



Farooq Abdullah calls for release of all J&K detainees

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Tharoor-led panel flags delay in revamping film certification

page 13



Russian-Turkish patrol on Syrian highway cut short by protests

page 14



Axelsen stuns top seed Tien Chen, clinches All England title

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NEARBY



Bhim Army floats party, eyes Bihar election

GAZIABAD

The Bhim Army announced the launch of Azad Samaj Party, its political arm, at a glittering ceremony in Noida on Sunday. "We are not here to be servants, we are here to rule the country," Bhim Army chief Chandrashekhar Azad said at the event.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 12

4 militants killed in Anantnag encounter

SRINAGAR
Four militants – three affiliated to Lashkar-e-Taiba and another to Hizbul Mujahideen – were killed by security forces in Anantnag on Sunday. "Two AK-47 rifles, two pistols, ammunition and other incriminating materials were recovered from the encounter site," police said.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 12

Man murders friend over argument on petty issue

NEW DELHI
A man allegedly stabbed his friend to death after a fight over a petty issue in south Delhi's Yusuf Sarai, the police said on Sunday. The accused, Alok Singh, and the victim, Suman, were allegedly under the influence of alcohol when the incident happened. Alok has been arrested.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

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EDUCATIONPLUS ▶ PAGES 16 & 17

Confirmed COVID-19 cases rise to 114

First case in Uttarakhand; experts call for more testing to check for community transmission

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Figures released by the Union Health Ministry late on Sunday put the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the country at 110. However, according to reports from States, 114 persons have tested positive. Of the new cases, two were from Maharashtra, two from Kerala and one each from Rajasthan, Karnataka, Telangana and Uttarakhand.

Ten persons have so far been discharged after treatment.

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan reviewed action taken by States and Union Territories and preparedness regarding prevention, containment and management, along with senior officials.

The government has maintained that no cases of community transmission –

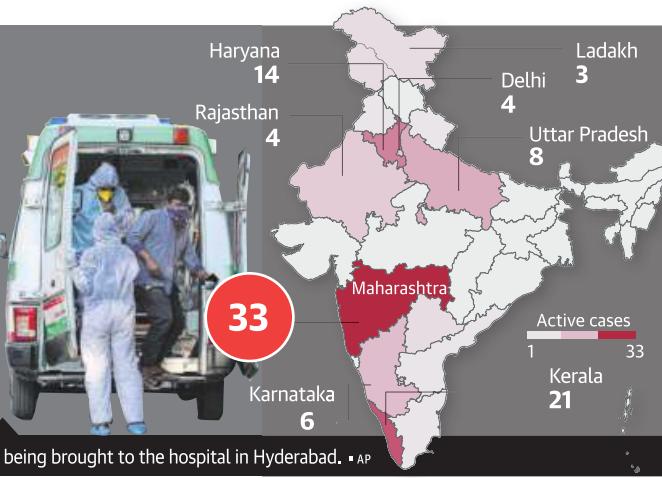
Viral count

Maharashtra had 33 active cases as of 10 P.M. on Sunday, the highest in the country. 14 States had at least one active case with all of south India reporting active cases.

A suspected COVID-19 patient being brought to the hospital in Hyderabad. ■ AP

people testing positive for the virus who have no traceable link to travellers who've come into India from abroad – have been detected.

However, a senior researcher at an institution affiliated to the Union Science



Ministry, who did not wish to be identified, said "it is likely" that community transmission is ongoing in India but has not been recorded in official counts due to inadequate testing.

Uttarakhand reported its first confirmed case with a probationer at the Forest Research Institute (FRI) testing

sons in Karnataka has now risen to seven, including the victim.

A third case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Telangana of a 48-year-old man, who returned from the Netherlands and was admitted to the Gandhi Hospital on March 11.

Two people, including a U.K. national, tested positive in Kerala, taking the total number of affected in the State to 21, as the government launched a "break the chain" initiative to prevent the spread of the virus.

Earlier in the morning, an Air India flight from Milan in Italy arrived in Delhi with 218 evacuees. They have been quarantined at the Indo-Tibetan Border Police camp at Chhawla.

TESTING IS THE EASIEST THING TO DO: GAGANDEEP KANG ▶ PAGE 9
MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 2, 8 & 9

Modi calls for SAARC emergency fund

Extends \$10 mn as India's contribution

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) should create a fund to fight the threat of COVID-19, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on Sunday.

Addressing the first-ever videoconference of the heads of member countries, he extended \$10 million as India's contribution to the fund.

"We all agree that we are facing a serious challenge. We do not as yet know what shape the pandemic will take in the coming days. It is clear that we have to work together. In this spirit of collaboration, let me share a few ideas on what India can offer to this joint effort. I propose we create a COVID19 Emergency Fund which could be based on voluntary contribution from all of us. India can start with an initial offer of 10 million U.S. dollars for this fund," he said.

He said India's Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla and his counterparts from other member countries should meet and decide on the plan for the creation of the fund.

'LIFT CURBS' ▶ PAGE 12

they have travelled abroad or are showing any symptoms of COVID-19.

Justice Chandrachud, chairman of the e-committee, assured that very soon the "people-to-people" contact will be reduced by introducing court proceedings via videoconferencing. He said e-filings could be made any time of the day and court proceedings and filing procedures would soon go digital and paperless.

Another meeting has been scheduled for March 18.

urgent cases on March 16.

Randeep Guleria from AIIMS, Balram Bhargava from ICMR, along with other experts, attended the meeting on Sunday. Office-bearers of the Supreme Court Bar Association and the Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association were also present at the meeting, advocate Joseph S. Aristotle said in a statement.

+

A common medical advice issued by the medical experts relates to entrants to the apex court declaring if



CJI Sharad A. Bobde

by the CJI along with Justices Arun Mishra, U.U. Lalit, D.Y. Chandrachud and L. Nageswara Rao.

Six of the 14 courts in the Supreme Court are taking up

CJI Bobde rules out complete shutdown of courts

'As virtual courts are on verge of commencement, there can only be a possibility of limited shutdown'

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

An urgent meeting was called by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde on Sunday to clarify that there cannot be a complete shutdown of courts in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The CJI explained that as virtual courts are on the verge of commencement, there can only be a possibility of limited shutdown at present. The court is reopening on March 16 after the Holi break.

Justice Bobde further clarified that any demand of the Bar and Bench would be subordinated to the medical advice drawn at the meeting attended by doctors.

Cause list

It was also clarified that the cause list has already been published for March 16 and hence the medical advice that had been sought has to be compiled with to facilitate the functioning of the apex court.

The meeting was chaired

Sky divers



Taking wing: The Mark Jeffery aerobatics team performing during the closing ceremony of the Wings India 2020 aviation show at the Begumpet airport in Hyderabad on Sunday. ■ G. RAMAKRISHNA

Crucial test of strength for Kamal Nath govt. today

It will have to secure votes of at least 112 MLAs

SIDHARTH YADAV
BHOJPAL

The fate of the Congress-led government in Madhya Pradesh is set to be decided in a floor test on Monday.

Although 92 Congress and four Independent MLAs turned up to Bhopal from Jaipur on Sunday, there was no sign of either the 107 BJP or 16 rebel Congress MLAs until late on Sunday evening.

The Kamal Nath government was pushed to the brink following the exit of senior Congress leader Jyoti Raditya Scindia and the block of 16 lawmakers owing allegiance to him.

It will now have to secure the votes of at least 112 MLAs to prove its simple majority.



Confident gesture: Congress MLAs arriving in Bhopal from Jaipur, Rajasthan, on Sunday ■ A.M. FARUQUI

in the Assembly, which has an effective strength of 222 after the resignation of six Congress MLAs and the death of two MLAs in the 230-member House.

Both the Congress and the BJP have issued three-line whips to their MLAs, directing them to attend all As-

sembly sessions from March 16 to April 13.

The Samajwadi Party has also issued a whip to its lone MLA to vote in favour of the government.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 12

UNCERTAINTY OVER MADHYA PRADESH FLOOR TEST ▶ PAGE 13

Two held for 'objectionable' posters in U.P.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh police have booked two Congress workers for allegedly putting up posters displaying the "criminal records" of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, his deputy Keshav Prasad Maurya and several other BJP leaders at different places in Lucknow.

The two were identified as Sudhanshu Bajpai and Lalu Kanaujia.

The posters refer to the BJP leaders as "rioters", and ask when would they pay damages, in an apparent response to the hoardings put up by the State government displaying personal details of those accused of vandalism during anti-CAA protests last year.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 12

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Cong. suffers Rajya Sabha setback in Gujarat as four MLAs resign

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
AHMEDABAD

Four Congress MLAs in Gujarat have tendered their resignation to the Assembly Speaker, delivering a blow to the party ahead of the Rajya Sabha elections in the State.

The party was hoping to wrest two of the four seats from the State, but will now have to either withdraw one of the two candidates or face defeat in the second seat.

According to party sources, the high command is likely to take a call on withdrawing one of the candidates.

All three candidates field-

ed by the ruling BJP – Abhay Bhardwaj, Ramila Bara and Narhari Amin, who is a former Congress leader – are likely to win, along with one candidate of the Congress now.

Announcement today The legislators who resigned are Somabhai Patel from Limbadi, J.V. Kakadia from Dhari, Pravin Maru from Gadhad and Pradyumna Singh Jadeja from Abdasa.

They tendered their resignation to Speaker Rajendra Trivedi, who is likely to make an announcement in the Assembly on Monday.

More than a dozen legislators were flown to Jaipur on Saturday evening.

"Four Congress legislators have tendered their resignations on Saturday late night," Mr. Trivedi said in a statement.

According to insiders, a few more legislators may submit their resignation as severe infighting has besieged the Opposition party that remains fragmented.

On Saturday, fearing poaching of its legislators by the BJP, the Congress shifted more than a dozen of its MLAs to the party-ruled Rajasthan.

More than a dozen legislators were flown to Jaipur on Saturday evening.

published on August 31,

2019. "Moktar, Joinal, Akbar Ali, Mirchan Nessa... their documents may be considered as they are among one or two members of their families excluded from the list. What will happen to us when they (courts) are rejecting 15-16 documents?" said Jochhon Ali, a farmer whose 31-member family does not figure in the NRC.

The number is a reference to Ms. Begum, who submitted 15 documents, including PAN card, land revenue receipt and bank passbook but did not pass muster for the Gauhati High Court to overrule the order of a Foreigners Tribunal (FT) declaring her a foreigner of the "post-March 1971 stream". The court dismissed her petition on February 12.

March 25, 1971 is the cut-off date for detecting and deporting foreigners or illegal immigrants, or "Bangladeshis", according to the Assam Accord of August 15, 1985.

Since finding themselves among the 19.06 lakh NRC-rejects, Mr. Ali and his three brothers have been trying to salvage any document they might have missed while applying for inclusion in the NRC. But the case of Ms. Begum, who has been absconding after the dismissal of her petition, has made Mr. Ali and thousands like him lose hope as the NRC authorities prepare to issue rejection slips.

The Assam government told the Assembly a few days ago that such slips may be issued from March 30 onwards. A rejected person has to appeal

In communal flare-ups, rumours have tactical use

Irrespective of religion, people shielded temples during the recent riots

JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI

In instances of communal violence, truth is often the first casualty and a mobilisation tactic used by those behind fomenting trouble is to spread rumours that places of worship have been destroyed.

A fact check by *The Hindu* found that while there were instances of stone pelting at temples, local residents, including Muslims, came forward to defend at least three temples during the recent outbreak of violence in north-east Delhi in which 53 persons were killed.

At the Shri Durga Fakir Mandir in Chand Bagh, where sporadic episodes of stone pelting led to violent clashes on February 24, both Muslim and Hindu residents came out to defend the temple, its prabandhak Sanjay Malhotra said.

"There were violent clashes for at least three hours but only the board affixed above the gate was damaged; all the credit goes to members to the seven-odd Muslim families who stay in the gali. They came on their own and stood beside the Hindus to save the temple. I wish I could introduce you to them myself but most of them have sent their families away and have, after weeks, finally gone back to their trades," Mr. Malhotra, a resident of Geeta Colony, said.

"I could only come here the next morning after [paramilitary] forces were deployed and saw that the only damage inflicted on the tem-



Shri Gauri Shankar Temple in Shiv Vihar in riot-hit north-east Delhi. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

ple was to a board bearing its name. My family has overseen the functioning of this temple since 1978...the area always had both Hindus and Muslims residing in it, but there was never the kind of fear and mistrust that exists here now," he said.

Two smaller temples located in bylanes across the road from each other – one in Muslim-dominated Chaman Park and the other in Bhagirathi Vihar which has a mixed population – visibly remained untouched by the violence which occurred along the main road leading towards the Shiv Vihar tira.

Rajesh Vashisht, the pandit overseeing the Maha Shakti Hanuman Mandir in Prem Vihar across the road from Shiv Vihar, which wit-

nessed some of the worst arson and vandalism, said the predominantly Hindu population of the area came and stood guard outside its gate as "information" about the rioting began surfacing.

"Not only local residents, but people from neighbouring areas also came to stand guard outside the temple to secure it," he said. The Shri Pracheen Hanuman Mandir, located at the Shiv Vihar Tiraha, also saw mobilisation by Hindu residents.

"Pandit Sewa Ram, who oversees the temple, was hit on the forehead with a brick while he was on his way here. Thankfully no one else got hurt," Pandit Munna Lal, who is also associated with the temple, said.

At Shiv Vihar across the road, however, damage to

the wall reportedly due to stone pelting, according to local residents staying near the Shri Gauri Shankar Mandir, was evidence that temples in north-east Delhi were targets during the recent communal violence.

"Our temple bore most of the brunt of the stone pelting from across the road because of its location - all the three small bridges connecting this area to the main Karwan Nagar road - were blocked by rioters from the other [Muslim] side leaving us with no option but to stay put. Some of them working in pairs - with one using a torch to distract passersby and the other firing from a gun," claimed Shivam Mishra, whose father Pandit Ranjit Mishra, oversees the Gauri Shankar Mandir.

His mother died on March 13 at Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital here.

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His mother died on March 13 at Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital here.

Allow us to work from home, DU teachers to Vice-Chancellor

"This can reduce unnecessary travelling of over 10,000 people"

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Four members of the Academic Council (AC) of Delhi University have written to Vice-Chancellor Yogesh Tyagi, saying that teachers should be allowed to work from home so that unnecessary travelling of over 10,000 citizens can be further reduced.

The university has already suspended classes for all students till March 31 in the wake of a nationwide health emergency caused by the spread of COVID-19.

The AC members said that many principals asked

teachers to compulsorily report to their respective colleges despite the suspension of classes, even though the university press release clearly insisted on making e-resources available to students on a weekly basis.

The teachers also pointed out that it cannot be assumed that the teaching-learning time lost in the temporary cessation of classes can be made up through e-resources and e-learning modules.

The teachers of the university added that the V-C should consider extending the duration of the semester

Jamia asks students to consider returning home

'Library, mess, canteens likely to be shut'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Jamia Millia Islamia on Sunday advised student to consider to return to their respective houses to deal with the COVID-19 epidemic in the city.

The way the threat is progressing in the city, places which see gathering, like library, mess, canteens etc. in Jamia, are likely to be shut as part of precautionary measures, an advisory read.

Students are advised to understand the seriousness of the prevailing circumstances to consider returning home for their own safety and better care, it also stated.

The students were asked to lock their rooms and inform the warden concerned before leaving for home.

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which may further be extended if the epidemic is not contained, it said, adding that the university could not expose its students to the threat.

The university said that it was issuing the advisory as places witnessing large gatherings, like hostels, dining halls, libraries, kitchens are all highly vulnerable and susceptible to the threat.

"The idea is not to indulge in any kind of fear psychosis, however, it is being impressed upon all the students of the dangerous nature of the threat," the university added.

Classes have already been suspended till March

Haryana schools, cinema halls closed till March 31

Mass gatherings prohibited in State

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GURUGRAM

The cinema halls, gyms, swimming pools, theatres, clubs and night clubs will remain closed across Haryana till March 31 in view of the outbreak and spread of COVID-19.

Apart from this, all schools in the State will remain shut during this period and mass gatherings of more than 200 people will be prohibited in all religious, social, political, cultural, sports and personal and family events in the State. The schools will, however, conduct examinations as per the schedule.

A decision to this effect was taken in a meeting held under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar and Health Minister Anil Vij on Sunday to review the preparedness of the Health Department to check the spread of COVID-19.

Till date, 57 samples have been sent for test, out of which 49 were tested negative and the results of eight are awaited.

wards set up in the government hospitals of the State. However, he said, the number of beds could be increased in cities adjoining Delhi, like Gurugram, Rohtak and Jhajjar.

1,328 beds
At present 1,328 beds have been identified in 298 isolation wards in government hospitals and district-wise arrangement of quarantine facilities has been made for 3,000 persons. Apart from this, sensitisation programmes would be held in all government and private hospitals in the State to sensitise the doctors and other staff about COVID-19.

2,876 under observation
Currently, 2,876 people in Haryana are under observation and 2,844 of them are ones who have travel history to affected countries and are asymptomatic.

Till date, 57 samples have been sent for test, out of which 49 were tested negative and the results of eight are awaited.

'Son of woman who died due to COVID-19 in Delhi stable'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The son of the 68-year-old woman from west Delhi who was the second COVID-19 casualty in the country, is being treated at the Centre-run Safdarjung Hospital and his condition is stated to be stable, official sources said on Sunday.

The 46-year-old man, a resident of Janakpuri, who was shifted from Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital to Safdarjung Hospital on Friday, was shifted to an isolation ward on Saturday from the ICU after his condition improved.

"He is out of the ICU and his condition is stable. He is not stuck to bed," an official source said.

The man could not attend the funeral of his mother who was cremated at Nigam Bodh Ghat under the supervision of medical staff.

He had travelled to Switzerland and Italy between February 5 and 22 and returned to India on February 23. He initially was asymptomatic, but developed fever and cough after a day and reported to Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital on March 7.

"As per protocol, the family was screened and since he and his mother had fever and cough, both were hospitalised," a Health Ministry official said, adding the man had to be put on oxygen support after he developed severe respiratory problems.

His mother died on March 13 at Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital here.

Kin of police personnel stage stir over virus screening centre

"Such a centre at training camp will be a threat to people's health"

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The family members of police personnel on Sunday staged a protest outside Police Training School (PTS) in Dwarka Sector-9 against setting up of a COVID-19 screening centre in the locality.

On Saturday, the Delhi police set up quarantine facilities at their training centres in Jharoda Kalan, Wazirabad and at other training schools located in the city.

Police personnel undergoing training at centres that have been turned into quarantines were asked to vacate the premises.

Around 122 families of the police personnel staying in the staff quarters located next to Dwarka Sector-9 PTS staged the protest at the main gate of the training school.

"Why is PTS being used as COVID-19 screening centre when there are so many hospitals in the city? It will pose threat to the health of the



The protesters at the Police Training School gate in Dwarka on Sunday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

children and senior citizens living in the housing society located next to the PTS. We demand that the screening centre be shifted to some other isolated place," said Anita, one of the protesters.

Team of doctors called

A senior police officer said that to interact with the protesters, they had called a team of doctors who explained to the residents why COVID-19 spreads. The protest was called off after a few hours after the doctors could successfully convince them.

"We assured them of maintaining high level of hygiene and taking precautions at the screening centre. A team of doctors will be available for them in case they need any medical assistance," added the police officer.

Meanwhile, Delhi Police Commissioner instructed all district DCPs and police personnel posted in other units, who have direct interface with the public at large, to frequently use sanitisers and wear masks in order to protect themselves from COVID-19.

COVID-19 scare: people avoid eating out, attending parties

Delhiites practise social distancing as precautionary measure

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

With several Delhiites practising social distancing as a precautionary measure to protect themselves from the COVID-19 epidemic, restaurants, malls, and even wedding venues have been seeing the number of visitors dwindle.



Masks put on display at a roadside shop in New Delhi on Sunday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

not only hit businesses, but has also managed to ruin weddings and birthday parties. Rajinder Pal who manages a banquet hall in Mayapuri, says that he has received calls from people who had booked the hall if they could reduce the "minimum guarantee" number that they had promised. "Many people are avoiding social gatherings and at weddings held over the weekend, only close family of the bride and groom have been turning up, whereas the minimum guarantee number given by them was over 200," Mr. Pal said.

Abhishek, the manager of the restaurant, said, "We expected less guests but to have only one table full in such a large restaurant shows that people in the city are practising social distancing very seriously. For us, we have to keep running the place and hope that it is back to business as usual. But until then, we are going to suffer a huge loss."

Mr. Abhishek added that for the past week, they have not got any group bookings and that the band was playing only because they had a contract with the restaurant.

The COVID-19 scare has

ing and several other activities that I had lined up for him after school. All sessions and classes have been cancelled," Ms. Seth said. She added that as a precaution, she has not been ordering food through food delivery apps as well.

Several conferences at scheduled places in the city have also been cancelled due to the virus outbreak. The Dastakar bazaar has been cut short by the organisers and is scheduled to end on Monday.

The organisers said that they had ensured that every visitor to the bazaar sanitised their hands before entering and that all counter had sanitiser next to them, adding that they decided to cut the event short adhering to the WHO guidelines and other health advisories on COVID-19.

Crisis crops up



A farmer in a pensive mood on Sunday after crops were damaged by Saturday's hailstorm and heavy rainfall. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Two COVID-19 patients discharged in the Capital

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Two persons, who were undergoing treatment for COVID-19 in Delhi, have been discharged from hospitals following their recovery, authorities said on Sunday.

So far, Delhi has seen se-

ven positive cases, including a patient who died last week. Of these, two persons, who had earlier tested positive for COVID-19 and were admitted to hospitals,

have been discharged following treatment, the Delhi Health Department said in a statement.

Meanwhile, the number of COVID-19 cases in the country rose to 114 on Sunday.

Over 450 stranded Indians were flown back from Italy and Iran, the two worst affected countries after Chi-

na, and quarantined. The country reported its second COVID-19 casualty in Delhi on March 13. The death was caused due to comorbidity, the authorities said, adding that the woman was admitted to RML Hospital.

IN BRIEF

Miscreants flee with drunk man's BMW

NOIDA
Unidentified miscreants allegedly fled away with a BMW car after the man driving it pulled up to urinate on a roadside here, police said on Sunday. According to officials, the incident happened on Saturday night at Sector 90 under Phase 2 police station limits, when Rishabh Arora, a stock broker, was returning in the car from a party in an inebriated condition. The luxury car is owned by Arora's brother-in-law and there is a loan pending on the vehicle, said DCP, Central Noida, Harish Chander. PTI

Air Quality of Delhi-NCR			
Delhi	131	Gurugram	123
Ghaziabad	148	Faridabad	120
Noida	106	Greater Noida	122
Good	51-100	Satisfactory	Moderate
Poor	201-300	Very Poor	Severe
201-300	301-400	301-400	>400
Air Quality Index at 4 p.m. yesterday (Average of past 24 hours) Source: CPCB			

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

Man murders friend following argument over petty issue

'They were under influence of alcohol at the time of incident'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A man undergoing treatment at a hospital allegedly stabbed his friend to death after a fight over a petty issue in south Delhi's Yusuf Sarai area following which he was arrested, the police said on Sunday.

The accused Alok Singh (34) and the victim Suman (24), had come from Begusarai in Bihar and were under the influence of alcohol when the incident happened, the police said.

Would fight often
According to the police, Alok was undergoing treatment at Safdarjung Hospital for bone-related complications sustained during an accident in his home town in January. He brought Suman along with him from Bihar as a caretaker.



The accused in police custody. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The duo stayed at a rental accommodation in Yusuf Sarai and would fight quite often over petty issues, the police said.

On Saturday night, when they were consuming alcohol in their room, they had a fight over some issue following which Alok took out a kitchen knife and stabbed Suman in his chest, Deputy Commissioner of Police (South-West) Devender Arya said.

Man held for ATM theft in Badarpur

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 48-year-old man was arrested in connection with the theft of an ATM containing ₹22 lakh in south-east Delhi's Badarpur area last month, police said on Sunday.

The theft was reported to the police on February 13 and the accused, Tahir Hussain, a resident of Raipuri in Mewat district of Haryana, was arrested on Friday, a police official said.

"On Friday, we received information that Hussain was to go to Faridabad to settle a car loan with a finance company. Accordingly, a raid was conducted and he was apprehended," DCP (South East) R.P. Meena said.

Hussain – a transporter – has four trucks and a car. The monthly EMI of the vehicles was approximately ₹3 lakh, which he was unable to pay. Hussain had recently joined his cousin Shahid's gang. Shahid used Hussain's car to commit crime and gave him a share of the looted money, the officer said.

DELHI TODAY

Exhibition: A solo painting exhibition by Anita Sharma at Convention Centre Foyer, India Habitat Centre (IHC), 11 am - 7 p.m.

Exhibition: "Natural Instincts", a group paintings exhibition of various artist at Visual Arts Gallery, India Habitat Centre, 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Exhibition: "Queen Campus", a solo exhibition of paintings by Shivani Soni at Triveni Gallery, Triveni Kala Sangam, Tansen Marg, 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Exhibition: An exhibition of sculptures by Lallan Singh at Triveni Kala Sangam, Tansen Marg, 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Culture: Akhila Bharata Sadhu Samajam presents discourse on Sri Ramayanam by Sri Krishna Premi Swamigal at Sri Rajaram Mandir, Dasarath Puri, 7 p.m.

(Mail your listings for this column at cityeditor@thehindu.co.in)

CMYK

Youth held for brandishing pistol on WhatsApp status

'He clicked photo to show off to friends'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 19-year-old youth was arrested from south Delhi's Ambedkar Nagar after he allegedly posted a picture of himself posing with an illegal firearm on social media on Holi, the police said on Sunday.

Though the post was removed later, the police received its screenshot through informers, they said. In the picture, the man, identified as Vinit, could be seen flashing a pistol and posing along with three others.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (South) Atul Kumar Thakur said Vinit clicked the picture posing with a pistol to show off to his friends and acquaintances and posted it as WhatsApp status.

Acting on a tip-off, the police conducted a raid at Maharsi Valmiki Marg, Ambedkar Nagar, at about 6.30 p.m. on Saturday and apprehended Vinit along with the weapon, he said.

A case was registered at Ambedkar Nagar police station, Mr. Thakur said, adding the countrymade pistol along with two live cartridges was seized.

Quit studies

Vinit is a resident of south Delhi's Madangir. He quit studies after he failed in Class 9, the DCP said.

He has no previous involvement in any crime, the police said, adding they are trying to nab his accomplice from whom he had bought the pistol.

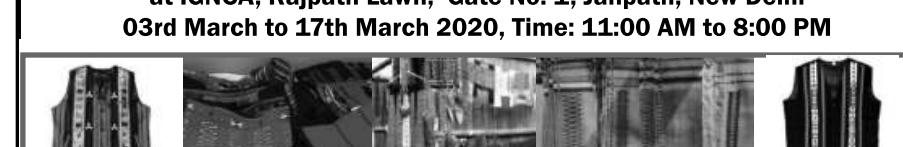
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Delayed execution

SOIBAM ROCKY SINGH
NEW DELHI

Seven years after their barbaric act of gang raping a young paramedic student, the four men convicted for the heinous crime have left no stone unturned to save themselves from the gallows.

Ever since the first death warrants were issued by a trial court here in January this year, all four convicts – Mukesh Kumar Singh (32), Pawan Gupta (25), Vinay Kumar Sharma (26), and Akshay Kumar Singh (31) – have made every possible endeavour to delay their execution, even if it meant living for a few more days.

After three successive postponement of the death warrants, the trial court on March 5 set the date of execution at Tihar Jail on March 20 at 5.30 a.m.. Having exhausted all available legal remedies, including mercy petition before the President, the convicts have now been given final time to meet their respective families.

The fateful night

December 16, 2012, would have probably been just another day for the 23-year-old paramedical student returning after watching a movie with a friend, had they not boarded the private bus.

The girl and her friend, after watching *Life of Pi* at a cinema hall in south Delhi's Saket, reached the Munirka bus stand at 9 p.m. in an auto. As they could not find any public transport to return home from there, they boarded a chartered bus after its conductor talked them into it.

Inside the bus, there were already four men in the driver's cabin and two more sitting behind it. They sat next to each other on the left side – second seat in the bus – and paid a fare of ₹20.

As the bus reached the flyover near the airport, three boys came out of the driver's cabin. Two of them started abusing the woman's friend and asked him where he was taking her late in the evening. One of them hit the victim's friend who tried fighting back.

Soon, two other boys joined them in beating him with iron rods lying in the bus. As the victim came forward to save her friend, two of the assailants pushed her to the back seat.

While the victim's friend was being beaten up, the other assailants took turn to rape her. In their brutal act, the convicts damaged her internal organs using an iron rod.

The convicts then tried to throw both the victims out of the moving bus from its rear door. But since they couldn't open it, they brought them to the front and pushed them out of the moving bus on National Highway 8 near the Mahipalpur flyover. They were later spotted by passers-by, who informed the police.

The passers-by also brought sheets to cover them. They were then rushed to Safdarjung Hospital. The girl was later airlifted to a hospital in Singapore, where she died after 13 days.

Changes in law

The nationwide public outcry, following the incident, led to the passing of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act in 2013 which widened the definition of rape and made punishment more stringent.

Parliament made the amendments on the recommendations of the Justice J.S. Verma Committee, which was constituted to re-look into the criminal laws in the country and suggest changes.

The 2013 Act, which came into effect on April 2, 2013, increased the jail term in most sexual assault cases and also provided for death penalty in rape cases that cause death of the victim or leaves her in a vegetative state. It also created new offences, such as use of criminal force on a woman with intent to disrobe, voyeurism and stalking.

The punishment for gang rape was increased to 20 years to life imprisonment from the earlier 10 years to life imprisonment.

Earlier, there was no specific



Protesters atop a police bus during a demonstration at Vijay Chowk in the city demanding justice for Nirbhaya. ■ FILE PHOTO: PTI

provision in the law for offences such as use of unwelcome physical contact, words or gestures, demand or request for sexual favours, showing pornography against the will of a woman or making sexual remarks. But, the 2013 Act clearly defined these offences and allocated punishment. Similarly, stalking was made punishable with up to three years in jail.

Arrest and conviction

Within days of the incident, the police arrested all six convicts, including the driver of the bus – Ram Singh – and the lone juvenile assailant.

A fast-track court began proceedings against the five adults on January 17, 2013. The same month, the Juvenile Justice Board ruled that the sixth accused is a minor, who would be dealt with differently.

On March 11, 2013, Ram Singh was found hanging in his cell in Tihar jail.

The juvenile assailant was on August 31 convicted by the Juvenile Justice Board for gang rape and murder and awarded

three-year term at a probation home.

The next month, the trial court convicted the remaining four of 13 offences, including gang rape, unnatural offence and murder of a woman and attempt to murder her male friend. It awarded death to all the four.

On March 13, 2014, the Delhi High Court upheld the death sentences awarded to the four convicts. Three years later, the Supreme Court on May 5, 2017, upheld the death penalty.

Rush for execution

On February 2019, the mother of the victim moved a Delhi court seeking death warrants for all convicts. She had contended that it was the need of the hour and law that death sentence be executed as early as possible and not delayed any further.

Seven months before that, the top court had already rejected the review petitions of three of the convicts against their death sentence.

In late October last year, the

Tihar Jail authorities informed the convicts that they have only seven days to file mercy petitions before the President as they have exhausted all their legal remedies.

During this period, convict Pawan moved the Delhi High Court claiming that he was a juvenile at the time of the offence. This, however, got dismissed later.

In December the Supreme Court dismissed the review petition filed by the fourth death row convict Akshay.

Akshay, in his last ditch effort to save himself from the gallows, had pleaded that there was no evidence to show that such a punishment has got a deterrent value.

"The State must not simply execute people. It must persistently work towards systematic reforms to bring about change. Executions only kill the criminal, not the crime..." Akshay's plea argued.

He even referred to the health risks because of the rising pollution level in the Capital to state that, "Life is going

short-to-short, then why death penalty".

Death warrants

On January 7, a Delhi court, while hearing plea by the parents of the victim to expedite the execution of the convicts, issued their death warrants for January 22 at 7 a.m. inside Tihar jail.

The mother of the victim, who was present at the court while the verdict was being pronounced, said the decision to hang the convicts will restore the faith of women in the judiciary.

The second death warrants were issued by the Delhi court on January 17 for February 17 on a day when President Ram Nath Kovind rejected the mercy plea of death row convict Mukesh Kumar. But, the execution of death sentence was postponed for the second time on January 31 by Delhi court on the ground that Vinay's mercy plea had not been decided by the President. This led to an unprecedented event, in which the Delhi High Court sat for a hearing on a Sunday to hear the Centre's plea to remove the stay on execution of the convicts. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Home Ministry, argued that the acts of the four convicts clearly shows their intention to delay the process of execution of death sentences.

There was "a deliberate, calculated, well thought out design to frustrate the mandate of the law", the Solicitor General had argued.

The High Court declined the plea of the Centre to separately execute the death row convicts but gave all four convicts seven days to exhaust all their available legal remedies.

Meanwhile, the President had rejected the mercy pleas of Mukesh, Vinay and Akshay. On February 17, the Delhi court issued fresh death warrants for the execution of the four convicts on March 3, at 6 a.m.

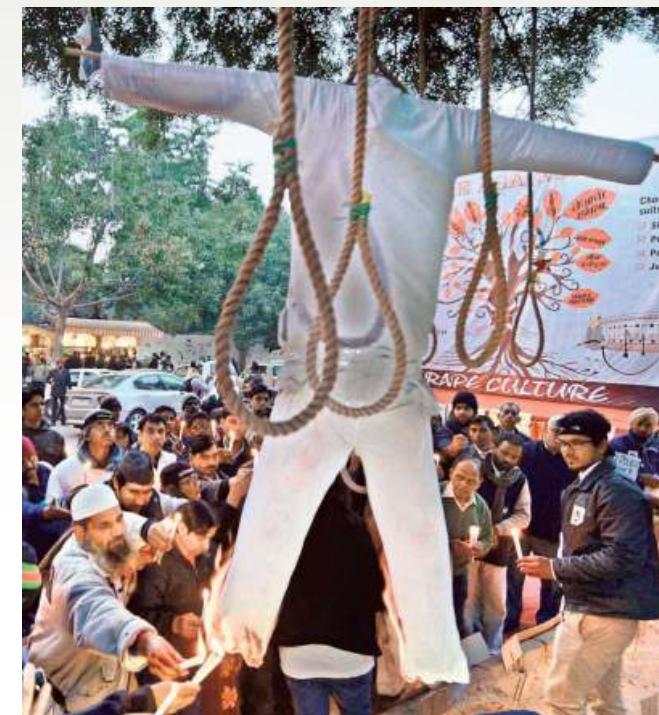
During this period, Vinay moved the Election Commission of India questioning the timing of the rejection of his mercy plea. In the representation, he contended that the model code of conduct for the Delhi elections was still in force when the Delhi government made its recommendation to the President to reject his mercy plea. Finally on March 5, the Delhi court issued the latest death warrants for the convicts to be executed on March 20 at 5.30 a.m. inside Tihar.

Even after exhausting all legal remedies, Vinay has moved a fresh mercy petition before Lieutenant-Governor Anil Baijal, seeking commutation of his death penalty to life imprisonment.

Death row convicts in the Nirbhaya case have made every possible endeavour to slow down their execution. After three successive postponements, the court has now set the date for hanging on March 20

Hangman to reach Tihar on Tuesday

He will carry out dummy executions



Parents of Nirbhaya and their supporters burning an effigy of the rapist during a march on her death anniversary at Jantar Mantar.

■ FILE PHOTO: SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

SAURABH TRivedi
NEW DELHI

For the fourth time, Tihar jail authorities are making arrangements for the execution of the four convicts in the Nirbhaya case which is scheduled for March 20, officials said.

Convicts are hopeful that their lawyers will find some way to get the date of their hanging postponed once again, said a jail official.

"Hangman Pawan will reach Tihar on March 17 and will carry out dummy executions. The phansi ghar will be inspected again as per jail manual by a team to check whether all things are in place," said Sandeep Goel, Director General (Prisons).

The hanging of the four men – Mukesh Kumar Singh, Vinay Kumar Sharma, Akshay Kumar Singh and Pawan Gupta – who are lodged in Tihar, was fixed for March 20 at 5.30 a.m. in Tihar jail as per a court order.

Out of the four convicts, Mukesh, Vinay and Pawan have already met their families before the February 1 death warrant, while Akshay was left to meet his family for the last time, said the jail officials.

During normal meetings, inmates are allowed to meet their families from behind an iron grill. In the last meeting, they were allowed to meet their families face-to-face for

30 minutes. "We have informed Akshay's family members about the final meeting. We are hopeful that they will reach Delhi within a couple of days," said Mr. Goel.

Priority to health

Meanwhile, Tihar jail authorities are taking extra care of convicts in the wake of COVID-19 outbreak.

"The convicts are given round-the-clock security and are put under CCTV surveillance. A team of doctors visit them twice a day for medical check-up. They have been shifted to isolation wards. We are taking extra care of their health and preventing them from getting in contact with other prisoners," said a jail official.

"We are taking extra care of hygiene inside isolation wards and the convicts are not allowed to meet unnecessary people so as to avoid any chances of getting infected," the official said. The official added that the convicts haven't made any special demands.

The first date of execution was fixed on January 22, but it was postponed by the court to February 1. Again, it was postponed and the court issued a fresh date for execution of death warrants for March 3, which was postponed further. The fresh date of hanging was scheduled for March 20.

Tracing their background

RAM SINGH



He was 30 at the time of the incident and resided in Sant Ravi Dass Camp. Hailing from Rajasthan, Ram was the first to be arrested. He was also the driver of the bus in which the incident happened.

He thrashed the victim and assaulted her with iron rods. Police had recovered Ram's bloodstained clothes and the iron rods that were used to assault the victim. He was found dead inside Tihar Jail on March 10, 2013.

VINAY SHARMA



He was a gym instructor. Vinay was arrested two days after the incident. Police had recovered his bloodstained clothes and also found the mobile phone of the victim in his possession. He used to live with his family in Sant Ravi Dass Camp and was also pursuing graduation through correspondence when he committed the crime.

PAWAN GUPTA



He was a fruit vendor and lived with his family. Pawan was 19 at the time of the incident and his father claimed he was not complicit in the crime but was being framed. His father had filed a criminal case against the victim's friend. Pawan raped the woman and assaulted her friend.

MUKESH SINGH



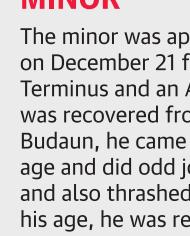
Mukesh is Ram Singh's younger brother. He worked as a cleaner in the bus in which the incident took place. He was driving the bus on the night of the incident. He hit the woman and her friend using an iron rod. Mukesh was apprehended from Karoli village in Rajasthan and the mobile phone of the victim's friend was recovered from him. He was then brought to Delhi and arrested.

AKSHAY SINGH



Akshay is a school dropout and worked as a cleaner in the bus. He is married and also has a son. He had fled to his hometown in Aurangabad from where the police recovered his bloodstained clothes. Bite marks of Akshay and Ram Singh were found on the victim's body.

MINOR



The minor was apprehended by police on December 21 from Inter-State Bus Terminus and an ATM card of the victim was recovered from him. A native of Budaur, he came to the Capital at an early age and did odd jobs. He raped the victim and also thrashed the friend. Because of his age, he was released after completing his term set by the Juvenile Justice Board in December 2015.

Timings
DELHI

MONDAY, MAR. 16
RISE 06:30 SET 18:30
RISE 00:46 SET 11:27
TUESDAY, MAR. 17
RISE 06:29 SET 18:31
RISE 01:46 SET 12:18
WEDNESDAY, MAR. 18
RISE 06:27 SET 18:32
RISE 02:40 SET 13:13

Delhi Weather max min
Delhi City 26 12
Safdarjung 26 12
Palam 26 12

Delhi Pilm Today
27°C Fog/mist is likely in the morning. A warm afternoon is likely with a partly cloudy sky.

Delhi Pilm Tomorrow
28°C Mist/haze is likely in the morning. A warm and sunny day is expected with moderate winds.

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Man declared dead after his flight lands

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AMRITSAR

A 41-year-old Punjab native, returning to Amritsar from Malaysia, was declared dead after his flight landed here, officials said on Sunday.

Hukam Singh's flight reached here late Saturday night. Singh belonged to Gande village of Gurdaspur district.

Amritsar's Civil Surgeon Pardeep Kaur Johal said Singh's body has been kept in the government hospital here.

It will be handed over to his family after postmortem, she said.

Dr. Johal said immediately after landing of the flight, the passenger was shifted to a hospital near the airport, where doctors declared him "brought dead".

According to the family of the deceased, during flight Singh is believed to have suffered a sudden chest pain.

Immediately after landing, the family members shifted him to a private hospital where Singh was declared "brought dead".

Distress sale of mustard in Haryana as govt. yet to start procurement

Farmers can't afford to wait for long since they have no storage facility, have loans to repay and many other expenses to meet'

ASHOK KUMAR
NUH

In urgent need of money to pay for Haj, Abdur Razzaq, a resident of Murad Bas village in Nuh, sold off his mustard crop to a commission agent at the new grain market here for a price far lower than the minimum support price as the Haryana government is yet to begin the procurement process.

Accompanied by his farmer sons and two grandsons, Abdur, on Friday sold off around 26 quintal of mustard from his two acre land at ₹3,150 per quintal – much lower than the ₹4,425 per quintal MSP fixed by the Haryana government for the crop this year. Abdur said he suffered a loss of around ₹26,000 but had little choice as the government was yet to announce even the schedule for procurement.

"I had to pay ₹2.40 lakh for Haj today (Friday). So I could not wait even for a single day," said Abdur, sporting a white flowing beard.

Kisan Credit Card

Javed said he did not know the procedure to procure the Kisan Credit Card. "I have heard about the Kisan Credit Card, but do not know how to procure it," he said.

Bustan, an elderly farmer from Salaheri village, too sold off his mustard from over an acre of land – around six quintals – at a price almost ₹1,000 per quintal lesser than the MSP. "Farmers



Labourers sitting idle at the new grain mandi in Nuh due to delayed arrival of mustard. ■ ASHOK KUMAR

with small land holdings cannot afford to wait for the government to start the procurement. Most of them sell off their crop soon after harvesting. It is only the big farmers who avail of the government's procurement policy," chipped in Aas Mohammad, another farmer.

He added that almost half the farmers in Nuh district who produce mustard sell off their produce by mid-March every year while the procurement starts only in April. He said the farmers could not afford to wait for the government to start the procurement as they had no

storage facility, had loans to repay and many other expenses to meet. Also, the government agencies had procured mustard at only two of the four mandis – Tauru and Punhana – last year and not at Nuh. "We don't even know when the government would start the procurement process and whether it would buy mustard at Nuh or not," said Aas Mohammad.

Besides, the commission agents make immediate payment while the payment from the government takes weeks. This too discourages farmers from selling their produce to government agencies.

Sitting in a huddle with other commission agents sipping tea, Laxman Kumar, 62, himself a commission agent, lamented that business was slow this year and the mandi, usually abuzz with activity during this time of the year, wore a deserted look. "The commission agents

are too busy to find time even for meals during this time of the year, but now they are sitting idle. It is partially because the unexpected rain has delayed the arrival of mustard, and also because mustard production is less this time round. The farmers, helped by better irrigation facilities, have shifted to wheat," said Laxman.

The agents said starting the procurement process early could be of little help this time round as the mustard arriving in the mandi had 20-25% moisture while the government bought it only at 7-8% moisture.

Few takers for scheme

As per the policy, the Haryana government procures the crop of only those farmers who have got themselves registered under the "Meri Faal Mera Byora" scheme, but only 8,203 farmers in Nuh district with a total area of 40,220 acres have registered

War on drugs



A policeman destroying illegal opium plants in Khunti district of Jharkhand on Sunday. ■ PTI

'People with vested interests playing into the hands of rival parties'

BSP supremo Mayawati's veiled attack on Bhim Army chief

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LUCKNOW

In a veiled attack on Bhim Army chief Chandrashekhar Azad, BSP supremo Mayawati on Sunday said people with vested interests are playing into the hands of rival political parties and claimed they have nothing to do with B.R. Ambedkar and his movement.

"Even now, people with vested interests are playing into the hands of rival political parties. They have nothing to do with Babasaheb Ambedkar and his movement. Nor they have anything to do with Manyavar Kanshi Ram's sacrifice and

austerity," Ms. Mayawati said without naming the Bhim Army chief.

"The truth is that these people are only using their (Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram) names to realise their vested interests," she said in a statement issued by the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) central office in New Delhi.

Ms. Mayawati's statement assumes significance as it comes on the birth anniversary of BSP founder Kanshi Ram and amid reports of Mr. Azad floating a new political party.

Sharpening her attack, she said, "Kanshi Ram had written a book 'Chamcha

Divide and rule'

Ms. Mayawati also said, "Formation of new parties or organisations will not benefit these people, but it will lead to success the policy of divide and rule of the casteist parties and people opposing these sections, thereby making these people helpless, and then they will never be able to stand on their feet."

Industry fights virus with 'precaution, education, counselling'

Garments, automotive sectors in Gurugram adopt measures to contain spread of virus among workforce

ASHOK KUMAR
GURUGRAM

Although schools, colleges and universities in Gurugram have been shut down and corporate companies, such as IT firms, have allowed their employees to work from home in view of the COVID-19 scare, hundreds of garments and automotive units across the city are at a disadvantage as their workforce live in unhygienic conditions and do not have the luxury of staying back at home.

These units are trying to fight the deadly virus with a three-pronged strategy – "precaution, education and counselling". CEO of Neetee Apparel LLP Animesh Saxena said a

majority of their staff are staying in unhygienic conditions around the industrial area and their biggest fear is that any rumour can lead to a mass exodus as most of the workers are migrants from Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh.

Group talk

Mr. Saxena said in a bid to address this concern, 25 garment exporters came together and formed a WhatsApp group to share the best practices in the industry and the information related to the coronavirus. "This also helped us negotiate the prices to buy sanitisers and masks in bulk for the workers," said Mr. Saxena, adding that counselling sessions on

personal hygiene are being conducted daily.

Mr. Saxena said all the workers are screened for fever before entering the premises, made to wear masks and told to frequently wash their hands. "The factory floors are disinfected in the morning and the supervisors have been asked to inform us about any worker showing flu symptoms. The masks are collected after duty hours and washed every day to be used the next day. It is a huge task and has added to our financial burden," said Mr. Saxena, who employs around 700 people at his garment manufacturing unit in Udyog Vihar Phase-I.

Manesar Industries Welfare Association vice-presi-

dent Manmohan Gaid said they have issued an advisory to the members to sensitise employees about the spread of coronavirus. "We have advised the members to keep sanitisers at the reception desk from tomorrow. It was not possible earlier since sanitisers were in short supply," said Mr. Gaid. He said that employees are allowed leave in case of illness or any ailing family member. "Though our workforce are not well-educated, they are aware because of social and mainstream media. But they have a casual approach towards hygiene," he claimed.

Maruti Suzuki India Limited, with its facilities in Gurugram and Manesar, has introduced a host of measures,

Wheat harvesting to be delayed in Punjab, Haryana

Inclement weather takes a toll; farmers, facing financial losses, a worried lot in both the States

VIKAS VASUDEVA
CHANDIGARH

The recent rain could delay harvesting of the standing wheat crop by at least a week in Punjab and Haryana, an agriculture expert and farmers said on Sunday.

Standing crop in the two States had been hit by heavy rain, wind and hailstorm in the past few days, after which both the State governments had ordered "girdwari" (revenue survey) to assess crops damage.

Most parts of Punjab and Haryana experienced widespread rain with gusty winds in the past week, according to the Meteorological Department. Another forecast of



Farmers show damaged wheat plants after the recent rain and hailstorm, near Amritsar in Punjab. ■ FILE PHOTO:PTI

winds have flattened the crop. At least 50% of my crop is damaged. Even if clear weather prevails now it will be difficult to recover the losses," he said.

Wheat, the main rabi (winter) crop is sown between late October till December while the harvesting of the crop usually starts from April onwards. The wheat procurement season in Punjab and Haryana usually begins on April 1.

P.S. Rangi, an agriculture expert and former Punjab State Farmers Commission adviser told *The Hindu* that the unseasonal rain has damaged the wheat crop not just in Punjab and Haryana but al-

so in western Uttar Pradesh. "The crop, which has flattened in fields, will be difficult to harvest.. even when it is harvested, mostly manually, the yield will certainly drop. Also water logging at this time will damage the crop. The inclement weather has caused extensive damage to the wheat crop in many parts, and if it rains in coming days then definitely it could be a cause of worry for farmers," he said.

Unfavourable condition
Mr. Rangi said that the harvesting of wheat is likely to be delayed by at least a week on account of unfavourable weather conditions.

3 held in connection with headless body of woman found in Bahraich

In-laws killed her so that their son could remarry: police

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BAHRAICH (U.P.)

Three persons, including the father-in-law and brother-in-law, have been arrested in connection with the headless body of a woman that was found in Argharha village here on March 9, police said on Sunday.

Bahraich Superintendent of Police Vipin Mishra said, "Five persons including the husband of the deceased were made accused in the case. Of the five, three have been arrested on Saturday. Riyaz, the husband of the deceased, is living in Saudi Arabia for the past three years. The deceased was later identified as Hasreen."

The SP informed that Hasreen was not on talking terms with her husband and in-laws and was living at her father's place.

Unwilling for divorce'
"Riyaz was planning for a second marriage but Hasreen was not willing to divorce her. To get rid of Hasreen, Riyaz plotted a conspiracy from the foreign country with his father, mother and brothers to kill her. Riyaz sent his brother Meraj from Mumbai to Bahraich and convinced Hasreen to return to her in-laws place," Mr. Mishra said.

On the way to her in-laws place, Hasreen's father-in-law Sadiq Ali and Sadiq's nephew Nanhe murdered her in Argharha village. To hide the identity of the deceased, her head was cut off and thrown in Saryu Canal, the SP said.

Sadiq, Nanhe and Meraj have been arrested while efforts are on to arrest Saira (mother-in-law of the deceased) and her husband Riyaz, the SP added.

Police demand for murder, rape accused

SYED SAJAD ALI
AGARTALA

A local court here on Sunday sent the main accused in the murder-cum-rape of a 22-year-old girl at Mohanpur area to police custody for seven days. The girl was allegedly set ablaze by the accused in the early hours of Friday.

Mohanpur is the home constituency of State's most senior Minister Ratan Lal Nath. Mr. Nath visited the victim's residence and met her family members. He denied any laxity on the part of police in carrying out investigation.

"The government will not spare anyone involved in the incident. Strict legal action would be taken against the guilty," Mr. Nath said. The police launched investigation after the victim's father lodged a complaint and arrested the main accused.

Assam shuts schools, malls, gyms

Two Kerala-return men in isolation for suspected COVID-19 infection

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

All exams except those of CBSE and SEBA (State Board) have been postponed

KUMAR SANJAY KRISHNA
Chief Secretary

The Assam government on Sunday shut down all educational institutes, cinema halls, multiplexes, gyms and swimming pools besides suspending school annual exams "with immediate effect" up to March 29 to prevent the possibility of the outbreak of COVID-19.

In some districts such as Sivasagar, the authorities have banned all functions, including spiritual gatherings and periodic convergence at *namghars*, Vaishnavaite prayer halls.

Mr. Krishna said 10,605 people have been surveyed so far, while 599 others who came in contact with COVID-19 patients were identified and kept under home surveillance. The samples of five symptomatic cases among them were found to be negative.

Those under home surveillance include a doctor couple in western Assam's

Barpeta who returned from Saudi Arabia a few days ago. Officials in Guwahati also made one person who returned after a tour of Italy, Germany and France on March 1, check into the isolation ward of a government-run hospital. The man was complaining of fever, cough, diarrhoea and body ache since March 6.

A resident of Sootea in northern Assam, suspected of being infected with COVID-19, was on Sunday morning shifted to the Tezpur Medical College and Hospital. The man had complained of respiratory problems and fever after returning from Kerala on Saturday.

He had been admitted at a government-run hospital in Biswanath district east of Tezpur soon after reaching home. "He is under observation. We are not in a position to update his health status now," a doctor said.

Another Kerala-return man from Raha in central Assam's Nagaon was admitted to the Guwahati Medical College and Hospital on suspicion of being infected with the coronavirus. The man had allegedly escaped from the Guwahati railway station, about 100 km west, without any proper health check-up.

Switzerland couple

On Saturday, a couple from Switzerland put western Assam's Dhubri town on the edge as people suspected them to be infected with the virus.

Locals almost came to blows with the priests of Joganmaya Temple, on the banks of river Brahmaputra, for letting out a room to them in an adjoining ashram.

"We managed to rescue the couple and had them checked by a medical team," a Dhubri district police officer said.

3 held after Class VI boy found hanging in Arunachal school

He was reported to be missing after a fight among students

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

The police in Arunachal Pradesh's Papum Pare district on Sunday arrested three employees of a school after a Class VI student was found dead. Two minors were also detained.

The incident happened at the Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya (VVK) in the Sher area near Kimin town on Friday evening.

"The autopsy report said the boy died of asphyxia. A case was registered against the three employees for abetting suicide," the district's Superintendent of Police Jimmy Chiram told *The Hindu* from district headquarters Yopia.

He said three employees of the school were arrested and two boys detained for production in a local court and Juvenile Justice Board respectively.

The case against the employees was under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code, and the minor boys under Section 75 of the Juvenile Justice Act (punishment for cruelty to child).

According to the police inquiry report, the boy was missing after a fight among a group of students at the end of the school's games and sports period. Two students found him dead almost two hours later in the bathroom of the hostel.

Probe demanded

The district's Child Welfare Committee (CWC) has demanded an impartial probe into the incident. CWC members from Yupia and State capital Itanagar visited the school on Saturday and recorded the statements of the teachers, students and others

besides asking the school authorities to install CCTV cameras.

The VKV in Sher was in the news in 2019 after some students of lower classes were allegedly sodomised by their seniors. The same year, the school authorities had also rusticated 60 students of Classes XI and X for vandalising school and hostel property.

Kani Nada Maling, general secretary of the Arunachal Pradesh Women's Welfare Society, also visited the school. She said most of the students were found to be too scared to report any wrongdoing.

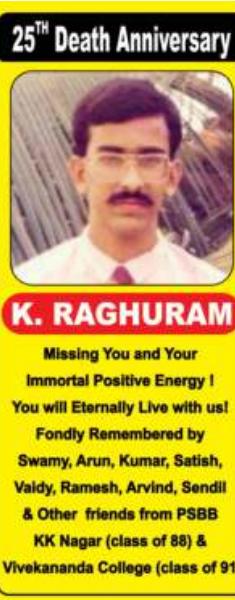
(Helpline for children in Papum Pare district/Itanagar: 996317777; those who require assistance for overcoming suicidal thoughts may see Suicide prevention helplines.)

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH

DR. T.V. Rajan, Retd. Professor MNIT Jaipur & IIT Roorkee, S/o Sri R. Thiruvenkatachari, IA & IAS, Retd., attained Acharya, Thiruvananthapuram on 14th March 2020. Contacts : 044-24985819 / 900104999 / 9962577998

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COVID-19: Odisha cancels annual Chaitra Jatra festival

Tara Tarini Development Board has decided not to allow any gathering or mass feast at the foothill

STAFF REPORTER BERHAMPUR

The famous annual Chaitra Jatra festival scheduled to be held on March 17 at Odisha's Tara Tarini hill shrine was cancelled as a precautionary measure against COVID-19 infection.

The administration and the Tara Tarini Development Board (TTDB) at a meeting held at Chhatrapur on Sunday decided to abide by the instructions of the government after COVID-19 was de-

clared a pandemic.

According to TTDB, more than 1.5 lakh visitors were to arrive for the festival. Of these, around 50,000 were expected to reach the hill top to offer prayers to the deity, while the rest would have enjoyed the festival at the foothill.

The administration withdrew all public services that were to be provided for the jatra. It has been decided to not allow any congregation at the foothill from March 16.

No mass feast will also be allowed. Purishottampur Block Development Officer (BDO) and tehsildar have been instructed to monitor the same.

The free bus service from the foothill to the hill top has been cancelled. The makeshift bus stand and parking facility near the shrine have been withdrawn. The administration has decided to stop the 'mundan' facility to dissuade visitors.

"All servitors of the temple have been asked to inform devotees and to persuade them to cancel their trips," said the TTDB secretary. A medical team will be present at the temple to screen the small number of persons who may arrive.

'Keep safe distance'

The devotees will be advised to keep a safe distance from among each other and their hands will be sanitised. Persons with cold and cough will not be allowed to enter the temple premises.

TTDB has also decided to make all servitors wear masks. They have been advised to wash their hands regularly and avoid touching the offerings by devotees.

The rituals will continue inside the temple which will be decorated as per plans. All the proposed cultural programmes have been cancelled.

This festival is celebrated at Tara Tarini hill shrine on Tuesdays of the Hindu month of Chaitra. The largest gatherings occur on second and third Tuesdays. March 17 happens to be second Tuesday.

Tara Tarini hill shrine, located at Kumari hill on banks of the Rushikulya river, is a major centre of Shakti worship in Odisha.

Indian Navy's sailboat INSV Tarini was named after Tara Tarini hill shrine. The first Indian all-woman crew had circumnavigated the globe in INSV Tarini.

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Museums shut to curb COVID-19 spread

Cinema halls across State to be closed as well; govt. may impose in Section 144 to prevent crowds

TANVI DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government on Sunday ordered museums to be shut and expanded the closure of cinema halls across the State. The government may also impose Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code will be at public places, if required, to prevent crowding.

The capacity of the quarantine facilities at Seven Hills Hospital and Kasturba Hospital in Mumbai will be increased. Apart from Kasturba and KEM hospitals, COVID-19 tests will also be conducted at JJ Hospital, Haffkine Institute and Pune's BJ Medical College in near future. Health Minister Rajesh Tope said on Sunday.

By Sunday, the number of positive novel coronavirus patients in Maharashtra had reached 33. Mr. Tope, addressing a press conference, said the State has so far screened 1.81 lakh passengers arriving on 1,584 flights at various airports.

Of the 758 samples tested for the infection, 669 were found to be negative, 33 tested positive, while the results of the rest are awaited.

Mr. Tope said, "All patients are stable, nobody is severe or critical." The Health Minister said a majority of the positive patients



Taking stock: Health Minister Rajesh Tope visits Kasturba Hospital on Sunday. ■ EMMANUEL YOGINI

have a history of foreign travel, and for the rest, the authorities have established the point of contact.

MPSC exams

Apart from shutting museums and film theatres, the government will also request the Maharashtra Public Service Commission (MPSC) to postpone its upcoming exams, he said. Tourism Minister Aditya Thackeray had tweeted that the State has postponed all MPSC exams until March 31.

The minister said that since the government has invoked the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, commissioners and district collectors are authorised to take up measures such as directing any hospital – private or public – to set up a quarantine facility, force those who do not isolate to do so, take action against anyone hindering this, and shut down an entire area to ensure social distancing.

Boosting capacity

Seven Hills Hospital, which has been turned into a quarantine facility with a capacity of 400 beds, will undergo some repairs so that additional beds can be added to

expand the capacity to 1,000. Kasturba Hospital has an isolation capacity of 80 beds, which will be increased to 125. At present, all 80 beds are occupied.

The State has set aside 450 ventilators for COVID-19 patients.

Besides, the lab at Kasturba Hospital, which can test 250 samples per day, will be boosted to test another 100 samples per day. From Wednesday, the civic-run KEM Hospital will also get a testing lab with a capacity of 250 samples per day. In the next 20 days, JJ Hospital and Haffkine Institute in Mumbai and

BJ Medical College in Pune will also get testing facilities.

In the future, the State will set up labs in Miraj, Solapur, Dhule and Aurangabad, which will be affiliated to the National Institute of Virology, Pune, and reduce burden on it. "Since those quarantined have to stay isolated, we are providing them with television, Wi-Fi and newspapers," Mr. Tope said.

Preventing crowds

When it was pointed out that people are using time off work to visit beaches and open spaces, the Health Minister said the police have been instructed to impose Section 144 wherever there are crowds. "The lockdown in Wuhan helped slow down of the virus. We will take whatever measures required," he said.

He also said that the traffic police will be instructed to stop using breathalyzers on motorists.

When asked about random sampling of people for the novel coronavirus, Mr. Tope said the State will follow the Centre's protocol in such cases.

In light of isolated patients running away from an Ahmednagar hospital, he said security, including police bandobast, will be increased.

Sample of man who died in quarantine tests negative

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BULDHANA

The sample of a 71-year-old man who died on Saturday, while under quarantine in Buldhana for suspected exposure to the novel coronavirus, has returned negative, a health official said on Sunday.

It was feared earlier that the septuagenarian may have been the first victim of COVID-19 in the State, which has reported 33 confirmed cases as on Sunday.

The man, with a history of diabetes and high blood pressure, had returned from the UAE a few days ago, an official said.

"He was admitted to Buldhana general hospital, where he died on Saturday. His sample, which was sent to Nagpur for testing, has returned negative," civil surgeon Premchand Pandit said.

There have been no deaths due to the virus in Maharashtra so far.

PM talks to Uddhav

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday to discuss the State's preparedness to tackle the outbreak.

The telephonic conversation, which took place at 11 p.m., was centred on the efforts by the State and the Centre to tackle the situation. Mr. Thackeray informed the PM about the measures taken by his government, sources said.

4 cases without travel history worrisome'

Four patients in Pimpri-Chinchwad contracted infection from relatives

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
PUNE

The man from Pimpri-Chinchwad who tested positive for COVID-19 on Sunday is the sixth positive case in the township within a 24-hour span. Three women and two men had tested positive for the infection on Saturday.

The six people are among the nine people to test positive thus far in the Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation limits. Besides, seven people have tested positive in the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) limits so far.

The man who was found to be infected on Sunday has a travel history to Japan. Pune Divisional Commissioner Dr. Deepak Mhaisekar said her swab sample was sent for testing on March 14.

Dr. Mhaisekar said "it is worrisome" that four of the five Pimpri-Chinchwad patients from Saturday had no history of foreign travel and had contracted the infection from their relatives who had travelled abroad.

The fifth patient had gone to Thailand with 93 others, and the authorities were tracking the other members of the group.

Urging people not to step out of their homes needlessly, Dr. Mhaisekar said the district administration was mulling over imposing Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code in certain places in the city to discourage assembly.

He said that at present, 57 patients are in isolation at Naidu Infectious Disease



Taking precautions: Residents are wary of stepping out without protective masks and face coverings, at a market in Pimpri-Chinchwad on Sunday. ■ JIGNESH MISTRY

Hospital. "Till date, we have sent 315 samples to the National Institute of Virology for testing. We have thus far received the reports of 294 samples, of which 16 have tested positive while the remaining have tested negative. The results of 21 samples are awaited," he said.

He added that 16 patients have been discharged so far.

Urging people to avoid travel, mass gatherings and social engagements, Dr. Mhaisekar said that after the order to shut malls on Saturday, open parks in the city would also be closed.

"We are adopting a two-prong strategy to check the spread of the virus. One, of course, is to strictly enforce home isolation, and the second to try and prevent mass gatherings in public places. Since [Saturday], we have al-

ready closed down malls. However, I want to make it clear that medicine shops and groceries located in malls will remain open," he said.

He said institutes cannot force students to evacuate hostels until they had appeared for their examinations.

Pune District Collector Naval Kishore Ram said there had been complaints of residents in housing societies harassing people who had been asked to self-quarantine. "Henceforth, anyone attempting to give trouble to any foreign-return individuals who have been asked to quarantine themselves, or complaining about them will face stern action from the district administration," Mr. Ram warned.

5 booked for holding yatra

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI

Five people have been booked in Satara for violating rules in place to tackle the coronavirus outbreak by organising a religious event on March 13, in which over 5,000 people participated, the police said on Sunday. The five are members of the Bawdhan Yatra Sanyojan Samiti that organises the Bawdhan Yatra in Wai.

COVID-19: as poultry farmers' losses mount, leaders seek proactive intervention from govt.

AIKS, SSS seek subsidy to help farmers tide over crisis, urge State to intensify efforts to dispel misconceptions linking meat consumption to novel coronavirus



Badly hit: A worker carries live chicken at a poultry farm in Sindhudurg district on Sunday. ■ PTI

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
PUNE

As losses facing Maharashtra's poultry farmers keep mounting, farmers' leaders in the State have urged for proactive action from the government to dispel rumours linking COVID-19 to poultry.

Estimating that the poultry industry's losses had well exceeded ₹500 crore in a matter of weeks, farmers' leaders like Dr. Ajit Nawale of the All Indian Kisan Sabha (AIKS) and Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana (SSS) chief Raju Shetti have urged that the government announce some subsidy to poultry farmers to help them tide over the current crisis.

"Thanks to the widely spread misconception that chickens are the wellspring of the novel coronavirus, poultry prices have plummeted to a startling low of ₹5 to ₹10 per kg. Chicken farmers in Maharashtra and neighbouring States like Karnataka find themselves in the grip of a grave crisis," Dr. Nawale told *The Hindu*.

Given that the estimated input cost in raising a live chicken weighing 1 kg is ₹75, while a 3 kg chicken costs the farmer ₹215, he urged the State government to actively consider waiving the input cost of poultry farmers to help them surmount this rough patch.

Communication key to cope with challenges of isolation

Experts say social distancing, quarantine can cause anxiety

TAKING A TOLL

The period of social distancing, quarantine, isolation can lead to:

- Fear and anxiety**: You may feel anxious or worried about yourself or your family members contracting COVID-19 or spreading it to others.
- Depression and boredom**: A hiatus from work and other meaningful activities interrupts your daily routine and may result in feelings of sadness or low mood.
- Anger, frustration or irritability**: The loss of agency and personal freedom associated with isolation and quarantine can often feel frustrating.
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle**: Get enough sleep, eat well and exercise at home when you are physically capable of doing so.
- Stigmatisation**: If you are sick or have been exposed to someone who has COVID-19, you may feel stigmatised by others who fear they will contract the illness if they interact with you.
- Use psychological strategies to manage stress and stay positive**: Try not to catastrophise; focus on what you can do and accept the things you can't change. Keep a gratitude journal or use apps for mindfulness, relaxation exercises.

How to tackle this?

- Limit news consumption to reliable sources**: Balance your time spent on news and social media.
- Create and follow a daily routine**: Try to include regular daily activities, such as work, exercise or learning, even if they must be executed remotely.
- Integrate other healthy pastimes as needed**: Use phone calls, text messages, video chat and social media to access social support networks.
- Stay virtually connected with others**: Use these to discuss your experience and emotions.

(SOURCE: AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION)

JYOTI SHELAR
MUMBAI

The novel coronavirus has brought along with it a unique challenge for people – that of social distancing and being quarantined at home or at medical facilities. Experts say that the initial reaction to such measures can cause immense anxiety, but accurate communication can bring relief.

There have been many reports over the past few days of people escaping from isolation facilities or refusing to remain under home quarantine for the prescribed period of 14 days. On Saturday, three people suspected of exposure to the virus escaped from an isolation facility in Ahmednagar and were later brought back by the police.

"People have to understand that isolation is not just for them, but for the safety of their loved ones and society at large. The correct message and communication can help," said Lucknow-based psychiatrist Dr. P.K. Dalal, who is the president of the Indian Psychiatric Society.

Bengaluru-based psychiatrist Dr. Ajit Bhide agreed.

"Isolation leads to sensory as well as social deprivation, but people have to be convinced about why it is needed. If we educate people well about the need, the process can be a lot easier," Dr. Bhide said.

SITUATION IN MUMBAI

More than 700 people are currently under home quarantine in the city

98 people, including nine positive patients, are in isolation at Kasturba Hospital

10 travellers have been quarantined at Marol's Seven Hills Hospital

A recent *Lancet* review that looked at the psychological impact of quarantine and ways to reduce it said that "depriving people of their liberty for the wider public good is often contentious and needs to be handled carefully". The authors of the review stress that if

quarantine is essential, then officials should take every measure to ensure that this experience is as tolerable as possible for people.

"This can be achieved by telling people what is happening and why, explaining how long it will continue, providing meaningful activities for them to do while in quarantine, providing clear communication, ensuring basic supplies (such as food, water, and medical supplies) are available, and reinforcing the sense of altruism that people should, rightly, be feeling," the review said.

BMC's health officer, Dr. Daksha Shah, said that when advised home quarantine, people should remain confined in well-ventilated rooms and avoid direct contact with family members, especially those from high-risk groups like senior citizens, pregnant women and those with underlying ailments.

"We found that some people who were in home quarantine had invited their relatives at home. By doing this, the person may infect many others if he or she is later found positive," said Dr. Shah.

emphasised the need for the government to intensify its efforts at the district and taluka levels by conducting sustained awareness campaigns to dispel misleading rumours linking poultry to the coronavirus.

Mr. Shetti said poultry farmers should be given assistance to the tune of ₹50 per chicken as they face the very real threat of being run out of business if the harmful trend continues.

Dr. Nawale said the AIKS will hold a meeting of poultry farmers in Aurangabad district on Monday to review the situation and present their demands before the government.

Book on Vivekananda launched

Swami Gautamananda lauds The Hindu Group for the initiative

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI
Sri Ramakrishna Math president Swami Gautamananda on Sunday launched a book, *The Monk who took India to the World*, on Swami Vivekananda brought out by The Hindu Group of Publications.

Speaking on the occasion, he said the first biography on Swami Vivekananda was brought out in 1933 after which more and more materials have been brought out by various persons, including Mary Louis and Prof. Shankar Prasad Basu.

"I am glad that The Hindu Group has brought out this book. I feel anybody associated with Swami Vivekananda and his message is doing great national and international work," Swami Gautamananda said. He also hoped that The Hindu Group would bring out similar books on Swami Ramakrishna and Mother Sarada Devi.

N. Ravi, Publisher, The Hindu Group, said that more than a century has gone – 117 years to be exact – since the passing of Swami Vivekanan-



Swami Gautamananda Maharaj, president, Ramakrishna Math, launching the book 'The Monk who took India to the World' in Mylapore on Sunday. N. Ravi, Publisher, The Hindu Group, and Swami Vimurtananda are present. ■ M. KARUNAKARAN

da, yet his message of oneness of religions, tolerance and concern for the common people remain as relevant today as during his time.

During the period when Swami Vivekananda strode on the Indian nationalist stage, *The Hindu* reported extensively on his travels, lectures and his call to the people on what Swami Gautamanandaji describes in his

message published in the book as "man making" and "nation building," he said.

Malini Parthasarathy, Co-Chair, The Hindu Group, said in the foreword, "One of India's greatest leaders and a timelessly stellar example of Hinduism's fundamentally universalist essence is Swami Vivekananda whose rich life continues to fire our imaginations and uplift our collective consciousness."

Transcripts of his addresses at the Parliament of Religions including the famous opening address that began with the words, "Sisters and brothers of America" are included in the volume priced at ₹399.

There is an interview done on February 6, 1897 with a correspondent on the train from Chingleput to Madras on religion and ritual in daily life. The book touches upon the life and travels of Swami Vivekananda, his erudition, his essential message of the universal acceptance of all religions, compassion, call for service to the poor and the disadvantaged as reported in *The Hindu*.

Swami Vimurtananda, manager, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai; Swami Dayatmananda, formerly of Vedanta Society, London; K.N. Ramaswamy, director, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Chennai Kendra; and L.V. Navaneeth, CEO, The Hindu Group, were also present.

Copies can be purchased online at <https://publications.thehindugroup.com/bookstore/>

A.P. local body polls postponed by 6 weeks

Decision taken to contain possible spread of SARS-CoV-2

STAFF REPORTER

VIJAYAWADA

The State Election Commission (SEC) has deferred the local body elections in Andhra Pradesh by six weeks due to the threat of COVID-19.

It also decided to continue the process from where it stopped in respect of Zilla Parishad Territorial Constituencies (ZPTC), Mandal Parishad Territorial Constituencies (MPTC) and urban local bodies after six weeks or after the COVID-19 threat recedes, whichever is earlier.

The conduct of elections in two phases for the village panchayats for which notifications were scheduled to be issued on March 15 and March 17 has been kept in place immediately to avoid large public gatherings to contain the possible spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Announcing this at a press

conference here on Sunday, State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar said political parties had requested him at a meeting held on March 6 to postpone the elections due to the outbreak of COVID-19 in several parts of the country, and the

central government had declared the outbreak a "notified disaster" prompting necessary measures by the States.

He also observed that there was a likelihood of the movement of a large number of voters from Telangana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Odisha, which could aggravate the situation.

Citing a Supreme Court judgment, Mr. Kumar said the elections could be postponed for genuine supervening difficulties and exceptional circumstances such as natural disasters or man-made calamities such as rioting or breakdown of law and order, till normalcy was restored.

He said the decision to put the elections on hold had been taken in view of the challenge posed by COVID-19.



Despite order, Karnataka CM attends wedding

BELAGAVI

Despite issuing an order banning mass gatherings, including large-scale weddings, Karnataka CM B.S. Yediyurappa attended the grand wedding celebrations of the daughter of BJP MLC Mahantesh Katavagimath in Belagavi on Sunday. A police officer estimated the crowd at over 3,000. The CM had earlier urged people to scale down such events.

Don't let in foreign nationals, resorts told

IDUKKI

No bookings by foreign nationals will be allowed in Kerala's Munnar till March 31.

Domestic tourists will have to undergo tests to prove that they are COVID-19 negative if they have to be book resorts. The decision follows an escape bid by a COVID-affected U.K. citizen from a Munnar resort, Tea County, which has since been closed.

Tasmac clarifies on demonetised notes

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

The Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (Tasmac) has said it had issued clear instructions to all district managers on November 9, 2016 to desist from accepting demonetised notes. It was responding to the article 'IT Dept shocked by Tasmac's acceptance of banned notes' published in these columns on Sunday.

In a release, Tasmac claimed that the managers, in turn, had communicated

the instructions to liquor shop personnel and that written communications were also sent to bankers asking them not to accept demonetised notes, if any, deposited by shop staff.

Tasmac has also claimed it furnished to the Income Tax department branch wise details of deposits made in demonetised notes and that it had filed a statutory appeal with the Commissioner of I-T (Appeals) challenging an order passed by a Deputy Commissioner.

Tiger found on Kodagu coffee plantation dies

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MYSSURU

might have injured itself, possibly in a territorial fight.

The tiger was aged around 10. "We suspected it was injured. We followed the standard operating procedure for tiger capture. It was tranquilised and was in the process of being shifted to the Mysuru Zoo when it died," said Shivashankar, Deputy Conservator of Forests, Virajpet.

The animal was first sighted by local people who informed the Forest Department in Virajpet.

The tiger was immobile for a long time and there were suspicions that it

A tourist from the United Kingdom, who was under observation for suspected coronavirus infection, and his wife were sent to the isolation ward in the Kalamassery Government Medical College in Kerala on Sunday morning after they were prevented from taking a flight to Dubai from Kochi airport.

The 57-year-old man and his wife were part of a group of tourists. Based on the flow of passengers through the airport facility and cameras installed at the airport lobby and entrance, airport authorities decided to take 19 persons off the Emirates flight. One other passenger

opted not to take the flight to Dubai, airport authorities said. Seventeen persons were placed under observation at the Aluva government hospital.

After a review, it was decided not to shut down airport operations.

Authorities are looking into the circumstances in which the tourist managed to evade Health Department surveillance in Munnar with reports of alleged use of force by a travel agent to get the man out of a hotel.

Tour operators and hotels have been instructed to contact the health and administration departments with regard to bookings of guests in the wake of the incident.



A paramedic interacting with a traveller at the Aluva Government General Hospital on Sunday. ■ PTI

More birds culled in Kerala over avian flu

STAFF REPORTER

MALAPPURAM

Culling of birds was carried out for the second day on Sunday, within a one kilometre radius of Palathinal near Parappanangadi here, where avian flu was detected a few days ago.

In the operation, 899 birds, including chickens, ducks, doves and other exotic pets were killed, adding to the nearly 500 destroyed a day earlier.

The rapid response teams (RRTs) of the State Animal Husbandry Department focused on areas in Parappanangadi municipality and Munniyoor grama panchayat, covering 81 houses with birds in Munniyoor panchayat.

Officials said the culling in Munniyoor had been completed, and they would focus on Tirurangadi municipality on Monday.

Removal of birds will continue in wards one and 39 of Tirurangadi and ward 16 in Parappanangadi. The first phase of culling which lasted three days will conclude on Monday.

Anguished owner

"It is so anguishing for me," said Haris Rahman Kavungal, an ornamental poultry farmer at Parappanangadi, who stayed away from his farm as his 105 ornamental pet birds were culled. Among them were turkeys, costly doves and pigeons, swans and several exotic fowl and ducks. Mr. Rahman had procured these from different places.

Mr. Rahman said it was not the cost of the birds that made him sad, but the emotional attachment that he had with them.

A mop-up search for birds will be conducted on Tuesday. The entire area will be sanitised along with the mopping up.

Godavari calling



Speed thrills: Tourists enjoying a ride on a speed boat operated by the Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation on the Godavari at Rajahmundry on Sunday. ■ S. RAMBABU

As summer sets in, water level comes down in KRS reservoir

Evaporation and dip in inflows cited as reasons

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MANDYA

With the mercury level rising, the water level in the Krishnaraja Sagar (KRS) reservoir in Mandya district of Karnataka is coming down rapidly owing to increase in the evaporation rate and the decrease in inflows.

The storage level of KRS, built across the Cauvery near Srirangapatna, was 110.28 ft., as against the full reservoir level of 124.80 ft., at 6 a.m. on Sunday.

According to Cauvery Neeravarai Nigama Ltd. (CNNL) officials, the dam was receiving just 154 cusecs of water as against the outflow of 708 cusecs.

There was just 20.09 tmcft of water as against the maximum storage capacity of 45.05 tmcft, said the officials. The temperature at the reservoir area was 36 degrees Celsius at 12.30 p.m. The temperature has been hovering between 34 and 36 degrees Celsius in the reservoir area over the last two weeks. The rate of evaporation has been between 150 and 250 cusecs a day, a senior official in the Department of Irrigation said. The KRS had 120.97 ft. of water, slightly nearer the FRL, on January 1 this year.

The KRS reservoir is getting just 154 cusecs of water as against the outflow of 708 cusecs. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The threat perception is so high that the police have

SC approves Kerala slotting projects in orange category

Stringent norms meant to protect environment, says PCB

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has declined to interfere in an appeal filed by the Kerala chapter of the Confederation of Real Estate Developers Association of India (CREDAI) against the National Green Tribunal's rejection of its contention that the inclusion of constructions between 2,000 sq.m and 20,000 sq.m in the 'orange category' by the Kerala State Pollution Control Board was arbitrary.

A Bench, led by Justice Arun Mishra, allowed the CREDAI's Kerala chapter, represented by senior advocate V. Giri, to withdraw the appeal on March 6, 2020. The State Pollution Control Board was represented by

advocates Jogy Scaria and Beena Victor.

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) slotting industrial activities into the red, orange, green and white categories, based on the pollution index, in March 2016. The very next year, the State Pollution Control Board, in pursuance of the CPCB's direction and the report of an expert committee, brought flats, apartments and commercial buildings – spanning over 2,000 sq.m, but less than 20,000 sq.m – under the orange category.

The CREDAI successfully challenged the State Pollution Control Board's circular before the Appellate Authority on the ground that residential constructions did not fall in the category of industry.

The State Pollution Control Board then appealed before the NGT, which set aside the Appellate Authority's decision and held that these stringent conditions were required on account of higher groundwater level and contamination of waterbodies and the groundwater.

The State Pollution Control Board had argued that it was authorised to impose stringent conditions to prevent environmental degradation and pollution. It had said it merely exercised its powers under the directions of the CPCB and the Environment (Protection) Rules. But the circular did not find favour with the Appellate Authority.

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Police on alert on 'Maoist recruitment'

General public asked to report on movement of Naxalites across State borders

S. HARPAL SINGH

ADILABAD

Have the Maoists descended on the erstwhile Adilabad district in Telangana to recruit cadres in a big way? The manner in which the police of the Kumram Bheem Asifabad and the Mancherial districts are making preparations to counter the reported move of the Naxalites indicates it.

Combining operations apart, the police have activated the network of former extremists, who have been designated as special police officers (SPO) in those police stations that look after the inter-State riverine border with Maharashtra. They have also urged the public to inform them of any movement of people that arouse suspicion.

The threat perception is

so high that the police have issued a warning to all officers not to respond to calls on dial 100 emergency service after dusk or move singly. Apparently, such calls could be traps.

According to sources, six or seven teams of Maoists are said to have entered the two districts. The Naxalites are also reported to have entered the thick forest, most of which is now either the core or buffer area of the Kawal Tiger Reserve. The police are combing the forest, an old route that the extremists take to

reach the interiors of Sirikonda mandal, earlier their stronghold.

Experts in Maoist affairs point out that the extremists do not prefer moving in the forests in summer months. "The dry tree cover will not be helpful as camouflage," they said.

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■ M. ND-NDE



Mounting crisis: (1) Passengers wearing masks at the New Delhi railway station in view of the COVID-19 outbreak on Sunday; (2) Medics taking samples of a patient in the isolation ward at Patna Medical College and Hospital; (3) A traffic policeman wearing a mask at the Rajmahal traffic square in Bhubaneswar; and (4) Inmates of the Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Central Jail in Jabalpur making face masks. •PTI, BISWARANJAN ROUT

COVID-19 cases rise to 33 in Maharashtra

One each from Pimpri-Chinchwad, Aurangabad test positive

JYOTI SHELAR
MUMBAI

A 59-year-old woman from Aurangabad with a travel history to Russia and Kazakhstan, and a 31-year-old man from Pimpri-Chinchwad with a travel history to Japan and Dubai tested positive for COVID-19 on Sunday, taking the total cases in Maharashtra to 33. The State has reported the highest number of positive cases in the country so far.

Maharashtra health officials said both the patients were stable. "The patient from Pimpri-Chinchwad had travelled to Japan and Dubai between February 23 and March 3," officials said.

COVID-19

As many as 98 people suspected for the exposure to the novel coronavirus were placed under isolation at various hospitals on Sunday. "Overall since January 18, we have placed more than 758 people in isolation wards. Of the total admissions, 669 laboratory samples were negative and rest of the tests were currently in process," said an official.

Nine cases in Mumbai
In Mumbai, nine positive cases have been reported and a total of 98 people are



Safety measures: Tourists wearing protective masks at the Gateway of India in Mumbai on Sunday. •PTI

admitted to the Kasturba Hospital. "Till date, we have seen over 1,500 people walk into the COVID-19 outpatient department set up at the hospital," said Mumbai's civic health officer Daksha Shah. More than 10,000 households had been visited for creating awareness and tracking people with travel history. "We are currently in the stage two of the epidemic which means we are in the local transmission level. The efforts that we are taking now will ensure that we don't get into the third level which is community transmission," said Dr. Shah. Maharashtra has announced that those who do not follow the 14-day quarantine period will face action as per the COVID-19 Regulations.

Of the 40 people who had

been on the week-long Dubai and Abu Dhabi tour, 13 have tested positive for the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). A Pune couple from this tour group became Maharashtra's index patients on March 9. Mumbai's first cases – a senior citizen couple – were also reported from this group the following day.

PM speaks to Uddhav
Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday to discuss the State's preparedness to tackle the COVID-19 outbreak.

The Mumbai Police invoked Section 144 prohibiting tour operators from conducting any kind of group tours till March 31, an official said.

(With PTI inputs)

INTERVIEW | GAGANDEEP KANG

'Testing is the easiest thing to do'

Early detection will reduce intensive care cases, says community health expert

JACOB KOSHY

Gagandeep Kang, Director of the Translational Health Science and Technology Institute, who has extensive experience in working on community health and played a key role in developing an indigenous rotavirus vaccine, says India should be testing many more persons for symptoms of COVID-19 than it is now.

Is India testing for community transmission as aggressively as it should?

■ No. As a first step, India has been tracing importations (cases with a travel history from abroad). We are now beginning to test for influenza-like illnesses through the influenza surveillance network. We are told that about 150 samples were tested in February by the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) and in the coming week they are going to be doing much of that testing. Singapore went about finding cases and tracking them. Finding contacts and tracing was the best step.

Is it that Indian authorities would like to do much more community testing, but cannot? Or is it part of a larger strategy to wait and gradually ramp up testing?

■ Newspaper reports suggest that the Union Health Ministry says it has done a risk as-



We have several microbiology and accredited testing laboratories... most of them with real-time PCR systems

sessment and the testing strategy in place follows from this assessment. Now what that assessment is, we don't know. We don't know, for instance, if there's a plan that once we reach an 'x' number of positive cases there will be a different approach to testing. We are today at over 100 cases. What we can do is be rational and test as many as we can.

But the fact remains that we have only 63 diagnostic centres...

■ Detection requires a real-time PCR (polymerase chain reaction) tests. We have thousands of real time PCR set ups in the country. [A PCR or polymerase chain reaction test is DNA-based and can quickly confirm presence of the virus] We have several microbiology labs and several accredited medical testing laboratories in the

country. Most of them have real-time PCRs and quality systems in place. In the HINI (swine flu) outbreak of 2009-10, the government called in private labs. It trained them, evaluated them, and said, 'Ok, now go ahead and test.'

Is it a matter of government policy today that private labs aren't allowed to test for coronavirus?

■ Yes. But what is this policy based on – voluntary risk assessment or information on the lack of quality in the private health care system?

This is the first pandemic in a post-WhatsApp world. Information and misinformation travels rapidly. Has the availability of information improved trust, or only whetted panic? Have government communication systems improved?

■ The panic is greater, yes. (compared to HINI). People don't know who to trust and, in such situations, information can almost be dangerous. If you think that gaumutra or gobar (cow urine and cow dung) baths are going to help you, you are going to be falsely confident...

Many countries have learnt that governments have a key role and that they can be proactive. South Korea's initiative of drive-through testing (of people driving up to mobile testing

centres) is remarkably innovative. Imagine, if we could offer the same in India, or like we now administer polio drops, the kind of confidence in the government that would build!

Why don't we do that? Are these diagnostic tests expensive, or too costly to rapidly scale up?

■ Yes. But what is this policy based on – voluntary risk assessment or information on the lack of quality in the private health care system?

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Many countries have learnt that governments have a key role and that they can be proactive. South Korea's initiative of drive-through testing (of people driving up to mobile testing

(Read the full interview at bit.ly/GagandeepInterview)

Primary schools shut in T.N.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami on Sunday announced holiday for kindergarten and class V sections in all schools, besides closure of malls and cinemas in select talukas in 16 border districts in Tamil Nadu till March 31. He appealed to the people to avoid travelling out for the next 15 days and not to have social gatherings in public places. The advisory also appealed to parents to prevent children from playing in groups.

Colleges shut in Gujarat

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
AHMEDABAD

As a precautionary measure, the Gujarat government has decided to shut all schools, colleges and educational institutions, swimming pools and multiplexes for two weeks starting from March 16 in the wake of the growing threat from COVID-19 outbreak. The government has also decided to impose a fine of ₹500 for spitting in public. Earlier, the State had banned conferences, seminars and workshops till March 31.

No blankets in trains: Railways

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

In the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Railways has issued directions to all its zones to withdraw blankets and curtains from AC coaches as they are not washed every day. The railway board has also instructed that the minimum temperature in the coaches be set at 24-25 degrees Celsius.

No trains to Bangladesh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOLKATA

India-Bangladesh passenger train services between Kolkata and cities in the neighbouring country have been suspended from Sunday as a precaution against the spread of COVID-19, on a Union government directive, an Eastern Railway official said. The services of Maitree and Bandhan Express trains will remain suspended from March 15 to April 15 or till further orders, whichever is earlier.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



Forecast for Monday: Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning very likely at isolated places over Assam, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. Scattered rainfall likely over Gangetic West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura.

CITY RAIN MAX MIN CITY RAIN MAX MIN

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	—	34.0	18.0	Kozhikode	—	36.0	25.0
Ahmedabad	—	32.0	17.0	Kurnool	—	38.0	24.0
Aizawl	—	23.0	11.0	Lucknow	—	26.0	17.0
Allahabad	—	22.0	15.0	Madurai	—	37.0	24.0
Bengaluru	—	33.0	20.0	Mangaluru	—	35.0	24.0
Bhopal	—	30.0	13.0	Mumbai	—	35.0	20.0
Bhubaneswar	—	34.0	18.0	Mysuru	—	34.0	21.0
Chandigarh	—	9.0	2.0	New Delhi	37.0	26.0	12.0
Chennai	—	35.0	22.0	Patna	—	29.0	16.0
Coimbatore	—	35.0	23.0	Port Blair	—	33.0	25.0
Dehradoon	8.5	26.0	11.0	Puducherry	—	33.0	24.0
Gangtok	2.3	18.0	9.0	Pune	—	33.0	16.0
Goa	—	33.0	22.0	Raipur	—	30.0	21.0
Guwahati	—	29.0	17.0	Ranchi	—	24.0	15.0
Hubballi	—	36.0	22.0	Shillong	—	19.0	10.0
Hyderabad	—	34.0	21.0	Shimla	11.3	11.0	3.0
Imphal	—	31.0	14.0	Srinagar	—	16.0	2.0
Jaipur	—	26.0	14.0	Thiruvananthapuram	—	34.0	25.0
Kochi	—	33.0	26.0	Tiruchi	—	36.0	24.0
Kohima	—	25.0	12.0	Vijayawada	—	36.0	22.0
Kolkata	—	31.0	20.0	Visakhapatnam	—	33.0	24.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you're breathing

CITIES	SO ₂	NO _x	CO ₂	PM _{2.5}	PM ₁₀	CODE
Ahmedabad	30	39	10	.66	109	■■■■■
Bengaluru	13	18	57	.50	73	■■■■■
Chennai	—	.23	34	.96	—	■■■■■
Delhi	.6	40	18	.106	111	■■■■■
Hyderabad	3...	50	32	.83	100	■■■■■
Kolkata	17	42	57	.32	.50	■■■■■
Lucknow	.5	34	54	.135	—	■■■■■
Mumbai	17	.60	20	.92	.212	■■■■■
Visakhapatnam	.70	27	88	.134	.105	■■■■■

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.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI/JAISALMER

Over 450 Indians evacuated from Iran, Italy

They are quarantined at separate facilities in Delhi and Jaisalmer



Returning home: The 218 Indians brought from Italy have been taken to an ITBP quarantine facility in New Delhi. •PT



Way to go

The Centre must do more to restore normalcy in J&K, and return it to full statehood

The release of five-time Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir Farooq Abdullah on Saturday after seven months in detention is a welcome step that could open fresh political possibilities in the troubled region. The conditions of his release, if any, are not public but it is clear that there were backchannels open between him and the Centre before the release. Taken together with other recent relaxations in J&K that was put under a lockdown last August as the Centre unilaterally ended its special constitutional status, his release could help reopen the public space in the Valley. Coinciding with his release, Prime Minister Modi assured a delegation of the newly formed Apni Party led by former People's Democratic Party (PDP) leader Altaf Bukhari that he would work towards the restoration of statehood for J&K, which was downgraded to a Union Territory as part of last year's restructuring. Mr. Modi also said no demographic changes would be forced in J&K. Earlier, mobile telephony was restored fully and mobile Internet partially. However, restrictions on assembly remain largely in place, and hundreds, including two former Chief Ministers, Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti, still remain in detention. Their staggered release could be the next step towards normalcy.

Mr. Modi's moves have often been characterised by surprise and subterfuge, including on J&K. There could be justification for such secrecy in statecraft, but new beginnings in the Valley will require more openness as there is a considerable trust deficit between its people and New Delhi. The Centre should not try to orchestrate politics but engage with it as it organically evolves. Hard as it is, the Centre must try and undo the damage it did to mainstream parties such as the National Conference and the PDP. It must allow all opinions to be articulated. Coercive measures must be limited to combating violence. It must shun the baseless notion that communities will surrender political autonomy in return for material prosperity. Above all, it must end its perilous propensity to paint the demands for autonomy and separation with the same brush. J&K's instrumental status as a place for demonstrating the strength of the Indian nation in the current government's imagination is not helpful. There is also an evolving international situation that could complicate the situation. With the long-awaited U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan now imminent, Islamist forces in South Asia are feeling triumphant and are using the current communal turmoil in India to paint it as a Hindu theocracy. The Pakistani military establishment will exploit the situation to India's disadvantage. India's approach towards J&K must be people-centric and guided by a resolute commitment to its diversity and religious pluralism.

Needless appeal

HC rap for violating citizens' privacy through banners has had no effect on Yogi's regime

It is regrettable that the Uttar Pradesh government has appealed against the Allahabad High Court order directing the removal of hoardings in Lucknow that displayed details of those who participated in the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. Further, it has approved an ordinance that provides for recovery of compensation from those suspected of involvement in rioting for any damage to property. In a quick and well-reasoned response, the court curbed the administration's gross misuse of power. Even though the Supreme Court's vacation judges were sceptical about the legal basis of the government's action, they referred it to a larger Bench, observing that crucial questions of law were involved. It is difficult to see what arcane legal question has arisen, considering that the High Court's order was on the grounds that the erection of the hoardings lacked statutory backing and that it was a gross violation of citizens' privacy. The Lucknow administration had displayed the photographs, names and addresses of those who, it claimed, owed compensation for the alleged destruction of public property during the protests. There has been no judicial finding that those named were involved in such violence; and there is no law that authorises such public "naming and shaming". It was quite apparent that the government was humiliating the protesters and exposing them to danger from the CAA's supporters and the government.

Once the High Court Bench, headed by Chief Justice Govind Mathur and Justice Ramesh Sinha, took *suo motu* cognisance of the development, the government could not justify its action on any legal ground. All it could do was come up with weak objections to the court acting on its own motion, arguing that those featured in the banners had the capacity to seek legal redress themselves, and also questioning whether the principal seat in Allahabad could take cognisance of developments in Lucknow, which has its own Bench. At a time when the higher judiciary is seen to be passive before a powerful executive, the court's resolve to act on its own against a case of obvious injustice and violation of fundamental rights is quite commendable. Its approach was rooted in the revived privacy rights jurisprudence established by a nine-judge apex court Bench in K.S. Puttaswamy. Applying the tests laid down in that verdict, the top court ruled that there was no necessity for a democratic government to disclose anyone's identity and particulars without a legitimate purpose. And that choosing a small group among hundreds arrested in connection with the violence during the protests for the public display was a "colourable exercise" of power. That the State government went on appeal shows that the judicial order hardly had any chastening effect on the regime that has been displaying unusual stridency in its crackdown on the anti-CAA protests.

When every line in the book is violated

The core values of education are injured by the violence that breaks out among citizens during a riot



KRISHNA KUMAR

After a violent riot, teachers of young children have a difficult time deciding what to say in their classes when children ask awkward questions. Some of these questions arise from the news that children have heard or from the scenes they have seen on television. In some cases, they ask about what they have seen with their own eyes. There are also questions reflecting the children's desire to verify something their parents have told them. It is not difficult to imagine the bewildering array of queries that the recent communal riots in the nation's capital have triggered in the minds of young people. How a teacher can address them is anyone's guess. Although cities such as Mumbai and Delhi and many provincial towns of northern India have considerable experience of living through violent riots, little effort has been made to study the response of children to such occurrences and the dilemma that teachers face when classes resume after a riot.

A violent riot is normally seen as a breakdown of law and order. That it indeed is, implying a weakening of the state's moral authority and people's trust in it. Within a few days, the state re-establishes its authority and state functionaries, such as the police and other officers, start to assume that the damage done to their credibility has been restored. In the context of education, however, the impact of a riot goes much deeper. Although schools are the main provider of education, their routine func-

tioning is hardly an adequate measure of the state's expectation from their role. As an institution of the state, a school – whether privately run or managed directly by the government – enables the young to imbibe the moral principle underlying the state's authority. It is this moral principle that permits the state to exercise power over the lives of citizens. When a riot breaks out, schools are closed, mainly to protect children from aggression and violence. During the Delhi riots, a private school was set on fire and its property looted. Imagine the horror this school would have faced if children were inside it. When a riot has swept past, schools reopen and the resumption of their routine is usually perceived as the return of normalcy.

The real loss

This perception is erroneous because it does not take into account the school's real loss in terms of its own authority to serve and perpetuate the state's morality. Every core value of education is injured by the violence that breaks out among citizens during a riot. It takes years to explain to the young that relations among people and communities are guided by certain values. Even a specific topic such as respect for someone else's property and publicly owned infrastructure takes a long time to teach in a manner that it would make sense to children. All this effort is wasted when children see with their own eyes that people are killing others and burning shops, houses and buses. In the case of Delhi, the damage done to children's learning was greater as it included the incredible realisation that the police did nothing and merely watched when the killing and looting started. The magical significance of the phone number 100 is conveyed to children in



SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

their primary classes. Why didn't the police stop the riot, children want to know.

Then and now

No wonder that teachers feel like Sisyphus when teaching resumes after a riot. Sisyphus was a king depicted in Greek mythology. He was condemned to a life of hard labour which involved routinely destroying its own accomplishment. Sisyphus was supposed to push a huge rock uphill, and when he reached the top, the rock rolled back down, forcing him to start all over again. This image captures the frustration a teacher must face after people are killed or wounded in a riot. In early November of 1984, riots broke out following Indira Gandhi's assassination. Schools remained closed for many days. When they reopened, the government sent a specific instruction to schools, forbidding any discussion of the riots. Teachers faced a dilemma. They knew how deeply many children had been scarred. Not just Sikh children who had seen the brute killing of their own elders, but others too who had witnessed horror or heard about it. They all needed ways to express their disturbed minds and seek some solace from teachers.

Now, 36 years later, the city is back at the same juncture. Teachers feel bewildered as they face the task of explaining to the young

why a part of Delhi burst into flames. Any explanation would necessarily involve telling children why the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 has proved controversial. A teacher attempting to discuss this subject is likely to get into trouble, both within and outside the school. A school in Bidar, Karnataka, recently faced police action for staging a play on the citizenship law. In the charged atmosphere that preceded the riots and still prevails, no critical thinking is likely to be tolerated. Although the official curriculum now proudly claims to promote critical thinking and foundational learning, these terms provide little scope for responding to what is happening in one's own neighbourhood or the country. Like everything else in education, these wonderful sounding terms are now used for promoting hollow formal routines.

The Delhi riots coincided with an official visit of the American President, Donald Trump, to India, beginning February 24. His wife, Melania Trump, was scheduled to witness how a government school transacts a so-called 'happiness' curriculum. It was terribly ironical that she was attending a 'happiness' class in south Delhi while violence and fire raged in the north-eastern part of the city. We can imagine the meaning of the happiness that curriculum designers hope to impart through this innovation. In their design, happiness is another form of cynicism, marking the capacity to stay aloof and unaffected by the fate of fellow human beings.

Sanctity of education

Textbooks, teachers and principals routinely tell children that India's religious diversity is a matter of pride. What, then, accounts for so much hatred, children must wonder. Someone will have to ex-

plain to them why there is such a sharp contradiction between real collective life and what is conveyed to them. Many children know from watching television that Delhi's present political ethos is full of bitterness and anger. Slogans that ask for shooting down dissent have been openly shouted. In such an ethos, the official message conveyed through post-riot parent-teacher meetings that all is well now cannot reduce cynicism. The personal trauma suffered by hundreds and the bewilderment of others who have witnessed the collapse of social order and police responsibility cannot be healed by words and promises alone. Education must deal with the deeper anxieties of the young in order to retain its own sanctity and credibility. The hatred that found open expression for some days in north-east Delhi has put a question mark on the capacity of the system of education to nurture the core values a democratic order demands.

Violent riots knock down the sanctity of public education and people's faith in it as a resource for maintaining basic human values. In a post-conflict phase, officers and teachers must decide what they will tell the young and how. To follow the modern idiom and simply 'move on' (i.e. put the riots behind) is to invite the usual price that unresolved trauma incurs. Its effects go deeper. The temporary social breakdown that riots signify requires a long-term strategy to restore teachers' morale and people's trust in schools. Simply ignoring the damage done to the sanity of young minds is tantamount to letting democracy suffer the loss of intellectual vitality that education alone can provide.

Krishna Kumar is a former Director of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)

Kanshiram's legacy of Dalit empowerment left adrift

In the absence of any credible sourcing of talent within the BSP, other regional units could step in and fill the vacuum



SURAJ YENGEDE

In republican India's history, there is no politician who can match Kanshiram's life story. No one else could have carved a niche for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and the Minorities as much as he did. He came on the Indian political scene without a résumé popping with credentials of legacy, inheritance, wealth, title, surname or party. Irrespective of all these barriers, he sculpted a solid, unremitting, electrifying Bahujan movement in India.

He hailed from an agriculturist Chamar family, but being a Sikhs had no impact on caste exclusions of Dalits in the region. Kanshiram, born on March 15, 1934, was aware of this, yet not to the extent of grasping the nuances of such discrimination. He had naively thought of Brahmins as being a poor and backward community due to their low status in Jaat-dominant Punjab.

In his later life, there was one incident in his diverse working stints that had an impact on him. In 1957, he settled for a job as a research assistant in the Ministry of Defence's Explosives Research and Development Laboratory (also called the High Energy Materials Research Laboratory), in Pune. A colleague, a class IV employee, Dinabhabna from Rajasthani's Bhangi caste, had taken it upon himself to protest the administration's cancellation of holidays for Ambedkar and Buddha Jayanti. As a consequence, he was

fired for raising the issue. He chose to fight it in court. Looking at Dinabhabna's unrelenting struggle, Kanshiram turned towards activism to seek social justice and political freedoms.

Much of Kanshiram's memories are lived through anecdotes and his speeches. A.R. Akela, a foremost scholar of the Bahujan movement, has compiled a series and published them in Hindi.

Political disrupter

It must be noted that Kanshiram did not leave extensive written records or archives barring the classic, *The Chamcha Age* (An Era of the Stooge). Dedicated to Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, *The Chamcha Age* was later to be the founding ground of a party that would be a disrupter in India's casteist political spectrum – the Bahujan Samaj Party. Kanshiram started by wanting to do nothing with the tokenised, genuflecting leadership of Dalit leaders that the Poona Pact between Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar had produced. Such a leadership was willing to be the secondary elements of the dominant Congress party.

Following simmering resentment against the political attitude towards Dalits, Kanshiram gathered middle class government employees who were seeking leadership that had a spine and self-pride. He recruited disgruntled intellectuals and government employees to give wings to the caravan of the Bahujan movement.

In current times, Kanshiram's struggle continues to be more popular and his ideas acceptable to second and third generation Dalits who are unwilling to settle for anything less than what they deserve. Educated and with a confident outlook, he was able to help create a strong sense of accountability to



FILE PHOTOS: SUBRAMANIAM

Dalits are now aiming to give life to Ambedkar's vision – of becoming a part of the ruling class of the country. Through Kanshiram they see a feasible, methodical approach to getting that throne.

Almost every student organisation, social and political outfit subscribes to the legacy of Ambedkar.

The Bhim Army Ekta Mission, for instance, wants to be seen as a part of Kanshiram's Ambedkarite legacy. The Bhim Army's status is complicated on a national scale. Though its flamboyant leader, Chandrashekhar Azad, has an appeal across caste, religion and regional lines, the organisation's social base has still to be firm. Its apolitical work such as preschool training, having an atrocious grievance cell and cultural activism needs to be expanded. There needs to be a multi-organisational strategy.

There are several Bahujan organisations that work towards Dr. Ambedkar's dream of a non-caste India. But the origins of this can be traced back to the BAMCEF, or the All India Backward (SC, ST, and OBC) and Minority Communities Employees Federation.

Along with his colleagues, Kanshiram began one of the largest unions of government employees. Through BAMCEF, he connected SC, ST, OBCs, and other minorities to fight back against atrocities and discrimination. With a structure in place, he was able to help create a strong sense of accountability to

wards the community. Thus, the widely popular initiative 'Pay Back to Society' was inaugurated in 1973. As a part of BAMCEF there were simultaneous initiatives such as the BAMCEF Datta Graham, -Bhaichara, -Sahakarita. In 1981, the Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti (DS-4) with 10 wings (students, women, etc.) was established to experiment with socio-political possibilities. Eventually the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) was formally established in 1984. Kanshiram declared that he wanted the community to become givers rather than receivers. For that to happen it required training and preparation. Cadre camps and various events filled the gap.

Instead of downplaying the importance of caste, Kanshiram opted to strengthen oppressed caste associations which was one way to weaken the structures that sustain caste. Every 'upper' caste had an investment in caste, which is why it transferred this into structures that catered to its needs. Kanshiram invested in the cultures of caste and cultural methods of anti-casteism. He understood well that artists and in turn their art were organic intellectuals who were a part of the grass-roots. He sought them out and trained them. It is no accident that the 'Ambedkar Mela on Wheels' was among the many first Dalit History Month projects that featured Ambedkar's photographs, books, pamphlets and posters.

Kanshiram understood that emotional appeal was a far more powerful way to use radical anger that would help tackle the oppressor. Thus, the artwork and paintings depicting atrocities on the communities played a pivotal role in his outreach initiatives. He had grasped early on that while emotions are essential, a strategy was

needed to direct people's thoughts into producing material.

His deft editorial skills also found expression. The popular *The Oppressed Indian* and the *Bahujan Sanghatak* were his organisation's mouthpieces. There were others that dealt with land reform, nationalisation of industries and a labour welfare regime such as *Aarthik Utthan* (1980) and *Economic Monthly* (1981) in addition to the impressive *Bahujan Times* (1984).

Kanshiram can be said to be the leader who introduced Periyar to villages in north, central, eastern and western India. Like Periyar, there were many unsung heroes who were given space on the canvas of the BSP. They include Nandanar, Iyoothee Thass, Nangeli, Birsa Munda, Savitribai Phule and Jhalkaribai.

Growing void

In hindsight, we are yet to find similar investments by his protégés. There are certainly no intellectual research wings, as was the case earlier, which can provide guidance to the movement. There is no media that can converse with the public on a daily basis on Dalit issues; neither is there any trust-building mechanism.

Finally, moving to the present state of the BSP, it appears that the party leadership lacks a committed young cadre that can be trained to take over the reins of the leadership. Kanshiram's legacy remains alive and kicking in the words of the BSP's chief Mayawati. But in the absence of any credible sourcing of talent, organisations such as the Bhim Army and many BAMCEF-BSP inspired regional parties could step in and fill the vacuum.

Suraj Yengde, the author of *Caste Matters*, is a fellow at Harvard's Kennedy School

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.

Reviving SAARC

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation has been in a frozen state mainly on account of tensions between India and Pakistan. Regional integration is a must for its revival (Page 1, "SAARC virtual meet on COVID-19 today", March 15). Using the coronavirus outbreak as a catalyst, India can once again push for regional cooperation that can lead to better diplomatic relations. As a platform,

SAARC needs to integrate the region better.

RIYA DADHICH,
Raipur, Chhattisgarh

■ While it is heartening that the Prime Minister has taken the lead in initiating a virtual conference, equally encouraging is the response he has received from member nations. There has to be a sharing of actions being taken to contain the pandemic. SAARC, as a regional body, has not been functioning very effectively for quite some time, but the

health crisis should be used to get things back on track.

V. HARIHARAN,
Chennai

blessing for humanity. The irony is that the first reaction to the pandemic has not been a collaboration among nations but a frenzied shutting down of borders to protect citizens of one's own country. COVID-19 offers two immediate lessons. One, the anthropocentric vision's wanton disregard for biodiversity's known and unknown complexities, especially the tampering with wildlife habitats, has hidden costs. Two, no nation however powerful it may be, has no right to treat

epidemics as its internal matter.

The source nation has a moral obligation, if not a legal necessity to disclose facts about the outbreak to the World Health Organization, expeditiously (Page 1, "Virus cases rise, more airlifts planned", March 15).

V.N. MUKUNDARAJAN,
Thiruvananthapuram

Smart Chennai

The gaps in urban planning and ineffective enforcement of Smart City planning on the part of Chennai's CMDA have

been exposed on more than one occasion. Even after the devastating floods in 2015, the CMDA has not made amends. It must follow the models used in Ahmedabad and New Delhi. Without engaging the services of professional planners, the mere announcement of projects will not deliver any result (Chennai, "The tough

Reforming power to serve people

Political parties in India pursue power without adequate transparency and accountability



TRILOCHAN SASTRY

Recent events yet again highlight the need for electoral reforms. The campaign for the Delhi Assembly elections was filled with hate speeches. In Madhya Pradesh, the ruling Congress is battling defections. Last year, in November, in Maharashtra, Devendra Fadnavis took oath as Chief Minister early morning one day only to be replaced within days by Uddhav Thackeray from the Opposition alliance, which consists of parties that are ideologically mismatched. And before that, in Karnataka, defections from the Janata Dal (Secular)-Congress coalition to the BJP brought the government down.

Capturing power

First we need to understand why this is happening. The answer is simple: the primary goal of political parties is to capture power, and they use all the means at their disposal to obtain power. Power brings money, privileges, and control of the treasury. The total budgeted expenditure of the Central government for 2019-20 is ₹27.86 lakh crore. So, the stakes are high.

Political parties in power are supposed to deliver good governance and serve the public, but usually power becomes an end in itself. The fact that more and more freebies are being provided nowadays clearly shows that public funds are being used by those in power to lure voters, and are not necessarily being used for public service.

Let us look at a few important ways in which the power game is played out in India. In Delhi, hate speeches delivered by a few members of a political party did not help that party come to power. But that is not the issue – in another State, in another election, this tactic may work.

There are two factors that strengthen the growing deterioration in the quality of campaigns. One is the rapidly increasing criminalisation of politics. In 2019, the Lok Sabha had 43% MPs with a criminal record, up



"In Madhya Pradesh, the ruling Congress is battling defections." Jyotiraditya Scindia, who moved from the Congress to the BJP, in Bhopal with BJP leaders. • PTI

from about 23% in 2004. Political parties that give tickets to such candidates are directly responsible for this. The other factor is the widespread use of social media to spread fake news during an election campaign. Most of what is online consists of abuse of rivals and vilification of Opposition parties.

Money also fuels much of what we see today. It was money that was responsible for the defections in Karnataka in 2019, and in Madhya Pradesh recently. The practice of whisking away MLAs to distant resorts to prevent them from being lured away by the Opposition is unique to India. Who is elected or which party wins does not seem to matter any longer. In this game, those with money and the ability to engineer defections can always come to power.

Two factors contribute to this open use of money to topple governments. One is the total lack of transparency in the funding of political parties. Electoral bonds have made it even more difficult to trace the source of funds of political parties. The second is that political parties in power have complete hold over law and order. A corporate scamster is arrested when the money trail is discovered, but no effort is taken to trace the money trail during massive defections.

Good governance needs democracy. But today, hardly any political party in India is internally democratic. They are fully controlled by a small ruling clique. Finances are

raised and used in a completely opaque way. The situation is ripe for a small group of enterprising persons to raise funds and capture power and then exercise it without accountability. The use of muscle and money power makes re-elections possible. Parties that try to win power based on a track record of good governance show mixed results.

Consequences

So, we have the root cause of the problem: the goal of political power without adequate transparency and accountability. Before we come to the remedies, we need to understand the consequences of the system we have today. All governments, whether Central or State, are in financial difficulty. More than 25% of the Central Budget is spent on paying interest on money borrowed by the government. Then there is deficit financing. The Central government has made efforts to bring it down, but has not been able to meet its targets. India's fiscal deficit is among the highest in the developing world, with the IMF estimating it to be 7.5% of the GDP in 2019. State government finances are worse: a substantial amount is spent on salaries and pensions. Then we have the huge problem in the financial sector with banks, non-banking financial companies and ILFS going almost into liquidation. That means that a lot of the public's money is either gone or is under great risk. Is there a link between the use of election funds and

non-performing assets in banks? Other manifestations of these problems are an increasing number of government scams; corruption; growing fear and insecurity; average or poor governance, including public services provided by the government; and rising unemployment. How can we really expect good services for the taxes we pay if 43% of MPs have criminal cases against them?

The way forward

India needs a system that throws up parties and politicians whose primary goal is public service, not power. Mahatma Gandhi suggested a way: "Democracy is an impossible thing until power is shared by all... Even... a labourer, who makes it possible for you to earn your living, will have his share in self-government."

That goal of having enlightened politicians who feel answerable to the people is perhaps distant. For now, we need democratic, accountable and transparent political parties. We need to check the use of muscle and money power. Politicians in the ruling party are rarely, if ever, arrested, and old cases against them are even withdrawn. Sometimes no action is taken against those making hate speeches. Only rival politicians are targeted. This shows that the police follows the orders of their political masters. Therefore, police reforms are required. As a quick fix for misuse of money power and engineered defections, a forensic audit by an independent agency should be mandatory when MLAs defect to other parties. As the famous Watergate dictum goes, we need to "follow the money". That alone can restore public confidence in democracy.

Above all, we need political party reforms that make parties transparent, accountable and democratic. But we are in a logjam: those who can reform the system do not want to. Voters are no doubt getting educated rapidly, but they are not in a position to bring about inner change in the electoral and political system merely through voting. Some kind of citizen action to raise awareness may be required. Otherwise things will have to get worse before they get better.

Trilochan Sastry is founder and trustee of the Association for Democratic Reforms and Professor, IIM Bangalore

FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

Journalistic challenges in reporting COVID-19

Reports should neither create unwarranted panic nor underplay the gravity of the situation



A.S. PANNEERSELVAN

On March 11, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) characterised COVID-19 as a pandemic. He said: "Pandemic is not a word to use lightly or carelessly. It is a word that, if misused, can cause unreasonable fear, or unjustified acceptance that the fight is over, leading to unnecessary suffering and death." What are the lessons that this important declaration holds for journalism? How can journalists arrive at a tone and tenor in reporting the health crisis that neither creates unwarranted panic nor underplays the gravity of the situation?

I have been closely monitoring every report on the spread of the virus and its aftermath in this newspaper over the past three weeks. In my opinion, the language used in explainers and reports seems to work well in informing readers without generating anxiety. The explainers on March 15 – "Is the global economy headed for recession?" and "How does soap use help in tackling COVID-19?" – were carried along with news reports on the spread of the virus.

Tools to evaluate reports

The idea of this column is not to praise *The Hindu*'s coverage, but to seek feedback on what aspects of its reports worked, what aspects need improvement, and where the paper failed to meet the journalistic standards that I spoke of in my column, "Journalism in the time of an epidemic" (February 10). For the benefit of the readers, I would like to share some of the tools that I use to evaluate reporting on this pandemic, which started as an epidemic.

I draw extensively from New York-based First Draft's study and tools on health misinformation. They have come up with multiple tips for reporting on COVID-19 and slowing the spread of misinformation. I follow the guidelines issued by WHO, exchange notes with fellow news ombudsman across platforms and countries, and also try to list some of the best practices across the globe.

First Draft's prescription for good reporting expects journalists to avoid using sensa-

tionalist language. It points out that emotional phrases such as "no end in sight", "turmoil", "killer" and "catastrophe" might draw clicks, but they can also lead to panic, which experts warn is the opposite of the calm that we need at a time like this. In his interview to First Draft, Karin Wahl-Jorgensen of Cardiff University, who has studied the use of emotions in journalism, said that journalists should recognise "both the nature of the threat and their responsibility to manage the emotions of the audiences, and not unduly spread fear." The other important recommendations are: avoid speculating or asking experts to speculate about worst-case scenarios and provide readers with specific actions that they can take.

Roxanne Khamsi's article in First Draft and an extensive report in Reuters point out the problems related to the proliferation of preprints on COVID-19 since the outbreak began. They say that these preprints are yet to be peer-reviewed and should therefore be approached with a great deal of caution. The Reuters fact sheet points out that out of the 153 studies published on COVID-19, 92 were not peer-reviewed.

Preventing the spread of rumours

First Draft asks media organisations to avoid drawing attention to rumours if they are circulating only in niche communities or have received little engagement. First Draft uses a five-question test to check whether a rumour has reached the tipping point. These questions apply to the Indian mainstream media too. They are: "How much engagement has the rumour received, and how do these numbers compare to similar content on the platform? Is the discussion around the rumour limited to one community online? Has the rumour jumped platforms? Did an influencer or verified account share the rumour? Have large media outlets covered the rumour?"

I also draw from an essay by Bill Hanage and Marc Lipsitch, professors of epidemiology at Harvard University, in *Scientific American*, titled "How to Report on the COVID-19 Outbreak Responsibly". They write: "Good reporting and science have to distinguish legitimate sources of information from no end of rumors, half-truths, financially motivated promotions of snake-oil remedies and politically motivated propaganda."

readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

A dam of contention in Africa

International mediation over GERD is no substitute for regional cooperation

GARIMELLA SUBRAMANIAM

As the July deadline draws closer for the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the river Nile to become functional, the dispute between Ethiopia and Egypt, with Sudan caught in between, has escalated into a diplomatic stand-off. Differences were laid bare recently when Ethiopia skipped the latest round of tripartite negotiations with Egypt and Sudan in Washington, being mediated by the U.S. and the World Bank.

The Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Abiy Ahmed, who won the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize, even said last October that "no force could stop Ethiopia from building a dam," though he stressed that war was not a solution, echoing similar rhetoric from Cairo. The Arab League earlier this month underscored Egypt's historical and civilisational links to the river region and opposed any unilateral action by Ethiopia.

History and geopolitics
Cairo's strong reservations over the GERD are also rooted in history and geopolitics. Under the 1959 Nile Waters Agreement, the two downstream riparian states Egypt and Sudan, respectively, were allocated 55.5 billion cubic metres and 18.5 billion cubic metres of Nile water annually. That settlement reduced Cairo's control of the waters, compared to the virtual veto over utilisation it was granted under a 1929 treaty.

Ethiopia was outside the purview of the 1959 treaty, as also other upstream states including Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda. But Addis Ababa's assertion of its rights for an equitable share of the Blue Nile flows from the Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) signed by some of the 10 Nile Basin Initiative nations (under the initiative, Eritrea participates as an observer).

Cairo's reservations
But the GERD's storage capacity of 74 billion cubic metres of water has raised hackles in Cairo. Egypt, which relies on the Nile for 90% of its freshwater supply, is apprehensive that a rapid filling of the reservoir in upstream Ethiopia would cause a drastic reduction in supplies. President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has insisted on a staggered approach to fill the reservoir, say, between 10 and 21 years, and for the release of a minimum of 40 billion cubic metres annually. No less is the risk Egypt perceives from the diversion of waters to its own

High Aswan Dam.

Conversely, Addis Ababa is concerned that a long delay in filling the reservoir would jeopardise returns on its investments and hamper the prospects for overall growth. The GERD is said to have been financed almost entirely from domestic resources, in part due to the resistance mounted by Egypt against global funding for the project. There is in addition the element of national pride in the timely completion of the GERD, as Ethiopia's recent economic resurgence has revived the old vision of Great Ethiopia. There is also a lot at stake for the government of Mr. Ahmed, who faces a difficult general election this year after the euphoria of the 2018 peace process with Eritrea has largely faded.

History and geopolitics

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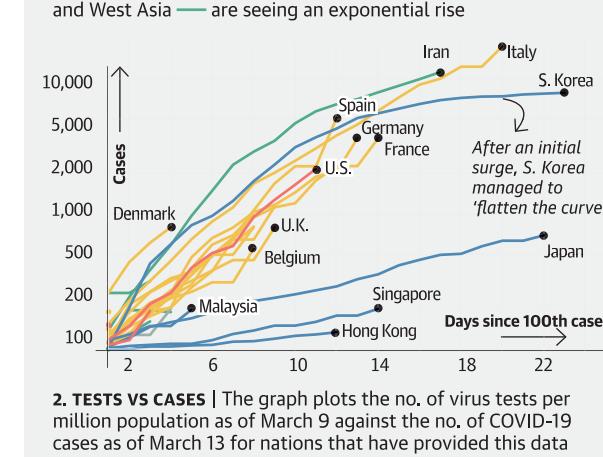
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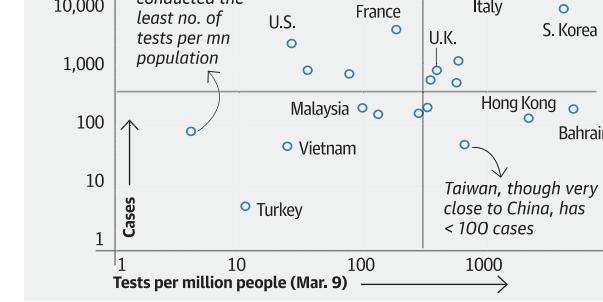
DATA POINT

Testing times | While most of China's neighbours have been able to contain the spread of COVID-19, countries far from it are seeing an exponential surge in cases. Early testing and wider coverage distinguish such Asian countries from Western countries. However, India is dangerously placed as it has among the lowest testing rates. By Vignesh Radhakrishnan and Suman Sen

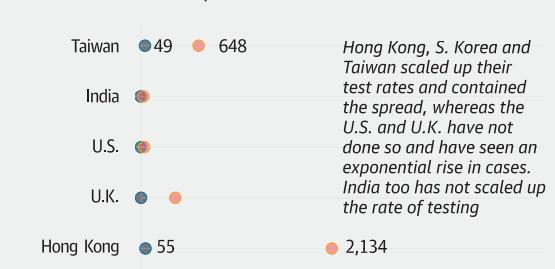
1. VARYING SPREAD | The graph shows the no. of COVID-19 cases since the 100th case. Many Asian nations have contained the spread, whereas Europe, the Americas and West Asia are seeing an exponential rise



2. TESTS VS CASES | The graph plots the no. of virus tests per million population as of March 9 against the no. of COVID-19 cases as of March 13 for nations that have provided this data



3. TEST RATES | The graph shows virus tests per million population as of Feb. 4 ● and Mar. 9 ●. As of Feb 4, the testing rates of all nations were similar, but since then, some nations have scaled up the rate of testing by a huge margin and contained the spread of COVID-19



4. EARLY BIRDS | The graph shows the date on which testing/screening started. While Taiwan and S. Korea initiated this process early, the rest took their time to get going



LAST WORD

▪ In India, though the testing rates are abysmal, as of Sunday no spike in disease spread has been reported. But the exponential rise of cases in Western nations, which have similarly low rates of testing, should set the alarm bells ringing

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 16, 1970

Kurds of Iraq

FROM PAGE ONE

Crucial test of strength for Kamal Nath govt.

However, there has been no direction for the two BSP MLAs who have so far backed the Congress government.

Directing Mr. Nath to take the floor test after his address in the Assembly, Governor Lalji Tandon, in a letter issued at 12.30 a.m. on Sunday, stated his "prima facie belief" was that the government had lost trust of the Assembly and was in a minority. He wrote that the test must be conducted in any condition, shouldn't be "postponed, delayed or suspended". Earlier, BJP leaders had claimed the Congress was attempting to stall the test.

Meanwhile, 16 rebel Congress MLAs owing allegiance to Mr. Scindia, responding to Speaker N.P. Prajapati's notice directing them to appear before him in person to attest their resignations, said that given "the bad law and order situation" and "uncertainty" in the State, they would not be able to appear before him. The resignations of the MLAs, presently in Bengaluru, were submitted to the Speaker by BJP leaders.

Can avail security
In verbatim letters, the MLAs wrote: "The way you had accepted resignations of six MLAs on March 14, kindly accept mine too." After six rebel Ministers failed to appear before him despite being given two days for it, Mr. Prajapati on Saturday had accepted their resignations, stating they were not fit to be members.

Following the letters, the Governor requested the State government to provide the MLAs CAPF security. On Sunday, Home Minister Bal Bachchan said the MLAs, "held in captivity by the BJP in Bengaluru," could seek protection of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), if they required, so that they could return to Bhopal.

Nath's request
As nine rebel MLAs failed to appear before the Speaker on Sunday despite being served notices, Mr. Prajapati said, "As the Vidhan Sabha Speaker, I am the protector of those MLAs. I am worried, being a protector, what is happening to the honourable members. And this is a question mark on democracy."

Mr. Nath on Saturday had requested Union Home Mi-



Kamal Nath

nister Amit Shah to ensure the "release" of the MLAs by the police of BJP-ruled Karnataka, and assured them full protection in Madhya Pradesh. He had said there was no point in demanding a floor test if MLAs were "being held hostage outside".

Ready to face test?
Writing to the Governor on Friday, Mr. Nath had confirmed he was ready for the test, even as he requested inquiry into BJP leaders submitting resignations of Congress MLAs who were "in captivity" in Bengaluru and accused BJP of conspiring to subvert the government. A day later, BJP vice president Shivraj Singh Chouhan said he was ready for a test, requesting the Governor for division of votes and videography of proceedings.

The first signs of a political turmoil in the State emerged on the intervening night of March 3 and 4, when two Ministers claimed to have freed six MLAs, including independents and BSP and SP members, from a poaching bid by the BJP at a hotel in Haryana. Meanwhile, four MLAs were believed to be taken to Bengaluru, with two of them returning to Bhopal later and pledging allegiance to the Congress government.

Then on March 9, 19 MLAs supporting Mr. Scindia went incomunicado and were believed to have moved to Bengaluru, giving jitters to the government, whose 16 Ministers tendered resignations to Mr. Nath the same night, in an attempt to placate the rebels and make space for them. Yet, as Mr. Scindia quit the Congress a day later, as many as 22 MLAs, pledging allegiance to him, tendered resignations to the Speaker through BJP leaders, while remaining in Bengaluru themselves.

Fear of statelessness haunts NRC-rejects

The NRC authority had during the updating exercise listed 14 documents as admissible. These included the NRC of 1951, which Ms. Begum had submitted (of her parents), electoral rolls up to the midnight of March 24, 1971, land and revenue records, citizenship certificate and refugee registration certificate.

An additional list of admissible documents includes ration card and certificate from circle officer of Gram Panchayat secretary in case of married women.

"The apprehension is understandable. When those running the system are determined not to accept any document, nothing you show will really matter. And the excluded will have to go to the FTs, which will be like jumping from the frying pan to the fire," All Assam Minority Students' Union president Rejal Karim Sarkar told *The Hindu*.

Each FT is headed by a member, who is either a retired judge or bureaucrat with judicial experience or an advocate with at least seven years of practice.

Assam had in August 2019 appointed 221 members for 200 FTs to be added to the existing 100 for handling the cases of the NRC-excluded.

J&K will have a domicile policy'

Shah denies move for demographic change in region

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday assured members of the newly formed Apni Party of Jammu and Kashmir that the intention of the government was not to bring in any "demographic changes" in the region.

Mr. Shah informed a party delegation that J&K would have a "better domicile policy than other States in the country".

On August 5, 2019, the Centre revoked the special status of J&K under Article 370 and Article 35A of the Constitution. The two revoked provisions had enabled the J&K Assembly to decide the "permanent residents" of the erstwhile State, prohibiting people from outside from buying property and ensuring job reservation for residents.

A statement issued by the Home Ministry on Sunday said Mr. Shah met a 24-member delegation from the Apni Party, led by Altaf Bukhari, and held discussions on some 40 issues. Mr. Shah said "visible changes will be seen on the ground in the next three to four months".

The delegation was told that the statehood of J&K, which was made a Union Territory along with the



Lending an ear: Home Minister Amit Shah meeting an Apni Party team in New Delhi on Sunday. • PTI

abrogation of special status, would be restored at an early opportunity and "this is also good for India's interest, as the region is a border area".

Mr. Shah said all decisions on relaxation of restrictions in J&K that were being taken by the Prime Minister and implemented by the Home Ministry were based on ground realities and not under any pressure.

"He referred to steps like release of people from preventive detention, restoration of the Internet, relaxation in curfew, and added that even political prisoners would be freed in the time to come as the main objective of the government is that not a single person should die, be it a common Kashmiri or security personnel," the Ministry's statement said.

Mr. Shah told the delegation that soon, an attractive industrial policy and an eco-

nomic development policy would be announced.

A land bank had been created.

"He said for the last 70 years, J&K attracted ₹13,000 crore and expressed hope that by (the year) 2024 three times more investment will come in the region as there is huge potential for the same," the statement said.

Open to suggestions'
On the issues of reservation, the Home Minister said a commission would be set up soon and reiterated that no injustice would be done to Gujjars, nomads and other communities.

Mr. Shah said the government was open to suggestions and feedback from all including "old parties, new parties and individuals".

Emerging from the meeting, Mr. Bukhari, who was a Minister in the previous Peo-

ples Democratic Party government in J&K, denied allegations that the Apni Party was a "B" team of the BJP.

"We came with a message from the people of J&K. Time will show whether we are an 'A' team or 'B' team. We have been clearly told that there will be no demographic changes, and our land will not be snatched. We are here to discuss the economic distress and other problems faced by people in the past eight months," Mr. Bukhari said.

He said half the Apni Party members would be experienced people and the rest newcomers.

By restricting the number of terms a person could become party president to two, the party would ensure that it did not turn into a dynasty-driven party. The delegation met Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday.



Farooq Abdullah

Farooq Abdullah calls for release of J&K detainees

'Shift those outside J&K to the UT'

PEERZADA ASHIQ

SRINAGAR

National Conference president Farooq Abdullah on Sunday appealed to all political parties here to join hands to seek the release of the detained people in J&K and sought immediate shift of all such detainees from outside jails to J&K.

Appeal to all

"I appeal to all political leaders here to unite behind the call to the Union government to bring back all detainees from J&K in prisons outside pending their release," Dr. Abdullah was.

He was released after over seven months of incarceration on Friday.

Lives at risk

He said at a time when people are being advised not to travel due to the COVID-19 scare, these families are being forced to put their lives at risk to meet their loved ones for a few short but very precious hours.

Dr. Abdullah said he has consciously avoided making any political statements. "Yesterday when I went to meet my son Omar, also detained under the Public Safety Act, I had to travel a kilometre from my home to be able to see him. For families of most of the detainees meeting their loved ones is not nearly as easy. Their loved ones have been detained in jails spread

Baseer Khan appointed J&K Adviser

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

SRINAGAR

The Union Home Ministry on Sunday accorded sanction to the appointment of IAS officer Baseer Ahmad Khan, now serving as a Divisional Commissioner in Jammu and Kashmir, as Adviser to the Lieutenant-Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, G.C. Murmu.

A spokesman said he would assist the Lieutenant-Governor in the effective discharge of his functions.

Mr. Khan, who was given an extension in 2019, proved an effective officer for the Centre during the run-up to the revocation of J&K's special status last August. The statehood of J&K was revoked on August 5, 2019.

Bhim Army floats party

We will start with Bihar Assembly polls: Chandrashekhar Azad

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GHAZIABAD

"We are not here to be servants, we are here to rule the country," Bhim Army chief Chandrashekhar Azad said at the launch of the political arm of the outfit in Noida on Sunday.

The Bhim Army announced the launch of the Azad Samaj Party at a glittering ceremony at a farmhouse in Sector 70, which followed a dispute with the Noida police. Hundreds of workers from across the country attended the function.

"We will start with the Bihar Assembly election and the Uttar Pradesh panchayat election to be held later this year," said Mr. Azad, who was appointed the national president of the party.

"Hum yahan naukar na-



Bhim Army chief Chandrashekhar Azad. • PTI

hin, shasak banne aye hain. Every time we used to take to the streets to save the Constitution, I was put behind bars. It used to stop our work. With political power in hand, nobody would be able to stop us from implementing the ideals of Kanshi Ram," he said explaining the rationale behind forming the

party.

Earlier, the Gautam Buddh Nagar administration had withheld permission because of the COVID-19 scare.

It is significant that the announcement was made on the 86th birth anniversary of Kanshi Ram, the founder of the Bahujan Samaj Party. "It could not have been held on any other day," said Kanishk Singh, a senior member of the Delhi unit of the party.

"The withdrawal of permission at the last minute was politically motivated as the BSP was allowed to celebrate the birthday of Kanshi Ramji at a nearby spot," he alleged.

Mr. Azad launched Mission 78, on the lines of the All India Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation.

Four militants – three affiliated to the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and another associated with the Hizbul Mujahideen – were killed by security forces in Anantnag on Sunday.

"Acting on a tip-off, the police, along with the Army's 19 Rashtriya Rifles and CRPF personnel, cordoned off Dar Mohalla in the Watalram area in Anantnag. The hiding terrorists opened fire on the joint search party. In the encounter, all four terrorists were killed," a Srinagar-based police spokesman said.

Four militants – three affiliated to the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and another associated with the Hizbul Mujahideen – were killed by security forces in Anantnag on Sunday.

Sources said the militants were hiding in a bunker-like space constructed inside a residential house, which was also damaged in the operation.

The authorities snapped Internet in parts of south Kashmir, fearing protests.

Pakistan representative calls for lifting of curbs in J&K

Hasina pitches for SAARC agency to fight contagious diseases

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE

NEW DELHI

Zafar Mirza, Special Assistant on Health to Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan of Pakistan, pointed to the cases of COVID-19 from Jammu and Kashmir and called for lifting of "all lockdowns" immediately.

He was speaking at the first-ever videoconference of the heads of SAARC nations on Sunday.

A large number of pilgrims and students from Kashmir remain in Iran as India has been carrying out tests before evacuating them.

The videoconference was addressed by Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Bhutan Prime Minister Lotay Tshering, Nepal Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli, Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani.

Ms. Hasina pitched for an institution to fight contagious diseases that pose a threat to public health [in the region]. "It is extremely important to create an institution to prevent and fight against any public health threat in the South Asian re-

gion in the future. We can work together in future and Bangladesh will be happy to host such an institution if you all kindly agree," she said.

Tourist flow hit

She was also happy that the leaders of the SAARC countries got together after a "long time". The group's summit has not taken place since 2014 because of the tension in India-Pakistan relations.

Addressing the impact of the pandemic on the region's economy, President Solih said the economy of the Maldives would be affected as the tourist flow from Italy, China and Europe had dried up. Mr. Tshering highlighted the economic impact that the virus would have on the economies of South Asia and urged SAARC to help the member countries. The regional leaders explained how they had taken measures to stop the spread of the virus.

Mr. Ghani highlighted the vulnerability of Afghanistan as it shares a long border with Iran, one of the worst affected countries. "We are in an unknown territory. Our major vulnerability is our openness. We have an open border with Iran, one of the major centres [of the infection] and the flow cannot be stopped," he said, suggesting that the SAARC countries create a task force and a framework of telemedicine to deal with the threat. He said his government had shut schools and stopped public prayers and urged India to provide satellite links for distance education.

Addressing presspersons a day after his party's national executive meeting here, Mr. Yadav said his party colleagues had vowed to win 351 of the 403 seats.

"Our target is big. I have quoted a number that nobody can imagine. Even we had not imagined that the BJP would win more than 300 seats," Mr. Yadav said.

In the 2017 polls, the BJP and its allies had won 325 seats propelling Yogi Aditya-

SP can win 351 seats in UP, says Akhilesh

'BJP had won 325 by spreading lies'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

LUCKNOW

If the BJP can win over 300 seats in Uttar Pradesh by "spreading lies", then with honest hard work, truth and by bringing people together, "we can win 351 seats" in 2022, Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav said on Sunday.

Addressing presspersons a day after his party's national executive meeting here, Mr. Yadav said his party colleagues had vowed to win 351 of the 403 seats.

"Our target is big. I have quoted a number that nobody can imagine. Even we had not imagined that the BJP would win more than 300 seats," Mr. Yadav said.

In the 2017 polls, the BJP and its allies had won 325 seats propelling Yogi Aditya-



Akhilesh Yadav

nath to the Chief Minister's seat. The SP, which was in power, managed only 47 while the BSP and the Congress trailed even further.

On Sunday, several former BSP and BJP leaders joined the SP. Mr. Yadav said with the support of his new colleagues, "we won't fall into any net" woven by the BJP.

APPEAL

I am Gayathri aged 11 years suffering from B Cell Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia. Kindly help me to combat this disease as I require Rs.

IN BRIEF



Rahul keeps the heat on govt. for excise duty hike

NEW DELHI A day after the government hiked excise duty on petrol and diesel by ₹3 a litre each, former Congress president Rahul Gandhi again took a jibe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a tweet. He said that instead of passing on the benefit of the global oil price crash, "our genius" had hiked excise duty. The government seeks to collect ₹39,000 crore in additional revenue with the decision.

Complaint to Speaker on obituary notice

NEW DELHI Former Trinamool Congress MP Sugata Bose has written to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, pointing to his "failure" to read out an obituary notice for his mother and three-time MP Krishna Bose, who died on February 22. He said the family informed the Lok Sabha Secretariat of her death the next day. Though Parliament had been in session for the last two weeks, the Lok Sabha did not take note of the death of "as eminent a parliamentarian and citizen as Krishna Bose".

Chhattisgarh raids: I-T Dept. to issue summons

RAIPUR/NEW DELHI The Income Tax Department is expected to soon summon some government officials and businessmen in Chhattisgarh after it raided their premises and claimed that unaccounted-for cash was being paid to public servants every month, officials said on Sunday. Businessman Baldeo Singh Bhatia alias Pappu Bhatia clarified that it was "factually incorrect that any income tax raid was carried out at his establishments".

NCLAT Bench to be opened in Chennai

NEW DELHI A Bench of the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) is being constituted in Chennai to handle matters from the southern States. The government has notified the constitution of the Chennai Bench, which will come into effect on March 18. The Bench would hear appeals against the orders of the Benches of the National Company Law Tribunal having jurisdiction of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Lakshadweep and Puducherry.

Labour Ministry yet to spend ₹2,053.59 cr. of 2019-20 Budget

MPs' panel also worried over uneven spread of spending

DAMINI NATH

NEW DELHI The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour, in its March 13 report, has flagged the under-utilisation of funds by the Labour and Employment Ministry, which was yet to spend almost 20% of its 2019-20 Budget (revised estimate) as on February 10.

The committee, chaired by Bhartuhi Mahtab, wrote in its report on the demand for grants by the Ministry for 2020-21 that it was concerned about the unutilised funds. The report said the Ministry had utilised 81.64% of the ₹11,184.09 crore allocated to it in the revised estimate.

The committee is concerned to note that underutilised funds amounting to ₹2,053.59 crore still remain for the fiscal 2019-20. The committee further finds that for the current fiscal 2019-20, the utilisation of funds was not evenly spread out across all the four quarters, which stood at ₹504.88 crore, ₹5,975.92 crore, ₹8,067.77 crore, ₹8,422.93 crore (up to 10.02.2020) respectively," the report stated.

The report noted that utilisation of funds for the National Career Service (NCS) project of the Ministry,

Uncertainty over M.P. floor test

Assembly has not listed the motion, despite Governor's direction

STAFF REPORTER

Bhopal

Though Governor Lalji Tandon has ordered a floor test in the Madhya Pradesh Assembly on Monday, it is not yet clear if the voting will take place. The government is yet to move a motion in the Vidhan Sabha, Assembly sources said.

As of 9 p.m. on Sunday, the schedule for the first day of the Budget session beginning from 11 a.m. on Monday mentions only the Governor's address and vote of thanks, raising questions on whether the government would go in for the test on Monday.

Claiming that his "prima facie belief" was that the government had lost the trust of the Assembly and was in a minority, Mr. Tandon had directed Chief Minister Kamal Nath to take the test during Monday's session, which should not be "postponed, delayed or suspended".

As there is no facility to register votes by pressing buttons in the Vidhan Sabha, Mr. Tandon, who had ordered that the trust vote be sought on division of votes by pressing buttons, passed a new order stating that the vote would now be taken by raising hands and no other method.



At the ready: Police personnel deployed in the Assembly complex on Sunday. ■ A.M. FARUQUI

Earlier, during the day, BJP leaders had requested the Governor to change the method of voting to raising of hands, owing to the lack of other required facilities.

BJP holds meets
Ahead of the floor test, the Bharatiya Janata Party held a series of meetings on Sunday with former Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan camping in Delhi to meet the party MLAs lodged at Mane-sar, near Gurugram. Sources said Madhya Pradesh BJP

leaders met at the residence of Union Minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Sunday morning.

The meeting was attended by Mr. Chouhan, Dharmendra Pradhan and the newly inducted Jyotiraditya Scindia.

They all went to the residence of Home Minister Amit Shah and held a brief meeting with him.

Later, the BJP leaders met Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta where they discussed the legal aspects of the political turmoil in the State, and

sought his opinion if the matter reached the Supreme Court.

Whips issued

These meetings came after the ruling Congress and the BJP issued whips to all their MLAs to be present in Bhopal on Monday ahead of the floor test.

(With IANS inputs)

Snowmobile



Scraping through: The Border Roads Organisation clearing snow at the Zojila Pass on Sunday to open the 434-km Srinagar-Leh highway. Ladakh remains cut off from the rest of the country from November to April because of heavy snowfall. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

New law in U.P. to recover costs for damaging property

Tribunals to decide compensation, awards will be final

OMAR RASHID

LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government has now armed itself with a stringent new law to recover compensation from those who damage public and private property during protests and riots.

Claims for compensation will be decided by designated Claims Tribunals that will be authorised to investigate complaints and assess the damage.



The Cabinet met under Yogi Adityanath on Friday and approved the ordinance.

graph of a warning for public at large not to purchase property attached," the notification said.

The Claims Tribunal shall have all the powers of a civil court for the purpose of taking evidence on oath and enforcing the attendance of witnesses and compelling the discovery and production of documents and material objects, it said.

The claims would cover not only damage to public and private property but also the costs borne by the police and the administration in taking preventive measures.

The liability would be fixed on the alleged perpetrators as well as those accused of instigating or exacerbating them. The tribunal will have to adhere to the principles of natural justice, issue notices and receive replies from the respondents, but it also has the power to decide a matter *ex parte*, if those given notices do not respond. The pendency of any criminal proceedings relating to the incidents would not be a bar on the tribunals proceeding with their work.

The tribunal also has the power to appoint a claims commissioner to estimate the damage caused and investigate liability to assist it in holding the inquiry.

Amit Shah meets Sufi delegation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday met representatives from the Ajmer Sharif Dargah, a Sufi shrine in Rajasthan.

Syed Nasiruddin Chishiy, chairman of the All India Sufi Sajjadanashin Council, said the delegation discussed the revival of Sufi culture in Jammu and Kashmir.

He said the Minister promised full cooperation. "Kashmir has nearly 60-70 Sufi shrines that are 500 years old. Many shrines were desecrated. We are in touch with the clerics there, and the government has promised [us] that a policy will be announced soon," he said.

MPs' panel flags delay in revamping film certification

With previous reports ignored, archaic processes are followed with only superficial improvements

SOBHANA K. NAIR

NEW DELHI

A parliamentary panel pulled up the Union government for dragging its feet on overhauling the archaic film certification and censorship mechanism, bringing only incremental changes to the Cinematograph Act that was first introduced in 1952.

The Standing Committee on Information and Technology, headed by Congress leader Shashi Tharoor, which will table its report on the Cinematograph (Amendment) Bill, 2019, on Monday in Parliament, said that the government was being "unambitious".

The Cinematograph Amendment Bill, 2019, is a belated measure by the government to tackle the issue of piracy. It seeks to introduce two Sections to the Cinematograph Act, 1952 – one, prohibiting illegal recording in cinema halls to make a "pirate copy" of the film, and the second, prescribing punishment of up to three years or a fine of up to ₹10 lakh for the said offence.

The Bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha in February last year and referred to the Standing Committee.

Limited scope

The committee, according to sources, has found the scope of the Cinematograph (Amendment) Bill, 2019, limited.



Congress leader Shashi Tharoor led the panel.

"Piracy can happen at various levels. The Bill only tackles illegal recording at cinema halls. Also, the punishment prescribed in the Bill is

tion and Broadcasting Minis-

try, under the United Progressive Alliance government, had instituted a committee under Justice Mukul Mudgal.

The report was forgotten by the National Democratic Alliance government, which in 2016 formed a committee under filmmaker Shyam Benegal.

Mr. Benegal recommended that the CBFC only be a film certification body.

Nearly four years on, the committee said, the government has done little to implement either of the two reports, and continues to follow archaic processes with only superficial improvements.

DoT units seeking bulk call data records routinely'

It's a deviation from norms laid down by the government, say telecom companies

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Some units of the Department of Telecom (DoT) are seeking huge call data records (CDRs) of people in some circles on a routine basis, a practice alleged to be in deviation from the standard operating procedure laid down by the government, according to sources.

Industry players have raised concerns over such a practice in a communication

to the Telecom Secretary, the sources said.

They claimed the DoT unit of Delhi had demanded the call data records (CDRs) of the entire State for February 2, 3 and 4, 2020, and for specific routes in Delhi with the residences of Ministers, MPs and judges and important offices.

Following this, they gave a representation to Telecom Secretary Anshu Prakash to raise concern.

An email query to the DoT elicited no reply.

SOPs in place

The source, who did not wish to be named, said the DoT had already issued detailed instructions and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for providing CDRs to law enforcement agencies in August 2016 and April 2019.

The DoT, including its field units, are required to ascertain the identity of the

subscriber, examine the justification for the demand, detail the purpose and not use them for any other purpose, define the officers authorised to seek and approve such a request.

However, various licence service area (LSA) units of the DoT are not adhering to the process and seek voluminous CDR details on a regular basis.

"Almost all LSA units of the DoT seek one day CDR

details from telecom operators on a monthly basis in States like Andhra Pradesh on the first and fifth day of the month, Delhi on the 18th day, Haryana on the 21st day, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir on the last day of the month, and Madhya Pradesh and Punjab on the last day of the previous month and the first day of the current month," the source said.

Spain, France tighten border controls

Germany also plans to close borders from Monday; death toll from the virus crosses 6,000

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS

Cafes, shops and restaurants shut down across France and Spain on Sunday as governments stepped up their fight against the COVID-19 pandemic which has now reportedly killed more than 6,000.

France ordered the closure of all non-essential businesses, while Spain went a step further and banned people from leaving home except to go to work, get medical care or buy food. Cases also spiked in Germany and sources said that the government planned to shut its borders with France, Switzerland and Austria on Monday.

Spike in Italy deaths

Spain and France are among the worst-hit countries in Europe although Italy, which imposed Europe's most draconian lockdown on its 60 million citizens last week, still dominates in terms of infections from COVID-19. Italy on Sunday recorded 368 new deaths, its highest one-day increase to date, taking the total to 1,809, the most outside China, official data showed.

A spike in deaths reported in Spain from 183 on Saturday to 288 on Sunday took the global toll to 6,036 from almost 1,60,000 infections, according to an AFP tally compiled from official sources.

Experts warn, however, that the real figure is likely to be higher as tests are not available to everyone and people can be infected without showing symptoms.

The disease has hit all global regions, ripping up sporting and cultural calendars, causing panic in markets and companies and prompting often contradictory responses from governments.

As the virus continued its



Hand of support: Doctors and members of the Chinese Red Cross, who are in Italy to assist the country in fighting the outbreak, in Rome on Sunday. • AP

Majority of Malaysia cases linked to Islamic gathering

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KUALA LUMPUR

Malaysia said on Sunday that more than half the country's 428 COVID-19 cases were linked to an international Islamic gathering held last month.

The Southeast Asian nation announced a spike of 190 new infections over the weekend, mostly linked to a global Islamic event attended

by almost 20,000 people. "Of the 428 cases, 243 are participants from the religious event in Sri Petaling mosque," said Noor Hisham Abdullah, Director-General of the Health Ministry.

Brunei reported some 40 cases on Saturday, most in people who attended the Malaysia gathering. Singapore has also announced cases linked to the event.

Trump has tested negative, says physician

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump has tested negative for COVID-19, his physician said, following concerns over his exposure to a disease that has paralysed the globe. Mr. Trump agreed to the test after coming in contact with several members of a Brazilian presidential

delegation visiting his Florida resort who have since tested positive for the virus. "This evening I received confirmation that the test is negative," the President's physician Sean Conley said in a Saturday memo.

Mr. Trump declared a national emergency on Friday, freeing up some \$40 billion in disaster relief funds.

U.S. officials spreading political virus, says China

War of words escalates between nations

REUTERS
BEIJING

Some U.S. politicians are using coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) as a weapon to smear China, the Xinhua official news agency said on Sunday, as a war of words escalated between the two countries over China's handling of the epidemic.

The editorial accused Robert O'Brien, the U.S. National Security Adviser, and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo of spreading a "political virus" and using it to put China down.

Mr. O'Brien said last week that China had reacted slowly to the virus, probably costing the world two months when it could have been preparing, in remarks

Precious time earned

However, Xinhua said China's actions including strict quarantine of millions of people had earned the world "precious time" to prepare for the epidemic, which has been recognised by the international community.

It added that the U.S. efforts to deal with its own virus cases had been widely criticised.

Xinhua also attacked the U.S. politicians for calling the virus the "Wuhan virus" or "Chinese virus".

that angered China. Mr. Pompeo has said the U.S. response to the outbreak had been hindered by what he called imperfect data from China.

Protests cut short Syria joint patrol

Rebels opposed to Turkey-Russia deal block highway



Syrian rebels protesting along a highway in the northern part of the country, ahead of Turkey-Russia patrols. • AFP

the roadway, rejecting the presence of Russian forces and what they said was an agreement that did not guarantee their re-settlement after being pushed out by violence. "If the patrols happen without people being able to return to their lands, we oppose them," said Osama Ra-

hal, a military commander with the rebels.

The Russian Defence Ministry said the joint patrols were cut short because of rebel "provocations" and civilians being used as a human shield, forcing them to take a shorter route, according to Russian news agency RIA.

4 sentenced to death for Bangladesh priest's murder

They are members of the Islamist JMB

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
DHAKA

Four Islamist extremists were sentenced to death in Bangladesh on Sunday for the 2016 decapitation of a senior Hindu priest during a spate of attacks targeting religious minorities in the Muslim-majority nation.

The Islamic State (IS) had claimed responsibility for the attack in the northern district of Panchagarh, but authorities blamed militants from Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB).

The court... sentenced all four to death over the murder. They are JMB members," said Abdur Rafique, a court official in the capital Dhaka.

The priest was a prominent member of Bangla-

desh's Hindu community, which makes up nearly 10% of the South Asian country's population of 168 million.

JMB was blamed for the murders of minorities, secular writers, publishers and foreigners between 2013 and 2016. Among them was a savage attack at a Dhaka cafe in 2016 that killed 22 people, mostly foreigners.

Seven Islamist extremists were sentenced to death in November over the assault that was claimed by the IS.

Bangladesh security forces launched a nationwide crackdown after the cafe siege, killing more than 100 members of the JMB, including its top leaders, and arresting hundreds of suspected militants.

SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★

Solution to puzzle 12883

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

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

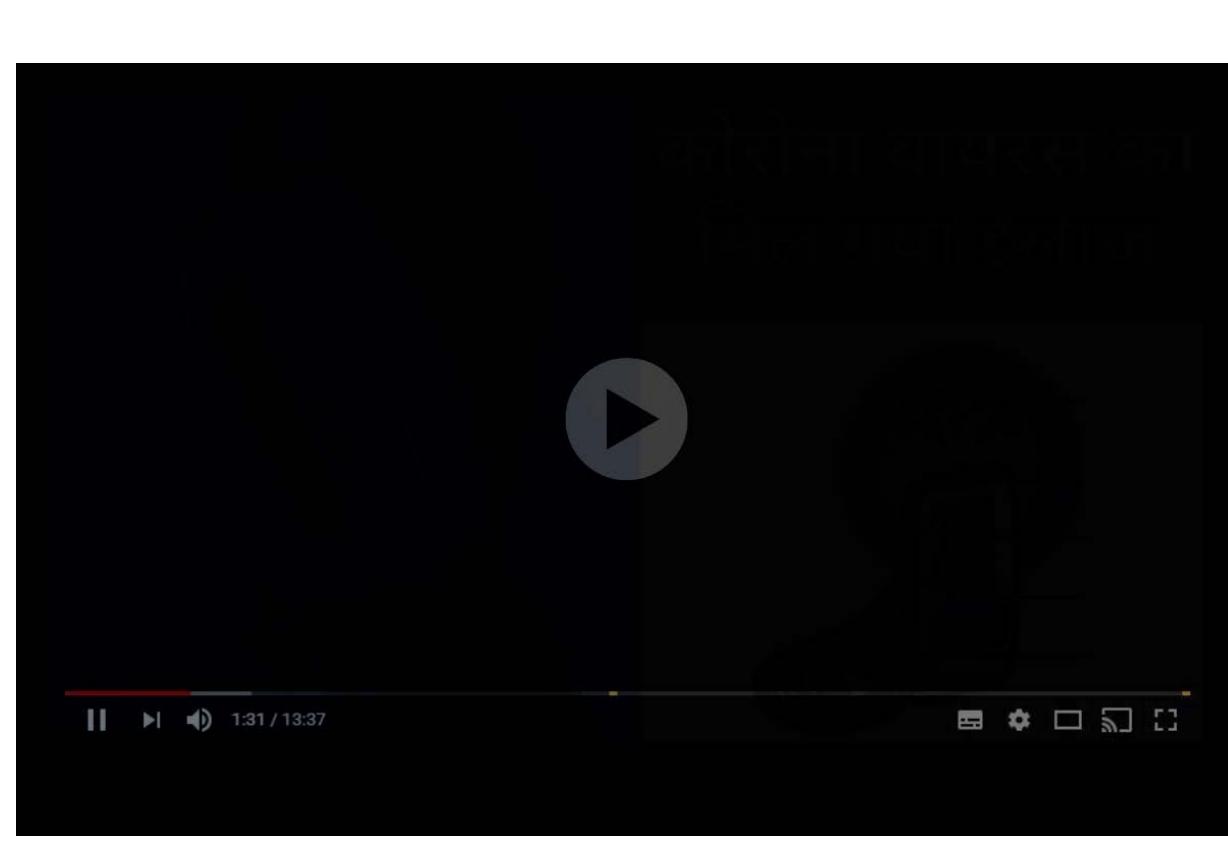
1 2 5 8 3 7 6 4 9
6 7 9 4 1 5 3 2 8
3 4 8 2 6 9 1 7 5
4 5 3 1 8 6 7 9 2
2 9 1 7 5 3 4 8 6
7 8 6 9 2 4 5 3 1
5 6 7 3 9 8 2 1 4
8 3 2 5 4 1 9 6 7
9 1 4 6 7 2 8 5 3

FAITH

Manmatha's praise

King Nimi asks Dhrumila, one of the nava yogiswaras, to tell him about Lord Narayana's avatars, said P.T. Seshadri in a discourse. He wants to know about the Lord's deeds in the past, present and future. Dhrumila answers that the Lord is limitless, and so are His gunas. None is capable of speaking of all His qualities. It is far easier to try to describe the specks of dust in the world than to try to describe His qualities. Even the Vedas tried to praise Him and failed, for His auspicious qualities are infinite. The Lord made the Universe and everything in it, and He is in everything as antaryama. He has the three lokas as His body. He creates, sustains and dissolves the world. His first avatar was the Nara Narayana avatar in Badrikasrama, where the Lord appeared as both Nara and Narayana and did tapas. Indra wanted to disturb the penance. He sent Manmatha, the god of love, to disrupt the tapas.

When Narayana opened His eyes and looked at Manmatha, he praised the Lord thus: "When yagas are performed, havis is offered to various devatas. Because they get havis, they do not disrupt the yagas. But Vishnu bhaktas seek no benefits. All they want is Paramapada. If everyone becomes a Vishnu bhakta and reaches Sri Vaikuntha, there will be none left on earth to give havis to the devas. Afraid that this might happen, they put hurdles in the path of Vishnu bhaktas. But because of Your mercy, Your devotees cross these hurdles. Those who do not worship You do not know how trivial worldly desires are. They drown in worldly pleasures. Even small joys of life are enough to keep them immersed in worldly life. They are like a man who can drown in even a small volume of water, for example, the water that can be contained in a cow's hooves."



Germany trying to stop U.S. from luring away firm preparing vaccine

Trump tried to secure exclusive access to CureVac's work

REUTERS
BERLIN

Berlin is trying to stop Washington from persuading a German company seeking a vaccine to the virus to move its research to the United States, prompting German politicians to insist no country should have a monopoly on any future vaccine.

German government sources said on Sunday that the U.S. administration was looking into how it could gain access to a potential vaccine being developed by a German firm, CureVac.

Florian von der Muelbe, an official at CureVac. • REUTERS

Government is very interested in ensuring that vaccines and active substances against the new coronavirus are also developed in Germany and Europe," a Health Ministry spokeswoman said, confirming a quote in the newspaper.

"In this regard, the government is in intensive exchange with the company

CureVac," she added.

Welt am Sonntag also quoted an unidentified German government source as saying Mr. Trump was trying to secure the scientists' work exclusively, and would do anything to get a vaccine for the United States, "but only for the United States."

2 candidates for trial

Florian von der Muelbe, CureVac's chief production officer and co-founder, said last week the company had started with a multitude of vaccine candidates and was now selecting the two best to go into clinical trials.

The privately-held company based in Tuebingen, Germany hopes to have an experimental vaccine ready by June or July to then seek the go-ahead from regulators for testing on humans.

ASK US



VIDYA BALA

Q. I will be retiring in May 2020 at the age of 58. On retirement, I will have about ₹1 crore in savings. I also own a house. Kindly advise on how to invest my money for the next two years and after I become a senior citizen.

RAM

A. Even if you are less than 60, you can invest in the Post Office Senior Citizens' Scheme. The law says: "An individual of the age of 55 years or more but less than 60 years who has retired on superannuation or under VRS can also open account subject to the condition that the account is opened within one month of receipt of retirement benefits and amount should not exceed the amount of retirement benefits." So, you can invest up to ₹15 lakh (maximum permitted) in your name as soon as you retire. The balance can be invested in a combination of large bank FDs, post office time deposit and select top-rated corporate deposits. If you are familiar with mutual funds, you can also consider liquid funds and do a systematic withdrawal plan (SWP). It would be very tax efficient. Assume you generate an average 7%, or ₹7 lakh of income, from your corpus per annum. If this is more than adequate, then reduce investments in the above safe options and invest a small proportion in some quality hybrid funds under the category of equity savings. This will also provide some tax efficiency and earn debt-like returns.

Q. I am married and have children. My home loan EMI is ₹10,908 and my personal loan EMI is ₹6,200. My wife wants to close the home loan with ₹4 lakh from pledge of gold. I feel we should close the personal loan...

SABARINATH

A. It is good to close the loan that does not provide any tax benefit. In your case, personal loan repayment should come first. However, we see little need to pledge gold to close any loan. Is your interest rate on pledging gold lower than the personal loan rate? It is unlikely but if that is the case, then it can be a reason to pledge. Else, my candid answer would be to sell gold now (prices are high) and repay, if you don't need that gold and your monthly cash flows are becoming tight, post EMI.

Q. I'm 23 years old and currently preparing for a competitive exam. I have savings of ₹50,000. Can you suggest some investment plans for 1-3 years?

KARTHIK

A. For your time frame, you can consider a combination of large bank FDs, short duration debt mutual funds that are consistent and some exposure to equity savings fund. Given your short time frame, we do not wish to recommend any equity exposure.

Q. I have made mutual fund (MF) investments in physical statement of account (SOA) form through a lump sum investment mode. Please advise on the benefits of conversion of physical SOA MF units into an online demat mode.

VARUN DAMBAL

A. Physical form of investing is not an optimal way to organise your investments. You should consider going online. However, there are several platforms that provide you online MF services without demat form. In other words, they are like having a statement, except that it is all online and you can view your investments at any point in an app or laptop. Demat form of investing also helps you consolidate your investments and view them online (assuming your broker is indeed online). But it is not a necessity. If you are already investing in stocks, then holding MFs and stocks in the same demat can help you consolidate. If you aren't, then you could look at other online options to avoid demat or brokerage charges.

(The author is co-founder, Primeinvestor.in)

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.

LOOSE CHANGE

RAVIKANTH



"The movie started to get boring. So, I switched to the stock market news."



MIND YOUR MONEY

Savings can save you

It's important to have some funds at hand to help you deal with unexpected circumstances

GAURAV MASHRUWALA

It was July 26, 2005. The afternoon rain had started its frenzy in the city of Mumbai.

The rain continued the whole night and well into the next day.

People were stranded in offices, in trains, in cars and buses. "The whole night, I was sitting in the train, without food to eat, water to drink and no access to washroom facilities to relieve myself," was the experience of many.

The next day had its own set of problems. One of the difficulties faced by many was the lack of cash. They had balances in bank accounts but not much at home.

"I always thought, in the case of emergency, I

will go across the street and withdraw cash from the ATM," said a friend.

Unfortunately, in some parts of low-lying suburban Mumbai, ATMs were submerged in water.

We all end up facing situations in life or sometimes have been witness to situations that are not only unplanned but also unexpected.

These could be in form of natural or man-made calamities, e.g. torrential rain, tsunami, earthquakes, floods, terrorist attacks or geopolitical situations. These impact the entire region.

There could be some situations which impact a particular individual or a family e.g. loss of income due to job loss, slowdown in the economy, health

condition of bread-winner, and the like. At such times, there could be loss of income or an unexpected rise in expenses or both.

In most situations, there is no formal insurance available and hence, it is prudent to keep aside some funds to meet these vagaries of life.

My CEO

Most of us who are salaried have a CEO for our organisation. Ever company in whose shares we have invested has a CEO.

As individuals, we have no control over these CEOs even though they directly or indirectly impact our lives.

However, there is one CEO over whom we do have control, and that is our Contingencies and

Emergencies Options (CEO). These are funds kept aside to help us deal with adversities in times of stress. We all have heard the saying 'a stitch in time saves nine.'

Whether it saves nine or ten, I don't know, but if there are funds kept aside for contingencies and emergencies, that would certainly enhance our ability to deal with adversity.

How much? Where?

During such times, there will be emotional trauma and financial stress. If there are adequately planned contingencies and emergencies options in place, then our emotional trauma will dilute significantly.

Usually, most financial planners recommend we

keep aside funds equivalent to about three months' mandatory expenses for emergencies. Three months, or 90 days, is sufficient time to come to terms with any kind of trauma.

How long-lasting the scare from trauma is, is dependent on each individual's frame of mind but in most instances, within about 90 days, life starts limping back to normalcy.

Advice to elderly who are dependent on investments and pension could be to keep aside about 180 days' reserve. In some extreme cases, advice is also to set aside provision for 220/240 days.

After deciding on how much to keep, the next question that comes to mind is where to keep

these funds. Here, the recommendation is to keep funds equivalent to about one week's expenses in the form of cash at home.

Even today, in most parts of the country, vegetable vendors, milkmen and their ilk prefer cash; more so, if it is a calamity-struck area. The remaining funds may be parked in a savings bank account. This account should be linked to a fixed deposit.

Returns on investment 'What kind of returns should I expect on these funds?' was a question posed to me in an investor awareness programme.

Please do not think of returns, tax benefit etc. on funds set aside for emergencies. The only focus should be to ensure a por-

tion of it should be available any time and the rest should be accessible at the earliest with the least effort.

Prepare, don't predict Preparation is about taking action. Prediction, a lot many times, is manifestation of inner fears due to hearsay, gossip and rumours.

We are witnessing the pandemic of COVID-19. It is difficult to predict the future but at our end, we can always take small steps to ensure that if there is a slowdown, loss or reduction in income, there is sufficient financial armour to meet our routine expenses for a while.

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

COVER NOTE: POLICY REMINDER

Keep date with your insurance policies

It is your duty to renew policies on time, keep documents safe, assign nominees

K. NITYA KALYANI

In this column, over the past year, we saw how to buy various types of insurance policies including health insurance, life insurance, annuities, motor insurance and some property insurances.

One way of looking at insurance is that the policy you buy is not the product. The claim is. The implication is also that when you buy the policy your job is not over. You have to maintain the policy and administer it in such a way that you get your claim paid.

What does this involve? Firstly, it means keeping your policy current and valid. Most people think it is the insurance company's or agent's duty to remind them about renewal and chase up the renewal premium. Maybe it makes business sense for them to do so, but it is really our duty to keep our policies valid by paying renewal premiums on time and ensuring we receive the policy documents and checking if they are in order.

Renewal in the case of non-life policies are more mission-critical because the typical policy is annual and actually expires in one year unless renewed.

So, if your policy expired yesterday, any claim that ar-



Screen alert: It's not that difficult to put a reminder on your smartphone to avoid last minute hassles. ■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

ises today will just not be payable. The policy itself can be renewed after a gap, but you can lose out on benefits during the waiting period for pre-existing conditions, or will have to fulfil some additional formalities like medical examination, or inspection in the case of a motor policy.

Considering this hassle, it's not that difficult to put a reminder on your smartphone or your wall calendar/diary and renew your policy well ahead of time!

The most important thing you have to do to maintain your policy is to ensure your nominations are in place. This applies to any policy that involves mortality.

Any type of life policy including annuities, hospitalisation policies and personal accident policies should have a clear nomination and

newal date in mind as the formalities for this start about six to eight weeks ahead of the renewal date.

Keep your insurance company updated with your personal information whether it is your new mobile number or a change of address. This will help the insurer serve you better for renewals and, in case of a claim, you will be saved additional formalities at a time of distress.

The most important thing you have to do to maintain your policy is to ensure your nominations are in place. This applies to any policy that involves mortality.

And when there is a claim, you and / or your family will find the process painless – exactly the kind of support needed during trying times.

(The writer is a business journalist specialising in insurance & corporate history)

you should file an acknowledged copy of it along with your policy for your records, or rather, that of your family members.

Another key duty is to keep your policy documents safe and in a handy place. Of course, we live in a digital age, but you have been issued a policy which is a signed, stamped bond and you should safeguard it and retrieve it at the time of need. Keep policies under lock and key. Higher value policies of longer term that need to be negotiated after you pass may even be kept in your bank locker which your heirs should be briefed about and should have access to.

Ensure your documentation is absolutely perfect to support your insurance claim. Address proof, identity proof, age proof, ownership proof in case of property insurances like motor and home insurance, your PAN card, bank details – since most claims are paid only through electronic channels – all these will help you sleep in peace, once insured.

And when there is a claim, you and / or your family will find the process painless – exactly the kind of support needed during trying times.

(The writer is a business journalist specialising in insurance & corporate history)

BLACKBOARD: CIRCUIT BREAKERS

When frenzy in markets needs to be tempered

ASHISH RUKHAIYAR

What are market wide circuit breakers?

Market-wide circuit breakers refer to the daily limit – both on the upside and the downside – that the benchmark indices can move in a single day before a trading halt is initiated. The circuit breaker mechanism was introduced in July 2001 as a measure against a significantly huge swings in the Sensex or Nifty.

Most recently, the circuit breakers were triggered on Friday after the Nifty hit the first limit of 10% soon after the start of the trading session. As per regulations, trading is suspended in both the BSE as well as the National Stock Exchange (NSE), if either of the benchmarks hits the circuit breaker.

What are the circuit limits? The limits have been pegged at three levels – 10%, 15% and 20% – and the duration of the trading halt has been linked to the time at which the triggers are hit. If any of the benchmarks move 10% before 1 p.m., then trading is halted for 45 minutes.

Such a movement between 1 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. entails a 15-minute halt, while a 10% swing after 2:30 p.m. does not call for any trading halt.

A 15% movement in the Sensex or Nifty before 1 p.m. leads to suspension of trade for 1:45 hours while a 15% swing between 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. brings trading to a halt for 45 minutes. If the Sensex or Nifty hits the 15% limit after 2 p.m. then trading is suspended for the rest of the day.



The maximum market-wide circuit breaker limit has been fixed at 20% and if this trigger is hit at any point of time during the trading session, then trading is halted for the rest of the day.

Are circuit limits revised often? Earlier, when the concept of circuit breakers for indices was introduced, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) made it mandatory for exchanges to translate these trigger limits in absolute points on a quarterly basis.

At the end of each quarter, these absolute points were revised and made applicable for the next quarter. From 2013 onwards, the regulator directed stock exchanges to introduce daily calculation of circuit breaker limits based on the previous day's closing level of the index.

Additionally, a pre-opening session of 15 minutes was mandated after trading resumed post the compulsory halt.

Bank fixed deposit rates

Bank Name

Interest Rates (%)

Highest Slab

1-year tenure

3-year tenure

5-year tenure

Small Finance Banks

Suroday Small Finance Bank

Fincare Small Finance Bank

Utkarsh Small Finance Bank

North East Small Finance Bank

Jana Small Finance Bank

Equitas Small Finance Bank

Ujjivan Small Finance Bank

ESAF Small Finance Bank

AU Small Finance Bank

Capital Small Finance Bank

Private Sector Banks

Lakshmi Vilas Bank

DCB Bank

IDFC First Bank

RBL Bank

Nainital Bank

Dhanlaxmi Bank

Bandhan Bank

Tamilnad Mercantile Bank

IndusInd Bank

City Union Bank

South Indian Bank

Axis Bank

Federal Bank

Karnataka Bank

India is witnessing a steady rise in elementary and adolescent Montessori education. The system allows students to find their own space

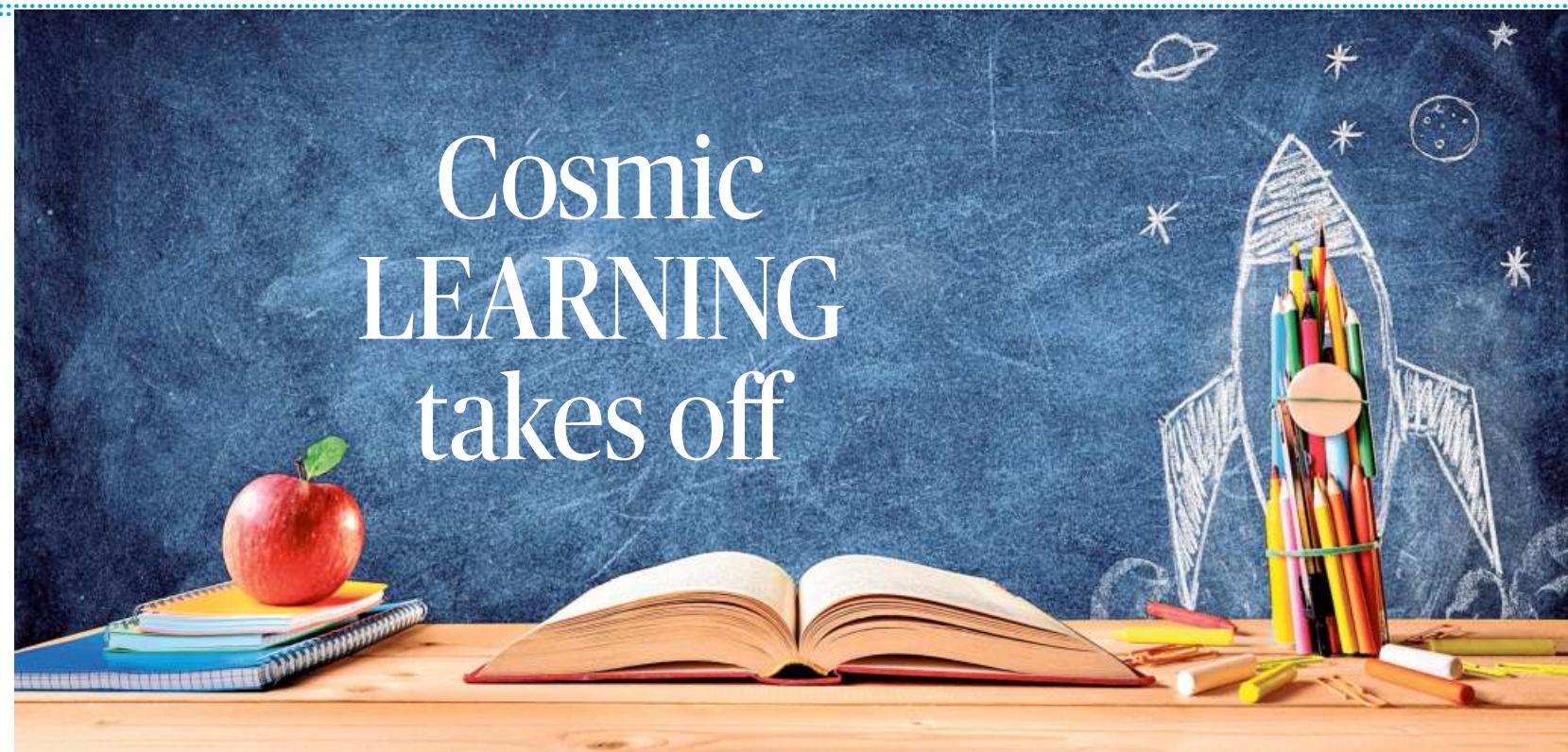
■ SHWETA SHARAN

Preeti Jain's daughter studies in a Montessori in Bengaluru. When she turned six, Preeti decided to continue her education in the same montessori instead of choosing a mainstream school. "My daughter's Montessori has an elementary section too," she says. "I saw how different she was from other children her age, in terms of her social interactions and her independence as a learner. This helped me make my choice."

Montessori preschools are hugely popular in India but surprisingly, many parents do not know that the Montessori pedagogy and practice extend beyond the preschool years and move to the higher grades too. Montessori education is designed for elementary students in the 6 to 12 age group and for adolescents in the 12 to 18 age group.

India has seen many new elementary Montessoris come up in the last few years. There are currently more than 20 in Bengaluru alone, and this number keeps increasing every year. Chennai has more than three elementary Montessoris. Hyderabad has around 15 and there are new elementary Montessoris coming up in Mumbai, Coimbatore, Erode and Salem. These Montessoris are among the most popular schools in their respective cities.

The adolescent Montessori community is fairly new but is gaining popularity. The country's first adolescent Montessori community began at Pragnya Montessori in Hyderabad, in 2017. A second adolescent community came up at Medha Montessori in Hyderabad in 2019. These are the first two Montessori adolescent communities in India with teachers or adults trained by the



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK PHOTOS

Association Montessori Internationale, a training body that Maria Montessori founded in 1950.

Chaitanya Yalamanchili, Programme Director, Erdkinder, at the Pragnya Montessori School, marvels at the adolescent Montessori or the Erdkinder because it truly unlocks the adolescent's potential. "They can run an all-economic system completely on their own," he says. "In our community, they work on entrepreneurial projects, raise funds, make money and reinvest in future projects. They grow vegetables, explore rainwater harvesting and even build boats. They maintain the whole adolescent programme on their own."

Revolution

Kavya Chandrasekar, the Executive Director of the Montessori Institute of Bangalore (MIB) and Founder of The Montessori School in Bengaluru, says that the elementary Montessori is built on the idea of cosmic education. "We give children tools to be better observers of nature," she says. "They delve into cause and effect, and investigate their own moral values and beliefs. They work predominantly in groups,

Students are not confined to subjects. They regularly conference with their guides, document their learning journeys and steer their own course.

but may choose to work independently too."

This system constantly encourages its students to find their place in the world. They are not confined to subjects. They regularly conference with their guides, document their learning journeys and steer their own course. The Montessori material gives them impressions of real-life scenarios and hands-on practice. In the higher grades, the students in a Montessori move into more abstract work. They work in an interdisciplinary manner and there is a lot of peer-based work.

Curricula

As every student knows, all roads lead to high school exams and all Montessoris that progress into the higher grades inevitably help the students to write these exams. Chandrasekar, for instance, insists that accountability to the national curriculum is emphasised con-

tinuously. "Our children understand that they are working with the national curriculum," she says. "We have a curriculum list that tells them what ground they need to cover by a certain age. Once the children enter elementary Montessori, they meet their teachers or guides once a week or fortnight and discuss their progress. They maintain a journal and talk about how much math, physics or language work that they have done that week. So with freedom, students are also made accountable for the work they need to do."

Says Yalamanchili, "Montessori students do write board exams. At Pragnya, we work with the Cambridge curriculum. Some montessoris work with the NCERT curriculum. Students don't find it hard to adapt to that system at all. In fact, we sometimes have students who leave us in the elementary and primary grades to go to mainstream schools and they adapt fairly quickly. When Montessori students leave the school, they are keenly aware of the opportunities and possibilities that exist in the world. For example, my student wants to pursue a career in economics, but also wants to opt for physics."

As the students approach class VIII and IX, many Montessoris streamline their work to prepare students to meet these challenges. They start using prescribed textbooks and study material. Their concepts are in place and they are able to apply them beautifully. Good elementary and adolescent programmes do prepare children to write exams fearlessly but the difference is in how they do it.

The Montessori method of education was developed in 1897 as a multidimensional learning experience. A Montessori is a mixed-age environment and this encourages a high level of collaboration. In fact, India has a long-standing connection with adolescent Montessori education. When Maria Montessori visited India, she interacted with older children in the country and it greatly influenced her method. The idea of the adolescent community is not at all unusual to India, as seen with Shantiniketan or Gandhiji's Tolstoy farm.

The writer is a freelance journalist and also runs Bangalore Schools, a popular online community comprising parents and educators.

SCHOLARSHIPS

■ Ranker Scholar Aptitude Test (RSAT)

RSAT has announced this scholarship for the meritorious class XII passed/appearing and degree students and provide them with favourable opportunities for higher education along with several awards.

ELIGIBILITY: Indian students who have passed or will be appearing in Class XII exam in the current academic year, can apply.

PRIZES AND REWARDS: Selected students will get cash awards, prizes and other gifts.

DEADLINE: March 20

APPLICATION: Online www.b4s.in/edge/RSAT

■ K. C. Mahindra Scholarships for Post-Graduate Studies Abroad

K. C. Mahindra Education Trust has opened this scholarship for Indian graduates who want to pursue postgraduate studies abroad. The objective of this scholarship is to support deserving students and help them continue their higher education.

ELIGIBILITY: Indian students who have secured admission or have applied for admission in reputable foreign universities for courses commencing from August 2020 and have a first-class degree or an equivalent diploma of a similar standard from a recognised university, can apply.

PRIZES AND REWARDS: An interest-free loan of up to ₹8 lakh will be awarded to the top three K. C. Mahindra Fellows. The rest of the successful applicants will get an interest-free loan up to ₹4 lakh.

DEADLINE: March 31

APPLICATION: Online www.b4s.in/edge/KCM

Courtesy: buddy4study.com

IN CONVERSATION

Design your thinking

An entrepreneurial mindset creates a huge impact, says Nandini Piramal

■ MADHUMITHA SRINIVASAN

The Piramal Group recently organised 'The Tangram Challenge', an initiative that aims at providing B-school students with a platform to understand the concept of design thinking, and implement its learnings by providing innovative solutions. As part of the competition, students are presented with real-life problem statements in a social setting, identified and curated by Piramal Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the Piramal Group.

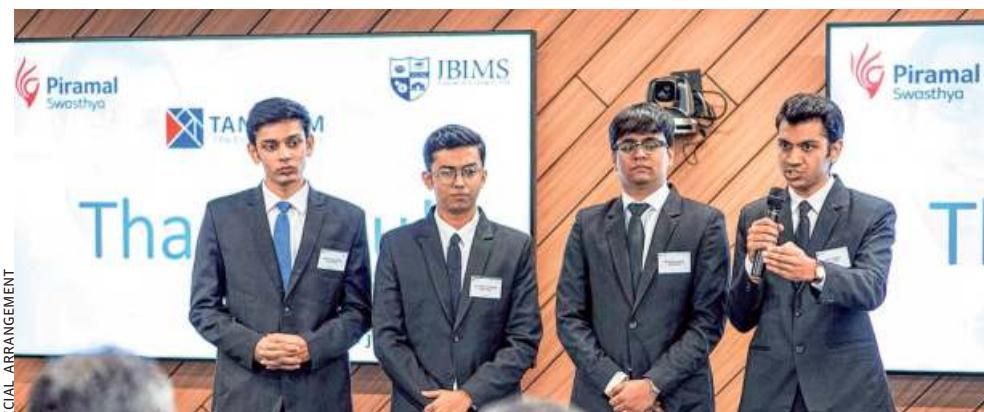
A key aspect of this challenge involves participants visiting the identified rural areas to delve deeper into the problems faced by communities at the grassroot level, to build and test prototypes of the solutions presented. Through this, they are made aware of issues that are critical roadblocks towards unlocking India's economic potential.

"Through Tangram, we aim to nurture design thinking as a mindset amongst participants, as they work closely with local communities to build a better future. By the end of the competition, participants discover their own potential and build sustainable, meaningful solutions," explains Nandini Piramal, the executive director of Piramal Enterprises Limited.

This edition of The Tangram Challenge saw participation from 40 B-schools across India, and received over 1,800 team applications comprising 7,000+ students, where participants underwent three challenging rounds of evaluation.

The top 14 shortlisted teams then presented their insights and innovative solutions to a multidisciplinary jury panel that comprised Swati Piramal, Group Vice-Chairperson, as well as other CEOs and business leaders at the Group.

Nandini Piramal, who also heads the Human Resources and Information Technology



Platform for innovation: Students taking part in the Tangram challenge.



Nandini Piramal

functions, and is passionately involved with the Foundation, speaks to *Education Plus* about the importance of design thinking.

Why is design thinking relevant in an academic and corporate environment?

Today's volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world necessitates individuals and organisations to create innovative, scalable and sustainable solutions with a hands-on approach to address global and local challenges. To meet this requirement, 'design thinking' is increasingly being adopted across academic and corporate institutions, providing individuals with a 360° perspective on the current need, its technological feasibility in a social setting, and its economic viability.

The crux of design thinking is in developing empathy and focusing on the end users and communities. As to its relevance in corporate life, we all are in it to serve our customers. Design thinking facilitates this shift from focus on solutions to focus on the customer.

What are the skills that have become increasingly necessary and relevant to the changing corporate sector?

Today, the dynamic workplace ecosystem, while ex-

and challenges faced by the unserved and underserved communities across India while making them more empathetic towards them. Through such competitions, they develop the ability and interest to contribute to the social sector by developing innovative solutions or prototypes that address the concerns faced by marginalised sections of society. These serve as a platform to develop future-ready skill-sets such as design thinking and lateral thinking that are critical for developing holistic solutions to complex problems. In fact, several participants have written to us on how the whole experience has grounded them and encouraged them to step out of their comfort zone.

What is your take on skills versus educational qualifications?

Both are equally important. Increasingly, academic institutions are offering courses focused on building skill-sets such as critical thinking, problem-solving, negotiation, reasoning, technology literacy, creativity, communication, and so on, that are conducive to successful workplaces. These new-age skill-sets complement educational qualifications to enable a well-rounded professional.



Ps AND Qs

ANUPAMA RAJU

As a language enthusiast, I often try to explore the roots of expressions or phrases and reflect on how we tend to use them. One such expression that recently caught my fancy is "take a chill pill" or just "chill".

Apparently, the phrase has its origins in the early 1980s, referring to a kind of medication that induced calmness. Of course this expression has, over time, become quite a popular slang, mostly used when someone is telling us to relax and calm down.

However, in a formal environment such as the workplace, we may not always be able to tell stressed co-workers "to take a chill pill" as it may not always go down well. But we could certainly champion the need to be calm at all times, to the extent possible. This may be especially relevant for the times we live in, infected with anxiety and ambiguity.

After all, the ability to stay calm and act decisively is perhaps one of the greatest indicators of leadership, especially in difficult circumstances. And we don't need to be in positions of authority to demonstrate leadership and exercise this sense of



Calm over chaos

When things start getting tensed, remember to take a chill pill

calm. Fortunately (and perhaps not so fortunately), life throws several situations at us, giving us ample opportunities to navigate stress by staying calm.

Helping others understand

I am full of admiration for individuals unruffled by stressful situations, who indirectly instil confidence in the people around them, through their stoic and comforting presence. I particularly recall a work situation from a long time ago, when a former boss gave us clear, concise and

helpful instructions laced with dark humour, when we had to edit and put together content on the 9/11 attacks. This individual's wisdom and wit helped us objectively approach the task and complete it with diligence and discretion.

We can see the same qualities in some younger individuals too. I have been lucky to work with

younger colleagues who exude calm and positivity even when things tend to go south. So, this particular quality needn't be attributed to wisdom brought on by age or professional experience alone. It could simply be a decision: a decision to choose calm over chaos and panic. Perhaps, this is a choice we could all make in our day-to-day lives, especially when we go through dynamic routines and unpredictable circumstances; or when we are at the receiving end of too much information and misinformation.

Of course, being prepared with the right information, being proactive, taking the right decisions and steps are all necessary and key in any environment, whether the circumstances are extraordinary or not. A calm mindset, perhaps, helps these good old tenets of professionalism to flourish.

So, any time things tend to overwhelm us, we could simply take a chill pill. A few minutes of calm, and we will probably know what to do.

The writer is a literary journalist. She also heads Corporate Communications at UST Global. Twitter: @anupamaraju

EAR SHOT

ASHOK RAJAGOPALAN



Engineering science

BML Munjal University (BMU), has recently announced a new B.Tech programme in engineering science for undergraduate students, by the School of Engineering and Technology for the 2020-24 batch.

The new programme will focus on developing the fundamentals of engineering science. Students can pursue a specialisation in a chosen interdisciplinary domain based on their interest, aptitude, and readiness of the market for such new-age courses. Secondary and senior secondary scores will be considered as eligibility criteria. Selected candidates will be called for a personal interview, followed by a case discussion.



WIDE ANGLE
ALBERT P'RAYAN

Thirty-six years ago, on the first day of my college life at St. Joseph's College, Tiruchi, my English teacher, Mr. OK Jose, asked the class, whether anyone knew the meaning of the term 'autonomy'. With so much enthusiasm, one of the students said, "self-governance". The teacher was happy with the answer and started explaining the meaning of the term and its implications. The whole 45-minute period was spent on the concept of autonomy and how colleges that are autonomous are different from those which are not. For 17-year-old freshers, it was a useful orientation session.

During the discussion, when a student asked the teacher how autonomy would help the student community, Professor Jose replied, "Prestige. Autonomy is granted by the University Grants Commission (UGC) only to prestigious colleges. There are many benefits...you can proudly state that you are a student of St. Joseph's Autonomous College."

Yes, I can proudly state that I studied in St. Joseph's College (Autonomous) for my UG and PG degrees as the college has been consistently enhancing the quality of education and achieving academic excellence. I was fortunate enough to have my higher education in prestigious autonomous institutions including the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL), now known as the English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Hyderabad.

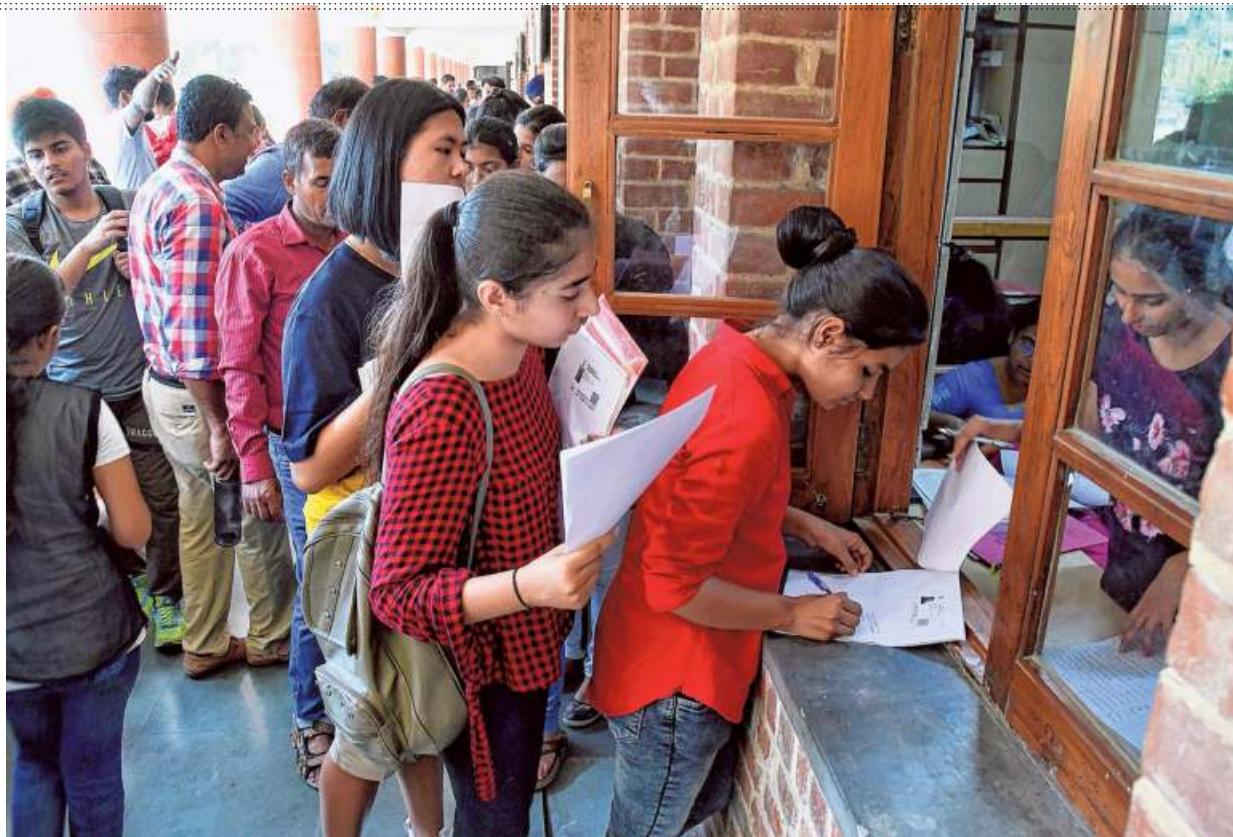
Why autonomy?

The UGC document on guidelines for autonomous colleges (2017) clearly states that "the only safe and better way to improve the quality of undergraduate education is to delink most of the colleges from the affiliating structure." Why? The document states that "Colleges with academic and operative freedom are doing better and have more credibility."

Autonomy implies academic and administrative freedom which should result in the enhancement of quality of education and achievement of academic excellence. The word "delink" is a misnomer as autonomous colleges are not completely de-linked from affiliation. They are affiliated to a government body or university but have academic independence.

Advantages

According to the National Policy on Education (1986-1992), colleges which have



Autonomy is key

Promoting autonomy is an important step towards higher education reforms. But, are we going about it the right way?

been granted autonomy status have the freedom to "determine and prescribe its own courses of study and syllabi, and restructure and redesign the courses to suit local needs, make it skill-oriented... evolve methods of assessment of students' performance, the conduct of examinations and notification of results, promote research in relevant fields, use modern tools of educational technology...promote healthy practices such as community services, extension activities..." Academic independence is the major advantage of being an autonomous institution. Institutions which use the academic and administrative freedom in a responsible manner will flourish and those which misuse the freedom and turn the institutions into 'teaching shops' will perish.

Reality

There are over 700 autonomous colleges in the country and Tamil Nadu has the distinction of having the highest total of 190+ autonomous colleges in the country. On what basis is autonomy status granted to colleges? Do all autonomous colleges deserve the status or are they worthy to be

called autonomous colleges? Can autonomy be equated with academic excellence?

According to the UGC, colleges which have been given 'A' grade – a cumulative grade point average of 3 on a scale of 4 – by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) or colleges with three or more programmes accredited by the National Board of Accreditation (NBA) are eligible to apply for autonomy status. What it implies is that colleges accredited by NAAC or NBA have a record of academic standards. But, whether such colleges are really institutes of repute and academic excellence is a debatable question as the perception of the people about the institutions varies.

Affiliation system is not common in developed countries. There is an urgent

need to reform the affiliation system in higher education in India. There are 17 affiliating universities with over 500 colleges attached to them. Is good governance possible?

More and more colleges should be given autonomy status. While promoting autonomy is an important step towards higher education reforms, monitoring whether already existing autonomous institutions have fulfilled the objectives and have really worked towards academic excellence is equally important. As some educationists have raised the concern that not all autonomous colleges are worthy to be called so as they do not propel academic excellence, it is high time the UGC looked into this aspect and took some corrective measures.

Autonomy is a prestige tag and it should be given only to educational institutes that deserve it.

The writer is an academic, columnist and freelance writer. rayanal@yahoo.co.uk

Exclusively for women

Exclusively for women

The University for Peace (UPEACE) is an intergovernmental organisation with the status of a 'university', established by a United Nations General Assembly resolution 34/111 of December 14, 1979.

It offers postgraduate courses and PhD programmes in addition to its online courses. However, the university draws its maximum strength from its year-long master's programme which hosts over 200 students from over 50 countries. Students pursue diverse discipline in International Law, Environmental Studies, Peace Studies and Gender Studies. These courses are taught by top experts and UN officials,

and students are encouraged to engage with the material and are also given the opportunity to network with people around the world. UPEACE graduates work in diverse areas, and over 20% work with the UN after completing their degree. The cost of education is as low as \$15,000, in addition to a monthly expense of \$800. Every year, around five students from India are selected to pursue their master's from the UPEACE and later work around the world tackling various development challenges.

For more information and application details, visit <https://www.upeace.org/pages/apply-admission>.

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No. Ac. B/1875/SSUS/2020 Date:09.03.2019
ADMISSION NOTIFICATION
Applications are invited through online to the **M.A., M.Sc., M.S.W., M.F.A. & P.G. Diploma** programmes for the academic year 2020-21 at the Main Campus, **Kalady** and Regional Campuses of the University at **Payyannur, Koyilandy, Tirur, Ettumanoor, Thuravoor, Panmana and Thiruvananthapuram**.
Admission to the P.G. Programmes are based on the marks obtained in the Entrance Examination/ Interview/ Aptitude Test to be conducted in April/May 2020. Details regarding the eligibility, programmes offered at different Campuses/online registration for Entrance Examination, Prospectus etc. are available in the University website www.ssus.ac.in/www.ssusline.org. Last date for the receipt of applications through online is **03.04.2020**. The University reserves the right to make any change in the programmes and Centres without assigning reasons whatsoever.

Sd/-
REGISTRAR

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Admissions 2020-21

UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS
Based on All India Rank of JEE (Main) - 2020

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B.Tech. (Honours) in ICT with minor in Computational Science

B.Tech. (Mathematics and Computing)

- A premier ICT education and research Institute.
- Wide ranging placement & internship opportunities.
- Residential facilities.
- Merit and merit-means scholarship for B.Tech. students.
- Competitive fellowships for M.Tech. and Ph.D. students.
- 15 percent of B.Tech. seats for NRI, OCI, PIO and Foreign Nationals.
- Separate merit scholarship for NRI, OCI, PIO and Foreign Nationals.

POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMS

M.Sc. (Data Science)
M.Sc. (IT)
Admission test at multiple centres in India.

M.Tech. (EC)
Specialization in Wireless Communication and Embedded Systems Joint Program with C.R. Rao AIMSCS, Hyderabad

M.Tech. (ICT)
Specializations:
Communication & Signal Processing
VLSI & Embedded Systems
Machine Learning
Software Systems

M.Des. (CD)
Admission test and Interview conducted at DA-IICT.

Ph.D.
Admission test at multiple centres in India and/or Interview to be conducted at DA-IICT.

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Beat exam stress

Save the Children India, and TikTok have come together to launch a campaign, #BeatTheStress. With school students experiencing exam stress, there has been an increase in anxiety levels, which ultimately affects performance. The campaign aims at sharing tips to #BeatTheStress enabling the community to celebrate exams instead of fearing them. Popular creators have been sharing tips to help students relieve stress.

Clarity can be elusive

It is easy to express one thing but it could mean something else, thus confusing the listener or reader. How can we become more coherent?



BACKPACKER'S GUIDE
USHA RAMAN



that can distract from what you are actually saying. Make it clear from the beginning whether you are asking a question or offering a comment. This helps people prepare their minds to receive information or think about a possible answer.

On the other hand, it also happens that you read or listen to something, and you get the sense right away – it is as if the words do not stand between you and the meaning.

It could also be the other way around, that you are the one speaking – or writing – and you have a feeling that you are able to say exactly what you mean, and at other times, you feel that the words are just not coming out right.

Clarity is something we all struggle with, both in speech and writing. At times even the simplest idea, even what you think is a straightforward request or response, is very difficult to articulate – and you can see that people do not understand. Being clear is not just about having command over language, although having a good stock of words and an understanding of grammar is a big advantage.

Third, try to be brief. If your idea is clear, it will not take too many words to express it. The advertising wizard David Ogilvy is supposed to have said that if your idea cannot be written on the back of a visiting card, then it is not an idea. You can go into detail if people request you to, and they will definitely ask follow-up questions if they are able to understand what you are saying.

Clarity in writing and speech presents different challenges, and it is important to be aware of them. When you speak, you may have the opportunity to explain yourself once you see people do not understand. But when you write, you cannot do that, so it is even more important to check that you are as clear as you can be – your writing should be impossible to misunderstand.

Ultimately, clarity is about simplicity of expression, and sensitivity to the listener's or reader's expectations and needs.

The writer teaches at the University of Hyderabad and edits Teacher Plus. usha.bpgl@gmail.com

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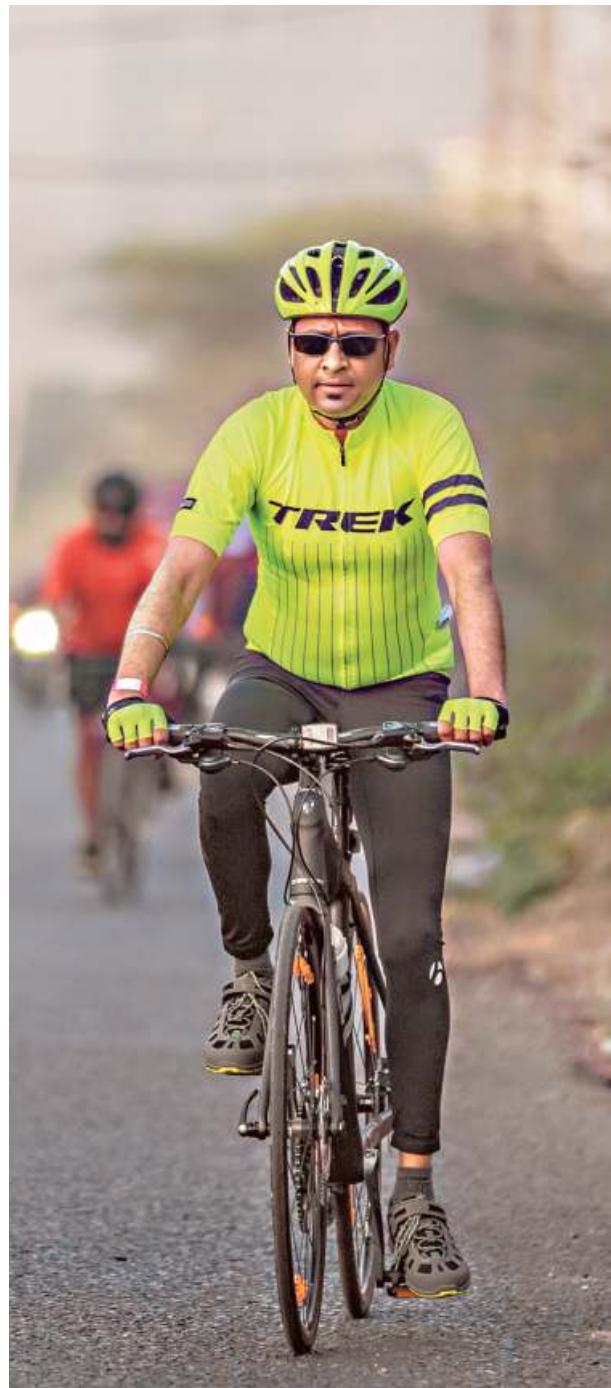
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Navneet Banka,
43, Country Manager, Trek Bikes

Banka, who formerly worked with a motorcycle company (where he rode as well), began cycling when he joined Trek Bikes, which sells super premium cycles in India. After having visited the headquarters in Wisconsin, U.S., a few times over two years – where “people cycle to work, and go out for a ride after lunch” – he was influenced by a lifestyle where cycles were everywhere, even “in the office next to the desk”. While the Delhi traffic doesn’t allow for it to become a commute option, he tries to ride 28-30 km thrice a week, early in the morning, so he’s back by 7 a.m. He usually cycles in Gurugram, using low-traffic zones like the Golf Course Extension and the Gurugram-Faridabad roads.

“It is a non-impact sport,” he says, adding that it is now being seen as a recreation and fun activity. While he hasn’t built up his capacity to do long rides, he hopes to “slowly reach that level”. Over the weekend he and his 10-year-old son ride within the society they live in, and, when the roads aren’t crowded, outside as well.

The advantage of being a cyclist is that he can speak to people who buy his brand with understanding. “Customers in the segment are well read and know the technicalities. When I talk to dealer partners, I can have a more detailed conversation. Also, while product planning, I know what to bring into the country.” Mostly though, it helps him to have conversations on safety with fellow riders – on wearing high-visibility clothing, using daytime running lamps, and a helmet.

Meet the heads of India’s top sports brands who steer their companies with help from their own experiences in fitness

On the leader board

SUNALINI MATHEW AND VANGMAYI PARAKALA

As our interest in leisure sports grow, the top bosses of companies that sell gear for it find that to truly understand the product they sell and the consumers they’re selling to, they must participate themselves. Radhika Gordhandas, a psychologist who worked with the Sports Authority of India, and currently heads Talent and Performance Management at Tata CliQ, says it helps both the company and the individual. “You are better connected mentally if your values match with the ecosystem you propagate,” she says, adding, “The company benefits through the high levels of positive engagement that they bring.” Here, leaders tell us their stories.



Sanil Sachar,
27, co-owner, Trusox

Sachar says that when he gets up in the morning, coffee in one hand and his workout clothes in the other, he is on auto-pilot. After he was scouted for Wakefield at 15, he played club football in England during his teenage years – he was a left winger, running down the flank with the ball, which required speed, endurance, and stamina. He now runs “at least 6 km thrice a week,” and does HIIT in the gym another three – “but not the kind they show on YouTube”, he says, speaking of doing a great deal of pulling and pushing exercises, as well as heavy lifting. He still sometimes follows his former coach’s running regime and plays tennis that he competed in school at the state level. Sachar says he was one of the early investors in Trusox that was recently launched in India, feeding into the pool of knowledge as the product was tested and improved upon.

Vijayaraghavan Venugopal,
44, CEO of Fast & Up

When he started running, Venugopal didn’t think he’d be working at, much less heading, a fitness-nutrition brand. In 2012, when he was still “in the corporate life”, he decided to lace up and head out – it was “a way to get into some kind of activity and do something different from work”.

At the time, Pune, his city of residence, was seeing the nascent stages of a running culture. He was 37 then, and started looking forward to weekend runs. “In school and college, I was always into sports. But in your early 20s and 30s, with work, travel, marriage, and kids, you lose almost 15 years,” he says.

Venugopal sees this trend reflected even with the customers of his company Fast & Up, a once-dormant Swiss brand that he’s revamped. As CEO for the past four years, he’s noticed that those who take to running more seriously, and require gels and supplements, are usually all in their early 30s.

In the initial few years, getting the word out about the business would mean participating in runs with various locals clubs. They now partner with four major marathons across the country, supply to cricket teams at the Ranji level and upwards, and have grown to a company of 75 people.

The only two challenges that sometimes force structured running to take a back seat are travel and family, he says. “I try to do five days of running a week, taking into account some early morning or late night flights. I also aim to finish by 7.30 a.m.,” so that he’s available to help send his children to school. “In fact, my older daughter nowadays wakes me up for a run sometimes – she’s taken to it already – and because I don’t want to say no to her, I’m forced to get up!”

In the last seven years, Venugopal has completed six full marathons in under three hours. Having conquered Berlin, Boston, Chicago, and New York, his next goals will be repeating the feat in London and Tokyo.

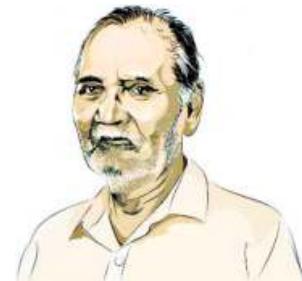
Rajat Khurana,
45, MD, Asics India and South Asia

After his first visit to the Asics headquarters in Japan, a few months after he’d joined the company in 2011, Khurana decided at midnight to run 12 km from home to work the following day. He’d been inspired by the ‘sound mind, sound body’ philosophy of the sports performance brand. He did, and was “shattered”. It took him two hours 45 minutes in a run-walk combination and while “mentally I was strong, the body requires training”, he says, of his inability to go to work for a couple of days because of the soreness. At the same time though, “I felt proud”, says the now full-marathoner, who participated in his first 42 km in Tokyo last year. In fact, his most recent achievement is a half marathon every week over the weekend (recorded on the Runkeeper app) for 52 weeks.

It has been a smooth journey for Khurana in terms of training, who says he was never an athlete in school or college, and came to it much later in life. The first year, he did the Bengaluru 10 km and the Airtel Delhi Half Marathon with not-great timing. Over the years, though, he’s consistently run four times a week and a day over the weekend. What has suffered is his socialising (he sleeps at 10 pm, with a 5 am wake up, daily), though not his relationships (“my family and friends know which days I run and plan accordingly”). But he says, “Everything comes at a price, so if you want to be fit and healthy you need to sacrifice something.”

Despite frequent travel, both within and out of the country, he makes sure to pack his shoes. “It is the best way to explore a new place. Even if I’m jet lagged, I reach the hotel and go for a run. It helps me physically and mentally,” he says. Though there may be days he misses, he’ll make up over the weekend. “It is not about the distance, it is about the feeling.”

DOWN MEMORY LANE



In the ruins of the Kotla lived a Mast Qalandar. Every day he would walk down to the tomb of Bhure Shah in the vicinity of the Red Fort and pray to the “saint with the fiery temper”. A big-built man with a barrel of a chest and a shaggy beard, his prayers were not the silent outpourings of a heart, but the mutterings of one who had lost contact with his surroundings. He would walk up to the shrine of Hare-Bhare and beat his *chimta* (iron tongs) to announce his arrival. Like Zanoni, from the 1842 book of Edward Bulwer-Lytton, who had the gift of immortality, he was likened to an order of mystics who thrive for centuries.

Sufi Rafiq Khan had this tale to tell about the Mast Qalandar. When Firoze Shah Tughlak took the reins of government into his hands after the sudden death of Mohammad bin Tughlak in Sindh, he was reminded by a young fakir that the emperor had died not because of the after-effects of a dish of bad fish, but because of cruelty to his subjects. So it was Firoze’s lot to undo the harm done by his cousin. The new Sultan was impressed by the words of the fakir and brought him along to Delhi. And when he built his Kotla, a



A man offering prayers at Jami Masjid, Feroz Shah Kotla, in New Delhi ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

Kotla’s mast qalandar

The belief that some men have advanced stages of being still persists, though there may be a logical explanation

special place was marked in it as the fakir’s abode.

Firoze Shah died after a very long reign. Taimur came and devastated Delhi. The Tughlaks were ousted by the Sayyids, who in turn lost their kingdom to the Lodhis. Next came the Moghuls and the British, but the fakir was still around. In 1857, during the revolt, he was at Kashmira Gate, encouraging the *bhists* (water carriers) to carry water to the sick and wounded.

The Qalandar was seen right up to 1947, but after the riots, he just disappeared. Some said that he had passed on, we’d never know the difference.

he had decided to make himself scarce because of the disgusting events. Nobody could imagine that he might have been killed – such was the aura that surrounded him.

Abdul Hai, a man who kept track of goings on in Delhi, and whose religious and other beliefs were tinged more by logic and reason than blind faith, had a more plausible story to offer. The Mast Qalandar was a member of an order of dervishes who lived in secluded areas, and what was better than the ruins of the Kotla? Even if one came and another passed on, we’d never know the difference.

One remembers a Mast Qalandar who used to stand in front of the sweets shop of Haji Kalan in Jama Masjid and beat his back with a *chimta* from time to time. He wore a huge black shirt and was quite wild in his habits, but people were somehow attracted to him though he hardly seemed to care, and the more alms he got the wilder he became. He used to come all the way from Basti Nizamuddin on foot and lived in one of the ruined dargahs. But he is long dead.

The writer is a veteran chronicler of Delhi

Caine, who will be seen in *Tenet* this July, has been a part of every Christopher Nolan film since *Batman Begins* in 2005. He adds that the Batman film was “one of the greatest things I have done in my life.”

It is an industry joke that

Nolan thinks of Caine as a ‘lucky mascot’.

The actor confirms this, saying, “All

‘I only read thrillers’

Soon to be in Nolan’s *Tenet*, a chat with Michael Caine, who just turned 87

KARISHMA UPADHYAY

In the early ’60s when Michael Caine crossed the pond to make his first Hollywood film, *Zulu*, he never imagined that he would spend the next few decades making over a 100 films, win two Oscars, and become a movie star. “I just did not have the looks and I had a very thick cockney accent,” he says during an early afternoon phone call from his London flat.

The British film icon spoke about the films he is making, the book he is writing, shows he follows on streaming platforms, and on working with director Christopher Nolan.

Caine, who will be seen in *Tenet* this July, has been a part of every Christopher Nolan film since *Batman Begins* in 2005. He adds that the Batman film was “one of the greatest things I have done in my life.”

It is an industry joke that Nolan thinks of Caine as a ‘lucky mascot’. The actor confirms this, saying, “All



the films I have made with him have raked in over a billion dollars, so he has to have me in a film even if he has no part for me. In *Dunkirk*, I was a voice-over.”

It is no surprise then that he is in *Tenet*, also starring Robert Pattinson, Dimple Kapadia and other.

“Nolan is so secretive he won’t let me have the script. I did my part and...haven’t heard anything since.”

While Caine often talks about how ‘there aren’t too many parts for 87-year-old men in the movies’, he has two other releases apart from *Tenet* this year. “There’s a modern version of Oliver Twist called *Twist*. Rita Ora plays the title character. I [also] did *Best Sellers*, a comedy movie in Montreal about an alcoholic author who has to go out and

publicise his book.” And in 2021 are *Medieval* and *Four Kids and It* (based on the eponymous 2012 novel by Jacqueline Wilson).

When he is not making films, the actor enjoys watching them on TV. In January, he tweeted in praise of the Sam Mendes film, *1917*. “It is one of the best war movies I have ever seen,” he says.

A fan of OTT platforms, Caine has watched all the *Jack Ryan* adventures and is currently watching *The Crown*. “I thought I knew everything about the British royal family, and every single episode (he has watched four now) has me sitting there with my mouth open, amazed about all these things I did not know. It is quite extraordinary.”

Off screen too, Caine is a raconteur extraordinaire. Over the years, he’s written multiple biographies; the last one was called *Blowing the Bloody Doors Off*.

He is now busy with his first attempts at fiction with a thriller, *If You Don’t Want To Die*. “I cannot write any more biographical books because I am 87,” he laughs, adding, “I do not read posh, intellectual fiction; I only read thrillers. I am having fun writing it, but I do not know whether anyone will have a great deal of fun reading it.”



Think, DIFFERENT

Provided with the right workplace environment, people with cognitive conditions like dyslexia and autism can be an asset to the company, claim neurodiversity advocates

SWETA AKUNDI

"There's one type of diversity we've spent less time considering: diversity of thought."

Universal Music U.K. CEO David Joseph's words find place in the company's Creative Differences handbook. Brought out early this year, it sought to address the need to make workplaces more 'neurodiverse', kick-starting a conversation around the phrase.

So what is neurodiversity? A growing movement in socio-political and mental health advocacy, it refers to the notion that seemingly 'impaired' cognitive features, characteristic of developmental disorders such as autism spectrum disorder, fall into normal human behavioural variations.

What it means

The movement pushes forward the idea that along with autism, other cognitive conditions such as Asperger's, dyslexia, and dyspraxia among others, are not always impairments or diseases that need to be corrected.

"The term neurodiversity is used by the autism community to distinguish persons with autism from the neurologically typical," says Merry Barua, Director, Action For Autism (AFA) and the National Centre for Autism in New Delhi. So those fall-

ing outside the spectrum become neuro-typical, and not the so-called 'normal'. "It is based on the understanding that people are neurologically diverse versus being 'lesser' or 'abnormal'."

Instead, if people with these conditions work in an environment favourable to their personalities, their condition could prove an advantage.

For instance, research has shown that people with autism often outperform others in auditory and visual tasks, and do better on non-verbal tests of intelligence. A study by University of Montreal found that in a test that involved completing a visual pattern, people with autism finished 40% faster than those without the condition.

"Ideally, they would be employed in fields that don't require constant group meetings, like programming, software developing, scientific research work or music," says Ritika Agarwal, consultant psychologist at Jaslok Hospital and Research Centre.

What neurodiverse persons may lack in social skills, they can make up for with other talents such as attention to detail, the ability to stick to a routine, and to recognise patterns. A person with ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), for example, can bring in creativity



and innovation, and not get tired easily.

"When you bring in these other perspectives to the organisation, your company is more likely to succeed," she says. It is a way to innovate, and that requires fresh perspectives.

How workplaces can help

The Universal Music U.K.'s handbook advises making these changes to the workplace environment: use of light background memos that make it easier for people with dyslexia to read, accepting a person's incapability to be extroverted at social gatherings, and so on.

"For companies to be accommodating of neurodiversity, they can make accommodations in their job interviews. Such as having the job applicant with autism demonstrate work skills that she is being interviewed for, rather than asking her where she sees herself 10 years later (something that might be difficult for someone on the spectrum to answer)," says Merry.

Other accommodations such as providing flexible work hours, and giving instructions in writing over email or voice recording can also help. "Managers need to have frank conversations with their employees

Open mind policy Wearing headphones helps with sensory overload; a table laying training session at ALFAA • GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

about their expectations. Sarcastic and passive hints could be hard to understand for them," adds Aggarwal.

She further says that there are NGOs who work in tie-ups with certain companies to train neurodiverse people for hiring. The hospitality sector in India has seen many such employees.

Ruby Singh's Assisted Living For Autistic Adults in Bengaluru has been helping people with autism get hired in workplaces for over a decade now. In her experience, Ruby finds that people with autism get disturbed with sensory overload. That could mean maintaining a low-noise and fragrance-free environment. "Offices can allow neurodiverse employees to play light music, or use headphones while working. They can build corners where employees can go when they need to calm down."

But perhaps the most important of all is educating other neuro-typical employees of the needs of the neurodiverse ones. Aggarwal recalls one of her clients who had to deal with corporate jealousy, and allegations of favouritism. "He needed to wear headphones to concentrate, but as a principle, the others did not. So one of his colleagues complained to their manager, and the manager had to explain the situation to him."

You could even employ a buddy system, explains Aggarwal, "it would help someone who gets too involved in their work, and forgets to take breaks. Their buddy could call this person along if he is going to have coffee. Basically make the person feel like he is part of the group."

The very question whether a neurodiverse person is too low functioning for a job comes from the kind of prism through which neurodiverse people are viewed, believes Merry. "I would do terribly if I were placed in a job in the IT sector. No one would presume that therefore women, or Bengalis, or Indians are not suited to IT. All of which I am," she says. "We have to first get rid of our assumptions about neurodiversity, and find the right person for the right job based on individual strengths and interests."

WHAT IS IT?

Diabulimia

SOMA BASU

When someone who has diabetes restricts insulin and binges too, they're diagnosed with a condition called diabulimia. Though uncommon in our country, this is usually seen in those with type 1 diabetes. Being insulin-dependent, they tweak their prescribed drug dosage to lose weight.

Weight gain is a natural side-effect of insulin, as the constant focus of treating diabetes is on diet and adjustments in insulin levels. Under peer pressure, adolescents and people in their 20s, mostly girls and women preoccupied with their physical appearance and need to look thin, tend to limit or skip insulin doses. This develops diabulimia in them.

The publicity given to the struggles of celebrities (Princess Diana, Britney Spears, Jane Fondla, Lady Gaga) with eating disorder bulimia – where people binge on food and then purge it out either with laxatives or vomiting to control weight – has people more clued into it. But diabulimia is less talked about and under-recognised.

"It finds no mention in medical textbooks," says Dr. Anoop Misra, chairman of Fortis CDOC Hospital for Diabetes and Allied Sciences, Delhi. "People with diabetes cannot use their body sugar for energy. Their increased blood sugars are released in excess in the urine. The insulin injection helps their cells to absorb sugar from the food and maintain a healthy glucose level," he explains.

"When there is no or less insulin injected, the glucose from the food remains unutilised, forcing the body to break down its fat reserves and cause weight loss," explains Dr. Sudhir R., a diabetologist based in Madurai. "Social relationships are important in recovery and those with diabulimia have to be reminded they are not alone. We have to identify what is driving their behaviour and help them to correct themselves," says Madurai-based psychiatrist, Dr. Deep T.

Anju Sood, a dietician from Bengaluru, says in her career of 25 years, she has seen three cases of bulimia so far and none for diabulimia. She says a collaborative approach to the care of both is needed.

"Combining psychological counselling and supervision, proper medical education about insulin, a nutrition plan with right food choices and family support helps in effective treatment."

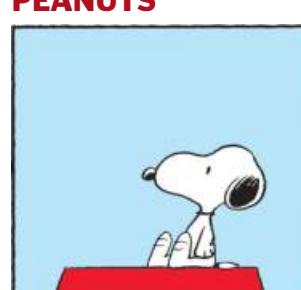
In this column, we demystify the buzzwords in wellness



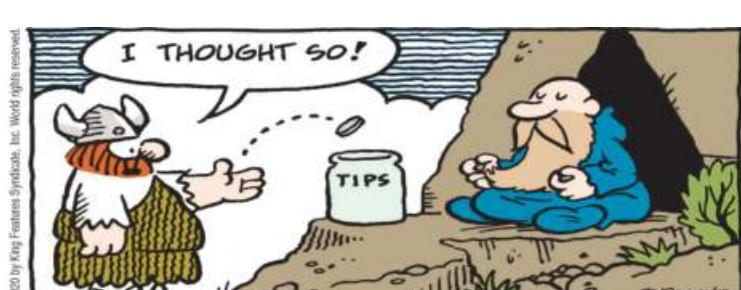
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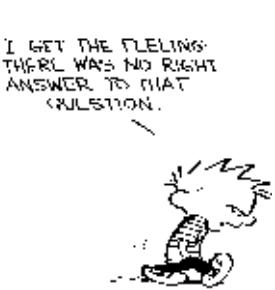
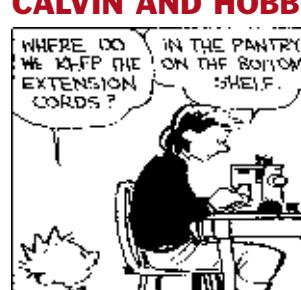
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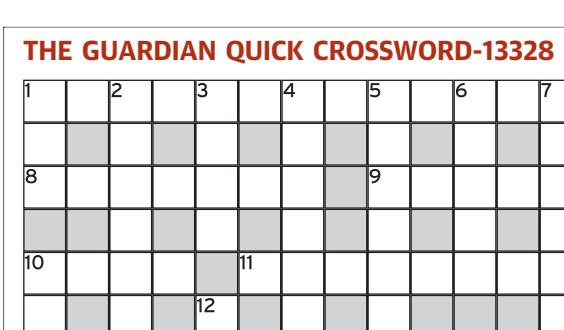
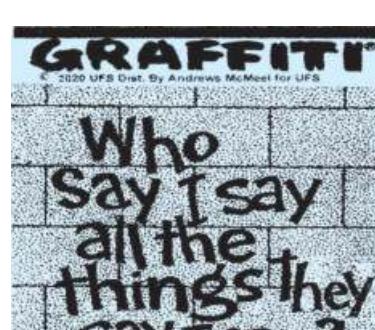
HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



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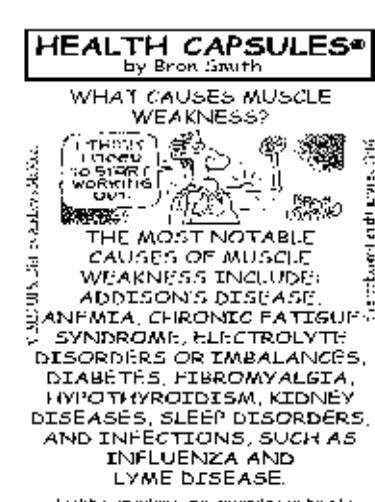
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- 5 Hitherto (8)
6 Eyed lecherously (5)
7 Occurring repeatedly (9)
10 Brazen (9)
12 Oily fish (8)
15 Expressed doubt about (7)
16 Deteriorate (6)
18 Electronic sound reproduction (5)
20 Funeral fire (4)
23 Concealed (3)

The solution will appear on March 17, 2020.

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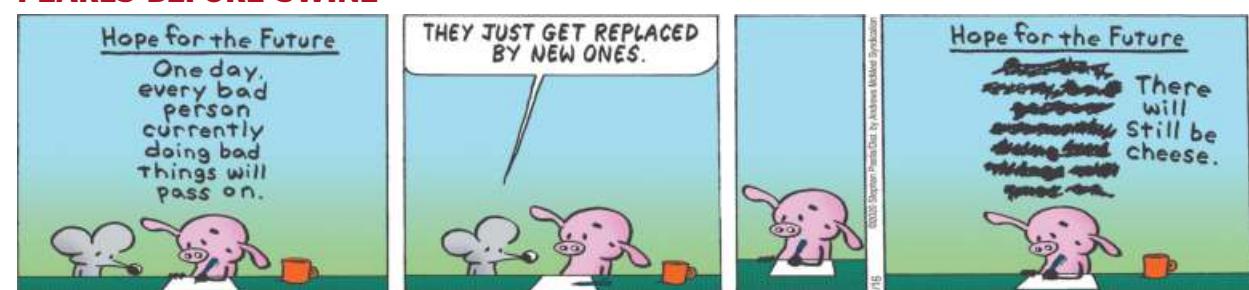
WUMO



- Across
1 Join the opposing side in Parliament (5,3,5)
8 Lamentable (7)
9 Object surviving from the past (5)
10 Partly open (4)
11 Bullfighter (8)
13 Harsh order, allowing no discussion (6)
14 Coterie (6)
17 Eccentric (8)
19 Something owed (4)
- Down
21 More mature (5)
22 Chic – fashionable (7)
24 With an exaggerated sense of self-importance (7-6)

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PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



COVID-19 IMPACT

A bit over-exaggerated, says Lockie Ferguson

AUCKLAND
The way things played out after he reported a sore throat, leading to COVID-19 tests and isolation in his hotel room, were a "bit over-exaggerated", feels New Zealand pacer Lockie Ferguson. "No. Probably a bit over-exaggerated as to how I was. I just sort of had very, very mild cold symptoms and the procedures were as they were and followed by Tommy



(Simsek, physio) and the support staff. Completely understandable. So yeah, kinda had a day in the hotel room by myself." PTI



Four-goal Ilicic donates ball to hospital

ROME
Atalanta forward Josip Ilicic has donated the ball with

Valencia confirms five positive tests

MADRID
Valencia confirmed on Sunday five of the club's players and staff have tested positive, including defender Ezequiel Garay, who became the first player in La Liga to confirm a positive test earlier on Sunday. Valencia said all those affected were "now at home, in good health and obeying self-isolation measures." AFP

which he scored four goals in the Champions League last week to a hospital in Bergamo, at the centre of Italy's coronavirus drama.

"We too are by your side, our angels, to win the most important match of all," said Ilicic, who gifted the ball to the Papa Giovanni XXIII Hospital in the city. Coach Gian Piero Gasperini has appealed for funds for the hospital to purchase medical equipment. AFP



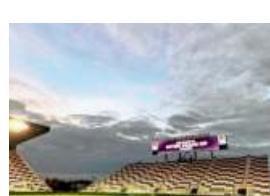
coronavirus, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), in a statement has said all its Lausanne-based staff will work from home starting Monday, until further notice, with the exception of some essential functions. It also been decided to close the Olympic museum from Monday, for two weeks. After this time, the situation will be reassessed. IANS

IOC staff to work from home starting Monday

LAUSANNE
In order to proactively limit the risk of spreading the

Paul Pogba makes fund-raising pledge

LONDON
Manchester United star Paul Pogba has promised to financially support the fight to stop the spread of the coronavirus. He has organised a fundraising page on Facebook and the France midfielder will double the amount raised if the target of £27,000 is reached. The appeal had raised over £2,000 within hours of being launched. AFP



Beckham visits empty stadium as MLS club's home debut delayed

MIAMI
David Beckham's six-year wait to watch his MLS club Inter

Miami make its home debut, which was to have ended Saturday, has been extended. But that didn't stop him from visiting the empty stadium on Saturday. His club was to have hosted the LA Galaxy, where he played between 2007 and 2012, in its first match at its temporary home in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. "Special day showing the family what we've built," Beckham posted on Instagram. So

Anand to commentate on Candidates

SPORTS REPORTER
CHENNAI
GM Viswanathan Anand for the first time will don the hat of a commentator for chess.com during the FIDE Candidates Tournament. The five-time World champion will be part of the commentary team alongside other GMs and will give his views regularly during the tournament from his home here. Anand failed to qualify for the Candidates tournament, which will be held in Yekaterinburg, Russia, from March 17 to April 4 to find a contender to face Magnus Carlsen.



Anand. ■ R. RAGU



Anand. ■ R. RAGU



Anand. ■ R. RAGU



Anand. ■ R. RAGU



Anand. ■ R. RAGU

Anand. ■ R. RAGU

Aadil Bedi
triumphs



Aadil Bedi •

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Nineteen-year-old Aadil Bedi's lion-hearted performance helped him win his maiden title in the Bengal Open golf championship at the Tollygunge Club here on Sunday.

Chandigarh-based Bedi triumphed in style with a chip-in birdie on the sixth playoff hole to end Pune golfer Udayan Mane's incredible three-match winning streak on the PGTI Tour.

The tournament, worth ₹ 30 lakh, witnessed the longest-running playoff on the PGTI. The previous record for the longest playoff was four holes which was set three times. The last event decided on the fourth playoff was the Jeev Milkha Singh Invitational 2019 where Ajeeetes Sandhu prevailed over Rashid Khan.

Bedi and PGTI Order of Merit leader Mane, joint leaders overnight, carded an identical 69 in the final round to tie at the top after the regulation 72 holes with matching totals of 14-under-266.

The scores: 266-Aadil Bedi (65, 65, 67, 69), Udayan Mane (67, 63, 67, 69); 267-Viraj Madappa (66, 68, 69, 64); 268-Mukesh Kumar (66, 65, 67, 70); 269-Rahil Gangjee (68, 66, 68, 67), Om Prakash Chouhan (65, 65, 70, 69), Khalin Joshi (67, 63, 69, 70).

SI Rally
postponed

SPORTS REPORTER

CHENNAI

The Madras Motor Sports Club postponed the South India Rally scheduled for March 20-22 to June 19-21 in view of the COVID-19 virus situation across the country.

The South India Rally also doubles up as a round of the FIA Asia-Pacific Rally Championship and the FMSCI Indian National Rally Championship (4-wheelers).

Chairman of the event, Vicky Chandhok said, "After much discussion internally, and following the lockdown in various States and territories across India, besides travel advisories and restrictions on public assembly, we have decided to postpone South India Rally to June 19-21."

"We were confident of running the event on schedule. However, developments in the past couple of days forced us to rethink and decide on postponing the South India Rally," said Chandhok who is also the president of APRC Working Group.

Rawat makes
1500m
freestyle B cut

SPORTS BUREAU
SYDNEY

Middle-distance swimmer Kushagra Rawat achieved the B cut (OST) for Tokyo 2020 in the 1500m freestyle by clocking 15.25.22s (cut time: 15.28.02s) at the 2020 NSW Open Swimming Championships here.

Over the past year, the 20-year-old has also bettered the B cut (OST) in both the 400m freestyle and 800m freestyle events.

Coyle's men deserve a round of applause

From the depths, Chennaiyin rose all the way before losing the title clash to ATK

ANIRUDH VELAMURI
CHENNAI

Even the loss in the biggest game of the season would've done little to dampen the mood in the Chennaiyin FC camp.

Under the stewardship of Owen Coyle, the team rose from rock bottom, outplayed the league's most entertaining side (FC Goa) in the playoffs and was also the dominant side in the final against ATK.

Poor finishing

If not for poor finishing, Chennaiyin would have probably clinched its third title.

"We want to win but also entertain while we do so," said Coyle, while taking charge in December 2019. His players did just that, producing some exciting football.

At the Fatorda Stadium on Saturday, right from kick off, they moved the ball with urgency, passed with accuracy and only a goaline clearance denied Chennaiyin. All of this in under 60 seconds!

The Chennai outfit registered the lion's share of possession (62%), had 279 more touches of the ball, played



Step by step: Chennaiyin FC, under Owen Coyle, climbed from ninth in the table at one stage to go all the way to the summit clash. •TWITTER

299 more passes with a lot more accuracy (75% compared to ATK's 58%).

Owen-fresh

Coyle's love for the game

and his positivity rubbed off on the players. He always spoke about taking it one game at a time, and it worked like a charm.

The Irishman landed in

the middle of the season, made minor tweaks to his predecessor John Gregory's system and everything suddenly fell in place. A side that was struggling to string

together even a few meaningful passes steamrollered its opponents and made its climb up the table.

It was not just the new manager and his philosophy, but also the hard work on the training ground that brought about this transformation.

"If you don't take your chances, it will come back to haunt you," said Coyle after the final. "The spoils went to ATK... so all the very best to them."

Earning respect

There might be regret but there won't be sleepless nights, for the players and fans. Coyle's men overcame all hurdles, brought the fans back to the stadium and earned back lost respect.

"Chennaiyin was the one team we did not want to face in the playoffs," said FC Goa's Clifford Miranda, the man in charge of the most entertaining and dominant side in ISL history.

From an also-ran to being feared by the best side in the country... that is Coyle's legacy. And Chennaiyin's incredible run, despite the reverse in the final, will be part of Indian football folklore.



more than 250 athletes, including stars of the United States' 2012 and 2016 gold medal-winning Olympic teams.

A US Senate investigation found that "multiple institutions" failed to adequately respond to credible allegations against Nassar, but

Biles – who also owns 19 world titles and is expected to be among the stars of the Tokyo Olympics – used the tweet as a chance to demand an independent investigation into the Larry Nassar sex abuse scandal.

"How about you amaze me and do the right thing... have an independent investigation," Biles snapped on Twitter after the federation's birthday tweet.

"HAPPY BIRTHDAY to the most decorated gymnast of all time, @simonebiles!" USA Gymnastics wrote, posting a video of Biles in action in a floor exercise.

"We know you will only continue to amaze us and make history!"

Former national gymnastics team doctor Nassar was

jailed for life for abusing

survivors & I do," she tweeted earlier this month.

The dazzlers



Owner's pride: Sanjiv Goenka, chairman of RP-Sanjiv Goenka Group and owner of ATK, at a felicitation function for the team in Kolkata on Sunday. •RAJEEV BHATT

IOA delegation's visit to Tokyo cancelled

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The visit of a high-powered delegation comprising Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju and top IOA officials to Tokyo later this month to look into India's logistical preparedness for the Olympics has been put on hold in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The visit was scheduled for March 25 to 29 but will now happen at a later date which is yet to be decided.

Besides Rijiju, the other members of the delegation included Indian Olympic Association president Narinder Batra, secretary-general Rajeev Mehta, Boxing Federation of India president

Carrom tournaments postponed

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The proposed visit of High Level Indian Delegation to Tokyo consisting of Govt Officials and Indian Olympic Association to review India's #Tokyo2020 preparation on 25th March is temporarily postponed," Rijiju tweeted.

Mehta told PTI, "In view of the rising threat of this COVID-19 pandemic, the visit has been put on hold. As of now, we have not decided when the delegation will visit Tokyo. It will happen at a later date depending on the situation."

Fury won't lose world title: WBC chief

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

Tyson Fury's reign as world heavyweight champion will not be ended by new claims over an alleged drug-testing scam, according to WBC president Mauricio Sulaiman.

It was alleged in a *Mail on Sunday* report a farmer was offered money to provide an alibi for Fury's failed drugs test in 2015.

Fury and his cousin Hughie tested positive for nandrolone in 2015, which they subsequently blamed on eating uncastrated wild boar meat, citing a farmer called Martin Carefoot who claimed to have provided them with the product.

After an expensive and elongated stand-off with UK Anti-Doping, Fury and Hughie received retrospective two-year bans and were able to resume their careers in December 2017.

In the *Mail* report, Carefoot denied having provided

the Fury team with the meat, insisting he was offered £25,000 to make up the story in order to aid their case. But Sulaiman, whose WBC belt Fury won against Deontay Wilder in Las Vegas last month, said the allegations would have "no impact" on his reign as champion.

"Personally, I prefer to believe Tyson Fury ahead of someone who has already admitted to lying in legal

documents for financial gain," Sulaiman told *The Sun*.

"The person who has claimed he accepted money to lie should be the one on trial, in my personal opinion, especially when he has waited five years to tell his story.

Fury's promoter Frank Warren, who was not involved at the time, told *The Sun* he had previously been sent letters by Carefoot.

Van Dijk worried about winning in empty stadium

Coronavirus effect could see the Premier League play out without fans

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

Virgil Van Dijk fears Liverpool will be forced to celebrate its first English title for 30 years in an empty stadium as a result of coronavirus chaos. All Premier League games have been postponed until at least April 3 due to the spread of the global pandemic.

Premier League chiefs are

set to meet on Thursday to discuss if it will be possible to continue the season and, if so, in what format.

Games could be played behind closed doors, which would mean Liverpool, 25 points clear of second placed Manchester City, winning the title without its fans being present.

That is a depressing prospect for Liverpool defender

Van Dijk. "If we won it in an empty stadium and the fans weren't there, I'd be gutted for them," he told several British newspapers on Sunday.

"Obviously, if there are no fans at Anfield, then it will be a bit of a blow. No one wants to play games without the fans being present."

"Until a decision is made on how we go on from here,

then we just have to deal with it."

Scrapped?

Some have suggested the season should be scrapped for safety reason, which would leave Premier League chiefs to decide if Liverpool should be given the title even though the campaign did not reach its scheduled 38-game conclusion.

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**STEP FOR
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Italians find a moment of joy in times of crisis

From the southern islands to the Alps, they sang the national anthem and played instruments in chorus to keep spirits up

JASON HOROWITZ
ROME

It started with the national anthem. Then came the piano chords, trumpet blasts, violin serenades and even the clanging of pots and pans – all of it spilling from people's homes, out of windows and from balconies, and rippling across rooftops.

Finally, on Saturday afternoon, a nationwide round of applause broke out for the doctors on the medical front lines fighting the spread of Europe's worst coronavirus outbreak.

"It was from our hearts, to say thanks and show that we can get past this," said Emma Santachiara, 73, who came out onto the terrace of her apartment in the Monteverde section of Rome to clap with her granddaughters.

Italians remain essentially under house arrest as the nation, the European front in the global fight against the coronavirus, has ordered extraordinary restrictions on their movement to prevent contagions.

As of Sunday, the virus had infected more than 21,000 Italians and left more



In unison: A woman playing music from her balcony in Milan and opera singer Laura Baldassari, right. Italians remain in self-quarantine to prevent spread of COVID-19. ■NYT

than 1,400 dead, according to national officials – the worst toll reported anywhere outside of China. Italy has closed all of its schools, bars and restaurants and restricted movement for anything other than work, health or the procurement of essentials.

Like any national crisis, the virus has exposed the flaws of those countries it has struck the hardest, whether it be the reflex for secrecy in China, the down-

playing of the crisis in Iran or the initial confusion and fragmentation in the Italian response.

But to the extent that this is a virus that tries people's souls, it has also demonstrated the strengths of those national characters.

In China, patriotic truck drivers risked infection to bring desperately needed food to the people of Wuhan,

the epicentre of the outbreak. In Iran, videos show doctors in full scrubs and masks dancing to keep spirits up.

And in Italy, the gestures of gratitude and music ring out above the country's vacated streets, while social media feeds fill with encouraging, sentimental and humorous web videos.

On Friday evening, at the exact hour that health officials normally update the daily numbers of the coun-

try's increasing infected and dead, Italians from the southern islands to the Alps sang the national anthem and played instruments.

Santachiara, in Rome, was among them. "It's not like we're maestros," she said, but "it's a moment of joy in this moment of anxiety."

Keeping distance

On the web, one man showed off his new invention, a vest of horizontal cardboard spokes that maintained a 1-meter distance from anyone around him.

"Cool," said the man, looking like the centre of a pro-peller. "I'm going to work."

Other irreverent posts showed a parrot smashing its beak into a mirror above a "fourth day of quarantine" caption and a father extolling how happy he was to be home as his bickering children drowned out his voice.

In another, a teenager spritzed on some perfume for a walk to the kitchen.

Images of nurses collapsed from exhaustion or their faces bruised from tightly sealed masks have also spread across the web in recent days. One image cir-

culating widely on Saturday showed a nurse cradling the Italian peninsula in her arms.

Parents posted pictures of unicorns and rainbows drawn by young children with the hashtag "It will all be OK."

The Italian media reported a spike in sales of the Italian flag. The national anthem, usually limited to the start of soccer matches, reverberated off palazzo walls at 6 p.m. Friday.

Like many anthems, it is a martial call to arms and sacrifice – in this case, against the Austrian empire – and for unity after being for centuries "downtrodden and derided, /Because we are not one people."

"Let us join in cohort,
"We are ready to die!
"We are ready to die!
Italy has called!"

"We're Italians, and being vocal is part of our culture," said Giorgio Albertini, 51, an archaeology professor who clapped from his apartment balcony in the university district of Milan, calling it a way "to feel a community and to participate of the collective grief." ■NYT



Noah Colvin moving boxes of hand sanitiser to his storeroom in Hixson. ■NYT

with little idea where to sell them. "It's been a huge amount of whiplash," he said. "From being in a situation where what I've got coming and going could potentially put my family in a really good place financially to 'What the heck am I going to do with all of this?'"

The Colvins are among probably thousands of sellers who have amassed stockpiles of hand sanitiser and crucial respirator masks that many hospitals are now rationing, according to interviews with eight Amazon sellers and posts in private Facebook and Telegram groups from dozens more. Amazon said it had recently removed hundreds of thousands of listings and suspended thousands of sellers' accounts for price gouging related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Amazon pulled its items and thousands of other listings for sanitiser, wipes and face masks. The company suspended some of the sellers behind the listings and warned many others that if they kept running up prices, they'd lose their accounts. EBay soon followed with even stricter measures, prohibiting any U.S. sales of masks or sanitiser.

Now, while people search in vain for sanitiser to protect themselves from the spread of the coronavirus, Mr. Matt Colvin is sitting on 17,700 bottles of the stuff

Amazon, eBay, Walmart and others are trying to stop their sellers from making excessive profits from a public health crisis. While the companies aimed to discourage people from hoarding such products and jacking up their prices, many sellers had already cleared out stores and started selling the goods online.

Now, both the physical and digital shelves are nearly empty. ■NYT

U.S. students beat virus blues with #SunshineSongs

As events are being cancelled, actor Laura Benanti's call to 'find some bright spots' in the crisis draws strong resonance online

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

American students are belting out show tunes on social media to make up for high school musical performances that were called off because of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Schools have closed across the U.S. while cultural institutions such as Broadway have been shuttered in a

bid to slow the spread of the contagion.

Actress Laura Benanti sparked the Twitter trend after imploring her followers to "find some bright spots" in the public health crisis.

Post yourself singing'

"If you were meant to perform in your High School musical and it was cancelled please post yourself singing,"

the Broadway performer tweeted.

Hundreds of students responded to the #Sunshine-Songs call over the next hours with clips from rehearsals or home renditions of musical numbers from *Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Misérables* and other popular theatre plays.

"Our senior class designed and built EVERYTHING and

have been preparing for this for a year," tweeted one woman, whose opening night performance of *The Jungle Book* was cancelled.

"Thank you for the chance to share this."

The craze caught the eye of Broadway composer and *Hamilton* playwright Lin-Manuel Miranda. "Thank you, @LauraBenanti, thank you kids, I'm watching too."

Laura Benanti ■AFP

Glitz premieres are giving way to screenings at home and via online platforms

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LOS ANGELES

Hollywood directors who had their glitz premieres cancelled due to COVID-19 are finding inventive ways to build buzz for their films – including bringing the red carpet into their living rooms.

Movie festivals such as SXSW in Texas and Tribeca in New York have been scrapped in recent days as the deadly pandemic spreads.

This has shorn major titles of the publicity generated by opening night reviews and galas, and left hundreds of unsold indie films without distributors.

The makers of *The Carnivores*, a quirky thriller-meets-love story set to debut at SXSW, took matters into their own hands by shifting the "premiere" to the cinematographer Adam Minnick's Austin home.

"We have full catering, we

have a red carpet, we have a photographer coming, we have local news," said director Caleb Michael Johnson.

The red carpet will run from the front porch, through the house, and back to a taco stand – which is being catered for free by a local sponsor.

The idea emerged from a bar conversation the day the festival was cancelled.

"Our world premiere was

on Saturday 14th and dammit we wanted to still have our screening on Saturday 14th in Austin."

The same tactic was employed by U.S. actor David Arquette, whose documentary about his controversial forays into pro-wrestling shifted from a SXSW premiere to his home near Hollywood within 24 hours.

Mr. Arquette and his wife flew in the director from the

East Coast – and made a dash to wholesale store Costco for drinks – before guests gathered on couches and the living room floor, the Los Angeles Times reported.

No substitute'

Mr. Johnson said the more intimate nature of these events put guests at ease about the risk of contagion – but others are skipping physical events altogether, turning to technology.

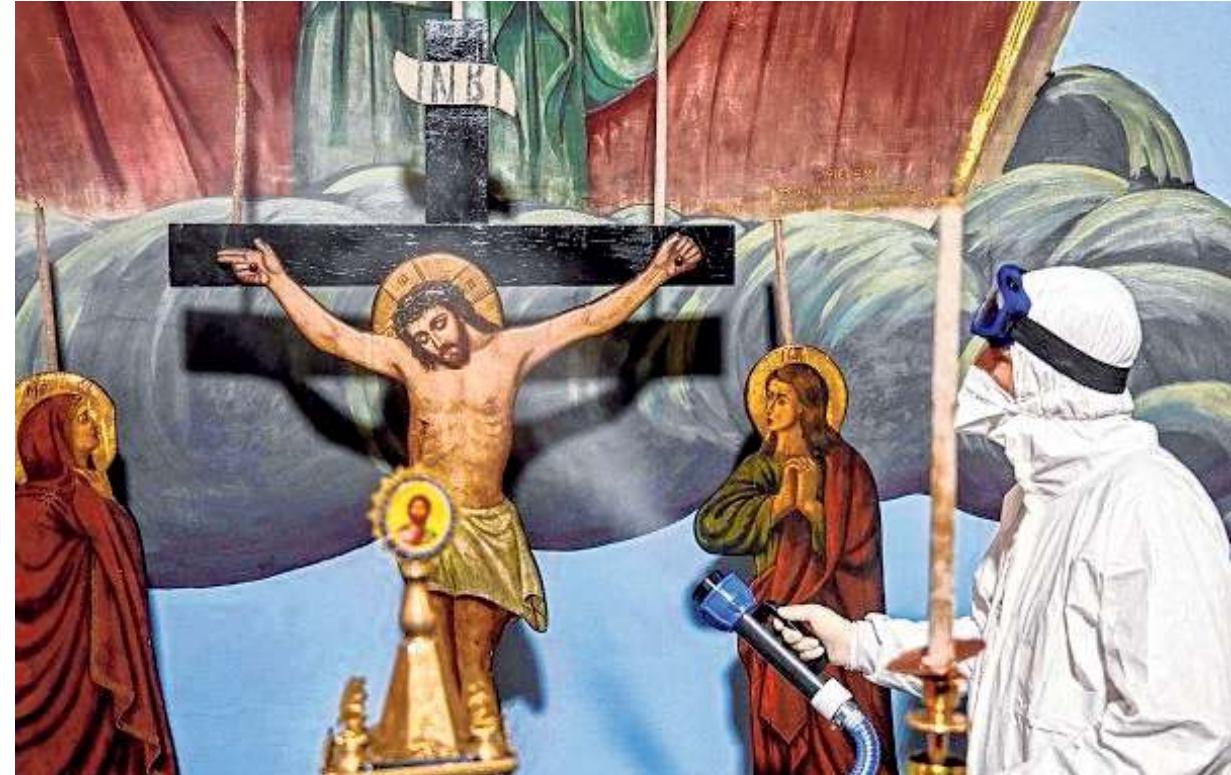
SXSW's prestigious film competitions will go ahead as planned, with movies available to juries online.

Spencer Folmar's new drama about the opioid crisis, intended to screen at the postponed Beverly Hills Film Festival, will hit streaming platforms on the day it was due in theatres nationwide.

The movie will now rely

on online advertising and sending digital "screener" links to critics.

+ Godliness and cleanliness



A municipal worker disinfecting the Panagia Altimermer Orthodox Greek Church in Istanbul to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 on Sunday. ■AFP

IN BRIEF



Oman to ban single-use plastic bags from 2021

MUSCAT
Oman will ban single-use plastic bags starting next year as part of efforts to reduce pollution and protect the environment. ■AFP



No public participation at Pope's Easter events

VATICAN CITY
The Vatican has said that its traditional Easter celebrations would be held this year without worshippers due to COVID-19 outbreak. ■AFP

No warm greetings, no mosque prayers

Across the Gulf, 'corona phobia' is making people change their habits

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
DUBAI

No shisha pipe sessions, deserted streets, mosques and shopping malls, drones in the sky broadcasting public health warnings – the new coronavirus has turned life upside down in Gulf societies.

More than 800 cases of the COVID-19 have been recorded so far across the six nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), but so far no deaths.

Facing a mounting public health threat, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman have taken drastic measures to combat the pandemic.

Awkward greetings
Drones in the skies were sounding messages in multiple languages urging people



When old habits die easy: A drone being used to disinfect the area around the Imam Hussein Shrine in Karbala, Iraq. ■AFP

to return to their homes.

Residents in the Omani capital of Muscat told AFP there had been much "fear and panic" over what many of them have termed "Corona phobia" at a time when a small bottle of disinfectant is in almost everyone's pockets or bags.

They said many people have stopped shaking hands or kissing each other on the cheeks, a common greeting across the Arab world.

In Saudi Arabia, 60-year-old Abu Abdulrahman said he felt awkward about the rapidly changing social norms. "Do I shake hands and kiss

or do I not? I don't know," he said. "I try not to do that, but I get embarrassed. What if the other person puts their hand out first?"

Meanwhile, both the UAE and Qatar have advised their citizens to stop the traditional "nose to nose" greeting, with Abu Dhabi instructing residents that a wave would suffice.

Measures to combat the spread of the virus have also impacted the way many Muslims in the Gulf worship.

After Saudi Arabia suspended the "umrah" year-round pilgrimage, it advised residents against praying in mosques if they have any symptoms of the virus.

Kuwait banned all mass prayers, an unprecedented move.

"Pray at home, pray at home," an imam preached.

Mexico holds music festival despite coronavirus concerns

Tens of thousands of fans flock to Vive Latino

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MEXICO CITY

While the COVID-19 pandemic has led authorities around the globe to cancel concerts and sporting events, and even shut down daily activities in some places, Mexico City is going ahead with Vive Latino – one of the most important music festivals in the country.

Some acts backed out, but tens of thousands of music fans flocked on Saturday to the first day of the festival, which still expected Guns N' Roses, Carlos Vives and Zootie to be among its headliners. Organisers said over 70,000 tickets were sold for each of the festival's two days.

Concerns about the new COVID-19 illness were evident, though. At the entrance, each person entering was checked for fever and a strong smell of antibacterial gel permeated in the air.

But once past that, the dynamics of the festival were not much changed. People walked excitedly toward the various stages and crowded together for the performances.



Staying upbeat: Fans dressed in biological suits strike a pose during the Vive Latino music festival in Mexico City. ■AP

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