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₹1 crore for kin of staff
who die fighting virus
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Release advance wages
to MGNREGA workers,
Sonia Gandhi tells PM
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Trump says ready to
help end Saudi-Russian
oil price war
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Wimbledon tennis
championships cancelled
due to pandemic
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NEARBY



Couple tie the knot at a police station in Odisha

BHUBANESWAR
A young couple in Odisha's Bargh district found no safer place than a police station to solemnise their marriage on Tuesday. Pabitra Sahoo and Lakshmi Meher had been in love for more than a year and did not want to delay their marriage.

NORTH & EAST ▶ PAGE 4

Devotees dispersed at Rajasthan dargah

JAIPUR
About 100 devotees, who defied the lockdown and gathered for observing the rituals of 'Urs' (death anniversary) at a dargah in Ajmer district, were dispersed by the police with the use of mild force. The six-day 'Urs' of Sufi mystic Khwaja Fakhrudin Chishti at the dargah ended on Wednesday.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 8

Five Delhi doctors test positive for COVID-19

NEW DELHI
At least three doctors of different Delhi hospitals and two doctors from Aam Aadmi Mohalla Clinics have tested positive for COVID-19. While it is alleged that a doctor working at the Safdarjung Hospital contracted the infection while treating COVID-19 patients, the hospital hasn't confirmed it.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 9

Tablighi Jamaat headquarters cleared

29 more occupants test positive, taking the total in Delhi alone to 53; contact tracing under way

NIKHIL M. BABU
SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

All occupants of the Tablighi Jamaat headquarters, at the centre of an extensive net of the novel coronavirus transmission, were evacuated by early Wednesday, even as the authorities scrambled to identify and quarantine visitors who had returned home to various parts of the country.

At least 29 more occupants tested positive on Wednesday, taking the total in Delhi alone to 53.

Of around 310 delegates from Kerala, only 60 have returned to the State, and are under quarantine.

The missionary sect's followers travel extensively, and efforts are on to trace the rest. At least 500 participants from Haryana are in quarantine.



Reaching out, for safety: Media personnel maintaining physical distance as they interview health workers sanitising an area near the Nizamuddin mosque in Delhi ▶ PTI

ple from different mosques in the city. "People who have visited the centre are present in other masjids. We have visited at least 15 such mosques in the city," said the official.

2,346 evacuated
The Delhi police Special Branch and the Delhi government shifted 275 foreign nationals to quarantine from various mosques and places in and around the national capital. They were associated with Tablighi Jamaat.

A total of 2,346 people were evacuated from the Markaz (centre), which serves as the international

headquarters of the sect, at Nizamuddin, and 536 of them were sent to hospitals and 1,810 were sent to quarantine facilities, the Delhi government said in a statement.

The evacuation was completed around 4 a.m. on Wednesday. Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said. "The operation lasted for three-and-a-half days, and extensively in the last 36 hours." He said the Delhi government prepared a list of the people evacuated, along with their phone numbers, and the police were looking into it. "The cyber cell will investigate the numbers and

look into who all they met and where are the rest of them. And where are the people who met them," he said.

The asymptomatic people, who have been moved to the quarantine facilities, are not being tested immediately, but will closely be monitored, officials said. Mr. Sisodia requested all visitors to the centre in March to report to the authorities. "If you do not come forward or if you are ill and are hiding it, action will be taken against you," he said.

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MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 5, 8, 9, 10
FOOD CRISIS ▶ PAGE 11

Phones to be tracked

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday announced that the mobile phones of all those who have been asked to home quarantine themselves will be tracked by the Delhi police to keep a check on their movement. Several other countries have used this technology to contain the spread of COVID-19 and it was one way to ensure that people abide by quarantine norms, Mr. Kejriwal said. ▶ PAGE 2

110 new cases from Delhi event in T.N.

No Stage-3 transmission, says govt.



Intensive checks: Coimbatore Corporation workers checking houses in Ukkadam on Wednesday. ▶ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu's tally of confirmed coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cases crossed the 200-mark on Wednesday. With 110 more persons who attended the Tablighi Jamaat conference at Nizamuddin in Delhi testing positive for COVID-19 in 15 districts, the total number of cases in the State increased to 234.

Health Secretary Beela Rajesh said of the 110, one person was from Myanmar and another from Indonesia. "Till yesterday, 80 people who attended the Delhi conference tested positive for COVID-19. With today's count, a total of 190 who attended the conference have tested positive in the State," she told reporters. However, it was not clear if the count

of 80 included the contacts of these travellers.

The 110 persons were in the following districts – 28 in Coimbatore, 20 in Theni, 17 in Dindigul, nine in Madurai, seven each in Tirupattur and Chengalpattu, six in Tirunelveli, five in Sivaganga, two each in Kancheepuram, Tiruvarur, Erode and Thoothukudi and one each in Karur, Tiruvannamalai and Chennai. Till Tuesday, the Health department had tracked 515 persons, who had returned to various parts of the State after attending the conference.

Ms. Rajesh added that Tamil Nadu had not progressed to Stage-3 transmission as all these cases belonged to one particular group.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

+ India sees a sharp spike in infections

376 new cases registered in past 24 hours

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India reported three deaths and 376 new cases on Wednesday – the highest-ever single-day increase in its COVID-19 tally.

This brought the total confirmed cases to 1,637 and took the death toll to 38. One hundred and thirty two persons have been cured/discharged from hospitals after recovery, the Union Health Ministry said at its daily press briefing, which was the shortest in a month as questions were restricted to a couple of media outlets.

Reports from the State Health Departments put the number of positive cases at 1,897, with 1,702 active ones. The number of deaths stood at 55.

An official of the Indian Council of Medical Research



Hunger pangs: Workers waiting for meals being distributed at the Koyambedu Market in Chennai. ▶ B. VELANKANNI RAJ

(ICMR) said 47,951 tests had been conducted so far, including 861 by private laboratories, and 126 ICMR laboratories were involved in testing.

Days after the lockdown began on March 24, several migrant workers were out on the streets of Delhi and other cities, trying to return home to Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal.

The Health Ministry issued an advisory for proper quarantine and "psycho-so-

cial measures" for migrants on Tuesday. Under this, trained counsellors and/or community group leaders of all religions would visit them in relief camps and provide support.

The measure followed a directive from the Supreme Court to deal with the migrants in a "humane manner".

The Railways are modifying coaches to accommodate 80,000 isolation beds.

Twenty-four categories of medical devices would be regulated as "drugs", according to a decision by the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority. This would prevent suppliers from hiking rates to more than 10% of their prices.

The Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy also recommended measures for self-care in preventive healthcare to boost immunity, especially for respiratory health.

Move aimed at protecting jobs in Group D category

VIJAYA SINGH
NISTULA HEBBAR
NEW DELHI

The Union government has issued a notification defining "domiciles" in the new Union Territory (UT) of Jammu and Kashmir for protecting jobs in the Group D category and entry-level non-gazetted posts for the dominies.

On August 6 last, the Centre withdrew J&K's special status under Article 370 and Article 35A of the Constitution and bifurcated it into the UTs of J&K and Ladakh.

Changes in PSA

Tuesday's notification of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) makes changes to the Public Safety Act (PSA) by removing a clause that prohibited J&K residents booked under the Act to be lodged in jails outside.

At a time when all our efforts and attention should be focused on the COVID-19 outbreak, the Centre slips in a new domicile law. Insult is heaped on injury when we see the law offers none of the protections that were promised

OMAR ABDULLAH,
National Conference
leader

This order is a casual attempt, cosmetic in nature, to hoodwink the people of J&K who genuinely believed that post October 31, 2019 their rights and privileges in the matter of employment and other rights would remain as it was

ALTAF BUKHARI,
JKAP leader

"This is according to the norms in other UTs and States. Recruitment by the UPSC expands the search for talent across the country," the official said.

Vacancies in posts

According to the MHA's reply to a parliamentary panel on February 18, there are more than 84,000 vacancies in J&K, of which 22,078 pertain to Class IV employees, 54,375 to non-gazetted and 7,552 to the gazetted level.

The order defines a domicile as one "who has resided for a period of 15 years in the UT of J&K or has studied for a period of seven years and appeared in Class 10th /12th examination in an educational institution located in the UT of J&K or who is registered as a migrant by the Relief and Rehabilitation Commissioner (Migrants)."

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

KASHMIR PARTIES OPPOSE NEW DOMICILE RULES ▶ PAGE 8

Facility for migrants in U.P. district awaits first occupant

Jaypee Sports Complex, which can accommodate 2,000 people, is lying vacant 2 days since it was opened

JATIN ANAND
GREATER NOIDA

The Jaypee Sports Complex on the Yamuna Expressway, the largest facility created by the Uttar Pradesh government in Gautam Buddha Nagar to provide shelter to stranded migrant workers, with a capacity to accommodate 2,000 people, has zero inmates so far, The Hindu found during a visit here on Wednesday.

Spread over approximately 12 acres, the facility consists of an estimated 57 large tin sheds – some of which have been designated 'family sheds' – lined with wooden panelling to keep a check on the ambient temperature as summer progresses, mats with visibly clean white sheets, sanitation and potable water supply, in addition to separate toilets for men and women.



Staff checking the facilities at the Jaypee Sports Complex on the Yamuna Expressway on Wednesday. ▶ R.V. MOORTHY

The only thing seemingly missing at the camp over the last two days since it was set up, according to officials associated with its creation and upkeep, is the people for whom it exists.

"Before the Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority (YEIDA)

cided that it will accommodate no more than 2,000 individuals," an official present at the site said.

"We have been here for the last two and a half days and not even a single migrant worker has turned up. We suspect most of them went to Agra along the banks of the Yamuna on foot or via the currently unused railway lines that criss-cross the area," said another official.

Former DM's plan

The former District Magistrate of Gautam Buddha Nagar, B.N. Singh – who was transferred earlier this week following a rebuke by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath over the high number of COVID-19 cases in the district comprising Noida and Greater Noida – had issued an order last Sunday under the Epidemic Diseases

Act, 1897, designating the area as a shelter home for migrants in the midst of their exodus to their respective hometowns.

After the order, arrangements for as many as 6,050 migrant workers were made at 28 shelters spread across 60-odd kilometres between Noida and Jyoti. Most of these, according to sources familiar with the developments in this regard, are either vacant or have "very thin occupancy".

"YEIDA has made all the necessary arrangements for migrant workers, who were not able to travel to their respective hometowns, at this facility. We look forward to receiving anyone in need of shelter here," said Navneet Goyal, Officer on Special Duty, Land, YEIDA.

MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 2, 3, 4

India welcomes foreign contributions to PM-CARES

Individuals and organisations can pitch in, says official

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

India welcomes foreign contributions to the PM-CARES fund to fight the threat posed by the novel coronavirus, a source said here on Wednesday.

The official highlighted the shortage of ventilators and personal protective equipment for medical professionals, which needs to be addressed urgently.

"The pandemic is unprecedented. In view of this, India has taken a decision to accept foreign contributions to the PM-CARES fund," said a source familiar with India's plans to deal with the crisis.

The PM-CARES fund, a public charitable trust, was set up in response to the emerging requirement for resources. "Contributions can be made by individuals and organisations, both in India and abroad," said the source familiar with India's plans to deal with the crisis.

The official described the shortage of ventilators and personal protective equipment as "acute", which prompted Indian diplomatic teams to look for reliable supplies from different parts of the world. "We are working with our ambassadors to deal with the huge shortage of ventilators and other equipment," the official said. The issue also featured during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's video discussion with 130 Indian envoys on March 30.

The official said the bulk of the equipment and relief materials were flowing in through independent organisations as special contributions, while the government was purchasing the items that were in short supply in the health sector.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8



Narendra Modi

Timings**DELHI**

THURSDAY, APR. 02
RISE 06:10 SET 18:40
RISE 12:26 SET 01:50
FRIDAY, APR. 03
RISE 06:09 SET 18:41
RISE 13:29 SET 02:43
SATURDAY, APR. 04
RISE 06:08 SET 18:41
RISE 14:35 SET 03:33

Delhi Weather max min
Delhi City 30 18
Safdarjung 30 18
Palam 31 18

Delhi Palam Today
28°C A cloudy and comfortable day lies ahead. There are chances of rain and thunder-shower activities.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
28°C A dry and warm day with partly cloudy sky to prevail. Night will be pleasant and dry.

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THE HINDU
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Air Quality of Delhi-NCR		
Delhi 73	Gurugram 69	
Ghaziabad 79	Faridabad 90	
Noida 73	Greater Noida 94	
Good 0-50	Satisfactory 51-100	Moderate 101-200
Poor 201-300	Very Poor 301-400	Severe >400
Air Quality Index at 4 p.m. yesterday (Average of past 24 hours) Source: CPCB		



Standstill: Homeless and stranded migrant workers rest in a government-run shelter; Connaught Place wears a deserted look; empty railway tracks as nationwide lockdown continues, on Wednesday. •GETTY IMAGES, AP AND AFP

Police to track phones of people under quarantine

Strict action to be taken against violators, says Kejriwal as he follows example of other nations to curb COVID-19 spread

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI



Tracking mobile phones is a way to ensure people abide by quarantine norms, the CM said. •PTI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday announced that the mobile phones of all those who have been asked to home quarantine themselves will be tracked by the Delhi Police to keep a check on their movement.

Several other countries have used this technology to contain the spread of COVID-19, and that tracking mobile phones was one such way to ensure people abide by quarantine norms, he said.

"The government has given 14,345 phone numbers to the Delhi Police on Wednesday

Making the announce-

ment during his daily digital briefing, the Chief Minister reiterated that there has not been any community transmission of COVID-19 in Delhi.

He added that for those persons who do not have ration cards, the Delhi government said it was a challenge

C The AAP government has given 14,345 phone numbers to the Delhi Police on Wednesday to track them, in addition to 11,084 numbers it had shared on Tuesday

ARVIND KEJRIWAL
Chief Minister

to distribute ration to them but it had created a system for roughly 10 lakh people who do not have ration cards.

"I want to request all those people to apply for a ration card on the Delhi government e-district website. You

can take the help of MLAs and SDMs. You will not get a ration card but will get ration every month till COVID-19 persists," Mr. Kejriwal said.

No salary cut

Appealing to employers to not cut salaries of their employees, Mr. Kejriwal said, "Today is April 1, and to release the salaries of the employees, the employers, and their accountants need to work through the offices. For this, the Delhi government is issuing two passes each to the employers for the next two days, so that they can release the payments online to their employees."

The Delhi government also

announced that it has initiated the process of giving assistance of ₹5,000 to daily wage labourers associated with construction work during the lockdown.

"The money is being transferred directly to the account of these labourers. The Delhi government has released ₹5,000 assistance amount for 32,358 registered workers on March 31. A total amount of ₹16.18 crore has been given to the registered construction workers of Delhi," the government said.

It added that it will soon give the assistance amount to nearly 9,000 workers as well whose applications are still pending.

City reports
32 fresh cases;
total now 152

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

Thirty-two new COVID-19 cases were reported in Delhi on Wednesday, taking the total number of cases to 152, according to the Delhi government.

This is the biggest single-day jump in the number of cases in the city so far. Twenty-nine of the 32 positive cases are people from a centre-run by Tablighi Jamaat in Nizamuddin which has been evacuated by the authorities.

A total of 53 people from the centre have tested positive for COVID-19 so far, just in Delhi alone.

Monday, Sunday and Saturday had recorded the biggest single-day jumps till then with 25, 23, and nine new cases, respectively.

The daily number of cases is expected to spike further as the results of majority of the people evacuated from the centre are yet to be out, according to officials.

FIR over DTC buses ferrying workers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

A case has been registered in connection with the use of DTC and cluster buses to ferry migrant workers leaving the city to Anand Vihar ISBT amid the lockdown due to COVID-19 outbreak, the police said on Wednesday.

The case was registered at Sharukhpur police station in east Delhi based on the complaint of a policeman. "We have registered the case under various sections of IPC and the Disaster Management Act, 2005," said a senior police officer.

"This act on the part of bus drivers/conductors and operations head of DIMTS C.K. Goyal and other government servants who are responsible for it, have committed an offence under sections of the Act," reads the FIR.

Ration shop owner held for misappropriation

Accused saw an opportunity to sell foodgrains at higher price, says police officer

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

Owner of a fair price shop was arrested for allegedly misappropriating foodgrains in west Delhi's Raghbir Nagar, the police said on Wednesday.

The accused was identified as Ravinder Kumar (64) who was arrested by the team of Additional Commissioner of Police (West) Sa-

meer Sharma.

The police said that an information was received about misappropriation of foodgrains by an owner of a fair shop owner at Raghbir Nagar's M Block after which the shop was identified.

Register checked

"The shops were cordoned off. Area Food and Civil Supply officer was informed,"

said a senior police officer, adding that the shop owner was then called and asked to open the shop where the sale and stock register was checked.

"There was a board outside the shop which carried a general notice that there is no ration and therefore, ration will not be disbursed today. Subsequently, the local general store where the stuff

was suspected to have been transferred was also checked where 21 jute bags of rice which were meant for disbursement at the fair price shop were found," the officer said.

The police said that the accused who was supposed to sell 6 kg wheat and 1.5 kg rice free of cost to ration cardholders saw this as an opportunity to sell at higher price.

The wait continues



A deserted Khan Market in New Delhi on Wednesday afternoon. •V.V. KRISHNAN

IN BRIEF



Virus awareness: 40 patrol bikes flagged off

NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police on Wednesday flagged off 40 motorcycles which would be used for patrolling in south Delhi to ensure proper implementation of the lockdown as well as spreading awareness about COVID-19 through announcements. PTI

Supply is erratic, say grocers

No need to panic as distributors will replenish stocks soon'

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

A week into the nationwide lockdown, several grocers across the city, said that supply of essential items, including dairy products were in shortage. However, they added that there was no need to panic as distributors had promised to replenish stocks at the earliest but were rationing a few products.

Biplab Banerjee, who runs a grocery store in CP Market, said, "Items like milk powder, cheese and even tea are not being supplied regularly. Most of what we have now is what we stocked just when the lockdown was announced. Foodgrain is the only item with a regular supply as of now."

Speaking about if distributors had assured them stock, Mr. Banerjee added, "All company deliveries which

are done are not happening currently. For other items, we are approaching local distributors and collecting whatever we get. We are not really sure of what the scenario will be like in the next few days."

Subir Pramanik, another grocer in the market said, "Supply for most products, apart from bread, milk and foodgrain, is very erratic these days. Products like biscuits and other junk items are mostly the stock we had

procured before the lockdown."

Imported goods

At a store that stocks several imported goods in Defence Colony, the owner said, "Those who are finicky about a particular brand may find it hard to find a product but there is no cause for concern. Customers understand that not all products will be available and some of them have left their phone number with me to call them when stocks arrive. However, when it comes to imported goods, supply has stopped."

Ramesh, who works in a shop in another south Delhi neighbourhood market added, "Supply of most items is less than half of what we are ordering. Because of the low supply, the stock is also finishing really quickly"

RAMESH
Grocery store worker

Over 30% of ration shops found closed, says food rights group

'No way to ascertain whether beneficiaries are getting supplies'

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

According to a report published by the Delhi Rozi Roti Adhikar Abhiyaan (DRRAA), 32% of the ration shops visited by the organisation were found closed. Of the 37 ration shops inspected by the DRRAA across the city including, Narela, Murik, Mayur Vihar, Hauz Rani, Dakshinpuri, Nangloi and others, 12 were found to be closed, the report said.

C Delhi has a network of 2,011 ration shops.

Proper functioning of these shops is crucial, especially during the time of the COVID-19 crisis

DELHI ROZI ROTI ADHIKAR ABHIYAAN REPORT

shops which were found to be shut, we were informed that the stock had finished and the shop will open when new stock reaches," the report read.

Noting the Delhi government's announcement on the ration for two months to be delivered to shops by March 29, the report said, "There is no way to ascertain whether all the beneficiaries have indeed been able to get their rations, as neither the

COVID-19

proof of distribution is available in the public domain nor are the contact details of ration cardholders available for verification by phone."

The report added that all the shops that were open, distributing ration free of cost, as per the government directive. It also said that in 10 of the 37 shops, no civil defence volunteer, representative of the MLA or police personnel could be located.

"Delhi has a network of 2,011 ration shops. Proper functioning of these shops is crucial, especially during the time of the COVID-19 crisis when lakhs of people are running out of food and are on the brink of starvation," the report said.

NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY

CORRIGENDUM

Notice for Extension of Opening Date of Tender

Following tender of Chief Workshop Manager/Bridge/Gorakhpur unit which are intended to be opened before 14th April 2020, the opening dates of these tenders have been extended due to effect of COVID-19 and LOCKDOWN in India.

The details are as under :- SN. 1. E-Tender No.: CWM-BR-05-2020.

Revised date and time of opening:- 29.04.2020 at 11:00 Hrs. SN. 2. E-Tender No.: CWM-BR-06-2020. Revised date and time of opening:- 29.04.2020 at 11:00 Hrs. SN. 1. E-Tender No.: CWM-BR-07-2020. Revised date and time of opening:- 29.04.2020 at 11:00 Hrs. SN. 2. E-Tender No.: CWM-BR-08-2020. Revised date and time of opening:- 29.04.2020 at 11:00 Hrs. The terms and conditions of these tenders as specified in tender document will remain same. Detailed E-tender notice, Eligibility criteria, terms & conditions are available at website www.reps.gov.in.

Chief Workshop Manager (Bridge)

CPRW/W-E01 (Bridge)

About any passenger amenity

complain SMS on Mob. No. 09794845955

Do Not smoke Bidi/Cigarette in train

एसजे डीपीएन लिमिटेड
(एक सरकारी या नियंत्रित व्यवसाय के संस्थान का संग्रहीत)

SJVN Limited
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People in riot-hit areas who applied for ration online yet to get response

Noor-e-ilahi and Ghonda residents had applied on Delhi govt. website 4 days ago

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The residents of north-east Delhi's riot-hit Noor-e-ilahi and Ghonda said they had applied for ration on the Delhi government's website but are yet to her back from the authorities.

The government recently launched a website for services listing "food required", "ration required", "₹5,000 compensation for construction workers", "pension amount" and "e-pass for travel during curfew".

At least 120 residents had applied for ration and none of them have either received a call or been visited by any official, it has been learnt. The area is inhabited mostly by unskilled workers, who hail from Uttar Pradesh or Bihar, and are now out of work.

One of the residents, identified as Salman, who runs a medical shop, said he had helped families apply for ration on the government's website, adding that they



People queue up in front of a PDS shop in east Delhi.

• SANDEEP SAXENA

had also requested for e-passes. "People in the neighbourhood are neither educated nor technologically sound and so they sought help. I applied for ration for 120 families," he said and mentioned that the application was made four days ago.

"Many of those who have applied do not belong to Delhi and do not have ration cards here either. They are out of work due to the restriction of non-essential services and are in need of ration," he said.

A 23-year-old woman, identified as Imrana, a resident of Noor-e-ilahi, who used to work in a diaper-making factory, said that her family has eight members, four of whom, including her, were working. All of them, however, at home, without work and without money. "The employers said that they would not give money and we don't know when this lockdown will end. My brother is a rickshaw-puller and my father ran a small business which has been shut

Mr. Salman said that after there was no response from the government on the requests, he wrote to the Chief Minister on his official email id, sharing the problem and requesting him to look into the matter. The email, he said, was sent on March 30.

According to a Home Ministry statement, some 2,100 foreigners visited In-

now. We are left with little money which will not last long. That is why we thought of applying for ration," she said.

"Socha tha sarkar se thodi madad ho jaegi lekin vo bhi nahin ho rahi [We thought that the government would help us a bit, but that is not happening]."

Gulfam Mustafa, who hails from Bihar and resides in Noor-e-ilahi, used to sew cloth material for a living. He said that he had also applied for ration to be able to feed his family of six in the coming days. "This will go on for months. We are getting help from good Samaritans of the area who donate food, but what about a week or two from now?" he said.

Mr. Salman said that after there was no response from the government on the requests, he wrote to the Chief Minister on his official email id, sharing the problem and requesting him to look into the matter. The email, he said, was sent on March 30.

According to a Home Ministry statement, some 2,100 foreigners visited In-

Statements of Hazrat Nizamuddin police station staff recorded

Statements of others in quarantine taken over the phone

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

In a joint search operation, the Delhi Police Special Branch and the Delhi government identified and shifted 275 foreign nationals into quarantine. The people are associated with the Tablighi Jamaat and were staying at various mosques and other places in Delhi, said a police officer on Wednesday.

A senior police officer said that after the Tablighi Jamaat incident came to light, they had written a letter to the Delhi government, seeking action against foreign nationals associated with the organisation staying in the city.

In a massive search operation, 275 people, including 172 from Indonesia, 36 from Kyrgyzstan, 21 from Bangladesh, 12 from Malaysia, seven from Algeria, two from Afghanistan, two from the USA and one each from France, Tunisia, Belgium and Italy, were rounded up. The remaining are Indians.

As many as 109 people were found living in Central district, followed by 84 in the North East district.

"A team of district administration, police and Health Department visited mosques and shifted foreign nationals into quarantine. They were part of the jamaat held in Nizamuddin... In order to decongest the building they were shifted to various mosques across the city," said a police officer.

Delhi Police said it is looking for more foreign nationals and is coordinating with other States to identify more people who were part of the jamaat.

"We have prepared a list of Indians and foreign nationals who were part of the Tablighi Jamaat and have shared it

with other States to track the people and put them in quarantine. We also got details of attendees from the people in quarantine. A team of U.P., Haryana, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh police visited the area to get more details about the people who went back after attending an event at the centre," said an officer.

A senior officer said that the staff of the local police station claimed that they visited the centre on March 23 and were informed that around 1,000 people had left and the remaining were from other States and it was impossible for them to leave.

A video has been provided by the local police where personnel can be seen instructing

Home Ministry wakes up to Tabligh event

2,100 foreigners visited India for Tabligh programmes since Jan. 1: Home Ministry

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

As many as 360 foreigners were deported from Delhi in 2018-19 for reportedly indulging in "missionary activities" while they were here on a tourist visa, a senior Home Ministry official has said. In 2016-17, the number of such violators stood at 120, the official said.

COVID-19

Currently, foreigners who participated in a Tablighi Jamaat congregation in Nizamuddin have come under the Home Ministry scanner, which is the nodal agency that gives permission to any foreigner to participate in any international event.

Any conference/event application is routed through an Indian mission abroad and without the Home Ministry's permission, the event cannot happen and participants are not issued visas.

According to a Home Ministry statement, some 2,100 foreigners visited In-

dia for Tabligh programmes since January 1 this year. "Usually, all the foreign nationals visiting India as a part of Tablighi Jamaat come on the strength of tourist visa. MHA had already issued guidelines that they should not indulge in missionary work on tourist visa. State Police would be examining categories of visas of all these foreign [Tablighi] workers and take further action in case of violation of visa conditions," the Ministry said.

Visa conditions violated

On Wednesday, Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba asked Directors-General of Police to initiate "action" against the foreigners and the organisers of the event as the "foreigners who had participated in the Tablighi Jamaat had violated visa conditions."

The Ministry is apparently set to blacklist the 824 foreign Tablighi members who came here on a tourist visa and "participated" in religious congregations and meetings.

The Jamaat congrega-

tion, part of regular Tabligh activity, was attended by people from Nepal, Malaysia, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Algeria, Kyrgyzstan, Indonesia, Thailand and Sri Lanka.

The Tabligh position

In a press release issued on Tuesday, the Tablighi Jamaat said. "When Hon'ble Prime Minister announced the 'Janta Curfew', for 22nd March 2020, the ongoing programme in Markaz Nizamuddin was discontinued immediately, however due to sudden cancellation of rail services across the country on March 21, 2020, a large group of visitors who had to depart by way of railways got stuck in the Markaz [centre] premises."

"Before the Janta Curfew could be lifted at 9 p.m. [on March 22], the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Delhi announced lockdown of Delhi beginning at 6 a.m. on March 23, 2020 till March 31, 2020, thereby further diminishing any chances of these visitors availing road transport for their journey back home. Despite this challenging situation, with

the help of Markaz [centre] administration, around 1,500 visitors left Markaz [centre] Nizamuddin by availing whatever meagre transport was available," the release said.

"Suddenly on the evening of March 23, a further nationwide lockdown was announced by the Hon'ble Prime Minister with clear message for people to stay put wherever they are. Under such compelling circumstances there was no option for Markaz Nizamuddin but to accommodate the stranded visitors with prescribed medical precautions till such time that situation becomes conducive for their movement..." the statement said.

"During this entire episode, Markaz [centre] Nizamuddin never violated any provision of law, and always tried to act with compassion and reason towards the visitors who came to Delhi from different states. It did not let them violate the medical guidelines by thronging ISBTs or roaming on streets," the release added.

275 foreign nationals identified, quarantined

They were part of Nizamuddin event'

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

In a joint search operation, the Delhi Police Special Branch and the Delhi government identified and shifted 275 foreign nationals into quarantine. The people are associated with the Tablighi Jamaat and were staying at various mosques and other places in Delhi, said a police officer on Wednesday.

A senior police officer said that after the Tablighi Jamaat incident came to light, they had written a letter to the Delhi government, seeking action against foreign nationals associated with the organisation staying in the city.

In a massive search operation, 275 people, including 172 from Indonesia, 36 from Kyrgyzstan, 21 from Bangladesh, 12 from Malaysia, seven from Algeria, two from Afghanistan, two from the USA and one each from France, Tunisia, Belgium and Italy, were rounded up. The remaining are Indians.

As many as 109 people

A team of district administration, police and Health Department visited mosques and shifted foreign nationals into quarantine. They were shifted to various mosques across the city

POLICE OFFICER

were found living in Central district, followed by 84 in the North East district.

"A team of district administration, police and the Health Department visited mosques and shifted foreign nationals into quarantine. They were part of the jamaat held in Nizamuddin... In order to decongest the building they were shifted to various mosques across the city," said a police officer.

Delhi Police said it is looking for more foreign nationals and is coordinating with other States to identify more people who were part of the jamaat.

"We have prepared a list of Indians and foreign nationals who were part of the Tablighi Jamaat and have shared it

with other States to track the people and put them in quarantine. We also got details of attendees from the people in quarantine. A team of U.P., Haryana, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh police visited the area to get more details about the people who went back after attending an event at the centre," said an officer.

A senior officer said that the staff of the local police station claimed that they visited the centre on March 23 and were informed that around 1,000 people had left and the remaining were from other States and it was impossible for them to leave.

A video has been provided by the local police where personnel can be seen instructing

ing people to vacate the centre as the event violated the Delhi government's order prohibiting the gathering of 50 or more people.

"We are also probing the claims of Jamaat officials that they had sought permission from the SDM to vacate the centre and that a list of vehicles were given to seek passes," the officer added.

"A Delhi police team visited Maulana Saad's hometown in western U.P., but he was not there. He was last seen on March 28," the officer said. We will interrogate him over an audio recording in which he is purportedly heard asking his followers to flout social distancing guidelines, he said.

Central government Standing Counsel Gaurang Kanth, a resident of Nizamuddin East, also sought action against the organisers and participants of the religious congregation at Alami Markaz Banglewali Masjid in Nizamuddin West for "compromising the safety of people and contributing to the spread of COVID-19". He also sought immediate action and remedial measures for curtailing and preventing the spread of COVID-19 in Nizamuddin.

Mr. Kanth said that being a Central government Standing Counsel, he required re-

Nizamuddin event: Centre seeks action against officials responsible

Govt. counsel seeks suo motu action for 'negligence'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A Central government standing counsel has written a letter to the Delhi High Court seeking to initiate suo motu action against the State government officials responsible for alleged negligence in preventing the religious congregation in Nizamuddin here that led to further spread of COVID-19.

Central government Standing Counsel Gaurang Kanth, a resident of Nizamuddin East, also sought action against the organisers and participants of the religious congregation at Alami Markaz Banglewali Masjid in Nizamuddin West for "compromising the safety of people and contributing to the spread of COVID-19". He also sought immediate action and remedial measures for curtailing and preventing the spread of COVID-19 in Nizamuddin.

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The standing counsel has written a letter to the Delhi High Court on the matter.

These gatherings were also in violation of another order issued by the Office of the Commissioner of Police, New Delhi, which was effective from March 18, 2020, wherein assembly of five or more individuals was prohibited," it said.

"However, despite the said orders being in place, the congregation [being conducted] shows carelessness and gross negligence of the State government and other officials, including the District Magistrate [South East] in handling the emergency situation in Nizamuddin. It cannot be denied that officials were not aware of the presence of such a large gathering at the markaz in Nizamuddin West," he said in the letter.

"This clearly constitutes a lapse on the part of the State government machinery and is inexcusable and unparable," he said.

COVID-19 Regulations, 2020 under the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897.

"These gatherings were also in violation of another order issued by the Office of the Commissioner of Police, New Delhi, which was effective from March 18, 2020, wherein assembly of five or more individuals was prohibited," it said.

"However, despite the said orders being in place, the congregation [being conducted] shows carelessness and gross negligence of the State government and other officials, including the District Magistrate [South East] in handling the emergency situation in Nizamuddin. It cannot be denied that officials were not aware of the presence of such a large gathering at the markaz in Nizamuddin West," he said in the letter.

"This clearly constitutes a lapse on the part of the State government machinery and is inexcusable and unparable," he said.

L-G reviews enforcement of lockdown, preparedness

'Ensure adherence to social distancing norms at all times'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Lieutenant-Governor Anil Baijal on Wednesday reviewed the enforcement of the ongoing shutdown of non-essential services and medical preparedness amid the outbreak and spread of COVID-19 epidemic in the Capital.

Mr. Baijal convened a vide-

conference for the purpose with Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and officials, including the Chief Secretary, Additional Secretary (Home), the Delhi Police Commissioner, Secretary (Health), Director (ILBS)/Chairman, STF on the matter.

"At the outset, the L-G stated that the administration has to ensure complete lockdown and adherence to social distancing norms at all times. He also advised that effective monitoring of home

quarantine cases and ramping up of medical facilities has to be the focal point of all actions," the Raj Niwas said in a statement.

The LG instructed that fire brigade service may be used for disinfecting vulnerable neighbourhoods, especially hot-spot areas, quarantine centres and public places, the statement added.

The disinfection, he stated, should be done under the overall supervision of District Disaster Management Authority.

Mr. Baijal, the statement said, also reviewed medical preparedness, action initiated for the procurement of medical essentials personal protective equipment, ventilators, nebulisers, medicines, masks, testing kits, discharge guidelines for patients and non-hospital isolation/quarantine.

"He directed the Health Department to prepare standard operating procedures for post-hospitalisation and post-quarantine care," the statement added.

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Muslims fear more 'social distancing'

Prominent community members see action against Tablighi Jamaat as govt. ploy to divert attention

ANUJ KUMAR
GHAZIABAD

The action against Tablighi Jamaat for allegedly hiding information about COVID-19-infected persons on its premises in Delhi's Nizamuddin has evinced a mixed response from Muslim intellectuals, clerics and professionals. Some fear it will lead to more social distancing with Muslims, others suggest Tablighi Jamaat would no longer be able to function in isolation.

Criticising the organisation's leader Maulana Saad, Zainus Sajidin Siddiqui, Shehri Qazi, Meerut, said he was no authority on Islam. "When most prominent mosques in the world are shut, when top clerics of Deoband and Nadwa have appealed to Muslims to offer prayers at home, why he didn't come forward in time? He didn't understand the spirit of Islam. Science and Islam are not at logger-



Health workers prepare to sanitise an area in New Delhi's Nizamuddin on Wednesday after reports of virus cases. ■ PTI

heads. Not taking medicine or not making an effort to get cured during illness, particularly when it could spread to others, amounts to taking one's life, which is a sin in Islam."

Mr. Siddiqui, who retired as a professor of Sunni theology from Aligarh Muslim University, said the Delhi police should also have acted in time. He appealed to all the Muslims who had been to the Tablighi Jamaat centre in Nizamuddin to come out on

their own and get tested.

Talking about its political fallout, Mirza Asmer Beg, professor of political science at AMU, said the way a large section of the media was reporting the incident, it would add "fuel to the fire".

"As an outsider, if you watch television, you will feel that the Jamaat was completely at fault. There is hardly any nuance. An indiscretion is being reported as motivated. It will only further the stereo-

types against Muslims and widen the gulf in society," he said.

Beyond the headlines, Prof. Beg said, it looked like a ploy to divert attention from the bad optics that the government faced after it failed to address migrant exodus in time. "Also, in Delhi, the BJP and Aam Aadmi Party are engaging in competitive communalism and Muslims are at the receiving end."

He said the Tablighi Jamaat didn't represent all Muslims. "Many don't like the way it maintains distance from political issues. It didn't take a stand on issues like the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and perhaps that is why governments find them harmless."

Atif Khan, a mass communication professional who attended Tablighi Jamaat meetings for several years before parting ways, echoed Prof. Beg's views. "The Jamaat

makes you self-sufficient in every manner, be it public speaking, personal hygiene, understanding of holy books, following a routine and acceptance of human fallacies. However, over a period of time, I realised those who run the show lack in understanding contemporary challenges. The leadership doesn't think in line with what is going around, technological advancements and imminent changes."

Community cooperation

He said community cooperation in natural disasters could have given them a more inclusive image in society. "It is something Sikhs have been doing for years," he said.

Supreme Court lawyer Fuzail Ayubbi, who has been engaged by the Tablighi Jamaat centre, agreed ignorance of the law excuses no one but he underlined that in hindsight anybody could be wiser.

14 more cases in Rajasthan

13 among them from virus hotspot in Jaipur's Walled City

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

JAIPUR

Fourteen more COVID-19 positive cases were detected in Rajasthan on Wednesday, taking the tally of infected persons in the State to 90. Thirteen of the infected persons were found in the Ramganj area of Jaipur's cuffed-bound Walled City, which has emerged as a major virus hotspot.



A deserted Badi Chaupar in the Walled City of Jaipur on Wednesday. ■ ROHIT JAIN PARAS

jaipur University of Health Sciences and the National Institute of Medical Sciences. All of them were being shifted to the Sawai Man Singh Government Hospital in Jaipur.

No travel history

The other case was reported from Jodhpur, where a 65-year-old man with no travel history or contact with any patient, tested positive for the disease.

The 13 infected persons found in Ramganj were the contacts of the first person in the area who had tested positive recently. They were kept in the isolation facilities at Ra-

ministration decided to monitor the curfew and carry out surveillance of the area with the help of drones. A flag march will also be conducted to instil confidence among the residents of Walled City.

Mr. Sharma said 183 persons had been identified in the State after they attended the Tablighi Jamaat event in Delhi. Staying in 13 districts of the State, they would be screened and sent to isolation or quarantine as per the medical advice, he said.

Two tie the knot at a police station in Odisha

Marriage in the times of pandemic

STAFF REPORTER

BHUBANESWAR With COVID-19 restrictions stifling movements across the country, a young couple found no safer place than a police station in Odisha's Bargarh district to solemnize their marriage on Tuesday.

Both Pabitra Sahoo (28) and Lakshmi Meher (24) of Bargarh district had been in love for more than a year and did not want to delay their marriage further.

The local marriage registrar office where they planned to get married was closed and temples were out of bound for commoners due to nationwide lockdown.

"Both Pabitra and Lakshmi approached us with a written request that they wanted to get mar-

ried. Due to restrictions, they were not finding proper place for marriage," said Sadanand Pujahari, inspector of Barghark town police station.

"We confirmed their ages and they were found to be major. Subsequently, we allowed the marriage to take place at police station. Since the government has been insisting on taking precautions, we gave two biscuits, masks and soap as gifts to them," said Mr. Pujahari.

The groom works as an automobile mechanic. Both of them were apprehensive of going to any temple as police were strictly enforcing the lockdown. Pabitra said it would have been embarrassing, had police taken action on them during marriage.

"I am standing here in the queue to get some cooked food to feed her family of five, 30-year-old Khushi in Faidan area of Chandigarh is praying for the ongoing lockdown to end at the earliest. She fears if the lockdown is extended, she would run out of ration and her meagre savings as her husband, the only breadwinner of the family, is sitting idle since the restrictions were enforced.

"I am standing here in the queue to get some cooked food as the ration at my home is fast running out and I don't have much money left to buy essentials if the lockdown continues," said Khushi, while waiting for her turn at a local gurdwara. The police personnel present on the premises ensured that "social distancing" was maintained during distribution of food.

"The local administration

Odisha churches live-stream worship to avoid gatherings

'Technology is helping the people tide over current crisis'

SATYASUNDAR BARIK
BHUBANESWAR

At a time when religious congregations are seen as a source of faster spread of COVID-19, churches in Odisha are using technology to make the faithful participate in Sunday worship from remote locations – a first in local church history.

After the State government asked the religious institutions to practice social distancing, Internet-based social media came to the rescue of the church leadership.

Bhubaneswar-based Church of Christ (Union Church) and Koraput-based Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church (JELC) have been reaching out to people

by either beaming the Sunday worship live through social media or making available deferred live recordings.

"We have been pre-recording the Sunday prayer, songs, reading of the Bible passage by the Pastors and the sermon. The same is sent through different social media channels at the appointed time of worship. We have been doing this after the government issued an alert," said Church of Christ (Union Church) secretary Pares Das.

Premises closed
"The church premises have been closed... we also have prayer, Bible study, women's and youth programmes through the week," he said.

"This is, perhaps, the first time we are not congregating in the church," he said.

The 140-year-old JELC authorities said though there was some apprehension among old timers over suspension of Sunday worship, everyone was, however, happy to participate in prayer.

Every Sunday, only the pastor goes to church and leads the worship. Technology has been helping the people to tide over this unprecedented crisis, church sources said.

"Although people are emotional about worship, they are also aware about the life-threatening potential of COVID-19," said Asish Pal, Bishop of JELC Church.

No shortage of goods in Odisha

7-member team ensuring smooth movement, says govt.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government on Wednesday assured the people that there will not be shortage of essential goods across the State in the remaining days of the lockdown.

COVID-19

supply for two days initially, Mr. Kumar said their movement was smooth after Prime Minister Narendra Modi accepted Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's suggestion to do away with differentiation of goods as essential and non-essential.

COVID-19

Mr. Kumar said the government has also decided to keep all wholesale markets open 24 hours so that small traders and retailers can buy essential goods without facing any rush. He also urged people to go to market twice a week to avoid chances of contracting coronavirus.

On rumours, State government's chief spokesperson for COVID-19 Subroto Bagchi said that any rumour will be

dealt with severely. The government will take strong action against rumour-mongers and action for any fake news shall be taken under the IT Act and Epidemic Act, he said.

He informed that 610 samples had been tested till Wednesday noon and the number of positive cases stood at four. As many as seven contacts of the fourth patient had been traced. The fourth patient had reached his home in Bhubaneswar on March 18. His asymptomatic sample was collected on March 30 and it tested positive on Tuesday, he said.

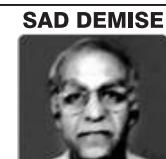
Meanwhile, the Odisha Administrative Service Association announced that members of the cadre will contribute a day's salary to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund.

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

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DONATE EYES-GIFT SIGHT



Dr. Anushri Mukhopadhyay at her home in Goa. ■

Zoom because traffic (on the former) seemed heavy and my signal in Goa was unstable too at times. But Rain Classroom has features like poll calls and MCQ

for future retrieval. Students who cannot attend a class can also access them later – that's the best part. I am also using an electronic board to write and draw diagrams, which fills the absence of a blackboard quite conveniently," said Dr. Mukhopadhyay, who teaches regional anatomy, genetics, medical ethics, radio-imaging and biostatistics at the university.

She teaches two batches of students, one with 38 students and another with 68. They are drawn from various countries across the world, including India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Nigeria, Guyana and South Africa.

"Overall the situation is making me tech-savvy too. I recently purchased a Nikon Z50 to make video lectures. I miss cadaveric dissection though!" she said.

Norm of the future

And so, the show goes on – the teacher teaches and the students learn – even as panic grips many pockets in the world. It is quite likely that many universities are doing the same, and who knows going ahead, this may just become the norm, with technology wiping out geographical distances and time zones.

For this Indian doctor, classes in China's Chengdu go on as usual

Video-calling applications enable Goa-based Anushri Mukhopadhyay to take the virtual route from the confines of her home

BISHWANATH GHOSH
KOLKATA

It was around mid-January that Dr. Anushri Mukhopadhyay, a Goa-based ENT surgeon who had taken up a teaching assignment at a Chinese university only months earlier, returned home on a scheduled break.

By then, COVID-19 cases had begun to be reported from China but it was still not thought of as a pandemic. Soon, humankind was to find itself in the grip of an unprecedented health crisis and today, parts of the world, including India, are under a lockdown. But one thing continues as normal: Dr.

Mukhopadhyay's classes in China. She is conducting her classes not in China, of course, but from the confines of her home in Goa – via a host of apps. "The college reopened on February 24 as scheduled and I was on the first lecture at 9 a.m. Beijing Time, which was 6.30 a.m. IST," Dr. Mukhopadhyay, who teaches at the International Medical School at Chengdu city in the Sichuan province of China, told *The Hindu*.

"After a few days of unhampered lecture on the app Rain Classroom, I was forced to shift to another app called

questions which makes the experience worth the effort," she said.

"All the apps are synced with WeChat. The lessons get published automatically on it

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60 from Jamaat in quarantine in Kerala

CM warns against stigmatising religious groups

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Wednesday said at least 60 persons who returned to Kerala from the Tablighi Jamaat centre at Nizamuddin in New Delhi early in March had been quarantined. Mr. Vijayan said there was no cause for panic. The State had foreseen their re-

COVID-19

turn and ensured their quarantine. The police had helped identify and trace them. The centre had organised meetings before the national lockdown. Scores of people from Kerala had visited the centre as part of their religious beliefs and the situation was the same in places of worship of other faiths in the country.

He said COVID-19 recognised no religion or geographical boundaries. The government had found that attempts were being made



Following up: An officer collecting details of preachers from Indonesia who had attended the Tablighi Jamaat Markaz, in a quarantine facility in Belagavi on Wednesday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

by some divisive elements to stigmatise people of a particular faith for the pandemic. The State would not tolerate such devious attempts. It would prosecute those who indulge in such malicious propaganda.

Mr. Vijayan said the German government had conveyed its appreciation of Kerala's efforts to trace 232 of its citizens in various locations during the epidemic. The country had informed that these citizens had reached Germany safely.

High alert in Guntur district

STAFF REPORTER

GUNTUR

High alert was sounded in the areas surrounding Macherla in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh as at least four persons, who are part of a group that took part in a congregation at Tablighi Markaz at Nizamuddin, were tested positive for COVID-19.

One more positive case was traced at Karemudi vil-

lage and all the five have been linked to the meeting held at Nizamuddin.

The entire Macherla town has been declared a containment zone, and barricades have been erected to prevent people from moving from one place to another.

"We have declared the entire Macherla town and Karemudi villages as red zones," said Superintendent of Police Ch. Vijaya Rao.

Nearly 1,500 attended from Karnataka'

AFSHAN YASMEEN

BENGALURU

About 1,500 people from Karnataka may have attended the Tablighi Jamaat in Nizamuddin. Of these, the State has been able to trace 800 people and 143 of them have been found to be symptomatic.

Jawaid Akhtar, Additional Chief Secretary, said the Centre had sent the list of 1,500 people to the State. "We cannot say if all these attended the congregation. Some of them may have attended and some may be the contacts of those who attended."

Stating that the department was working on identifying the number of people who attended the congregation from Karnataka, Mr. Akhtar said: "We had issued a public notification on Tuesday appealing to those who attended the meet to report to the department."

The Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) flayed the "unilateral" decision of the Cabinet. "The Chief Minister counsels people to be spartan during the

Kerala Cabinet nod for 'salary challenge' for govt. employees

Initiative to collect a month's pay to fight COVID-19

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala Cabinet has given the go ahead to the 'salary challenge' for State government employees.

The Cabinet on Tuesday decided to collect one month's salary from government employees compulsorily to meet the financial burden incurred by the spread of COVID-19. The funds



Cleaning drive: Fire service personnel spraying disinfectant at the Thiruvananthapuram Sub Treasury. ■ S. MAHINSHA

Staff may face salary cut

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

A drastic reduction in non-plan expenditure, mainly rationalisation of salary bills of the Kerala government, is being seriously explored to mitigate the impact of the fiscal shock rendered by

COVID-19. The State Planning Board is understood to have discussed a cut in the salary of government employees and has concluded that none should be spared of the onus of sharing the impact of the virus outbreak.

lockdown," said leader of the Opposition Ramesh Chennithala. "He wants to confiscate the salary of government staff but he has no qualms in sanctioning ₹2

crore at this juncture to hire a helicopter for VIP travel. There is a dichotomy between what this government sermonises and what it practices."

A.P. bites the bullet, defers salary payments

It is 100% for top brass, partial for others

STAFF REPORTER

VIJAYAWADA

With its revenue streams drying up owing to the lockdown imposed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and containment measures entailing an additional burden on the exchequer, the Andhra Pradesh government has resorted to deferment of salaries and pensions to salvage the situation. The deferment is in respect of the payments for March 2020 payable in April 2020 and it will be in force till further orders.

According to a G.O. dated

March 31, the deferment is 100% in respect of the Chief Minister, Ministers, MLAs and chairpersons and members of corporations, elected representatives of all local bodies and people holding equivalent posts.

It is 60% for All-India Service Officers, 50% for all other government employees and persons engaged as direct individuals through third parties, except Class IV employees.

The deferment is 10% for Class-IV, outsourcing and contract employees.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



Forecast for Thursday: Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning, hail and gusty winds very likely at isolated places over Arunachal Pradesh; Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning and gusty winds very likely at isolated places over Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura and with lightning at isolated places over West Bengal and Sikkim.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	...-37.0...	17.4	-36.4...	26.6			
Ahmedabad	...-36.8...	22.7	-40.6...	25.9			
Aizawl	...-29.8...	-	-36.0...	-			
Allahabad	...-38.7...	19.0	-37.4...	23.5			
Bengaluru	...-36.0...	21.0	-35.5...	26.8			
Bhopal	...-37.1...	24.7	-31.5...	24.0			
Bhubaneswar	...-39.2...	23.9	-35.2...	20.0			
Chandigarh	1.3...	29.7...	-12.0	New Delhi	3.0...	32.7...	16.6
Chennai	...-35.1...	26.1	-35.8...	18.2			
Coimbatore	...-37.6...	23.0	-38.1...	24.6			
Dehradun	...-30.8...	16.5	-34.3...	24.4			
Gangtok	0.1...	16.9...	-13.1	Pune	...-38.0...	20.7	
Goa	...-34.4...	24.7	-33.2...	20.4			
Guwahati	...-34.9...	16.8	-34.6...	19.2			
Hubballi	...-37.0...	22.0	-24.7...	16.9			
Hyderabad	...-38.2...	26.2	-31.2...	26.2			
Imphal	...-31.2...	12.0	-31.0...	6.5			
Jaipur	...-34.1...	20.0	-34.1...	25.6			
Kochi	...-33.4...	25.8	-39.3...	23.4			
Kohima	...-24.2...	13.0	-24.2...	-			
Kolkata	...-36.2...	26.1	-34.6...	27.0			

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

Forecast for Thursday: Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning, hail and gusty winds very likely at isolated places over Arunachal Pradesh; Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning and gusty winds very likely at isolated places over Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura and with lightning at isolated places over West Bengal and Sikkim.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	...-37.0...	17.4	-36.4...	26.6			
Ahmedabad	...-36.8...	22.7	-40.6...	25.9			
Aizawl	...-29.8...	-	-36.0...	-			
Allahabad	...-38.7...	19.0	-37.4...	23.5			
Bengaluru	...-36.0...	21.0	-35.5...	26.8			
Bhopal	...-37.1...	24.7	-31.5...	24.0			
Bhubaneswar	...-39.2...	23.9	-35.2...	20.0			
Chandigarh	1.3...	29.7...	-12.0	New Delhi	3.0...	32.7...	16.6
Chennai	...-35.1...	26.1	-35.8...	18.2			
Coimbatore	...-37.6...	23.0	-38.1...	24.6			
Dehradun	...-30.8...	16.5	-34.3...	24.4			
Gangtok	0.1...	16.9...	-13.1	Pune	...-38.0...	20.7	
Goa	...-34.4...	24.7	-33.2...	20.4			
Guwahati	...-34.9...	16.8	-34.6...	19.2			
Hubballi	...-37.0...	22.0	-24.7...	16.9			
Hyderabad	...-38.2...	26.2	-31.2...	26.2			
Imphal	...-31.2...	12.0	-31.0...	6.5			
Jaipur	...-34.1...	20.0	-34.1...	25.6			
Kochi	...-33.4...	25.8	-39.3...	23.4			
Kohima	...-24.2...	13.0	-24.2...	-			
Kolkata	...-36.2...	26.1	-34.6...	27.0			

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Bhubaneswar	...-39.2...	23.9	-35.2...	20.0			
Chandigarh	1.3...	29.7...	-12.0	New Delhi	3.0...	32.7...	16.6
Chennai	...-35.1...	26.1	-35.8...	18.2			
Coimbatore	...-37.6...	23.0	-38.1...	24.6			
Dehr							



Uncritical endorsement

SC must ask more probing questions on the way the government is handling the pandemic

There are two aspects to the Supreme Court's limited intervention in response to the humanitarian crisis set off by the exodus of migrant workers, following the announcement of a country-wide lockdown. In a brief order, the highlight of which is its full endorsement of the Centre's response to the pandemic, the Court has, first, underscored the need for kindness by the police and the authorities in the way they treat the workers and their families. Second, it has uncritically accepted the official narrative that "fake news" about the duration of the lockdown being "three months" caused a panic reaction from migrant workers across States. In the light of this finding – if it can be described thus – the Court has chosen to "direct the media to refer to and publish the official version about the developments", with a disclaimer that it does not intend to interfere with the free discussion about the pandemic. It has noted an offer from the Solicitor-General to bring out a daily bulletin to clear people's doubts. It recorded its expectation that the media, including social media, would "maintain a strong sense of responsibility and ensure that unverified news capable of causing panic is not disseminated". Significantly, the order flags the penal provisions in the law for punishing those who disseminate information amounting to false alarm or disobedience to a public servant's instructions.

It would be an exaggeration if anyone sees in this direction or appeal to the media for responsible journalism any attempt at censorship, but it is disappointing that the Court finds credible the government's claim about "fake news" being the main factor behind the exodus. It was quite obvious that the short notice of just four hours for the lockdown to take effect, the lack of planning and coordination with the States, the fears of the people about being left without cash and running out of food, and worries about their families back home were the principal reasons. A welcome feature of the Court's approach is that it did not concede the government's ill-advised request for a direction to restrain the media from reporting or publishing "anything" without ascertaining the factual position from the government. Implicit in this prayer was an attempt to control information, the very antithesis of the current need for the government to ensure proactive disclosure and dissemination of accurate data. To an extent, the Court's restraint is understandable; as, dealing with a pandemic, be it in the form of framing a strategy for prevention and treatment, or limiting its devastating economic fallout, is primarily the duty of the executive. However, as it has chosen to examine the humanitarian dimension to the crisis, it would be in the fitness of things if it asked more searching questions of the government and ensured greater accountability in these distressing times.

Beyond the blame game

India must use the lockdown for full contact tracing, especially after the Nizamuddin scare

Nizamuddin in Delhi has turned into a large cluster of novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) cases after a big religious congregation was held in mid-March by the Tablighi Jamaat at the Alami Markaz Banglowali Masjid. More than 400 people showing symptoms have been hospitalised in Delhi alone and nearly 240 have tested positive; at least 10 have died. The spectre of large-scale community spread by a few hundred attendees from different States cannot be ruled out. That the three-day event began on a day when the Health Ministry said that it did not consider the novel coronavirus as a health emergency despite 81 cases being reported cannot be an excuse. After all, WHO had called COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11. The organisers should have been very much aware that a similar congregation organised by them in Malaysia in end-February led to a spike in cases there and the attendees had carried the virus to other countries. But the Delhi government is equally culpable as nothing was done to stop such a meeting except issuing an order on March 13 prohibiting the assembly of more than 200 people. What prevented the State government from following the Centre's March 6 advice to States to avoid or postpone mass gatherings till the pandemic was contained? There have been several such large gatherings, religious and non-religious, in the country after India reported its first case, beginning with the Namaste Trump rally in Ahmedabad, to migrants gathering in a few cities including Delhi a few days ago. Until the lockdown began, many places of worship were open and political events held. Each such event could have potentially seeded the virus into the population and should have therefore been cancelled or prevented. But India failed despite being aware how global congregations – some linked to religion – had led to an alarming spread of the virus, examples being the large outbreaks in South Korea, Singapore, southern Italy and Spain.

States that already have cases with a link to the Nizamuddin event should now use the lockdown period to actively engage in finding everyone who has attended the event, trace their contacts, quarantine, test and treat them without losing time. Both South Korea and Singapore have demonstrated how meticulous tracing of contacts of a church event, isolation and aggressive testing helped prevent the highly infectious virus from spreading widely in the community. Ideally, the remaining period of the shutdown should be used to expand the testing to at least limited community level to find every suspected case linked to the attendee. The last thing that India can afford in the war against the virus is the disease acquiring a religious or class colour. Community leaders have been irresponsible, but those in the government have been lax too.

The return of the expert

An unintended benefit of the pandemic is the return of facts, truth and experts



RAJEEV BHARGAVA

The expert is back in public discourse. Dismissed until recently as an enemy, a self-indulgent blabber, an arrogant armchair intellectual, he returns now as a valuable adviser and ally, someone we cannot do without. The flamboyant display of ignorance has been suspended. Populist leaders who had openly berated experts, and spoke of their tyranny, are now singing their praise. Though forced by the coronavirus, this is an extremely welcome change. Why? Are experts blameless or exempt from criticism? Is the criticism of experts never justified? What is expertise anyway?

What is an expert

Humans realised quite early that an individual cannot lead his life doing everything by himself. He must rely on others who occupy different social roles. But mere division of labour does not yield a society of experts. To have the competence or technique of doing something is not the same as having expertise in it. One may be able to ride a bicycle or play cricket but not do either of these well. Expertise comes with doing something extremely well, which in turn relies on developing more than technical skills. It comes when skills are nurtured patiently and constantly honed. Their acquisition is impossible without continuous, time-consuming practice and their growth depends on making mistakes and learning from them, and on listening to constructive criticism by others. Thus, to become an expert, one must imbibe the broader culture surrounding good work.

This brings me to a preliminary

specification of an expert: she is not just a role-occupant or bearer of mere technique but, by investing time on developing special skills, by understanding the standards of excellence in her field, trying to measure up to them and hoping to raise the bar, she becomes a role model for others, an authority, someone who can teach others. A person may occupy the position of a gardener but becomes an expert only with experience, incessant learning, imaginative self-improvement and with the ability to pass on her skills to others. In short, experts are people with special skills and virtues, with legitimate authority in their own field and the stature to advise and teach their skills. This distinguishes them from non-experts, from competent fellow-workers and novices.

Skills may be primarily learnt informally or formally. Those trained informally, working predominantly with their bodies, particularly their hands, include farmers, gardeners, cooks, carpenters, potters, *mistris*, *vaidyas* and healers, traditional musicians and dancers. However, the enormous complexity of contemporary social and economic life necessitates that everyone be literate and have a bare minimum of formal schooling. This would have been sufficient in the past to make experts out of them but today this is merely one enabling condition of expertise. To become experts in some domains now, long years of formal training and education are required. The feature that distinguishes modern professionals – medical doctors, engineers, architects, lawyers, micro-biologists, physicists, historians, economists, sociologists – from their informally trained counterparts is their prolonged formal education. In such domains today, experience is necessary but not sufficient.

Denigrating experts

If it is good to have experts in society, why have they been deva-



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lied recently in public discourse? Two long-standing reasons come to mind. First, not long ago, expertise in our society was firmly believed to be inherited. But while shastric knowledge was overvalued, the practical knowledge of the informally trained was denigrated. They were not recognised as experts. However, a contemporary scientist does not genetically transfer science to his child. Why then is shastric knowledge a birth-related privilege of a few brahmins? And how many of us acknowledge the expertise of the *malis* who tends a beautiful garden? Why is he less of an expert in his field than a doctor is in his? Though some change in this mindset has occurred, it is not enough. (For instance, *vaidyas*, *nats* and *nartakis* were once considered lowly and socially stigmatised. Today's medical doctors, actors and dancers are not.)

In one sense then, an understandable disaffection with the expert is part of a continuing democratic revolt against the very idea of inherited shastric expertise. This revolt will not cease if inherited expertise is merely replaced by epistemic arrogance, a sense of superiority stemming from delusional infallibility. Indeed, unless experts cultivate the virtues of humility and corrigibility in an atmosphere of equality and solidarity, their relevance will remain under a cloud.

A second reason is the easy translation and transfer of authority from one field to another, enabling experts in a few fields to wield power and authority over others. The traditional Brahmin

may have been a shastric expert but how come this narrow expertise yielded a general social authority over others? Besides, experts jealously guarded their knowledge as a secret and refused transparency or accountability. A challenge to such translation and transfer of authority from one specific field to others is justified. So, part of the blame for the gradual fall of the expert lies with the historically transmitted culture surrounding him. Expertise must be disengaged and rescued from this hierarchical culture.

Education and expertise

However, the real roots of today's specific problems lie elsewhere, in the current mindset of the populace at large. The main trouble comes paradoxically from the very condition of general literacy and education in our society. All of us are encouraged by our generalised education to conflate expertise with competence and to believe that knowledge comes easy. In this age of fast speed, the very idea of patient learning is severely threatened. For quick fixers, skill acquisition is a waste of time. If everything can be swiftly self-taught, why bother with experts who slog. Just consider the recent trend to self-medicate. The situation is worse in the social sciences and humanities. I am astounded by the gumption of super-confident, self-styled 'historians' or pop statisticians who, without an iota of doubt, claim to know the past or the respective percentage of minorities in the overall Indian population. This is independence and equality gone berserk.

This problem is exacerbated by Wikipedia, Google and WhatsApp. The Internet allows us to treat every information and opinion as equally true. People simply view evidence selectively and with prejudice, confirming whatever it is that they already believe in, disregarding all evidence or argument against it. Abused easily, the Internet turns truth into falsehood and

opinion into dogma. This is mobocracy in the world of the intellect. Everyone has a licence to kill objective or inter-subjectively validated knowledge. This climate is hardly conducive to the survival of experts who seek validation for their claims. Moreover, it helps the political and economic exploitation of their difference from non-experts. With the expert's scrutiny out of the way, the avaricious capitalist can easily sell his well-advertised goods, the wily politician, his false promises.

The arrival of COVID-19 has changed something, at least on television. Both the Prime Minister and the Health Minister were recently seen imploring us to shun '*andh-vishwas*' (blind faith, superstition), disregard rumours and continually fact-check. A good beginning! Doctors from the best medical colleges are seen providing scientific answers to questions by laypersons. The word 'evidence' is heard frequently. Statistical data is cited from Johns Hopkins University, and Imperial College London. People seem passionately interested in research on vaccines by the best Indian institutes. Fake news is officially having a bad time! One Hindi channel even has a Truth index – what it calls '*sacchai ka sensex*'. This '*sacchai*', the source of facts and evidence, comes from, guess who? Experts! One unintended benefit then of the current pandemic – if one looks for a silver lining in our gloomy world – is the return of facts, truth and experts. One can only hope that the restoration of respect for expertise will not be confined to medical doctors and researchers but extend to expert historians, social scientists and socially grounded intellectuals – all badly needed to check the mayhem that has followed the announcement of the lockdown and its dreadful impact on migrant workers.

Rajeev Bhargava is Professor, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi

Still no bullseye, in volume and value

India's defence model faces challenges despite the positive trends generated by 'Make in India'



HARSH V. PANT &
KARTIK BOOMAKANTI

The emergence of evidence of a rise in Indian defence exports, also accompanied by a decline in imports, is a welcome development though the reasons for both are not identical. Based on the latest estimates released by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) in the period between 2009-13 and 2014-18, Indian defence imports fell even as exports increased.

Broadly, two factors appear to be driving this shift. The first is the 'Make in India' initiative, as part of which a number of components from Indian private and public sector enterprises have been prioritised by the government. The second set of factors is extraneous to India in the form of delays in supplying equipment by vendors and the outright cancellation of contracts by the Indian government or at least a diminution of existing contracts.

Under the Narendra Modi government's 'Make in India' initiative, the Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) lays out the terms, regulations and requirements for defence acquisitions as well as the measures necessary for

building India's defence industry. It created a new procurement category in the revised DPP of 2016 dubbed 'Buy Indian Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured' (IDDM). The 'Make' procedure has undergone simplification "earmarking projects not exceeding ten crores" that are government funded and ₹3 crore for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) that are industry funded. In addition, the government has also introduced provisions in the DPP that make private industry production agencies and partners for technology transfers. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) until 2016 accounted for a 17.5% share of the Indian defence market. According to government of India data for the financial year 2018-19, the three armed services for their combined capital and revenue expenditures sourced 54% of their defence equipment from Indian industry.

Public sector driven

Among arms producers, India has four companies among the top 100 biggest arms producers of the world. It is estimated, according to SIPRI, their combined sales were \$7.5 billion in 2017, representing a 6.1% jump from 2016. The largest Indian arms producers are the Indian ordnance factories and the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), which are placed 37th and 38th, respectively, followed by Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) and Bharat Dynamics Limited



(BDL). All four of these companies are public sector enterprises and account for the bulk of the domestic armament demand.

Explaining falling imports

To be sure, not all this growing indigenisation and reduction in imports can be attributed to 'Make in India'. Indian defence acquisitions have also fallen due to the cancellation of big-ticket items. Take for instance the India-Russia joint venture for the development of the advanced Su-57 stealth Fifth Generation Fighter Aircraft (FGFA). India cancelled involvement in 2018 due to rising dissatisfaction in delays with the project as well as the absence of capabilities that would befit a fifth generation fighter jet.

In 2015, the Modi government also reduced the size of the original acquisition of 126 Rafale Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) from Dassault to 36 aircraft, which is also responsible for significantly driving down the import bill. That apart, the delays in the supplies of T-90 battle tanks, and Su-30 combat aircraft from

Russia and submarines from France, in 2009-13 and 2014-18, also depressed imports.

Further, India's defence model faces challenges despite the positive trends generated by 'Make in India'. SMEs still face stunted growth because India's defence industrial model is at odds with global trends in that it tends to create disincentives for the private sector. Governments, including the incumbent, have tended to privilege Defence Public Sector Units (DPSUs) over the private sector, despite 'Make in India'. This model is highly skewed, undermining the growth of private players and diminishes the strength of research and development.

Export trends

Nevertheless, on the exports front, trends do look promising. Indeed, the period between 2012 and 2019 saw Indian defence exports experiencing a considerable jump sourced from Indian public and private sector enterprises. In the last two fiscal years, 2017-18 and 2018-19, exports have witnessed a surge from ₹7,500 crore to ₹11,000 crore, representing a 40% increase in exports. While this initial increase started during the previous United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, the sharpest rise in defence export products can be attributed to the measures introduced by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government under Mr. Modi, which in 2014, delisted or re-

moved several products that were restricted from exports. It dispensed with the erstwhile No Objection Certificate (NOC) under the DPP restricting exports of aerospace products, several dual-use items and did away with two-thirds of all products under these heads. According to the Ministry of Commerce and the Industry, Export-Import Data Bank export of defence items in the aerospace category has witnessed an increase in value. Small naval crafts account for the bulk of India's major defence exports. However, export of ammunition and arms remain low. As a percentage of total Indian trade, defence-related exports for the fiscal years 2017-18 and 2018-19 were 0.8 and 0.73%, respectively.

Thus, from a volume and value standpoint, Indian defence exports, while showing a promising upward trend, still remain uncompetitive globally. It is likely that Indian defence exports will take several years before they are considered attractive by external buyers. But green shoots are emerging in a sector that has long been devoid of any dynamism and Indian policymakers should make the most of the opportunities this represents.

Harsh V. Pant is Director, Studies at the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi and Professor of International Relations at King's College London. Kartik Bommakanti is an Associate Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

Decoding mask use

Opinions of the Health Ministry and Scientific Adviser differ on mask use (Inside pages, "Ministry, Scientific Adviser differ on mask use", April 1) signals a fault line that should not have become news. The public needs to know only the consensus. Masks that people wear, generally called 'surgical masks' are for blocking a surgeon's salivary droplets from falling on the surgical field of exposed tissue. By analogy, if people with cough wear masks, droplet expulsion is drastically curtailed. When a person who is hale wears a mask, the chances

of inhaling droplets from the person in front of you are also drastically reduced, not to zero. That is why we wear masks in tuberculosis (TB) clinics. By analogy, anyone who wears a mask during social interactions has a much reduced chance of getting infected. In TB clinics, both the patient and the health-care staff wear surgical masks. It is a good idea now with prevalent COVID-19, for people to wear masks while engaged in activities that require conversations – shop staff, cashiers, police, etc. If medical shops are out of stock, we can make make-shift masks. A mask can be removed and kept,

and re-used the next day by the same user. The sick person should safely discard the mask each day after use. When health-care workers care for patients with COVID-19, they must wear N-95 masks and not surgical masks. You need zero probability of inhaling the virus. No compromise is allowed. Equally important is goggles that fit reasonably tightly. You do not want virus in droplets or burst droplets falling on the eye, the exposed part of which – called conjunctiva – is mucous membrane, which is as vulnerable to virus entry as nasal mucosa. That is why

personal protective equipment for "respiratory precaution" is N-95 masks and proper goggles or at least a visor such as what motor-bikers wear. It is incorrect to say that if people buy surgical masks there will be a shortage of N-95 masks, unless you conflate the two. It is sad that for this simple matter they want WHO guidance. Remember we are in April; the problem had started in January. Let there be no more disagreements at the top level. Sufficient knowledge is available, just for the asking, in the country.

Drs. T. JACOB JOHN,
Vellore, Tamil Nadu

Treat them well
The directive by the Supreme Court of India to officials handling the exodus of migrant labourers is a clear indictment of the methods adopted by the establishment both at the Centre and the States concerned to solve the crisis. (Page 1, "Treat migrants humanely, SC tells officials", April 1). If the images of the spraying of disinfectants on migrants are downright appalling, the sight of thousands of them being packed like sardines in godowns and elsewhere too smacks of undignified behaviour by those to whose care these

migrants had been entrusted. The unorganised sector's contribution has never been recognised though it has been invaluable in several sectors including the construction business. While announcing the abrupt lockdown the Centre had probably not envisaged a crisis of such a high magnitude involving migrants. But it would be ludicrous to believe that they would have been able to stay on in their workshops with income drying up. C.V. ARAVIND, Bengaluru



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Thinking national, acting local

A planning institution must be a systems reformer and a force of persuasion, not just a control centre



ARUN MAIRA

The attack by the SARS-CoV-2 virus has highlighted, once again, both the bad shape of the Indian economy and the precariousness in the lives of millions of people. Citizens have been ordered to stay in their homes to prevent the pandemic. But many have no homes. They are being urged to wash their hands frequently, when many do not have access to enough clean water to drink. The public health system is woefully inadequate. GDP growth rates may have been good for sometime. But many systems in the country are fragile.

National planning, by whatever name it is called (Planning Commission or NITI Aayog), has failed to produce all-round development of India's economy so far. An all-round plan for recovery from the pandemic is required. As Einstein said, "you cannot solve intractable problems with the same thinking that produced the problems". Therefore, it is time to consider the weakness in India's national planning.

Any planning institution in a federal and democratic system faces two basic challenges when it comes to performing a long-term role – a constitutional challenge, and the challenge of competence.

The constitutional question

The fundamental issues a national plan must address, such as the condition of the environment, the shape of the economy, and pace of human development, need consistent action over decades. Therefore, policies must continue beyond the terms of governments that change in shorter spans in electoral democracies. Moreover, if the planning body does not have constitutional status independent from that of the government, it will be forced to bend to the will of the latter. Planning in China does not face this disruption.

Short-termism in policymaking is a weakness of electoral democracies everywhere, as citizens of California have realised. California is suffering from great environmental stress. Its



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vaunted public education system has been underfunded for years. A group of concerned citizens in California, convened by the Berggruen Institute, formed a Think Long Committee. They studied the systems of governance in many countries and examined how long-term planning fits in them. China, whose remarkable economic progress can provide some lessons for planners everywhere, received special attention. With their insights, they have proposed a few changes to constitutional structures in California.

Debates have begun amongst economists about the inefficacy of long-term planning in India and the performance of NITI Aayog.

They say that planning is weak when planners do not have the powers to allocate money for national priorities, which NITI Aayog does not have. They forget that the Planning Commission had such powers and yet was considered ineffective in bringing about all-round progress.

Moreover, they glide over constitutional issues in granting powers to institutions that allocate public money in democracies.

A fundamental principle of democratic governance is that the power to allocate public money must be supervised by elected representatives. Therefore, a planning body that allocates money must be backed by a constitutional charter, and also accountable to Parliament.

India's national planning process must address the constitutional relationship between the Centre and the States. In India's constitutional struc-

ture, elected governments in the States are accountable to the people. They are expected to improve human development, create infrastructure, and make it easy to do business in the State. They must manage their financial resources efficiently and balance their budgets. Constitutionally established Finance Commissions determine the sharing of Centrally raised resources with the States. What then is the role of a national planning commission?

Indeed, this was the question that several State Chief Ministers had raised during the UPA-II period.

States who were becoming self-sufficient in their resources questioned the value they were getting from their interactions with the Planning Commission. They said the Commission was out of touch with their ground realities and had little experience of how to get things done to produce outcomes. Moreover, it was becoming apparent that the model based on which the Commission seemed to be forming its advice was inadequate.

Need for competence

Whether a planning institution allocates money, or advises others how to, it must have the necessary competence. A national planning institution must guide all-round progress. It must assist in achieving not just faster GDP growth, but also more socially inclusive, and more environmentally sustainable growth. For this, it needs a good model in which societal and environmental forces are within the model. Economists who have

been advising policymakers do not have comprehensive models of socio-environmental systems. Their models are inadequate even to explain economic growth, because they have not incorporated the implications of economic growth on inequality, for example, which has become a contentious issue.

An economy is a complex system, which sits within an even larger and more complex system of human society and the natural environment. The globalisation agenda has been driven by an economic agenda, with policies promoting global trade and finance to maximise global economic output. It has paid too little attention to the impact of the 'GDP agenda' on the well-being of communities where employment declines when production moves to lower cost sources elsewhere. Or to the total environmental impact of global supply chains. Now the system is reacting and stalling globalisation.

A feature of complex systems, in which all the parts are connected, is that the system cannot be healthy if any part becomes very sick – even if the others are in robust health. Even if all other organs in a human body are functioning, if one fails, the whole body dies. Therefore, a healthy global system must help its weaker members to become stronger. Another feature of complex systems with many interacting forces is that the forces combine in unique ways in different parts of the system. For example, the conditions of livelihoods, the natural environment, and infrastructure, combine in different ways in different localities and States. Therefore, systems solutions must be local too.

These insights into systems structures, as well as considerations of democratic governance in which governance should be devolved to national governments, and, within them, to State governments, and even to the third tier of city and district governance, have implications for the role and competencies of a national planning institution for India. It must be a systems reformer, not fund allocator. And a force for persuasion, not control centre. Because its role must be to promote local systems solutions to national problems.

Arun Maira is a former member of the Planning Commission

The battle to set oil prices

Russia's move to reject production cuts is driven by its strategy of denying market share to U.S. shale producers



PINAK RANJAN CHAKRAVARTY

The global economy, grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic, is now facing an energy war, with crude oil prices crashing in the international market. Crude oil prices tanked, as the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its alliance partners failed to reach any consensus on cutting back production to levels that would enable prices to remain stable. The U.S., as the largest oil producer today, has stayed away from the OPEC-plus arrangement, hoping that production cuts by OPEC-plus countries will help it increase its market share.

Russia refused any production cuts, unleashing an energy war with Saudi Arabia. There has been a spectacular fall of around 30% in crude oil prices. The International Energy Agency (IEA) has scaled down global demand for oil, a move not taken by the energy watchdog since 2009. Demand for oil had already weakened owing to the global economic slowdown, and this weakening has become more pronounced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has hit China's economy and reduced consumption by the world's largest importer.

Russia's decision to reject any production cuts is driven directly by its strategy of denying market share to American shale oil producers. The latter rely on higher prices in the range of \$50-\$60 to remain profitable because of higher production costs. At \$31 per barrel, not more than five American shale oil producers can remain profitable.

Sanctions on Rosneft
Russia also remains resentful of sanctions imposed on Rosneft, which is building the gas pipeline project Nord Stream 2 across the Baltic Sea, carrying Siberian gas to Germany, a major consumer. This pipeline was delayed due to opposition from Denmark's environmental activists and could not be completed before the U.S. sanctions kicked in. Moscow has accused Washington of using geopolitical tools for commercial reasons.

Russia had promised to retaliate at a time of its own choosing. The energy war over prices is Russia's revenge, to cripple the American shale oil industry. President Donald Trump has scrambled to put together a rescue package for the shale oil companies. Russia is also signaling to Saudi Arabia that

its American patrons can do little to protect its oil interests and it would be prudent for Saudi Arabia to reach some understanding with Russia. Both Saudi Arabia and Russia depend heavily on oil revenues – upwards of 80% of export revenues accrue from crude oil. Both are also fighting to retain market share. It has been reported that Saudi Arabia has agreed to supply crude oil at lower rates to refiners in India and China, two primary customers, but refused to supply to other refiners in Asia. This will impact on India's oil procurement from the U.S.

Benefit to importing countries

Lower crude oil prices are not necessarily bad news for oil importing countries like India, which is the world's third-largest importer of crude oil and the fourth largest importer of LNG. There are, however, collateral adverse consequences like the battering of the stock markets worldwide. The global economy, already impacted by President Donald Trump's trade war with China and other countries, including India, and the COVID-19 pandemic, may find lower energy costs helpful in overall growth.

From a high of \$147 per barrel in 2008, crude oil prices have fallen to around \$24 per barrel and may even go further southwards. India, with 80% of its energy requirements met by imports from the international market, stands to save ₹10,700 crores for every \$1 drop in prices. While this may help manage the current account deficit, fiscal deficit and inflation, there are non-oil related collateral factors that can cause countervailing adverse economic impact.

There is no doubt that India will benefit from lower oil prices, if the cost of fuel at the pump is passed on to consumers. It will reduce transportation costs and boost demand. The consumer, however, may not benefit much since the government may choose to use this financial windfall for other purposes, like bailing out banks which have been hollowed out by NPAs to leading Indian companies.

Can Russia and Saudi Arabia sustain the energy war for long? Unlikely. Saudi Arabia's production cost is the cheapest in the world and it can ramp up production to around 12 million barrels a day. By offering discounts, it can undercut other producers, including Russia. Domestic considerations also matter.

Meanwhile, oil importing countries, like India, can enjoy a breather and cushion the adverse impact of COVID-19 and other factors.

The author is a former Ambassador and Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs. Views are personal

Lessons from Hubei

A lockdown, followed by aggressive screening testing and hospitalisation, brought results

MUKUL SANWAL

Success in conquering SARS-CoV-2 is best defined in terms of ensuring that there is no community spread. The nature and scale of the effort calls for fresh thinking, as it reverses established approaches. The messaging from the Central and State governments must bring this out, and not leave it to the local bureaucracy and police to interpret as a curfew.

The Prime Minister has taken a bold political decision. However, India faces an unprecedented implementation challenge and must combine the lockdown with community involvement, and technology-based interventions.

Wuhan provides lessons, but not a template. The United States, European countries and even Singapore have not instituted a complete lockdown. Their focus is on those who need hospitalisation. Earlier, China relied extensively on technological tools to enforce the lockdown. India's comparative advantage lies in the fact that the District Magistrate has the legitimacy and authority to mobilise the local population. Changing public behaviour, from one defined by panic and anxiety to one characterised by acceptance will not be easy without community involvement.

Catching them early
The key takeaway from the experience of Wuhan is quite obvious but the devil, as always, is in the detail. Dr. Zhong Nanshan, a leading epidemiologist, emphasised a few "earlies" – early protection, early detection, early diagnosis, and early isolation.

The goal of the lockdown should not just be to keep the people indoors but to ensure that patients with symptoms are hospitalised and not just placed under home isolation, to make sure that the virus does not spread to the members of the infected individual's family.

Second, we need all the support we can mobilise from the healthcare workers. In Hubei, some 42,600 healthcare workers from all over China were deputed. Among them, 19,000 were from the critical care department, which was 10% of the country's ICU doctors.

The spread of the virus also pro-

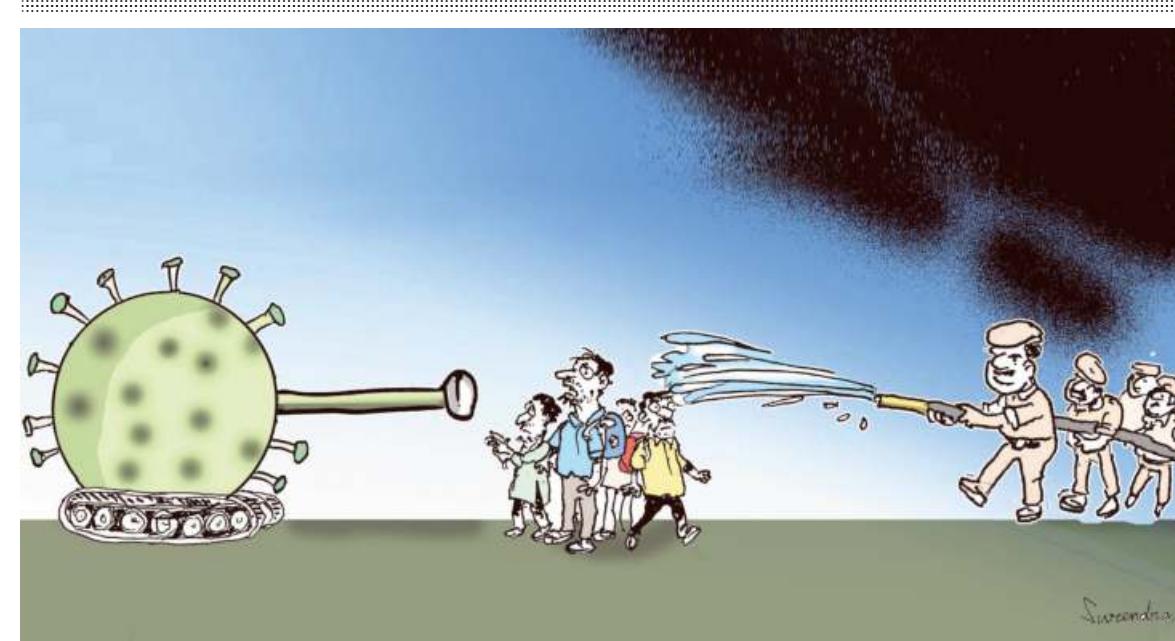
vides important lessons, in view of the migration patterns in the country. Around five million people left Hubei to other parts of China to celebrate the New Year just prior to the lockdown of Wuhan on January 23. Thereafter, the number of confirmed cases doubled every three days and the numbers reached 30,000 cases in a fortnight, by February 9. The spread peaked at 70,000 cases on February 16.

The experience of Wuhan, a city of 11 million, is relevant for our hotspots. The city was shut down on January 23. Residential complexes were sealed-off on February 8, and transport was put off the roads. With intensive testing, next week, Wuhan registered over 15,000 positive cases in a single day. In response, more than 20,000 health workers were deputed from outside, providing free testing and putting the infected people in quarantine. Doorstep delivery of essential supplies was ensured, with residential complexes monitoring body temperatures. A telephone-based app reported the vitals. Four weeks after the lockdown, the number of new cases drastically dropped. This is an optimum strategy for our hotspots.

The media, especially local media, should be encouraged to highlight successful and replicable community action to build public confidence. District Control Room numbers for each local area to communicate all concerns must be widely announced, including by the health workers and NGOs.

Infectious disease is in the Concurrent List and the Government of India has invoked the National Disaster Management Act, devolving the national duty onto District Magistrates. While the Army and the police forces are 'deployed', the District Magistrate has to identify, bring together the needed resources and 'improvise'. They would require real-time sharing of emerging good practices by the Central Government, and even hand-holding, to avoid a demobilisation like outcome.

Mukul Sanwal is a retired diplomat and was recently in Wuhan on an official invite



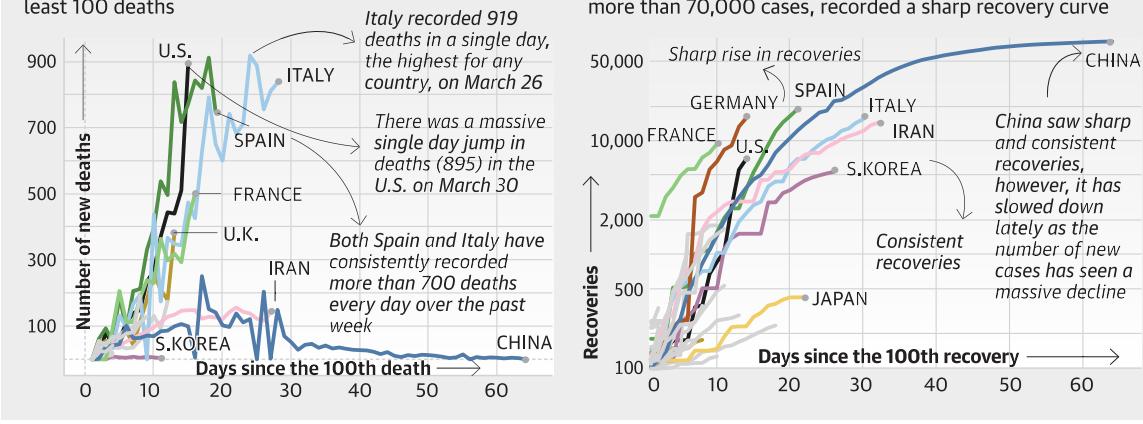
DATA POINT

America's bane

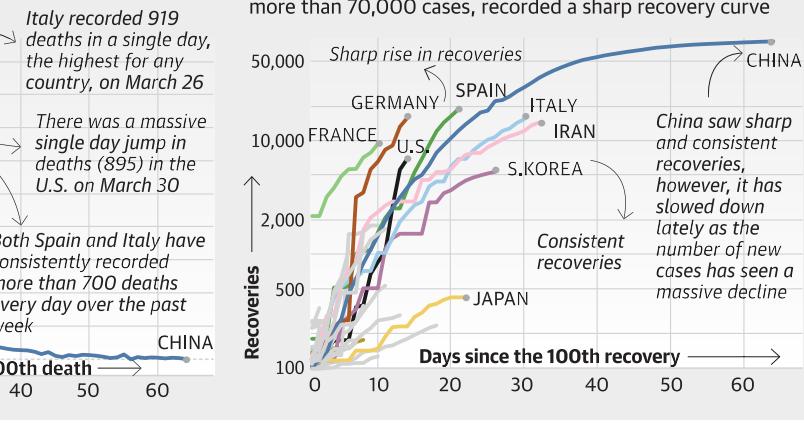
United States and Spain continue to bear the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic with consistent increases in the number of new cases recorded in the past week. The U.S. is also witnessing an exponential increase in the number of new deaths recorded along with Italy in the same period. On the recoveries front, Germany, France and Spain are faring better.

By Suman Sen and Naresh Singaravelu

NEW CASES RECORDED DAILY | The chart shows the number of new cases recorded each day since the 500th case in a country. U.S. recorded over 1.2 lakh cases between March 25-31, the highest seven-day increase in cases for any country. Italy has managed to turn the corner, with a consistent decline of new cases since March 27



CUMULATIVE NUMBER OF RECOVERIES | The chart shows the day-wise progression of the number of people who recovered since the 100th recovery. Germany, with more than 70,000 cases, recorded a sharp recovery curve



FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 2, 1970

Unnecessary visit by foreign expert

A U.S. engineer, Mr. J.D. Edmonds of Western Knapp Engineering Company, the U.S. consultants of the Rs. 90-crore public sector project, Hindustan Copper in Khetri, Rajasthan, was summoned by the project authorities to carry out an emergency job recently. But when he arrived in India, he discovered that his visit was unnecessary since the job had been accomplished already by Indian engineers. The project authorities, it is learnt, had failed to inform him that he need not come even after the Union Ministry of Petroleum and Chemicals, Mines and Metals had disapproved of their decision to summon the U.S. engineer, and assigned the job to Indians. The result was that Mr. Edmonds found there was nothing for him to do, but to return to the United States. What is even more surprising is that the other consultants of Hindustan Copper, Vendt Plc of France, who were also asked to depute their experts, had a better understanding of the nature of the emergency job than the project authorities. This has caused considerable embarrassment to the Department of Mines and Minerals. This is cited as one of the many instances of public sector undertakings to summon foreign experts without taking the trouble to find out whether it is necessary.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 6, 1920

Discoveries in Poona

(The issue of April 2, 1920 is not available) Some interesting archaeological discoveries have been made in the most thickly populated parts of the old city of Poona. The Peshwa's Wada in Sanibherpeth which once contained the palace of Brahmin Peshwas who were de facto heads of the Maratha confederacy in India in the 19th century still stands there surrounded by high walls on all sides. Since the burning down of the palace buildings within the walls in the year 1840, it was converted into a parade ground for the police and mud huts were constructed within the walls to accommodate the city police. Some 30 to 40 years after the fire the Police lines were abandoned and a Court building was erected on the plinth of the old palace and is used as such even now. Almost a year back, the place attracted the attention of Sir George Lloyd, Governor of Bombay who evinced a personal interest in the matter and invited the Viceroy to inspect the place. The latter sanctioned Rs. 5,000 for clearing and removing the debris. The Archaeological Department took work in hand and as a result of it, an elaborately laid out garden has been discovered all round the plinth of the palace.

FROM PAGE ONE

Tablighi Jamaat headquarters evacuated

The Delhi police said Maulana Saad, the head of the centre, remained untraceable. He has been charged with defying restrictions on gatherings. Thousands had gathered at the centre and dispersed between March 13 and March 24 when the nationwide lockdown came into force. Those who remained at the centre could not leave as all transport facilities came to a halt.

A senior police officer said personnel from the local police station had visited the building on March 23

and earlier to communicate the restriction on gathering of over 50 people. "We have got to know from the media that there is an FIR. But we haven't got a copy of the FIR. We are ready to cooperate with the police if they summon us or if they come to us," Fuzail Ahmad Ayyubi, advocate for the centre, said.

"The authorities have sanitised the Markaz and closed it. We have offered it to be used as a quarantine facility, but it is up to them," he said.

110 new cases from Delhi event emerge in TN

"After we made a fervent appeal asking persons who had attended the conference to come forward and report to officials, this number has increased to 1,103 persons. We have admitted them to isolation wards in hospitals, and we have lifted samples from 658 of them so far. We will test samples from the remaining persons in the next 24 hours," the Health Secretary said.

The department had earlier mentioned that 1,500 persons had travelled to Nizamuddin from TN and it was a "dynamic figure". It appeared that around 300 to 400 persons are still in Delhi, and many of them have tested positive after laboratory testing. But the exact numbers were not clear, she said.

Centre defines J&K domicile rules

The two constitutional provisions that were withdrawn – Article 370 and Article 35A – let the legislature decide the "permanent residents", prohibiting a non-J&K resident from buying property there and ensuring job reservation for its residents.

On Tuesday, the MHA issued the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Adaptation of State Laws) Order, 2020, through which it amended 109 laws and repealed 29 laws of the erstwhile State and inserted the "domicile" clause in the Jammu and Kashmir Civil Services Decentralisation and Recruitment Act, 2010.

The order was issued at 11.07 p.m. Under the 2010 Act, the clause for "permanent resident of the State" has been substituted by "Domicile" of the Union Territory. The Act pertained to employment in the civil services, comprising "district, divisional and State" cadre posts. Only permanent residents of J&K were eligible to apply for the gazetted and non-gazetted posts. The amendment allows non-domiciles to apply to these posts.

"Children of Central Govt. officials, All India Services, PSUs, autonomous body of Centre, Public Sector Banks, officials of statutory bodies, Central Universities, recognised research institutes of Centre who have served in J&K for a total period of 10 years" will be domiciles.

The domicile status applies to "children of such residents of J&K who reside outside J&K in connection with their employment or

business or other professional or vocational reasons but their parents should fulfil any of the conditions provided". Another official said, "All posts that are up to the rank of junior assistant and below are open only to domiciles, the entire non-gazetted services has been reserved. Only a few positions such as police sub-inspectors are directly recruited at a higher level than junior assistants."

The Jammu and Kashmir State Legislature Members' Pension Act, 1984, has been amended by the MHA. It fixes the pension for former legislators and councillors at ₹75,000 a month.

Changes in PSA The MHA order has also made amendments to the PSA, 1978. It changes the criteria for appointing the PSA advisory board on the recommendation of a search committee headed by the Chief Secretary instead of the Chief Justice of the J&K High Court. It also bars sitting High Court judges to be made part of the board without the Chief Justice's consultation. The board has a crucial role to play in release of detenus. The order scraps a clause that dealt with the power to regulate place and conditions of detention.

There are 12 States, including Himachal Pradesh, where provisions of special status under Article 371 apply. The provisions pertain to regulation of ownership and land transfer in order to conserve the limited resources and to ensure that the State preserves its unique identity.

India welcomes foreign donations to PM-CARES

The issue of the short supply of essential items made the headlines after nurses and doctors sent video messages to Mr. Modi, urging for lifesaving devices. However, at the last weekend, Serbia purchased medical items from India, prompting a debate.

The official, however, clarified that the supplies to the Serbian government did not include the prohibited items.

Along with the other countries of the SAARC region, India has set up the SAARC-COVID-19 Emergency Fund for helping the front-line health workers with the personal protective

equipment. Mr. Modi took up similar issues and urged for a global approach at a videoconference with G20 leaders.

The official indicated that India would be open to having the issue discussed at the United Nations Security Council. "However, it is a matter to be taken up by the members of the Security Council," he said.

The Ministry of External Affairs has set up a dedicated wing for communications with the Indians abroad, many of whom are eager to return home. The wing has so far received 3,300 phone calls and 2,500 emails.

Expedite tracing of Tablighi attendees, Centre tells States

Enforce quarantine, says govt.; PM to hold video call with Chief Ministers today



Mapping one and all: Participants from Agartala at the Delhi Tablighi meet being taken for tests on Wednesday. • PTI

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba on Wednesday held a videoconference with the Chief Secretaries of all the States a day after the Tablighi Markaz at Nizamuddin was evacuated and the area – the latest COVID-19 hotspot – put under an intense lockdown.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is to hold a video call with all the Chief Ministers

on Thursday. A government statement said Mr. Gauba "sensitised" the Chief Secretaries that contact tracing of the congregation attendees (spread over multiple States) be undertaken on a war footing and quarantine procedures enforced.

He also stressed that many of the congregation had violated visa terms.

While appreciating that on the whole the lockdown was being implemented

well, he said all the benefits announced by the Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman last week under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana be disbursed within the week.

Supply chain worries have been top of the mind with the government allowing transport of all goods across various State borders last week.

But Mr. Gauba again told the Chief Secretaries that this needed to be

smoothed further and that manufacture and supply of goods, especially essential ones, be maintained across the States.

India has entered the second week of a three-week lockdown over the COVID-19 pandemic.

On Tuesday, the country saw its largest spike in COVID-19 positive cases, more than 200 in over 24 hours, as the Tablighi Markaz case came to light.

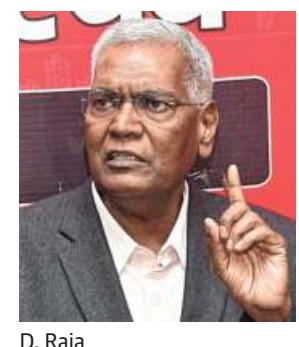
Don't communalise Tablighi issue: CPI

Not the time to rake up religion: Raja

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Two Left parties slammed the BJP for allegedly propagating the narrative of "criminalisation and communalisation" of the Tablighi Jamaat gathering in Nizamuddin, which has emerged as a hotspot of COVID-19.

CPI general secretary D.



Till mid-March, the Centre was denying that COVID-19 represented a health emergency. Instead of regulating crowds, the BJP was busy promoting the visit of U.S. President Donald Trump and warnings by Opposition leaders in early February were ignored, the party alleged.

The CPI(ML) also slammed the Delhi government's decision to file criminal charges against the Tablighi Jamaat. "The gathering was held with the approval of the Delhi police [which comes under the Ministry of Home Affairs] and the concerned SDM [Sub-Divisional Magistrate] office that falls under the Delhi government. If the gathering was illegal, why did the Delhi government not issue an order stopping it," it asked.

Devotees defying lockdown dispersed from dargah

6 arrested in Rajasthan's Sarwar town

MOHAMMED IQBAL
JAIPUR

About 100 devotees, who defied the lockdown restrictions and gathered for observing the rituals of 'Urs' (death anniversary) at a dargah in Sarwar town of Rajasthan's Ajmer district, were dispersed by the police with the use of mild force.

The six-day 'Urs' of Sufi mystic Khwaja Fakhrudin Chishti at the dargah ended on Wednesday.

Though the police had given permission to five persons from the world-famous dargah in Ajmer for offering a 'chadar' (sacred cloth) at the Sarwar dargah, several others joined them.

When the police asked

them to vacate the dargah premises, they allegedly objected and confronted the police.

Dargah's *mutawalli* (manager) Mohammed Yusuf told *The Hindu* that while all gates of the shrine had been closed, some local devotees scaled the wall and tried to join the offering of 'chadar'. "This was clearly in violation of the prohibitory orders," he said.

According to the police sources, six persons were arrested under Section 151 (arrest to prevent cognisable offences) of the Criminal Procedure Code on charges of infringement of orders banning the assembly of people.

It was mentioned by advocate Prashant Bhushan before a Bench led by Justice L. Nageswara Rao, which agreed to take up the plea

when the court assembles next.

The petition wants the Centre and States to jointly and severally ensure payment of wages/ minimum wages to migrant workers within a week, whether employed by other establishments, contractors or self-employed. It also sought a direction from the court to the Central and State governments to immediately activate the National and State Advisory Committees of experts in the field of disaster management and public health to deal with COVID-19.

"The order, for which no prior intimation was given, created a panic across the country and led to job loss for millions of migrant workers.

It was mentioned by advocate Prashant Bhushan before a Bench led by Justice L. Nageswara Rao, which agreed to take up the plea



The Centre and the States should ensure payment of wages to such workers within a week, says the petition.

wages of millions of migrant workers employed in establishments or self-employed as street vendors, rickshaw pullers, domestic house helps, petty job workers, etc. This led to the large-scale exodus of migrant workers to

their hometowns," the plea said.

The petition said the declaration spread panic to such an extent that "workers crowded in large numbers of many thousands at bus terminals, railway stations, inter-State borders, potentially exposing them to the virus."

Mr. Mander and Ms. Bhardwaj criticised the Ministry of Home Affairs communication that employers should continue to pay the wages to their workers. They said the communication does not take into account the harsh realities that establishments that employ migrant workers are mostly small themselves and can ill-afford to pay their wages during a lockdown.

Pay MGNREGA workers in advance'

Job scheme a critical lifeline for the rural poor, says Sonia in third letter to Modi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Congress president Sonia Gandhi wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday to consider paying advance wages to workers who are registered under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). This is Ms. Gandhi's third letter to Mr. Modi since the announcement of the lockdown.

Stating that the MGNREGA has been a critical lifeline for the rural poor during economic distress, Ms. Gandhi said, "However, so-

cial distancing norms have rendered all work unfeasible during the lockdown. Even after the works commence, MGNREGA workers have to wait for more than a month to get wages

SONIA GANDHI, CONGRESS PRESIDENT



cial distancing norms have rendered all work unfeasible during the lockdown. Furthermore, even after the works commence, MGNREGA workers have to wait for more than a month to receive wages. Given the

urgency... the government may consider immediate advance payment of wages for 21 days to registered and active MGNREGA workers."

The Congress president suggested that the advance wages can be adjusted

against the work to be done after the MGNREGA sites are opened up for regular work.

Seeks rollback

The party slammed the government for reducing the interest rates on small savings and the Public Provident Fund (PPF) amid fear of income loss because of the pandemic.

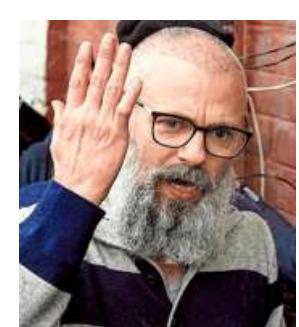
"In times of acute distress and uncertainty about income, people depend on the interest income on their savings," former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram tweeted, demanding a rollback.

Kashmir parties oppose new domicile laws

Insult is heaped on injury, says Omar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

Regional parties, including the recently floated J&K Apni Party (JKAP) that met Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently, the National Conference (NC) and the Peoples Conference (PC), deplored the Centre's move to bring in new domicile laws to the Union Territory of J&K.



"This order is a casual attempt, cosmetic in nature, to hoodwink the people of J&K who genuinely believed that post October 31, 2019, their rights and privileges in the matter of employment and other rights would remain as it had been," JKAP president Altaf Bukhari said. He termed it "most unfortunate".

Mr. Bukhari said the order was totally unacceptable to his party. "In the matter of employment-non-gazetted, gazetted posts in the service and admissions to professional colleges, a tangible legal and constitutional mechanism was supposed to be put in place to safeguard and protect these privileges of the people of J&K, who had been the permanent residents. The new notification regarding domicile rule is not immune to any judicial review."

The PC, headed by Sajad Lone, described the order "short of expectations even for those who expected some reconciliation process". A PC spokesman said, "The new definition of 'domicile' is humiliating and insulting... We had no expectations but this particular order has made the disappointment even more intense. The government of the day has embarked on an erroneous path and seems to be in no mood to rectify wrongs..."

The hand of another Indian is suspected in Kabul attack

The second suspect too hails from Kasaragod

VIJAYA SINGH
NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) registered a case on Wednesday to probe the terror attack at a gurdwara in Kabul last week, in which 27 Sikh worshippers, including an Indian, was killed.

Muhammed Muhsin, a 29-year-old man from Kerala's Kasaragod, is suspected to be one of the three attackers. A senior official said there were indications that

more than one Indian could have been involved in the attack. Also a suspect is Sajid Kuthirummal, a shopkeeper from Kasaragod, part of the group of 21 men and women that left India in 2016 to join the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) in Afghanistan.

While Muhsin was not part of the group, he last spoke to his mother nine months ago. He moved to Dubai in 2018, and the family did not inform the police that he was missing.

This is the first instance of the NIA registering a case for a terror attack committed outside India. The NIA Act

was amended last year to empower the agency to investigate terror attacks committed outside India, "affecting Indian citizens or affecting the interest of India".

The NIA registered the case under various sections of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, the Indian Penal Code and Section 6(8) of the NIA Act.

About 150 persons were present in the gurdwara when the attack took place. "Proscribed terrorist organisation the Islamic State in Khorasan Province claimed the responsibility for this terror attack," the NIA said.

Anti-people move: CITU

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) on Wednesday termed the government's decision to cut interest rates on small savings an "anti-people" decision that would adversely hit senior citizens.

"This is the second reduction in interest rate on small savings in a span of less than one year, last being in June 2019. This will affect financially the mass of the populace, the superannuated, income-less several crores of senior citizens, in particular, who survive mainly on the meagre return on savings," a CITU statement said.

There were sections of the order that were antisocial to what was promised by the Prime Minister and the Home Minister on the floor of Parliament of "a better

States warned against exemptions

Centre says it violates lockdown

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla on Wednesday wrote another letter to the States cautioning that "some States are allowing exceptions beyond what has been allowed under lockdown measures by the MHA [Ministry of Home Affairs]."

Mr. Bhalla said the exceptions amounts to violation of the lockdown measures under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and might defeat the overall objective of containing the spread of COVID-19.

On March 24, when the 21-day lockdown was announced, the Ministry issued a slew of guidelines to be followed by the States for "containment of COVID-19 epidemic", and asked all "enforcing authorities to note that these strict restric-



Ajay Kumar Bhalla

tions fundamentally relate to movement of people, but not to that of essential goods."

Minister of State for Home G. Kishan Reddy contributed a month's salary to the Prime Minister-CARE fund that has been set up to collect money to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Reddy also allocated ₹1 crore from his MPLAD fund to the PM-CARE account.

IN BRIEF

Will help stranded women students: NCW

NEW DELHI

Women students stranded in different cities away from their homes due to the lockdown can contact the National Commission for Women (NCW) for help, its Chairperson Rekha Sharma said. Ms. Sharma assured them that the NCW would work with State governments to ensure that "help reaches them". On Tuesday, Ms. Sharma held a meeting with NCW members to discuss the matter. "Had meeting with @NCWIndia members and discussed how we can help girl students who got stranded in different cities and couldn't go home. Will be reaching out to universities to get the details," Ms. Sharma said in a tweet. PTI

Seven Tablighi Jamaat members booked in J&K

SRINAGAR

Seven people associated with Tablighi Jamaat were booked for hiding their travel history on Tuesday. The Chairman, District Disaster Management Authority, Kathua, ordered the filing of a FIR against seven locals who belong to the Tablighi Jammat for hiding their travel history. "These seven people have a travel history to Nizamuddin and were hiding the same. All others not disclosing their travel history will be booked soon," said an official. The administration also quarantined the entire escort of Srinagar Mayor Junaid Azim Mattu after the brother of a police personnel tested positive for COVID-19.

Arm's length



Safety first: (From top): Women cover their faces at ration shops in Beawar and Guwahati; and children cleaning hands in Mumbai on Wednesday.
■ PTI, RITU RAJ KONWAR & ARUNANGSHU ROY CHOWDHURY

Nine people in same locality of Indore test positive

Madhya Pradesh city has recorded 63 COVID-19 cases so far

STAFF REPORTER

BHOPAL

Indore, the largest and most populous city of Madhya Pradesh, bears an overwhelming burden of 63 of the 86 COVID-19 cases in the State. Three persons from the city, two from Ujjain and one from Khargone had died from the illness. A man in Bhopal had escaped from quarantine in Indore.

As many as 19 residents of Indore tested positive for COVID-19 on Tuesday night and 17 earlier during the day, the steepest spike in cases on a day, according to the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Medical College, Indore.

The samples of a 65-year-old man from Khargone, who died while undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Indore on March 29, tested positive.

Among the new cases in Indore, nine patients live at the same postal address in Tazim Nagar. They include six women aged 45, 21, 30, 36, 23 and 30, two toddlers aged three and five, and a boy aged eight. A man aged 39 and a woman 66 also share an address at another location in Indore.



On the up: The Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Medical College, Indore, which has reported a spike in cases. ■ A.M. FARUQI

Two men aged 24 and 74 living in one address in Indore have a contact history.

They were home quarantined by health officials. This means they may have had contact with someone positive within the family," said Rahul Rokade of the college.

A woman aged 24 also had contact history. Most cases earlier didn't have a contact or travel history.

In addition, said Dr. Rokade, a man aged 22 visited New Delhi.

"The rest of the patients don't have a travel or contact history."

Meanwhile, Khargone be-

came the seventh district to be hit by the outbreak, recording its first case.

"The man from Dhargoan village in Maheshwar tehsil of Khargone was admitted to M.Y. hospital's chest ward in Indore on the afternoon of March 23 with a complaint of bilateral pneumonia," said Dr. Rokade. "He succumbed to the illness in a cardiac pulmonary arrest at 6.20 p.m. on March 29."

The patient's sample was taken when he was admitted in accordance with the guidelines, he said. He didn't have a travel or contact history.

Meanwhile, Khargone be-

It's too early to detect lockdown impact

As incubation period is 14 days, the cases emerging now are older and they have to be discounted

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

The impact of the lockdown on arresting the spread of COVID-19 can be gauged only after two weeks, government and independent experts suggest.

On the evening of March 24, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a nationwide 21-day lockdown to arrest "community transmission" of the novel coronavirus, or SAR-CoV-2. Between March 24 and April 1, the number of COVID-19 positive cases has more than doubled – from 606 on March 25 to 1,637 on April 1. This, however, was slower – about half the rate of growth from the week before when only 151 cases were confirmed on March 18.

The growth in number of positive cases in India is slower than in many countries that are dealing with the worst of the pandemic.



Empty spaces: A deserted highway near the Akshardham temple in New Delhi on Wednesday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

On March 8, the U.S. recorded 541 cases in two days, and the figure nearly doubled to 994 cases. In the last week, however, it has risen by 75%.

Indonesia, which as on March 31 had 1,528 cases and therefore roughly in the league of India, is also recording a similar growth

rate. It had 686 cases on March 24 or a little fewer than half the cases from today. Though it has laws restricting movement, there is no lockdown.

Government experts and independent researchers concur that it is early to estimate the impact of the lock-

down on slowing down the spread of the virus. "The incubation period of the virus is 14 days. Therefore, the cases we are seeing are older cases (from before March 24). So only once these old cases are discounted can we judge the impact of the lockdown. Whatever models and statisticians say, nobody can really predict the outcome of the epidemic," Raman Ganeshkar, Chief Scientist, Indian Council of Medical Research, and spokesperson for COVID-19 communication, said at a press briefing.

Sujatha Rao, former Secretary of the Health Ministry, tweeted on Tuesday: "Impact of lockdown can only be known after April 5. Today's infections are of the situation two weeks ago." However, both of these reflect the extreme outer limit of the incubation period – defined as the time taken to contract the virus and an in-

fected person manifesting symptoms. The World Health Organization says incubation is commonly five days.

For more testing

Giridhar Babu, an epidemiologist and physician associated with the Public Health Foundation of India, said it would take a minimum of three weeks and a lockdown would be useful only with heightened testing, particularly to catch those who might be carrying the virus but were not yet manifesting symptoms.

"Lockdown alone, without an increase in finding the new cases either through a syndromic approach or increased rate of testing, is not enough to break the chain. Also reviewing of the States with silent areas [where very few cases are reported] is important," he said in an e-mail.

U.P. records its first two virus deaths

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh recorded its first two fatalities due to COVID-19 on Wednesday. They were a 25-year-old man from Basti, whose relatives allegedly hid his travel history to Mumbai, and a 72-year-old man from Meerut.

The patient from Basti died at the Baba Raghub Das Medical College in Gorakhpur. Subsequently, it was reported that he was infected with the virus, BRDRC principal Ganesh Kumar told *The Hindu*.

The patient in Meerut, a diabetic who was suffering from chronic pulmonary disease, tested positive on March 29, said R.C. Gupta, principal of the Meerut Medical College. Earlier, the patient's son-in-law tested positive.

Meanwhile, 13 new patients tested positive in U.P., taking the tally to 116.

Baby out of quarantine in Srinagar

Seven-month-old boy was among 236 released after compulsory 14-day stay

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

In a glimmer of hope, more than 230 people, including a seven-month-old baby, were discharged from administrative quarantine centres in Kashmir on Wednesday after two weeks. Meanwhile, seven more people tested positive for COVID-19 in J&K, taking the total to 62.

Travelling with his wife and two children, Mudasir Ahmad Bhat of Sundoo village in Kulgam said he was frightened when he heard the announcement made on March 19 as their flight landed at the Srinagar airport.



To freedom: Zaid Mudasir with his mother, Romi Jan, after completing the 14-day quarantine in Srinagar on Wednesday. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

Shock news
"It was after eight months my family and I were returning home from Leh. It took us time to absorb the announcement made about our quarantine. I was not carrying enough clothes and blankets. I was worried about my seven-month-old son Zaid Mudasir and seven-year-old daughter. Thankfully, we had a comfortable stay. Our son became everyone's favourite on our discharge day on Wednesday," Mr. Bhat told *The Hindu*.

"We ensured that the baby, being the youngest, was well fed and attended

them showed any symptoms. By World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, many infected people show symptoms within two weeks.

"These locals were kept in well-equipped hotels and government accommodations. They had come from COVID-19-affected parts of the country and overseas," said Additional Deputy Commissioner, Srinagar, M. Haneef Balkhi. "Today, special buses were provided to them to reach their districts," he added. "Only three managed to reach home and informed the locals about four others being trapped in snow. A rescue team reached the spot. One was declared dead on his arrival at hospital. Two succumbed later," they said.

These locals were kept in well-equipped hotels and government accommodations. They had come from COVID-19-affected parts of the country and overseas," said Additional Deputy Commissioner, Srinagar, M. Haneef Balkhi. "Today, special buses were provided to them to reach their districts," he added. "Only three managed to reach home and informed the locals about four others being trapped in snow. A rescue team reached the spot. One was declared dead on his arrival at hospital. Two succumbed later," they said.

An official said none of

3 labourers die after trekking in snow

SRINAGAR

Three persons died on Wednesday while walking through a mountain pass in Banjali to reach home, in a bid to avoid the stringent implementation of lockdown on the National Highway in Kashmir. An official said around seven people, all labourers, decided to avoid using the Srinagar-Jammu Highway to reach Banjali from Ramtan and trekked a mountain pass full of snow. Only three managed to reach home and informed the locals about four others being trapped in snow. A rescue team reached the spot. One was declared dead on his arrival at hospital. Two succumbed later," they said.

Meanwhile, seven more patients tested positive for COVID-19, taking the total number of cases to 62.

Five Delhi doctors test positive for COVID-19

One has been confirmed to be infected

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

At least three doctors of different Delhi hospitals and two doctors from Aam Aadmi Mohalla Clinics have tested positive for COVID-19 in the city, according to officials.

But only one of the doctors has been confirmed to be infected while treating patients.

A resident doctor from the Biochemistry Department of the Safdarjung Hospital tested positive for COVID-19 on March 26, according to hospital sources. Her husband, a senior resident doctor in Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Hospital, Pusa Road, later tested positive.

While it is alleged that the doctor working at the Safdarjung Hospital contracted the infection while treating COVID-19 patients, the hospital hasn't confirmed it. According to sources, she is a third year postgraduate student of the Biochemistry Department.

Apart from these, earlier this month, a 49-year-old male doctor, who works at an Aam Aadmi Mohalla Clinic (AAMC) tested positive.

Later the doctor's wife, a 48-year-old woman, who is also a doctor at an AAMC, tested positive for the virus.



A view of an Aam Aadmi Mohalla Clinic in New Delhi. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

positive for COVID-19, officials said on Wednesday. The hospital has been shut and is being sanitised.

A senior resident from Delhi State Cancer Institute has tested positive. His brother had come back from the U.K. a few days back and had met him. We are looking into the reason behind his case," Health Minister Satyendar Jain said.

The patient's sample was taken when he was admitted in accordance with the guidelines, he said. He didn't have a travel or contact history.

Also, another doctor working at the Delhi State Cancer Institute has tested

No need for additional spectrum for now, say telecom operators

A flattening of demand seen due to various measures'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Telecom operators on Wednesday said they had seen a flattening of traffic demand on their networks due to various measures, including streaming services reducing the video quality to standard definition (SD). Hence, they did not require additional spectrum to maintain quality of networks amid the 21-day nationwide lockdown.

"Over the past few days, the industry, in concert with actions coordinated with the DoT, has seen a flattening of traffic demand on members' networks," Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) director-general Rajan S. Mathews said.

Mr. Mathews added that some of these actions related to streaming services reducing their content from HD (high definition) to SD,

local municipalities working with operators to bring sealed towers back on line and some redistribution of traffic on the network, among other things.

"We believe there is no such present need and operators remain confident that the steps they have taken presently can maintain the relatability and quality of their networks and services," he added.

POSTGRADUATE INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL EDUCATION & RESEARCH, CHANDIGARH	
Advertisement No. PG/RC/017/2020/1377	RECRUITMENT NOTICE Dated: 01.04.2020
The Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), Chandigarh invites ONLINE applications from Indian Nationals for filling up of 102 posts of Senior Residents, 04 posts of Senior Medical Officers (Casualty in Emergency) & 12 posts of Jr.-Sr. Demonstrators in different specialties in PGIMER, Chandigarh; 14 posts of Senior Residents, 07 posts of Demonstrators in different specialties in All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Bathinda, Punjab, and 13 posts of Senior Residents, 07 posts of Demonstrators in different specialties in All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Bilaspur, Himachal Pradesh for a maximum period up to 63 years as per details given below:	
ITEM(S)	TIMELINE(S)/REMARKS
DETAILS OF VACANCIES & OTHER RULES/ INSTRUCTIONS TO BE COMPLIED WITH	AS PER DETAILED GUIDELINES WITH THIS ADV. NOTICE AT www.pgimer.edu.in
OPENING DATE FOR ONLINE REGISTRATION FOR FILLING UP OF ONLINE APPLICATION ON PGIMER'S WEBSITE <a href="http://www.pg	

DGCA allows flights to carry cargo in cabin

Move helps to meet demand for more supplies

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Director General of Civil Aviation on Wednesday allowed airlines to carry cargo within passenger cabin and on seats, apart from the aircraft belly, in order to enable them to accommodate more freight in view of the lockdown and manage cost-efficient operations.

Airlines will have to obtain permission from the DGCA and ensure that the cargo is restrained and will not interfere with emergency evacuation. Aircraft manufacturers such as Airbus and Boeing allow their airplanes to be used in this manner and have detailed guidelines to ensure safety.

In order to stow consignments on and below passenger seats, airlines will have to



Essential cargo: IAF aircraft being loaded with medical supplies to be flown to various parts of the country as part of the assistance to the civil administration. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

obtain additional permission

"Operations without passengers and with cargo in the passenger compartment will require suitable number of crew member/ personnel to

survey and access all areas of the cabin during all phases of flight," says the latest DGCA advisory. So far, 74 cargo flights have been operated in the past one week by Air In-

dia, Alliance Air, IAF, Pawan Hans, IndiGo and SpiceJet. Passenger airlines like Air India, SpiceJet and IndiGo have conducted a total of 64 flights among them.

All safety measures being taken for crew: Air India

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Air India said on Wednesday that it has taken adequate measures to protect the health and safety of its crew. The statement was in response to criticism from pilots' unions that complained of poor precautionary steps taken by the airline when operating special flights to repatriate foreign citizens stranded in the country.

"All possible measures have been taken towards

their health and safety as the safety of our air crew is paramount to us at Air India. Best available Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) are procured for our crew including masks, gloves, apron, hazmat suits, sanitizers. Aircraft are fumigated and disinfected as per Ministry and Manufacturers SOP," said the statement.

The airline also said that its doctors were available for its crew and employees.

tion Territories of J&K and Ladakh, a statement said.

The IAF's C-17, C-130, An-32, AVRO & Dornier aircraft are operated for the assistance.

CBSE to give 10 days notice for fresh exams

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI/KOLKATA

Out of the 40 papers for Class 10 and 12 board examinations that the Central Board of Secondary Education was forced to put on hold due to the situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, only papers in 12 key subjects for Class 12 will be rescheduled. The remaining examinations will not be held, CBSE said in a statement on Wednesday evening.

The Board has not announced fresh dates for the rescheduled examinations. Instead, it promised to give students, schools and all stakeholders at least 10 days notice as and when it is in a position to hold the examinations again.

Class 10 students had almost completed their exams, with only two subjects – Information and Communication Technology, and

JEE-Advanced postponed

NEW DELHI

IIT Delhi, the organising institute for the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE-Advanced) 2020, on Wednesday announced that it has postponed the examination that was scheduled to be held on May 17. The exam will be rescheduled after JEE (Main).

Computer Applications – remaining. Both of those exams will not be held now, and the Board said it would provide instructions for assessing those students.

For Class 12 students, the CBSE has said it will reschedule papers in 12 subjects: Business Studies, Geography, Hindi (both Elective and Core), Home Science, Sociology, Computer Science (old and new), Informatics Practicals (old and new), Information Technology and Biotechnology.

DRDO to make five-layer masks

It will modify ventilators to raise capacity

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI



Priming the forces: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh conducting a review via videoconferencing on Wednesday. ■ PTI

Chief of the Defence Staff Gen. Bipin Rawat said that separate hospitals have been identified to exclusively deal with COVID-19 and more than 9,000 hospital beds were available.

At a review meeting of the Ministry held through videoconferencing, the three Service chiefs and other officials too apprised the Minister of their efforts, a statement said.

Mr. Reddy said that 50,000 litres of sanitisers made by the DRDO labs were supplied to various security entities, including the Delhi Police and another one lakh litres distributed all over the country. "A five-layered nano-technology mask N99 is being made on a war footing. A total of 10,000 have already been made and soon per day production will be extended to 20,000," the statement said.

Besides airlifting tonnes of medical supplies, regular airlift of COVID-19 test samples from Ladakh to Delhi was being undertaken, stated Air Chief Marshal R.K.S. Bhadauria.

Army chief Gen. Manoj Naravane informed the Defence Minister that more than 8,500 doctors and support staff were available to extend necessary assistance to the civilian administration. On providing assistance to neighbouring countries, he said that "assistance to Nepal in the form of medical equipment will be delivered shortly".

Navy chief Admiral Karambir Singh said naval ships were on a standby to extend any assistance.

Retired health professionals have been kept in readiness, said Lt. Gen. Anup Banerjee, Director General Armed Force Medical Services (AFMS). Approximately, 25,000 National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets are being mobilised for local assistance.

Army chief Gen. Manoj

Plea in SC to ensure fair sale of goods

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday asked the Union and Delhi governments to respond to a petition for a direction to ensure fair and equitable sale and distribution of masks, hand sanitizers and liquid soap among the public to deal with COVID-19.

A Bench, led by Justice L. Nageswara Rao, issued notice to the governments on the petition filed by the NGO, Justice For Rights Foundation, that the prices of these protective items had increased manifold.

The petition said the notifications that the government had issued on the prices of face masks and hand sanitizers had little effect. "...even after the issuance of such notification and orders, several chemists throughout the country have not reduced the prices or [were not] deterred from selling the essential commodities at a higher price," the petition said. It called for guidelines and a task force to enforce the price control orders.

The press statement issued by the association noted that as per a Brookings report, the country might need anywhere between 1,10,000 and 2,20,000 ventilators by May 15 in the worst-case scenario and the number of ventilators available today in the country is about 57,000. "There is a pressing need for ventilators in India and a huge disparity in their availability in various States. For instance, Mumbai has 800 to 1,000 ventilators, while States such as Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh have 1,500 and 1,800 respectively. Bengaluru has approximately 400 ventilators, whereas Kerala has 5,000," the statement said.

AIIMed said seven of its ten major manufacturers have confirmed that the current production capacity of ventilators is 5,500-5,750 pieces per month, compared with production of about 2,700 units in the previous month.

Skanska, the leading ventilator manufacturer, has created a consortium with BEL, BHEL and Mahindra & Mahindra to ramp up production from 2,000 units per month to 5,000 units per month, and to 30,000 pieces per month by May.

Likewise, Agva Healthcare has tied up with Maruti Suzuki to scale up production from 400 units per month to 4,000 units in April and 10,000 units per month by May.

Industry eyes manufacture of 50,000 ventilators a month

Big companies are getting together to ramp up production



Need of the hour: There is a huge disparity in the availability of ventilators across the country. ■ AFP

YUTHIKA BHARGAVA
NEW DELHI

The Association of Indian Medical Device Industry (AIIMed) is looking at the production of 50,000 ventilators a month by May, particularly with companies such as Maruti Suzuki and Mahindra & Mahindra committing support to help scale up production of medical devices.

Huge efforts are being put to increase medical device manufacturing capacity by the manufacturers ... big companies like Maruti Suzuki, Mahindra & Mahindra, Kalyani, Tata Motors, Hyundai, etc. will possibly offer to collaborate with our members to rapidly scale up production of ventilators.

The aim is to produce 50,000 ventilators per month by May," Rajiv Nath, forum coordinator at AIIMed, said.

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Mizo boy donates ₹333 from savings

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

A seven-year-old boy in Mizoram has donated his entire savings of ₹333 to a State fund to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

The boy, Rommel Lalmuangsana, handed over a polythene bag containing the amount – mostly coins and a few currency notes – over to the village task force at Kolasib Venglai in Kolasib district on Tuesday.

The boy's gesture drew the attention of Mizoram Chief Minister Zoramthanga who tweeted: "May the good Lord bless you abundantly. You are a hero."

The boy's parents were quoted as saying that he insisted on giving the money for the fight against the pandemic after watching appeals on television and social media.

Masks and thermal scanners among 5.38 lakh items donated

One lakh people, 4,100 organisations register as volunteers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has received offers for more than 5.38 lakh items, including over 1,000 digital thermal scanners and 100 full-body thermal scanners, in donation to fight COVID-19.

As of Wednesday, the donated items included 8,275 N95 masks with exhalation valves, 43,000 triple-layer surgical masks, about 230 personal protective coverall garments, 8,770 face shields and 2,638 personal protective goggles that can be used by doctors.

About 30,000 examination gloves of large and medium sizes, close to 23,000 Nitrile gloves of various sizes, and more than 60,000 bottles of sanitisers of 100 ml and 500 ml packaging



Screen test: Full-body scanners can depict body temperatures with colours on a computer monitor. ■ REUTERS

sizes, have also been donated.

In all, 469 donation requests have been initiated.

Close to one lakh individuals and more than 4,100 organisations have registered as volunteers till Wednesday. The volunteers have come forward to contribute in the areas of health services; communication and public awareness on the precautions to be taken; assistance in producing personal protection equipment and offering tech-based solutions.

SC declines to hear Michel's bail plea

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday did not intervene in a plea for bail filed by Augusta Westland VVIP chopper scam accused Christian Michel James. The accused had said he was vulnerable to COVID-19 infection while in custody as an undertrial.

A Bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud asked Michel to first present his bail plea before the Delhi High Court.

The accused had cited the recent order passed by the Supreme Court to de-congest crowded prisons in a bid to stop infection from spreading within and from prisons.

"The agedness and a pre-existing ill state of health will make the applicant's (Michel) body more susceptible to the infection than any other ordinary prisoner with a normal health condition," the plea argued. The CBI had said that he should not be given bail as he could influence witnesses.

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH SAMAGRA SHIKSHA STATE PROJECT OFFICE, KBC BOYS HIGH SCHOOL CAMPUS, OPP.RAITHU BAZAR, PATAMATA, VIJAYAWADA, ANDHRA PRADESH

e-procurement notice No. SSA-16/2014/2019-MIS SEC-SSA, dt.01-04-2020

Request for Proposal

Samagra Shiksha, Andhra Pradesh is inviting Request for Proposal for procurement and supply of 3 (Three) pairs of uniform cloth under the scheme of "Jagannan Vidya Kanuka" to all the students (approximately 40 lakhs in number) studying classes I to X in Government/ MPP/ ZPP/ Municipal KGBVs/ Model Schools/ Ashram Schools/ Residential/ Aided Schools of Education and welfare departments in the State of Andhra Pradesh during the year 2020-21. For details please visit <https://tender.aeprourement.gov.in> from 03-04-2020. Tender/RFP form can be downloaded from website. Eligible firms shall upload the prescribed format as per the schedules given in the above said site. Contact No. 0866-2428599.

Sd/- Vadrevi Chinaveerabhadru, IAS, State Project Director, Samagra Shiksha, Andhra Pradesh.

DIPR 01PP/CL, DT: 01/04/2020

TRANSMISSION CORPORATION OF TELANGANA LIMITED e-PROCUREMENT NOTIFICATION

TSTRANSCO invites tenders under Local Competitive Bidding for Design, engineering, manufacturing, testing before dispatch, loading, supply for destination including transportation, civil & construction works, erection, testing and commissioning of the following on Turnkey basis through e-procurement as detailed below: Specification No.: (1) e-HVHT-04/19-20, Name of Work : Erection, Testing and Commissioning on turnkey basis under Yadiad Thermal Power (5 x 800MW) Evacuation Scheme of the following:

(i) 400/220/132kV Choutuppal Substation (ii) 400kV QMDC Line from Yadadri TPP Switchyard to proposed 400/220/132kV Choutuppal SS (102kms approx.) (iii) 400kV QMDC Line from Yadadri TPP Switchyard to 400/220kV Dindi SS (115kms approx.)

(iv) Double circuit LILO of existing 400kV Khamman – Mamidipally TMDC Line to proposed 400/220/132kV Choutuppal Sub-Station (2x11kms approx.) (v) 2 Nos. 400kV Quad Moose Bays at 400/220kV Dindi SS. (2) e-HVHT-05/19-20 : Erection, Testing and Commissioning on turnkey basis under Yadadri Thermal Power Scheme of the following:

(1) 400/220kV Damaracherla Sub-Station, (2) 400kV Quad Moose DC Line from Yadadri TPP Switchyard to proposed 400/220kV Damaracherla SS (6.12kms) (3) 400kV QMDC Line from proposed Yadadri Thermal Power Plant (YTPP) Switchyard to 400/220kV Jangaon SS - 150KM. The interested bidders may enroll themselves in e-procurement at www.eprocurement.telangana.gov.in. The tender documents are available at the web site www.eprocurement.telangana.gov.in. For details visit our website: www.tstrancco.in. Contact Nos: 040-2332 3933, 040-2339 6000-3500, 3633, 3801, 3586, 3580.

R.O.No. 01/20

Sd/- CHIEF ENGINEER / 400kV

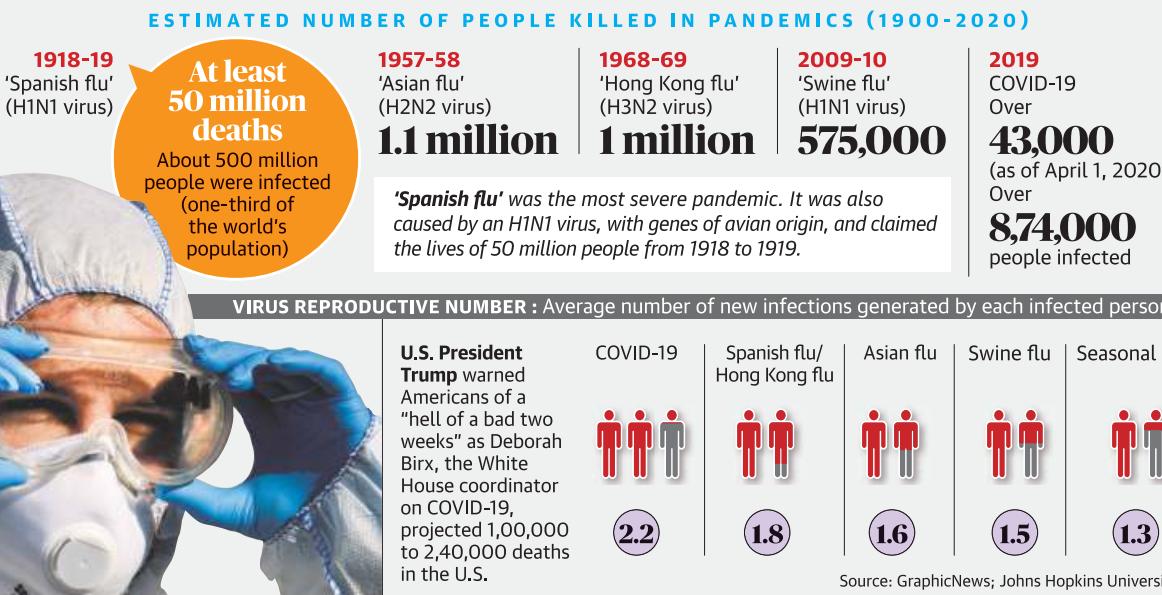
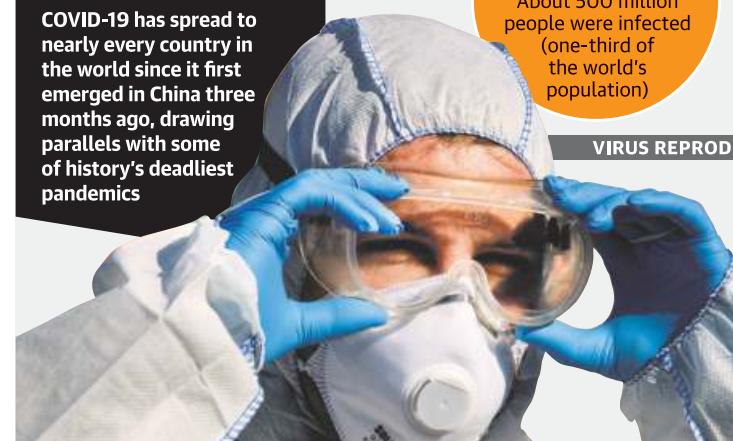
NOTICE INVITING REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATION (RFQ) for Construction of New Bus Stand in Tiruvannamalai Municipality on Design, Build, Finance, Operate and Transfer (DBOT) basis

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATION (RFQ) - EXTENSION OF SUBMISSION DATE upto 13.05.2020

Tiruvannamalai is a Temple and also known for its trading activities. The existing bus stand of the Tiruvannamalai Municipality was constructed around 20 years back with 50 bus bays as "A" class bus stand being operated at present to connect surrounding villages and towns

Deadly pandemics

COVID-19 has spread to nearly every country in the world since it first emerged in China three months ago, drawing parallels with some of history's deadliest pandemics



World could face a food crisis: UN, WTO

White House's COVID-19 coordinator projects a range of 1,00,000 to 2,40,000 deaths in the U.S.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE PARIS

The heads of three global agencies warned on Wednesday of the risk of a worldwide "food shortage" if authorities fail to manage the ongoing COVID-19 crisis properly.

Many governments around the world have put their populations on lockdown causing severe slowdowns in international trade and food supply chains. Panic buying by people going into confinement has already demonstrated the fragility of supply chains as supermarket shelves emptied in many countries.

"Uncertainty about food availability can spark a wave of export restrictions, creating a shortage on the global market," said the joint text signed by Qu Dongyu, head of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the World Health Organization (WHO) and Roberto Azevedo, director of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

"In the midst of the COVID-19 lockdowns, every effort must be made to ensure that trade flows as freely as possible, specially to avoid food shortage(s)" from deve-

loping, they said in their statement.

"When acting to protect the health and well-being of their citizens, countries should ensure that any trade-related measures do not disrupt the food supply chain," they added.

U.K.'s highest daily toll

Meanwhile, Britain reported 563 deaths on Wednesday, the first time the national toll has exceeded 500, bringing the total fatalities to 2,352, according to official figures.

The U.K. government came under renewed pressure to ramp up mass testing of frontline medical staff and the wider community.

In the U.S., President Donald Trump warned of a "very painful" two weeks. "This is going to be a very painful, a very, very painful two weeks," Mr. Trump told a press conference at the White House.

"I want every American to be prepared for the hard days that lie ahead," he said.

Deborah Birx, COVID-19 response coordinator at the White House, displayed a chart projecting a range of 100,000 to 240,000 deaths in the U.S., when current efforts at mitigation are taken into account.

Putin working remotely after doctor tests positive

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE MOSCOW

Russian leader Vladimir Putin has decided to handle his duties remotely, the Kremlin said on Wednesday, after the head of the country's main COVID-19-focused hospital tested positive following a meeting with the President.

Denis Protsenko met Mr. Putin last week as the Russian leader visited the Kom-

munarka hospital in Moscow. "The President prefers these days to work remotely," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists, shortly before Mr. Putin was due to hold a Cabinet meeting by videoconference.

"We are taking all precautionary measures," he said, adding that Mr. Putin was at the presidential residence in Novo-Ogaryovo.

Spain toll hits 9,053 as virus cases pass 1,00,000

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE MADRID

The COVID-19 death toll in Spain surged over 9,000 on Wednesday after a record 864 deaths in 24 hours, with the number of confirmed cases passing the 1,00,000 mark, the government said.

Spain has the world's second-highest death toll after Italy, with the virus so far claiming 9,053 lives and the

number of confirmed cases reaching 1,02,136.

But on a day-to-day basis, the rate of new infections continued its downward trend, showing an increase of just over 8.0%, compared with nearly 11% on Tuesday, Health Ministry figures showed. And the death rate has also slowed, from 27% a week ago to 10.5% on Wednesday.

Number of cases in Pak. crosses 2,000

11-year-old Indonesian girl dies

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE JAKARTA

An 11-year-old girl has become Indonesia's youngest person to die after contracting COVID-19, officials said on Wednesday. The girl, who was also suffering from dengue fever, was admitted to hospital on Madura Island off the coast of Java on March 19.

Trump says ready to help end Saudi-Russian oil price war

REUTERS BEIJING

China reported dwindling new infections on Wednesday and for the first time disclosed the number of asymptomatic cases, which could complicate how trends in the outbreak are read.

Almost all of Tuesday's 36 new cases involved overseas arrivals, the National Health Commission said, down from 48 a day ago, and taking the number of cases to 81,554.

As of Tuesday, there were about 20,000 people under observation, the commission said, though they may not necessarily be carriers.

On Tuesday, 1,367 asymptomatic cases were under observation in China, down from 1,541 the previous day, the Health Commission said.

Citing classified data, the South China Morning Post said China had found more than 43,000 cases of asymptomatic infection through contact tracing. Seven

deaths from the virus were reported on Tuesday, up from just one a day ago.

India welcomes Ghani's talk team

Govt. calls Afghan leader's decision to form a team for dialogue a 'positive step'

SUHASINI HAIDAR NEW DELHI

Welcoming Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani's decision to form a team for intra-Afghan negotiations that will include the Taliban, the government said this is a "positive step" for the process of reconciliation in the country.

"We view the formation of the team as a positive step which would lead to a peaceful and stable future for Afghanistan free from the scourge of externally sponsored terrorism," said a statement issued by the Ministry of External Affairs. The statement followed a conversation between External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to discuss cooperation on the COVID-19 pandemic.

MEA sources said there had also been a "discussion



The way forward: A file photo of Taliban militants at the Pul-e-Charkhi Jail in Kabul. ■ AP

the Bagram Base outside Kabul on Tuesday to talk about the release of prisoners that had been decided in the U.S.-Taliban agreement in February.

Technical measures
"They (the Taliban delegation) will pursue the issue of release of the prisoners and will conduct the necessary technical measures," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid, tweeted.

The issue of the prisoners release, including 5,000 held by the government and 1,000 by the Taliban, has been a sticking point in the deal, and has meant that intra-Afghan talks planned for March 12 had to be put off.

India sent its envoy to witness the signing of the U.S.-Taliban deal but has been cautious in welcoming its content and sceptical of dealing with the Taliban.

Although the Taliban rejected the announcement initially, claiming that it was not "inclusive enough", the group sent a delegation to

the developing situation.

India's statement also follows similar statements by the UN's mission in Afghanistan UNAMA, other countries

and even Mr. Ghani's arch political rival former Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, that have all hailed his announcement on March 27 of a 21-member negotiating team that included five women, to talk to the Taliban.

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MARKET WATCH

	01-04-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	28,265	-4.08
Brent oil	25.17	10.39

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	244.80	-6.50
Asian Paints	1603.20	-63.30
Axius Bank	358.65	-20.35
Bajaj Auto	2051.10	-28.75
Bajaj Finserv	4501.90	-89.30
Bajaj Finance	2219.35	3.55
Bharti Airtel	421.35	-19.55
BPCL	302.95	-13.95
Britannia Ind	2564.83	-124.10
Cipla	413.75	-9.10
Coal India	139.45	-0.60
Dr Reddy's Lab	3095.00	-25.75
Eicher Motors	13001.60	-94.30
GAIL (India)	75.75	-0.80
Grasim Ind	476.15	0.05
HCL Tech	413.55	-22.85
HDFC	1583.50	-49.60
HDFC Bank	829.65	-32.25
Hero MotoCorp	1639.65	-43.20
Hindalco	91.65	-4.05
Hind Unilever	2179.65	-118.85
ICICI Bank	3111.15	-12.60
IndusInd Bank	342.25	-9.05
Bharti Infratel	155.10	-4.90
L&T	774.35	-34.15
M&M	272.85	-12.10
Maruti Suzuki	4246.35	-41.95
Nestle India Ltd.	15654.55	-646.05
NTPC	81.00	-3.20
ONGC	65.75	-2.55
PowerGrid Corp	154.60	-4.50
Reliance Ind	1080.45	-33.30
State Bank	186.55	-10.30
Shree Cement	16549.65	-996.70
Sun Pharma	343.55	-8.75
Tata Motors	67.95	-3.10
Tata Steel	266.35	-3.25
TCS	1708.75	-117.35
Tech Mahindra	511.20	-54.30
Titan	936.05	-2.35
UltraTech Cement	3140.65	-104.20
UPL	305.75	-20.75
Vedanta	62.65	-2.05
Wipro	189.50	-7.20
Zee Entertainment	120.90	-3.05

RBI relaxes export rules, allows States and UTs to borrow more

Sets up panel to review ways and means advances limit for States

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced more measures to fight economic disruptions caused by COVID-19, including extension of the realisation period of export proceeds and allowing States to borrow more.

"Presently, the value of the goods or software exports made by exporters is required to be realised fully and repatriated to the country within nine months from the date of exports.

"In view of the disruption

COVID-19

caused by the pandemic, the time period for realisation and repatriation of export proceeds for exports made up to or on July 31, 2020, has been extended to 15 months from the date of export," the RBI said. The measure will



In the interim: Pending submission of the report, RBI has raised the ways and means advances limit by 30%. ■ REUTERS

enable exporters to realise their receipts, especially from COVID-19 affected countries, within the extended period, and also provide greater flexibility to exporters to negotiate future export contracts with buyers.

The central bank has also formed an advisory committee to review the ways and

means limit for State governments and union territories. Till the panel submits its report, the central bank has increased the ways and means advances limit by 30% for States and union territories.

"Pending submission of the final recommendations by the Committee, it has been decided to increase the WMA limit by 30% from the

existing limit for all States/UTs to enable State governments to tide over the situation arising from the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The revised limits will come into force with effect from April 1, 2020 and will be valid till September 30, 2020, the RBI said.

The 'Ways and Means Advances' is a scheme that helps meet mismatches in receipts and payments of the government. Under this scheme, a government can avail itself of immediate cash from the RBI.

The central bank has also deferred the implementation of counter cyclical capital buffer (CCyB) for banks. "Based on the review and empirical analysis of CCyB indicators, it has been decided that it is not necessary to activate CCyB for a period of one year or earlier, as may be necessary," the RBI said.

While Mumbai witnessed a ₹4-per-litre increase in petrol prices,

Chennai saw a ₹3.42 per litre increase in diesel prices.

The price of petrol in Mumbai has been increased from ₹72.28 a litre to ₹76.31 a litre and the price of diesel in Mumbai has been increased from ₹65.71 a litre to ₹66.21 a litre, making it the highest among the four metros.

Similarly, in Chennai, the price of petrol has been increased from ₹69.59 a litre to ₹72.28 a litre, while diesel price has been increased from ₹62.29 a litre to ₹65.71 a litre.

In Kolkata, the price of petrol has been reduced from ₹75.30 a litre to ₹73.30 a litre, while diesel prices have been increased from ₹65.21 a litre to ₹65.62 a litre.

In Delhi, the price of petrol has been reduced from ₹72.29 to ₹69.59 a litre and diesel prices from ₹64.62 a litre to ₹62.29 a litre, making it the cheapest among the four metros.

OMCs have reduced the prices of LPG or cooking gas by an average of ₹63 per 14 kg cylinder.

Petro prices hiked as BS-VI fuel kicks in

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Even as prices of international crude have dropped to the lowest in the last 18 years since 2002, state-owned oil marketing companies (OMCs) have increased the price of sensitive petroleum products like petrol and diesel in most Indian cities.

The price of petrol has been increased in Mumbai and Chennai, while the price of diesel has been increased in Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai. Delhi is the only Indian metro where the prices of petrol and diesel have been reduced, while Kolkata witnessed a reduction in petrol prices.

The central bank has also deferred the implementation of counter cyclical capital buffer (CCyB) for banks.

"Based on the review and empirical analysis of CCyB indicators, it has been decided that it is not necessary to activate CCyB for a period of one year or earlier, as may be necessary," the RBI said.

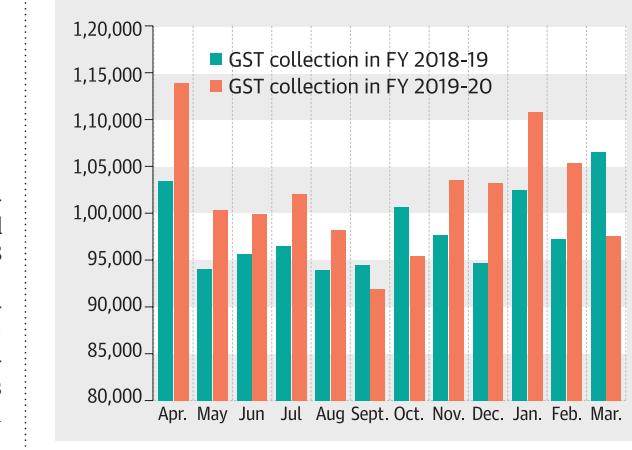
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Trends in GST collection (in ₹ crore)



March GST revenue drops below ₹1 lakh cr.

COVID-19 impact to be seen from Apr.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections for March 2020 stood at ₹97,597 crore, more than ₹83 lakh filed in the previous two months. "It seems that many businesses may not have been able to pay GST because of the liquidity issues being faced after the lockdown," said Pratik Jain, partner and indirect tax leader at PwC India.

The situation is likely to worsen. "With most businesses being non-operational for a considerable period in March and the relaxation of delayed payments allowed, collections in the coming quarter would see quite a fall," said Abhishek Jain, tax partner at Ernst and Young. Small businesses have been allowed a three-month deferment of GST payments due to the COVID-19 situation, and there is a wider industry demand for a moratorium on payments and reduction in rates.

"At this stage, it is necessary for businesses to conserve cash in order to enable resumption of operations once the lockdown ends. Any deferral of the GST payment timelines by a few months would significantly assist them in this process," said M.S. Mani, partner, Deloitte India.

Although GST revenue from domestic transactions dropped 4% in comparison with March 2019, there was a 23% fall in the tax collected on import of goods. "Global trade was affected by COVID-19 in February itself, so we could be seeing the result of that," said Sachin Menon, national head, indirect taxes, KPMG in India.

There has also been a sharp 7% decline in the filing

SBI, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank activate moratorium

State Bank of India to reverse March EMI if already paid

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

State Bank of India, the country's largest lender and private sector lenders ICICI Bank and HDFC Bank have started activating the loan repayment moratorium option for customers.

The moratorium was announced by the Reserve Bank of India last week in view of the financial stress faced by borrowers following the lockdown declared on account of the COVID-19 pandemic.

SBI customers who want to avail themselves of the moratorium, are required to send an email to avail the option. "No action is required. They may continue to pay in



Rescue act: SBI customers need to only send an email to avail themselves of the EMI moratorium option. ■ REUTERS

use course," SBI said of customers who do not wish to avail the moratorium option.

SBI has also clarified that if a customer has already paid the EMI for March, then the amount will be reversed

if the customer sends in a request. "Interest shall continue to accrue on the outstanding portion of the term loan during the moratorium period," SBI said.

Commenting on impact in case of home loans if the EMI

is deferred, SBI said that for a loan of ₹30 lakh with a remaining maturity of 15 years, the net additional interest would be ₹2.34 lakh, which is equal to eight EMIs.

"For a loan of ₹6 lakh with a remaining maturity of 54 months, the additional interest payable would be ₹19,000 approximately, equal to additional 1.5 EMIs," SBI said on the impact in the case of auto loans.

Both ICICI Bank and HDFC Bank have also activated the options in their websites to avail moratorium. Customers have to fill in a simple form giving loan account numbers and other details to avail themselves of the moratorium.

Similarly, Mahindra and Mahindra sold 3,384 PVs in March 2020 in the domestic market, a decline of 88% from 27,646 units in the year-ago month. For fiscal year 2019-20, domestic PV sales fell 27% to 1.86 lakh.

Relatively new entrant Kia Motors sold 8,583 units in the retail market in March 2020.

Naveen Soni, Senior VP, Sales and Service, Toyota Kirloskar Motor (TKM), said, "...last month has been very challenging for us, both in sales as well as production," adding the pandemic has financially impacted all its dealerships across India.

TKM reported a 55% decline in sales to 7023 vehicles in March in the domestic market. It added that March was the last month of production for the Etios series as well as the Corolla Altis.

In the case of medium and heavy commercial vehicles,

the company's sales dipped by 93% to 918 units

and in buses by 62% to 913 units.

Light commercial vehicle sales declined by 94% to 348 units.

Tata Motors' domestic commercial vehicle (CV)

sales tumbled 90% to 5,336 units in March. For the full

Commercial vehicle sales fall off a cliff on COVID-19

Virus lockdown impacts operations

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI/CHENNAI

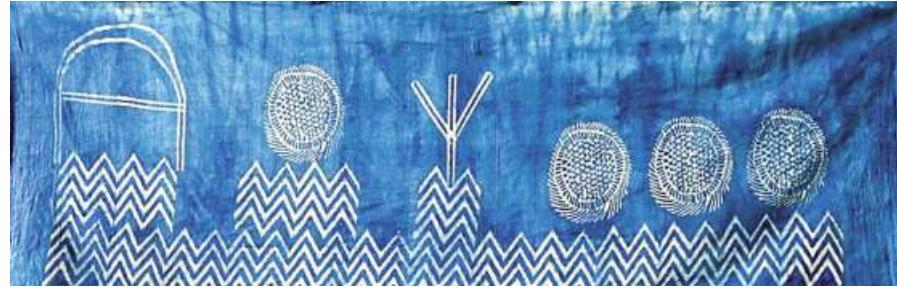
Commercial truck manufacturer Ashok Leyland has reported a 90% drop in its total international sales volume for the month of March 2020, following suspension of operations across its factories in the wake of COVID-19.



Returning to Shiva's nature

Showing the way
(Clockwise from right)
Sangeeta Gupta holding a block; two of her works

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



MADHUR TANKHA

For an artist, being in solitude can be a boon. Sangeeta Gupta, who was Chief Commissioner of Income Tax (Delhi), until she retired in May 2018, has made the best possible use of the coronavirus lockdown.

She is working on a series of 85 paintings titled Aadiyogi Shiv, each done on khadi. They will eventually be stitched together to form a continuous 200 metres. She hopes to send this as an entry to the Guinness Book of World Records.

Painting isn't new to her though: she had her first show in Kolkata in 1995. Inaugurated by Mother Teresa, the proceeds went to Child Rights and You, a not-for-profit working for the benefit of children. So far, she has participated in over 150 group art shows and 35 solo painting exhibitions across the country and over-

seas, exhibiting work in oil and acrylic on canvas.

Sangeeta conceptualised this project last December. She made the sketches and purchased khaddar, natural indigo, and dyes in Sangam, near Jaipur, in Rajasthan. Shiva's symbols like the *damru*, *trishul*, his third eye come alive on the coarse khadi fabric.

"I started painting in February, with *dabu*," she says. Dabu is mud-resist printing, where mud is painted or printed on fabric in a design (Sangeeta used her paint brush), covered with saw dust, and then sundried. After that the cloth is soaked in drums of indigo dye, washed and dried again. "We needed to cut the cloth as the 200 metres could not fit into the drums."

Excerpts from an interview:

Has the coronavirus lockdown given you more time to wrap up your work?

When artists work, they are in solitude; they are preoccupied with their creativity. This pandemic brought all social life to a halt and in a way I was drawn to Mahamrityunjaya Mantra (a chant from the Rig Veda). I painted the text with brush in natural indigo. I died the *khaddar* first in light shades of indigo, dried it, and then painted on the cloth again with dark shades of indigo. I completed 185 meters in nine days in Sangam, and returned to Delhi

Sangeeta Gupta paints across 200 metres of *khadi*, and hopes to enter the piece in the Guinness Book of World Records

on March 4 because COVID-19 had started spreading near Jaipur. The rest of the 15 meters I completed painting in my gallery Prithvi Fine Art and Cultural Centre, in Safdarjung Enclave, Delhi. In fact, March 30 was the last day of work.

Why did you choose Shiva?

I have always been a spiritually inclined person, but with maturity my interest in the eternal cosmic entity Shiva became deeper. He is omnipresent, both inside and outside of us. My love for him started in my childhood. Kashmari reiterated my faith in the universal principle of Shivohum (a set of mantras written by Adi Shankacharya), as the state is known for Shaivism. Staying there for two years, I was greatly influenced by it.

How did you work with the medium of cloth?

Subject and medium merge when the artist is at peace with herself. If you are experiencing love, compassion and bliss, the medium doesn't bother you. I just had to train my hands a bit to use *dabuas* a medium on fabric.

Why did you choose khadi?

We have to return to the basics if we want to survive in peace. Handmade fabric is environment friendly and natural colours and dyes are handmade too, and free of artificial chemicals. The intent behind my work is to encourage the revival of indigo cultivation, and to make this cash crop a mass movement. Only then can we make indigo a commercially viable venture for farmers, dyers, and craftspeople. We need to encourage print makers to merge contemporary art with traditional crafts of block printing with natural *dabu* and organic indigo.

PEOPLE

In lockdown land

The people of Vijaynagar in Arunachal Pradesh have lived in lockdown for nearly 60 years without even a road connecting them to the rest of the world



After half-an-hour of it-is-making-me-nervous flying, the Mi-17 slowly descends. Most of the flight has been over densely forested mountain ranges, interspersed with the continuous white curl of the Dihing River winding its way across the landscape like a giant snake. Our luggage is piled in the centre of the chopper; benches along both sides have passengers strapped to their seats. Most of them are soldiers from the Assam Rifles, India's oldest paramilitary force, returning to their post.

Peering out of the window, the wind whipping my hair into a bird nest, I find specks of green turning into soldiers standing with their backs towards the helipad, the wind from the chopper's blades making their trousers flap like fans unfurling from their socks. On a raised hillock sit crouched men, women and children – also with their backs to the helipad, shielding themselves from the wind blast.

A cluster of small huts stands bravely in the desolate landscape. Villagers crowd around the chopper, some waiting to be ferried back, others just curious to see who has come. I have been told to carry packets of salt as gifts for the old soldiers, but the obvious joy with which they accept it tells me how precious it is.

A quiet place

Surrounded by Myanmar on three sides, Vijaynagar is the remote end of Changlang district in Arunachal Pradesh. An impregnable protected forest called the Namdapha National Park, inhabited by wild animals, surrounds it.

The story goes that in the early 1960s, India received alarming reports of Chinese aggression into Arunachal. It was decided that soldiers from the Assam Rifles should be encouraged to settle down here to discourage foreign aggression. Two expeditions were taken. Soldiers from the second one, led by Maj Gen A. S. Guraya, Inspector-General, Assam Rifles, ferried material and constructed an airfield there at a height of nearly 5,000 feet.

The airstrip was named Vijaynagar after Guraya's son, Vijay. Soon after, a Kaling aircraft landed there, bringing 100 Assam Rifles soldiers who established a company post and started border-guarding duties. Slowly, old retired soldiers and families started joining them with the number rising to 240.

Smiling old Savitri Damai tells me that she was just 27 when her husband Rifleman Sanman Damai accepted the Government's offer in 1971. The couple, along with their three children, got on the plane from Mohanbari airfield. It was the first time she was getting into a "hawai jahaj" and she was very scared, she says. She carried in her arms her youngest son who was just two months old and firmly held by the hand her six-year-old daughter. Her husband held their second son while also balancing a carton with holes cut into it that held the family's most precious possession – a fat and confused hen, clucking in annoyance. When the aircraft landed in Vijaynagar, Savitri's heart sank.

The airfield was in the middle of a dense forest. But her husband and the other soldiers pulled out their *khukris* and set about clearing the forest to make huts.

She soon discovered that while the land was fertile and could grow the best of tomatoes, *lai patta* (a kind of mustard), rice and corn, there was no one there to sell them salt, sugar, spices or oil. It was only when her husband went on leave that he would get these commodities that she would carefully ration, trying her best to make them last as long as she could.

Forgotten past

Savitri's son Rifleman Sunil Damai was born in Vijaynagar in a home delivery assisted by older women. "There would hardly be any studies at our school, since teachers wouldn't come to Vijaynagar. Mostly, we managed on our own and helped with farming. Sometimes we would light a lantern, but since kerosene was precious, my mother would cook on a log fire. We would eat in its light and go to sleep when it got dark. We would see the helicopter coming every week and that was entertainment," says Sunil. He adds that he'd never seen a car or cinema hall or even light bulbs until he walked seven days and 150 kilometres to Miao, for his Class X exams.

Other than the weekly visits from the Mi-17s, aircraft no longer land in Vijaynagar. The airfield where Savitri and her family had landed, broke down. For a short while, a mud track existed from Miao to Vijaynagar, but soon the jungle swallowed that too.

In February 2013, the foundation of a 157-kilometre road, that was to connect Miao to Vijaynagar under the Prime Minister's Gram Sadak Yojana, was laid. Just 15 kilometres of the road was constructed and then that too fell into disrepair. Vijaynagar continues to be a land locked down in time forever.

RACHNA BISHT RAWAT

Contact us at delhimetro@thehindu.co.in

IN OUR BACKYARD

Happy times from a balcony

It's just the right time to observe the Common Myna, as they pair up and roost, often in cavities in our outside walls

comparison to its siblings. I had read this in several places, and while I couldn't disregard it, I was also slightly skeptical.

It is only when I started observing the Common Mynas nesting site close to home that I realised it was all true. I also noticed that the parents alternated in feeding the young ones and they always made sure to keep the nest cavity in the



Always around The Common Myna fighting; (below) searching for food

■ WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/ JAMEELA P., DR. RAJU KASAMBE

tree clean by ridding it of excreta and other unwanted things.

Given the commonness of the bird, we generally tend to ignore its presence and little details. The overall plumage of the species is dark brown with a glossy yellow bill.

Being quite gregarious in nature, the clan generally roosts in large numbers in a particular tree and keeps up a noisy chattering concert (sometimes musical and sometimes harsh) of *praikh praikh* (when perched) and *twee twee* (in flight) all morning and evening.

Soon after sunrise, the birds disperse to their foraging grounds, leaving a few behind on guard duty to look out for crows and other troublemakers, making them quite

except for in dense forests. In cities, they breed almost exclusively in nooks and eaves of houses, under roofs, and in holes in walls, considering that they are cavity nesters.

A passing look suggests it has dark eyes, but only when you spend time observing it – and we all have a great deal of time of our hands today – you'd notice that the eye colour is reddish-brown with white specks.

The Common Myna likes a wide array of habitats like open country, cultivated land, and urban spaces, and thrives in almost every habitat,

for birdwatchers like me, behaviour is key. Nodding their heads at each step and hopping occasionally is a common trait among mynas. They have a strong, direct, and somewhat quick flight – you'll see white in the underwings as they fly.

These birds were once commonly caged and domesticated, often following their masters around the house like dogs. They are good imitators and soon pick up words and sentences, much like parakeets.

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The writer is the founder of NINOX - Owl About Nature, a nature-awareness initiative. He is the Delhi-NCR reviewer for Ebird, a Cornell University initiative, monitoring rare sightings of birds. He formerly led a programme of WWF India.

ABHISHEK GULSHAN

In these distressing times of leaving the house only for the bare essentials, what does a naturalist like me do to pass time and be happy? Do some backyard birdwatching!

No human presence on the road and the pleasant spring season has given birds the peace they had always hoped for. A pleasant melancholy of calls and songs of urban garden birds echoing everywhere is often complimented by my sacred early morning cup of coffee in my balcony.

This season is perhaps the best time to observe resident birds in our backyard, as it is a time of joy in their lives as they pair up and raise their young ones. One such fascinating account from my diary entry dated 23rd April, 2017, was of a pair of Common Myna trying to raise two chicks in my noisy neighbourhood.

I had always read in books that the parents feed the juvenile who screams louder and the most,



comparison to its siblings. I had read this in several places, and while I couldn't disregard it, I was also slightly skeptical.

It is only when I started observing the Common Mynas nesting site close to home that I realised it was all true. I also noticed that the parents alternated in feeding the young ones and they always made sure to keep the nest cavity in the

tree clean by ridding it of excreta and other unwanted things.

Given the commonness of the bird, we generally tend to ignore its presence and little details. The overall plumage of the species is dark brown with a glossy yellow bill.

Being quite gregarious in nature, the clan generally roosts in large numbers in a particular tree and keeps up a noisy chattering concert (sometimes musical and sometimes harsh) of *praikh praikh* (when perched) and *twee twee* (in flight) all morning and evening.

Soon after sunrise, the birds disperse to their foraging grounds, leaving a few behind on guard duty to look out for crows and other troublemakers, making them quite

except for in dense forests. In cities, they breed almost exclusively in nooks and eaves of houses, under roofs, and in holes in walls, considering that they are cavity nesters.

A passing look suggests it has dark eyes, but only when you spend time observing it – and we all have a great deal of time of our hands today – you'd notice that the eye colour is reddish-brown with white specks.

The Common Myna likes a wide array of habitats like open country, cultivated land, and urban spaces, and thrives in almost every habitat,

for birdwatchers like me, behaviour is key. Nodding their heads at each step and hopping occasionally is a common trait among mynas. They have a strong, direct, and somewhat quick flight – you'll see white in the underwings as they fly.

These birds were once commonly caged and domesticated, often following their masters around the house like dogs. They are good imitators and soon pick up words and sentences, much like parakeets.

For birdwatchers like me, behaviour is key. Nodding their heads at each step and hopping occasionally is a common trait among mynas. They have a strong, direct, and somewhat quick flight – you'll see white in the underwings as they fly.

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The writer is the founder of NINOX - Owl About Nature, a nature-awareness initiative. He is the Delhi-NCR reviewer for Ebird, a Cornell University initiative, monitoring rare sightings of birds. He formerly led a programme of WWF India.

5 ONLINE EVENTS WORTH YOUR WHILE



ONLINE STORYTELLING

Penguin and online parenting community Momspresso have jointly launched an web-only initiative called #OnceUponABookWithPenguin. On till 14th April, the programme will witness a children's book author go live on video on the Momspresso Facebook every evening at 6:30 p.m. They will tell kids an interesting story from their book. The intent is to make playtime fun for kids even if they are indoors and the focus will be on animated storytelling and reading.



ONLINE LIT FEST

Vani Prakashan Group has organised literary activities in the online space for book lovers. There will be live talks of authors and interesting books read every day between 12 noon and 3 p.m. As a part of the festival, new writers will interact through the social media handle Facebook.com/vaniprakashanbooks, with their books and their ideas. The festival is organised to maintain the bridge between readers and writers to exchange thoughts and ideas.



E-LEARNING

Scholastic India offers free e-learning courses for students upto 9th grade, supported by a community of educators. Their Scholastic Learn at Home course will provide grade-wise learning resources and activities, while Scholastic Classroom Magazine is a hub to help kids learn about the coronavirus. Book Flix presents an online literacy resource. It is free and available for all students until 31st May. Access it at <http://bit.ly/38Y4DSR>



ONLINE YOGA SESSIONS

Jindal Naturecare Institute is conducting 14 days of free online yoga learning. The sessions have been introduced to motivate people towards a healthy lifestyle and to keep at bay fear and anxiety while they are at home. The experts will do yoga and answer the queries of viewers. Open to all, these sessions can be accessed at 7 a.m. and will go on for half an hour. Visit Facebook.com/JindalNatureCare for further information.



VIRTUAL BOOK CLUB

During this lockdown, publishing house Roli Books is providing live content through their social media platforms Twitter and Instagram. This will feature a virtual reading club, live cooking sessions, storytelling hour, and live readings. Some of the authors will engage in live conversation with readers too. Also, every day at noon, the editors of the book house will appear live and take readers' questions and recommend books to read.



WEDNESDAY

PRIYADARSHINI PATTANDY

I have been travelling across the world all day, despite the lockdown.

It's a muggy day at the Gateway of India in Mumbai. In order to cool off, I hop onto the Splash Mountain Ride at Disneyland, California. Then, inspired by Dumbledore and Harry Potter, I head to the Cliffs of Moher in Ireland for a breathtaking view of the grey sea below and the dramatically jagged crags around.

Currently, I am in Machu Picchu looking at three alpacas. Oh, wait! There is one more behind me. It is a glorious day at Huayna Picchu – the highest viewing point – where fluffy silver clouds snugly drape themselves around the heads of the mountains. Usually, to trek up to this point, one needs to be among the first 400 visitors in line on any given day. Yet, here I am, eating chips in my ragged pyjamas, all set to head to the next destination: the Louvre Museum, Paris. And I shall reach in five seconds or less, depending on my Internet connectivity.

As real as it gets

Thanks to the concept of virtual tours, destinations that hitherto seemed difficult to get to are available at one's fingertips. While some were already available on Google (or via their respective websites), the recent lockdown triggered by COVID-19 has made many more landmarks, museums, galleries and shows navigable, or accessible, online.

The Louvre, for example, lets you manoeuvre through its halls and corridors via a website called youvisit.com, which takes you through sections including Grande Gallery, Napoleon's ornate apartment and Roman Antiquities.

Delhi's National Gallery of Modern Art, Amsterdam's Van Gogh Museum, London's British Museum, Florence's Uffizi Gallery among others offer similar facilities.

Given that the lockdown in cities has shuttered attractions, Anabeth Guthrie, chief of communications, National Gallery of Art, Washington, says, "We've seen an incredible response to our social media gallery tours (that began

Globetrotting, with a mouse in hand

Under lockdown with nowhere to go? Virtual tours bring the world to your desktop. Now, watch an opera in your pyjamas and trail a whale from the comfort of your couch



following the closure on March 14) with thousands of new followers across our channels following along."

In addition to this, more than 42,000 works from the Gallery's collection are also viewable on the Google Arts & Culture platform. "Each day, our social media channels (@ngadc on Twitter/Instagram and @NationalGalleryofArt on Facebook) feature one gallery and take a deep dive into the works of art it includes: featuring commentaries by curators, close-look at details, and links to resources where followers can learn more," she adds. The social media tours will cover all parts of the East and West Buildings as well as the Sculpture Garden.

So, which are the most popular works on display? "We opened 'Degas at the Opera' before the temporary closure. It was quite popular in just a few

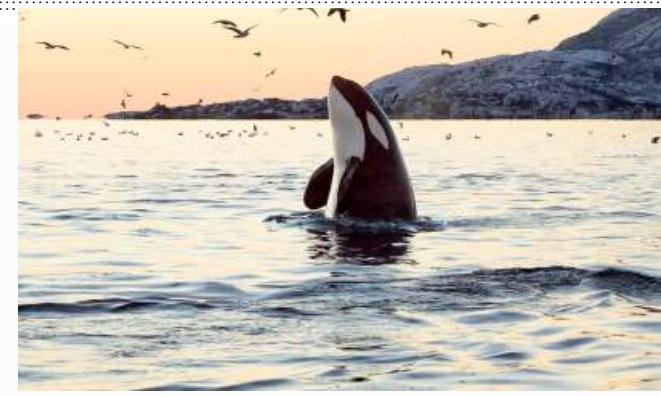
short weeks. From the permanent collection, our most popular works of art include 'Multiverse' by Leo Villareal and 'Ginevra de' Benci' by Leonardo da Vinci (the only painting by da Vinci in the Americas)," says Guthrie. For something more quirky, check out Las Vegas' Neon Museum, which features cheerfully gaudy signs rescued from old motels and casinos, as well as narrates their stories via its free app. It also

Being one with Nature

To bring the outdoors to those confined within the walls of their homes, a number of national parks have also hopped

FOR CONNOISSEURS OF THE PERFORMING ARTS

- The Metropolitan Opera in New York has been streaming a free series of encore Live in HD presentations on their website. The upcoming line-up has Verdi's *Don Carlo* and *Macbeth*, Bizet's *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* and Bellini's *Norma*.
- Berlin Philharmonic's Digital Concert Hall is free for all. Catch the orchestra play pieces by composers such as Luciano Berio and Béla Bartók.
- London West End shows and those from Broadway as well are available online on platforms such as Marquee TV and BroadwayHD. Choose from *The Wind in the Willows*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Cats*, *The King and I*, *The Sound of Music*...



onto the virtual bandwagon. Sure, strap on your Fitbits if you like. Kenai Fjords in Alaska, Carlsbad Caverns, New Mexico, Bryce Canyon, Utah, Dry Tortugas, Florida, are all available via Google Arts & Culture. And if you opt for the Hawai'i Volcanoes tour, I suggest you hold on tight to your armchair because it involves taking a flight over the seething mass of fire, and you get to witness the Nahuku Lava Tube.

If that makes you nervous, you can always seek refuge in upbeat videos from zoos and aquariums currently offering

live footage of their properties. Meet polar bear cubs Akiak and Sura on explore.org. These twins can keep you entertained non-stop as they laze, roll, and go about their day along with their mother Freedom and grandmother Huggies at Ouwehands Zoo in Rhenen, The Netherlands. You can also see polar bears from Canada and Denmark. "Polar Bears International was one of the first cameras we installed and live-streamed from Churchill, Canada," says Emily Berlin of Explore. The organisation was started in 2004 by Charles Annenberg Weingar-

ten with the idea of connecting people to the natural world in the purest way possible: by being an observer as life unfolds. "Anyone around the world can log on to the website, watch the live cams, comment on the chat boards and take snapshots," she adds.

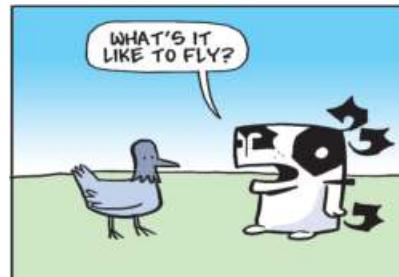
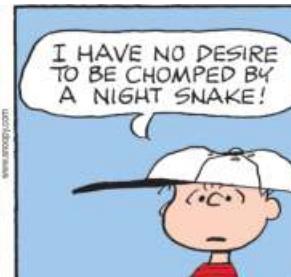
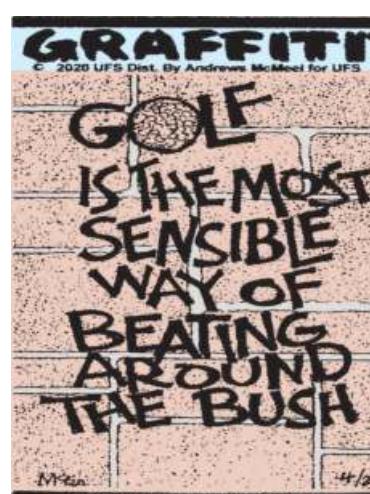
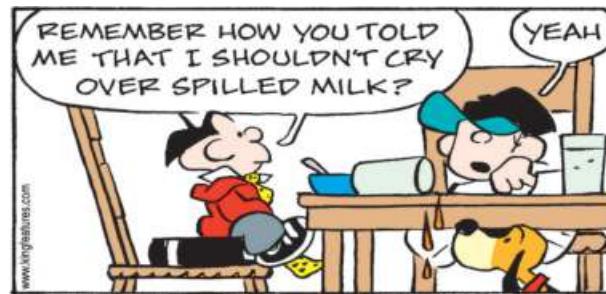
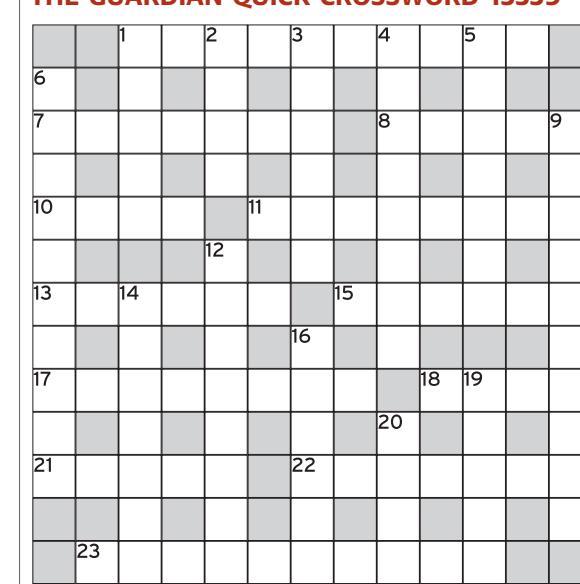
Explore currently has 173 cameras set up at diverse locations relaying the lives of animals and birds. Gawk at cuddly pandas from Wolong Valley in China, or watch orcas gracefully make their way through Canada's Blackney Pass. In Katmai, Alaska, the brown bear cameras are among the most popular. "They are placed in a remote location with incredible views of Brooks Falls where brown bears gather every summer as they come out from hibernation looking for salmon. Viewers can watch several bears fishing in the river at a given time, mothers with cubs playing down river and salmon trying to jump upstream to spawn. There's really nothing like it, and it provides viewers with the increasingly rare opportunity to witness a robust, healthy ecosystem," says Berlin. Coming soon, she adds, is a wolf sanctuary in northern Minnesota.

Nature is a powerful medicine and our viewers have used the streams to unwind and connect to something bigger than themselves, states Berlin, adding, "We have seen a 40% increase in viewership in the past week and are excited to continue to connect people around the world to Nature during these uncertain times."



Around the world in 80 clicks (Clockwise from above) An orca, a polar bear cub and the Louvre Museum

• GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

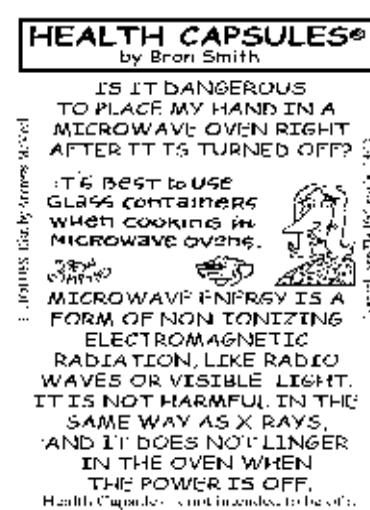
POOCH CAFE**PEANUTS****HAGAR THE HORRIBLE****CALVIN AND HOBBES****TIGER****THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13339**

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

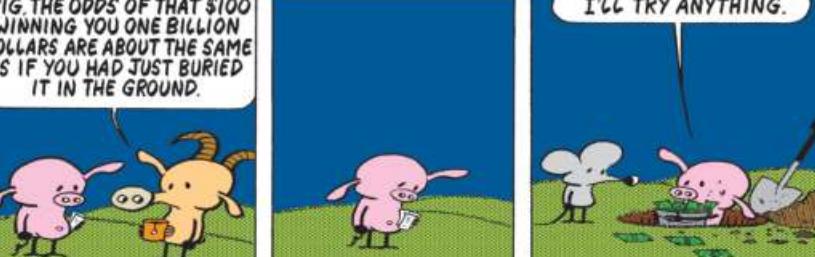
- 5 Let sing (anag) – shine (7)
6 Fawning (10)
9 Over which one may walk (10)
12 Set apart (8)
14 Fair play (7)
16 State of inactivity (6)
19 Frivolous – liable to fall (5)
20 Landing stage (4)

The solution will appear on April 3, 2020.

Solution No. 13338

WUMO

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PEARLS BEFORE SWINE

© JEFF MCKEE/COMICS WORKS INC.

- 1 Across
1 Cooked breakfast (stolen?) (7,3)
7 Portable anti-tank weapon (7)
8 Inhale audibly through the nose (5)
10 Jacob's twin brother (4)
11 High heel (8)
13 Not fair (6)
15 Associate socially with superiors (6)
17 Out of date (8)
18 Trademarked citrus fruit (4)
21 Stout pole with a foot rest – wading bird (5)
22 Noisy party (7)
23 Encourage departure from the straight and narrow? (4,6)
■ Down
1 Italian open pie (5)
2 Hailing call (4)
3 Fireside (6)
4 Refuse to accept (8)

D	O	L	L	A	R	S	I	G	N
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C	R	U	X	S	K	I	D	R	W
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And now, Wimbledon also succumbs to the pandemic

The Championships cancelled for the first time since World War II

REUTERS
LONDON

The Wimbledon tennis championships were cancelled for the first time since World War II as the coronavirus pandemic wiped another blue-riband sports event off the calendar on Wednesday.

While the decision had looked inevitable for some time, since the virtual shutdown of world sport and the postponement of the Tokyo Olympics, Wimbledon had been one of the few events not to have been officially cancelled or postponed.

Emergency talks

But after emergency talks between the various stakeholders over the last few days, the All England Lawn Tennis Club (AELTC) announced that it was impossible for the grasscourt Grand Slam, scheduled for June 29-

C “So sad to hear @Wimbledon won’t take place this year. ‘Last year’s final will forever be one of the happiest days of my life!”

SIMONA HALEP
Defending women’s champion

July 12, to take place.

“It is with great regret that the main board of the All England Club and the committee of management of the championships have today decided that The Championships 2020 will be cancelled due to public health concerns linked to the coronavirus epidemic,” the AELTC said in a statement.

“The 134th Championships will instead be staged from June 28 to July 11, 2021.”

Federer, Serena aghast
“Devastated,” tweeted eight-time champion Roger Federer,

■ Shortly after the news came from Wimbledon, the U.S. Tennis Association issued a statement saying it “still plans to host the U.S. Open as scheduled,” from Aug. 31 to Sept. 13 in New York

er, while Serena Williams, who has won the tournament seven times, said she was ‘shocked’ by the momentous decision.

The French Open, due to be held from May 24 to June 7, has been postponed and controversially rescheduled by the French tennis federation for September 20 to October 4, shortly after the end of the U.S. Open.

Former Wimbledon champion Amelie Mauresmo doubts whether either tournament will be played though. “I think we’re going to have to draw a line under

the 2020 tennis season,” Mauresmo said on Twitter this week.

Limited options

Unlike the French Open which is played on clay, Wimbledon’s scope for rearranging the start date was extremely limited.

While Centre Court and Court One boast a roof, playing elite level tennis outside on grass would have been extremely challenging in late summer or autumn with a lack of light and problems caused by dew forming on the surface late in the day.

Shortening the format of the tournament, or playing behind closed doors, would also have proved extremely unpopular with the players.

Wimbledon has been held every year since 1946 after a six-year hiatus because the country was at war.



Locked out: Yet another blue riband sports event became a victim of the coronavirus pandemic, with Wimbledon – the premier grass court event in the world – deciding to host it next year. ■ GETTY IMAGES

Nine years on, Dhoni at the crossroads

Time running out for the World Cup-winning skipper

CRICKET

S. DINAKAR
CHENNAI

The stands were a blaze of light. In the middle, though, M.S. Dhoni shone the brightest.

His bat speed and dexterous wrists had combined wonderfully as he sent a full ball from Nuwan Kulasekara for the maximum over long-on in the maximum city. You can freeze the frame.

The stunning shot brought an entire nation to life. India had, on April 2, won the 2011 World Cup at Mumbai’s iconic Wankhede Stadium.

Bold move

Dhoni was captain courageous in a big game – the summit clash – promoting himself ahead of the in-form Yuvraj Singh when the contest was delicately balanced at 114 for three; India was chasing a challenging 275 against the gallant Sri Lankans.

And along with a resilient Gautam Gambhir (97), he first ran like a panther between the wickets and then cut loose in what was a brutal onslaught.

Dhoni’s 79-ball unbeaten 91 had guided India to a rousing six-wicket triumph. And the spectators swung to the rhythmic beating of the drums as if there was no tomorrow.

Outside, there were traffic jams. The skipper was the toast, made all the right moves.

That was then; Dhoni at the height of his powers. Now, the scenario is different. Time waits for no one and Dhoni is pushing 39. Deep down Dhoni realises that his best days are be-



For posterity: M.S. Dhoni's six to bring World Cup glory is one of the enduring images of Indian sport. ■ FILE PHOTO: K.R. DEEPAK

hind. But then, he still has the eye of the tiger.

Had not Martin Guptill scored a sensational direct hit in the 2019 WC semifinal, he and India might have had a different story to tell.

Dhoni, on 50, was lining himself for the big hits. India was in doldrums at 92 for six, when he rallied with an inspired Ravindra Jadeja to keep the Men in Blue in the hunt. Under the circumstances, the criticism that Dhoni came under was harsh and without reason.

In the IPL, he has whipped up spectacular mo-

ments in the last two seasons, making the impossible possible. And he still possesses the fastest hands behind the stumps.

Yet, the odds are loaded against a Dhoni comeback for the World Twenty20 with the Coronavirus pandemic putting a huge question mark over the IPL and a stage for the CSK skipper to conjure blitzkriegs and put himself in India contention.

The luminous star of 2011 now finds his career at the crossroads. Will there be one final Dhoni hurrah for India?

Real Kashmir coach Robertson yearning to return home

Stranded in Srinagar, he wants to reach Aberdeen to attend to his ailing mother

FOOTBALL

ASHWIN ACHAL
BENGALURU

David Robertson has faced his fair share of challenges in his three years as head coach of Real Kashmir Football Club, but the latest predicament may be the toughest one yet.

Having endured through the security lockdown and communications blackout imposed in Jammu and Kashmir last year, Robertson is now stranded in a Srinagar hotel on account of the ongoing lockdown to tackle the coronavirus pandemic threat.

With commercial international flights suspended, Robertson, son Mason (who

plays for Real Kashmir FC) and wife Kim are waiting on the United Kingdom government to employ evacuation measures to take them back home to Scotland.

Give support

The Robertson family is particularly worried about David’s mother, who was recently diagnosed with cancer. “My mother, who lives in Aberdeen, just finished her second chemotherapy session. If anything were to happen, it would be just horrible. I want to be close to her – to support her at this tough time. My dad is caring for her, but he is not in the best of health either. My siblings drop off groceries outside their home. It’s a



David Robertson.
■ FILE PHOTO: NISSAR AHMAD

tough situation, all over the world,” Robertson told *The Hindu* from a Srinagar hotel run by Real Kashmir co-owner Sandeep Chattoo.

“We’ve contacted the British High Commission in New Delhi to help us return

home. It could be a few days, few weeks – it is a case of sitting and waiting. We also have (English winger) Kalum Higginbotham, four players from Africa and a few U.K. coaching staff with us here in Srinagar. All foreigners are facing a similar situation,” Robertson, a former Rangers FC and Leeds United player, said.

Tougher to handle

Robertson stated that the latest restrictions have been tougher to handle than the security lockdown and communications blackout.

“It is never easy in Jammu and Kashmir. That’s why I keep coming back – there are so many challenges to tackle. Last season was

tough (due to the security lockdown and communications blackout), as we did not have internet and could not call home. But at least the team was together, and we could play football,” Robertson said.

Grateful to owner

The 51-year-old is grateful to Chattoo for his support. “Chattoo is staying here with us in the hotel. He is away from his family as well. There are around 20 hotel staff with us here; no one is allowed in and out. We’re all helping each other. There is

a lot of responsibility placed on Chattoo. He’s doing everything possible to keep all of us comfortable,” Robertson said.

COVID-19 IMPACT

HI, AIFF to contribute ₹25 lakh each

NEW DELHI

Hockey India and the All India Football Federation on Wednesday pledged to donate ₹25 lakh each towards the PM-CARES Fund. “The love, care and support from countrymen has provided us motivation throughout.

Hence, now is the time to pay back our country in whatever manner we can,” said AIFF president Praful Patel. “In these difficult times, it is the absolute need of the hour to come together as a nation to help fight the crisis and fulfil our duties as responsible citizens. It was a unanimous decision taken by the Hockey India Executive Board,” HI president Mohd.

Mushtaque Ahmad said. PTI

Sourav Ganguly visits Belur Math, donates 2000kg rice

KOLKATA

BCCI president Sourav Ganguly on Wednesday visited Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission, in Howrah to extend his helping hand to the needy

people during the COVID-19 outbreak.

“Visited belur math after 25 years... handed over 2000kgs rice for the needy,” tweeted the 47-year-old. Earlier, Ganguly, along with a rice company, had provided rice worth ₹50 lakh for the poor people.



Former US Davis Cup captain Pat McEnroe tests positive

NEW YORK

Davis Cup-winning former US captain Patrick McEnroe said on Tuesday he has tested positive for coronavirus but is feeling well and no longer has symptoms. The younger brother of seven-time Grand Slam singles champion John said he and his family had been self-

quarantined for more than two weeks, and advised others to do the same as a safety measure. AFP

Butler to auction World Cup final shirt for hospital appeal

LONDON

England’s Jos Butler is auctioning the shirt he wore in last year’s dramatic World Cup final win in support of hospitals treating the coronavirus. All proceeds will go to the

Royal Brompton and Harefield hospitals’ charity. “To help with their fundraising effort I’m going to be donating this shirt, which is the shirt I wore in the World Cup final last year, signed by all the players who were members of the squad,” said the 29-year-old ‘keeper. AFP

SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to puzzle 12898

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Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

FAITH

Free from partiality

Parikshit is impressed by the Lord’s leelas in His various incarnations. But at times he begins to wonder if the Lord, who is free from partiality, is also overtly favourable to the devas. He raises this doubt to Suka after listening to the Vritrasura episode, said Sri B. Sundarkumar in a discourse. Vritra is a ferocious asura but is also a devotee of the Lord. Then why did the Lord not protect him against Indra who defeated him? Suka points out that the Lord transcends all gunas and is free from all passions and partialities commonly found in jivatmas. But He assumes the power of Yogamaya by which He is manifest as the two opposing forces. He is reflected in the attributes of Prakrti like the sun reflected in water and fire in fuel. But He is the master of the gunas. By His Sankalpa He can create into existence everything through the instruments of Prakrti and Purusha.

He also gives them His manifestation called Time. When Time favours satva, He allies with the satva dominated devas and destroys their enemies, the asuras. Then Suka recalls the strange incident of Sisupala’s salvation that everyone present at the Rajasuya Yaga conducted by Yudhishtira witnessed with wonder and amazement. Was not this Sisupala a sworn enemy of Krishna? To understand the rationale of this, one has to go back to their previous lives, their actions, behaviour, etc. Jaya and Vijaya who were in the exclusive and exalted service of the Lord at Vaikunta as gatekeepers had to be born on earth as asuras for three births before they could attain the Lord.

Collective willpower should prevail: Yogeshwar

The wrestler shares how his determination helped him stay isolated in South Africa

Y.B. SARANGI

KOLKATA
Olympic bronze medal-winning wrestler Yogeshwar Dutt has a simple solution to the problem of staying confined at home in the time of a nationwide lockdown.

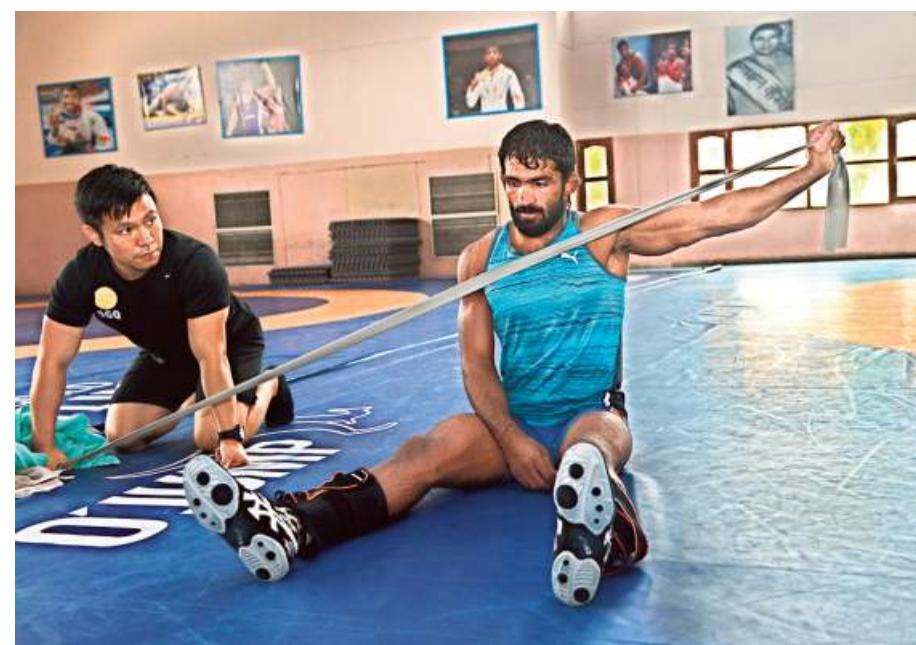
Sharing how his determination helped him stay isolated for six months in South Africa while recovering from a knee surgery, Yogeshwar said the country's collective willpower would beat the deadly COVID-19 virus.

Failure at the 2008 Beijing Olympics had made Yogeshwar hungrier for success.

He travelled to South Africa in 2009 for a surgery to fix his injured knee.

Testing times

The time required for recovery and rehabilitation tested Yogeshwar, who has bagged several medals in top level competitions, including the 2012 London Olympics.



Fighting mode: Yogeshwar Dutt says that in order to overcome loneliness, he focused on recovering from injury. ■ FILE PHOTO: SANDEEP SAXENA

"I spent six months in recovery and rehab. I was almost alone. In those days, it was not easy to speak to one's family over phone. I used to watch whatever Indian films came on television and listened to music to pass my time."

"My only aim was to recover from the injury and become fully fit. I focused on that to overcome my loneliness."

"Right now, we should aim at beating coronavirus. This will make our stay at home easier."

"These days we have got so many facilities, including social media, to stay engaged. Spending time with family is another good option," Yogeshwar told *The Hindu*.

For Yogeshwar, who joined politics during the Haryana elections last year, social commitments have increased.

But he is monitoring all this from home.

"In our Gohana village, we are feeding about 2000 to 3000 people every day. We are also trying to extend help to all the needy people in our locality. We have a 12-member team, which is looking

into all this."

"Amidst all this, we are following the rules of social distancing. The biggest challenge at this moment is helping poor families with food and other basic needs," said Yogeshwar, who has shut down his wrestling academy to protect the trainees from the virus.

Confident

Welcoming the postponement of the Olympics, Yogeshwar expressed confidence that the Indian wrestlers would be unaffected by the one-year delay.

"All of them have been performing well for the last two-three years."

"They need to protect themselves from the virus, maintain focus and use the additional time to get back to top form again."

"They know how to do it, they just need to stay fit," said Yogeshwar.

All days are practically Sundays, says Tejaswin

'Lack of motivation to keep fit'



Tough road: Tejaswin feels the important thing is to stay sane and preserve some normalcy. ■ FILE PHOTO: SANDEEP SAXENA

ATHLETICS

UTHRA GANESAN
NEW DELHI

On March 14, Tejaswin Shankar was in Albuquerque for the NCAA Division-I Indoor Track and Field Championships. The event was cancelled because of COVID-19 and Tejaswin, along with his Kansas State University teammates, moved back.

That was the last time the 21-year-old stepped out of the city he's called home for the past three years. The national high jump record-holder and Business Administration student has since been trying to keep himself fit and sane even as the pandemic took a serious turn in the United States.

Frustrating
He has been trying to improvise his workouts – using rock-filled sacks as barbells and running up and down stairs – but admitted the uncertainty was frustrating.

"Olympics dates have been announced for next year but what if this goes on till September or beyond? No one knows how things will be when it does get over. There is a serious lack of motivation to keep fit," he added.

Tejaswin, though, knows better than worrying about things he has no control over. "People forever crib about wanting a break from routine but now that they have, most do not know what to do about it. Now it's all about mental strength," he signed off.

It's a 'welcome break' for tired Prannoy

Says skipping the All England championships was the right decision

BADMINTON

M.R. PRAVEEN CHANDRAN
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

For H.S. Prannoy, the COVID-19-enforced break has been a blessing in disguise.

The 27-year-old former World No. 8 Prannoy said he was using the layoff to rest his tired body and rediscover his lost mojo.

"The month-long break is the biggest I have got in my professional career. I have never stayed at home for more than a week in the last seven years and I am enjoying every minute of it."

"In a way, it is a welcome break and good for me to recharge my batteries and



H.S. Prannoy. ■ FILE PHOTO

come back fresh for the new season," he said.

Prannoy, who skipped the

All England Open badminton championships, said it was the right decision in the prevailing circumstances. He, however, said was worried about the slump in his ranking due to the snapping of the international schedule. [The BWF has since frozen the rankings as of March 17, a decision Prannoy has welcomed].

"The tournament was taking place at a time when the disease was spreading rapidly in England and I thought it was risky," he said.

Inconsistent

Prannoy, whose form has taken a dip in the last one and a half years (he has now slipped to 28th in the ran-

kins), said he was using the break to reflect on what went wrong with his game. "I must confess that I am not anywhere as consistent now as I was two years ago. A lot of things have contributed to it. I was not happy with the way I was training, as I struggled with the methods of the new coach at the academy. I wasn't getting any match practice and there wasn't any time to reflect on my game as I was playing non-stop."

Prannoy is following the workout plan prescribed by his trainer at Gopi Chand Academy. "Every other day, there is a video conference with the trainer and I follow the schedule given to me."

UEFA postpones all internationals in June

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS

UEFA has made a move towards clearing the decks for the return of club football by announcing on Wednesday that all international matches that had been pushed back to June have now been postponed until further notice.

"This includes the play-off matches for UEFA EURO 2020 and qualifying matches for UEFA Women's EURO 2021," said European football's governing body in a statement.

"All other UEFA competition matches, including the centralised international friendly matches, remain postponed until further notice."

The decision followed a videoconference with Europe's 55 member federations as part of discussions on how to adapt the fixture calendar in the face of the ongoing coronavirus crisis.

The play-off semifinals and finals that are supposed to decide the last four qualifying berths for the next European Championship were initially postponed at the end of March and pencilled in provisionally for June.

That was "subject to a review of the situation" amid uncertainty over how the pandemic will develop and whether many European countries currently in lockdown will be able to return to some kind of normalcy.

I am confident of the car: Daruvala

Red Bull junior driver hopes to be ready when season begins

MOTORSPORTS



Jehan Daruvala.
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

that we have a good car," added Daruvala.

Despite the break, he is leaving no stone unturned to be in shape and is ready if and when the season starts.

"I am just going to train as I usually do. I also have a new simulator that I have set up at home, though there are some connectivity issues. I hope I can fix them once the lockdown ends."

New simulator

The simulator is a very important tool for drivers to be fully prepared before going into a race weekend.

With the current situation not expected to ease until June or July in the continent, F2 faces a tough road ahead.

When asked if there are concerns that the season could be massively curtailed or even cancelled, he said, "It is unfortunate not to be racing and we have no idea what is going to happen."

"So, I just hope to be as prepared as possible when it starts."

+ ITTF's assurance to players

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) on Wednesday assured players that the ranking points that relate to events that were held in March 2020 will be taken into consideration, and that the world ranking list would be released in the middle of April.

"The ranking points corresponding to events that took place in March 2020 will be taken into consideration and added to the ITTF Rankings before the April 2020 edition is released, expected to be no later than April 15. Once released, the ITTF Rankings will be frozen again until activities eventually resume," ITTF said in a statement.

A. Sharath Kamal told *The Hindu*: "I am looking forward to the April rankings where I hope to equal my career-best ranking (30th) which I [last] reached in January 2019."

Staying on top of things, the Gopi way

Teams up with fitness expert Vervatwala to keep trainees of his academy in shape

BADMINTON

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM
HYDERABAD

P. Gopi Chand, India's chief National coach, has worked hard to contribute to the badminton world.

Even as most of the athletes are struggling to find ways to stay fit during the current lockdown, Gopi is on top of his game, using the Zoom App to ensure that the majority of trainees of the Gopi Academy are linked to and participate in the live, video fitness sessions.

"We have to think of ways to stay fit, which is a pre-requisite to being back on the badminton court. So, I thought the best way is to en-



Gopi Chand. ■ FILE PHOTO

sure that most of trainees have some physical conditioning to be game-fit once the lockdown is lifted," Gopi said in an exclusive chat with *The Hindu* on Wednesday.

"These sessions are conducted twice a day via the Zoom app, which facilitates

[fitness expert] Dinaz Vervatwala to demonstrate and monitor how the players are doing the exercises.

"It is a mix of traditional and scientific methods – the exercises include breathing, meditation, 15 minutes of skipping, [variations of] Surya Namaskar, and alternate toe-touches. Besides this, I am also keen to see them stay in touch with the sport by opting for shadow and wall practice," he said.

Virtual sessions
These innovative 'circuit work-out' sessions online are not just confined to those in and around Hyderabad, but also to those who have left the Academy to be at their respective homes in Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata.

Many like B. Sai Praneeth welcome this. "It is wonderful to have these sessions, as something is always better than doing nothing," he said.

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