



Union Home Secretary writes to States to curb black marketing

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Battle against the virus should be at the human level, says Sachin Pilot

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Bernie Sanders drops out of 2020 Democratic race for President

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## NEARBY



Delhi seals 20 areas to contain COVID-19 spread

NEW DELHI Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Wednesday said the Delhi government has sealed 20 areas in the city and people will not be allowed to enter or exit them to control the spread of COVID-19 in the city.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

U.S.-based firm sacks staff at Gurugram unit

GURUGRAM At least a hundred employees have been terminated by Fareportal, a New York-based tech travel firm, in Gurugram amid the COVID-19 outbreak, without assigning any reason. The company laid off employees at its Pune firm as well. Many of those laid off had been working with the company for five to 10 years.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

Masks must for stepping out of homes in Odisha

Bhubaneswar The Odisha government has ordered that people coming out of their homes across the State should wear masks from Thursday. The public has been directed to cover their mouth and nose with any kind of mask. A handkerchief or any piece of cloth in at least two layers can also be used for the purpose.

NORTH & EAST ▶ PAGE 4

# It will not be possible to lift the lockdown in one go, says Modi

The country is going through a 'social emergency', PM tells political parties

SOBHA K. NAIR

NEW DELHI

At a videoconference on Wednesday with parties' floor leaders in Parliament, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said it won't be possible to lift the 21-day nationwide lockdown in one go as scheduled for April 14. He, however, noted that he would consult the Chief Ministers before deciding the exit strategy.

Speaking at the end of a nearly three-and-a-half-hour meeting, Mr. Modi said the country was going through a "social emergency".

Many countries are using lockdown and physical distancing to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus. "In the coming days, you have suggested that the

Till now, the suggestions I have been getting are that it won't be so simple to lift the lockdown. We will have to take some strong measures to ensure social distancing

NARENDRA MODI, Prime Minister

No question of supporting or opposing it. It is a decision to be taken by the government.

If they consult everyone before taking the decision, then we shall welcome it

GHULAM NABI AZAD  
Congress Leader

emergency; it has necessitated tough decisions and we must continue to remain vigilant," he said, and sought their continued support. "Kareeb, Kareeb yeh mood ban raha hai ki ek dum se lockdown uthana sambhav nahi hoga" (The general mood is that it won't be possible to lift the lockdown in one go.)

Leaders from 18 political parties attended the interaction. Top Central officials gave presentations on the steps being taken to meet the emerging challenges, including the status of distribution of benefits under the PM Garib Kalyan Yojana.

If U.S. is struggling to control the spread of the virus without stringent social distancing norms, then how can we, considering we have limited healthcare amenities?

RAMGOPAL YADAV  
Samajwadi Party leader

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8  
MORE REPORTS ON ▶ PAGES 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10 & 11  
WUHAN LOCKDOWN LIFTED AFTER 76 DAYS ▶ PAGE 14

## Restrictions on spending

With the Centre expecting an extreme cash crunch due to the COVID-19 crisis, most Central government departments have been asked to cut their first quarter expenditure to 15-20% of the year's budget estimates. Departments considered crucial to dealing with the pandemic and the resultant lockdown will not be affected by these restrictions. ▶ PAGE 15

## Tax refunds to be released

The Centre has decided to immediately release tax refunds to the tune of ₹18,000 crore, in a bid to provide relief to individual taxpayers as well as businesses. All pending income tax refunds up to ₹5 lakh would be released immediately by the Income Tax Department. Similarly, all pending refunds for Goods and Services Tax and Customs will also be issued. ▶ PAGE 15

# Focus shifts to contact tracing, infrastructure

32 deaths reported in the past 24 hours, taking toll to 149

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

With 32 deaths reported in the past 24 hours, the Union Health Ministry on Wednesday said building hospital infrastructure, aggressive contact tracing and total enforcement of the lockdown with the help of people were the main focus now in the fight against COVID-19.

The country has 5,194 cases and 149 deaths, with 402 patients recovered. The Indian Council of Medical Research said 1,27,919 tests had so far been done and 13,143 samples were reported on Wednesday.

Reports from the State Health Departments put the number of confirmed cases at 5,598, with 4,932 active ones. The death toll in the country stood at 182, while 404 people have recovered.

The most number of cases have been reported from Maharashtra (1,135), followed by Tamil Nadu (738) and Delhi (576).

**'Early identification key'**  
At a press conference here, Lav Agarwal, Joint Secretary, Health Ministry, said: "We are speeding up infrastructure-building and grading up our response as the number of cases...has shown a rise over the past few days."

He added that the country

## Status check

Maharashtra had the highest number of COVID-19 related deaths and cases as of Wednesday.

Eighteen States have recorded at least one death. Table lists 10 States that have reported the most deaths

State	Deaths	Cases
Maharashtra	72	1,135
Madhya Pradesh	23	308
Gujarat	16	186
Telangana	11	364
Delhi	9	576
Punjab	8	106
Tamil Nadu	8	738
Rajasthan	6	363
Karnataka	5	181
West Bengal	5	92

An IAF aircraft ferried medical equipment from Chennai to Bhubaneswar on Monday for setting up COVID-19 testing facilities in Odisha.

## SC bats for free testing

Tests relating to COVID-19, whether done in approved government or private laboratories, shall be free of cost, the Supreme Court ordered on Wednesday. A Bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan and S. Ravinder Bhat held that tests must be carried out only in NABL accredited laboratories or any agencies approved by the WHO or the ICMR. ▶ PAGE 9

# + Muslim men carry Hindu woman's bier

Relatives refused to help the family; neighbours arranged material for last rites

SIDHARTH YADAV

BHOPAL

When the sons of Draupadi Bai Verma's sister refused to tend to her as she suffered from high fever, suspecting she had contracted COVID-19, there was no one left to take her to hospital.

The next morning she died. Even then, her relatives refused to touch the body. That's when 10 Muslim neighbours got together to buy things for her last rites, put together a bier, and carried her body to the cremation ground on their shoulders.

"This is the purpose of humanity, to serve each other," said Abdul Rehman Sheikh, one of the neighbours in South Toda of Indore, who carried the bier.

Ailing with paralysis for three months, Draupadi Bai lived with the family of her son, a daily wage labourer, who doesn't even own a bicycle. The other son lives in



The men carrying the bier of Draupadi Bai in Indore. ▶ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

was helpless. We had tears in our eyes," said Mr. Sheikh, 30, a businessman. That's when they called her sister's sons, who live just 100 metres away. "The sister and her sons refused to step inside the house. If she was taken to a hospital the same day, she probably wouldn't have died," he said.

### Funeral procession

The next day, the neighbours woke up to the news of Draupadi Bai's death. "We asked the son about the material we could buy for the last rites. And put together her bier," said Mr. Sheikh. Around 11 a.m. on Tuesday, the 10 men, along with the two sons and their children, took out the procession to the cremation ground around a kilometre away.

The number of COVID-19 cases are spiralling in Indore, with health workers yet to locate a source, as most pa-

tients have had no contact or travel history. South Toda falls in the containment area of the outbreak, which has Jhanda Chowk, 350 metres away, as its epicentre. As most patients are testing positive for the virus after death, owing to the limited testing protocol, local residents are wary of approaching anyone ailing with cough, cold or fever, common symptoms of the infection. So far, 16 persons have succumbed to the disease in the city, which has recorded 213 cases.

The act of the neighbours earned praise from former Chief Minister Kamal Nath. "The example of humanity and brotherhood they have presented is commendable," he wrote on Twitter. "This is our Ganga-Jamuna sanskriti. Such visuals represent the harmony and our brotherhood," he said, while sharing a photograph of the men carrying the bier.

# U.P. to seal virus hotspots in 15 districts

Officials asked to ensure 100% home delivery; markets not to be allowed to open

OMAR RASHID

LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government on Wednesday decided to completely seal COVID-19 hotspots within 15 districts till the end of the lockdown on April 14. The announcement, first made orally by a senior official, triggered panic buying among anxious public who stepped out to the markets in big numbers as confusion prevailed over which areas would come under the purview of the total lockdown. Several hours after the government decision, officials were yet to declare the names of the hotspots in many districts.

The government listed 100 such hotspots spread across 15 districts, including Lucknow, Noida, Ghaziabad, Agra, Varanasi and Meerut. The actual names were still trickling in till late on Wednesday evening. The district-wise hotspots to be sealed



Flag march: Police personnel in Lucknow asked people not to crowd outside. ▶ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

stood as – Agra (22 hotspots), Ghaziabad (23), Noida (62), Kanpur (12), Shamli (3), Meerut (7) including some rural areas, Varanasi (4), Bareilly (1), Bulandshahr (3), Basti (3), Firozabad (3), Saharanpur (4), Maharaiganj (4), Lucknow (12) including 8 major ones, and Sitapur (1).

The "affected areas" in these 15 districts, which have reported six or more positive

cases, should be "completely sealed" to make the lockdown secure, the State's top official Rajendra Kumar Tiwari said in instructions to District Police and administrative heads.

Mr. Tiwari instructed officials to review the movement passes issued in these districts and cancel those that were "unnecessary".

Officials were asked to en-

sure 100% home delivery in affected areas. Shops and vegetable mandis would also not be allowed to open, so there is strict implementation of lockdown and social distancing, the Chief Secretary said.

The complete lockdown was first implemented in some areas of Agra and it produced "good results", said Awanish Awasthi, Additional Chief Secretary-Home Department, explaining the rationale behind the decision.

Confusion among the public started after Mr. Tiwari told media that affected areas in 15 districts would be sealed to prevent community spread but did not elaborate which areas would be included. Many television channels initially reported that the entire 15 districts, and not just the hotspots identified, would be completely sealed.

Mr. Tiwari instructed officials to review the movement passes issued in these districts and cancel those that were "unnecessary".

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

# Escaping quarantine centres at night, returning by day

Migrant workers slip out of Bihar shelters, allegedly lacking basic facilities, only to return for free food

AMARNATH TEWARY

PATNA

Many of Bihar's migrant workers, who have been quarantined in village schools and panchayat buildings after returning from elsewhere in the country, are found missing from these centres at night, with most of them likely heading home to join their families before coming back to the quarantine facilities in the morning, according to village heads.

After the countrywide lockdown was imposed last month to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, Bihar's government set up quarantine centres at 3,115 government schools and panchayat buildings in rural parts of the State. The government said

more than 1.7 lakh people had returned to the State in the wake of the lockdown, and as many as 27,300 of them had been lodged in these quarantine centres opened in different districts.

However, several of those staying in these centres, usually for two weeks, told *The Hindu* over phone that though they were being provided with free food, the shelters lacked even basic infrastructure like electricity, toilets and beds. "Let's not even talk about sanitizers or masks," they complained.

Village mukhias (heads), who have been asked to monitor the movement of those quarantined, often feel helpless under local pressure.

"In my village school building 14 migrants have been quarantined for the last three days but the building has no window, toilet, door or bed," admitted a village head of Saraiya block in Muzaffarpur district, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "Only food is being served to them three times a day. So many of them go to their family at night and return to the quarantine centre in the day for free food."

Similar reports have also come from several village heads in Madhubani, Munger, Samastipur, Siwan, Sitamarhi, Araria and Katihar districts. The migrants placed in quarantine centres quietly slip away at night to join their families while coming back to the centre in the daytime. "Yes, free food is the only attraction for them, otherwise they would not have come to the centre even in the daytime," asserted several village heads, who all declined to be identified.

The infrastructure at several village schools and panchayat buildings in Bihar is barely adequate with no toilets or washrooms. Many schools are windowless, have no doors separating rooms and are without running water or electricity supply.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Shipping companies working on plans to send them back

JAGRITI CHANDRA

NEW DELHI

Indian seafarers around the world would be allowed to return to the country after the ban on flights goes and the Government of India finalises a policy on repatriation of Indians, according to a senior official of the Shipping Ministry.

As per government estimates, there were "16,000-17,000" seafarers who need to be brought back to the country. "How they are brought back will depend on the Government of India's policy on allowing people to come from outside. Whatever policy is finalised,

**Timings****DELHI**

THURSDAY, APR. 09
RISE 06:02 SET 18:44
RISE 20:16 SET 07:01
FRIDAY, APR. 10
RISE 06:01 SET 18:45
RISE 21:25 SET 07:44
SATURDAY, APR. 11
RISE 06:00 SET 18:45
RISE 22:31 SET 08:28

**Delhi Weather** max min  
Delhi City 33 20  
Safdarjung 33 20  
Palam 35 18

**Delhi Palam Today**  
34°C Dry and warm weather to prevail. A sunny sky is likely.

**Delhi Palam Tomorrow**  
36°C Dry and warm weather to prevail. A clear sky is likely.

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**THE HINDU**

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Air Quality of Delhi-NCR		
Delhi 83	Gurugram 91	
Ghaziabad 113	Faridabad 103	
Noida 85	Greater Noida 103	
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		

**IN BRIEF**

**Nuh MLA offers party office for virus treatment**  
NUH  
Haryana Congress Legislative Party deputy leader and Nuh MLA Aftab Ahmed has offered his residence, also party's district office, for the treatment of COVID-19 patients. In a letter to Nuh Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Ahmed on Wednesday offered the party's office to be used in the fight against COVID-19. This is the first such offer made in the State and was indicative of the constructive politics. Mr. Ahmed said prevention was the only cure for COVID-19. Nuh has 38 active COVID-19 patients, highest in the State.

**Traders' body calls for lockdown extension**

NEW DELHI  
The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) on Wednesday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, calling for an extension of the lockdown till April 30, in view of "current troubled time of COVID-19", it said in a statement. The union said that it had made the appeal following a survey of trade leaders across the country, in order to negate prospects of the further spread of virus. While small and medium-scale traders were being severely hit by the lockdown, the union said that they stood by the government in whatever decision it would take. The union has, however, written to the Finance Minister asking for a relief package.

**Civic body ties up with firm for waste disposal**

NEW DELHI  
To dispose biomedical waste from quarantined households in its jurisdiction, the North Delhi Municipal Corporation has tied up with Biotic Waste Solutions, it said on Wednesday. According to guidelines issued by the CPCB, urban local bodies are responsible for ensuring safe collection and disposal of biomedical waste from such areas. To this end, six covered auto tippers have been deployed, one in each zone, where work is being carried out as per the Bio-Medical Waste management rules, 2016, it said.



**Half empty or half full?** Women return empty-handed after meeting a local MLA to avail PDS scheme; Vikas Marg wears a deserted look; people leave with goods from Ghazipur Mandi during the lockdown on Wednesday.  
• V. V. KRISHNAN, R.V. MOORTHY AND SANDEEP SAXENA

## Gurugram unit of U.S.-based firm sacks several employees

Company refuses to give reasons for move; staff of its Pune unit also laid off

**ASHOK KUMAR**  
GURUGRAM

At least a hundred employees have been terminated by Fareportal, a New York-based global tech travel firm, in Gurugram amid the COVID-19 outbreak, without assigning any reason. The company laid off employees at its Pune firm as well.

Many of those laid off had been working with the company for five to 10 years. Though there was no exact numbers, the sacked employees claimed that more than 800 people were laid off in total.

The company's Gurugram unit vice-president Vinay Kanchi disconnected the call when contacted by *The Hindu* to seek his reaction. He also did not respond to a text message also in this regard.

**'Illegal' termination**  
The All India Central Council of Trade Unions has written to Haryana Chief Minister on the complaints received by them about the "illegal" ter-



The ever-busy national highway wears a deserted look during the nationwide lockdown. • V. V. KRISHNAN

mination of the employees in Fareportal.

In its letter, the union said that it was a gross violation of all the laws, and dealt a heavy blow to the employees during the COVID-19 outbreak. Seeking necessary action, the letter further said that the governments had asked the employers to refrain from termination of employees and this act of the company further aggravated the chaotic situation.

The union also wrote a similar letter to Maharashtra Chief Minister and the Minister of State (Independent Charge) Labour and Employment.

Chief Minister and the Minister of State (Independent Charge) Labour and Employment.

Raju Prasad, a ticketing executive, working with the company for the past four years said that he and many of his colleagues received their termination letters through e-mail.

**Left in the lurch**

"In terms of the 'termination' clause of the Appointment Letter, company hereby, terminates your

employment", read the letter, without assigning any reason.

He said that he was staying on rent in Delhi and had a family of three to support, including his ailing mother, and the sudden termination had left him in the lurch. "How will I pay rent for this month," asked Mr. Prasad.

He claimed that he was in contact with 134 colleagues, who had been sacked.

Many of those sacked had been working with the company for several years. A few of them were employed for more than 10 years," said Mr. Prasad. He said that it was difficult for them to get a job in the current situation.

He said the number of sacked employees in Gurugram alone could be around 500 and the same number of people were believed to have been sacked in Pune.

Mr. Prasad said the management people did not respond to their repeated calls to ascertain the reason for sudden retrenchment.

## Firm recalls termination letter of 13 employees

Move comes a day after seeking govt. aid

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

The AICCTU had written to the Delhi government terminating the alleged termination during the COVID-19 pandemic as "gross violation in law".

In response to *The Hindu*'s query, the company had on Tuesday said that some of the employees were issued a letter "under routine performance reviews".

However, Devendra Singh, one of the employees who was initially laid off and then given the "recall letter" said, "The company was trying to say that non-performers were laid off. But there was no kind of intimation from their side regarding this. It had just been a month that I was rehired in the company. There are several others who have still not received the recall notice yet."

Some of the employees, who were among the ones to be handed out the termination letter on March 29, said that on Wednesday they got mails from the company stating that the former letter was sent "under business as usual environment".

"We would like to inform you that under the present circumstances, the letter stands withdrawn," read the e-mail.

**Not on duty**

The guard had not reported on duty after April 3, and after the complaint when the police reached his home he was found missing. He was later held from another house in the locality.

After the family tested

## FIR registered against security guard for 'spreading' COVID-19

South Delhi family tests positive, admitted to hospital

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has registered an FIR against a security guard of a house in South Delhi after three members of a family were tested positive for COVID-19, said a police officer on Wednesday.

"The security guard was questioned and has been sent to quarantine. His medical reports are awaited," said the officer.

A senior police officer said that the three members of a family went to a hospital after they developed COVID-19 symptoms on April 3, and were tested positive. The reports of other family members are awaited. The family used to stay on the ground floor and the guard was the only outsider who used to visit the house to deliver groceries.

ery and other food items. Residents on other floors are fine. The police said that they received information that the family members were presently hospitalised.

**Not on duty**

The guard had not reported on duty after April 3, and after the complaint when the police reached his home he was found missing. He was later held from another house in the locality.

After the family tested

positive, they suspected the security guard because the entire family claimed that they were following lockdown guidelines seriously and no one stepped out, said a police officer.

During investigation, when he was questioned over places he visit frequently, it is suspected that he had visited the Tablighi Jamaat centre in Nizamuddin.

"We have registered an FIR against the accused used to stay in Okhla," said the officer.

## Circular issued against Tablighi Jamaat leader

He will join probe after isolation period

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

Tablighi Jamaat leader Maulana Saad Kandhalvi, who has been on the run after an FIR was registered against him for organising a religious congregation here allegedly in violation of the lockdown orders and not maintaining social distancing to contain the spread of the virus.

A day later, the Delhi Police's Crime Branch wrote to Saad and others, seeking the details under Section 91 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. A second notice was also issued to him this week.

In an audit message last week, Saad said he was exercising self-quarantine after tested positive for COVID-19.

His lawyer Tauseef Khan said Saad is under self-quarantine and the cleric will join investigation after his quarantine period is over.

On March 31, Delhi Police

e's Crime Branch lodged an FIR against seven people, including the cleric, on a complaint by station house officer Nizamuddin for holding a religious congregation here allegedly in violation of the lockdown orders and not maintaining social distancing to contain the spread of the virus.

Meanwhile, the Delhi Police have issued a Look Out Circular (LOC) against head of Tablighi Centre Maulana Saad and six others who were named in the FIR for violating lockdown orders and organising a religious gathering at Nizamuddin.

In an audit message last week, Saad said he was exercising self-quarantine after tested positive for COVID-19.

Visited by thousands last month, the Tablighi Jamaat's Nizamuddin centre also turned out to be a hotspot for spread of COVID-19 in the country.

## DMC issues notice to police chief over 2 videos

Panel seeks report within a week

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Minorities Commission has sent two notices to the Police Commissioner regarding two videos in which Muslim youth are being targeted.

The first notice is regarding a video shot in Shastri Nagar on April 5, in which a group of people are seen holding a meeting on the street in violation of the COVID-19 restrictions and are planning to stop Muslims from entering their colony and asking people in other colonies to do the same.

The second video it says has been circulating on social media since April 6 where a Muslim youth is being beaten by some people in a rural setting. The commission said its investigation has established that the incident pertains to a village named Harewali under PS Bawana Industrial Area where a person was not allowed to enter his village after attending a Tablighi conference in Bhopal.

The DMC has sought a report from the commissioner within a week on the matter.

## Panel dissatisfied with delay in prison decongestion

New inmates being kept in separate wards so that they do not intermingle with the old ones

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

convicts eligible for "emergency parole" was about 1,500. However, only 650 convicts have been released so far.

The city government had relaxed the norms for grant of parole to eligible inmates lodged in jails here following the outbreak of COVID-19. As part of the effort to decongest jails, a new provision of "emergency parole" so as to complete the exercise of decongestion of jail, "will make the entire effort futile".

**Emergency parole'**  
The observation of the chairperson of the committee came after it was informed that the number of

**Safety measures**  
Meanwhile, the Tihar jail authority also informed the committee that fresh in-

rim bail. Out of these bail applications, "interim bail" has already been granted in approximately 823 cases.

The committee was of the opinion that the criteria needs to be further relaxed to give effect to directions of the Supreme Court to decongest jails. This will include grant of interim bail for 45 days to various eligible inmates.

DG (Prisons) has informed that on the basis of this new criterion, approximately 973 more Under Trial Prisoners (UTPs) would be the beneficiaries and their release would considerably ease out the jail population.

The panel was also apprised that the jail population has come down from 17,552 as on March 25, 2020, to 16,179 as on April 7, 2020. On complete implementation of the said criteria, it would further come down to about 15,500.

It also said that out of the in-house manufacturing of soap cakes, liquid soaps, phenyl, masks, and sanitizers, adequate number of these materials have been sent to Juvenile Justice Boards or Observation Homes, as per the requirement received from them, besides the same being put to use in all the jails.

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## IN BRIEF

## Constable deployed at IGIA tests positive

NEW DELHI  
A constable deployed at the Foreigner Regional Registration Office (FRRO) of the IGIA Airport tested positive for COVID-19, said a senior officer on Wednesday. After the flight operation was suspended, the staffer was sent on home quarantine. On Sunday, he developed COVID-19 symptoms and got himself tested at a government hospital.

## Man booked for spitting at quarantine centre

NEW DELHI  
A case has been registered against a man, kept at Balkarwala quarantine centre in west Delhi's Mundka for suspected COVID-19 infection, for allegedly spitting and misbehaving with the medical team, police said on Wednesday. "On the complaint of SDM, Punjabi Bagh, a case was registered against the man at Mundka police station on Sunday," a senior police officer said. PTI

## Virus treatment: Sikh body offers 2 buildings

NEW DELHI  
The Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) on Wednesday offered the city government a 50-bedded hospital and an unfurnished 500-bedded hospital building for treatment of Coronavirus patients. "We have no inhibition to offer you the hospitals," said DSGMC president Manjinder Singh Sirsa in a letter to the CM. PTI

# 20 areas sealed in Capital, 93 fresh COVID-19 cases reported

State government will distribute essentials to the residents of sealed areas in city



The total number of COVID-19 cases reported in the city stands at 669. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

On Wednesday, 93 new COVID-19 cases were reported in Delhi, taking the total number of cases to 669, according to a daily health bulletin of the Delhi government. All of the 93 new COVID-19 positive cases are people from a centre run by Tablighi Jamaat in Nizamuddin, which was evacuated by the authorities.

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Wednesday said that the Delhi government has sealed 20 areas in the city and people will not be allowed to enter or exit these areas to control the spread of COVID-19 in the city. Residents will have to stay inside their houses in these areas and government will distribute essentials to people in these areas.

"Total there are 20 areas in Delhi that have been sealed. People will not be allowed to enter or exit from these colonies, streets, or apartments," Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia told the media.

The areas, which have been termed as "containment zones" by the government, include "Markaz Masjid and Nizamuddin Basti", Nizamuddin West (G and D Block), street near Gandhi Park in Malviya Nagar, Shahajahanabad society in Dwarika Sector II, and J, K, L and H pockets of Dilshad Garden among other places.

Delhi government on Wednesday also ordered to cordon off Bengali Market area near Mandi House after three people tested positive for COVID-19 in the area.

"DCP, New Delhi District, to immediately cordon off the

## Face masks compulsory while stepping out

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday said that people stepping out of their houses will have to compulsorily wear a face mask.

"Wearing of facial masks can reduce the spread of coronavirus substantially. Therefore, it has been decided that facial masks will be compulsory for anyone stepping out of their house. Cloth mask shall be eligible

entire Bengali Market Area... to prevent the spread of COVID-19," an order issued by Tanvi Garg, District Magistrate (New Delhi), on Wednesday read. The DM has also directed the DCP to take action against the owner of the Bengali Pasty Shop, where around 35 people were found in "highly unhygienic conditions", compromising social distance measures.

"Three people have been tested positive near Bengali Market – a man who runs a sweet shop at the market, his son and their domestic help. They have been shifted out of

too [sic]," he said in a tweet.

"All government departments of Delhi have been instructed to stop all expenses except salary. Any expenditure other than corona and lockdown expenses will be done only with the permission of the Finance Department. Given the current state of revenue [collection], the government will have to cut its expenses drastically [sic]," he said in another tweet.

the area," an official said.

"Two workers with flu-like symptoms have been shifted to quarantine facilities. Rest of them [around 35] have been moved to night shelters," the official said. "At a Moti Bagh slum, a person and his son have been tested positive. It has also been cordoned off," the official added.

A total of 426 people from the centre have tested positive for COVID-19 so far just in Delhi alone. No death was reported in the city due to the virus on Wednesday. Nine people have died due to COVID-19 in the city.

# Residents flock to markets after video of strict lockdown surfaces

Authorities take to Twitter asking locals to avoid panic buying

VIJAYA SINGH  
JATIN ANAND  
NEW DELHI/NOIDA

On Wednesday afternoon, after a video clip of Uttar Pradesh Chief Secretary R.K. Tiwari announcing that "affected areas" with "high load" of COVID-19 cases in 15 districts, including Noida and Ghaziabad, will be sealed till April 14 surfaced, several residents thronged the nearest markets.

With no clear communication from bureaucrats in Lucknow, people came out in hordes in the two satellite cities of Delhi. Cars could be seen hurriedly backing out of their parking spaces in housing colonies as people rushed to petrol pumps, grocery and chemist shops, and departmental stores to stock up on essentials.

Wednesday night there is going to be a "forced lockdown" and borders are going to be sealed. When asked if he was aware that the sealing order was only for specific areas, Mr. Larooya said, "Nobody told us. There is a difference between what the government says and does."

At 4.19 p.m., Suhas L.Y., District Magistrate, Gautam Buddha Nagar, tweeted: "Dear residents, no need for panic buying. Identified hotspots shall be sealed and home delivery of essential commodities and services shall be available at all places in the district. We shall take strict action against rumour mongers/spreaders." He shared the list of 22 hotspots in Noida and Greater Noida at 7.42 p.m. via Twitter. NOIDA Authority CEO Ritu Maheshwari, took to Twitter to state: "I request Noida residents not to



People queue up at a chemist shop to buy medicines on Wednesday. ■ VIJAYA SINGH

panic or engage in panic buying during the strict implementation of lockdown in hotspots. All essential services shall be maintained as earlier including doorstep delivery of essentials."

By that time, however, the Alpha I commercial belt, which is among the list of 12 hotspots, was already teeming with shoppers lining up outside prominent grocery and departmental stores in the area.

"I rushed here as soon as I heard the term hotspot," said Sahil Gupta, a local. "Entry of outsiders to our area was the first to be restricted because there was apparently someone who was found COVID-19 positive. I don't know whether that's true. I am sure it will be designated one of the hotspots," he said. He was proved right a few hours later.

## Press club staff cook, pack meals to stand by the needy

Delhi govt. steps in to help distribute 600-700 packets a day

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Cooks and service staff employed by the Press Club of India (PCI) who live in the vicinity of the club have decided to stand by the needy and feed the hungry during the ongoing lockdown imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19.

The PCI management put together the logistics, the members contributed funds and the Delhi government stepped in to help distribute 600-700 meal per day.

"Since March 30 we have packed and distributed over 600 meals everyday. Staff come in the morning and by lunch we have the meals packed and ready. A vehicle sent by the Delhi government comes to collect the packets. After we are done, civic body staff come and sanitise the entire area," said Jitender Singh, Office Secretary of PCI. Mr. Singh added that after they took the initiative, press clubs in other parts of the country also took up same initiatives with contributions from journalists.

Bhaskar, the cook heading the kitchen at the club, said that they have been cooking pulao, biryani or poori alu that is served with



Over 600 meals have been packed at the club and distributed everyday since March 30. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

pickle and curd or a banana. "The food is very different from what we are used to cooking at the club but with limited rations, these are the items that we can cook on a large scale," Mr. Bhaskar says. The club has been spending ₹12,000 a day to cook and pack the meals.

This is an initiative taken by our staff who have come forward to volunteer. So we are making it possible. We do not know when the lockdown will end and even after it does, if there will be res-

triction on gatherings. So we may not be able to hold press conferences and open the facilities of the club. These volunteers do not know what the future holds for them, but are coming forward to provide this service," says Mr. Singh.

Shyam and Manjeet, two other staff said that they have been maintaining social distancing and wearing gloves and masks while packing the food. "When we finish our work and the van from the Delhi government comes to pick up the food, we feel satisfied that someone who is hungry is getting a good meal," they say.

"This is an initiative taken by our staff who have come forward to volunteer. So we are making it possible. We do not know when the lockdown will end and even after it does, if there will be res-

triction on gatherings. So we may not be able to hold press conferences and open the facilities of the club. These volunteers do not know what the future holds for them, but are coming forward to provide this service," says Mr. Singh.

When Laila\*, a nurse and mother of three children, started working at a COVID-19 ward of the LNJP Hospital in mid-March, she used to carry a bag with a few clothes and toiletries in the hope that the hospital would provide accommodation. It turned out to be a false hope.

Naturally, she was disappointed. "I used to return home after work with the bag. I would go to the bathroom straight and wash my clothes in hot water so that my husband and children would be safe. Of course, we were scared for our families," said the woman in her fifties, who has been working as a nurse

at the LNJP hospital for the past two decades.

The nurse, who lives in Mayur Vihar stated that other nurses too used to carry bags in the beginning and after repeated requests, the hospital gave them rooms about 10 days later. By March 26, the government gave them accommodation in a hostel on the hospital premises, which was shut. "Two people stay in a room. But around six have to share the bathroom," she said.

**Home quarantine**

After her 14-day work period got over (Delhi has a 14-day work and 14-day quarantine plan for health workers and medical professionals who are on Coronavirus duty)

## People resort to panic buying in Ghaziabad

This follows announcement of sealing of hotspots in the area, neighbouring clusters

ANUJ KUMAR  
GHAZIABAD

'What if...' was the catchphrase as people in Ghaziabad thronged streets for panic buying of essential items on Wednesday evening after the State government announced the sealing of 13 hotspots in Ghaziabad and 12 clusters in neighbouring Gautam Buddha Nagar.

Though district magistrates of both the districts almost instantly clarified through video messages on WhatsApp groups that the entire districts were not being put under curfew and that only certain hotspots where COVID-19 cases have been reported would be sealed, a little delay in specifying the hotspots led people to speculate.

Ghaziabad has registered 23 cases of COVID-19 so far. "What if the entire Vasundhara is put under curfew," exclaimed Rajneesh Kumar while queuing up in front of a grocery store in Sector 9.

On being reminded that no case has been found in the sector, Manish Mishra chipped in and said: "What if the place from where the grocery store gets its supply is sealed?"

At the Sahibabad Mandi, Secretary Vishvendra Singh had a tough time controlling the crowd. "It is hard to convince the senior citizens,"

said Mr. Singh. "I have been shouting for an hour that the mandi would open on usual time on Thursday and that retailer shops would remain open in colonies, but people are not listening." Ultimately, he had to call the police as scores of cars were blocking the streets. It made things difficult for the vendors returning to the mandi as the constables were in no mood to pick and choose.

Mr. Kumar said nobody was allowed to buy a couple of kilos of vegetables (retail shopping) from the wholesale market during the lockdown and that the process would continue. "There is no drop in supply and there is no need for panic buying," he said.

However, anxious buyers

outside kept coming up with excuses. "What if the retailer in our colony comes from an area that is sealed?" asked one.

Gaurav Jain, a software engineer who was standing in a queue in front of Sharma Medicos in Vasundhara said people had come to terms with lockdown, but this new order had forced them to come out.

"I guess electronic news media is to blame. The news that they circulated created panic. You can't blame the customer. My wife suffers from allergy in hands. She uses gloves while cooking. If the channel shows that the area could be sealed for a week, I will have to come out," he countered.

Senior Superintendent of

Police (Ghaziabad) Kalanidhi Naithani said, "Ghaziabad has not been put under curfew. Only those areas where COVID-19 cases have been reported would be put under stringent lockdown. This is a containment exercise. In the areas, essential items would be provided by the district administration."

In Gautam Buddha Nagar where two more cases were reported on Wednesday, the district administration released a detailed list of 22 localities, including 12 clusters and 10 epicentres.

"It is better to be safe than sorry. We will ensure that minimum discomfort is caused to people living in these localities," said Suhas L.Y., District Magistrate, Gautam Buddha Nagar.

The CM explained to the MPs the work done by the Delhi government to fight Coronavirus. Suggestions from the MPs were also sought to fight the virus, sources said.

the dormitories provided to the nurses, where a large "number of people" have to share the bathroom.

"The government should treat everyone – doctors, nurses, nursing assistants and sanitation staff – at the same level if they want to fight the virus. The exposure is more for sanitation staff as they clean these spaces. They are less educated than us and the government should provide proper quarantine facilities for them too," she said.

The nurses' association has been sending emails to the Chief Minister and Union Health Minister almost every day, but they are yet to act, she informed. ("name changed to protect identity)

CM takes stock of situation

## 30 doctors, nurses at AIIMS advised quarantine

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

Around 30 healthcare workers, including doctors, nurses and technicians at AIIMS here have been advised to undergo quarantine after a 72-year-old man who visited the facility with neurological problem tested positive for COVID-19, sources said on Wednesday.

The patient had reported to the emergency with brain stroke symptoms around two days back and was immediately shifted to the Neurology ward N-55 for evaluation and treatment.

+

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The CM explained to the MPs the work done by the Delhi government to fight Coronavirus. Suggestions from the MPs were also sought to fight the virus, sources said.

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Mr. N SELVAKUMAR  
PH: 9820350726  
selvakumar.n@thehindu.co.in

Mr. MANOJ KUMAR KUSHWAHA  
PH: 9999490055  
manoj.kushwhaha@thehindu.co.in

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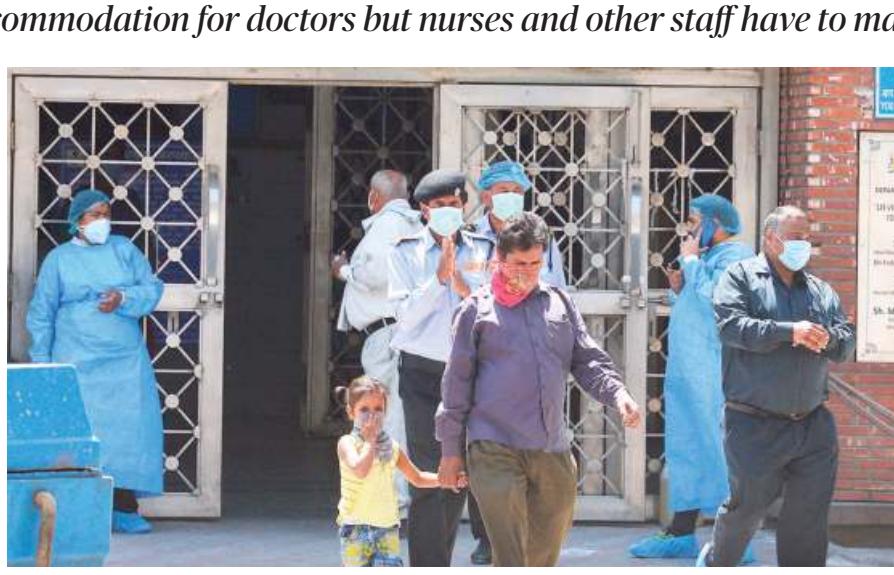
## Dormitories, hostels and shared bathrooms for nurses on COVID-19 duty

The government has arranged suitable accommodation for doctors but nurses and other staff have to make do with basic or inadequate facilities

NIKHIL M BABU  
NEW DELHI

When Laila\*, a nurse and mother of three children, started working at a COVID-19 ward of the LNJP Hospital in mid-March, she used to carry a bag with a few clothes and toiletries in the hope that the hospital would provide accommodation. It turned out to be a false hope.

Naturally, she was disappointed. "I used to return home after work with the bag. I would go to the bathroom straight and wash my clothes in hot water so that my husband and children would be safe. Of course, we were scared for our families," said the woman in her fifties, who has been working as a nurse



A view of the COVID-19 ward at LNJP Hospital in the Capital. ■ FILE PHOTO: R.V. MOORTHY

she has quarantined herself at her house, due to 'lack' of facilities at the government facility.

"My quarantine started on April 2 and for three-four days I stayed at the hostel. But on our floor, there are

other nurses who are still working in COVID wards and we even have to share bathrooms with them. We

go back after our shifts and sometimes wait for an hour to get the bathroom as everyone's shift gets over at the same time and each one will be washing their clothes," narrated Laila, who felt home was better.

Even as the nurses are struggling, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced on March 30 that the government had arranged 100 individual rooms in The Lalit, a five-star hotel, for the doctors who are treating in COVID-19 wards. "We do not want any five-star rooms. We just need a proper room with an attached bathroom so that there is no exposure to the virus," she said.

All the same, she said that the hostel was better than

the dormitories provided to the nurses, where a large "number of people" have to share the bathroom.

Fourth death  
in U.P. due  
to COVID-19

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GHAZIABAD

A 76-year-old COVID-19 infected woman died in Agra on Wednesday, taking the tally of deaths in Uttar Pradesh to four, said district officials.

According to District Magistrate Prabhu N. Singh, the woman was also an asthma patient and was admitted to S.N. Medical College. "The grandson of the aged woman had returned from the Netherlands on March 15. She was admitted to two different private hospitals because of asthma-related problems," Mr. Singh told reporters.

A health department official said, later, she was shifted home and was on oxygen. "On Tuesday, when her report came out to be positive, a rescue team brought her to S.N. Medical College where she succumbed during treatment," he said.

The government was yet to take a decision in the matter and a call in this regard would be taken after the Cabinet meeting on April 10, he said in a statement here.

The government was continuously assessing and reviewing the evolving situation, which was changing day to day, and any decision would be taken in the context of the conditions prevailing around mid-April, keeping in mind the overall interest of the State and its people, he

## No move on extending curfew yet: Punjab CM

'Call would be taken after Cabinet meeting on April 10'

VIKAS VASUDEVA  
CHANDIGARH



CM Amarinder Singh

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Wednesday said that no decision had been taken yet on extending the curfew in the State beyond April 14 even as the State reported seven fresh cases of COVID-19.

The State government was yet to take a decision in the matter and a call in this regard would be taken after the Cabinet meeting on April 10, he said in a statement here.

The government was continuously assessing and reviewing the evolving situation, which was changing day to day, and any decision would be taken in the context of the conditions prevailing around mid-April, keeping in mind the overall interest of the State and its people, he

ways for the State to gradually come out of the unprecedented lockdown.

Earlier in the day, the Chief Minister held a video conference with industrialists.

After the meeting, he tweeted, Interacted over video conferencing with experts of Punjab's industry regarding measures to be taken to assist industry during the #Covid19 crisis.

### 106 positive cases

According to the State health department two patients who tested positive are from Jalandhar, while one is from Faridkot. Four other cases were from Sabhazda Ajit Singh Nagar, taking the tally of confirmed Covid-19 cases to 106, it added.

(With PTI inputs)

## Rajasthan govt. returns drug stocks to market

Bid to ease HCQ shortage in the State

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
JAIPUR

The Rajasthan government has returned the entire stocks of hydroxychloroquine 300 mg tablets and 25% of hydroxychloroquine 200/400 mg tablets to the private firms from which it had acquired the medicine for managing the novel coronavirus patients. The antimalarial drug is considered useful for treatment of COVID-19 and some other ailments.

The notification for acquiring hydroxychloroquine 200/300/400 mg tablets from private firms was earlier issued under the provisions of Rajasthan Epidemic Diseases Act, 1957, for treatment of COVID-19 patients and for controlling the coronavirus infection.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to reconsider the decision to allow the export of hydroxychloroquine.

After the State government acquired the medicines from the clearing and forwarding agents, distributors, stockists, wholesalers and retailers in March-end, its shortage in the market had created inconvenience for patients of rheumatoid arthritis and other diseases.

## Police disperse gathering in Guwahati

Their faces refuse to betray the lack of sleep, daunting task of screening people

SIDHARTH YADAV  
BHOJPUR

Policemen at the Jahangirabad police station, whose six members had contracted COVID-19, remain unusually unfazed.

Their faces refuse to betray the lack of sleep, unending duty hours and the daunting task of screening people on roads at a time when a local outbreak looms over Bhopal.

Assistant Sub-Inspector of Police R.K. Singh pllops himself in a chair inside, keeping at least a metre's distance from his colleagues sitting around a table. "What is there to fear while serving the public? Even if it's death in line of duty, we are ready to accept it."

Although the disease has downed the City Superintendent of Police Alim Khan as well as the police station's in-



Policemen spraying disinfectant at the Jahangirabad police station in Bhopal on Wednesday. ■ A.M. FAROOQI

charge, the morale of other policemen, including juniors, remains unruffled. The 19 hours of duty – manning barricades and patrolling in vehicles to ensure the lockdown is complied with – has failed to take a toll on them.

"We get to sleep for just three hours. And I return

home only to take a bath," said Mr. Singh, 55, while sprinkling hand sanitiser on his shoes, a ritual he performs at least five times a day. "It is inevitable to face the threat of falling ill now while working in a congested area like this. In fact, I would say if you don't fall ill, you didn't perform your duty

well," he chuckles.

Different officials may use the same vehicles, sit in the same chairs and use the same protective face masks at different times during the day. "And you don't know who's carrying the infection," he said.

Just one of the infected policemen is above 60. "Young boys in uniform are spindly and lack a strong immune system. They can't take pressure and long working hours," a constable chipped in.

### No pickpockets'

And the crime rate remains unaffected, said Mr. Singh, only their nature had changed. "There are violators of prohibitory orders now. And no pickpockets. Who will they target anyway when there's barely anyone on the roads?" he asked.

According to Ganjam Collector Vijay Amrutha Kulange,

## Masks must for stepping out in Odisha

Handkerchief, any piece of cloth in two layers can also be used, says State govt.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
BHUBANESWAR

While adopting strict social distancing and isolation measures to contain the spread of COVID-19, the Odisha government has ordered that people coming out of their homes across the State should wear masks from Thursday.

The general public has been directed to cover their mouth and nose with any kind of mask while stepping out of the house for any purpose. A handkerchief or any other piece of cloth in at least two layers can also be used for the purpose, the government said.

### Strict implementation

All the district and municipal authorities have been directed to implement the decision strictly, said the State government's chief spokesperson for COVID-19, Subrato Bagchi, on Wednesday.

Mr. Bagchi urged the peo-



A family wearing protective masks returns home after buying vegetables in Bhubaneswar on Wednesday. ■ BISWARANJAN ROUT

ple to cooperate with the authorities in areas that had been earmarked as containment zone following detection of positive cases from those localities in Bhubaneswar and other places in the State.

"Do not believe in fake news. While sharing information about COVID-19, use only trusted sources. Stay alert, stay safe," said the Health Department. As many as 55 cases have been registered in the State for rumour-mongering.

A total of 2441 samples had been tested in the State

till Thursday morning. Of the 42 positive cases detected so far, while two had recovered and one had died, 39 COVID-19 cases were under treatment. A total of 91 persons were kept under hospital isolation.

While three testing laboratories – two at Bhubaneswar and one at Cuttack – are already functioning at present, the fourth facility will commence testing at the Institute of Life Sciences, Bhubaneswar next week.

### Farming allowed

Meanwhile, the State government has allowed farming operations for ongoing Kharif and preparatory activities for the coming Kharif season.

Harvesting of agricultural produce including fruits and vegetables and transportation to markets have been permitted without any restrictions by retailers and transporters.

## Dehradun daily wagers running out of food

'Saved rations will last three days'

PRISCILLA JEVARAJ  
NEW DELHI

and State governments are mulling an extension.

Chetna Andolan, a movement which includes a 7,000-strong informal workers' union, surveyed 282 families living in 14 slums or bastis on April 5 and 6.

They were asked how many days their food ration would last under the current circumstances where they were not receiving any wages.

### Lockdown extension

The COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown imposed to contain it have deprived most daily wage workers of their livelihood. As originally announced, the lockdown is supposed to last another week, till April 14, but the Centre

found that 128 families (45%) could not manage beyond three days, while 12 families (43%) said they could manage for another week. Only 33 families (12%) said that they would be able to cope for two more weeks.

## Ganjam starts 3-day mega health screening programme from today

Travel history of each citizen in the district will be checked

STAFF REPORTER  
BERHAMPUR

Health condition and travel history of all families in Odisha's Ganjam district would be checked through a three-day-long mega health screening programme to identify persons having symptoms related to COVID-19.

The programme will start from Thursday morning and end on April 11. It is the first district in the State to take up such a major health screening programme that will reach each and every citizen of the district. Ganjam is the most populous district in Odisha with around seven lakh families, having a population of around 40 lakh.

The programme will start from Thursday morning and end on April 11. It is the first district in the State to take up such a major health screening programme that will reach each and every citizen of the district. Ganjam is the most populous district in Odisha with around seven lakh families, having a population of around 40 lakh.

According to Ganjam Collector Vijay Amrutha Kulange, there will be extra

stress on locating persons with symptoms of cold, cough, fever along with information about those who have returned from abroad or other parts of the country. Such persons will be under focus of the administration. If needed, they will be tested for possible COVID-19 infection.

Till now, no COVID-19 positive case has been reported from Ganjam district. As per the official information, till now 761 persons have returned to the district from foreign countries. Similarly, 28,098 persons have returned to their homes in Ganjam from different States. These include migrant workers, who have returned from Kerala, Maharashtra and Gujarat.

## OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

### DEATH ANNIVERSARIES

#### FIRST ANNIVERSARY

We miss you every moment of our lives. You will forever live in our hearts and minds. We have the blessed hope that we will meet again.

Fondly remembered by wife – Stella Gnanaraj, children and grandchildren.

Dr.S.J.V. GNANARAJ M.D.  
Former Professor & H.O.D.,  
Department of Medicine,  
Madurai Medical College  
17-10-1939 to 09-04-2019

**DEATH**  
**OBITUARY**

**DR. P.D. JAGANNATHAN** Age: 86 yrs  
Passed away at 224B Ponniamman Kol Street, Urur, Adyar, Chennai-20 on 07.04.2020, at 10:30 PM  
Cremation was performed on 08.04.2020  
He is survived by his many Nieces, Nephews & Grandchildren.  
Meena Srivatsan Ph: 9840080124

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## Textile industry hit by slowdown, lockdown

Punjab govt. urged to provide concessions, including loan deferment, for survival

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHANDIGARH

Reeling under losses amid nationwide lockdown due to Covid-19 outbreak and economic slowdown, Punjab's textile industry has urged the State government to lend a helping hand to mitigate the problems of the industry.

Amritsar Textile Processor Association (ATPA) has written to State Industries Minister Sunder Sham Arora and pointed out that amid the economic slowdown and the lockdown the industry is unable to meet its expenses, including interest cost on term loan and working capital, instalments of term loan, statutory taxes, dilution in value of stock due to seasonal fashion trends, revenue losses due to low demand in



over a period of 12 months. Also, there should not be compulsion for payment of full salary-wages to employees from the employer for lockdown period," said Krishan Kumar Sharma, president ATPA.

Mr. Kumar said the association has also demanded the government not to impose anti-dumping duty on textile basic raw materials for a period of two years. "This is needed so that the user industry can avail the advantage of international decline in rates of key textile raw materials to be able to remain competitive," he said.

The textile processing units, which prepare dye and print fabrics are considered to be the backbone of nearly 700-800 textile factories that are involved in warp-knitting, woollen, embroidery, spinning and weaving. The closure of these processing units is apparently having a cascading effect on the textile business.

AN-ND-E

# Kerala experts for 3-phased easing of curbs

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

An expert committee headed by former Kerala Chief Secretary K.M. Abraham has recommended a phased relaxation of the lockdown to contain COVID-19 for areas outside the seven hotspot districts in the State from April 15.

"It should be borne in mind that the phased withdrawal is sustainable only if there is a steady recovery and decline in the number of cases leading to initial flattening of the infection curve and then gradual tapering of the curve to zero infection cases," the committee said.

It has asked the government to advise the people that in the event of a resurgence, they should be ready and willing to undergo the rigours of a complete lockdown once again.

## Phase I relaxation

For qualifying for Phase I relaxation, there has to be not

### Restrictions during 3 phases

PHASE I	Face mask compulsory for stepping out	Identity card must, travel purpose to be explained	Odd-even scheme for private vehicles
Ban on those above 65 with history of comorbidity from stepping out	Total clampdown on vehicle movement on Sunday	No flights, train services	No gathering of more than 5 persons
Govt. offices, banks may reopen with 50% attendance	One person per house can go outside for 3 hours	No entry of any person from outside the State	No religious congregations
Govt. offices, banks may reopen with 50% attendance	One person per house can go outside for 3 hours	No entry of any person from outside the State	Attendance at marriages, funerals to be 10
Autos, taxis may be allowed, but only one and three passengers respectively	Activities under MGNREGS, micro, small and medium enterprises begin	Supermarkets, malls, cinemas, bars to remain closed	
Bus travel for short distance within city or town with one person per seat	Inter-district bus transport with two-thirds capacity	Hostels, residential facilities may be opened	
Attendance at marriages and funerals to be 20	IT companies to open partially	Bevco may start online sale of liquor	
People may be permitted to walk for 30 minutes before 7.30 a.m.	Universities, schools, colleges open for exams	Entry into the State, should undergo 14-day quarantine	

more than one new case in the district for the entire week prior to the date of re-

view on April 14. No increase more than 10% of the number of persons under home

surveillance in the district and no hotspots of COVID-19 anywhere in the district as

identified by the Health Department are the other criteria fixed.

### Criteria for Phase II

A district will qualify for Phase II relaxation at the time of second review only if there is no more than one new case for the entire fortnight prior to the date of review. Not more than a 5% increase in the number of persons under home surveillance from the date of the previous review and no infection hotspots are the additional criteria.

### Phase III relaxation

A district will qualify for Phase III relaxation only if there is no new case of infection in that district for the fortnight prior to the date of review. Also, a decrease of more than 5% of the number of persons under home surveillance from the date of the previous review and no hotspots anywhere in the district are needed.

# Virus claims one life each in A.P., Karnataka

A.P. has 34 new cases & Karnataka 5; Kerala curve stabilising

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/VIJAYAWADA/BENGALURU

Andhra Pradesh reported one fatality and 34 new novel coronavirus cases on Wednesday, while in Karnataka, a 65-year-old resident of Kalaburagi succumbed to COVID-19, taking the toll in the State to five.

The district administration in Karnataka was working to trace the fruit vendor's infection trail. He had severe acute respiratory infection. A statement from the Deputy Commissioner of Kalaburagi said a team of police and doctors was inquiring.

A notice was served to Bahmani Hospital, where he was first admitted on April 4, as the hospital referred him to the government hospital only two days later. A case was booked against the management for criminal negligence, and the hospital's medical team was quarantined.

Briefing the media, Primary and Secondary Education Minister S. Suresh Kumar said 20 primary contacts of the person were traced and shifted to quarantine, and samples of close primary contacts were being taken. An effort was on trace secondary contacts.

On Wednesday, Karnataka recorded five more COVID-19 cases, taking the total to 181. They included one each from Uttara Karnataka, Kalaburagi, Mandya, Chikkaballapur and Bengaluru.

One was in contact with a person who had travelled to Dubai, and two others were contacts of positive patients. Two others had travelled to New Delhi.

The ambulance should have only the patient, one attendant, one paramedic along with the driver.

The department said 48% patients were in the 21-40 age group and 36% in the 41-60 age group, while 8% each were above 60 years and below 20 years.

### Nine new cases in Kerala

Kerala's COVID-19 case curve appeared to be stabilising, but it could not let up on the vigil or preparedness, the Chief Minister, Pinarayi Vijayan, said. The State's surveillance, testing, and pre-

### Spreading the word

Besides the government, people are also doing their bit to create awareness of COVID-19 among the public



**Virus on wheels:** Police officers join in as K. Sudhakar Yadav (not seen) drives his coronavirus-themed car on a road in Hyderabad on Wednesday. ■ NAGARA GOPAL

State	Total number of cases	Active cases	Number of those cured	Deaths
Andhra Pradesh	348	334	9	5
Karnataka	181	148	28	5
Kerala	345	259	84	2
Tamil Nadu	738	709	21	8
Telangana	453	397	45	11

34 new cases from seven districts, taking the tally to 348.

Three patients had recovered and were discharged in Visakhapatnam. Two of them, a 49-year-old woman and a 51-year-old man contracted the virus from contacts who returned from abroad. Guntur, Nellore and Krishna districts had eight, six and six fresh cases. Anantapur reported seven, the Health Department said.

### COVID-19

The department said 48% patients were in the 21-40 age group and 36% in the 41-60 age group, while 8% each were above 60 years and below 20 years.

### Seven A.P. districts

A 70-year-old man from Kalyandurg in Anantapur district became the fifth victim of COVID-19 in Andhra Pradesh and the State reported

actions such as equipping hospitals, finding isolation rooms, stockpiling Personal Protection Equipment, drugs, ventilators would continue at the same pace, regardless of case numbers, he told the media on Wednesday.

Nine cases of COVID-19 were reported on Wednesday in the State. Four were those who had returned from abroad, two were linked to the Jamaat meeting in Delhi and three were contacts of imported cases.

Of the nine, four were in Kannur, two in Alappuzha, and one each from Kasaragod, Pathanamthitta and Thrissur. Mr. Vijayan said the State had identified 212 individuals who travelled to Nizamuddin, of whom 15 tested positive.

In Telangana, an official State bulletin on Wednesday said the total number of cases in the State were 453 of which 397 were active and 45 treated and discharged.

### WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



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

**Forecast for Thursday:** Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning and squall likely at isolated places over Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	0.4...32.2...	25.0	24.2	Kozhikode	—	36.0...	26.4
Ahmedabad	—	38.7...	24.2	Kurnool	1.7...	39.1...	23.8
Aizawl	—	29.7...	—	Lucknow	—	37.3...	21.8
Allahabad	0.2...	39.3...	20.0	Madurai	—	39.6...	27.3
Bengaluru	—	30.2...	21.0	Mangalore	3.8...	35.6...	20.4
Bhopal	—	38.3...	21.2	Mumbai	—	32.5...	23.2
Bhubaneswar	—	38.7...	21.0	Mysuru	—	31.4...	23.3
Chandigarh	0.3...	30.7...	16.1	New Delhi	—	34.2...	19.0
Chennai	—	34.0...	28.7	Patna	—	38.5...	20.4
Coimbatore	—	35.7...	24.2	Port Blair	—	33.6...	25.3
Dehradun	—	30.8...	15.5	Puducherry	—	34.6...	27.6
Gangtok	2.6...	20.4...	12.7	Pune	—	35.9...	16.4
Goa	—	34.3...	24.8	Raipur	—	38.5...	24.2
Guwahati	—	33.9...	19.6	Ranchi	—	35.8...	18.4
Hubballi	—	36.0...	21.0	Shillong	—	27.0...	19.0
Hyderabad	0.1...	38.0...	24.1	Shimla	1.4...	17.4...	7.7
Imphal	1.6...	29.9...	17.0	Srinagar	—	17.6...	10.0...
Jaipur	—	36.0...	21.8	Thiruvananthapuram	—	33.7...	26.2
Kochi	—	32.0...	25.6	Tiruchi	—	39.9...	27.6
Kohima	—	22.6...	17.0	Vijayawada	—	34.2...	28.0
Kolkata	—	35.5...	25.9	Visakhapatnam	—	—	—

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

**Pollutants in the air you are breathing** Yesterday

CITIES	SO <sub>2</sub>	NO <sub>x</sub>	CO	PM <sub>2.5</sub>	PM <sub>10</sub>	CODE
Ahmedabad	44	20	18	65	91	...
Bengaluru	05	09	38	—	—	■■■
Chennai	03	13	38	49	—	■■■
Delhi	24	16	13	80	112	■■■
Hyderabad	04	13	19	34	45	■■■
Kolkata	10	12	24	38	53	■■■
Lucknow	04	21	54	123	—	■■■
Mumbai	04	17	05	65	118	■■■
Pune	32	31	44	73	38	■■■
Visakhapatnam	08	29	06	13	29	...

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)  
SO<sub>2</sub>: Sulphur dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO<sub>x</sub>: Nitrogen dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

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

PM<sub>2.5</sub> & PM<sub>10</sub>: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease.

# Ambulances allowed to enter Karnataka

Three vehicles from Kasaragod that complied with norms were allowed to ply

ANIL KUMAR SAstry

MANGALURU



## For better use

While taking over MPLADS funds to fight the virus, Centre must allocate judiciously

The suspension of the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) for two years to boost the funding available for the COVID-19 fight is a step in the right direction. It may appear at first blush that the decision may undermine the decentralised manner of funding local area development. However, past experience has been that some members do not utilise their full entitlement and that there is a gap between recommendation made by members and implementation by the administration under this scheme. The immediate benefit now is the freeing up of about ₹7,900 crore over a two-year period so that it can be spent on boosting the health infrastructure needed to combat the pandemic. This is the second announcement regarding MPLADS that the Centre has made after the disease outbreak. Last month, it allowed utilisation of MPLADS funds to the extent of at least ₹5 lakh by each MP to purchase medical equipment for government hospitals in their constituencies. Many members made immediate use of the one-time dispensation to recommend the procurement of N95 masks, personal protective equipment, and ventilators. Now that the entire scheme has been suspended, the government should ensure that recommendations already made are acted upon immediately. While the transfer of these sums to the Consolidated Fund of India would help judicious deployment anywhere in the country, based on an assessment of the varying needs in different regions, it would redound to the government's credit if the genuine efforts made by members to help their constituents are not frustrated. It should also see to it that allocations are non-discriminatory.

Political reactions indicate that there is considerable disenchantment over the suspension – the ₹5-crore corpus available to each member is a source of much goodwill for elected representatives. Better performing MPs identify and fulfil local development needs with empathy and alacrity. However, there has also been persistent criticism about the scheme's very nature. A conceptual flaw pointed out by experts is that it goes against the separation of powers. It allows individual legislators to encroach on the planning and implementation duties of the administration. Jurists have pointed out that the Constitution does not confer the power to spend public money on an individual legislator. Experts have called it out for weak monitoring. The Supreme Court, while declining to strike down the scheme, called for a robust accountability regime. MPLADS gives scope for MPs to utilise the funds as a source of patronage that they can dispense at will. The CAG has flagged instances of financial mismanagement and inflation of amounts spent. The Second Administrative Reforms Commission recommended its abrogation altogether, highlighting the problems of the legislator stepping into the shoes of the executive. The current suspension gives some scope for a reconsideration of the scheme in its totality.

## Prolonged injustice

Mehbooba Mufti's continued detention in J&K is hard to defend morally and politically

It has been eight months since the Centre revoked the special constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir and downgraded and divided it into two Union Territories in August 2019. Several political leaders imprisoned in the wake of the abrupt decision continue to be in detention even now, the most prominent among them being the former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti. Two other former CMs – Farooq Abdullah and Omar Abdullah – were released last month. Freedom for Ms. Mufti is still not near, the administration indicated on Tuesday as it shifted her from a guesthouse-turned-jail to her official residence that has been designated as a subsidiary jail. She will not be allowed to move out of here or receive visitors, and remains in detention under the controversial Public Safety Act (PSA). Hundreds of others including veteran Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) leader Naeem Akhtar and IAS-officer-turned-politician Shah Faesal continue to languish in jail. The manner in which the Centre hollowed out Article 370 and dismantled a State set an inglorious precedent in the history of Indian federalism. The lockdown of J&K was mostly lifted, before it was reimposed to combat COVID-19. Meanwhile, the constitutionality of the revocation of the special status and accompanying restrictions on the entire population of a region remains untested before the Supreme Court, eight months on.

Ms. Mufti's home imprisonment, at a time when the entire population is expected to lock themselves up in their own homes, is the theatre of the absurd. Her continuing incarceration even after two other former CMs have been freed is inexplicable. What is it that makes her an exceptional suspect under the PSA? The change in the status of J&K and the massive deployment of force to deal with its aftermath were spectacles of a new national resolve, according to the supporters of those decisions. The unfolding tragedy of the pandemic bespeaks the pitfalls of lopsided priorities, by laying bare the country's inadequate health-care infrastructure. J&K is badly hit by the disease, with a fightback restricted by the absence of an elected government. The havoc by the virus should not be used as a facade to trample upon civil rights or to criminalise expression of opinion. If anything, this unprecedented crisis should spur fresh thinking on finding solutions to intractable political problems. The BJP's view on Kashmir is as old the party itself. But that by itself is no reason to avoid revisiting the issue. The very least it can do, however, is to immediately free Ms. Mufti. That will be a good signal to the people of J&K during these tough times.

# Needed, greater decentralisation of power

Even as States have taken up positions of leadership in the pandemic response, federal limitations are becoming hurdles



SUHRITH PARTHASARATHY

Over the course of the last few weeks, as we have found ourselves in the throes of a pandemic, one of the striking features of governance has been the signal role played by State Chief Ministers across India. Even before the Union government invoked the Disaster Management Act, 2005, many State governments triggered the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, and installed a series of measures to combat what was then an oncoming onslaught of COVID-19. These actions have not always been perfect. Some of them have even disproportionately entrenched upon basic civil liberties. But, by and large, they have been tailored to the reality faced on the ground by the respective governments. States such as Maharashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, and Karnataka have shaped their policies to address their direct, local concerns. They have communicated these decisions to the public with clarity and consideration, helping, in the process, to lay out a broad framework for the nation. In doing so, they have acted not merely as "laboratories of democracy", to paraphrase the former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, but also as founts of reasoned authority.

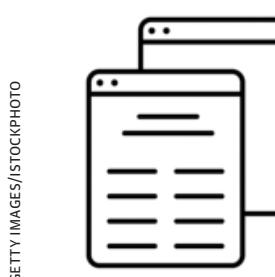
### Stifled by limitations

Equally, though, as much as State governments have taken up positions of leadership, they have repeatedly found themselves throttled by the limitations of the extant federal arrangement. Yamini Aiyar and Mekhala Krishnamurthy of the Centre for Policy Research have pointed out at least three

specific limitations. One, the inability of States to access funds and thereby structure their own welfare packages. Two, the curbs imposed by a public finance management system that is mired in officialdom. This has prevented States from easily and swiftly making payments for the purchase of health-care apparatus such as ventilators and personal protective equipment. Three, the colossal disruption of supply chains not only of essential goods and services but also of other systems of production and distribution, which has placed States in a position of grave economic uncertainty. As Ms. Aiyar and Ms. Krishnamurthy argue, these limitations demonstrate an urgent need to decentralise administration, where States – and local bodies acting through such governments – are allowed greater managerial freedom. Under such a model, the Union government will command less but coordinate more.

### Two distinct levels

There are varying accounts of what Indian federalism truly demands. But what is manifest from a reading of the Constitution is that it creates two distinct levels of government: one at the Centre and the other at each of the States. The Seventh Schedule to the Constitution divides responsibilities between these two layers. The Union government is tasked with matters of national importance, such as foreign affairs, defence, and airways. But the responsibilities vested with the States are no less important. Issues concerning public health and sanitation, agriculture, public order, and police, among other things, have each been assigned to State governments. In these domains, the States' power is plenary. This federal architecture is fortified by a bicameral Parliament. Significantly, this bicameralism is not achieved through a simple demarcation of two sepa-



rate houses, but through a creation of two distinct chambers that choose their members differently: a House of the People [Lok Sabha] comprising directly elected representatives and a Council of States [Rajya Sabha] comprising members elected by the legislatures of the States.

In formulating this scheme of equal partnership, the framers were also conscious of a need to make States financially autonomous. To that end, when they divided the power to tax between the two layers of government they took care to ensure that the authority of the Union and the States did not overlap. Therefore, while the Centre, for example, was accorded the power to tax all income other than agricultural income and to levy indirect taxes in the form of customs and excise duties, the sole power to tax the sale of goods and the entry of goods into a State was vested in the State governments. The underlying rationale was simple: States had to be guaranteed fiscal dominion to enable them to mould their policies according to the needs of their people.

Despite this plainly drawn arrangement, the history of our constitutional practice has been something of a paradox. It is invariably at the level of the States that real development has fructified, but the Union has repeatedly displayed a desire to treat States, as the Supreme Court said in *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India*, as mere "appendages of the Centre". Time and again, efforts have been made

to centralise financial and administrative power, to take away from the States their ability to act independently and freely.

As Christophe Jaffrelot and San-skruh Kalyankar have shown, as Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi rallied against these attempts. So much so that an undertaking to decentralise power and steer a new era of Centre-State cooperation became a leitmotif of the Bharatiya Janata Party's campaign for the 2014 elections. Among other things, in its manifesto, the party promised to create a "Team India" that will "not be limited to the Prime Minister led team sitting in Delhi," but that "will also include Chief Ministers and other functionaries as equal partners"; to place "centre-state relations on an even keel"; and to "ensure fiscal autonomy of the States".

### Matters of finance

Some efforts have no doubt been made to this end. But they have been ostensible, at best. Consider the widely hailed decision to accept the 14th Finance Commission's recommendation for an increase in the share of the States in total tax revenues from 32% to 42%. While, in theory, this ought to have enabled the States to significantly increase their own spending, in reality, as a paper authored by Amar Nath H.K. and Alka Singh of the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy suggests, this has not happened. Gains made by the States, as the paper underlines, have been entirely offset by a simultaneous decline in share of grants and by a concomitant increase in the States' own contribution towards expenditures on centrally sponsored schemes.

Other measures have proved still more destructive. Notably, the creation of a Goods and Services Tax regime, which far from achieving its core purpose of uniformity

has rendered nugatory the internal sovereignty vested in the States. By striking at the Constitution's federal edifice, it has made the very survival of the States dependent on the grace of the Union. The tension today is so palpable that a number of States are reported to have written to the Union Finance Ministry highlighting that more than four months' worth of Goods and Services Tax compensation to the States – reportedly totalling about a sum of ₹40,000 crore – remains unreleased.

The Union government's centralising instinct, though, has not been restricted to matters of finance. It has also introduced a slew of legislation as money bills, in a bid to bypass the Rajya Sabha's sanction, even though these laws scarcely fit the constitutional definition. Similarly, the role of the Governors has been weaponised to consolidate political power. But perhaps most egregious among the moves made is the gutting of Article 370 and the division of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories without securing consent from the State Legislative Assembly.

To be sure, this impulse to appropriate authority is not in any way unique to the Bharatiya Janata Party's command. Congress-led governments of the past have also been susceptible to such motives. But perhaps a crisis of the kind that COVID-19 has wrought will show us that India needs greater decentralisation of power; that administration through a single central executive unit is unsuited to its diverse and heterogeneous polity. We cannot continue to regard the intricate niceties of our federal structure as a nettlesome trifle. In seeing it thus, we are reducing the promise of Article 1 of the Constitution, of an India that is a Union of States, to an illusory dream.

Suhrit Parthasarathy is an advocate practising at the Madras High Court

# A key arsenal in rural India's pandemic fight

With migrant labour back in their hometowns, gram panchayats can strengthen containment measures in the interiors



SONUBAL I.V.

If you build a fortress to strengthen your defences against an enemy, what is of importance is the strength of its walls. The issue of space or comfort within the fortress is the last question one may dare to ask or even think about, apart from the minimum supplies required for sustenance. But what if the enemy is a virus?

With the ongoing war against COVID-19, it is the exact opposite which needs equal if not greater attention – the state of preparedness within the fortress. Yes. With the ubiquitous 21-day national lockdown unprecedented in the history of independent India, stronger and harsher than anywhere else in the world, the interiors within the boundaries need attention.

### Ground realities

Interestingly, every village is in itself a fortress during these difficult times and every village needs attention within. With the influx of thousands of migrant labourers into their villages, there is an imminent need to isolate them for at least 14 days. Unfortunately, the houses here, which are often one or two-room dwellings, with an average seven family members to accommodate, are some of the worst places where one can hope to contain the deadly disease. Along with the absence of running water within households, the possibility of

common points in village arenas becoming hotspots for this deadly contagion becomes manifold.

Notwithstanding the fact that the entire State machinery is now involved in near wartime efforts to contain the spread of this pandemic, only a few States have been able to organically involve their foundational governance structure – i.e. gram panchayats – very effectively and efficiently in this situation. In some southern States with pre-embedded conditions of self-governing and nearly autonomous panchayats, they are becoming the beacons of hope by proactively engaging with citizens at the village level. A case in point is the community kitchens run by local bodies in Kerala, where home delivery of cooked food is spiking as the situation demands.

Enough has been discussed already of the instrumental use of panchayats as mere wings of State administration. Issuing orders from the top is the norm and an ecosystem has evolved where even the elected representatives of panchayats wait for directions and a sarpanch does not assert himself before a bureaucrat. It would be surprising, therefore, if such a conditioned institution, originally envisioned to be the pivot of self-sustaining villages, creatively thinks of dealing with this pandemic. But the time has arrived, to reinvigorate these institutions of people and facilitate them to be the proactive agents in this fight. Many scientists and researchers have already predicted the possibility of villages becoming hotspots of the disease after the 21-day lockdown is lifted. Though geographical spread may be limited, the concentration of the spread



may get out of hand. It is here that gram panchayats which are very well placed, and close to their own people with limited resources, can help them in enforcing isolation and making the necessary arrangements. Panchayats can work exactly in three areas: awareness generation, setting up isolation conditions, and streamlining social security measures announced by the Central and State governments.

### Reaching out effectively

First, a model needs to be established, with concrete standard operating procedures and best practices that can be replicated throughout rural India. Organisations such as Professional Assistance For Development Action (PRADAN) have been trying to influence gram panchayats and district administrations in many States ever since the pandemic. With sustained engagement, they have been able to coordinate with the administration to use the resources of panchayats, collaborate with self-help groups, and to set isolation conditions within village premises (with beds, sanitiser, drinking water, cooked meals, etc.) in many interior blocks across the districts in central and eastern India. Involving pan-

chayats – and by observing adequate safety measures – to establish isolation facilities across the length and breadth of the country is the need of the hour.

Consider the second part, even with the harvesting of wheat almost over in States such as Madhya Pradesh; people are still out in the fields, but once they are done with their work it is the panchayat that can do the work effectively to confine people within their homes with adequate awareness generation. The police cannot reach out to each and every village round the clock because of their inadequate resources. Community policing with the active engagement of panchayats, by collaborating with women's collectives, is a potential area where a people-led movement can be kick-started in a short time span. Who can make the people aware better than their own elected representatives and who the villagers see on a daily basis?

Finally, despite the financial packages being rolled out to avert panic and worry about livelihoods and basic food requirements, it is an inexorable situation that many will be left out as documentation is core to availing these social-service provisioning schemes. The Jandhan-Aadhaar-Mobile trinity is vulnerable in those areas where even mobile connectivity fluctuates, leave alone Internet connectivity. Without the active engagement of panchayats, it would be chaotic to even expect everything remaining under control within villages in case of even a minor disturbance. A seminal understanding developed is that, without the agency of gram panchayats, it is not possible to deploy any system effectively and to ade-

quately take prompt actions to include the excluded.

With a package of ₹1.7-lakh crore to meet the needs of the population and streamlining health services, it is clear that the government is trying its best; with more volunteers and social commitment through raising resources, civil society organisations are trying their best; with pledges of financial support and donations, concerned citizens and industry players are also trying their best. There have been enough ideas floated, proposed and implemented – from food to using railway coaches as isolation wards. But reinvigorating panchayats is an unattended area which needs a push in strengthening the arsenal available in this fight against COVID-19.

Directions to gram panchayats to use the 14th Finance Commission grants to help villagers is a welcome measure, already done by various State governments. But laying stress on three actions specifically – arranging isolation facilities with cooked meal supply; awareness generation, and finally, ensuring that the most vulnerable have access to the welfare measures announced – is crucial if rural India is to be saved. It is time for panchayats to exercise their agency. For this, thrust is needed from top layer of administration – a direction that will help the nation fight this deadly virus. With enough political will, and a changed perspective of executive machineries, it is totally possible. It is time to unleash the power of panchayats to be with the people and lead this fight.

Sonubal I.V. is with the PRADAN - Bhoura Team at Betul, Madhya Pradesh

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

### Caving in

It is alarming that U.S. President Donald Trump threatened India with retaliation if it refused to export hydroxychloroquine. And, rather than ensuring first that the drug was adequately available for Indians back home, Prime Minister Narendra Modi caved in to pressure. Perhaps, he could have taken a leaf out of the book of former Prime Ministers. Back in 1971, Indira Gandhi did not yield to President Richard Nixon and went on

to declare war on Pakistan, liberating Bangladesh. In 2003, veteran Bharatiya Janata Party leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee withheld international pressure and refrained from sending Indian troops to aid the U.S. during the Iraq invasion.

ADRIAN DAVID,  
Chennai

### Ending the lockdown

India must plan for a calibrated and calculated exit from the lockdown. Indeed, oiling the wheels of the economy without causing a surge in cases is

going to be a challenge for the government (Editorial, "Preparing for exit," April 8). Therefore, identifying hot spots and selectively implementing a lockdown in those places can be a useful step. But, with the low number of cumulative tests done and low testing rates in the country, even now, it is not clear how well hot spots can be identified. The total number of tests done in various States differs considerably now.

Perhaps, these differences may get amplified in some instances, if per capita testing rates are considered. If a State shows a low number of cases, in part because of a lower number of total tests, can the lockdown be removed? Or, what about the State which shows a higher number of cases because of a high testing rate? Won't lifting a lockdown amount to penalising the State for being aggressive in testing?

A. VENKATASUBRAMANIAN,  
Tiruchi, Tamil Nadu

■ The challenges in preparing for an end to lockdown are multifold. The

country needs to be prepared for rabi harvest, massive procurement effort is needed by governments at the Centre and States to procure food grains, and manufacturing processes need to be restarted. Each of these is a Herculean task. For a greater push to local manufacturing, the societal anxiety caused by the spread

of the virus in the country has to be brought down. The administration needs a foolproof plan to bring migrant labourers back to production hubs while maintaining norms of social distancing.

S.S. PAUL,  
Chakdaha, Nadia, West Bengal

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:  
A Business page story headline ("Tata AIA Life to provide extra cover" (April 7, 2020)) should be corrected to "Tata AIA Life to provide additional benefit". The error was in the text of the story as well.

The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

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of the virus in the country has to be brought down. The administration needs a foolproof plan to bring migrant labourers back to production hubs while maintaining norms of social distancing.  
S.S. PAUL,  
Chakdaha, Nadia, West Bengal



# Financing the pandemic rescue package

The govt. must issue GDP-linked bonds, tap the excess liquidity of PSUs, and monetise non-core assets



NANDINI VIJAYARAGHAVAN

The priority for India is to ensure that it overcomes the COVID-19 pandemic and kick-starts GDP growth rather than fix the weaknesses in the macroeconomy: a high fiscal deficit of 7.49% and government indebtedness that was 69% of GDP in 2019.

When COVID-19 cases began to increase, the Government of India (GoI) swung into action by announcing a 21-day national lockdown and a ₹1.7-lakh crore (approximately \$22.59 billion) rescue package. Available in the state disaster relief fund is ₹60,000 crore, comprising ₹30,000 crore of outstanding balance and the Central government's allocation of a similar amount for FY2021. Hence, the GoI needs to raise an additional ₹1.1-lakh crore, i.e., 65% of the rescue package outlay. Its financing strategy should be to raise long-term funds at cost effective rates, with flexible repayment terms that allow it to take tactical advantage of market movements.

#### GDP-linked bonds

The GoI may issue listed, Indian rupee denominated, 25-year GDP-linked bonds that are callable from, say, the fifth year. The coupon (interest) on a GDP-linked bond is correlated to the GDP growth rate and is subject to a cap. The issuer, the GoI, is liable to pay a lower coupon during years of slower growth and vice-versa. The callable feature from the fifth year till maturity allows the GoI to effect partial repayments during high growth years and when it earns non-recurring revenues such as proceeds from disinvestment of public sector enterprises (PSEs). The listing of bonds provides investors an exit option. Costa Rica, Bulgaria and Bosnia-Herzegovina issued the first pure GDP-linked bonds in the 1990s. Argentina and Greece issued warrant-like instruments similar to GDP-linked bonds in 2005 and 2012 respectively. India could learn from their experience.

Publishing reliable and timely GDP data is a prerequisite for the suc-

#### Funds that can be tapped

The government can mandate public sector enterprises to transfer their non-core properties to a holding company

Amount as on March 31, 2019 (₹ crore)

Name of the Central PSE	Financial investments	Cash & cash equivalents	Non-operating assets	Statutory payments due
ONGC	33,860	4,106	43,515	5,094
Coal India	2,709	2,276	35,477	6,204
BPCL	6,818	414	17,109	3,881
NTPC	-	244	3,036	501
IOC	32,034	933	36,982	7,681
GAIL	10,626	297	13,544	454
Power Grid	4,858	3,648	16,264	308
Bharat Electronics	834	760	1,850	108
Container Corporation of India	1,172	129	1,475	-
MIDHANI	2	140	200	0
RITES	120	169	1,452	3
SAIL	135	66	1,041	-
BHEL	3	796	7,747	1,311
NMDC	-	46	4,774	154
IRCON International	391	892	3,516	206
<b>Total</b>	<b>93,562</b>	<b>14,914</b>	<b>1,87,983</b>	<b>25,904</b>

Source: CPSEs FY2019 annual reports and analyst calculations

cessful issue of GDP-linked bonds, which the GoI may use to part-finance the COVID-19 rescue package and to diversify its borrowing sources.

#### Streamlining PSEs

The 15 largest non-financial central PSEs (CPSEs) in the S&P BSE CPSE index contributed approximately 75% of the GoI's ₹48,256.41 crore dividend income from PSEs in FY2020. The Union Budget projected PSE dividends to increase by 36.25% to ₹65,746.96 crore in FY2021. This milestone is unlikely to be achieved in the current environment.

The 15 CPSEs have accumulated sizeable non-core assets including financial investments, loans, cash and bank deposits in excess of their operating requirements, and real estate. The return on these assets (excluding real estate) is around 200 basis points lower than the returns on their core businesses. These CPSEs owe the government ₹25,904 crore as of end-March 2019. These non-core assets must be monetised to repay statutory dues and upstream dividends to GoI.

While loans and excess cash and bank deposits may be monetised within three months, streamlining investments and selling real estate is

a time-consuming process. It is imperative for the GoI to form a PSE and public sector bank holding company ('Holdco') along the lines of Singapore's Temasek Holdings and Malaysia's Khazanah Nasional Berhad to enable PSEs to monetise their non-core assets at remunerative prices, maximise their enterprise value and focus on their core businesses.

The ₹30,168 crore loans that CPSEs have extended to employees, vendors and associates may be securitised or refinanced, with CPSEs guaranteeing loans extended to weak counterparties.

The 15 CPSEs have accumulated ₹93,562 crore financial investments comprising listed and unlisted debt, equity and mutual fund units. These exclude investments in associates

and joint ventures. The CPSEs ought to transfer these investments to Holdco, which can manage the portfolio and transfer the returns to the original investors.

One important non-core asset, whose value is likely to exceed the combined value of other non-core assets, is the real estate holdings of PSEs. In September 2018, the GoI identified properties of nine PSEs (Air India, Pawan Hans, Hindustan Fluorocarbons, Hindustan Newsprint, Bharat Pumps & Compressors, Scooters India, Bridge and Roof Co, Hindustan Prefab, and Projects & Development India) to be divested. The GoI must mandate all PSEs and government departments to transfer their non-core properties to Holdco, which can opportunistically sell these properties and transfer the proceeds to the owners.

#### RBI dividends

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has allocated ₹1 lakh crore to carry out long-term repo operations in tranches and has reduced the repo rates by 75 basis points to 4.4% to help banks augment their liquidity in the wake of the pandemic. Recognising the RBI's liquidity requirements, the GoI must refrain from asking the RBI to pay more dividends than it can viably pay. During the five years ending on June 30, 2019, the RBI paid the GoI 100% of its net disposable income, with its FY2019 dividends more than trebling to ₹1.76 lakh crore from ₹50,000 crore in FY2018. The Bimal Jalan panel constituted in 2019 to review the RBI's economic capital framework opined that the RBI may pay interim dividends only under exceptional circumstances and that unrealised gains in the valuation of RBI's assets ought to be used as risk buffers against market risks and may not be paid as dividends.

This sound recommendation must be adhered to in letter and spirit. The GoI may finance the COVID-19 rescue package by issuing GDP-linked bonds, tapping PSEs' excess liquidity and monetising non-core assets. Further, it is in India's self-interest to allow a robust and independent RBI to defend the financial sector's stability.

Nandini Vijayaraghavan is the Singapore-based Head of Research at Korea Development Bank. Views are personal

## It's time for the Red Berets

The world needs a special UN force to fight COVID-19

T.P. SREENIVASAN

Tation will be much more. Only a UN force which can enforce social distancing and lockdowns can prevent a catastrophe.

Most Chapter VII resolutions determine the existence of a threat to the peace, a breach of the peace, or an act of aggression in accordance with Article 39, and make a decision explicitly under Chapter VII. A UNSC Resolution is considered to be a Chapter VII resolution if it makes an explicit determination that the situation under consideration constitutes a threat to the peace, a breach of the peace, or an act of aggression, and/or explicitly/ implicitly states that the UNSC is acting under Chapter VII in the adoption of some or all operative paragraphs.

#### Many resolutions

Chapter VII resolutions are very rarely isolated measures. Often the first response to a crisis is a resolution demanding the crisis be ended. This is later followed by an actual resolution detailing the measures required to secure compliance with the first resolution. Sometimes dozens of resolutions are passed over time to modify and extend the mandate of the first Chapter VII resolution.

The UN stands discredited today as the UNSC has not been able to meet. It may take place, now that China has vacated the Security Council chair and Dominican Republic has taken over. Several resolutions are in circulation, but none under Chapter VII. The first step will be to pass a resolution to take action to end the crisis and authorise the Secretary General to request member states to make personnel available. Meanwhile, another resolution must spell out the modalities of the operation.

The UN peacekeeping forces are called Blue Berets because of the colour of the caps that they wear. The health force can have caps of another colour, probably red. The launch of the Red Berets will be a historic action to be taken at a critical moment. The UN's relevance will be established and there will be concrete action taken to end the pandemic.

T.P. Sreenivasan, a former diplomat, is Director General, Kerala International Centre, Thiruvananthapuram. He tweets @sreeniv

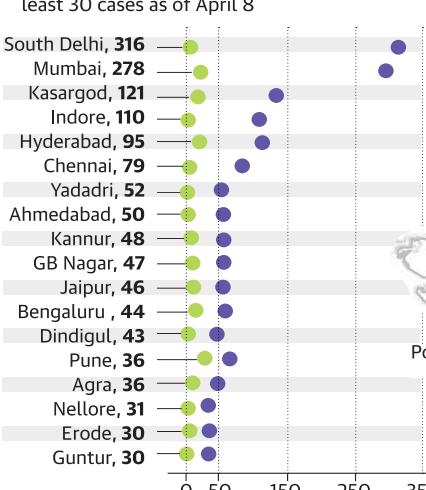


#### DATA POINT

## Spreading thick and fast

#### 1. RAPID RISE

The graph plots the number of COVID-19 cases in 18 districts as of March 23 ● and April 8 ●. The number in bold in the graphic indicates the increase in cases in the period. These 18 districts have recorded at least 30 cases as of April 8.



South Delhi recorded a rise of 316 cases in this period, the highest among all the districts, followed by Mumbai (278 more cases in the period) and Kasargod (121 more cases).

Source: Central Health Ministry website

From Kargil in the north to Kanyakumari in the south, and from Porbandar in the west to Lohit in the Northeast, 284 Indian districts have at least one COVID-19 case as of April 8. About 15 days ago, on March 23, there were only 84 such districts.

By The Hindu Data Team

## No lockdown for abuse

Both formal and informal means of support can be extended to women facing domestic violence now



AKSHAYA VIJAYALAKSHMI & PRITHA DEV

down due to the pandemic is leading to a substantial negative income shock for everyone. In our interviews with unorganised sector workers, we often heard that women suffered domestic violence coupled with the husband's alcoholism. The NFHS data also show a high correlation between alcohol intake and domestic violence. Keeping in mind that access to alcohol may be limited in these times, frustration could also lead to abuse.

#### What can be done?

The most important thing that we can do is to acknowledge and accept that domestic violence happens and work to reduce the stigma attached to the victims of such violence. Such support may prompt abused women to seek at least informal means to redress their issues. The NCW has appealed to women to reach out to their nearest police stations or call the State Women's Commission for support. While this is the least that can be done, there are some other formal means by which we can extend help to women right now. The provision of cash transfers and ration support are likely to sustain the family and also reduce stress in the household leading to lower violence against women. Since the lockdown began, the amount of TV viewing, particularly of news, has increased. Coupled with a lack of other activity, this is an opportune time to improve messaging. The NCW could increase its advertising expenditure on TV to relay messages requesting women to contact the police station for help. The 181 helpline number set up for this reason should remain active, and women should be reminded of this number via TV ads. The government could also send mass SMS messages as it did during the onset of the COVID-19 crisis as most women have access to at least a basic phone.

The French government has extended monetary support to organisations fighting this crime. British activists have requested their government to release emergency funds to support organisations that are dealing with domestic violence-related issues. The Indian government should also extend monetary support to such organisations in India rather than rely entirely on ASHA workers on whom the burden of community welfare is already very high. The staff of such organisations should be allowed to travel without being stopped by the police.

Studies show that women more than men tend to be affected adversely during epidemics. We need to take these advisories seriously to prevent further widening of the rift between men and women in our society.

Akshaya Vijayalakshmi and Pritha Dev are faculty members at the IIM-Ahmedabad

The Hindu

## FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 9, 1970

### Airlift of Post Cards to be Stopped

The Union Government is stated to have taken a decision in principle to stop airlifting of post cards. The actual date of implementing the proposal will be finalized soon. It is learnt that this decision follows a recommendation made by an economy subcommittee set up by the Ministry of Communications to go into the whole structure of post card operation. A post card actually costs 14 Paise for the Government, as against its price of 10 Paise. On post cards alone the department is making a loss of over Rs. 4 crores. The position was worse two years ago when the post card was selling at six Paise. At one stage, Government also considered the possibility of abolishing the post card altogether but since it is used by the poorer section of the community, the proposal was dropped. The economy subcommittee which consisted of top officials of the P and T Department has also suggested that the price of the inland letter should be the same as that of an envelope i.e. 20 Paise. The inland letter, it is stated, serves the same purpose as a letter by guaranteeing the same amount of secrecy. The Government is considering this suggestion too and a decision is expected to be taken shortly.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 9, 1920

### Civilized vandalism.

Mr. Lodd Govindoss writes: While attempts are being made to improve the health of the city by means of educating the people on the importance of health, sanitation, etc., by the Health and Welfare Association on the one hand, proposals are being made to create more and more congestion in the city of Madras by constructing houses everywhere, by depriving the people from enjoying free and fresh air and by converting open spaces available for inhaling pure air on the other. It is an admitted fact that we require large open spaces not only for maintaining good health but also to prevent diseases, particularly those due to respiratory organs such as the Pukka Tuberculosis and the most dreadful and horrible Meningitis. Just as we require good and strong lungs, the city also requires lungs. But our plans are now centred at creating congestion, which is bound to produce the very kind of lung diseases which we want to prevent. It is not merely the big house that contributes towards the health of the individual but it is the surrounding sanitary conditions that enliven and invigorate the health.

FROM PAGE ONE

## Not possible to lift the lockdown in one go: PM

Among those who supported an extension of the lockdown were the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP).

TRS president and Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao has earlier advised Mr. Modi to extend the lockdown.

SP Rajya Sabha member Ramgopal Yadav said the lockdown should continue till the last patient affected by the novel coronavirus is cured.

LJP president Chirag Paswan recommended that while the lockdown should continue in urban areas, it should be eased in villages where farmers are in the process of harvesting the rabi crops.

Many parties flagged that the economic package announced by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on March 26 is insufficient.

Mr. Azad said the Congress recommended that the MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) be extended to harvesting activities.

**Tablighi Jamaat event**  
NCP president Sharad Pawar raised the issue of 'communalisation' of the battle against COVID-19. He said that while the Delhi Tablighi Jamaat congregation at the

## Focus shifts to contact tracing, infrastructure

The Health Ministry said there was no shortage of drugs. "The whole situation [of hydroxychloroquine] is being monitored at the highest level; it is being ensured that there will be no shortage... Currently, this is being used for a very small section of the population," he said.

Punya Srivastav, Joint Secretary, Home Ministry, said community leaders were being drafted for spreading

## Escaping quarantine at night, returning by day

"Yes, it is difficult to stay at these stinking quarantine centres even for 24 hours," rued a *mukhia* in Siwan district. "The government should have first developed infrastructure in government schools and panchayat bhawans before converting them as quarantine centres," he added. "If the government really wanted to quarantine the migrants why didn't they put them up at Patna's newly constructed convention centres with capacity for thousands of people... given the facilities inside those places no migrants would have slipped away from there."

Another village head from Saharsa district remarked, "The government has asked us to monitor the quarantined migrants' movements but we feel helpless in checking their movement some times under local pressure." More-

over, how can we ask them to stay put in such hellish conditions at government schools, where swarms of mosquitoes start hovering overhead at dusk," he added.

However, at some other places in the State the village heads are getting support from the villagers themselves to restrict the movement of those quarantined. "Along with the villagers, I keep strict vigil on their movement and ensure that they do not come out of the centres," said Ram Kumar Yadav, village head of Sirpur panchayat in Madhubani district.

And at Mabbi village, in Samastipur district, 18 quarantined migrants have found their own family members not only repeatedly rejecting their requests to be allowed to return home but also keeping a strict vigil on their movement.

## U.P. to seal virus hotspots in 15 districts

Mr. Awasthi, then in the official government briefing, clarified that the total lockdown would be enforced in only the hotspots.

However, by the time his statement arrived, people had already started queuing up outside shops, ration stores and medical stores to purchase essential items. Panic buying was reported even from areas which did not feature among the list of hotspots as the government did not announce the names.

Many people who

## Ambedkar birthday will be a holiday

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) on Wednesday declared April 14, 2020, birthday of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a "closed holiday" for all Central government offices, including industrial establishments, throughout India.

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet on Tuesday extended the tenures of officials working at the level of deputy secretary, director and joint secretary, appointed under the Central Staffing Scheme or through the Civil Services Board procedure.

The extension has been given till June 30 or until further orders.

The decision is learnt to have been taken to ensure smooth implementation of anti-COVID-19 measures.

## PMO miffed at leaked clip

The Prime Minister's Office, in a statement, expressed concern after a two-minute video clip of the PM's concluding address to the 18 political parties found its way to the media. "Selectively leaking the content of such consultations, as seen today, runs counter to their spirit and objectives and is avoidable," the PMO said.

time of the pandemic was wrong, the fact that it was being played out on television and social media and "being used to divide the country" was not right.

DMK's T.R. Baalu said, "Communal colour should not be given to this pandemic."

The CPI(M) was represented by Rajya Sabha member Elamaram Kareem who, among other things, demanded that the Centre immediately release all pending dues to the State governments.

Almost all the parties criticised the government's decision to suspend MPLAD funds for the next two years.

A. Navaneethakrishnan, a member of the AIADMK's legal wing and a member of the Rajya Sabha, represented the party.

## Wildlife board holds virtual meet

Committee cleared a number of infrastructure projects in 11 States: Javadekar

JACOB KOSHY  
NEW DELHI

The Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) had its first-ever video-conferencing meet on Monday where infrastructure projects in 11 States were cleared, Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar tweeted.

"I chaired the meeting of standing committee of NBWL through videoconference and approved wildlife clearance for a number of developmental projects by 11 States," it read.

Two were infrastructure proposals related to setting up power transmission lines and constructing a highway in Goa, which would "boost

Prakash Javadekar

tourism." Other projects included the Nagpur-Mumbai superhighway, a small-scale stone mining project in Kota, Rajasthan; an underground pumped storage facility for generating hydroelectricity; an Indian railways project to

build a railway bridge in Madhya Pradesh and Telangana, irrigation projects in Uttarakhand and Telangana and defence projects in Uttarakhand, according to his tweets.

Projects that encroach into forests or protected reserves require NBWL nod as part of the government's environmental clearance process. Projects are appraised at the State level and then subsequently presented to a large committee of wildlife experts, the Chief Wildlife Wardens of States, top officials in the Union Environment Ministry and Forest Ministry and, the Environment Minister.

Plans to hold a videocon-

## Assam leader in soup over interview

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI

The Kokrajhar police have filed an FIR against the president of a regional political party in western Assam's Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) for "spreading false information" on the COVID-19 pandemic.

Suleman Narzary, a resi-

dent of Kokrajhar town,

filed a complaint on Tues-

day alleging that the chief

of the United People's Par-

ty Liberal, Promod Boro,

during an interview to a te-

levision channel on April 5,

said more than 30,000 peo-

ple had got infected with

coronavirus in India when

the government data on

April 6 put the figure at a

little more than 4,200.

Mr. Boro told *The Hindu*

that his remark "was a slip

of the tongue".

## Shringla dials Biegun to discuss COVID-19 fallout

India, U.S. agree to share best practices

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla took up bilateral collaboration to deal with COVID-19 during a telephone discussion with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Stephen E. Biegun on Wednesday.

The discussion is being viewed as being part of official consultations after India changed its export policy for a major consignment of the anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine that the U.S. had ordered for dealing with the pandemic.

**More cooperation**  
"Both sides discussed ways to further enhance their cooperation to counter and control the pandemic, including through the deve-

lopment of novel therapies and prophylactics against COVID-19 and ensuring availability of essential medicines, diagnostic and medical equipment and sharing of the best practices/information," said a source familiar with the exchange.

India on Tuesday made changes to an export policy to ensure that hydroxychloroquine is shared with countries that have been badly affected by the pandemic.

The statement sent a clear message that despite India's policy, the consignment of the drug will be sent to the U.S., which has emerged as an epicentre of COVID-19. After India's decision, President Donald Trump described Prime Minister Narendra Modi as "great".

The activists, who were directed by the top court on March 16 to surrender within three weeks, had sought extension saying that going to jail during the COVID-19 pandemic is "virtually a death sentence".

INTERVIEW | VINAY SAHASRABUDDHE

## 'Importance of soft power is increasing globally'

We believe that centrality of cultural ties will promote our diplomatic, strategic and economic relationship: ICCR chief

NISTULA HEBBAR  
DAMINI NATH

Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) president and BJP MP Vinay Sahasrabuddhe speaks about ICCR's future programmes, how it is handling the lockdown and its legacy as it marks its foundation day on Thursday.

April 9 will mark the 70th anniversary of the ICCR's foundation. Looking back, what do you think has been its legacy and how, if at all, do you see it changing in your tenure? What are the reforms that you have undertaken with regard to ICCR?

■ ICCR has a great history and many stalwarts had shouldered this responsibility. What I myself and our team is doing is to take the legacy ahead and also further add value in tune with the changing times. ICCR was established when there was

neither the concept of soft power nor was the term in use. Naturally then, the activities were limited in terms of their number and their diverse character as well. Majorly, it was about scholarships to foreign students, cultural exchanges involving artists and youths as also establishing some Chairs in some universities etc. Now, we are in a world where every nation wants to influence and occupy the mind space of the global community and thereby add to its prowess. In a way the limitations of military might are now more obvious and hence the im-

portance of soft power is increasing.

On reforms, we are trying to fine-tune certain systems and galvanise the entire functioning in keeping with the modern times. India enjoys a groundswell of goodwill, but the challenge is to translate this goodwill into understanding of India. To that end we plan to start academic programmes like an Understanding India course, cultural exchange between future leaders, mainstreaming of our traditional artisans through exchange with similar artisans abroad and converting Chairs into full-fledged India Study Centres abroad.

This time the foundation day happens to be during the lockdown imposed to curb COVID-19, so how will it



We have successfully started e-tutorials on a wide range of subjects, including classical dances

be celebrated in India and around the world? And, what are the initiatives being rolled out by ICCR during the lockdown?

■ Three things could be shared. Firstly we are utilising this time for preparing to

make a new beginning in some areas of academic courses through a more structured system of knowledge dissemination and evaluation as well as certification. Secondly, with the 'Show Must Go On' spirit, we have successfully started conducting e-tutorials and classes on a wide range of subjects including classical dances, Hindi, Sanskrit and even Yoga.

Thirdly, in the wake of all pervading gloom and tensions as a result of pandemic, we have announced a global painting competition and also an essay competition for NRIs and alumni of Indian institutions. We always believe that centrality of cultural relations will eventually promote our diplomatic, strategic as well as economic relationships.

## CITU flags wage cuts, job loss in IT field

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) on Wednesday wrote to the Union Labour and Employment Ministry highlighting cases of wage cuts and job terminations in the IT sector, in violation of the Ministry's directive to companies during the lockdown.

In the letter to the Secretary, CITU general secretary Tapan Sen said this was its fifth such communication to it regarding the violations of the March 20 advisory to employers. After highlighting violations

in banks, jute mills and tea gardens in West Bengal and road and hydel projects in J&K, the CITU said this time it was raising concerns in the IT sector in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Bengal. It asked the Ministry to intervene in the matter as well.

## DNA samples of 5 militants collected

Families identify two of them as kin

### Jaish militant killed in Sopore

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
SRINAGAR

The J&K police have collected DNA samples of five militants killed in Kupwara's Keran Sector on April 4-5. It is suspected that three of them could be the youth missing from south Kashmir since a few years.

A top police official told *The Hindu* that the encounter, which started on April 1 and ended on April 5, saw the five infiltrators "withstanding heavy snowfall for four days and having enough training to take on the elite PARA troopers of the Army despite the inclement weather" near the Line of Control (LoC) in Keran Sector. Five PARA troopers died in "a very close range gunfight".

### Two left for PoK

Three families from south Kashmir's Shopian and Kulgam have claimed the slain militants were their kin. The two militants identified by the families were Sartaj Ahmad Dar, a resident of Kulgam's Hangir Yaripora who was missing since December 20, 2017; and Sajad Ahmad Hurrah, a resident of Shopian's Daramdora-Keegam area, who was missing since April 10, 2018.

"Both of them exfiltrated from India to Pakistan and later went to Pakistan-occupied Kashmir on valid passports. There are fears that the handlers in Pakistan are upgrading the training of locals after a major dent was inflicted on local militants' striking capabilities in the last three years," the police said.

The police had buried the five militants in a forest area of Zurhama in the Shalbaroo-Jungund range. Accord-

ing to the Kupwara police, DNA samples have been collected and will be matched to establish their identity. One family, the police said, identified one of the slain militants from photos uploaded online.

### Lashkar links

One user of social media, believed to be close to the militants, claimed the slain militants belonged to the recently floated the Resistance Front. The front is believed to be working in tandem with the Lashkar-e-Taiba and has set up bases in north Kashmir.

Hurrah's uncle Sheeraz Ahmad Hurrah said: "We appeal to the authorities to return the body for the final rites." The third militant, according to a family, could be Umar Nazir. Not much is known about him, the police said.

The police had buried the five militants in a forest area of Zurhama in the Shalbaroo-Jungund range. Accord-

Among the activities of the ICCR is promotion of Hindi. Are there any plans on expanding these activities, for example the number of scholarships for foreign students here and Chairs set up in foreign universities?

■ Well, not just Hindi, but promotion of all languages from India is something we want to work for. In Israel, there are many Marathi-speaking Jews. Now if they demand a Marathi class, we may accept even that. Same is true with Tamil, Bengali, Sanskrit or Gujarati. We have started using Amar Chitra Katha comics to conduct language training. But this is also to some extent demand-driven. About scholarships, we desire to increase them but getting eligible students also becomes an issue.

## States told to curb black marketing

Offences may result in imprisonment

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI  
Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla on Wednesday wrote to all State Chief Secretaries to ensure the availability of essential goods by invoking the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.

Offences under the Act may result in imprisonment of seven years or fine or both.

The States and the Union Territories may also consider detention of offenders under the Prevention of Black-marketing and Maintenance of Supplies of Essential Commodities Act, 1980, the Ministry of Home Affairs said.

"I would urge you to take steps to ensure availability of these commodities at fair prices for public at large," Mr. Bhalla said.

These measures include fixing the stock limits, capping the prices, enhancing production, inspecting the

accounts of dealers and other such actions, a statement by the MHA said.

### Ensure fair prices

"There have been reports of loss of production due to various factors, especially reduction in labour supply. In this situation, there is a possibility of inventory building/hoarding and black marketing, profiteering, and speculative trading, resulting in price rise of essential goods. The States have been asked to take urgent steps to ensure availability of these commodities at fair prices for public at large," the MHA said.

Earlier, in an order issued under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, the MHA had allowed the manufacture, transport and other related supply-chain activities in respect of essential goods such as food-stuff, medicines and medical equipment.

## 108 foreigners under quarantine in Bengal

Mamata says 177 people took part in Nizamuddin meet

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA  
West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday said 177 people, including 108 foreigners from various countries, who had taken part in the Tablighi Jamaat in Delhi had been put under quarantine in the State.

"Within six hours of receiving the information, we quietly began to work. Around 10-12 days ago, we put 108 foreigners who had participated in the programme in a quarantine centre. They are being monitored by the State administration and the Health Department," Ms. Banerjee said at a press conference here.

The remarks came after the Opposition political parties particularly the BJP had



**Empty streets:** New Market wore a deserted look in Kolkata on Wednesday. •PTI

raised questions on the number of participants from the State in the event.

The Chief Minister on April 1 said 54 persons including 40 foreigners were put in quarantine. Giving details of the persons who attended the religious gathering Ms. Banerjee also targeted the Centre.

"A lot of people had gathered at Nizamuddin, because they were allowed to gather there... I do not want to get into a political argument over this issue. But what I want to say is that when we got the information that many people from Bengal had also gone there, our administration quietly took the necessary steps," the Chief Minister said.

Calling COVID-19 a "na-

## Dharavi reports one death, six new cases

More than 3,200 under quarantine

### STAFF REPORTER

MUMBAI  
Dharavi reported six new COVID-19 cases on Wednesday, including one death. So far, Asia's largest slum has reported 13 COVID-19 cases including two deaths.

The patient who died, a resident of Social Nagar, was reported positive on Wednesday.

Of the five other cases, one of them is the 25-year-old son of a positive patient, and was already under quarantine at the Rajiv Gandhi sports complex.

Another new case was

that of a 35 year-old man from Dhanwada chawl. His immediate family members do not live in Dharavi

A resident of Muslim Nagar, a 50-year-old cleaning staff from KEM Hospital, has tested positive and her five immediate contacts quarantined. More than 3,200 people from Dharavi are under quarantine.

Meanwhile, Mahim, which falls under the same administrative ward, also reported its first two cases on Wednesday – a 43-year-old mutton shop owner in Worli, and a nurse.

The five other cases, one of them is the 25-year-old son of a positive patient, and was already under quarantine at the Rajiv Gandhi sports complex.

Another new case was

## Virus hits both genders equally, except in 2 nations

76% of confirmed cases in India, and 72% in Pakistan are men

### JACOB KOSHY

NEW DELHI  
In a striking contrast with many countries, men in India more than women appear disproportionately likely to test positive for COVID-19, an analysis of global data shows. This anomaly, experts told *The Hindu*, could be a statistical reflection of relatively low testing for the disease in India. On April 6, the Health Ministry said 76% of the confirmed cases in India were men. That day, the total number of confirmed cases stood at 4,506.

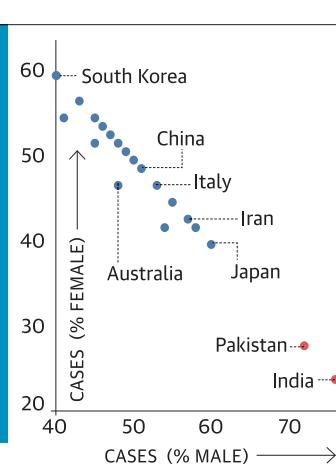
Many countries – including the United Kingdom and the United States – while publishing data on cases and death rates don't have sex-

segregated national data. However, data from 40 countries, which do share such data and compiled by GlobalHealth5050, an independent research initiative that tracks gender and health, suggest that the gender-split in all countries is roughly 50-50, barring two exceptions: India and Pakistan. 72% of our neighbour's 4,004 cases have been confirmed in men.

Greece, for instance, with 17,551 cases is 55% male; Italy assailed with 124,547 cases is 53% male. China too, even though data has not been updated since February 28, showed that its 55,924 cases then were almost evenly split 51:49 among men and

**Gender skew**  
More than 70% COVID-19 patients in India and Pakistan are men. In most other nations, the difference between the number of men and women patients has remained narrow. The graph plots the share of male patients against that of women patients among the total cases

women. Another unusual exception was South Korea – the country that has conducted the maximum number of tests as a proportion of population – in that more women tested positive than men. 60% of its 10,000 cases, as on Wednesday, were



women. Germany, another country that has tested significantly, notes an even split, 50: 50 in its case load of 99,255.

However, men in all countries were significantly more likely – almost twice – to die than women, though this da-

ta point is available for only 18 countries. India hasn't yet shared national figures on COVID-19 mortality rates in men and women.

Experts told *The Hindu* that India's wide disparity was more likely due to sociological factors and when testing increased and more infections detected the male-female gap would likely narrow. Giridhar Babu, an epidemiologist associated with the Public Health Foundation of India, said it was likely that in most countries international travellers – the key source of the initial tranche of infections in most countries – were equally likely to be men or women. "It's possibly more reflective of employment trends in India. Women are less likely to be travelling for work internationally from India."

**DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION**  
Office of the Commissioner, New Public Offices, Nrupatunga Road, Bengaluru-560001.  
Ph:080-22211086/22212137/22210117 Website: <http://www.schooleducation.kar.nic.in>

No:CPE(2)/Uniform tender-09/2019-20 Date: 08.04.2020

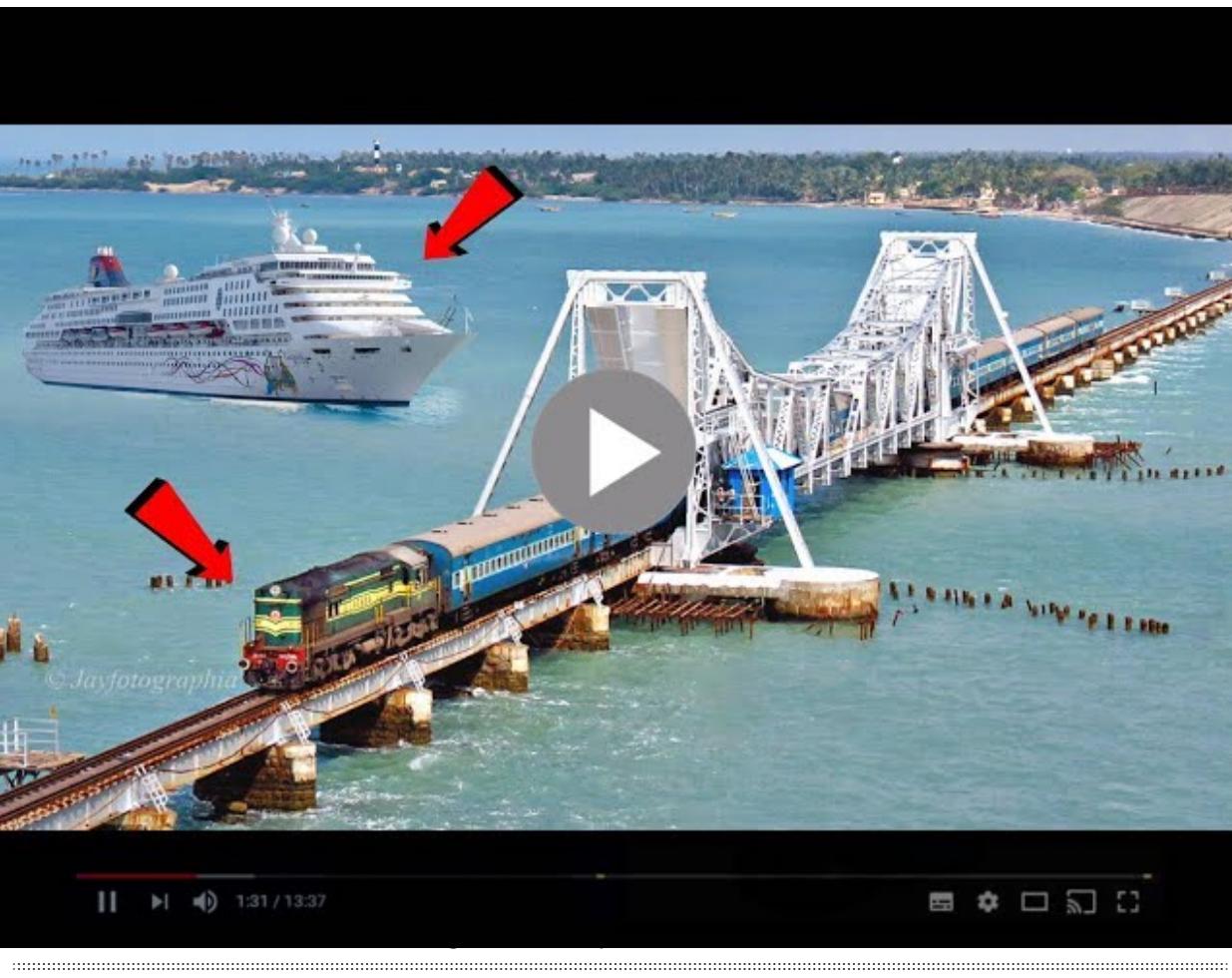
**TENDER NOTIFICATION**

Director of Public Instruction (Primary Education) of Office of commissioner for public instruction, Bangalore has invited e-Tender for the Supply of Uniform cloth material to all students studying in Govt. Schools of Mysore Division, Belgaum Division and 5 Districts of Bangalore Division and Chudiar to Girl students studying in class-8 to 10 in all Government schools of the State in Karnataka for the year 2020-21 through e-procurement portal of Government of Karnataka. The tender document with detailed conditions can be obtained through web site <https://eproc.karnataka.gov.in> and should submit the bids through e-procurement system only.

1. Tender Reference	CPE(2)/UF-TNDR-09/2020-21
2. Date of commencement of Tender	08.04.2020 - 4.00 pm.
3. Date & Time of Pre Bid Conference	16.04.2020 - 11.00 am.
4. Date & Time of Submission of Pre Bid Queries	16.04.2020 - 5.00 pm.
5. Last Date and Time for submission of Tender	28.04.2020 - 4.00 pm.
6. Date & Time of opening of Technical Bid	30.04.2020 - 11.00 am.
7. Date & Time of opening of Commercial Bid	06.05.2020 - 11.00 am.
8. Venue of Pre Bid conference opening of Tenders & address for communication	Office of the Commissioner for Public Instruction, Nrupatunga Road, Bengaluru-560001.

Sd/- Director  
Department of Public Instruction.

## Space management



## Centre concerned over polarisation on religious lines

Ensure safety of health workers, it says

### S. VIJAY KUMAR

CHENNAI

The Centre has expressed serious concern over the "polarising of public opinion on religious lines" against the backdrop of a particular community being targeted as being responsible for the spread of COVID-19 in the country.

In a note issued to all States on Tuesday, the Union government said a sizeable number of non-Muslims was getting a perception that a particular community was not taking the pandemic very seriously and not complying with the lockdown conditions and prohibitory orders.

This situation was further aggravated by various media projections and social media posts appealing public to refrain from purchasing fruits/vegetables/grocery items from sellers belonging to the said community. This had also triggered a strong resentment against them in northeast States.

Such targeting of a particular community and its religious organisations would lead to communal polarisation. Strict action should be taken against any person posting fake/provocative posts in the social media, it said. Local community leaders should be called upon to motivate the people for better compliance of the lockdown norms and also to strengthen congenial feelings between the communities.

Referring to recent instances of clashes between the police and coronavirus-infected persons in Tamil Nadu and Bihar and also "ill-treatment" or "non-cooperation" meted out by a particular community to doctors, nurses and other health workers, the Centre called for adequate safety and security of the healthcare professionals.

States were told to coordinate with community leaders and persuade Tablighi Jamaat conference returnees to voluntarily come forward for quarantining which "will help clear the shroud of distrust and allegations to a large extent."

"Following this advisory, we have issued an alert to all concerned to take effective steps to prevent the posting of hate messages that could trigger friction between two groups of people. The Tamil Nadu police have already put in place a model where Tablighi Jamaat has appointed volunteers in all districts to facilitate in identifying and quarantining Delhi returnees along with their family members, close associates etc," a senior police officer told *The Hindu* on Wednesday.

The court directed the government to explore alternatives, including enabling and augmenting domestic production of protective clothing and gear for medical professionals. This include alternative modes of production of such clothing (masks, suits, caps, gloves, etc.) and permitting movement of raw material. The government may also restrict export of such materials to augment inventory and domestic stock.

The court made it clear that the onus is on the Centre and the States to ensure availability of appropriate Personal Protective Equipment, including sterile medical/Nitrile gloves.

We find *prima facie* substance in the submission of petition that at this time of national calamity permitting private labs to charge ₹4,500 for screening and confirmation test of COVID-19 may not be within means of a large part of population of this country and no person be deprived to undergo the test due to non-payment of capped amount of ₹4500," the court observed in its order. It said government laboratories were testing free of cost.

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A Bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan and S. Ravindra Bellahudi held that tests relating to COVID-19 must be carried out only in National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories accredited labs or any agencies approved by the World Health Organisation or the Indian Council of Medical Research.

The order was passed on a petition by advocate Shashank Deo Sudhi to implement free testing by private labs. On April 3, the court issued notice to the government on the plea, which challenged the legality of a March 17 advisory capping the price for testing at ₹4,500 in private labs and hospitals.

Tests relating to COVID-19, whether done in approved government or private laboratories, shall be free of cost, the Supreme Court ordered on Wednesday.

Issue the necessary directions immediately, the court told the government.

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# Personnel from Herat, Jalalabad return

Contingency plans in place to bring back staff from Kabul too, if such a situation rises

SUHASINI HAIDAR  
DINAKAR PERI  
NEW DELHI

India brought back 56 staff members and Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) personnel from Afghanistan on an Indian Air Force (IAF) aircraft on Tuesday night, effectively winding down the operations at its consulates in Herat and Jalalabad, in view of the novel coronavirus spread and growing security threats, government sources confirmed to *The Hindu*.

"A C-130 Super Hercules aircraft brought back 56 people from Herat, which reached Delhi on Tuesday evening," an official source said. All 56 – 10 officials of the Ministry of External Affairs and 46 ITBP personnel who were stationed at the Consulate in Herat – were sent to the ITBP's quarantine facilities at Chhawla, where 30 personnel from the Jalalabad consulate who returned



**Safety zone:** The quarantine facility of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police at Chhawla in Delhi. ■ PTI

last week are also being kept.

As *The Hindu* had reported earlier, a high-level security group decided at the end of March to bring back all personnel in the two consulates, close to Afghanistan's borders with Iran and Pakistan respectively, given heightened security threats in the wake of the U.S.-Taliban agreement, increased activity by Pakistan-based

groups like the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP), as well as the return of Afghan refugees from Iran and Pakistan who could be carriers of the novel coronavirus.

Official sources said the government had received a series of cables with inputs from different intelligence agencies on the probability of attacks on "international

targets" in Afghanistan, including Indian missions.

In Herat, the lack of medical facilities was a particular worry, but specific security threats to the Jalalabad consulate after the ISKP's attack on a gurdwara in Kabul, which left 25 dead, hastened the decision, the officials said. Security officials also believe that the Indian mission in Kabul may have been the intended original target for the ISKP attackers, who included an Indian national from Kerala.

#### ISI connection

The arrest and interrogation of ISKP leader Abdullah Orakzai, a Pakistani national, by the National Directorate of Security on April 4 has confirmed the apprehensions that the ISKP is linked to "regional intelligence agencies", namely Pakistan's ISI, Afghan officials indicated. Pakistan's Ministry of Fo-

reign Affairs has denied the charge.

Sources said the operation to bring the personnel back from Herat was conducted in complete secrecy by the IAF, given the threat from the ground, and refuelling constraints. The C-130 took off from the Hindon airbase on April 6 and flew to Herat overnight after a halt at Jamnagar. It returned on the evening of April 7 carrying the personnel, after taking "full precautions" against COVID-19, for which the IAF personnel undertaking the operation were specially prepared, the sources added.

It has been learnt that contingency plans are in place to bring back staff from Kabul too, if such a situation arises. India also has consulates in Mazar-e-Sharif and Kunduz, which continue to function as of now.

(With inputs from  
Vijaita Singh)

# Australia to ensure welfare of Indians

Foreign Ministers hold a conversation

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

Australia has assured India of the welfare of Indian students stranded there due to travel restrictions over the novel coronavirus pandemic, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said after a conversation with Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne on Wednesday.

"A very good conversation with FM Marise Payne on our respective responses to COVID-19. She assured that there is no change in the status of Indian students studying in Australia," Mr. Jaishankar wrote in a tweet.

"We discussed the importance of Australia's Indian community in responding to the crisis & supporting Australians in India affected by internal & travel restrictions," Ms. Payne added on Twitter.

The conversation followed a call between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Australian counterpart, Scott Morrison, on Monday, with the latter saying Indian students would continue to be "valued". Thousands of Indian students in Australia have been worried by Mr. Morrison's comments last week that those who are not able to support themselves should "return to their home countries".

The Australian High Commission in India is planning to charter flights to take Australian citizens from India back home.

However, unlike other countries, India is not at present allowing citizens abroad to return.

"India will fully facilitate arrangements for Australians wishing to return home," Mr. Jaishankar said.

# EPFO settles 1.27 lakh claims

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has processed around 1.27 lakh claims, disbursing ₹238.48 crore in total, under the special withdrawal scheme introduced in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, EPFO officials said on Wednesday.

With the country in a three-week lockdown to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced a special withdrawal scheme for employees on March 26. EPF subscribers can withdraw up to 75% of the amount in their PF balance or three months of their basic pay and dearness allowance, whichever is less.

The scheme was notified on March 27 and rolled out on March 29, with the EPFO developing new software within 24 hours to process applications quickly, EPFO officials said.

As of Wednesday, the EPFO had processed around 1.27 lakh claims that amount to ₹238.48 crore in total and remittances of the money had already started, its CEO, Sunil Barthwal, said. He added that there was "no dependency" for the applications that were completely KYC compliant. While those applications that were KYC compliant were being processed in under 72 hours in an "auto mode", those that had deficiencies were being processed manually, on priority, he said.

The Labour Ministry had on Sunday announced that EPFO would accept the date of birth recorded in the Aadhaar card of a subscriber as a valid proof for rectification of the date of birth.

# Poaching, not virus, is the bigger threat, says tiger expert

If we fail to stop the killing of prey animals such as deer during the lockdown, big cat populations will suffer, says Ullas Karanth

R.KRISHNA KUMAR  
JACOB KOSHY  
MYSURU/NEW DELHI

Wildlife scientist Ullas Karanth, an expert on tiger conservation, has cautioned that a spurt in poaching during the lockdown period poses a greater threat to wildlife than the coronavirus.

The warning came after the advisory issued by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and the Wildlife Division of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change for immediate preventive measures to stop the spread of the virus from humans to animals and vice versa in national parks, sanctuaries and

tiger reserves. The advisory came after a tiger at the Bronx zoo in the U.S. tested positive for the novel coronavirus. Dr. Karanth worked for three decades with the organisation that runs the zoo, the Wildlife Conservation Society.

Writing on the Centre for Wildlife Studies portal, he said that the issue was being blown out of proportion because of the media focus, although this could be attributed to genuine concern. This specific virus was known to affect domestic cats and it came as no surprise that tigers could get it too. Dr. Karanth pointed out that wild tiger populations

had high birth rates and high annual mortality rates and the coronavirus-related threats were highly unlikely to cause population declines.

On the contrary, he said, the real threat to tigers was posed by a surge in local poaching of prey species during the lockdown. He cited incidents in Kodagu and Shivamogga, reported in recent days [involving sale of deer meat.] The police were busy otherwise, and forest officials faced movement constraints, emboldening a new wave of poachers, he said.

Responding to the issue,

N.S. Murali, Inspector-General of Forests, NTCA (South Zone) said the advisor-

taken precautionary measures while handling captive animals, without relaxing anti-poaching activities.

Very referred to wild animals straying into human habitation and needed tranquillisation and translocation. Personnel handling tiger operations should ensure that they were coronavirus

negative. The same held good for post mortem.

On the reported spurt in poaching due to lockdown, Conservator of Forests T. Balachandra who is also the Director of Bandipur Tiger Reserve said there was no known case of poaching in protected areas where fire guards supplemented the field staff. The one reported from Bandipur took place in an adjoining reserve forest.

This being fire season, there were 400 fire watchers in Bandipur besides field staff and another 400 watchers in Nagarhole, two famous tiger reserves, and the added staff would deter poachers.

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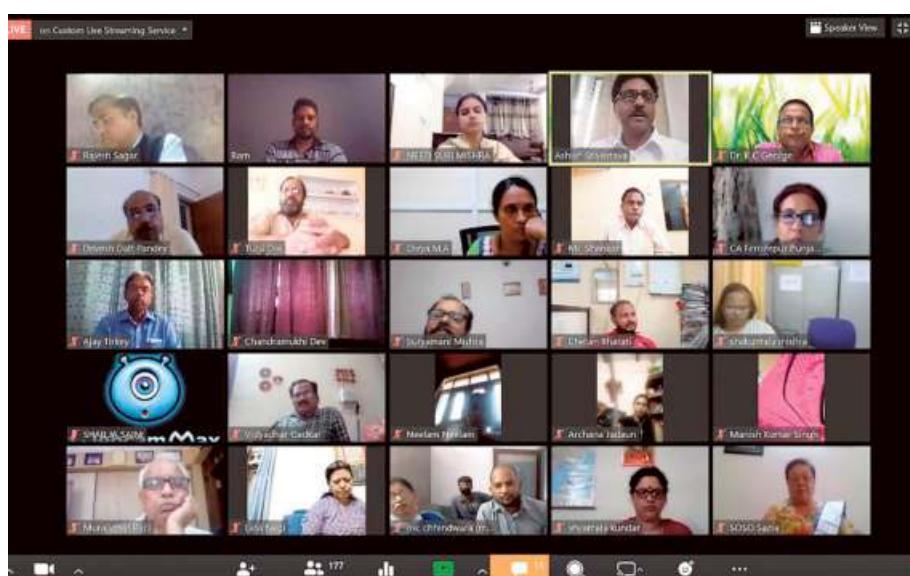
# Centre rolls out steps for women's safety

Minister urges activists to establish connect to send message of solidarity with those in distress

JAGRITI CHANDRA  
NEW DELHI

The government and its machinery are working for women who seek protection – Union Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani sought to send out this message through a video-conference on Wednesday with institutes associated with her Ministry.

The appeal comes at a time gender rights activists and the U.N. have called for the need to boost helplines, psycho-social support and online counselling as well as demanded that these be declared essential services so that women in distress can continue to access help. The National Commission of Women has recorded a more than two-fold rise in domestic violence and sexual assaults and a three-fold increase in cases of police apathy in the first week of lockdown since March 24.



**Digital connect:** Personnel from institutes linked to the Women and Child Development Ministry in a conference with Minister Smriti Irani (not in picture) on Wednesday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Ms. Irani instructed officials of her Ministry to ensure that One Stop Centres, which provide legal and psycho-social help to survivors

of gender-based violence, are linked with local medical teams, police and the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) so that their ser-

vices are not impacted due to restrictions on movement. Nearly 1,000 people joined the video conference live, including the staff members of

One Stop Centres, as well as shelter homes for women in distress (Swadhar Greh, Ujjwala homes) and Working Women Hostels.

#### Counselling help

"One Stop Centre teams must also be linked with NIMHANS," Ms Irani suggested to equip counsellors across the country to deal with the unique problems faced by women.

"Under lockdown, we must use digital governance to ensure safety of women which must be replicated at the State-level and with NGOs so that there is no deficit of either information or help," Ms Irani said, ordering a senior official to hold a discussion with a State every second day. She also urged NGOs to try to ensure that every individual calls at least 10 women every day so that "women know that they are not alone".

As Haryana is all set to start staggered wheat procurement for the ongoing Rabi season from April 20, the State government is still awaiting the Centre's response to its request for financial incentives to encourage farmers to stagger the arrival of the produce.

"We have sent a proposal to the Centre according to which, from April 20 till May 4, we will buy wheat on the already announced Minimum Support Price (MSP) of ₹1,925 per quintal. From May 5 till May 31, we have proposed to pay an incentive of ₹50 per quintal, and for the purchase in the month of June, the proposal is to pay ₹125 per quintal. By end of June, the procurement operations are proposed to



A worker winnowing wheat in Chandigarh.

financial incentives for farmers in Haryana on account of staggered procurement of wheat.

#### Purchase centres

In the wake of the government's decision to purchase the farmers' produce in a staggered way, the number of mandis and purchase centres for the procurement of wheat have been increased from 477 to 2,000 this year. Bharatiya Kisan Union (Haryana) spokesperson Rakesh Bains said that the amount proposed as an incentive was very low and the government should increase it. "Besides, the State government should not wait for the Centre to decide on it but should instead make an announcement at its level to mitigate farmers' miseries," he said.

## West Bengal begins live lectures on TV

Class 10 and 12 students to benefit

BISHWANATH GHOSH  
KOLKATA

West Bengal's school education department has tied up with television channel ABP Ananda to hold live lectures for the students of Classes 10 and 12 to compensate for the classes they are missing due to the COVID-19 lockdown.

The lectures will be telecast daily from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. – with half an hour being devoted to students of Class 10 and the remaining to those belonging to Class 12 – and will continue till April 13. The televised classes began on Tuesday and the subject was English. The programme is aimed at students following the State board syllabus and, therefore, covers all schools run or aided by the State government.

"It is an excellent initiative by the State government and is a good way of keeping the students pepped up. How effective this is going to be will be seen in the coming days, but it is certainly better than doing nothing," said Krishnakoli Ray, headmistress of Jaynagar Institution for Girls, a State government-aided school on the outskirts of Kolkata.

"But many State government-run and State government-aided schools happen to be in interior areas where there's no dish antenna or cable, so students living in those areas may be missing out on the [televised classes], but this is a good start. Going forward, when villages are better connected, this



Students will be given assignments that they can submit after school opens. ■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

could become the norm," Ms. Ray said.

#### WhatsApp groups

In the event of the lockdown being extended, she said, schools are likely to form WhatsApp groups of Class 10 students to circulate worksheets so that they do not lag behind in preparing for their board exams.

The televised classes could be extended if the lockdown continues. They are being conducted by a panel of experienced teachers, who will also take questions from students on phone – there is a dedicated WhatsApp number – and on email. They will also assign tasks to students, who will submit the completed assignments to their respective teachers once the schools reopen.

The live classes were originally supposed to be telecast on Doordarshan, but according to sources, the arrangement did not work out.

## ChildLine fielding calls against abuse

One in three callers seek protection from abuse and sexual violence

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

One in every three calls made to the emergency helpline for children, ChildLine 1098, days before and during the nation-wide lockdown sought protection from abuse and sexual violence, according to a presentation made on Tuesday in the presence of Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani.

The Minister has been holding frequent video-conferences. On Wednesday, she held one on safety of women. She has already chaired virtual sessions on protection of children, with anganwadi workers as well as with field workers in her constituency, Amethi.

Between March 20 and March 31, the helpline recorded a total of 4.3 lakh calls – 50% more than the



average. Nearly 30% reported instances of abuse and violence, either experienced first hand or on behalf of a child survivor, as lockdown leaves children confined to their homes, rendering them vulnerable to physical and sexual violence, a majority of which take place within homes and families.

Significantly, many who called the helpline also sought information related to availability of food and

shelter. These calls were made for missing and runaway children, children stranded due to the lockdown as well as children of unemployed and migrant labourers who found themselves displaced.

#### Safety measures

The video-conference headed by Ms. Irani on Tuesday was to sensitise Child Welfare Committees, Child Care Institutions and District Child Protection Units, which primarily deal with orphaned, abandoned and missing children. Senior officials of the Ministry were also present during the virtual session held on Zoom as well as streamed live on YouTube.

UNICEF's child rights specialist Tanishtha Datta, psychiatrist from NIMHANS Shekhar Sheshadri and Chil-

dLine India Foundation's Deputy Director Harleen Walia fielded questions on safety measures for children residing in shelters and measures for new entrants to these homes and those who may want to return to their families.

#### Appeal to NGOs

Ms. Irani urged all NGOs to share information about adolescent girls in temporary shelters provided for migrant labourers with District Collectors and Superintendents of Police to ensure safety and health measures, such as provision of sanitary napkins. She said her Ministry would work with the Ministry of Home Affairs to ensure district authorities were sensitised to the needs of adolescent girls who have been displaced due to the lockdown.

## Rajasthan mandis to open in phased manner

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
JAIPUR

Mandis, functioning as agricultural marketing hubs, will open in a phased manner in Rajasthan from April 15 for procurement of agricultural commodities from farmers at minimum support prices.

The authorities will ensure adherence to social distancing norms and control the crowds at the mandis.

Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot gave instructions here on Wednesday for management of services at the mandis and maintenance of all pro-

tocols to take care of health of farmers, traders, labourers and those connected with the procurement process.

He reviewed the arrangements at a video conferencing with seven Ministers and senior officers.

Mr. Gehlot said the farmers' interest was of paramount importance for the State government and the decision to procure the farm produce would help out the peasants during the last stage of harvesting of rabi crops in the State.

## NGOs can buy FCI grains to provide cooked food

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

In order to facilitate cooked food distribution at privately-run relief camps during the lockdown due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Food Ministry has allowed NGOs and charitable organisations to directly buy wheat and rice from the Food Corporation of India at Open Market Sale Scheme rates without going through the auction process.

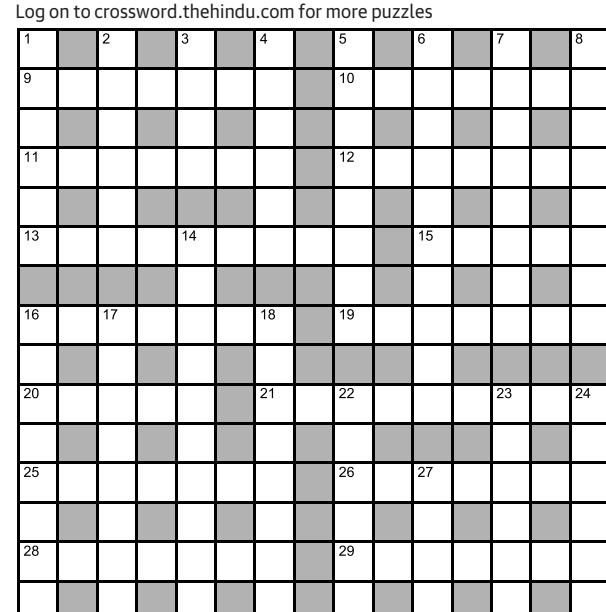
So far, only State governments and registered bulk users like roller flour mills

were allowed to do so. Now, philanthropic organisations can purchase 1 to 10 metric tonnes at a time at the predetermined reserve prices and lift the grains from FCI's 2,000-odd godowns across the country, according to a Food Ministry statement.

District administrations will be kept informed of the details of lifting of food-grains by NGOs to ensure that it is used for the intended purpose of providing cooked food to the poor and needy.

## THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12905

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles



#### ACROSS

- 9 Informed of an empty bar to dine, son enters (7)
- 10 Perhaps the painting is incomplete, leading cartoonist left halfway (7)
- 11 Constant endeavour in artificial intelligence is to find new logic essentially (7)

- 12 Honesty is boring; chasing prison (7)
- 13 Ram has ladies's type bicycle (4,5)
- 15 To write first line before second parts (5)
- 16 Empty? It was well-stocked; directed to replace regiment (7)
- 19 Say, boxes aggressor with no alternative, subdue (7)
- 20 Discharge giving small tablet (5)
- 21 British PM fell behind, assembly ending early (9)
- 25 An adult gives directions to class (7)
- 26 Instrument to free police force? Not free in a way (7)
- 28 The french retreat's serene, settled to start a card game (7)
- 29 After civil services exam, had beer that's expensive (7)

#### DOWN

- 1 Tried a hard movement without interest (3,1,2)
- 2 Boy coming for college trip is called Mark (6)
- 3 Writer having wine finishes early, before 1 (4)
- 4 Mark for first sum? Cleared first test (6)
- 5 Article on first page; Delhi region often delays getting organ (8)
- 6 No reason to follow foreigner, he primarily is connected to a branch of anthropology (10)
- 7 Beg, scream, stop halfway getting detailed enough to make up (8)
- 8 Ericsson fights damage to cells (8)
- 14 Cleans without orders, acts independently (10)
- 16 Professional singer angry after getting duped initially leading to trouble at the end (8)
- 17 Inmate given rule at the end, before an issue is accommodated (8)
- 18 ESL has limit? Some oddly get a flight of fancy (8)
- 22 Free to gulp brew after 1 (6)
- 23 A line in graph is nothing big to start a row on source (6)
- 24 Relax in rest room, soon to be empty but will be occupied by Engineer (6)
- 27 Actors can always stand tall if they are leading (4)

## SUDOKU



Solution to puzzle 12904

SUMMER	SUB	SUM	ED
U	U	V	D
B	I	L	O
I	L	W	N
L	W	E	A
Y	E	T	O
Z	T	R	S
O	R	I	F
T	S	G	H

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

## FAITH

### Nishkamya karma

In Srimad Bhagavatam, King Nimi asks Avirhotra, a yogisvara, to explain nishkamya karma, said P.T. Seshadri in a discourse. Avirhotra replies that the Sastras divided karmas into three categories. One is karma – this includes duties prescribed by the Sastras, which one must necessarily perform. The second category detailed by Avirhotra is akarma, that is failure to perform what one should. The third division is vikarma, that is doing that which is forbidden by the Sastras.

Even scholarly persons get confused about these three divisions and do not know which action falls into which category, says Avirhotra. This is because the Vedas do not tell you anything directly. You have to infer the correct meaning. The Vedas are like a sugar-coated pill, which is sweet on the outside, but inside is the medicine. The sweetness of the coating makes us swallow the medicine. So, the Vedas lead us to the right path in an indirect manner. They prescribe duties to eventually release us from karma. Doing deeds and not bothering about the results is nishkamya karma.

Nimi asks how this can be, when the Sastras themselves say that the performance of certain duties will fetch certain results. Avirhotra replies that this is to motivate people to do what is enjoined on them. But only a man who has no expectation about the results of his actions will attain moksha. Those who want to get rid of ajnana must worship according to Vedic and Agamic rules. One must identify an archa murthi and get deeply involved in worship of this murthi. He must sit before that murthi, and do pranayama and bhuta siddhi. He must recite mantras. He must offer water for washing the deity's feet, for washing His mouth and for His bath. He must offer garments and flowers, and food.

# Embracing the lockdown

An online art project celebrates the resilience and the creative spirit of emerging artists

MADHUR TANKHA

The Spirit Remains Unlocked is an online project launched on March 25th, the first day of the three week lockdown, by Gurugram-based art consultant and curator Lubna Sen. The commercial project initially had just 10 artists, but today has 30 from across the country. "Art has always been a cultural documentation of the time that it was produced. Through The Spirit Remains Unlocked we aim to create a snapshot of history through the life and work of these artists," says Sen, who founded The Art Route, a platform that connects emerging artists with buyers.



bles, mirror and ceramic tiles. "It is time for the dreamers, artists and creators to surface and showcase the true creative spirit," says a post dedicated to her work.

With galleries shut and major international fairs and exhibitions cancelled or postponed indefinitely, the art world is facing a financial crisis ahead. In these times of uncertainty, Sen says the brick and mortar gallery model will be under strain. "We will have to learn new

ways to survive. The cancellation of all physical events like exhibitions and residencies mean that artists lose not only the opportunity to earn through sale, but also to showcase their works. Promotion of their work is vital for their survival," says Sen.

She used to be a management professional before she studied art history (at the National Museum Institute) and its promotion (at Sotheby's, London; and the Museum Of Modern Art, New York) before setting up The Art Route in 2014.

**Working with emotions**  
There are some artists who are hoping to capture their emotions in their work. Pranjal Sarma, a printmaker in Bengaluru, says, "We as

humans value social interactions. Due to this lockdown, we are all on our own. I often question myself during these times: Where is our spirit in the absence of social interactions now? Have we unlocked our spirit even today?"

Sarma has not been able to visit his studio, but has recently picked up sketching. "As a printmaker, I have been doing research on the subject of motherhood since 2017. In this period of the lockdown, I realise how motherhood also plays a role in psychologically stabilising each individual. I have been trying to re-visit the essence of motherhood and identify the modification in a mother's role in today's times."

Similarly, A. Naveen Ku-

mar, an inter-media artist living between Bengaluru and Palakkad, says his studio is a place where aesthetic practice is infused with personal beliefs, memories, identities and stories. His work Siege of Delhi was born during his many visits to the labyrinthine *gallis* (streets) of the Walled City of Delhi.

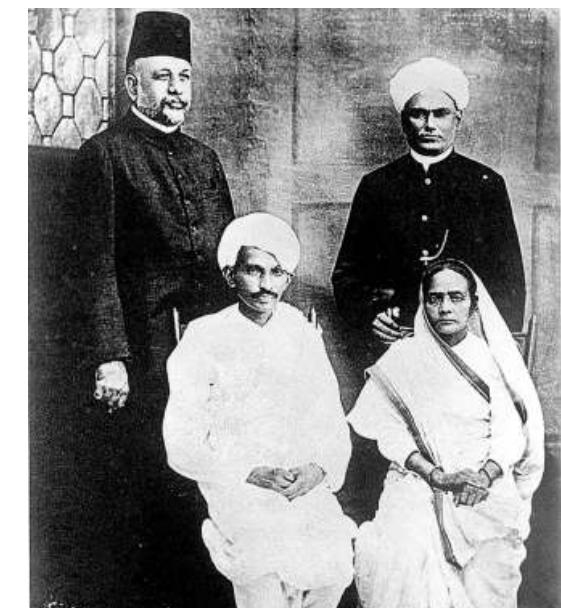
"The studio space becomes a location where existential questions regarding self-identity and knowledge about the world is developed. I am now looking at how the studio table itself can become a work of art. Every single object in my studio started interacting with me," he says.

Once the lockdown opens, Sen will exhibit the work in a gallery in Delhi.

## PEOPLE

### Married to the Mahatma

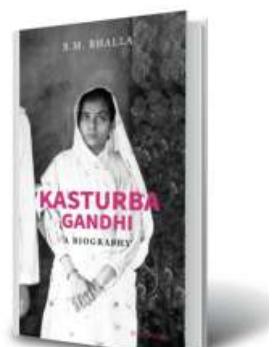
B. M. Bhalla's *Kasturba Gandhi* is both an exhaustive biography and a social history of the times



The world dealt with Gandhi the messiah; she dealt with the ordinariness. Married to an awkward teenager who grew up to be a successful barrister and a dhoti-clad demigod for the Indian masses yearning to breathe free, Kasturba, Mahatma Gandhi's wife, spent most of her life in his shadow. While Gandhi has been the subject of numerous books and films and an inspiration to Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela — Barack Obama even had the Mahatma's portrait in his office when he first became Senator — not much emerges of Kasturba's life. Yet Gandhi had said that but for her unfailing cooperation he might have been in the abyss.

For nearly six decades, Kasturba played the good wife, the patriot and the suffering mother of her sons, whose own individuality was lost in the face of Gandhi's persona. It is this Kasturba that B.M. Bhalla's book (published by Roli Books) throws light on.

The 85-year-old Delhi-based author says he has always been interested in Gandhi. "The more I read about him, the more I felt Kasturba's story deserved to be told," he says in a telephone interview.



Bhalla brings to the book six years of research that includes ploughing through papers and an extensive bibliography. "It has been difficult to find material on Kasturba. I had even travelled to Ahmedabad, but there is little information on her," he says. As a result, the 300-page book draws from multiple sources on Gandhi and is an amalgam of fact and fiction, the latter especially used when portraying Kasturba's thoughts and emotions.

"I recreated the past as a combination of imagination and the understanding of the historical forces that operated at that time. There were plenty of characters in the life of the Gandhis, but except for the stellar ones, not much is known of how the others contributed," says Bhalla, who has had a distinguished career teaching at Delhi University, after education across India and America, with a focus on DH Lawrence, European drama and Indian literature.

"Kasturba's life should be read in terms of women's struggle for emancipation, dignity and independence. Although not an independent woman herself as she was uneducated, confined to the ashram and with little opportunity to explore the world on her own, she reacted and took her own decisions when it came to the things that mattered, especially Gandhi's close friendships with women like Millie Polak. Kasturba's relationship with Gandhi was stormy from the beginning, but she took life's knocks uncomplainingly, including the extreme sexual discourse in his life. She passionately drove him to the fruition of his dreams for India," he says.

The book traverses the linearity of Kasturba's life, beginning with her birth into a Modh Bania family of means in Porbandar; marriage to Gandhi in 1883 that resulted in four sons; her schooling in the ways of the world by her mother-in-law Putli Bai; the death of her first born, a tragedy from which she never recovered; Gandhi's change from a man of passion to one who manically suppressed all desires, a decision she accepted with grace; her private life in India and the one in South Africa and India in public gaze; her angst as the mother of the wayward Harila.

It concludes with her death at the Aga Khan Palace in Pune in 1944. Her youngest son Devdas described her ashes as "a literal handful of tiny motherly bones".

The language is lucid, as is expected from a translator of four languages — Bhalla is familiar with Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali and Hindi. His translation of Shiv Kumar Batalvi's *Luna* won him the Sahitya Akademi Award.

Where the book scores is in its innate ability to tell the very private story of a very public woman who was, as Hermann Kallenbach, German architect and Gandhi's friend, wrote in 1914, "...has both the devil and the divine in her in a most concentrated form".

DEEPA ALEXANDER

Contact us at [delhimetro@thehindu.co.in](mailto:delhimetro@thehindu.co.in)

## IN OUR BACKYARD

### Blowing in the wind

The Semal flower is out in all its red, waxy wonder, and will soon give way to crusty pods and silk cotton

ABHISHEK GULSHAN

Every year, just when exam time was peaking and the school session coming to a close, I would see, along avenues, a leafless tree with vibrant clusters of red flowers. The child in me just reveled in their beauty, of the waxy, fallen leaves and bare ashen branches, and it was only much later, when my interest in nature was piqued that I started trying to identify trees in Delhi.

At every nook and corner of the city, there lies a majestic tall dry deciduous tree popularly called the Semal (also called the silk cotton tree, the cotton tree, Bombax, Indian Kapok, Shembal). In February, the Semal bares most of its leaves and is filled with clusters of large red flowers with five petals on each of them.

The tree has a silvery bark with the lower sections covered with conical prickles to perhaps deter animals from coming too close. It fashions compound leaves (a leaf

consisting of several or many distinct leaflets joined to a single stem) with about five pointy leaflets (sometimes six or seven).

Their fruits resemble woody capsules which ripen and split open in May, bursting open with the intense sun, to release silky fibres and seeds into the air, only to be propagated through wind pollination.

These fibres, though beautiful, are not great for those who have asthma and other respiratory conditions. Semal is quite drought-hardy, and thrives in dry deciduous and moist areas, including the forests, across India, but not in arid zones.

The silk cotton from fruits are often collected to stuff pillows and quilts and collecting rights from trees are often auctioned in Delhi. Semal is known for its ornamental value, but its bark and roots are sometimes used as a tonic and stimulant in traditional medicine practices. A gummy substance collected from the stem is said to



be an aphrodisiac and also used to treat stomach disorders, says environmentalist Pradip Krishen, in his book *Trees of Delhi*.

Ecologically, the tree plays an

important role in attracting several creatures like birds, butterflies, bees, and spiders. The flowers are not only a hit amongst nectar-sipping creatures like the Purple Sun-

Nature's bounty The Semal flower ■ VIJAY DHASMANA

bird and bees, but also with frugivorous (fruit-eating) birds like the Coppersmith Barbet. The Indian Grey Hornbill sometimes uses the top branches of the tree as a perch to call out to mates.

Since there are so many insects attracted to the flowers of the Semal, Crab Spiders camouflage themselves in the open petals, lying in wait to pounce on their unfortunate prey. In the early morning, a flock of Yellow-footed Green Pigeons may sit atop, to bask in the sun. These inter-dependencies make Nature what it is — a series of connections built over time.

You can see the Semal in areas like Hauz Khas, Lodhi Road and several other parts of the city, sometimes dropping on cars and streets, covering them in a deep red mess.

They face upwards, so they have a tendency of retaining rainwater fall with a heavy plop. These are the wonders of watching a tree unravel its magic.

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



### PREGNATAL YOGA

Motherhood Hospital has launched online Lamaze, childbirth preparation classes for expecting mothers, and also prenatal yoga classes to fight anxiety and stress during the lockdown. Conducted by physiotherapist Shilpi Srivastava, an hour-long class will have basic *yoga asanas* suitable for pregnancy and like *pranayama*, breathing exercises.

**VENUE:** Motherhoodindia.com/noida

**TIME:** Tues, Thurs, Sat; 11 a.m. - 12 noon



### WINE AND SPIRIT

Food consulting company All Things Nice has started conducting Wine & Spirits Online Masterclasses with sommelier Nikhil Agarwal. These are one-on-one or small group online classes conducted for an hour which can be tailor-made as per your preference. The topics include the fundamentals of Scotch, Whisky, food, cheese and wine pairing.

**VENUE:** Call 98206 98888

**TIME:** 10 a.m. - 7 p.m.



### THEATRE

Theatre artistes, musicians, and other performers are all going online to perform live via online streaming websites. Music, storytelling, poetry, and monologues can all be enjoyed. Today's programme features two events. The first, pop, rock and retro English songs played by Suchitra Pillai; the second is acoustic, indie and rock music by Suhaas Ahuja.

**VENUE:** In.bookmyshow.com

**TIME:** 7 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.



### DIGITAL CONVERSATION

HarperCollins India, in association with Algebra Club, presents #Reset, a live conversation every Wednesday morning with speakers from the publisher's celebrated roster of authors across fields. On this digital interaction, a speaker or a panel of speakers will take the virtual stage on Zoom to address concerns which are both contemporary and timeless.

**VENUE:** Harpercollins.co.in

**TIME:** 11:30 a.m.



### RESTORATIVE YOGA

Delhi-based Om Yoga Shala is conducting live online Restorative Yin Yoga classes through Zoom. Conducted by Shikha Sud, the session will focus on releasing anxiety, tension, and stagnation by stimulating the body's lymphatic system, using poses supported by props easily available at home. Registration and online payment is required to join this session.

**VENUE:** Call 9717085369 for the Zoom link

**TIME:** 6:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.



Despite the uncertainty caused by COVID-19, it is business as usual at cultural and tourist sites across the world where maintenance staff continue to preserve these spaces, awaiting a return to normalcy



**Changing times** Penguins at the Shedd Aquarium in USA, a meerkat and a sea lion at the Colchester Zoo in the U.K., a guard stands at the Bronx Zoo entrance

■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

tracted 4.53 million visitors in 2019, and has offered its maintenance crew personal protection equipment, while advising staff to observe social distancing guidelines. "Our logistics and public health specialists are coordinating through a supply chain to keep our field staff equipped, safe and informed on the latest guidance from the CDC," Obleschuk adds.

#### Duty calls

In Alberta, Canada, much like in the U.S., the provincial government, while declaring a public health emergency, has not imposed a lockdown. This allows for provincially-operated museums like Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology and other historic sites, which are classified as "essential services" for the sake of safety and care of Alberta's prehistoric and historic collections, to remain functional (meaning critical research work is allowed to continue) although the facility remains out of bounds for Alberta's residents. "All government employees are still working on site," says Lisa Makin, Director of Exhibits and Communications, Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology, adding that the staff have been following social distancing measures when on duty.

"We are adhering to all measures outlined by Alberta's Chief Medical Officer, and are making sure all areas of the museum are regularly disinfected."

In contrast, the six-storey, 36,000-square-metre facility that is the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington, which houses several thousands of fossil collections, and, among others, a colossal squid that weighs nearly 500 kilograms, has opted to delegate maintenance activities to a skeletal staff keeping guard of the facility. "Our security team is looking after the building and the collections," says Kate Camp, head of marketing and communications at Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. The museum, attracts at least 1.5 million visitors every year. The island nation entered lockdown midnight on March 25. "New Zealand's lockdown is in place for at least three more weeks, but we are making plans now about how we will manage the flow of visitors in the building [once it is lifted]," Kate adds.

# KNIGHTS IN shining armour



PRADEEP KUMAR

Wellington is a miracle. At 32, this Rockhopper penguin, who calls the Shedd Aquarium in Chicago (USA) home, is no spring chicken, considering the average Rockhopper's lifespan (in the wild) is only 10 years. Even with a few added years due to captive breeding, Wellington is the living embodiment of Ian Fleming's vision that You Only Live Twice!

A couple of weeks ago, a surge in the number of Coronavirus infections across the world caused most places of cultural and tourist significance to close. And since the public were prohibited, Wellington's caretakers decided to throw open the facility for him and friends. What followed next was a stream of captive animals debuting on Instagram in videos (like the Colchester Zoo in the U.K.) that show them watching in wonderment when they

spot another species; such videos offering the proverbial silver lining to a human race wired to look for one in every debilitating situation.

It takes a lot of work for the upkeep staff in such facilities to committedly offer care for captive animals. Case in point: it is already the nesting season for penguins, and animal care staff at the Shedd Aquarium noticed it when Rockhoppers and Magellanic penguins started collecting "sturdy twigs and stones",

and the zookeepers do their bit to help the penguins along by providing materials like "lavender sprigs, fig branches, grape vines and pebbles", reads a social media post from Shedd.

In case of a tourist or cultural site like a museum or a national park, or where the work is more hands-on, to continue to go about one's business while still keeping in mind social distancing and watch over one's own health can be taxing. An example of this is Jay Brewer of The Reptile Zoo in California (USA), for whom his interest in nocturnal species is only exceeded by his reputation as the "American Steve Irwin". Jay is known for the dozens of videos that show him working with snake and reptilian eggs that make one squirm. With a razor blade in his hand, he slices them open and out pop baby snakes covered in goop, blood and gooey material. "... it's kinda a new world we are living in. Hopefully, it will end soon somehow like it started. This is the week to stay home. We will see the curve flattened and fall," writes Jay in one of his recent Instagram video posts, shot from on site, with very little staff around, even as he holds baby snakes fresh out of egg shells wearing a 'Snake Dad' T-shirt.

But the recent case of a Malayan tiger named Nadia presumably contracting the Coronavirus from an asymptomatic zookeeper at the Bronx Zoo – the ripple effect of which saw tiger enclosures in Indian zoos in Mysuru and Kolkata, for instance, being sprayed with disinfectants – complicates things, and puts the nature of work for upkeep staff in such places, in the spotlight.

#### Man management

For instance, the National Park Service (NPS) in USA, which administers as many as 419 properties – 62 of which are designated national parks that attract a lot of tourists –



#### PEANUTS



#### POOCH CAFE



#### HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



#### TIGER



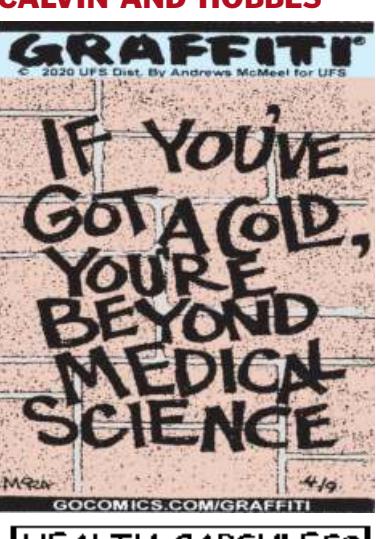
#### WUMO



#### PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



#### CALVIN AND HOBBES



HEALTH CAPSULES®  
by Brian Smith

WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT HAIR LOSS?  
Occasionally wash your hair with mild shampoo.  
2) Massager scalp with *lotion* *potato*.  
3) Avoid brushing wet hair.

BY THIS AGE OF 60, 65% OF MEN AND 80% OF WOMEN EXPERIENCE NOTICABLE HAIR LOSS. THESE SCALP-SUPPORTING FOODS CAN HELP PREVENT THINNING AND LOSS OF HAIR, AND PROMOTE HAIR GROWTH: EGGS, SPINACH, SEA VEGETABLES, PLUMS AND NUTRITIONAL YEAST.

Health Capsules is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice.

#### THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13342

	1	2	3	4	5
6	7				
8			9		
10					11
13				14	
16					17
19				18	
21					20

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

(from Wales?) (4)

4 Kind of beet grown as cattle food – glum re

Zen law (anag) (6-6)

5 Become irrationally

angry or upset (informal) (5,1,6)

6 Flat surface having

switches, dials and

meters (7,5)

7 OTT celebration in

victory (12)

12 Tuneful flyer (8)

15 From Benghazi? (6)

18 Main barrier island in

the Venice Lagoon (4)

The solution will appear on April 11, 2020.

Solution No. 13341

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

CM YK

A N D - N D E

# China lifts Wuhan lockdown after 76 days

About 55,000 people are expected to leave the city, where the pandemic began, on the first day

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
REUTERS

**LONDON** After 76 days in lockdown, the Chinese city at the heart of the global pandemic reopened on Wednesday, and tens of thousands immediately hopped on trains and planes to leave. Elsewhere, the economic, political and psychological toll of fighting the virus grew increasingly clear and more difficult to bear.

In the Chinese city of 11 million where the pandemic began, residents waved flags and the city staged a light show with skyscrapers and bridges radiating images of health workers helping patients.

More than 50,000 people in Wuhan were infected, and over 3,300 deaths were reported, about 80% of all deaths in China, according to official figures.

"I haven't been outside for more than 70 days," said Tong Zhengkun. "Being indoors for so long drove me crazy."

Some 55,000 people were expected to leave Wuhan by train on Wednesday. By early morning, more than 10,000 had left by plane, an airport official said. Flights to Beijing and international locations have not resumed.

People from Wuhan arriving in Beijing must undergo two rounds of testing for the virus.

**Need for caution**  
"We are acutely aware that we must not relax as we have not claimed final victory," Hubei Vice-Governor Cao Guangjin said at a news conference on Wednesday.

"We need to remain calm, and be just as cautious at the end as at the beginning."

Across the Atlantic, New York City endured one of its darkest days yet, with the death toll surging past 4,000, hundreds more than the number killed on 9/11. New York state recorded 731 new COVID-19 deaths on



**Ready to go:** A worker from China's Jilin Province, in red, with a colleague as she prepares to return home from Wuhan. ■AP

## Virus cases in Pakistan rise to 4,072

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's COVID-19 cases increased to 4,072 on Wednesday, as Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa directed his top commanders to provide full support to the federal and provincial governments in combating the pandemic, which has killed 58 people in the country. The Ministry of National Health Services said that 208 new cases were added to the list in the last 24 hours.

## Johnson is 'responding to treatment'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
LONDON

Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson was "responding to treatment", his spokesman said on Wednesday, as the 55-year-old leader spent a third day in intensive care battling COVID-19. Britain on Wednesday reported a record 938 new COVID-19 deaths in its daily update, 152 more than its previous highest toll, as the total number of deaths passed 7,000.

## WHO Europe warns against relaxing curbs

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
COPENHAGEN

The World Health Organization's European office said on Wednesday that despite seeing "positive signs" from some countries, it was too early to scale back measures aimed at containing the coronavirus. "Now is not the time to relax measures. It is the time to double and triple our collective efforts," WHO regional director for Europe, Hans Kluge, told a press conference.

## EU science chief resigns over response

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
BRUSSELS

The head of the European Research Council has resigned, the EU confirmed on Wednesday, reportedly in protest at the bloc's handling of its pandemic response. Mauro Ferrari, who only took over as president of the ERC in January, told the *Financial Times* he was "extremely disappointed" by the EU's response to the pandemic, which has hit Italy and Spain particularly hard.

## Afghan govt. releases 100 Taliban prisoners

No freedom for 15 top 'commanders'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
KABUL

The Afghan government released 100 low-risk Taliban prisoners Wednesday, officials said, a day after the insurgents announced they were walking out of talks with Kabul.

The two foes have been negotiating in Kabul since last week to try to finalise a prisoner swap that was originally supposed to take place by March 10 and pave the way for "intra-Afghan" peace talks between Kabul and the Taliban.

But the swap has been beset with problems, with Kabul claiming the Taliban want 15 "top commanders" to be released, while the insurgents have accused Afghan authorities of needlessly wasting time.

In a statement, Afghanistan's Office of the National

Security Council (NSC) said the 100 prisoners freed on Wednesday were "thoroughly vetted" and had all taken an oath never to return to the battlefield.

The government "has received the same assurance from the (Taliban's) leadership in Doha," the statement read.

An NSC spokesman earlier said the 15 commanders were not among those being released. The Taliban has not yet responded.

Officials said the freed prisoners were chosen based on their health, age and length of remaining sentence "as part of our efforts for peace and containment of COVID-19."

Afghan officials have said they want to release up to 10,000 non-Taliban prisoners to slow the spread of coronavirus in jails.

## Mujibur Rahman's killer to face the gallows after 45 years

Majed returned to Dhaka last month after being on the run

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
DHAKA

A Bangladesh military captain arrested after nearly 25 years on the run over the assassination of the country's founding leader will be executed, officials said Wednesday.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, father of current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, was killed along with most of his family in a military coup on August 15, 1975, nearly four years after he led Bangladesh to independence from Pakistan.

In 1998, Abdul Majed was sentenced to death along with a dozen other Army officers over the murders.

Bangladesh's Supreme Court upheld the verdict in 2009 and five of the killers

were executed several months later.

Majed is believed to have fled to India in 1996. He returned to Bangladesh last month, a prosecutor told reporters.

Acting on a tip-off, counter-terrorism police arrested Majed on Tuesday as he rode in a rickshaw in the capital Dhaka, said police inspector

Johurul Haque.

"The formalities to execute him have already begun," Justice Minister Anisul Huq told AFP, adding that the former officer will not be able to appeal his sentence.

Mr. Huq said Majed's only option to avoid the gallows was to appeal to the President for clemency.

However, since President Abdul Hamid is a close confidante of Ms. Hasina, any mercy appeal is expected to be turned down, paving the way for his execution within weeks.

Ms. Hasina, whose public celebrations this year for the centenary of her father's birth have been hampered by the pandemic, survived the 1975 attack because she was in Europe with her sister.

## TikTok sees appeal growing during lockdowns

The app, owned by Chinese tech company ByteDance, saw 65 million worldwide downloads in March



**In sync:** A file photo of two youths making a TikTok video on the terrace of their residence in Hyderabad. ■AP

800 million reported in January by DataReportal, the app is nearing a billion users – though TikTok itself does not publish such data.

And though teens have been posting on the platform for months, it seems adults

with more free time – as much of the world is encouraged to stay at home to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus – are finally catching on.

Cecile, stuck at home in Paris with her six- and three-

year-old children, was intrigued when a friend sent her a video. Soon, she had downloaded the app and was posting clips herself.

"I said to myself: 'Well, this is something funny I could do with the boys to pass the time, if only for fifteen minutes,'" she said.

Celebrities have joined the fun too, from Jennifer Lopez to Mariah Carey – even 82-year-old Jane Fonda.

Social media use is up across the board as movement is restricted around the world, but TikTok – already having a moment before the pandemic – is doing better than others.

Idyllic vacation views and perfectly framed artistic

shots – long the markers of the Instagram aesthetic – are currently out of reach for most.

But the typical TikTok post does not require a beautiful background, explained Thibault Le Ouay, founder of Pentos, a company that helps brands with their marketing strategy on the platform.

"On TikTok, you do a dance in your own house," he said.

Many videos on the platform – a descendant of the website Musical.ly – are amateur performances of short choreographed dances and lip syncs to song clips, repeated and riffed on over and over.

# Bernie Sanders opts out of Democratic presidential race

Former Vice-President Biden to face Trump in Nov. 3 election

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
WASHINGTON

Senator Bernie Sanders, who saw his once strong lead in the Democratic primary evaporate as the party's establishment lined swiftly up behind rival Joe Biden, ended his presidential bid on Wednesday, an acknowledgement that the former Vice-President is too far ahead for him to have any reasonable hope of catching up.

The Vermont Senator's announcement makes Mr. Biden the presumptive Democratic nominee to challenge President Donald Trump in November.

"The path toward victory is virtually impossible," Mr. Sanders told supporters as he congratulated Mr. Biden. The former Vice-President is "a very decent man whom I will work with to move our progressive ideas forward."

Mr. Sanders initially exceeded sky-high expectations about his ability to recreate the magic of his 2016 presidential bid, and even overcame a heart attack last October. But he found himself unable to convert unwavering support from progressives into a viable path to the nomination amid "electability" fears fuelled by questions about whether his democratic socialist ideology would be palatable to general election voters.

### Oldest contender

The 78-year-old Senator began his latest White House bid facing questions about whether he could win back the supporters who chose him four years ago as an insurgent alternative to the party establishment's choice, Hillary Clinton. Despite winning 22 states in 2016, there were no guarantees he'd be a major presidential contender this cycle, especially as the race's oldest candidate.

But a crucial endorsement of Mr. Biden by influential South Carolina Representative Jim Clyburn, and a subsequent, larger-than-expected victory in South Carolina, propelled the former vice president into Super Tuesday, when he won 10 of 14 States.

In a matter of days, his top former Democratic rivals lined up and announced their endorsement of Mr. Biden. The former Vice-President's campaign had appeared on the brink of collapse after New Hampshire



**End to a solid start:** Senator Bernie Sanders waving to the crowd at a campaign rally in Phoenix on March 5. ■AP

shire but found new life as the rest of the party's more moderate establishment coalesced around him as an alternative to Mr. Sanders.

### Loss in Michigan

Things only got worse the following week when Mr. Sanders lost Michigan, where he had campaigned hard and upset Ms. Clinton in 2016. He was also beaten in Missouri, Mississippi and Idaho the same night and the results were so decisive that Sanders headed to Vermont without speaking to the media.

The coronavirus outbreak essentially froze the campaign, preventing Mr. Sanders from holding the large rallies that had become his trademark and shifting the primary calendar. It became increasingly unclear where he could notch a victory that would help him regain ground against Mr. Biden.

Though he will not be the nominee, Mr. Sanders was a key architect of many of the social policies that dominated the Democratic primary, including a "Medicare for All" universal, government-funded health care plan, tuition-free public college, a \$15 minimum wage and sweeping efforts to fight climate change under the "Green New Deal."

### ELSEWHERE



**Germany to accept 500 children from camps**



**Ren Zhiqiang**

since Mr. Xi took power in 2012, tightening restrictions on freedom of speech and detaining activists.

Mr. Ren disappeared from the public eye in March, shortly after penning an essay that was fiercely critical of Mr. Xi's response to the coronavirus outbreak. The retired entrepreneur has emerged in recent years as one of the Party's most prominent critics in the business world.

### U.K. driver pleads guilty to 39 deaths in container

NORTHERN IRISH TRUCK DRIVER Maurice Robinson has pleaded guilty to 39 counts of manslaughter related to the deaths of Vietnamese people found in a shipping container in southeast England last year, British media reported on Wednesday. ■REUTERS

## Singer John Prine dies at 73

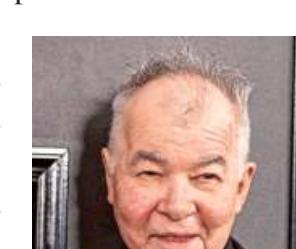
The cause was complications from COVID-19, said his family

WILLIAM GRIMES

John Prine, the raspy-voiced country-folk singer whose ingenious lyrics to songs by turns poignant, angry and comic made him a favourite of Bob Dylan, Kris Kristofferson and others, died on Tuesday at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, Tennessee. He was 73.

The cause was complications from COVID-19, his family said.

Mr. Prine underwent cancer surgery in 1998 to remove a tumour in his neck identified as squamous cell cancer, which had damaged his vocal cords. In 2013, he had part of one lung removed to treat lung cancer.



**John Prine**

His debut album, called simply *John Prine* and released in 1971, included songs that became his signatures. Some gained wider popularity after being recorded by other artists.

They included *Sam Stone*, about a drug-addicted war veteran (with the unforgettable line "There's a hole in Daddy's arm where all the money goes"); *Hello in There*, a heart-rending evocation of old age and loneliness; and *Angel From Montgomery*, the hard-luck lament of a middle-aged woman dreaming about a better life, later made famous by Bonnie Raitt.

"He's a true folk singer in the best folk tradition," Ms. Raitt told *Rolling Stone* in 1992.

Dylan, listing his favourite songwriters in a 2009 interview, put Mr. Prine front and centre. "Prine's stuff is pure Proustian existentialism... Midwestern mind trips to the nth degree. He writes beautiful songs."

■NY TIMES

CMYK

A ND-NDE

## MARKET WATCH

	PRICE	CHANGE
Sensex	29,894	-0.58
US Dollar	76.34	-0.92
Brent oil	31.94	-3.71

## NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	250.85	2.75
Asian Paints	1606.95	-14.85
Axis Bank	391.35	2.50
Bajaj Auto	2241.70	-38.35
Bajaj Finserv	4608.50	-116.40
Bajaj Finance	2322.90	79.55
Bharti Airtel	461.65	-8.55
BPCL	342.30	-8.80
Britannia Ind.	2775.55	-58.95
Cipla	512.75	20.50
Coal India	137.35	-2.80
Dr Reddys Lab	3682.00	99.80
Eicher Motors	13158.50	62.45
GAIL (India)	85.55	1.05
Grafix Ind	512.60	-5.95
HCL Tech.	463.10	11.95
HDFC	1558.80	3.65
HDFC Bank	888.90	-7.20
Hero MotoCorp	1821.65	52.45
Hindalco	100.85	-3.10
Hind Unilever	2460.85	15.95
ICICI Bank	318.95	-7.15
IndusInd Bank	399.15	15.30
Bharti Infratel	166.40	6.75
Infosys	631.60	-7.40
Indian Oil Corp	81.75	-1.25
ITC	178.65	-2.90
JSW Steel	154.60	-3.50
Kotak Bank	1187.65	-10.40
L&T	807.10	5.45
M&M	326.40	5.40
Maruti Suzuki	4698.10	144.45
Nestle India Ltd.	16871.25	-167.40
NTPC	85.20	3.65
ONGC	74.45	1.55
PowerGrid Corp	158.35	0.35
Reliance Ind	1192.15	-13.95
State Bank	183.00	-3.40
Shree Cement	16063.95	-570.60
Sun Pharma	436.70	19.35
Tata Motors	67.60	0.35
Tata Steel	274.75	-1.45
TCS	1705.45	-69.75
Tech Mahindra	558.90	9.05
Titan	913.45	-34.00
UltraTech Cement	3256.45	-23.05
UPL	320.20	-3.45
Vedanta	70.30	3.55
Wipro	192.90	1.00
Zee Entertainment	143.15	2.25

## EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	76.17	76.49
Euro	82.78	83.16
British Pound	94.02	94.43
Japanese Yen (100)	69.98	70.29
Chinese Yuan	10.78	10.83
Swiss Franc	78.38	78.75
Singapore Dollar	53.36	53.60
Canadian Dollar	54.32	54.57
Malaysian Ringgit	17.51	17.60

Source: Indian Bank

## Groupe PSA defers India launch of SUV

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

Groupe PSA in India has revised the time frame for the commercial launch of its debut vehicle, Citroen C5 Aircross SUV, to the first quarter of 2021.

A year ago, the company's top management had announced in Chennai the launch of its maiden Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV) manufactured at its Thiruvallur plant by end-2020. Now, it has been rescheduled to January-March 2021, while ensuring industrial readiness.

The second largest carmaker in Europe said it was working in close coordination with new dealer partners, while ensuring industrial readiness. The deferral was aimed to move the commercial launch to a more positive economic activity period where consumer sentiment is upbeat, it said in a statement.

Groupe PSA said it would maintain the timeline and investment for the C-Cubed programme, under which the first vehicle designed, developed and made in India would be launched in 2021.

## Post lockdown, CII for phased reopening

Says priority must be given to mass employment sectors

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Amid talks over extending the 21-day nationwide lockdown, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has suggested to the government to follow a phased reopening plan with sectors such as manufacturing and construction, that provide mass employment, re-started first.

The CII also sought a fiscal support package for FY21 limited to 2% of the GDP to support the lowest strata and the informal sector and ₹2 lakh crore be transferred to JAM account holders.

The CII, however, also cautioned that it was important to safeguard the macro fundamentals to ensure India did not suffer significant rating downgrades and a potential flight of capital. "Since we are not going to see the end of the crisis soon, the government should not spend all its fire-power at once," the CII said.

For lifting the lockdown, the industry body has pitched for a "re-start calendar" across cities and States, based on a dashboard that can monitor curves of various key cities and States. In phase 1, it said sectors where work-from-home is difficult and which provide mass employment could be re-started to protect low-wage employment. They include manufacturing and transport.

In phase 2, which could start 2-3 weeks after phase 1, other sectors could be allowed to start. "The ramp up could be 50% employees to start with, for about three weeks. This could be increased gradually, based on how the curves are progressing in various cities and States."

Truck drivers and migrant workers willing to come



Revival drive: The CII wants a fiscal support package limited to 2% of GDP to support lowest strata of society. ■PTI

back should be facilitated, dhabas on highways petrol/diesel stations and repair shops on highways should be opened, it said, adding logistics service providers must extend insurance cover of about ₹10-15 lakh for a period of three months to the workers and their families.

To get back migrant workers, the CII suggested a COVID-19 insurance scheme for three months for which part cost could be borne by the government and part by the industry, besides an aggressive 'messaging' campaign.

On the economic front, the CII said it expects GDP growth for the current fiscal to be no more than about 2% with a downward bias.

"India should brace itself for what may be a long haul to overcome the public health crisis and the economic crisis precipitated by the corona pandemic," the industry body said.

## Higher credit limit

On relief for businesses, the CII said rather than the government giving direct subsidies to industry, enterpris-

es should be supported through banks via enhanced credit limits for working capital, additional working capital limits – equivalent to April-June wage bill of the borrowers, backed by a government guarantee at 4-5% with a refinance guarantee from the RBI. Additional reconstruction term loans can be given to MSMEs and stressed sectors.

"Our estimates are the economy would need a credit expansion of 14-15%. Therefore, we would request the RBI to extend support to the industry," it said. There is also a need to pre-empt failure in the banking sector, it said.

While the steps announced by the RBI Governor on March 27, adequately addresses the potential liquidity issues that will arise in the system, it is eminently possible that the pain would soon manifest in terms of capital and solvency in the system."

Stating the economy cannot afford a bank collapse, the CII proposed the government set up a fund of ₹30,000 crore "that could be used by banks that meet certain criteria and under specified conditions."

## All pending refunds for GST and customs will also be issued, benefiting about one lakh business entities.

All pending refunds for

## Defer appointments till MD takes charge, HDFC Bank told

Jagdishan, Zaveri were inducted to the board in November

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has asked HDFC Bank to hold on to board-level appointments till a new managing director and chief executive officer takes charge.

The communication comes after the private sector lender inducted Jagdishan and Bhavesh Zaveri into the board of the bank in November last. These appointments were subject to the RBI's approval.

We are now in receipt of a communication dated April 7, 2020 from Reserve Bank of India stating that since these are important positions in the bank, the bank is advised to examine

and submit the proposal after a new MD and CEO assumes charge later this year," HDFC Bank said in a notification to the exchanges.

"The bank shall accordingly ensure compliance with Reserve Bank's instruction," it added.

HDFC Bank also said that Mr. Jagdishan and Mr. Zaveri would continue as additional directors on the board of the bank till the ensuing Annual General Meeting, citing relevant provisions of the Companies Act, 2013.

While Mr. Jagdishan heads functions such as finance and human resources, Mr. Zaveri heads operations, information technology and cash man-

agement functions.

Aditya Puri, the managing director of the bank, will hang up his boots after a 26-year stint at the helm of the largest private sector lender of the country, on October 26, 2020.

## MCLR cut

Separately, HDFC Bank has also decided to reduce the benchmark lending rate or the marginal cost of fund-based lending rate (MCLR) by 20 bps across all tenors.

With this cut, the one-year MCLR will be 7.95% with effect from March 7.

The move comes after Reserve Bank of India (RBI) reduced the repo rate by 75 bps in the last week of March.

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# Qualification period freeze a wise move: Anju

Says it is meant to be a hurdle for dope cheats; Sreeshankar, Toor and Annu among Indians eager to make it to the Games

## OLYMPICS

STAN RAYAN  
KOCHE

With every new day bringing a fresh load of worrying news, Anju Bobby George feels World Athletics' decision to freeze the Olympic Games qualification period for eight months, till November 30, is a wise move.

"They did this because there is a high chance of cheats taking illegal drugs during the coronavirus period since dope-testers cannot travel to take out-of-competition tests owing to lockdown in many places," said Anju in a chat with *The Hindu* from Bengaluru on Wednesday.

"Athletes can easily hide somewhere now, take drugs and qualify for the Olympics, and can later come up with better performances."

### Big worry

Anju, the chairperson of the Indian Olympic Association's Athletes' Commission, revealed that doping was a big worry when the qualification period extension was dis-



**Ready, but...** Annu Rani and Sreeshankar will be anxiously waiting for the qualification doors to open in December. ■ FILE PHOTOS

cussed recently.

"We had a con-call between the athlete commissions of various countries by the end of March. All of us were worried that cheaters could benefit. That could be the reason for closing the Olympic qualification doors till December," she said.

"We feel that proper test-

ing will happen only from January next year. So, to some extent, that will dissuade the dope cheats everywhere... even in India."

Anju feels that it will not be proper to conduct national competitions before the Tokyo qualification process begins in December.

"If there is no qualification

chance, I don't think it will be wise to conduct national competitions.

"And look at the way coronavirus is spreading in the country, I don't think athletes can have enough time to train if they have competitions in September or October.

"Right now, we don't

know how many days this situation will continue and when they can travel freely from one place to another.

"Since athletes have to travel a lot for competitions, we have to be careful about all these things. Nothing can be more important than the safety and health of our athletes."



Anju Bobby George.  
■ FILE PHOTO

Stars like long jumper M. Sreeshankar, javelin thrower Annu Rani and shot putter Tajinder Pal Singh Toor will be among those who will be anxiously waiting for the qualification doors to open.

### Helplessness

Anju said she was worried about the coronavirus pandemic.

"When you see that the UK Prime Minister is in the ICU, you feel a certain helplessness about the whole thing. It just shows how small and insignificant we are in this world."

## IOC's new roadmap for Tokyo berths

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
LAUSANNE

procedures. The IOC urged the federations to find a balance between protecting athletes who were close to qualifying based on the 2020 deadline and also ensure that the best athletes compete at Tokyo by taking into consideration performances in 2021.

It released a rewritten roadmap for qualifying for the Olympics which will be held from July 23 to August 8 next year.

The new deadline for

qualifying is June 29, 2021, and entry lists are due a week later.

Individual sports federations will be in charge of their qualifying

2021.

It also clarified a number of points, including the need for boxing to relax a rule that sets the top age at 40 and gymnastics to decide whether to allow those who would've been too young to compete in 2020 but will be eligible for

2021.

## Akhtar moots India-Pakistan ODI series

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

Former Pakistan pacer Shoaib Akhtar, on Wednesday, proposed a three-match ODI series against arch-rival India to raise funds for the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic in both the countries.

"In this time of crisis, I want to propose a three-match series in which, for the first time, the people of neither country would be upset at the outcome of the games," Akhtar told PTI from Islamabad.

"You are bound to get massive viewership for the games. For the first time, both countries will play for each other. And whatever funds are generated through this can be donated equally to the governments of India and Pakistan to fight this pandemic," added the 44-year-old.

## Wisden honour for Ben Stokes

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE  
LONDON

Ben Stokes has ended Virat Kohli's three-year reign as *Wisden's* leading cricketer in the world after playing a starring role in England's World Cup win last year. Australia's Ellyse Perry reclaimed the leading women's cricketer in the world title from Smriti Mandhana.

Stokes, the first England player to receive the honour since Andrew Flintoff in 2005, had won the ICC player of the year award.

### Two defining knocks

The 28-year-old won the man-of-the-match award in the World Cup final against New Zealand at Lord's and then produced a remarkable match-winning innings of 135 not out in the third Ashes Test against Australia.

"Ben Stokes pulled off the performance of a lifetime – twice in the space of a few weeks," said *Wisden*



**Freeze frame:** Ben Stokes celebrating the Headingley win has won the *Wisden* award for best photograph. ■ GETTY IMAGES

editor Lawrence Booth.

A photo taken by Gareth Copley for Getty Images showing Stokes celebrating after hitting the winning runs in the Headingley Test has won the *Wisden-MCC* Photograph of the Year award for 2019.

### Aussies strike it rich

England pace bowler Jofra Archer, who bowled the

Super Over in the World Cup final, is among *Wisden's* five cricketers of the year.

Australians Pat Cummins, Marnus Labuschagne and Perry have been named alongside Archer, as well as South Africa-born Essex spinner Simon Harmer.

West Indian all-rounder Andre Russell was named leading T20 cricketer in the world.

## Would love to win a Test series in India: Smith

Rajasthan Royals' captain hopes for 'IPL at some stage'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

Star Australian batsman Steve Smith believes India is one of the toughest places to play Test cricket and winning a five-day format series in the country is a major career goal for him.

"India is the No. 1 team in the world and it is a very difficult place to play Test cricket, so I would love to win a series there," Smith told New Zealand leg-spinner Ish Sodhi during a podcast organised by the inaugural IPL champion Rajasthan Royals.

"It has been a pretty long year with the World Cup and Ashes, a few away one-day tours. So this rest is not the worst thing but hopefully it is for a few weeks. I am pretty keen to get back to



Steve Smith. ■ AFP

playing.

"Plenty going on in the world at present, but hopefully we can get an IPL at some stage," said Smith.

"The two seasons that I captained the Royals were both half seasons.

"Looking at having a crack at it full time and the Royals have a pretty good squad," he said.

## Deepak's mantra: prevention is better than cure

Asian Games silver medallist is doing physical workouts to stay in shape

## SHOOTING

KAMESH SRINIVASAN  
NEW DELHI

Asian Games silver medallist shooter Deepak Kumar's message is "Saving lives, staying home."

It is a rare privilege for him to spend time with family at home. "I left home at the age of eight. After that I am in my house continuously for more than five days only now. *Zindagi nikhal gayi, success k peechhe peechhe bhagte* (life went away running after success)," said the 32-year-old.

Having studied at the Gu-

rukul in Dehradun, Deepak said that he was happy to contribute to the school.



permission from the Air Force to focus on his training. That was the reason he could reach home after the shooting range was shut down. He is happy to spend time with his family and enjoy his favourite food.

Of course, shooting is an integral part of his daily routine, as his main event is the 10-metre air rifle. "I am doing physical workouts and also dry-holding of the rifle in front of the mirror," he said.

Deepak could have been one of the first to win the Olympic quota, but missed it narrowly as he finished sixth in the World Championship

in Changwon in 2018. After agonising moments in the World Cups, Deepak eventually clinched his berth on the last chance in the Asian Championship in Doha.

He has also done well to stay on top of the list along with Divyansh Singh Panwar to make a convincing claim for a ticket to the Tokyo Games.

With time on hand, Deepak follows all the expert talks on Facebook live everyday, arranged by the Sports Authority of India to help the sporting fraternity gain insight into many aspects of sports and life.

## UWW plans to conduct Olympic qualifiers in 'same period' in 2021

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA

United World Wrestling (UWW) has decided to hold the remaining Olympic qualifying events in the 'same period' next year.

Following the coronavirus outbreak, the UWW postponed three of the four Olympic qualifiers scheduled last month. It organised the Pan-American Olympic qualifier in Ottawa last month, but had to postpone the African/Oceania, European and Asian qualifying events.

It also postponed the World Olympic qualifier, which was due to be held via teleconference.

The apex body also decided to postpone all UWW championships and cancel all international events planned until June 30.

The remaining OG qualifiers shall be organised in 2021 in the same period as in 2020 (supposing minor adjustments to the exact dates)

WRESTLING FEDERATION OF INDIA

ed to postpone all UWW championships and cancel all international events planned until June 30.

It advised all National federations to cancel their events to ensure that the health of all athletes and participants is protected.

## IN BRIEF



**Buttler's WC Final shirt raises £65,100**

LONDON  
England wicketkeeper Jos Buttler has raised £65,100 to help fight the coronavirus pandemic by auctioning off his World Cup final shirt. The proceeds of the shirt, which attracted 82 bids, will be given to specialist heart and lung centres provided by the Royal Brompton and Harefield hospitals in London. "It's a very special shirt, but I think it takes on an extra meaning by being able to go for an emergency cause," said Buttler. ■ PTI

### Olympic 800m finalist Sabia dies from virus

ROME  
Two-time Olympic 800m finalist Donato Sabia has died at the age of 56 due to COVID-19, the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI) said on Wednesday. Sabia finished fifth at Los Angeles (1984) and seventh in Seoul (1988). He won the gold medal at the European indoor championships in 1984. According to CONI, he is the first Olympic finalist in the world to die from the virus. ■ REUTERS



### F1 shutdown period extended further

PARIS  
Formula One's mandatory shutdown period, which was brought forward from August last month, will be extended by a further two weeks following the delay to the season caused by the coronavirus pandemic, FIA confirmed on Tuesday. Meanwhile, the Canadian GP, scheduled for June 14, has also been scrapped. ■ AFP

### Sai Praneeth contributes ₹4 lakh to fight pandemic

NEW DELHI  
World badminton championships bronze medallist B. Sai Praneeth on Wednesday donated ₹4 lakh to help in the fight against COVID-19. Praneeth donated ₹3 lakh to the PM-CARES Fund and ₹1 lakh towards the Telangana CM Relief Fund. ■ PTI



### Ronaldinho under house arrest in a hotel

ASUNCION  
A judge in Paraguay on Tuesday ordered the release of Brazilian football great Ronaldinho and his brother into house arrest at an Asuncion hotel. They were jailed almost exactly a month ago to await trial on charges of using false passports to enter Paraguay. Lawyers for the two posted a bail of \$1.6 million. ■ AFP

### French footballers strike deal to reduce wages

PARIS  
Footballers and clubs in France's top two leagues reached a non-binding agreement over a "temporary" pay cut, the national players' union (UNFP) said on Tuesday. The cuts will be done on a sliding scale starting at 20%, the highest earners (more than ₹100,000 monthly) facing a 50% reduction. ■ AFP

### Teen golfer Arjun sells trophies, raises ₹4.30 lakh

NEW DELHI  
He may be just 15 but golfer Arjun Bhati has managed to raise ₹4.30 lakh to fight the COVID-19 pandemic by selling all his trophies, including three World junior golf championship titles and a National championship. The golfer from Greater Noida has donated the money to the PM-CARES Fund. "After coming to know about my contribution, my grandmother first cried and then said, 'you are a real Arjun!'" he tweeted in Hindi on Tuesday. ■ AFP

The World Athletics Championships, originally scheduled for next year in Eugene, USA, will take place from July 15 to 24, 2022, avoiding a potential clash with the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham. World Athletics last month shifted the event to 2022 to accommodate the rearranged Tokyo Olympics. ■ AFP

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