are stranded after India suspended commercial international air travel on March 22 to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. The High Commission said.

Himachal man blamed for spreading virus, ends life

A 34-year-old man, who tested negative for COVID-19, allegedly ended his life in a village of Himachal Pradesh's Una district on Sunday after a few villagers allegedly blamed him for spreading the disease. He had reportedly met two attendees of the Tablighi Jamaat congregation held recently in Delhi. The police said an investigation team had reached Una to probe the matter.

PUNE reports three more deaths, 21 new cases

Three deaths were reported from Pune district and one from Aurangabad as Maharashtra saw a further spike of 55 fresh cases with positive cases soaring to 747 and the toll at 45 on Sunday. Pune district witnessed a sharp surge with 21 new cases, taking total to 103. At least four new cases are from Pimpri-Chinchwad.

Punjab reports one more death, toll reaches six

Punjab on Sunday reported one more COVID-19 related death, taking the toll to six, according to an official statement. A 69-year-old woman, who was suffering from diabetes and high blood pressure, died in Ludhiana while three fresh cases were reported on Sunday, taking the tally of confirmed cases to 68.

Phone records The Sergeant was identified by the Delhi police after they traced people present in the Nizamuddin area using phone records as part of efforts to identify those pre-

said Jan Thompson, acting High Commissioner.

The first flight will take off from Goa on April 8 and then on April 10 and 12. The flights from Mumbai and Delhi will leave on April 9 and 11. The first few flights are expected to carry the elderly and the most vulnerable.

The U.K. evacuated 113 of the most vulnerable citizens from Goa on an Irish aircraft on April 4. The effort will be focused on those citizens who are residents in the U.K. and their family members, the High Commission said.

IAF places Sergeant who visited Nizamuddin under quarantine

12 outsiders who attended congregation held in Lucknow

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Indian Air Force (IAF) has placed a Sergeant under quarantine as a precaution after the Delhi police found that he had visited the Nizamuddin area during the time of the Tablighi Jamaat congregation last month.

"He came in contact with two other personnel and they are all asymptomatic. But as per procedure all three have been quarantined," IAF spokesperson Wg. Cdr. Indranil Nandi said. Investigation is on to determine if the Sergeant had actually attended the congregation. The families of the personnel have also been quarantined.

Phone records The Sergeant was identified by the Delhi police after they traced people present in the Nizamuddin area using phone records as part of efforts to identify those pre-



tonment area after 12 outsiders who attended the congregation in Delhi were identified by Military Intelligence (MI) to be staying there.

"Actionable information regarding presence of a group of strangers who returned from Nizamuddin after attending the Tablighi Jamaat congregation was provided to the police by the MI unit of Lucknow," a defence source said.

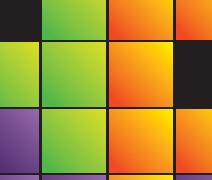
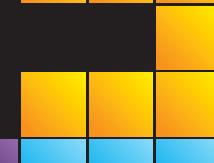
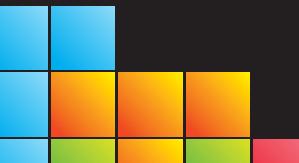
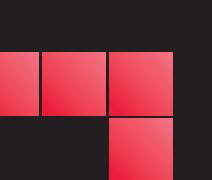
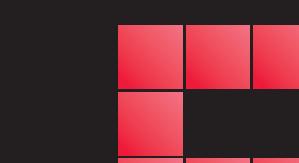
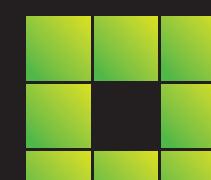
Acting on the input, the police and the district administration detained 12 people in the Pathar Mosque of Sadar Bazar, which is about 600 m from the Command headquarters of Army's Central Command, the source stated. All 12 have tested positive to COVID-19, following which a lockdown in the area was enforced.

The police are now trying to identify those who gave them shelter without informing the authorities.

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THE HINDU GROUP

In the time of the pandemic, classes go online and on air

Teachers and students enter a new world of virtual lectures and worksheets as the lockdown brought about by the coronavirus shuts down schools and colleges

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

The long lockdown for the COVID-19 pandemic has closed schools, colleges and other educational institutions and ushered in the city-wide classroom: tens of thousands of students in cities and towns are glued to computers and smartphone screens as teachers take to online apps for lectures, tutorials and assessments.

e-learning poses a challenge to both teachers and students over technology and access, but it is keeping everyone busy with worksheets, video lectures and assignments.

Some institutions are uploading lectures to YouTube, while the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan is deploying its Swayam Prabha portal, which has lectures on DTH and online, to help students. Andhra Pradesh is trying to tap Doordarshan to remove access barriers. Some institutions have adopted the Zoom app, others Google Classroom. Yet, the instructors are unable to say how effective they are, and not every student is tuning in. Here is how the system has rolled out.

Chennai

At DAV Public School, Principal Mino Aggarwal is keen that student interest in online classes offered as live teaching can be sustained only with a mix of activities, worksheets and interactive sessions. "It is unfair to expect the same level of concentration and involvement as in the classroom. Teachers should have a structured plan which does not suffocate or burden them," she said.

Not all students might



Making a trade-off: Online learning may not have the same level of involvement as in the classroom. ■ SUDHAKARA JAIN

have laptops or tablet computers. "Since the whole family is at home, the only laptop or computer in the house might be used by the parents who are working from home as well."

While smartphones are the next best option, teachers are apprehensive about students using them earnestly because of distracting apps.

Teachers too might have technical constraints, said K.R. Maalathi, an education consultant. In a higher secondary school, teachers had requested for laptops to plan their curriculum.

"These teachers are equipped to take classes but the same might not be the case for other institutions. Going forward, all institutions will have to chalk out an infrastructure plan," she said.

In the face of such constraints, several schools have engaged coaching academies that have subject experts and a structured online curricu-

lum for students taking board exams in the next academic year.

Mumbai
Parents in Mumbai are relieved that children are academically engaged online.

"My daughter Tia is in 10th class, at Podar International School, and it is important that online classes are started.

About the quality of education, it is too early to say,"

said Ajay Raorane, a marketing executive.

Most teachers find it difficult to cope with online teaching. Lack of familiarity with technology forces them to seek help from their children to set up apps and deal with technical glitches.

Sudha Sharan, Headmistress, Gopal Sharma Memorial School, Powai, said the Maharashtra State Board schedule is from June, but 10 days of revision and examination have already been lost.

"To compensate, we are trying to use e-learning. The problems is that we do not

have much technical help due to the lockdown. State Board schools are using trial and error methods to send worksheets and videos. But unlike the classroom we do not have 100% attendance," she said.

Parents are finding it difficult to adjust to the online system of the children. Due to the lockdown, domestic help is not available adding to household work. Some parents say schools are going online only to justify charging the fees in April. Without text books for the new session, schools are sending study materials as terse WhatsApp messages.

Language teacher Meena Raut (name changed) was exasperated as "many parents could be heard talking in the background while the class is on. This is very distracting." She said an entire domestic quarrel could be heard from a child's home. "Some parents don't use the mute button."

Managements have put off

the last date for fee payment to May 31 and children of all classes have been promoted. Podar International School uses Google Hangouts.

New Delhi
Teachers in the national capital have been pushed out of their comfort zones.

"Teachers all over are struggling to make online learning work. It is important to just embrace this new reality and work within its limitations and use the opportunities," said Naomi George, who teaches social studies and English to elementary and high school students at the Metro Delhi International School.

Teachers at the school alternate between prepared video and PowerPoint lessons and hosting live teaching via Google Classroom.

Most teachers and students are digitally literate and savvy, but full-time distance education is still a new experience.

"How children feel or what they are going through

during this lockdown needs to be worked through, and teachers need to be considerate," Ms. George said.

For educational institutions that are not so used to the digital world, the new reality can be more difficult. "We were caught off guard and did not foresee such a long lockdown, so we could not prepare our students for this," said Anita Keskar, Deputy Director of the Women's Training Institute, which provides vocational education to girls.

"Most of our subjects are very practical and hands on – beauty culture, fashion design and tailoring, office management, travel and tourism, web design – so it's difficult to teach from a distance. How do you show a student how to cut and tailor a piece of cloth unless they are in front of you," she asks. Only theory classes are being taught via Zoom for now.

The apex body of Kendriya Vidyalas, KVS, said the schedule of live and recorded lessons of the National Institute of Open Schooling for secondary and senior secondary levels, effective April 7, had been shared with schools for coordination between students, teachers and parents.

Select teachers would clarify doubts via Skype and live web chat. NIOS also offers free DTH television channels, a YouTube channel and massive open online courses.

Hyderabad

Vivek Akki of Hyderabad Public School at Begumpet concentrates just like he does in his classroom when his favourite teacher appears on screen. "The transformation is exciting as I can see all my classmates," he says.

HPS, Begumpet, a prominent school, has gone online. Vivek's mother Parvati Akki said the Zoom app is used to livecast classes. "As parents this is a new experience for us," she says. HPS, Ramzanapur Principal, Narasimha Reddy said the focus is on 10th and 12th classes. "We haven't started online classes but are keeping students busy with assignments through video links from educational providers."

At the Narayana group of schools, Sparshita Guda from Tarnaka, who is in 10th class said four daily classes are held via Zoom.

At some schools using Google Classroom, there is no live teaching, but students and teachers interact through video lessons. Sanjit Kaila, a 10th class student of DRS, International School, Komappally said, "I get video lessons and assignments."

Veda, a 7th class student of Abhaya Waldroff School, Komappally said Google Classroom was being used for grades 6 to 9 using the school connection. She also uses Edpuzzle to create interactive videos and embed questions.

realising that not all children have access to laptops," said V. Sasikala, convenor of a group school in Vijayawada.

Tiruvananthapuram

In Kerala's capital, Bindu Santhosh, who teaches Maths to class 12 students at Christ Nagar Higher Secondary School, Kowdiar, said the lockdown came in the way of training for teachers on using the Zoom app. Ms. Santhosh and class 12 Chemistry teacher Rekha P. reached out to students using Google Classroom.

The limitation is that students would have to type, write and scan doubts and then send them as a PDF file through the app.

Gayathri Rani M., the high school section head at Trivandrum International School, Edackode, and a history teacher, said Google Classroom was being used for grades 6 to 9 using the school connection. She also uses Edpuzzle to create interactive videos and embed questions.

Bengaluru

Lecturers in Bengaluru find attendance rates for online classes higher. "Attendance for online classes is even 90%, while for regular classes it is about 80%," said K.R. Venugopal, Vice-Chancellor, Bangalore University.

Some lecturers said they were struggling with technology as students played music or ran audio clips of cookery classes during lectures.

(With inputs from
Priscilla Jebaraj,
S. Poorvaja,
R. Krishnamoorthy,
R. Ravikanth Reddy,
P. Sujatha Varma,
Tanu Kulkarni, Roshni R.K.,
Lalatendu Mishra, Gauri Vij)

Study abroad dreams shattered or delayed

Some students believe it is time to look for a plan B and apply for colleges in India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

With an acceptance letter from Australia's Deakin University, 21-year-old Tripti Luthra was on cloud nine a month back but is now glued to TV following news updates from across the globe about the coronavirus pandemic as uncertainty surrounds her study abroad dream.

For Anoushka Ray, who had plans to go to New York for the session beginning in September, the development is demotivating but not a factor to change her entire life plan.

However, Tara Osan, who had acceptance letters from multiple colleges in Canada and Italy, believes it is time to look for a Plan B and apply for colleges in India.

The three are among sev-

eral students whose study abroad plans have either been shattered or delayed due to lockdown restrictions imposed in various countries across the globe leading to suspension of classes and vi-



Ms. Luthra said. "I had not applied for further studies in any college in India and the option of taking up a job or internship also looks a distant dream here with the economic slowdown on the doorstep once the lockdown is lifted," she added.

Ms. Tara Osan, a Shri Ram School student, who wanted to study Liberal Arts in New York, the plan is only deferred but not cancelled.

ing abroad had been a plan in mind since long.

"Two months back, I was elated to be counting the number of options I had but now it is a very demotivating phase. Our Class 12 exams are also suspended and will be evaluated on basis of internal assessments. So it is a feeling that lot needs to be done to get future plans in order but everything is on hold.

"Studying abroad does not look like a possible thing this year so I will now look for a plan B and start applying for colleges here," she said.

However, for Ms. Anoushka Ray, who wanted to study Liberal Arts in New York, the plan is only deferred but not cancelled.

"Planning to study abroad is a long process, I have in-

vested way too much both financially as well as mentally in the process so altering an entire life plan because of the situation at the moment, does not seem to be wise decision. I will go for next session but I will go. I am reaching out to my university in New York to see if my admission can be considered for next fall," she said.

"There are many students who have already got admission but are now reconsidering because the classes have moved online and there is no clarity by when situation will improve," Anupam Singh, who runs a Study Abroad consultancy firm in Delhi, said.

Interviews and announcements for several fellowship opportunities are also on hold in view of the uncertainty.

Anganwadi workers get online sessions on COVID-19 steps

Aim is to ensure safety of pregnant women, new mothers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

The Women and Child Development Ministry is regularly holding online interactive sessions with anganwadi workers to ensure the safety of pregnant women and lactating mothers after the 21-day lockdown ends, sources said.

The Ministry has reached out to more than two lakh anganwadi workers through these interactive sessions, the sources said.

"The Women and Child Development Ministry has initiated a series of interactive awareness sessions with them using digital platforms to ensure front line anganwadi workers have first-hand information regarding

measures to safeguard themselves from COVID-19 [even after the lockdown ends]," a source said. The government is also in touch with health experts on the matter, they said. "Special focus is also being given to ensure that the nutritional requirements of pregnant women and lactating mothers are met even after April 15," another source added.

On Sunday, digital interactive sessions, including an introduction on the virus, the preventive measures to be taken and the psychosocial impact of COVID-19 on women and children, were conducted by the Ministry, sources said. "Several measures and suggestions were discussed for maintaining

the physical and mental well-being of women and children amid the pandemic," an official said.

In a bid to help domestic violence victims, the National Commission for Women (NCW) has decided to form a task force of over 15 NGOs to help women in need, sources in the Commission said.

The move comes a few days after the NCW said that it has received 69 complaints of domestic violence since the imposition of the countrywide lockdown.

Since March 24, 257 complaints related to offences against women were received, of which 69 were of domestic violence, NCW Chairperson Rekha Sharma said.



U.S. braces itself for 'toughest virus week'

President Trump warns of increase in deaths but says that the shutdown cannot continue forever

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump warned Americans to brace for a "very horrendous" number of COVID-19 deaths in the coming days, ahead of a rare speech by Queen Elizabeth II on Sunday aimed at rallying hard-hit Britain.

Global deaths from the COVID-19 pandemic have soared past 60,000, with Europe continuing to bear the brunt of the virus which has left roughly half the planet confined at home. There are now more than 1.2 million confirmed cases across the globe, and around 65,000 people have died since the virus first emerged in China late last year, according to a Johns Hopkins University tally. Mr. Trump said the U.S. was entering "a time that's going to be very horrendous. This will probably be the toughest week," he said. "There will be a lot of death."

At the same time, the President stressed the U.S. –

COVID-19

where infections have surpassed 3,000,000 – cannot remain shut down forever. "Mitigation does work but again, we're not going to destroy our country," he said. "I've said it from the beginning – the cure cannot be worse than the problem."

Over 45,000 global deaths have been in Europe, with Britain reporting a new daily high in fatalities, taking the overall toll to 4,300 out of nearly 42,000 cases.

The Queen speaks
Queen Elizabeth II is to make a rare, "deeply personal" speech on Sunday to urge people to rise to the challenge posed by the virus, and



Keeping the patient stable: A medical worker holding an oxygen mask over the mouth and nose of a patient suspected to be suffering from COVID-19 in Paris last week. • AFP

thank healthcare workers. "I hope in the years to come everyone will be able to take pride in how they responded to this challenge," she will say, according to extracts released on Saturday.

Some relief in Europe

There was, however, some encouraging news from Europe over the weekend.

Worst-hit Italy cheered after seeing its number of intensive care virus cases drop for the first time – from 4,068 on Friday to 3,994 on Saturday. "This is a very important data point," said civil protection service chief Angelo Borrelli, adding that it "allows our hospitals to breathe." Spain, which is under a near-total lockdown, saw a second successive daily fall in coronavirus-related deaths with 809 fatalities.

New York State saw a record 630 deaths in a single day and Governor Andrew Cuomo warned the worst was yet to come. New York City appealed for licensed medical personnel to volunteer their services.

Mainland China sees an increase in infections

REUTERS
BEIJING

Mainland China reported 30 new COVID-19 cases on Saturday, up from 19 a day earlier as the number of cases involving travellers from abroad as well as local transmissions increased, highlighting the difficulty in stamping out the outbreak.

The National Health Commission said in a statement on Sunday that 25 of the latest cases involved people who had entered from abroad, compared with 18 such cases a day earlier. Five new locally transmitted infections were also reported on Saturday, all in the southern coastal province of Guangdong, up from a day earlier.

The mainland has now reported a total of 81,669 cases, while the death toll has risen by three to 3,329.

Though daily infections have fallen dramatically from the height of the epidemic in February, Beijing remains unable to completely halt new infections despite imposing some of the most drastic measures to curb the virus's spread. The so-called imported cases and asymptomatic patients, who have the virus and can give it to others but show no symptoms, have become among China's chief concerns in recent weeks.

The country has closed off its borders to almost all foreigners as the virus spread globally, though most of the imported cases involve Chinese nationals returning from overseas. The Central government also has pushed local authorities to identify and isolate the asymptomatic patients.

Highest daily rise in Tokyo

REUTERS
TOKYO

Some 143 more cases of the SARS-CoV-2 virus have been reported in Tokyo, the city's Governor said on Sunday, with the highest daily jump bringing the number of cases in the Japanese capital to more than 1,000.

The number of cases with untraceable transmission routes had increased in recent days, Governor Yuriko Koike said in a livecast YouTube video on Sunday, adding it was worrying that there were a number of people who were infected at hospitals.

Singapore sees 120 new cases

REUTERS
SINGAPORE

Singapore reported 120 new SARS-CoV-2 cases on Sunday, by far its highest daily rise, and quarantined nearly 20,000 migrant workers in their dormitories.

Of Sunday's new cases, 116 were locally transmitted and many were linked to two dormitories that house migrant workers, who will now have to stay in their rooms for 14 days.

The number of new cases is a 60% increase over the 75 reported on Saturday, which was the previous biggest daily rise. Singapore has reported a total of 1,309 infections and six deaths from the virus.

Pope Francis opens Holy Week, says now is the time to serve

'May we reach out to those suffering and those in need'

REUTERS
VATICAN CITY

Pope Francis marked a surreal Palm Sunday in an empty St. Peter's Basilica, urging people living through the COVID-19 pandemic not to be so concerned with what they lack but how they can ease the suffering of others.

The service, kicking off Holy Week events leading to Easter, usually attracts tens of thousands of people to a St. Peter's Square bedecked with olive and palm trees.

This time, it was held from a secondary altar behind the main one Pope Francis normally uses and attended by only about two dozen people, including a few aides, nuns and a scaled-down choir, all practising social distancing. The symbolic procession was only several metres long and a few potted olive trees were brought in.

The mass was broadcast on television and over the Internet to many millions. Cutting a solitary figure, Pope Francis listened as three priests read the gospel account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and being hailed as the messiah.



Pope Francis observing Palm Sunday Mass at the Vatican on Sunday. • AP

that weighs upon our hearts". The pandemic could help transform fear into service, he said. The Vatican has been in its own lockdown, mostly mirroring that in Italy. The Pope and his closest aides have tested negative.

"The tragedy we are experiencing summons us to take seriously the things that are serious, and not to be caught up in those that matter less; to rediscover that life is of no use if not used to serve others. For life is measured by love," Pope Francis said. "May we reach out to those who are suffering and those most in need. May we not be concerned about what we lack, but what good we can do for others," he said.

All of the Pope's Holy Week services, which normally draw tens of thousands of pilgrims and tourists to Rome, will take place in the empty basilica in a scaled-down version.

Over 300 Tablighi Jamaat members test positive in Pakistan's Punjab

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LAHORE

Over 300 Tablighi Jamaat members have been tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus till Sunday in Pakistan's Punjab province, amid efforts by authorities to track down and quarantine thousands of people who attended a massive congregation of the group last month. Authorities have placed the entire city of Raiwind that houses headquarters of the Pakistani faction of the Jamaat under.

Lahore were later tracked down across the country and placed in quarantine centres.

According to the government, in March the Tablighi Jamaat went ahead with its annual congregation in Raiwind, Lahore against its 'advice' that the gathering might spread the virus.

Pakistani authorities had urged the cancellation of the five-day Tablighi congregation, which was attended by thousands of people from several countries.

Planned U.S. aid cut will hit Afghan security forces: experts

The reduction came amidst the Ghani-Abdullah feud

REUTERS
WASHINGTON

A planned \$1 billion cut in U.S. aid to Afghanistan would come from funds for Afghan security forces, according to three U.S. sources, a step experts said would undercut both Kabul's ability to fight the Taliban and its leverage to negotiate a peace deal with them.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the reduction on March 23 and threatened to slash the same amount next year to try to force Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and his political rival Abdullah Abdullah to end a feud that has stalled U.S.-led peace-making efforts in Afghanistan.

Two U.S. congressional aides said State Department officials told Congress the \$1 billion would come from a



A wall-painting in Kabul symbolising the Afghan peace process. • AFP

preserving its bargaining power in peace talks. Congress appropriated at least \$86.4 billion for Afghan security assistance between fiscal years 2002 and 2019, according to a March 11 Congressional Research Service report. "That's the only fund large enough to support a \$1 billion cut," said the third source, a former U.S. military official.

The former U.S. military official said the proposed cut reflects U.S. President Donald Trump's determination to bring U.S. forces home from the longest conflict in American history. Asked what \$1 billion U.S. aid cuts this year and next would do to Afghan security forces' ability to fight the Taliban, he replied: "They will be toast."

3.86 billion masks exported since March: China

Statement comes amidst quality concerns expressed by many countries

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIJING

China has sold nearly four billion masks to foreign countries since March, officials said on Sunday, as they tried to stem widespread fears over the quality of medical exports. Despite Chinese cases dwindling, Beijing has encouraged factories to increase production of medical supplies as parts of the world face a protective equipment shortage.

China has exported 3.86 billion masks, 37.5 million pieces of protective clothing, 16,000 ventilators and 2.84 million COVID-19 testing kits since March 1, customs official Jin Hai said, with orders to more than 50 countries. She added the country's medical supply exports were valued at 10.2 billion yuan (\$1.4 billion). However numerous nations – including the Netherlands, the Philippines, Croatia, Turkey

and Spain – have complained about substandard or faulty medical products shipped from China.

Recall of orders

Last week, the Dutch government recalled 6,000,000 masks out of a Chinese shipment of 1.3 million that did not meet quality standards. China said the manufacturer "stated clearly that (the

masks) are non-surgical." Spain also rejected thousands of rapid test kits sent by an unauthorised Chinese company after it found that they were unreliable last week. Chinese officials hit back on Sunday at media reports over defective medical supplies, saying that they "did not reflect the full facts". "In reality there are various factors, such as Chi-

na having different standards and different usage habits to other countries. Even improper use can lead to doubts over quality," said Jiang Fan, an official with the Ministry of Commerce.

The comments echoed remarks from Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying, who over the past week has repeatedly urged Western media not to "politicise" or "hype up" the issue.

Tighter regulations

Earlier this week, Beijing tightened regulations for exported virus medical equipment, requiring products to fulfil both domestic licensing standards and that of their destination countries.

China has also increased its production capacity of COVID-19 testing kits to over 4 million a day, said Zhang Qi, an official with the National Medical Products Administration.

formula online. By the time Germany recorded its first case of COVID-19 in February, laboratories had built up a stock of test kits.

By now, Germany is conducting around 3,50,000 coronavirus tests a week, far more than any other European country. Early and widespread testing has allowed authorities to slow the spread of the pandemic by isolating known cases while they are infectious.

Further, all across Germany, hospitals have expanded their intensive care capacities. And they started from a high level. In January, Germany had some 28,000 intensive care beds equipped with ventilators, or 34 per 1,00,000 people. By comparison, that rate is 12 in Italy and 7 in the Netherlands. By now, there are 40,000 intensive care beds available in Germany. • PTI

The mystery of low German COVID-19 fatality rates

Early, aggressive testing, well-equipped ICUs, and faith in the government resulted in a remarkably low death count

KATRIN BENNHOLD

They call them corona taxis: Medics outfitted in protective gear, driving around the empty streets of Heidelberg, Germany, to check on patients who are at home, five or six days into being sick with the SARS-CoV-2 virus. They take a blood test, looking for signs that a patient is about to go into a steep decline. They might suggest hospitalisation even to a patient who has only mild symptoms; the chances of surviving that decline are vastly improved by being in a hospital when it begins.

"There is this tipping point at the end of the first week," said professor Hans-Georg Kräusslich, head of virology at University Hospital in Heidelberg, one of the country's leading research hospitals. "If you are a person whose lungs might fail,



No magic formula: A medical employee conducting a testing demonstration in Munich, Germany, in March. • AP

that's when you will start deteriorating."

High engagement
Dr. Heidelberg's corona taxis illustrate a level of engagement and a commitment of public resources that help explain one of the most intriguing puzzles of the pandemic: Why is Germany's death rate so low? The virus and the resulting disease,

2.5% in the United States. "There has been talk of a German anomaly," said Hendrik Streeck, director of the Institute of Virology at the University Hospital Bonn. Dr. Streeck has been getting calls from colleagues in the United States and elsewhere. "What are you doing differently?" they ask me," he said. "Why is your death rate so low?"

There are several answers to this question, experts say – a mix of statistical distortions and very real differences in how the country has taken on the epidemic. The average age of those infected is lower in Germany than in many other countries. Many of the early patients caught the virus in Austrian and Italian ski resorts and were relatively young and healthy, Dr. Kräusslich said. The average age of contracting the disease remains relatively low,

Fired intelligence official was a disgrace: Trump

President links move to impeachment

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump suggested that he fired the Inspector General for the intelligence community in retaliation for impeachment, saying the official was wrong to provide an anonymous whistleblower complaint to Congress as the law requires.

Mr. Trump called Michael Atkinson a "disgrace" after informing Congress late on Friday night that he intended to fire him. In letters to the House and Senate intelligence committees, Mr. Trump wrote that he had lost confidence in Mr. Atkinson but gave little detail.

A day later, Mr. Trump was more blunt, telling reporters at the White House: "I thought he did a terrible job, absolutely terrible." The whistleblower report was a detailed complaint written by an anonymous intelligence official who described Mr. Trump's pressure on Ukraine to investigate Democrat Joe Biden and his son. Mr. Atkinson determined the complaint was urgent and credible and therefore was required by law to disclose it to Congress, but he was overruled for weeks by the acting Director of National Intelligence, Joseph Maguire.

On Saturday, Mr. Trump questioned why Mr. Atkinson didn't speak to him about the complaint, though Mr. Atkinson's role is to provide independent oversight. "Never came in to see me, never requested to see me," Mr. Trump said. He added: "That man is a disgrace to IGs."

ELSEWHERE



Low risk activities will resume on April 11: Iran

DUBAI
Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said on Sunday that "low-risk" economic activities would resume from April 11. "Two thirds of all Iranian government employees will work out of the office from Saturday," REUTERS

Pakistan cleric booked for violating ban

ISLAMABAD
A case has been registered against former Lal Masjid cleric former Lal Masjid cleric Maulana Abdul Aziz and six others in Pakistan for gathering around 400 people for Friday prayers at a prominent mosque here, despite a ban on such religious congregations. PTI

ASK US



N. SREEKANTH

Q. If a person is sailing for six months and has no income generated from any source in India, is he still liable to pay tax here? If that is the case, what would be his tax liability?

NAIREEN AHMED

A. A person leaving India during an assessment year as a member of an Indian ship will be considered a resident if he is in India for more than 182 days. If the number of days crosses 182 in India, then any income earned by him from anywhere in the world will be taxable in India. He will be treated as a resident and all provisions applicable to a resident will be applicable to the said sailor.

Q. My son is presently working in an MNC, drawing an annual salary of ₹14 lakh and other perks, in addition. He is also entitled to the company's shares. What I would like to know is: are the shares eligible for tax payment when sold or while holding them; does he have to pay tax the next year also for the same shares?

MATHEW JACOB

A. As per the tax provision for AY 2020-21, taxability of Employee Stock Option Plan (ESOP) – the taxability of ESOP is two-fold: first, at the time of vesting the options viz, at the time of accepting the eligible shares as a prerequisite. The difference between the fair market value (FMV) and the exercise price is the prerequisite and the same will be taxed in the hands of the employee. Usually, TDS will be deducted for the prerequisite, taking care of the tax liability.

Second, on sale of the shares received by way of exercising ESOPs, the same is to be treated as a capital asset and tax is to be computed in the following manner – sale proceeds minus transfer expenses minus FMV on the date of exercise. If the shares are held for more than one year (in the case of listed securities) it will be termed as long-term capital gain/loss, and short-term otherwise. In case the shares are not listed, then the holding period criteria will be three years.

Determination of FMV: unlisted – price determined by the merchant banker; if listed – if traded, the average of opening price and the closing price on the exercise date, in case traded on both the exchanges, then, the exchange which records the most volume is to be considered.

Q. I had filed my income tax return on June 19, 2019 for assessment year 2019-20. The status shows 'successfully e-verified.' It's been six months now, I have not received my refund yet. All my previous returns were done within the normal time and refunds issued. This year, I had done the e-verification from outside the country. Please let me know if refunds should take this long and whom to approach for getting this sorted out.

VISHWANATH

A. This is something that we don't have an answer for; refunds are processed based on various parameters set by the Central Board of Direct Taxes. You may want to raise a ticket through the help desk in the web portal e-Nivasar.

Further, the processing is held up especially in a case where the transactions are to be matched with AIR (Annual Information Return) information and other data reconciliations which the CBDT undertakes for that particular assessment year.

Q. Kindly clarify whether TDS is applicable on dividends from equity shares as per the Budget for financial year 2020-2021

P.K. DAMODARAN

A. Under section 194 w.e.f 01-04-2020, TDS is to be deducted by companies on the dividend issued to its shareholders if such sum paid to a shareholder exceeds ₹5,000 in a year.

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

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

Sanitise your INVESTING HABITS

In these troubled times, when a pandemic is sweeping the world, investors need to be careful about their money

VIDYA BALA

In troubled times such as the present one, the urge to do 'something' to make your money work better is high. Here are some of the questions I received frequently, reflecting the above sentiment, and my corresponding suggestions.

"I have some surplus to invest now, where should I invest for high returns?"

Having some surplus does not automatically qualify it for risky, long-term investments in these hard times.

The COVID-19 pandemic may take time to resolve; some of us may have pay cuts and worse, some may lose jobs. If that be the case, be happy that you have some surplus and earmark the same as a contingency fund.

At least six to nine months of your expenses are best set aside in these extraordinary times. Stash much of this money in savings accounts and short-

term bank deposits (of large scheduled banks) that you can break. Overnight or liquid funds should only be your next choices. Please stop bothering about the interest it earns, until such time we get over this current crisis. In other words, near-term survival and sustenance matter first.

EMI payment

"Should I stop paying my EMI and use the money to invest?" No, this is not a good idea. First, there is no free moratorium. Your interest will get added over the three-month period. If you have enough money for your daily needs, avoid skipping the EMI. Second,

in such a dicey market, the last thing to do would be to ride the market on borrowed money hoping the market will generate quick returns.

"[The] RBI is cutting the interest rate. Should I lock into higher-earning depo-

sits options?" Higher earning options do not come without risk in normal times. They come with heightened risk in these risky times. Stay clear of any kind of credit risk if you are dependent on your investment for regular income. Good old small savings schemes will offer slightly better interest rates than bank FDs, especially for senior citizens, even after the recent rate cut. There are select, quality low-risk options in debt mutual funds that you can explore if you have other sources of income.

"Markets have fallen sharply. Can I buy some stocks now?" If you are a seasoned stock investor, then you might find opportunities in quality stocks that you are already invested in and accumulate those.

If you are new to stock markets, then trying to buy when markets fall can be like catching a falling knife. Instead, add more to

your mutual funds or simply use index funds or ETFs and keep accumulating in 6-8 small instalments and slowly deploy every week. Make sure this is money you don't need for 3-5 years at least and you have enough debt allocation in place. Avoid wasting your time asking friends or even experts whether this is the correct time to buy. Nobody really knows.

"Small-caps have been hit badly. So, they may bounce back fast. Should I shift to smaller companies?" This is not the kind of correction where stocks that fall the most bounce back the highest. The present crisis will lead to a question of survival of the fittest as stressed working capital and poor sales would threaten companies with weak finances.

Also, previous market falls have taught us that some stocks and sectors go out of fancy when a new rally starts after such ma-

jor corrections. This may mean that stocks that you eyed in the earlier rally may completely lose out and fade into oblivion, at times. Unless you track smaller companies and their financial strength closely, stay with quality companies that are cash rich, are known to emerge from downturns and are currently at a double-digit discount to the prices they were in a bull market.

Equity investment
"All my equity investments are below my cost after 5 years of investing now. What is the point in investing in equities?"

Social media comments on 5-year SIPs turning negative, 5-year FD returns or liquid funds being better than equity at present... are all true. But just 2.5 months ago, there would have been no case

to make. Also, nobody speaks of the bounce-back that happens not far after the hit. My point is, get to know how you could have mitigated it. The answer is asset allocation. Some equity, some debt, some gold and so on. If you had done this, then please a look at your portfolio in its entirety and not just your equity. You will still be better off.

This way, in steep falls, your portfolio is better protected, and you would already have reaped some profit and shifted it out, without knowing whether markets may rise or fall.

Stay safe, invest right!
(The author is co-founder, Primeinvestor.in)

THINK INVESTOR

The 'long-term' investment trap

A fall in equities nearer to the end of your goal term can land you in trouble

VENKATESH BANGARUSWAMY

The recent stock market crash has presumably affected your financial health. Yet, you take comfort from the typical advice that equity generates positive returns in the 'long term.' It is important that you make optimal decisions while managing your personal investments.

To make such decisions, you should first ask the right questions. One such question is: can I achieve my goal if equity generates positive returns in the 'long term'?

Life's asymmetry

If you run 10 km every day, you could, perhaps, maintain your body weight or, at best, reduce your weight by, say, 5 kg. But stop running for two months and you would gain 10 kg. Notice the adverse relationship. You do not lose much weight when you run, but you gain more weight when you stop running. In other words, you have to apply more effort to achieve a positive outcome, but a negative outcome comes easily.

A similar relationship exists in the market. Suppose your equity investments declined from 100 to 75 during the recent market crash. Note that a 25% unrealised loss requires a 33% gain to recover the losses (25 upon 75). In addition, your investment has to generate positive returns to justify your



Churn in time: One should keep reducing equity allocation as one nears his or her investment goal. ■ GETTY IMAGES/STOCK

decision to buy equity instead of investing in bank deposits.

You may argue that the market can gain 33% just as easily as it lost 25%. That is not necessarily true. Fear is at least twice as powerful as greed. This means that it takes less time for the market to decline than it takes for it to go up. Remember, the market rose between April 2003 and January 2008, but lost 65% in the subsequent 10 months.

Thereafter, it took another two years to recover the losses and an additional five years to generate significant positive returns. So, the question is: Can you wait enough for your loss-making

equity investments to generate positive returns?

Goal-based investments

Suppose you created a portfolio in 2010 to fund your child's college education in 2024. What if your equity investments are down 25% in 2020? Your portfolio has to recover 33% in the next 4 years and, in addition, earn the annual expected return. Why?

Suppose you invested a fixed amount every month from 2010.

You had determined that 8.5% compounded annual post-tax returns over 14 years will help you accumulate the money required to fund your child's education.

Based on a post-tax expected return of 10.8% (12% less 10% capital gains tax) on equity and 4.5% on bonds, you invested 65% in equity and 35% in bonds.

Then, the market crashes four years before your child is scheduled to go to college. What should you do? You cannot wait for the 'long term' because you need the money four years hence. Besides, you need to earn 10.8% returns every year on your equity investments to achieve your goal.

The point is this: Equity investments could recover over a long term. But you have a different time horizon. So, the question you should be asking is: are your investments likely to recover losses and generate gains in time to fund your life goal?

Thinking of equity as a long-term investment can help you reduce the emotional pain of investment losses. But that is unlikely to help you achieve your goal. What should you do?

For one, you should continually reduce your portfolio's equity allocation as you come closer to the time you need the money for your life goal. For another, you should have a plan to bridge any shortfall in your portfolio to meet your life goal.

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

TECH TRAIL: PRECIOUS METALS

Get set for volatility

Gold, silver prices move in a weak band

B. KRISHNAKUMAR

After an initial spike in the first week of March, precious metals fell sharply along with other asset classes in the second week. Comex gold gained 1.91% in March to settle at \$1,596.6 an ounce while Comex silver fell by a whopping 13.6% to close at \$14.15 an ounce.

In the domestic market, gold futures on the MCX gained 3.3% in March to settle at ₹42,956 per 10 gm. MCX silver futures slipped 10.1% in to close at ₹39,523 per kg.

As observed in the previous post, Comex gold turned weak and fell way below the target zone of \$1,510-1,520. The short-term outlook for Comex gold remains weak and a slide to \$1,450-1,490 appears likely.

From a medium-term perspective, gold price is likely to trade in the range of \$1,450-1,700. Until there is a breakout from this range, a range-bound action is likely to persist.

Comex silver, too, ruled weak and hit the earlier mentioned target zone of \$15.5-15.7 an ounce. The short-term outlook remains weak and a drop to \$13.13-13.5 appears likely. The trend would remain weak until the price moves past the resistance at \$16.6-17 one.

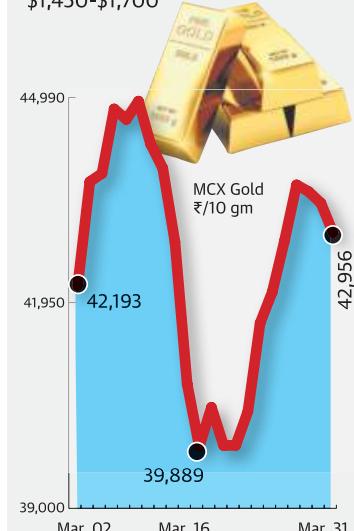
Outlook positive for MCX gold

The short-term outlook for MCX gold is positive and a breakout past ₹43,800 would push the MCX gold price to the short-term target of ₹44,800-45,000. The trend would turn weak if the price falls below ₹41,500 per 10 gm.

The short-term outlook for MCX silver is positive and the price could move up to ₹42,800-43,500 range. A move past ₹41,750 would strengthen

Losing sheen

In the medium term, Comex gold is likely to trade in the range of \$1,450-\$1,700



the positive view. A drop below ₹33,000 would indicate a major trend reversal and the price could then slide to far lower levels.

To summarise, precious metals achieved their short-term downside targets and have rebounded thereafter. Though there is a case for a minor bounce, especially in the domestic market, the international price of gold and silver are likely to remain volatile and range-bound.

(The author is a Chennai-based analyst/trader. The views and opinion featured in this column are based upon the analysis of short-term price movements in gold and silver futures at COMEX and the Multi Commodity Exchange of India. This is not meant to be trading or investment advice)

LOOSE CHANGE

RAVIKANTH



"Don't panic, I say! Yes, I have milk. No, I don't sell cows."

Life insurance term plan premium

Male: 30 Years, Sum insured- Rs. 1 crore, Cover upto- 70 Years

| Insurance company | Plan name | Maximum cover Up to (Years) | Annual premium (Rs.) (Male) |
|----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Aditya Birla Capital | Ultima Term | 85 | 10,270 |
| Aegon Life | iTerm Insurance Plan | 100 | 9,114 |
| Aviva Life Insurance | iTerm Smart | 80 | 9,007 |
| Bajaj Allianz | Smart Protect Goal | 99 | 8010 |
| Bharti AXA | Flexi Term Plan | 85 | 9,440 |
| Canara HSBC OBC Life | iSelect+ Term Plan | 99 | 9,284 |
| Pramerica Life | Flexi e-Term | 75 | 9,403 |
| Edelweiss Tokio Life | Zindagi+ Term Insurance Plan | 80 | 9,309 |
| Exide Life | Smart Term Plan | 75 | 12411* |
| Future Generali | Flexi Online Term Plan | 75 | 9,427 |
| HDFC Life | Click2Protect 3D Plus | 1 | |

IN BRIEF



Yuvraj pledges ₹50 lakh for PM-CARES Fund

NEW DELHI
Former India cricketer Yuvraj Singh on Sunday pledged to donate ₹50 lakh to the PM-CARES Fund to help fight the COVID-19 pandemic. The all-rounder also appealed to the people to stay united in the fight against the pandemic. PTI

Contributions raised by IOA crosses ₹1 crore

NEW DELHI
The Indian Olympic Association said in a statement that ₹1,02,56,003 has been raised by the NSFs, State Olympic associations, non-members (who have applied for recognition) and others for combating the pandemic. The IOA will transfer the donations to PM-CARES Fund. PTI



Harbhajan to feed 5000 families

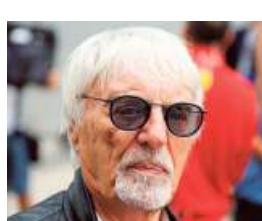
NEW DELHI
Harbhajan Singh has pledged to feed 5000 families in Jalandhar affected by the lockdown. The 39-year-old said he would continue to feed those who are homeless and jobless until normalcy returns. PTI

Badminton Worlds to be rescheduled

London
The Badminton World Championships next year is set to be rescheduled because it clashes with the new dates for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. The Badminton World Federation (BWF) said it was working with the organisers in Spain's Huelva to find a new time slot. IANS

Stephen O'Keefe quits First Class cricket

Sydney
Former Australia Test spinner Stephen O'Keefe retired from First Class cricket after being omitted from New South Wales' list of contracted players for the next domestic season. The 35-year-old left-arm took 35 wickets in nine Tests, including 12 in a match against India at Pune in 2017. AP



Cancel F1 this season, says Ecclestone

London
Former Formula One boss Bernie Ecclestone feels that the 2020/21 Championship should be cancelled. "I can't see it's going to be possible to get the right amount of races in that count for a championship," he said. IANS

Olympic Games ban for Thailand, Malaysia lifters

Budapest
Thailand and Malaysia have been banned from sending weightlifters to the Tokyo Olympics. The International Weightlifting Federation said in a statement on Saturday that the Thai Amateur Weightlifting Association (TAWA) has been suspended for three years, while the Malaysian Weightlifting Federation (MWF) has been given a one-year ban. IANS

East Bengal signs Iranian Omid

Kolkata
East Bengal on Sunday signed Indian-origin Iranian midfielder Omid Singh on a two-year deal. "Omids has signed with us for two years. He will join us once the next season starts," East Bengal top official Debabrata Sarkar said here. The 29-year-old left-winger, who originally hails from Punjab and holds an Indian passport, plies his trade for Naft Masjed Soleyman FC in the Persian Gulf Pro League. The I-League has been suspended with four rounds left. East Bengal is second in the table. PTI

Chirag-Satwik looking for coach

The ace doubles team planning to maximise the Olympics postponement

BADMINTON

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The crack men's doubles pair of Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy is now hoping to avail the services of a new foreign coach to help in their Olympic preparation after the sudden exit of Indonesian Flandy Limpele.

Limpele, appointed till the Tokyo Olympics, stepped down as doubles coach last month, becoming the fourth foreign coach to resign without completing his tenure.

Chirag said the postponement will now give them more time to deal with the departure of Limpele, who was specifically hired to prepare them for Tokyo.

More time to prepare

"We will definitely get more time to prepare now. Since it is more than a year to go, I believe we will get a new foreign coach. If the Olympics had happened this year, we wouldn't have got a coach



Dynamic duo: Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy believe that an experienced coach will make a big difference to their chances at the Olympics next year. ■ FILE PHOTO: AFP

for 3-4 months. But now, BAI might get one to help us," said Chirag.

"Now we have a year... hopefully, we will get a new coach and adjust to the new regime. So in a way, we got lucky with this postpone-

ment. If an experienced coach comes on board, it will make a big difference."

"We are almost there, it is a matter of 2-3 points. We are 90% there and a good coach like Rexy Mainaky (head coach of Thailand) would

give us that extra 10%. A high-calibre coach can help us get into world's top three."

Satwik said: "We also have coaches like Dwi Kristiawan and Namrith Suroto who can make a programme for us."

Premier League players reject pay cut

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LONDON

The English Premier League players rejected a move on Saturday by clubs to cut their wages by 30% during the coronavirus pandemic, escalating a bitter row as their union claimed the government would lose out on more than £200 million in tax.

"This would be detrimental to our NHS (National Health Service) and other government-funded services," the Professional Footballers' Association said in a statement.

Taking on the Premier League as a whole, the PFA said the £20 million pounds being given to the NHS by the world's richest

soccer competition was "welcome, but we believe it could be far bigger."

The union's strident stance came after further talks on Saturday involving clubs and the league.

No-win situation

Former England captain Wayne Rooney said the move would have placed footballers in a "no-win situation".

"If the government approached me to help support nurses financially or buy ventilators I'd be proud to do so – as long as I knew where the money was going," said Rooney.

"I'm in a place where I could give something up. Not every footballer is in the same position."

CRICKET

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Former India cricketer Yuvraj Singh said that Rohit Sharma reminded him of Pakistani batting legend Inzamam-ul-Haq in his early days.

The flamboyant India vice-captain made his ODI debut in June 2007 while his maiden T20 game came during the World Cup later that year against England, where unfortunately Rohit didn't get a chance to bat.

Asked about his first impression of Rohit, the left-hander said the swashbuckling batsman looked like somebody who had a lot of time to play his strokes.

"I think when he came in to the Indian team, he



Admiration: Yuvraj Singh, right, says Rohit Sharma is someone who has a lot of time to play his strokes. ■ FILE PHOTO: VIVEK BENDRE

looked like somebody who had a lot of time," Yuvraj said during a YouTube chat show.

"He reminded me of Inzamam, because, when he batted, Inzi had a lot of time (to

play the bowlers),"

Inzamam, a veteran of 120 Tests and over 300 ODIs, is known to remain calm under pressure situations. He captained Pakistan from 2003-07.

India submits bid to host AFC Asian Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

India has submitted its bid documents for hosting the AFC Asian Cup in 2027, a top official of the national federation confirmed on Sunday.

If India wins the bid, it will be the first time the country will host the continental showpiece. "We have already submitted our expression of interest to the AFC (Asian Football Confederation). That is what's required as of now," said AIFA general-secretary Kushal Das.

The AFC is expected to announce the host early next year. Saudi Arabia, which has never hosted the tournament, had already announced its bid. South Korea is likely to join the race. China will host the 2023 tournament.

Bergamasco has not lost hope

Women's coach wants to visit family after travel ban ends

BOXING

V.B. SARANGI
KOLKATA

Despite being caught between a rock and a hard place, Raffaele Bergamasco has not lost hope.

Even as Bergamasco, the foreign coach for Indian women boxers, is leading a solitary life on the campus of the Indira Gandhi Stadium in New Delhi, his heart is with his ailing wife and daughters in Italy.



Raffaele Bergamasco.
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

for his wife, though. "Unfortunately, she is unwell and has been on therapy for the last two years. I am concerned about her well-being."

"I try to talk to her often over phone and my daughters are there with her and keep me updated."

"I had promised to my wife that I will be there with her every month, even for a day or two, during the therapy. But she understands. She is a brave lady."

Bergamasco, who had a tough time during self-quarantine when he returned with the Indian side from the Asia/Oceania Olympic qualifier in Jordan, wants to continue with his current job and has been guiding the women boxers despite being in isolation.

"I am connected to all the boxers and my team through video conference on a daily basis. I provide them with what they are supposed to train at home."

"The aim is to keep them fit so that once we resume we can take things further for our Olympic preparation," said Bergamasco.

Could have handled KP better, admits Strauss

They fell out over ECB's IPL policy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON

Former England captain Andrew Strauss admits he may not have handled Kevin Pietersen well during his time at the helm. The flamboyant batsman should have been given some space despite not exactly adhering to the team ethos, Strauss said on a Sky Sports podcast.

However, Strauss maintained that while he understood why the cash-rich Indian Premier League (IPL) is necessary for players, he still does not agree that it should get precedence over Test cricket.

Strauss and Pietersen had a major fallout due to their difference of opinion on ECB's IPL policy. "I always had sympathy with KP over the IPL. I understood what a big event it was with all the best players playing there and huge amounts of money on the table as well," he said.

It must be mentioned that when Strauss became ECB's Director of Cricket he created a window for England players to play in the IPL, something Pietersen had always advocated. "But I thought it was incredibly dangerous to allow players to miss Test cricket to play

in the IPL. The message you'd be sending and the precedent you'd be setting was the IPL is more important than Test cricket," he said.

Strauss said he repeatedly tried to make Pietersen aware why Test cricket is more important.

After being dropped for good in 2014-15, Pietersen had hit out at some of his teammates like Matt Prior and Stuart Broad in his autobiography, which also included criticism of Strauss for not supporting him.

In hindsight, Strauss feels he should have cut Pietersen a little slack. "I think instead I just let KP be KP. In retrospect that was a mistake and might have sowed the seeds for what was to come down the track," Strauss admitted.

Strauss said Pietersen had not exactly been a team-man but the England dressing room should have been more accepting.

"I've always felt a good team environment embraces difference and finds a space for everyone."

"I think we did that for large periods of time but possibly through neglect, KP became increasingly isolated," Strauss said.



Avoidable friction: Andrew Strauss feels, in hindsight, he should have cut the maverick Kevin Pietersen some slack. ■ FILE PHOTO

No squash till July

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

The Professional Squash Association (PSA) announced in a release recently that the suspension of the PSA Tour due to COVID-19 has been extended and all World Tour, Challenger Tour and WSF & PSA Satellite Tour events, scheduled for May and June, have been postponed to August.

Speaking to *The Hindu* on Sunday, Cyrus Poncha, secretary of Squash Rackets Federation of India (SRFI), said "the Thiruvananthapuram and Pune legs will be held at a later date. Fortunately, no big events were planned by SRFI at this time."

tem gave complete details, while the live video checked on the shooters, making the whole exercise transparent and lively.

"I got this idea after reading about the criticism about the training camp for the National team at the Dr. Karni Singh Range. I decided that we should also try it. There was a good response to our

effort, and we didn't charge any entry fee," said Ved Prakash, who invited Asian Games gold medallist Jitu Rai to inaugurate the competition from his army base in Mhow.

"We will do it bigger in the future. State competitions can be done this way, so that shooters don't have to travel. Most of the shooters have in-

vested in electronic targets. I am also trying to develop a software so that we have a good system," said Ved Prakash.

"Shooters have known me for many years. I announced the competition through social media. Jitu has said that he will join the competition in future," observed Ved Prakash.

Fast bowlers have biggest challenge to remain fit: Nehra



Word of caution: Ashish Nehra, seen with Umesh Yadav, wants fast bowlers to refrain from shuttle runs on hard surfaces. ■ FILE PHOTO: K. MURALI KUMAR

Says lack of running time is an issue for them

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

A batsman can make do with yoga and weight training. But for merchants of speed, former India pacer Ashish Nehra felt the absence of running for more than three months at a stretch could affect fitness levels.

According to him, the fast bowlers will have to start running sooner or later.

With sporting activities coming to a standstill, elite athletes are confined to their homes, trying to remain fit.

"Let's consider a few situations. Even if the lock-

down ends on April 15, it will take a lot of time for life to become normal.

Long break

"I am not expecting any cricketing activity before July. So this is a long break but once action starts, fast bowlers have the biggest challenge to remain fit," Nehra said.

"Lack of running time for fast bowlers is an issue. So whoever has a garden with say 15 metres or 20 metres space, they should do shuttle run thrice a week," said Nehra.

He had a word of advice for those who had sprawling terraces with soil and grass cover.

"It's fine if you are doing 'Surya Namaskar' on the terrace, but if you start doing shuttle run, you will end up damaging your knees and ankles because of the hard surface."

Nehra also had a word of caution for the fast bowlers. "Zaheer Khan and Nehra can afford to come back from the lockdown with a paunch, not active players. So a break from sport doesn't mean you will have biryani."

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