

on Sunday



135 personnel from CRPF unit in Delhi test positive for COVID-19
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UAE sends medical aid to India as evacuation plans are being framed
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PM meets FM for second economic stimulus package
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North Korean leader Kim Jong-un seen in public after weeks of speculation
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NEARBY



Delhi records 384 cases, biggest jump in one day

NEW DELHI
Three more deaths and 384 new COVID-19 cases were reported in Delhi on Saturday, taking the toll of dead to 64 and the total cases to 4,122. This is the biggest single-day jump in the number of cases in the city so far.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

Minorities panel chief charged with sedition

NEW DELHI
The Special Cell of Delhi Police on Saturday registered an FIR against Delhi Minorities Commission chairman Zafarul Islam Khan on charges of sedition after he allegedly made a "provocative" Facebook post for which he later apologised.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

Cong. to file case against 7 Manipur legislators

GUWAHATI
The Congress has decided to file a case against seven of its MLAs who have been supporting the BJP-led government in Manipur. After their election in 2017, the seven MLAs, along with former Minister Thounajam Shyamkumar, helped the BJP form the government.

NORTH & EAST ▶ PAGE 4

CLASSIFIEDS ▶ PAGE 4
MAGAZINE ▶ 8 PAGES

2,411 cases recorded in highest single-day spike; toll now 1,223

One million tests conducted till date; ICMR ramps it up to 75,000 per day

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

India, on Saturday, recorded the biggest single-day jump of 2,411 COVID-19 cases, taking the total number to 37,776, according to data released by the Union Health Ministry.

This is the largest rise in cases since January, when the infection was first detected in India.

With 71 more deaths, the death toll has gone up to 1,223. India currently has 26,535 active COVID-19 cases, and 10,017 patients have recovered.

"In the last 24 hours, more than 1,061 patients were cured. This takes our total recovery rate to 26.65%," added the Ministry.

Data from the State Health Departments put the total number of cases at 39,435, of which 27,534 are active ones.

The number of fatalities stood at 1,316.

With 790 new cases, the number of cases in Maharashtra reached 12,296. Mumbai accounted for 547 of the cases.

The death toll in the State rose to 521, with 27 deaths in Mumbai and nine in other parts of the State.

Gujarat reported 26 deaths, the highest number

Consistent spike

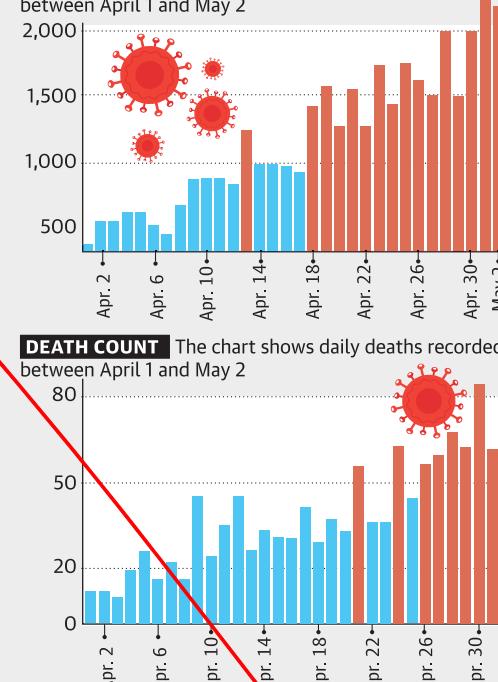
India has recorded more than 1,000 new COVID-19 cases every day in the past 15 days and over 50 new deaths every day in the past seven days. More than 2,000 new cases were recorded each day in the past three days



Anxious wait: A man, with his 10-day-old baby, waiting to get tested for COVID-19 in New Delhi on Saturday. ■ REUTERS

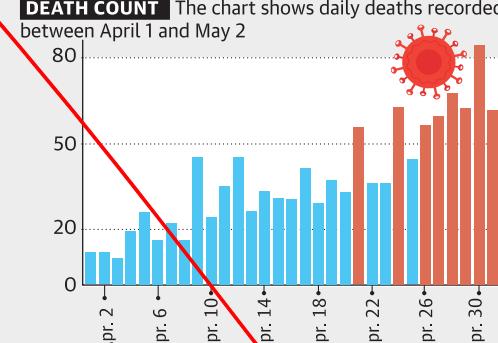
CASE COUNT

The chart shows daily cases recorded between April 1 and May 2



DEATH COUNT

The chart shows daily deaths recorded between April 1 and May 2



of fatalities in a single day so far, taking the overall toll to 262. With 333 new cases, most of them in Ahmedabad, the tally in the State rose to 5,054, an official said.

419 labs

India crossed the million-mark for conducting RT-PCR tests, with the Indian Council of Medical Research now

having ramped up testing to more than 75,000 samples per day.

"Currently, there are 419 labs testing for coronavirus in the country. There are currently 14 mentor institutions, including AIIMS, PGI Chandigarh, CMC Vellore, JIPMER Puducherry, and SGPGIMS Lucknow, who are hand-holding several medi-

cal colleges/ labs/ hospitals in carrying out tests. There are 15 institutions spread in the country working as depots for supplying testing kits/ material to these labs," a senior government source said.

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41 people in one building test positive for COVID-19

Structure in south-west Delhi sealed on April 19 after one case

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

Forty-one people living in a building in Kapashera in south-west Delhi tested positive for COVID-19 on Saturday. The building was declared a containment zone on April 19, a day after one COVID-19-positive case was detected there.

"A total of 175 samples were collected on April 20 and 22 of all the residents in the building and sent to NIB (National Institute of Biologics), Noida. Sixty-seven reports have come today (Saturday), out of which 41 are positive," said a Delhi government official, adding that most inhabitants of the building are migrant workers.



A worker spraying disinfectant at a residential area in north Delhi on Saturday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Delayed results

"The tests were conducted 13 days ago but the results were delayed due to issues of blockade at the Delhi-Noida border and the backlog at NIB, Noida. As all the individuals are asymptomatic and results are 13 days old, the [South West] district administration is conducting retests on Sunday and Monday to assess the present status of all positive cases," the official said.

According to the guidelines, an area is declared a containment zone when

there are at least three positive cases. The South West district administration took the proactive decision of sealing and containing the Kapashera building even when only one case was reported on April 18 as there were a lot of people living in it, said an official.

"First, a woman tested positive on April 18. As it was a small building and people were sharing toilets, we decided to seal the building. Since then, all of them have been restricted to the building and because of this, the spread of the virus has been contained to the premises," said Rahul Singh, District Magistrate (South West).

Mr. Singh said medical teams are present at the spot round-the-clock and the condition of everyone in the building is stable.

Last month, the private secretary of Mr. Singh had tested positive for COVID-19, prompting the District Magistrate to go into self-isolation. Mr. Singh himself has tested negative for COVID-19.

Majority of curbs lifted in orange zones

Barring containment areas, domestic help, electricians and plumbers can work

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

A day after the nationwide lockdown was extended till May 17 and major relaxations were allowed, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) clarified on Saturday that taxis would be permitted with two passengers.

Inter-district movement of vehicles are allowed only for permitted activities with a maximum of two passengers. Other than these, all activities are allowed without any restriction in the orange zones.

Also, e-commerce could be used for the delivery of essential and non-essential products in districts designated as green and orange zones. In red zones, e-com-

merce can only be used for the delivery of essential items, an MHA official said.

Salons, liquor shops

In another significant addition, the official said barbers and salons could also open in orange and green zones. Liquor shops could open in all zones, except containment areas. In urban areas, liquor shops that are not in market complexes and malls could open everywhere.

Regarding the entry of domestic helps, electricians, plumbers and others, the official said Residents Welfare Association (RWAs) in all zones, except containment areas, should take a call "by keeping health protocols in mind."

COVID-19

been allowed to ply with 50% capacity.

MHA also issued a separate clarification for orange zones where it said that "inter-district and intra-district plying of buses remains prohibited." According to the guidelines issued on Friday, buses were allowed only in green zones with a 50% cap.

"However, States and Un-

ion territories based on their assessment and priorities, may choose to permit a lesser number of activities," the official said.

Green zones are districts with either zero confirmed cases till date; or, no confirmed case in the last 21 days. Red zones are defined based on the total number of active cases, doubling rate of confirmed cases, extent of testing and surveillance feedback from the districts. The districts, which are neither defined as red nor green, shall be classified as orange zones. According to the Health Ministry's classification, there are 130 red zone districts, 284 orange zone districts and 319 green zone districts in the country.

Despair packs them into a concrete mixer truck

Ride ends in Indore for 18 U.P. men



A man gets off the concrete mixer truck in Indore
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

States scrape the barrel as revenues dry up

They face mounting costs of lockdown

Desperate to return home, four drivers took turns crawling into the steel drum of a concrete mixer truck as they set out on a 1,380 km ride to Uttar Pradesh. They left Mumbai on International Workers' Day on May 1 after battling hunger and with virtually no money after being denied wages for three months.

"The heat inside was more bearable than the hunger," said Manoj Yadav. On the way, they picked up 14 others trudging back home. While most of the others planned to get a ride to Gorakhpur district, Mr. Yadav hoped to disembark in Lucknow and walk to his home in Prayagraj, 200 km away. On the outskirts of Indore, Madhya Pradesh, a policeman caught sight of a head popping out from an opening on the side of the truck's drum.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

We have taken them to a quarantine centre, where they have been screened and given food," said Sunil Yadav, in-charge of the Sanwer police station. The police booked the driver for disobeying the lockdown.

The drivers had given up

hope of the lockdown ever being lifted. "They said it would be lifted on April 14, but it has not ended. We couldn't wait for something that was never going to end," he added.

All of these are now under strain. There have been no new vehicle and property registrations since the lockdown began and also no sale of liquor. Petroleum sales have dropped by about half. Resultantly, own tax revenues of the States have plunged by 80-90%.

REPORT ON ▶ PAGE 6



STATE OF FINANCES

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Timings	
SUNDAY, MAY. 03	
RISE 05:39 SET 18:58	
RISE 14:31 SET 02:55	
MONDAY, MAY. 04	
RISE 05:39 SET 18:59	
RISE 15:38 SET 03:35	
TUESDAY, MAY. 05	
RISE 05:38 SET 18:59	
RISE 16:44 SET 04:13	

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	38	24
Safdarjung	38	24
Palam	39	24

Delhi Pali Today
38°C A very warm day with partly cloudy sky to prevail. Chances of light spell of duststorm and thundershower.

Delhi Pali Tomorrow
37°C A warm and cloudy weather to prevail. Spell of duststorm and thundershower with strong winds to occur.

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Air Quality of Delhi-NCR	
Delhi	112
Ghaziabad	110
Noida	105
Good 0-50	51-100
Poor 101-200	201-300
Very Poor 301-400	301-400
Severe >400	>400
Air Quality Index at 4 p.m., yesterday (Average of past 24 hours) Source: CPCB	

Students stuck in Kota likely to return today

Over 40 buses deployed by Delhi govt.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government on Saturday dispatched 45 buses to bring back an estimated 800 students to the Capital, who are stranded in Rajasthan's Kota. The AC buses were requisitioned from the Delhi Contract Bus Association (DCBA).

The buses left Delhi at midnight on Friday and reached their destination around noon on Saturday, the DCBA said.

The students are expected to reach the city by early Sunday morning.

"Hundreds of our children studying in Kota were stuck there for over a month. We are arranging for their return to Delhi. I am so happy they will soon be reunited with their families," Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal tweeted.

According to the Delhi government, not more than 22 students would be allowed on one bus and all would be screened at the time of departure as well as arrival.

Delhi Contract Bus Asso-

ciation general secretary Harish Sabharwal said the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits for staff and the full sanitisation of buses at both points, masks, face shields and sanitiser bottles were provided by the association. One home guard and one Delhi Police constable were also deployed aboard each bus.

A team of doctors, senior officials from the Home Guards and the Delhi government's Social Welfare Department were also among the contingent that was on board the buses.

AC luxury buses

"All the buses deployed are luxury AC with 2x2 push bk seats so that social distancing can be taken care of during journey. Not more than 22 students are allowed in one bus or coach," Mr. Sabharwal said, adding: "The buses are ready to leave by 8 p.m. on Saturday so as to reach the Interstate Bus Terminal in Delhi by 5 a.m.-6 a.m."

Minorities panel chief charged with sedition

He made 'provocative' post on social media for which he apologised

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Delhi Police Special Cell on Saturday registered an FIR against Delhi Minorities Commission chairman Zafarul Islam Khan on charges of sedition after he allegedly made a "provocative" Facebook post for which he later apologised.

A senior officer said the FIR has been registered under Sections 124A (Sedition) and 153A (Promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony) based on a complaint by a resident of south Delhi's Vasant Kunj.

The complainant stated that on April 28 Mr. Khan shared a post social media which was "provocative". In the post, he thanked Kuwait for taking note of the "persecution of Indian Muslims" in the context of the violence in north-east Delhi.

Mr. Khan later issued a

C I realise that my tweet was ill-timed and insensitive in view of our country facing a medical emergency and fighting an unseen enemy. I apologise to all whose sentiments were hurt

ZAFARUL ISLAM KHAN
Delhi Minorities Commission chairman

statement apologising for the post. "I realise that my tweet was ill-timed and insensitive in view of our country facing a medical emergency and fighting an unseen enemy. I apologise to all whose sentiments were hurt. Further, the limitation of a tweet, which has to be very short by its very nature, was also responsible that the whole narrative was not made out in plain language," he had said.

In a parallel development, a group of former judges, bureaucrats, and others on Saturday urged

Delhi Lieutenant-Governor Anil Baijal not to allow Mr. Khan to complete his term, which ends in July.

"Mr. Zafarul Islam is completing his term in July this year. Keeping in mind his concurrent and recurring potential to abuse the authority bestowed upon him by the law, we plead to your honour that he should not be permitted to complete the term," the letter read.

'Criminally culpable'
The group, who called themselves "concerned citizens of India", termed Mr. Khan's post an "ill-conceived communal rant" and an "anti-national act".

The letter said the "illegal" action of Mr. Khan also makes him "criminally culpable" on many counts.

The group of 106 people included S.M. Soni, former judge of Gujarat High Court; Permod Kohli, former Chief Justice of Sikkim High Court; and Anand Bose, former Chief Secretary of Kerala.

Govt. launches exercise to identify, open liquor shops

Agencies to give details of such outlets

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government on Saturday launched an exercise to identify and open liquor shops in public places, except those located in malls.

The agencies were asked to immediately provide details of shops which operated under the L-6 and L-8 licenses and also give an undertaking stating that liquor shops being allowed to open will fulfill all conditions prescribed by the MHA, according to the excise department order. There are an estimated 450 liquor shops, except those in malls, in the Capital.

The latest guidelines by the Centre state that the sale of liquor, paan, tobacco will be allowed after ensuring minimum six-feet social distancing while no more than five people will be allowed inside a shop at a time.

HELPLINE NUMBERS	
COMMON HELPLINE	+91-11-23978046
DELHI	— 011-22307145
GHAZIABAD	— 0120 4186453
NOIDA	— 8076623612/6396776904
GURUGRAM	— 108/ 0124-2322412/ 9911519296/ 7015523417/ 9654231756



PNIT NO.F.8 (8)/DH&SC/TM/2019-20/9259 Dated: 29/04/2020

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All the information of the above stated tender is available in <https://tripuratenders.gov.in>. Submission of bids physically is not permitted.

(Dr. P.B.Jamiatia)
Director
Horticulture & Soil Conservation
Tripura, Agartala

ICA-C/124/20

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Indicative Notice	Dated: 02/05/2020
No: 752E/719/CMP/Pr- II/2016	Modern Coach Factory will hold a interview for engagement of 8 CMP's (04 GDMO + 04 Anesthetist) on contract basis for three months specially for COVID-19 Situation. Interested candidates are requested to send their application 20/05/2020.
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SR. NO.	NAME OF BOARD/CORP./AUTH
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2.	IMPROVEMENT BY PROVIDING WIDENING & STRENGTHENING OF ROAD IN PONDATVILLAGEAURANGABAD-BLOCK HODAL DISTT, SONEPAT (MAHLANA FARMANA ROAD TO THAR KHURD AND ROAD ID 6226, 6228, 6238, 6244, 6267, 9663) IN SONEPAT DISTT. (RE-INVITED)
3.	PANCHAYAT RAJ, BHAWANI
4.	IRRIGATION & W.R DEPTT, HISAR
5.	PWD B&R, BRANCH, HISAR
6.	HARYANA IRRIGATION & WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION KINDLY VISIT : www.haryanaeprocurement.gov.in or www.etenders.hry.nic.in

PRDH-80763

EASTERN RAILWAY

E-tender is invited by Principal Chief Engineer, Eastern Railway, Kolkata from and reputed contractors of Railways and those of approved list of Govt. of India/Public Sector undertaking for the under mentioned work: E-Tender No.: W2_623_19_8_185_ZN1_20_21, Dated: 30.04.2020. Name of the work and its location: Zone No. I: Civil maintenance including water supply, sanitary and horticulture works at Fairlie Place Building areas, Eastern Railway, Kolkata for the period ending 30.06.2021. Approximate cost of the work: ₹ 62,00,000. Earnest Money Deposit: ₹ 1,24,000. Date & time of closing of tender: 26.05.2020 at 14.00 hrs. The details of tender documents are available at website www.ireps.gov.in. Tenderers are requested to submit their offer online on the above website. No manual offer will be accepted.

(MISC-11/2020-21)

Tender Notices are also available at website: www.er.indianrailways.gov.in

EASTERN RAILWAY

e-Tender Notice No. : MC/16-5-Coach Clg-MDP, dated : 27.04.2020. E-tender is invited by Senior Divisional Mechanical Engineer, Eastern Railway, Asansol for the following work : Tender No. : MC-16-5-Coach Clg-MDP; Name of work : Coach and Yard cleaning work under SSE/C&W/MDP for a period of 03 (three) years through open tender; Tender Value : ₹ 1,37,52,334; Earnest Money : ₹ 2,18,800. Date and time of closing and opening : 19.05.2020 at 15.00 hrs. Complete details can be seen in the Railway's website www.ireps.gov.in (ASN-23/2020-21) Tender Notices are also available at Eastern Railway's website : [www.er.indianrailways.gov.in/www.ireps.gov.in](http://er.indianrailways.gov.in/www.ireps.gov.in)

Tender Notices are also available at Eastern Railway's website : [www.er.indianrailways.gov.in/www.ireps.gov.in](http://er.indianrailways.gov.in/www.ireps.gov.in)

Volunteers' group flags issues in accessing blood

They ask Minister to address concerns

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A group of volunteers comprising health professionals and citizens that has been facilitating access to healthcare during the nationwide lockdown have flagged issues in accessing blood requirements to the State government. To address these concerns, the group suggested regular mobile blood donation camps, relaxing donor replacement practices, free blood for pregnant women and that donor cards issued by government hospitals be honoured at all hospitals.

In a letter to the Delhi Health Minister, the Medical Support Group stated that patients in need of blood were asked to provide replacement blood donations to the hospital's blood bank in several cases involving ci-

ty hospitals. The group claimed that the State government hospitals were not readily accepting donor cards issued by the Delhi government hospitals. They stated that transporting donors to a hospital and exposing them to the risk of infection was not prudent. To address these concerns, the group suggested regular mobile blood donation camps, relaxing donor replacement practices, free blood for pregnant women and that donor cards issued by government hospitals be honoured at all hospitals.

Additional Sessions Judge Tyagita Singh rejected Hussain's bail plea on the grounds that the investigation is at an initial stage at present and his custody was required for it.

Court dismisses Tahir Hussain's bail petition

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Saturday denied bail to suspended AAP Councillor Tahir Hussain in a case related to communal violence that took place during protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act in northeast Delhi in February.

Additional Sessions Judge Tyagita Singh rejected Hussain's bail plea on the grounds that the investigation is at an initial stage at present and his custody was required for it.

POLICE HEADQUARTERS	

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In times of lockdown



(1) Migrant labourers and homeless people queue up at a meal distribution centre. (2) A scene at Keshopur wholesale vegetable market. (3) Medical staff at work inside a mobile testing van. (4) People flout social distancing norms as they wait to receive ration in Patparganj. (5) A bird's-eye view of the city. (6) A barber attends to a customer at Bhajanpura, amid the ongoing nationwide lockdown on Saturday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR, PTI AND R.V. MOORTHY



IN BRIEF

Functioning of city courts restricted till May 17

NEW DELHI The Delhi High Court on Saturday decided to restrict its and the district courts' functioning to urgent matters only till May 17, in view of the extended lockdown announced by the Centre in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Administrative and General Supervision Committee of the High Court, headed by Chief Justice D.N. Patel, decided that the restriction would be in place till May 17 and only urgent matters would continue to be heard via videoconferencing.

Door-to-door joint survey in Model Town

NEW DELHI A joint door-to-door survey was carried out in Model Town by teams of the Sub-Divisional Magistrate Model Town, the North Corporation, the Delhi police and medical representatives here on Saturday. The 10 households where individuals had tested COVID-19 positive were surveyed by the team.

BJP leaders discuss lockdown issues

NEW DELHI Delhi BJP president Manoj Tiwari has held a meeting with former Union Minister Vijay Goel and Leader of the Opposition Ramveer Singh Bidhuri on the upcoming scenario after the second phase of the lockdown ends. "To save municipal employees from financial crisis, it is the moral responsibility of the Delhi government to release stalled funds of the municipal corporation, Mr. Tiwari said. He also urged the Delhi government to resolve the 'waver attitude' of the ration distribution system.

Largest single-day jump in cases

Three deaths and 384 cases in city; 'welfare cell' set up for infected officials, kin

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Three more deaths and 384 new COVID-19 cases were reported in Delhi on Saturday, taking the toll to 64 and total number of cases to 4,122. This is the largest single-day jump in cases in the city since the outbreak began.

Earlier in the day, Health Minister Satyendar Jain said the whole city would remain in "red zone" till May 17, when phase 3 of the lockdown ends.

The Delhi government has also appointed CEO of Delhi Jal Board, Nikhil Kumar, as the nodal welfare officer to help to officials of the Delhi government, autonomous bodies, corporations and local bodies who have tested positive for the virus.

Mr. Kumar has been asked to identify and earmark two dedicated hospitals and one testing laboratory for officials and their family members on a "cashless basis", according to an order issued by Chief Secretary Vijay Dev.



People wait outside a POS shop to collect free ration in east Delhi on Saturday. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

COVID-19

Meanwhile, employees at a control room of CATS ambulance service on the fourth floor of a Delhi government Health Department office in Laxmi Nagar said that at least 15 staffers have contracted the virus till now.

"The ambulance drivers come to the fourth floor to collect Personal Protective Equipment kits from us and the employees contracted

the virus from them. We did not wear PPE or gloves as we were working inside a room. There are about 90 of us working in four shifts and more people will test positive now," said an employee at the control room, who did not wish to be named.

The staffer added that they had informed higher officials about the issue but no action has been taken yet.

The Delhi government spokesperson did not comment on the development.

Earlier in the day, an offi-

cial informed that another postgraduate student of the north civic body's Kasturba Hospital has tested positive for virus. She was under quarantine and had no symptoms. The student came in contact with 20 people between April 28 and April 30. The institute reported its first case on Wednesday after a postgraduate student had tested positive.

Doctor tests positive

A doctor of the corporation's Hindu Rao Hospital has also tested positive for COVID-19. Two nurses of the hospital have tested positive in the last one week. After the first nurse tested positive last Saturday, samples of 78 other staffers, including the doctor, were sent for testing. Reports of 11 staffers are awaited, they said.

Meanwhile, the four primary contacts of a COVID-positive ward helper of the corporation's Rajan Babu TB Hospital in GTB Nagar have tested negative for the virus.

Four more test positive in Gautam Buddha Nagar

COVID-19 cases in district climbs to 159

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NOIDA

Four people, including three women, tested positive for COVID-19 in Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddha Nagar on Saturday, taking the total tally of COVID-19 cases in the district to 159, officials said.

In total, 176 reports were received in the last 24 hours. Four of them tested positive for COVID-19 and 172 negative. The cumulative positive cases in Gautam Buddha Nagar is now 159; District Surveillance Officer Sunil Dohare said.

TO ADVERTISE PLEASE CONTACT

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Two policemen recover; one constable infected

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Two police officers from Jahangirpuri, an assistant sub-inspector and a constable, who had tested positive for COVID-19 have recovered and were discharged from a hospital on Saturday. They were given a warm welcome at their police station.

Meanwhile, another con-

stable tested positive for the virus on Saturday. He was also posted at the Jahangirpuri police station.

"The constable used to live in a barrack at the police station. His reports came on Friday. He has been admitted to a hospital here," a senior officer said. The personnel from this police station have so far been infected.

JNU sets up task force to monitor pandemic

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) on Saturday said it has set up a COVID-19 task force to monitor the pandemic. It will submit recommendations pertaining to handling of post COVID-19 scenarios.

JNU Vice-Chancellor M. Jagadesh Kumar said, "The task force will upload useful

information on the website and recommend measures for maintaining health security in the university."

In a statement, the university administration also said that wider consultations are on regarding online exams and classes, and that recommendations of the departments have been sent to the Academic Council.

Pandemic narrows trust deficit

At loggerheads during anti-CAA stir, AMU students provide relief with police help

ANUJ KUMAR
GHAIABAD

The novel coronavirus outbreak and the fight mounted to contain it has changed many socio-political equations. One of them is the relationship between Aligarh Muslim University students and the Uttar Pradesh police. Many students who were up against the police during the anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act protests are now contributing to the relief work with the support of the local police.

There are at least three student groups contributing to the relief work. "If the image has not completely



AMU students distributing relief material in Aligarh.

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

changed, the hostility has definitely come down," said Ansab Aamir, one of the prominent voices on campus during the anti-CAA protests.

He, along with two dozen students, is providing ration to rickshaw-pullers and daily wagers in the city.

When the group decided to help after the 'janata curfew' was announced, the district administration welcomed the move. "They liked our meticulous approach. From Bhujpur on one end to Manjoorgadh on another, we need to travel at least 40 km for our work," said Mr. Aamir.

Dipped into savings

They approached the city magistrate and he guided them to the police. "We had an impression that police would take their 'cut' or would pose friction but they helped us in distributing the ration while maintaining so-

cial distancing," said Mr. Aamir.

The group members initially contributed from their savings ranging from ₹5,000 to ₹10,000 and then collected donations. Javed Akhtar said there were localities that need to be worked upon through the year. "Islam Nagar, which houses the locks industry and slaughterhouse workers, is such an area. We make packets that could fulfil the requirement of a family of four for 15 days," said Mr. Akhtar, a student of sociology.

Senior SP Muniraj P. said he provided full support to

Cong. to file case against 7 MLAs

They have been supporting the BJP-led govt. in Manipur

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

The Congress has decided to file a case against seven of its MLAs who have been supporting the BJP-led government in Manipur.

After their election on Congress ticket in 2017, the seven MLAs, along with former Forest Minister Thounaojam Shyamkumar, helped the government. While Mr. Shyamkumar "joined" the BJP, the others remained with the Congress.

Assembly Speaker Yumnam Khemchand on March 28 disqualified Mr. Shyamkumar as an MLA for defection. This followed the Su-

preme Court's January 21 judgment that asked the Speaker to act within the stipulated time.

'Will go to SC again'

"The limit of three months that the SC had set has expired. We will go to court again if the Speaker fails to take a decision," Congress MLA Keisham Meghachandra said on Saturday.

Mr. Meghachandra was the petitioner in the case for the disqualification of the Congress MLAs who supported the BJP.

"The time has come for the Speaker to protect our Constitution by honouring its 10th Schedule..." Con-

gress spokesperson Ningombam Bupenda Meitei said.

The Speaker's tribunal last month summoned the seven MLAs to appear before it on May 8 for the final hearing.

The Congress and the BJP will be locked in a straight fight in the election for the lone seat in the Rajya Sabha. The votes of the seven MLAs will be crucial. The BJP is fielding Manipur's titular king Leishemba Sanajaoba.

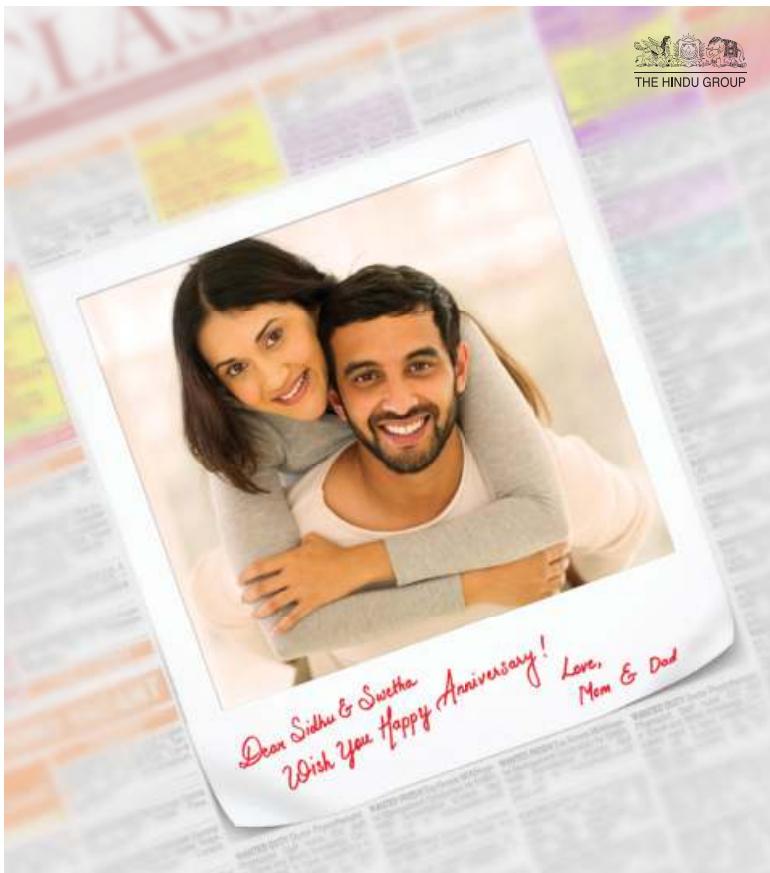
If the seven MLAs are to be disqualified before the Rajya Sabha election, the government's strength will dwindle to 32.

(With inputs from Iboyama Laithangbam in Imphal)

Worker cycling to his home in Bihar dies in U.P.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

A migrant worker who was cycling back to his native place in Bihar from Delhi died on the way in Uttar Pradesh's Shahjahanpur, an official said on Saturday. Identified as Dharamvir, he was going along with six people. Shahjahanpur medical college principal said Dharamvir was brought dead. His sample was collected and it tested negative for COVID-19, said the circle officer. Mohammad Faisal, who conducted the autopsy, said he had a lung disease and died due to "an aggression" of it.



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Special train with stranded labourers reaches Bhopal

Over 1 lakh workers from M.P. are stranded in other States

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BHOPAL

A special train carrying over 340 stranded labourers from Nashik in Maharashtra reached here on Saturday morning.

A district official said the non-stop special train reached Misrod railway station at the outskirts of Bhopal. "The train brought 347 passengers from Nashik. Of these, 13 were from Bhopal and remaining from other districts. After the screening, these passengers were sent to their respective towns in around 15 buses," Joint Collector Rajesh Gupta said.

Screening done
"During the coronavirus screening, none of these passengers was found symptomatic. After breakfast, they were sent to their home districts where another screening will take place," Mr. Gupta said.

These labourers are from Dewas, Indore, Jhabua, Khargone, Morena, Sheopur, Vidisha, Jabalpur, Seoni, Rewa, Sidhi, Singrauli, Satna, Shahdol, Damoh, Tikamgarh, Panna, Gwalior, Guna, Ashok Nagar, Bhind,



A health worker talking to a migrant worker at Misrod railway station in Bhopal on Saturday. ■ A.M. FARUQUI

Rajgarh, Datia, Khandwa, Barwani and Betul, he said.

Bhopal Divisional Railway Manager Uday Borwankar had said on Friday that the special train left Nashik at 9 p.m.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan had on Friday announced that one lakh labourers from the State stuck in various parts of the country will be brought back by special trains. He added that the State government had brought back 40,000 workers from other States by buses so far.

"Now the State government will bring back about one lakh workers to Madhya Pradesh from different parts of the country by trains. A discussion has already been held with the Railway Minister," he had said.

He also directed Additional Chief Secretary I.C.P. Keshari to provide necessary information to the Ministry of Railways about the number of labourers from the State who are stranded in different parts of the country.

Mr. Keshari said over one lakh labourers from Madhya Pradesh are stranded in other States: 50,000 in Maharashtra, 30,000 in Gujarat, 8,000 in Tamil Nadu, 5,000 in Karnataka, 10,000 in Andhra Pradesh and 3,000 in Goa.

Eight new positive cases reported from Odisha

Naveen speaks to Karnataka, Andhra CMs about return of Odia people

PRAFULLA DAS
BHUBANESWAR

Eight more COVID-19 cases, including two women, were reported from Odisha's Jagpur district taking the State's total of 157 on Saturday. While five of them had returned from West Bengal, the two women were contacts of the returnees.

Contact tracing and containment measures were ramped up in the villages from where new cases were detected, the State Health & Family Welfare Department said.

'Observe rule strictly'
Meanwhile, State Health Secretary Nikunja Bihari Dhal urged the people returning from outside the State to observe social distancing and quarantine rules strictly. It was due to violation of quarantine rules that the Katikata gram panchayat in Jagpur district has emerged as a hotspot with 21 cases so far, he said.

Stating that five persons had returned to Katikata from West Bengal recently,

Mr. Dhal said remaining persons had contracted the disease from the returnees who violated quarantine and social distancing rules. A total of 623 samples have been collected and possibility of more cases cannot be ruled out, he said.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik held videoconference with Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagannath Reddy and Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa for facilitating return of Odia people stranded in their State.

The first train with 1,150 Odia people, which left Kerala on Friday night, was scheduled to arrive in Odisha on Sunday morning. Another train was scheduled to leave Gujarat for Odisha Saturday night, officials said.

Fifteen of the 30 districts of Odisha have reported COVID-19 cases so far with five districts reporting maximum number of cases. These are Jajpur with 48 cases, Bhubaneswar with 47 cases, Balasore 20, Bhadrak 19 and Sundargarh 10.

Meanwhile, Chief Secretary Asit Tripathy said the government will soon issue orders with graded restrictions for different zones by considering local conditions.

FT members asked to explain communal rider on donation

Show-cause notice issued on April 30, told to reply by May 8

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

The Assam government has asked 14 members posted or attached to six Foreigners' Tribunals (FT) to explain why disciplinary action should not be taken against them for putting a communal rider to their donation for the State's COVID-19 relief fund.

A show-cause notice was issued on April 30 to these FT members with May 8 as the deadline for replying. The State's Political (B) Department had issued the notice. B is the section of the Department that deals with the appointment of the FT members.

Kamlesh Kumar Gupta, an FT member of western Assam's Baksa district, had in an April 7 letter to

Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma listed the donations by 13 members, including his own, to the Assam Aranya Nidhi for combating the pandemic. The letter carried a specific request: the money donated should not be used for those who were infected at the event in Delhi's Nizamuddin in March.

The show-cause by the Department's Deputy Secretary N.D. Patowary cited an FIR by the All Assam Minority Students' Union on April 11 against Mr. Gupta's "communal" letter.

Objection has been raised to a line in the said letter. Such an act is unbecoming of a responsible FT member, since it may lead to communal harmony," the notice said.

MP Abdul Khaleque had written to the Chief Minister seeking the termination of Mr. Gupta as his "repentable" mindset "disqualifies him as the guardian of our Constitution".

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ALLIANCE FOR boy, Feb 1996, Baradwaj, Arudra, fair 170 cm, BE, MS. Seeks



Patient wait: Migrants standing outside the Thiruvananthapuram station to board the 'Shramik Special' train. ■ S. GOPAKUMAR

Railways operate five 'Shramik Specials'

Two went to Bihar, two to Jharkhand and one to Odisha

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Railways operated five 'Shramik Special' trains from Kerala to Jharkhand, Odisha and Bihar on Saturday for migrant workers stranded by the nationwide lockdown.

The special trains, with 24 sleeper class coaches and two SLRs (seating-cum-luggage rakes), commenced journey from the Thiruvananthapuram Central, Ernakulam Town, Aluva, Tirur, and Kozhikode railway stations. Of the five, two are to Jharkhand, two to Bihar and one to Odisha.

Minister for Tourism Kadakkampally Surendran was present to see off 1,124 migrants who boarded the train from Thiruvananthapuram Central to Hati in Jharkhand. The second special train was from Aluva to Khurda Road in Odisha and the third from Ernakulam Town to Danapur in Bihar.

Two trains were operated for migrants held up in north Kerala. The special trains were from Kozhikode to Dhanbad in Jharkhand and from Tirur in Malappuram district to Danapur in Bihar.

The District Collectors



A worker cleaning the Bhubaneswar station before the arrival of a special train from Kerala on Saturday. ■ BISWARANJAN ROUTH

and District Police Chiefs of Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam, Malappuram and Kozhikode, supported by labour officers, brought the migrants from their camps and houses. All were subjected to screening before being allowed to enter the stations.

As in the case of the first 'Shramik Special' operated from Aluva to Odisha on Friday, the Railways handed over the tickets to the District Collectors, who collected money from the passengers and paid the Railways.

The 'Shramik Special' accommodates 1,142 travellers on 24 coaches as social distancing norms have to be fol-

lowed. Meals and drinking water are provided to the passengers by the States at the originating station. The Railways provides food during the journey with the assistance of the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation.

The Railway Protection Force and Government Railway Police provide security for the travellers.

Divisional Railway Manager, Thiruvananthapuram, Shirish Kumar Sinha said the Railway Board had made it clear that the rakes of the 'Shramik Specials' would return empty to the originating railway station.

Hundreds wait for buses in Bengaluru

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BENGALURU

The Majestic area in Bengaluru witnessed chaotic scenes on Saturday as hundreds of frustrated labourers gathered, desperate to catch a bus to their home towns. A large number was accompanied by families and children.

In the absence of public transport, people carrying belongings walked for miles to reach the bus stand. Many paid thousands of rupees to hitch rides on autorickshaws.

30 passengers

At Majestic, they had to wait for hours before they could board a bus as the KSRTC was allowing only 30 passengers on a vehicle.

Hanumantha, who came with his wife and children, said, "I have not got a bus; we may have to spend the night here."

Only 3,600 people managed to get a bus on Saturday. Minister S. Suresh Kumar admitted that there were some "lacunae" in the process.

The new COVID-19 patient

A.P. to ready 1 lakh hospital beds to tackle a rise in cases

Many are expected to return from other States, abroad

STAFF REPORTER

VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has ordered officials to make at least one lakh hospital beds ready to tackle a possible rise in COVID infections as people stranded in foreign countries and other States are heading home, subject to certain relaxations given by the Central government.

He also wanted quarantine facilities to be provided in village secretariats for 10 to 15 persons and at least 500 RTC buses (equipped with freezers) to be arranged for transporting essential commodities.

At a meeting on Saturday, Mr. Reddy said doctors, auxiliary nurse midwives and accredited social health activists should be posted within the reach of the people.



Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy

He said guidelines and standard operating procedures laid down by the Centre should be clearly communicated so that social distancing and other norms would be followed scrupulously.

Officials told the Chief Minister that the number of tests done per million population had reached 2,030

Andhra Pradesh reports 62 new cases, with Kurnool leading tally in the State

Robotic check-up

To reduce the risk of infection, some hospitals have started using robots for checking the temperature of patients and collecting their details



Smart staff: A robot installed in one of the hospitals in Bengaluru collecting details of a patient. ■ V. SREENIVASA MURTHY



TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES
1,525

| 33

ACTIVE CASES
DISCHARGED CASES
DEATHS



TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES
601

| 26

ACTIVE CASES
DISCHARGED CASES
DEATHS



TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES
499

| 3

ACTIVE CASES
DISCHARGED CASES
DEATHS



TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES
2,754

| 29

ACTIVE CASES
DISCHARGED CASES
DEATHS



TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES
1,061

| 29

ACTIVE CASES
DISCHARGED CASES
DEATHS

at Wayanad had travelled from Chennai, while the one at Kannur contracted the disease through contact with another known/unknown source of infection.

Mr. Vijayan said, ideally, people should remain indoors. The holiday was mandatory except for essential services. The police would not allow travel. However, they would enable journeys for an emergency.

On other days, the police would allow necessary travel in private vehicles in the Orange and Green zones. However, they would permit only three passengers, including the driver. The government had prohibited riding pillion on two-wheelers.

The Centre has not allowed stage carriage services. However, taxis and cabs could resume operations. The ban on autorickshaws would continue.

Morning walkers were allowed after 7 a.m. Single-storey cloth shops employing not more than five persons could open between 7 a.m. and 7.30 p.m.

Of the two COVID-19 deaths, which took the total to 25, one was a 63-year-old man from Bengaluru with a history of diabetes, hypertension, hypothyroidism, renal failure and multiple mye-

Nadu on Saturday. This was the highest ever single day spike that the State has reported till now, taking its total tally to 2,757.

Of the 231 fresh cases, there were 158 men, 72 women and a 48-year-old transgender in Chennai. The youngest among the new COVID-19 positive patients is a 14-day-old baby in Kancheepuram.

A 76-year-old woman from Chennai died due to COVID-19 at 5.30 p.m. on May 1 at the Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital. With this, the State has reported 29 deaths due to COVID-19. The State's single-day sample count crossed the 10,000-mark. A total of 10,127 samples were tested. This took the total number of samples tested so far to 1,39,490. With another 29 persons discharged from hospitals across the State, the total number of persons discharged increased to 1,341.

(With inputs from Vijayawada, Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad Bureaus)

IN BRIEF



Maoist case: NIA may question more people

Two held on Friday being interrogated

STAFF REPORTER

KOZHIKODE

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) is likely to question more persons suspected of maintaining contacts with Allan Shuaib, 20, and Thaha Fasal, 24, arrested earlier under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) on the charge of being associated with the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist).

The NIA office confirmed that Vijith Vijayan and Abhilash Padacherry, who were detained in Kozhikode on Friday following raids on their houses and later taken to Ernakulam, are suspected of inducing Shuaib and Fasal into the banned organisation. Their interrogation is on to elicit details of others from north Kerala who had cooperated with the CPI (Maoist), sources said.

The NIA has reportedly

got details of a few persons with help from local police stations and intelligence units. To prevent the suspects from fleeing, the local police have kept them under surveillance.

Phones seized

The objects seized from Vijayan and Padacherry, including eight mobile phones, two memory cards, one laptop, seven pen drives, books and documents supporting left-wing extremism and the CPI (Maoist), will be examined with the help of experts. A probe is on to check whether those arrested or their friends were in touch with suspected Maoist functionaries C.P. Usman, who is still at large.

Shuaib and Fasal were arrested on November 1, 2019, allegedly at a meeting with Usman, who escaped.

Many are expected to return from other States, abroad

STAFF REPORTER

VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has ordered officials to make at least one lakh hospital beds ready to tackle a possible rise in COVID infections as people stranded in foreign countries and other States are heading home, subject to certain relaxations given by the Central government.

He also wanted quarantine facilities to be provided in village secretariats for 10 to 15 persons and at least 500 RTC buses (equipped with freezers) to be arranged for transporting essential commodities.

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Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy

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Officials told the Chief Minister that the number of tests done per million population had reached 2,030

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 Sunday: Thunderstorm likely at isolated places over Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, west Madhya Pradesh, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Sikkim, Odisha, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and Mahe.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	0.6...	33.0...	23.0	Kozhikode	60.0...	35.0...	25.0
Ahmedabad	...41.0...	41.0	28.0	Kurnool	...35.0...	32.0	22.0
Aizawl	...27.0...	27.0	16.0	Lucknow	...35.0...	32.0	22.0
Altahabad	...37.0...	23.0	23.0	Madurai	...39.0...	26.0	26.0
Bengaluru	...34.0...	23.0	23.0	Mangaluru	...36.0...	28.0	28.0
Bhopal	0.7...	40.0...	26.0	Mumbai	...32.0...	24.0	24.0
Bhubaneswar	...37.0...	24.0	24.0	Mysuru	...32.0...	23.0	23.0
Chandigarh	...35.0...	23.0	23.0	New Delhi	...38.0...	24.0	24.0
Chennai	...38.0...	29.0	29.0	Patna	10.2...	30.0...	21.0
Coimbatore	...37.0...	26.0	26.0	Port Blair	4.9...	33.0...	26.0
Dehradun	...32.0...	18.0	18.0	Puducherry	...36.0...	28.0	28.0
Gangtok	2.8...	19.0...	13.0	Pune	...40.0...	24.0	24.0
Goa	...35.0...	27.0	27.0	Raipur	...41.0...	25.0	25.0
Guwahati	...32.0...	22.0	22.0	Ranchi	...32.0...	20.0	20.0
Hubballi	...36.0...	23.0	23.0	Shillong	12.9...	22.0...	14.0
Hyderabad	...39.0...	23.0	23.0	Shimla	...24.0...	14.0	14.0
Imphal	...28.0...	18.0	18.0	Srinagar	...25.0...	8.0	8.0
Jaipur	...						

FROM PAGE ONE

2,411 cases in highest single-day spike

A senior ICMR official said on Saturday that India is following the United States' decision to permit the emergency use of Ebola drug Remdesivir for treating patients with COVID-19.

"It is a development which is being followed across the world and India is no exception," he said.

The Union Health Ministry, meanwhile, has cautioned against the abuse of antibiotics to treat the coronavirus infection, stating that these do not work against viruses.

"They only work on bacterial infections. COVID-19 is caused by a virus, so antibiotics do not work. Antibiotics should not be used as a means of prevention or treatment of COVID-19. They should only be used as directed by a physician to treat a bacterial infection," the Ministry said.

Use of PPEs

Additional guidelines on rationed use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) have also been issued by the Health Ministry, adding that prescribed standard precautions are to be followed at all times by health care professionals.

"PPEs are not alternative to basic preventive public health measures such as hand hygiene, respiratory etiquettes which must be followed at all times. Also healthcare professional are to always follow the laid down protocol for disposing off PPEs as detailed in infection prevention and control guideline," noted the release.

It added that patients and their attendants are encouraged to put on face cover at all times.

The Health Ministry has reiterated that India has many people with COVID-19 who are experiencing only mild symptoms and this is particularly true at the early stages of the disease.

"It is, therefore, possible to catch COVID-19 from someone who has, for example, just a mild cough and does not feel ill. The main way the disease spreads is through respiratory droplets expelled by someone who is coughing. The risk of catching COVID-19 from someone with no symptoms at all are low but the possibility cannot be ruled out."

It added that the currently the most common known symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, tiredness, and dry cough.

"Some patients may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhoea. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. Some people become infected but don't develop any symptoms and don't feel unwell," noted the Ministry.

It has said that in India most people (about 80%) recover from the disease without needing special treatment.

Around 1 out of every 6 people who gets COVID-19 becomes seriously ill and develops difficulty breathing. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like high blood pressure, heart problems or diabetes, are more likely to develop serious illness. People with fever, cough and difficulty breathing should seek medical attention.

Despair packs them into a concrete mixer truck

On May 1, with the truck's fuel tank filled to the brim, one of the drivers stealthily drove it out to the highway in Mumbai, where his three co-workers at the concrete-mixing firm waited.

"We planned to hand over the truck to the police in Lucknow," said Mr. Yadav. "We just somehow wanted to get back home," added the sole breadwinner of his family of seven.

For the last 12 days, they had survived on biscuits. Sometimes, the local panchayat would give them lunch.

"I had spent the last nearly a month ago," Mr. Yadav added. His family owns

sparse patches of agricultural land, enough to sustain them.

"We just want our salary," said Mr. Yadav. His wife was to be operated upon for appendicitis, for which he needed at least twice as much as his monthly salary of ₹22,000. "I do not know why our salary was withheld."

Having left Mumbai at 5 p.m., they had made good time to Indore as they had not been stopped at any check posts. "There was enough space for everyone inside the mixer to sleep," said Mr. Yadav. "There was no problem breathing," he added.

CPI(M) offers suggestions for revival

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) on Saturday released a detailed note offering suggestions to the Union government on revival of the economy.

"...difficulties being faced by crores of Indians, especially migrant workers, daily labourers and the poor, unable to survive will deepen. This is what needs the Centre's attention," tweeted CPI(M) general Sitaram Yechury, while releasing the note.

Separately, CPI general secretary D. Raja told *The Hindu*, "The coronavirus pandemic has not changed the neo-liberal economic trajectory of the BJP government at the Centre. And this has worsened the economic inequality."

In the note, the CPI(M) said: "How long this distress will continue is not known ... the central government must make available to every non-income tax paying household ₹7,500 per month for three months, and to every individual 10 kg. of free grains per month for six months."

USCIRF report may prompt concerns

Though India has dismissed the report, the bigger worry is the CPC list

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

The government has unequivocally dismissed the US Commission of International Religious Freedom's latest report, which ranks India on the lowest grade of "Countries of Particular Concern", citing the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the proposed National Register for Citizens, both of which were announced by the government in the past year. In its statement this week, the External Affairs Ministry hit back at the USCIRF directly, calling it an "Organisation of Particular Concern", with no "locus standi" or official standing.

The government's stand is consistent with its policy on the USCIRF, which it has refused to cooperate with, and has disallowed its officials to visit India since 2009. The bigger worry this year is the fact that the USCIRF has recommended that India be put on the CPC list by the State Department, which is due to publish its annual report on religious freedom in a few weeks, most likely in May or June.

Former Indian Ambassa-



dors to the U.S. point out that though a CPC designation is unlikely to make any difference to the U.S.-India bilateral relationship on other issues, it would be premature to dismiss the USCIRF's recommendation completely.

NEWS ANALYSIS

"It's wrong to focus just on the statements of the USCIRF in CAA and NRC and other such issues. The question is, who has supported India [in the U.S.] on these issues? No one. One can say that you don't expect there will be reactions to such [domestic Indian] policies. Frankly, that is wishful, unrealistic thinking," Ronen Sen, who was Ambassador in Washington in 2005 when India was removed from the State Department.

Diplomats point out the

ments' CPC list, told *The Hindu*. "There is a reputational issue involved, for India, as the world's largest democracy that draws strength from the protection of diversity," said former Ambassador to Washington Nirupama Menon Rao, stating that the report could not be "ignored outright". "To be clubbed with China and Burma, Pakistan and North Korea as a country of particular concern is unfortunate," she said.

More punitive steps

The decision before U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (who will act on behalf of President Donald Trump) on whether to designate India as a CPC is significant, as it could bring other punitive actions. According to the US IRF Act, the President is obligated to take one of 15 possible actions, ranging from a demarche to cancellation of bilateral exchanges, to travel sanctions against specified officials, within 3-6 months. It was under this determination that the U.S. had banned travel visas for PM Narendra Modi (then Gujarat Chief Minister) in 2005.

State department hasn't always followed the USCIRF's recommendations. In December 2019, Mr. Pompeo designated nine countries including "Burma [Myanmar], China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan" that were on the recommended list, and put others like "Comoros, Russia, Uzbekistan, Cuba, Nicaragua, Nigeria, and Sudan" to its "Special Watch list", but left out Syria, Vietnam and Central African Republic, which were also on the USCIRF's list.

The Office of International Religious Freedom (IRF) in the State Department and the USCIRF were created by the American "International Religious Freedom Act of 1998", but are separate entities and the USCIRF's recommendations are non-binding on the State Department. However, according to the State Department website, the U.S. Secretary of State, who makes the final recommendation on whether to designate a country as a CPC, "takes into account" the recommendation made by the USCIRF.

(With inputs from Kallol Bhattacharjee)

T. RAMAKRISHNAN
CHENNAI

For a State that gets around 60% of its funds from its own tax revenue, the lockdown has been harsh on Tamil Nadu.

Going by a general yardstick, the State's own tax revenue (SOTR) yields an average ₹10,000 crore a month. "Of this, we may realise a mere 10% or a maximum of 20% in April, the first full month after the imposition of the country-wide lockdown since March 25," says an official of the State Finance Department.

A ban on alcohol and the slump in the sale of petroleum products in particular have hit finances hard as the two components account for nearly 50% of the SOTR.

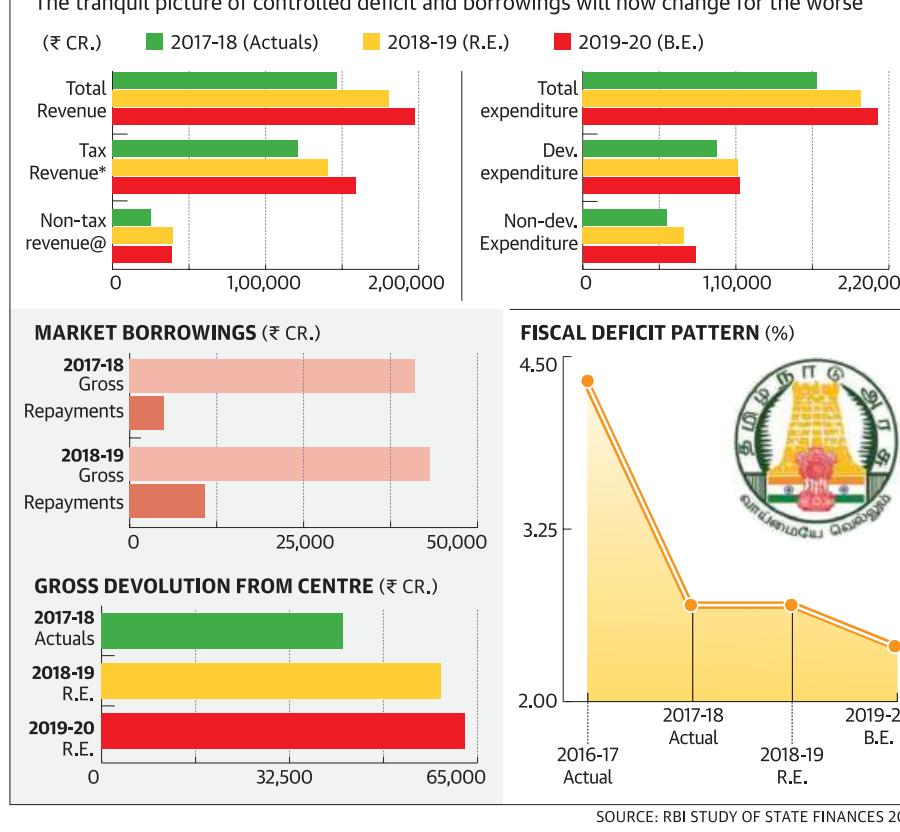
No registrations

The contribution through two other components – registration of vehicles and immoveable properties – has been virtually nil. The property registration was allowed to resume a few weeks ago but the response has been tepid.

The woes have been compounded by the Centre's announcement that the contributions to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund of States would not qualify to be treated under the Corporate Social Responsibility

Tamil Nadu- on a strong wicket till now

The tranquil picture of controlled deficit and borrowings will now change for the worse



SOURCE: RBI STUDY OF STATE FINANCES 2019

(CSR) expenditure for COVID-19.

Even as it is struggling to earn a modest share of its budgeted revenue, the Tamil Nadu government has gone ahead with the implementation of a relief package of ₹3,280 crore for people hit

by the impact of the COVID-19.

Besides, migrant workers and workers in the unorganised sector, including autorickshaw drivers, are being given monetary and material support. Simultaneously, the State has been investing in putting in place

the required health infrastructure.

All these have left the State government with only two options – borrowing and getting as much funds as possible from the Central government.

"We have already bor-

rowed ₹8,000 crore in the last one month," said the official.

For the current year, the government's original plan, formulated during the pre-COVID-19 period, was to borrow about ₹83,350 crore, keeping the net borrowing well within the permissible limit at around ₹59,209 crore.

Plea to hike limits

But post the outbreak, Tamil Nadu, whose general track record is one of sticking to stipulated fiscal indicators and not availing of the ways and means advances (WMA) from the RBI despite

posting a revenue deficit, has been pressing the Centre to increase the fiscal deficit limit of 3% of the Gross State Domestic Product to 4.5% for 2020-21. It has urged the Centre to allow it this year to go for additional borrowing of 33% above the previous year's level. Apart from demanding that the recently enhanced WMA limit be doubled, Tamil Nadu has suggested that this year's advances be made interest-free.

Besides, the State has also requested the Union government to immediately release 50% of grants recommended

by the 15th Finance Commission for local bodies; a special grant of ₹1 lakh crore for all States, including ₹9,000 crore for Tamil Nadu; ₹3,000 crore for the augmentation and strengthening of health infrastructure; ₹1,321 crore towards custom milled rice subsidy for paddy procurement and an ad-hoc grant of ₹1,000 crore from the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) to procure medical and protective material.

Even though the State's needs and expenditure are increasing, the nearly ₹6,420 crore released by New Delhi for a host of purposes has come as a breather. The amount includes the first instalment of the State's share in Central pool of taxes (₹1,928.56 crore) and that of revenue deficit grant (₹402.5 crore); GST compensation for December 2019-January 2020 of ₹1,369 crore, apart from ₹510 crore from the State Disaster Response Fund and ₹312 crore under the National Rural Health Mission.

Veteran policy makers say that given the sweep and nature of the COVID-19, the Centre should declare it a "national disaster" and liberally assist the States through the NDRF also.

IN BRIEF



Jan Dhan beneficiaries to get another ₹500

Women Jan Dhan bank account holders will start getting the second instalment of ₹500 from Monday. To help the poor tide over the COVID-19 crisis, the government had on March 26 said an ex-gratia payment of ₹500 would be credited to Jan Dhan accounts held by women for the next three months under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package, starting April. The transfer has been staggered over a period of five days to avoid rush at bank branches.

Two labourers killed in bus accident in Odisha

Two men were killed when a bus transporting migrant labourers from Gujarat's Surat to Odisha's Ganjam district overturned at Kalinga Ghat near the Kandhamal-Ganjam border on Saturday night. The bus was carrying over 60 passengers, including four women and two children. The deceased were identified as Chittaranjan Sethi and Tapan Sethi of Buguda block in Ganjam district. The others in the bus received minor injuries. The bus driver was from Gujarat and reportedly unfamiliar with the route.

Assam allows liquor shops to open

The Assam government has allowed liquor wholesalers and retailers to resume business two days ahead of the date recommended by the Centre. An official notification issued on Saturday said, "wholesale vends of foreign liquor and country spirit across the State" and retail outlets in districts under green zones have been allowed to open with immediate effect.

Fresh charge sheet in illegal cash deposit case

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) filed a supplementary charge sheet against Rajan S. Shah, proprietor of V.S. Healthcare, and 11 others for illegal cash deposit during demonetisation. A request has been made for confiscation of assets worth ₹8.12 crore. The accused, Moti Lal, director of MTI Cotton Mills, allegedly made deposits worth ₹44.79 crore in various accounts, in connivance with some Bank of India officials.

135 CRPF jawans of Delhi unit test positive

Deceased SI was part of the same unit

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Days after a 55-year-old sub-inspector of the CRPF died of COVID-19, as many as 135 personnel from the same unit have tested positive to the virus.

In all, 480 personnel were tested, of whom 323 tested negative and the results of 22 are awaited. The entire unit at Mayur Vihar in east Delhi has been quarantined at a Delhi government facility in Mandoli and an inquiry has been ordered to study the lapses that led to the infection spreading among such a large number of the force.

On April 28, sub-inspector Mohammad Iqram Hussain died at the Safdarjung Hospital. This was the first death reported in the Central Armed Police Force (CAPF), comprising the CRPF, the Border Security Force, the CISF, the ITBP, the SSF and the Assam Rifles. The deceased SI, a diabetic, was a resident of Barapeta in Assam.

Many personnel, including the deceased, were put in quarantine after a 43-

year-old constable posted as a nursing assistant tested COVID-19 positive on April 21.

Source not clear'

The constable, posted in Jammu and Kashmir's Kupwara, was on leave and living in Noida. Due to the lockdown, he joined the medical unit of the CRPF in Mayur Vihar close to his local base on April 6 after his leave ended.

He developed symptoms on April 17 and a test confirmed the infection on April 21, an official said.

It was not clear how he contracted the infection.

All Bhopal gas leak survivors to be screened

STAFF REPORTER
BHOPAL

The Bhopal district administration is going to survey all 1984 gas leak survivors for illnesses and identify high-risk patients in view of their greater vulnerability to COVID-19.

"For the identification of the gas-affected people, their survey and the identification of high-risk persons after that and the collection of their samples and subsequent treatment, a team has been constituted to take necessary action," said an order passed by Bhopal District Collector Tarun Kumar Pithode on Saturday.

Besides, the Pulmonary Medicine Centre, one of the six State-run hospitals for the survivors, has been designated as a care centre for the observation of asymptomatic virus patients among the survivors.

Bengal govt. in data cover-up operation, says Governor

Trinamool MP says 'agenda of the Governor is to target Mamata Banerjee'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA



Tracking the virus: Health workers wearing protective gear during door-to-door screening in Kolkata on Saturday. ■ PTI

The bulletin released on April 30 states that the number of "active cases" is 572.

Mr. Dhankhar asked why the bulletin on May 1 was not released.

"Give up 'Covid-19 data cover up operation' @MamataOfficial and share it transparently. Health bulletin 30/4 No of Active Covid cases 572. No health bulletin on May 1!! Information to cen-

tral Government No of cases 931," (on April 30), his tweet read. "Gap between 572 and 931 not reconcilable even if recovered/dead r [are] considered... For way forward @MamataOfficial withdraw

'political parties r [are] vultures in wait of dead bodies' and take all on board," he stated.

Hours later, a letter, without the signature of any State

15 COVID-19 deaths in 48 hours in Bengal

KOLKATA

West Bengal recorded 15 deaths from COVID-19 in 48 hours, taking the toll to 120 in the State, the State Health Department said on Saturday. In the past two days, 127 infections were recorded and 60 persons discharged from hospitals.

official, was made public by officials. It was a reply to the Governor's letter to Ms. Banerjee on April 24. Saturday's letter stated that the tone of the Governor to the Chief Minister was "unprecedented in the annals of Indian political history."

Trinamool MP Kalyan Banerjee said the only "agenda of the Governor is to target the Chief Minister."

790 new cases reported in Maharashtra

Tally stands at 12,296; State records 36 deaths in one day; new cluster emerges in Nanded gurdwara

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Maharashtra recorded 790 COVID-19 cases on Saturday, pushing the tally to 12,296. It also recorded 36 deaths, the highest in a single day, pushing the number to 521.

A new cluster emerged from Gurdwara Langar Sahib in Nanded, raising concerns about a possible spurt in the district. The new cases include 20 volunteers of the gurdwara and two drivers and a cleaner who had transported pilgrims to Punjab over the past two weeks.

Nanded, a popular pilgrimage centre for the Sikh community, witnessed a



Daily grind: A health worker during a routine check-up in Dharavi on Saturday. ■ RAVI NADAR

large gathering for the Holi Mohalla festival on March 10. While most pilgrims left for their home States after the festival, nearly 3,500 stayed back. However, they got

stuck because of the lockdown. After discussions among the two States, 325 pilgrims were sent to Punjab in 10 buses. When these buses returned to Maharashtra, the drivers and cleaners were tested. Two drivers and a cleaner tested positive on April 28.

The Punjab government sent 78 buses on April 26 to

take the remaining pilgrims back home. The drivers and cleaners of these buses spent a night in Nanded before leaving with the pilgrims on April 27. "Before coming to Maharashtra, these drivers had many halts. As they had come in contact with the gurdwara volunteers, we collected their swabs for testing. Twenty of them returned positive," said Neelkanth Bhosikar, Nanded's civic surgeon.

Gurdwara Langar Sahib and Takht Sachkhand Shri Huzur Sahib Gurudwara were sealed on Saturday and the entire area was declared a containment zone.

Virus tally in Gujarat crosses 5,000 with 333 fresh cases

With 26 deaths in a day, the toll goes up to 262

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
AHMEDABAD

The number of COVID-19 cases crossed the 5,000 mark in Gujarat on Saturday when 333 fresh cases and 26 deaths were recorded. The total number of cases now stands at 5,054 and the number of deaths at 262.

At a meeting, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said there had been a remarkable improvement in the situation. "For the first time, the count of active cases has gone down. Besides, no new cases were detected in Bhopal on the day."

In Indore, the hardest-hit city, 32 persons tested positive, while the number of deaths touched 74 on Friday night, said Pravin Jadia, Chief Medical and Health Officer.

going treatment at various hospitals and they were said to be in a stable condition. Thirty-six others were in a serious condition and put on ventilator.

The State has so far tested 74,116 samples.

Main cluster

Ahmedabad remains the main cluster. On Saturday, the city reported 250 fresh cases and 20 deaths, its highest single-day tally.

The total number of cases is 3,543 and the number of deaths is 185, while 462 people have recovered.

The rate of death in the

State and in Ahmedabad remains above 5%, higher than the national average and the worst-affected Maharashtra.

Besides Ahmedabad, 3 deaths occurred in Vadodara, 2 in Surat and 1 in Anand. Fresh cases were also registered in Vadodara and Surat, 17 each, and Gandhinagar, 18.

Surat's death toll has reached 28 and Vadodara's 24.

The infection has spread in 30 of the 33 districts, but more than 85% of the cases have been reported from Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat and Rajkot.

Recovered cases

On Saturday, 126 patients

were discharged after recovery. So far, 896 patients have been discharged. There

were 3,860 patients under-

treatment for the illness had tested positive, according to an analysis of the data released through the media bulletin. Until now, 41,460 of the samples have tested negative, while 2,330 have been rejected. The tests per million in the State stand at 558.6.

Meanwhile, 100 persons were discharged from hospitals on recovery. With this, 624, or 22.4%, of all the patients have been discharged in the State.

Till May 2, at least 16.7 tests were conducted before a person infected with the novel coronavirus was iden-

tified. So far, 6% of those testing for the illness had tested positive, according to an analysis of the data released through the media bulletin. Until now, 41,460 of the samples have tested negative, while 2,330 have been rejected. The tests per million in the State stand at 558.6.

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A salute from the sky and sea

Fly-pasts and illuminated naval ships will pay tribute to corona warriors

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

As part of a flypast by the Indian Air Force (IAF) to thank the corona warriors on Sunday, the national capital will see both fighter and transport aircraft flying between 10 a.m. and 11 a.m., an Army spokesperson said on Saturday.

The nation will witness the fly-pasts at multiple locations.

"The aerial salute from the armed forces will be flown as low as 500 metres so that everyone is able to witness the same from the safety of their homes. Military bands all over the country will visit various civil hospitals treating corona patients to express their gratitude by playing patriotic tunes," Army spokesperson Col. Aman Anand said, reading out a statement on behalf of the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) and outlining the various activities.

The events start on Sunday morning with a wreath-laying at the Police Memorial on behalf of all three Service chiefs to show respect to the



Coast is bright: A naval ship is illuminated off the Gateway of India in Mumbai on Saturday as part of the rehearsal for Sunday's show of solidarity with health workers. ■ VIVEK BENDRE

sacrifice by police and para-military forces.

"Forces have always stood as a wall against all threats to the country and every time our citizens have come out in large numbers and showered their blessings and appreciation towards us," Col. Anand said. "This time, it is our turn to applaud the sacrifice of our corona warriors."

This was also to assure the nation that despite of the COVID-19 pandemic, the armed forces were fully prepared to

address any type of threat, he stated.

Petal shower

Helicopters from the IAF and the Navy would fly over hospitals treating patients and shower petals as a tribute to the Corona warriors.

Naval helicopters would shower petals on hospitals in Mumbai, Goa, Kochi and Visakhapatnam between 10 a.m. and 10.30 a.m.

In the evening, naval ships at sea on the coasts of Mumbai, Porbandar, Karwar, Vi-

sakhapatnam, Chennai, Kochi and Port Blair would light up and fire flares in solidarity, Col. Aman said.

In addition to the Navy, Coast Guard ships would be seen at 24 places, some of which are Porbandar, Okha, Ratnagiri, Dahanu, Murud, Goa, New Mangalore, Kavaratti, Karaikal, Chennai, Krishnapatnam, Nizamapatanam, Puducherry, Kakindia, Paradip, Gopalpur, Sagar Island, Port Blair, Diglipur, Mayabundur, Hut bay and Campbell Bay.

Downloading of the Aarogya Setu app has been made mandatory for all government staff by the Department of Personnel and Training through an order on April 29 and for all employees in the public and private sectors through a Union Home Ministry order on Friday.

The Social Justice Ministry's Department of Empowerment of PwD (DEPwD)

wrote to the MeitY and NIC on April 27 listing the shortcomings of the app.

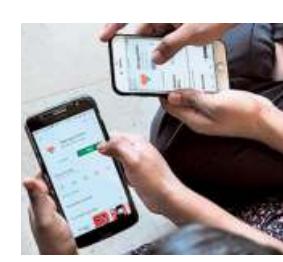
"The Aarogya Setu app needs to have a separate sec-

Social Justice Dept. writes to National Informatics Centre

DAMINI NATH

NEW DELHI

The government's Aarogya Setu app to track COVID-19 cases is not accessible to persons with disabilities (PWD), particularly those with hearing and visual challenges, the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry has informed the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and the app developer, the National Informatics Centre (NIC).



Downloading of the Aarogya Setu app has been made mandatory for employees.

tion with specific information for persons with hearing impairment with sign language interpretation/close captioning. So far as persons with visual impairment are concerned, provision for audio guide for navigation, audio description of colour used, proper colour contrast etc. need to be incorporated," the DEPwD wrote, asking the NIC and MeitY to address the concerns.

Disability rights activist and founder of Smarthyam Anjali Agarwal said on Saturday that the app had been tested by 11 persons with vi-

sual challenges and who were associated with the NGO. The app was found to be inaccessible, which was a violation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, she said. She added that a report of the findings of the testing had been sent to the DEPwD on Saturday.

Navigation issues

The Smarthyam report said that according to users, the screen reader in the app did not announce the purpose of all controls or the type of control, whether a link or button.

The report added users could not identify the number of slides in a carousel, so after receiving the information in the first slide they could miss out on information in other slides. On the "Your status", "COVID updates" and "E-Pass" tabs of the app, the screen reader was not announcing the control type, so users did not know these were interactive tabs, the report said.

Rahul, Prasad spar over Aarogya Setu

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Congress and the government were engaged in a war of words on Saturday over the Aarogya Setu app, with former Congress president Rahul Gandhi calling it a "sophisticated surveillance system".

Union Information Technology Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad called the charge a "lie".

"The Aarogya Setu app, is a sophisticated surveillance system, outsourced to a pvt operator, with no institutional oversight – raising serious data security & privacy concerns. Technology can help keep us safe; but fear must not be leveraged to track citizens without their consent," Mr. Gandhi tweeted.

"Daily a new lie. Aarogya Setu is a powerful companion which protects people. It has a robust data security architecture. Those who indulged in surveillance all their lives, won't know how tech can be leveraged for good!" Mr. Prasad wrote on Twitter.

Flights stay suspended till May 17: DGCA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

A day after the government announced the extension of the lockdown till May 17, the DGCA on Saturday said all commercial flights will remain suspended till the midnight of May 17.

"It is reiterated that foreign and domestic airlines shall be suitably informed about the opening of their operations whether international to/from India or domestic, respectively, in due course," a circular of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation stated. India has been under lockdown since March 25 to curb the spread of coronavirus.

All commercial passenger flights have been suspended for this period.

Cargo flights, medical evacuation flights and special flights are allowed to operate.

When duty calls



Frontline hero: A policeman being dragged on the bonnet of a car by a driver who did not halt at a checkpoint in Jalandhar on Saturday. The driver was later arrested. ■ ANI

Workers' rights group seeks employment guarantee

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

With the migrant labourers returning home from different parts of the country, a demand has been raised in Rajasthan for giving employment guarantee to every adult for a number of days in view of the workers having been deprived of their livelihood during the COVID-19 lockdown.

The Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), which made a "virtual celebration" of the May Day and its 30th foundation day through online platforms on Friday, said the majority of migrant labourers, who worked in the unorganised sector, were fighting poverty and hunger without any social security. The workers had not received wages even for the

days when they worked. The huge fair marking the May Day, held every year at the Patiya square in Bhim town of Raigarh district, was not organised for the first time in 30 years.

Strong campaign

The MKSS members recollect the memories of previous fairs when the people

were apprised of their rights and the labour movement gained strength.

MKSS founder Aruna Roy said a provision should be added to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) for engaging the labourers on work for a number of days as per their demand.

"Every adult in the rural areas needs employment

during the present crisis," she said.

Norti Bai, former Sarpanch of Harmada in Ajmer who has been in the forefront of the right to information campaign, said the pandemic had afforded an opportunity to the workers to unite against discrimination. Ms. Norti Bai is also the president of the Rajasthan Asanghat Mazdoor Union.

Tracking news reports in English and Hindi primarily, as well as in regional languages such as Kannada, Telugu and Tamil, the group found that 310 deaths had occurred from March 19 – when an auto-rickshaw driver in Bengaluru died by suicide owing to financial distress – till Saturday.

"News reports tracked during the ongoing lockdown suggest that more than 300 people died because of the lockdown: as a result of hunger, financial distress and exhaustion, due to police atrocities for lockdown violations, and inability to get timely medical attention. There have been a staggering number of suicides as well, caused by fear of infection, loneliness, lack of freedom of movement, and alcohol withdrawal during the lockdown," the group of activists and academics said in a release.

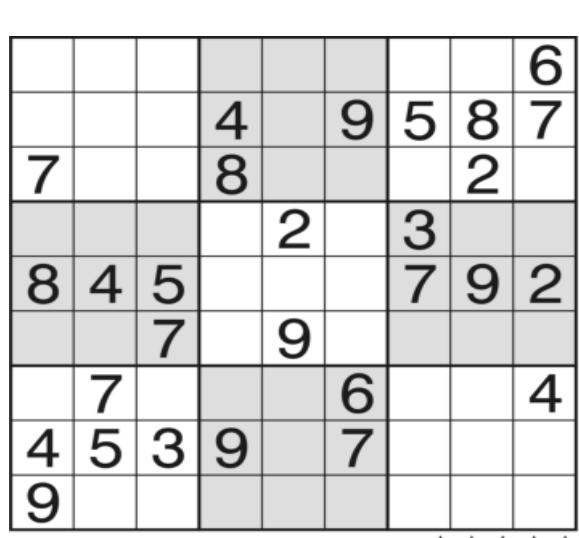
Among the deaths connected to the pandemic but non-virus related, 34 were due to starvation and finan-

cial distress, including the inability to sell farm produce; 20 were caused by exhaustion, including while walking long distances to reach their homes or standing in lines for ration; and 73 were from suicides due to fear of testing positive for the novel coronavirus and fear of loneliness.

Aman, an assistant professor of legal practice at Jindal Global School of Law, who is part of the project, along with researcher and Ph.D scholar Kanika, said the real numbers would be higher as the tracker could not capture all the news reports of such deaths in the country, and news organisations would not be able to report on every such incident.

"Our goal is to put a spotlight on these deaths. While we are focusing on the COVID-19-related deaths, we are neglecting the other deaths," he said.

SUDOKU



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

20-day-old in Jaipur dies of COVID-19

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

JAIPUR

A 20-day-old infant, who died of complications relating to COVID-19 here on Friday, could be the world's youngest victim of the disease. The boy was treated for septicaemia at the J.K. Lon Children's Hospital, where the paediatricians ruled out intrauterine infection.

The infant was admitted to the hospital early on Friday with complaints of diarrhoea and vomiting. No member of his family was earlier detected as positive and nor did the family have a travel history.

After brief treatment, the child died during the day. As his family resided in the Chandpole area of the Walled City where a large number of COVID-19 positive cases have been found, the hospital authorities sent his samples for viral test, which turned out to be positive.

The United Arab Emirates on Saturday sent seven tonnes of medical supplies for Indian health workers dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The aid from the leading Gulf nation is part of the Indian engagement with the region that is likely to lead to Delhi carrying out a massive evacuation of its nationals from the Gulf in the coming months.

The Embassy of UAE in a statement said the consignment underscores the 'brotherly' ties. "Combating COVID-19 has become a primary global concern, and we act out of our conviction that strengthening the efforts of other countries to contain the virus is a pressing necessity," said Dr. Ahmed Abdul Rahman Al-Banna, Ambassador of UAE to India.

The Indian mission has also arranged to send a team of 88 specialists, doctors and

nurses to the UAE to deal with the pandemic. The gesture from the Gulf monarchy coincides with India's ongoing preparation to evacuate a large number of nationals from the Gulf which is likely to pose a big logistical challenge.

Commentators here have pointed out that the number of evacuees is likely to be between two to five lakhs, making it the largest evacuation campaign undertaken by India. New Delhi had undertaken a mass evacuation from Kuwait in October 1990 which led to repatriation of nearly 1,76,000 citizens. That operation is part of the Guinness Book of Records.

That apart, a big evacuation was from Libya when the civil war hit that country in 2011 leading to the return of 300,000 Indians. According to the former envoy, the number of Indians willing to be evacuated may reach even the half-a-million mark in view of the widespread job cuts.



Essential aid: A consignment of medical supplies from the UAE ready for despatch to India. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

making it the largest evacuation campaign undertaken by India. New Delhi had undertaken a mass evacuation from Kuwait in October 1990 which led to repatriation of nearly 1,76,000 citizens. That operation is part of the Guinness Book of Records.

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COVID claims life of Lokpal member

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Lokpal member Justice A.K. Tripathi (retd) died of COVID-19 infection at the Jai Prakash Narayan Apex Trauma Centre of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), here at 8:30 pm on Saturday, a hospital source has confirmed.

He was admitted to the AIIMS after he tested positive on April 2.

Tripathi, 62, former Chief Justice of the Chhattisgarh High Court, was in the intensive care unit.

A ND-NDE

U.S. officials take a hard line on China

Trump was prodded to block a government pension fund from investing in Chinese companies

EDWARD WONG
ANA SWANSON
WASHINGTON

Some top Trump administration officials are moving to take a more aggressive stand against China on economic, diplomatic and scientific issues at the heart of the relationship between the world's two superpowers, further fraying ties that have reached their lowest point in decades.

White House aides this week have prodded President Donald Trump to issue an executive order that would block a government pension fund from investing in Chinese companies, officials said – a move that could upend capital flows across the Pacific. Mr. Trump announced on Friday that he was restricting the use of electrical equipment in the domestic grid system with links to "a foreign adversary" – a reference to China.

COVID-19

The administration is cutting off grants that would help support virology laboratories in Wuhan, China, the city where the coronavirus outbreak began, and is looking into scientific collaborations undertaken there by the University of Texas.

Senior aides, led by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, have asked intelligence agencies to continue looking for any evidence to support an unsubstantiated theory that the pandemic might be the result of an accidental lab leak, even though agency analysts have said they most likely will not find proof.

The open rivalry between the two nations has taken on a harder and much darker shading in the months since the virus spread from Wu-



Rebelling for freedom: A demonstration in Los Angeles, California, on Friday calling for an end to the ongoing shutdown. ■ AFP

han across the globe, speeding up efforts by hard-liners in both Washington and Beijing to execute a decoupling of important elements of the relationship.

Information war

The bitter information war over the virus has become a core part of the competition, but the administration's efforts to counter China have sharpened across the board. That is partly in response to what administration officials say are China's own aggressive moves, including the pushing of anti-America disinformation worldwide, increased military activity in the South China Sea and clampdowns on freedoms in the semi-autonomous global financial city of Hong Kong.

Mr. Trump's aides and Republican lawmakers also aim to amplify criticism of China partly to deflect from the administration's own record on

the pandemic, especially as the general election in November approaches.

Those in Washington advocating a more stable relationship with China, including some of Mr. Trump's top economic advisers, warn that the administration must take care not to overreach.

China is likely to emerge from the recession caused by the pandemic faster than other nations. The U.S. – still reeling from the virus, with more than 1.1 million infected and more than 65,000 dead – will probably rely on economic activity in Asia to help prop up its own economy. Part of that involves getting Beijing to comply with a trade agreement signed in January.

China controls a vast supply of the masks and protective gear needed by U.S. hospitals. And if China develops a vaccine first, it will wield a powerful card. ■ NY TIMES

China, U.S. spar over Taiwan

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
UNITED NATIONS

China has condemned a U.S. tweet backing Taiwan's push for participation at the United Nations as the global body works with its 193 member states to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.

Beijing's diplomatic mission to the UN expressed "strong outrage and firm opposition" to a message on Friday by the United States calling Taiwan's exclusion an "affront" to UN principles. The self-ruled island, which Beijing considers a wayward province awaiting reunification, has been held up as a model in fighting the virus.

"Barring Taiwan from setting foot on UN grounds is an affront not just to the proud Taiwanese people,

but to UN principles," the tweet by the U.S. mission said. U.S. Ambassador to the UN Kelly Craft retweeted the message.

In response a statement by Beijing said "Taiwan is an inalienable part of China". The Twitter account of the U.S. mission also shared earlier tweets from the U.S. State Department that called for Taiwan's inclusion in a coming World Health Organization (WHO) assembly. Relations between the UN and Taiwan were strained long before the pandemic but have deteriorated in the past three months.

The WHO's leadership have been accused of being complimentary of China's response to the virus's spread.

Kim reappears in public after weeks of speculation

State news agency releases images of him visiting a plant

REUTERS
SEOUL

After weeks of intense speculation about the health of Kim Jong-un, state news agency KCNA said on Saturday that the North Korean leader attended the completion of a fertilizer plant north of Pyongyang, the first report of his appearance since April 11.

Reuters could not independently verify the KCNA report.

KCNA said Mr. Kim cut a ribbon at the ceremony on Friday and those attending the event "burst into thunderous cheers of 'hurrah!' for the Supreme Leader..."

Mr. Kim was seen in photographs smiling and talking to aides at the ribbon-cutting ceremony and also touring the plant. The authenticity of the photos, published on the website of the official *Rodong Sinmun* newspaper, could not be verified.

Many in the large crowd of people, described as officials of the Army, the ruling party and the community who worked on the project, were wearing masks and standing some distance from the podium where Mr. Kim and his aides took part in the ceremony.

Tough measures

North Korea has not reported any case of the coronavirus and has said it has been taking tough measures to prevent an outbreak. One reason for Mr. Kim's absence has been the suggestion he may have been taking precautions against the coronavirus.

Mr. Kim was accompanied by senior North Korean officials, including his young



Back in limelight: North Korean leader Kim Jong-un visiting a fertilizer factory in South Pyongan, near Pyongyang, in a picture provided by the government. ■ AP

sister Kim Yo-jong and top aides Vice-Chairman Pak Pong-ju of the State Affairs Commission and Cabinet Premier Kim Jae-ryong, KCNA said.

Asked about the KCNA report on Mr. Kim, U.S. President Donald Trump said:

"I'd rather not comment on it yet. We'll have something to say about it at the appropriate time," he told reporters at the White House.

Speculation about Mr. Kim's health has been rife after he missed the birth anniversary celebrations of state founder Kim Il-sung on April 15. The day is a major holiday in North Korea and Mr. Kim as leader usually pays a visit to the mausoleum where his grandfather lies in state.

He last made a public appearance on April 11 attending a meeting of the ruling Workers' Party politburo. Following his absence from the anniversary, a South Korean news outlet specialising on the North reported that Mr. Kim was recovering after undergoing a cardiovascular procedure. A flurry of other unconfirmed

reports about his condition and his whereabouts followed. Officials in South Korea and the U.S. expressed scepticism about the reports.

Stiffness in leg?

State TV footage on Saturday showed Mr. Kim's leg movements appearing stiff and jerky and one of the images showed a green golf cart in the background, similar to one he used in 2014 after a lengthy public absence. "Preparing desks and chairs on the stage seemed a bit rare for such an outdoor occasion," Nam Seong-wook, a professor of North Korean studies at Korea University, said of the ceremony. "Kim might have some physical conditions that prevent him from standing too long and he needs to be seated after standing up for a while."

Mr. Nam said if Mr. Kim is unable to stand for long periods that maybe the reason he did not attend the anniversary event in April at the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun, where he would have had to stand for at least about an hour.

U.S. offers relief to H-1B holders, green card applicants

They have been given 60 more days to submit documents

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON

In a major relief for professionals and immigrants from countries like India, the U.S. government has given a grace period of 60 days to H-1B visa holders and Green Card applicants, who have been served notices for submission of various documents, taking into account the massive COVID-19 outbreak in America.

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (U.S.CIS) on Friday said the 60-day grace period for responding to its requests will include requests for evidence; continuations to request evidence (N-14); notices of intent to deny; notices of intent to revoke; notices of intent to rescind; and notices of intent to terminate regional investment centres;

and filing date requirements for Form I-290B, Notice of Appeal or Motion.

USCIS's comment

"USCIS will consider a response to the above requests and notices received within 60 calendar days after the response due date set in the request or notice before taking action," it said in a statement. The USCIS said it will consider a Form I-290B re-

ceived up to 60 calendar days from the date of the decision before it takes any action. The U.S.CIS can issue a maximum of 65,000 H-1B work visas every year to highly skilled foreign workers. It can issue an additional 20,000 H-1B visas to those highly skilled foreign workers who have obtained masters or higher degrees from an American educational institution. Under the existing law, the U.S. can issue a maximum of 1,40,000 employment-based green cards every year with a per country cap of seven per cent.

Accordingly, in fiscal year 2019, Indian nationals received 9,008 category 1 (E-B1), 2,908 category 2 (E-B2), and 5,083 category 3 (E-B3) green cards. E-B1 are different categories of employment-based green cards.

Fighters targeted

Early on Saturday, the jihadists attacked fighters of Iraq's Hashid al-Shaabi paramilitary force stationed outside a town about 180 km north of Baghdad, according to a statement by Iraq's security forces.

"Six fighters were killed. As another unit was dispatched to reinforce them, an explosive device detonated on that convoy and killed three fighters," the statement said. A 10th fighter was killed in a separate IS attack on nearby unit from the Hashid, a network of armed groups incorporated into the regular army chain of command.

A security source in Saladin province, where the attack took place, said that the first IS ambush took place just before midnight.

All the Iraqi security forces manning the checkpoint were killed. F16 planes are flying overhead to search for the IS fighters," said the source. The attack was IS's deadliest in several months and appeared to cap a period of more numerous and aggressive operations. Last week, the jihadists claimed a suicide attack that wounded four outside an intelligence headquarters in the northern province of Kirkuk.

Cousin pleads to Syrian President to save firm

Makhlof is also a key backer of Assad

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BEIRUT



Rami Makhlof in a 2010 photo. ■ AP

A cousin who has been a bulwark of support for President Bashar Al-Assad posted a video on Facebook late on Thursday pleading with the Syrian leader to prevent the collapse of his telecommunications company through what he called excessive and "unjust" taxation.

The unprecedented video pries open what has been rumoured as a major rift in the tight-knit Assad family, which has ruled Syria for nearly 50 years.

The cousin, Rami Makhlof, was once described as central to Syria's economy and a partner to the President. Media reports by pro- and anti-government sites suggested a campaign against Mr. Makhlof, possibly at the behest of Russia.

Russian media reports in

recent weeks have published criticism of corruption in Syria.

Former Syrian diplomat Bassam Barabandi aid Makhlof's financial holdings and charities have played a central role in financing and ensuring patronage, particularly among Syria's minority Alawite community – from which Mr. Assad hails.

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Ex-Green Beret led failed attempt to oust Venezuela's Maduro

The plan was to send some 300 heavily armed volunteers to Venezuela and ignite a popular rebellion against the regime

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MIAMI



Memories of a leader: A woman cleaning a pedestrian walkway in front of a mural of Hugo Chavez in Caracas. ■ AP

The plan was simple but perilous. Some 300 heavily armed volunteers planned to sneak into Venezuela from the northern tip of South America and ignite a popular rebellion that would end in President Nicolas Maduro's arrest.

Instead, the ringleader of the plot is now jailed in the U.S. on narcotics charges.

Authorities in Colombia are asking questions about the role of his former U.S. Green Beret adviser. And dozens of combatants who flocked to secret training camps in Colombia have been left to fend for themselves amid a global pandemic.

This bizarre, never-told story of a call to arms that crashed before it launched is drawn from interviews with more than 30 Maduro oppo-

nents directly involved in or familiar with its planning. Most spoke on condition of anonymity fearing retaliation.

trained some of the would-be combatants in basic first aid. "You're not going to take our Maduro with 300 hungry, untrained men," Mr. Mattos said.

When hints of the conspiracy surfaced last month, the Maduro-controlled state media portrayed it as a CIA plot.

An Associated Press investigation found no evidence of U.S. government involvement in the plot. Nevertheless, interviews revealed that leaders of Venezuela's U.S.-backed opposition knew of the covert force, even if they dismissed its prospects.

Opposition leader Juan Guaido was also told about it but was not involved and showed little interest, according to Hernan Aleman, a Venezuelan lawmaker.

Barracks revolt

Planning for the incursion began in the aftermath of an April 30, 2019, barracks revolt by a cadre of soldiers who swore loyalty to Mr. Guaido, recognised by the U.S. as Venezuela's rightful leader.

A few weeks later, some involved in the failed rebellion retreated to Bogota, Colombia, where Mr. Guaido's aide, introduced

lombia. That's where they met Jordan Goudreau, an American citizen and three-time Bronze Star recipient who served as a medic in U.S. Army special forces.

Mr. Goudreau, 43, said in a written statement that he would not "confirm nor deny any activities in any operational realm." Venezuelans he interacted with described him alternately as a freedom-loving patriot, a mercenary, and a gifted warrior.

After retiring from the Army in 2016, he set up Silvercorp USA, a private security firm, near his home in Melbourne, Florida. Mr. Goudreau's focus on Venezuela started in February 2019, when he worked private security at a concert on the Venezuelan-Colombian border in support of Mr. Guaido. In Bogota, Lester Toledo, Mr. Guaido's aide, introduced

Mr. Goudreau to a rebellious former Venezuelan military officer – Cliver Alcalá. Mr. Alcalá and Mr. Goudreau told the volunteers that – once challenged in battle – Mr. Maduro's troops would collapse like dominoes. The plot came to an end in late March when Colombian police stopped a truck transporting a cache of brand new weapons. Mr. Alcalá claimed ownership of the weapons shortly before surrendering to face the U.S. drug charges.

After the would-be insurrection collapsed, Mr. Maduro's allies celebrated. Socialist party boss Diosdado Cabello said the government was aware of the plot for at least six months. "We knew everything," said Mr. Cabello. "Some of their meetings we had to pay for. That's how infiltrated they were."

17 killed in Venezuela prison riot

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
CARACAS

At least 17 inmates were killed Friday in a Venezuelan prison riot, military authorities said. Deteinees at Guanare city's Los Llanos prison staged "a disturbance of public order... resulting in 17 deaths and nine injuries," according to a military report.

The Army gave no reason for the riot, stating that inmates had attacked prison officials. Among those wounded were the prison's director, hurt in the back, and a lieutenant injured by shrapnel from a grenade.

"The prisoners are upset that they are not allowed visits and they do not have water or food," said Carolina Giron of the Venezuelan Prison Observatory (OVP).

A NO-NDE

RBI cancels CKP Co-op Bank's licence

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has cancelled the licence of Mumbai-based The CKP Cooperative Bank Ltd., with effect from the close of business on April 30, 2020, as the lender's financial position had deteriorated and it was not in a position to repay depositors.

"The Registrar of Co-operative Societies, Pune, Maharashtra, has also been requested to issue an order for winding up the affairs of The CKP Cooperative Bank Ltd., Mumbai, and appoint a liquidator for the bank," RBI said in a late evening statement on Saturday.

The depositors of the bank will get a maximum of ₹5 lakh from the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC), as per law. The deposit insurance cover was increased to ₹5 lakh from ₹1 lakh earlier this year. The bank has a deposit base of ₹485.56 crore, as on November 2019.

The financial position of the bank is highly adverse and unsustainable. There is no concrete revival plan or proposal for merger with another bank. Credible commitment towards revival from the management is not visible," the RBI said, giving reasons for the decision.

The bank has negative networth of ₹239.2 crore. It has a customer base of 1,34,167 and has eight branches spread across Mumbai and Thane districts.

The banking regulator said the bank did not satisfy the requirement of minimum capital and reserves and was not in a position to pay its present and future depositors.

Das reviews credit flow, loan moratorium with bank chiefs

Discusses credit flow, particularly to MSMEs, and liquidity situation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI



Reality check: There had been complaints that lenders were not extending the moratorium benefit to NBFCs. •AFP

larly to non-banking finance companies.

Credit flows to different sectors of the economy, including liquidity to NBFCs, micro finance institutions, housing finance companies and mutual funds, were discussed in the meeting, the RBI said. Some of the mutual funds also faced redemption

pressure due to which RBI had opened a window specifically for these entities which can be accessed by banks to tap liquidity to lend to mutual funds. However, there was not much appetite from banks to tap the liquidity window.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Das appreciated the ef-

forts of banks in ensuring normal to near normal operations during the lockdown period, the RBI said. The interaction was held in two separate sessions through video conferencing.

Post-lockdown credit flows, including provision of working capital, with special focus on credit flows to MSMEs, were also discussed. The government had provided significant relaxation for starting economic activities in the third phase of the lockdown that starts from Monday.

Some other issues that came up during the interaction was monitoring of overseas branches of banks in view of the slowdown in economies across the globe, and stability of the financial sector.

PM meets FM for second economic stimulus package

'Govt. likely to announce second dose of relief measures'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI



overseas investment and revival of small businesses in the country so that the recovery process is hastened.

During these meetings both the Home Minister and the Finance Minister were present.

To mitigate hardships faced by the bottom of the pyramid, the government in late March had announced a ₹1.7 lakh crore stimulus package comprising free foodgrains and cooking gas to poor and cash doles to poor women and elderly.

Sources said the government is considering to announce a second dose of relief measures for the segment and a stimulus package for India Inc. shortly. The government had first imposed a 21-day nationwide lockdown beginning March 25 and later extended it till May 3.

tailed presentation to the Prime Minister later in the day on the state of economy and several initiatives that it plans to undertake to stimulate Indian economy.

The Prime Minister held discussions with Mr. Shah and Ms. Sitharaman and would have follow up meetings with ministers of key economic ministries such as micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME), sources said.

The Finance Ministry, which deferred release of monthly GST collection numbers on Friday, is also scheduled to make a de-

India Inc. welcomes resumption of economic activity in lockdown 3.0

Seeks revival package to put economy on growth trajectory

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

so revive India's economic growth trajectory, said D.K. Aggarwal, president – PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The chamber, however, urged the government to provide an increased stimulus relief package of ₹16 lakh crore, which is around 7% of GDP, sooner than later to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

"We appreciate PM Narendra Modi's decision to exit the nationwide lockdown in a graded manner by giving equal importance to the lives and livelihood of Indian citizens. This will go a long way in uplifting the sentiments of the stricken Indian industry, helping the daily wagers, poor and the needy earn their livelihood and al-

lert of time," Sajjan Jindal, chairman of JSW Group, said in a tweet.

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), while welcoming the decision to extend the lockdown, has asked for a revival package.

"CII has suggested instituting a government spending package equivalent to 3% of GDP, which would add ₹6 lakh crore to the available firepower. Enhanced debt to GDP ratio can be a way out for adding fiscal space at a time when the debt to GDP ratio is modest in India," Chandrajit Banerjee, director general, CII, said.

"The virus while controlled will be a threat till we find a vaccine. However, we need to find ways to work within a 'new normal' to bring this economy back to capacity in the shortest pe-

Now is the time for Centre to use its mints'

Print notes for liquidity, allow firms to access foreign capital, says lawyer Salve

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

At a time when credit has to go up, bank officers are averse to risk, not wishing to invite scrutiny

would be smooth enough doing-business in India. Statutory compliances? Tax disputes? Intrusive investigations into small violations? Put them on the back burner; let people spend time in factories rather than run to government offices answering show-causes."

"Inflation rates the world over are at an all-time low; LIBOR was between less than 1% to 1%; in India, interest rates are still 6%. Why not allow Indian industry to freely borrow from anywhere in the world? Repeat FMEA. Do we really need it?"

Mr. Salve batted for the removal of bank officers from the purview of the Prevention of Corruption Act. "Which bank officer today would risk sanctioning a loan? He would be hounded if the loan is not repaid."

"Global firms want to move out of China. But India has to stop fantasising that we are the only alternative destination." He cited Ireland convincing Apple to set up base there by offering low tax rates. "The PM sat with the CEO of Apple and negotiated a deal. This is how people do it. Prime Ministers talk to business folks saying, 'Invest \$20 billion in my country and we will charge one third the tax.'"

INTERVIEW | R. DINESH

'It will take 6 to 9 months or even longer for consumption to get back to normal'

Lockdown impact will last beyond Q3, says the TVS Supply Chain Solutions MD

N. ANAND

The supply chain sector needs cash flow. As such, banks have to provide funding through ways and means advances, which means that it is not linked with an asset or with any working capital related security, says R. Dinesh, managing director, TVS Supply Chain Solutions, in an interview to The Hindu. Edited excerpts:

Do you think COVID-19 will have a long-term or short-term impact?

■ It will have both short-term and long-term impact. Today, we are operating only about 15-20% of our normal business. We have about a thousand people working, as against 12,000 to 13,000 people under normal circumstances. Therefore, it is going to have a short-term impact on our cash flow and operations. While post-lockdown this may improve, it is going to have a significant short-term impact as we ramp up during the next couple of months. It will affect other businesses and the economy as a whole. It will be about six to nine months or even longer for the consumption side to get back to normal. Definitely the first two quarters will be significantly impacted and it will last beyond the third quarter, with some pick-up happening by the fourth.

What are the measures you feel that can kick start the economy?

■ The supply chain sector needs cash flow. So, the banks have to provide funding through ways and means advances, which means that it is not linked with an asset or with any working capital related security. Logistics sector can use these funds

to pay salaries to employees and repay this over a period of three years. Further, the losses incurred during the first quarter can be treated as a deferred revenue loss and can be written off over a period of the next three years rather than writing off in one go, because this is an extraordinary event affecting everyone. This would also help the engines of the economy to keep running.

How to get the trucks back on the road?

Three steps are important to get the trucks back on the road. The first step is to remove fear in people's mind. We give the truck drivers and load men protective kits, which reduces their fear of operating the trucks during this time. The second is to shift to digital mode and avoid physical handling of papers. Thirdly, truckers should get health insurance cover and supported by the government.

What kind of growth can we see during the current fiscal?

■ It is too early to get a sign and honestly it all depends on how long this situation will last.

As regards growth in the logistics and supply chain sector, generally, if you look at it, consumption items like food or essential services will grow, and definitely not go down. But,

if you look at other areas of supply chain like automotive, or FMCD, we could see a general slowdown. Therefore, I do not see truck additions taking place and the challenge would be to increase the utilization of these vehicles.

Your advice to MSMEs and other companies?

■ The biggest takeaway is that we have to focus on technology. We have learned to deliver and interact with our customer without any physical interaction and by moving to app-based solutions. As we evolve, all physical paperwork will disappear, which is a good business practice, and actually speeds up the whole process.

How long will it take for your company to bounce back?

■ As a global organisation providing essential services, we are already fairly active. If you look at in the U.K., 80% of our business is operational because we are supporting mainly essential services, about 60-70% of our businesses are working in Asia and as mentioned earlier, 15-20% in India. Since supply chain is the lubricant of the economy, we will ramp-up our operations as the government starts opening up different sectors.

Will there be any change in your capex or any other investment plans for the current year?

■ Short term, yes. Obviously, we will stop all non-essential capex and investments in this year, but we will continue to focus on providing technology solutions and therefore, we will continue to spend on further strengthening our capabilities. The other focus area would be specific customer related support which will also be necessary and essential during this period.



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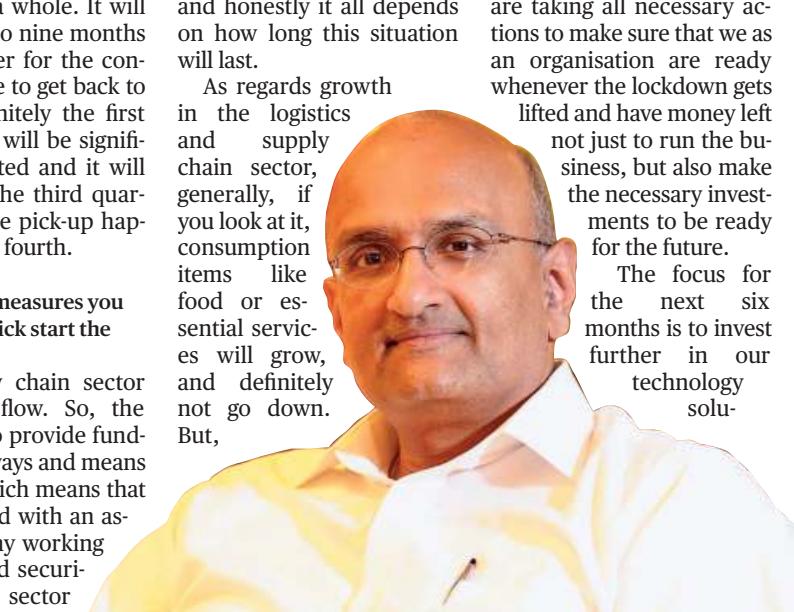
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Dead fragments of novel coronavirus led to false positives in recovered patients

This addresses the concern of reinfection or reactivation in people who have recovered from COVID-19

R. PRASAD

In early April, South Korea announced that patients who were declared as COVID-19 recovered have once again tested positive, suggesting that it could be a case of reinfection or reactivation (where the virus is not completely cleared once again begins to replicate). By the end of April, South Korea had recorded 263 such cases. China too reported such cases.

Cause of concern

This news caused concern as it highlighted the issue of low levels of immunity in people who have recovered and the short duration of protection offered by antibodies developed in response to the infection. If natural infection shows only a short duration of protection, it raised concerns about the duration of protection that vaccines can offer.



Limitation: The RT-PCR molecular test cannot distinguish between dead and live genetic fragments of the virus. •AP

But on April 30, infectious disease experts in South Korea confirmed that dead virus fragments still present in recovered people had led the people numbering over 260 to test positive again for the novel coronavirus even weeks after marking full recovery.

Addressing a press conference a few days earlier, Zhong Nanshan,

China's top respiratory expert had said the same – recovered persons can test positive because fragments of the disease remained in their body.

Little reason

Oh Myoung-don, who leads the central clinical committee for emerging disease control, said that the committee members found little reason to believe that those cases could be COVID-19 reinfections or reactivations, *Korea Herald* reported. The RT-PCR used for testing samples amplifies the genetic material of the virus prior to testing. The molecular test cannot distinguish between dead and live genetic fragments and hence cannot make out whether the virus is alive or not.

Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC) deputy director Kwon Joon-wook told CNN that so far there is no indica-

tion that patients who retest positive are contagious, even though about 44% of them showed mild symptoms. "At the moment, we think that there is no danger of further secondary or tertiary transmission," Kwon told CNN.

Family of cases

The KCDC had investigated three cases from the same family where patients tested positive after recovering. But scientists were unable to grow (culture) the virus. Culturing the virus is typically done for testing and producing vaccines. The inability to grow the virus in a cell culture confirmed that live virus was not present.

"The respiratory epithelial cell has a half-life of up to three months, and RNA virus in the cell can be detected with PCR testing one to two months after the elimination of the cell," Oh told *Korea Herald*.

NIAB develops portable coronavirus detection kit

The device can detect novel coronavirus antigens in 20 microlitres of human saliva within 30 seconds

ASWATHI PACHA

Adding support to the Health Minister's promise that India will be able to produce RT-PCR and antibody test kits by the end of May, researchers from the National Institute of Animal Biotechnology (NIAB), Hyderabad, have developed a biosensor that can detect the novel coronavirus in saliva samples.

Biosensors have been currently used across the world to detect toxins, narcotic drugs, and are also considered as a reliable tool to detect infectious diseases.

New device

The new portable device named eCovSens, can be used to detect the presence of novel coronavirus antigens in human saliva within 30 seconds using just 20 microlitres of the sample.

The in-house built biosensor consists of a carbon electrode and the coronaviruses antibody. The antibody is capable of binding with the spike protein found on the outer layer of the virus. An electrical signal is generated when the antigen and antibody binds.

Electrical components in the device further amplify this signal, process it, convert it to digital readings on an LCD display.

The device can also be connected to a computer or cellphone via Blue-



Cross-reactivity studies: The researchers checked that the antibody in the device does not bind with any other viral antigen. •GETTY IMAGES

The device is portable and requires only a small amount of saliva. It is stable and when built in bulk can drastically bring down the cost of testing.

SONU GANDHI
DBT-NIAB

tooth and studied. The signal's intensity was found to be proportional to the concentration of the antigen in the sample.

Battery-operated
The device can also be battery-operated as it uses very low voltage of 1.3V to 3V. The team also compared eCovSens to a regular potentiostat and found the new device to be ultrasensitive and quicker.

"The device is portable and can be taken to the bedside of the patient too. Also, it requires only a very small amount of sa-

liva. The device is stable and when built in bulk can drastically bring down the cost of testing. The validation studies using saliva samples from coronavirus patients are yet to be done," explains Dr. Sonu Gandhi from DBT-NIAB, Hyderabad, and corresponding author of the paper posted on the preprint server *bioRxiv* on April 29. It is yet to be peer-reviewed and published in a scientific journal.

Other viral antigens
Cross-reactivity studies were done to check if the antibody in the device binds with any other viral antigen. No electric current was generated when tested with antigens of the Avian influenza virus. The paper adds, "the device can be customised to any target analyte, and can also have other future applications for detection of various other ailments."

In effect, the number of tests that need to be carried out is less than if there had to be test done for each individual.

A protocol for pooled RT-PCR testing of COVID-19

The algorithm reconstructs the individual list of positives, negatives and their viral loads from the readings of the tests

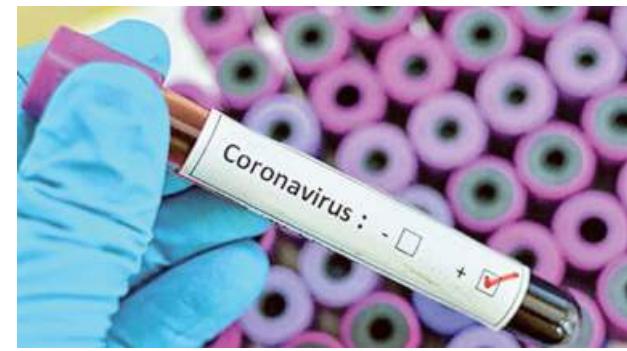
SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

IIT Bombay researchers have developed an algorithm which can be used to help conduct pooled testing of samples for COVID-19. In order to validate this protocol – known as Tapestry Pooling – *in vitro* experiments using synthetic RNA and DNA fragments have been carried out by NCBS and InSTEM, Bengaluru, and Wyss Institute of Biologically Inspired Engineering, U.S. Further validation using clinical samples is under way.

An important part of managing the COVID-19 pandemic is aggressive testing of people and quarantining those who test positive, to contain the spread. Until now, in India tests have been carried out only on people with travel history and their contacts, and on clusters that have known to be infected. This is due to the lack of sufficient testing kits to test a larger population. In this context, pooling of samples is one way of reducing the number of test kits used and increases testing capacity.

Pooled tests
Pooling of samples involves testing them in batches, and when pooled sample tests positive, then individual samples are assessed. Using combinatorics, an algorithm is found that unscrambles the test results and tells you which of the individuals in the pool are positive.

In effect, the number of tests that need to be carried out is less than if there had to be test done for each individual.



Pooled test: Pooling of samples is one way of reducing the number of test kits used and increases testing capacity.

•ISTOCK

The Android application named BYOM Smart Testing, which was developed by Shop 101, guides the user on how to perform the test. The technician enters how many samples they want to test, and the prevalence rate. They are given a pooling matrix.

"Samples are pooled according to this pooling matrix. Pools are tested and the quantitative reading from the tests is entered into our algorithm, which reconstructs the list of positives, negatives, and their viral loads," says Manoj Gopalakrishnan, from IIT Bombay and corresponding author of the preprint posted in *MedRxiv* server. Preprints are yet to be peer-reviewed.

The present version of the protocol has fixed numbers of samples. That is, for instance, 40 samples can be tested in 16 RT-PCR tests (up to 3 positives). This can go up to 961 samples that can be tested in 93 RT-PCR tests (up to 10 positives).

"In version 2, the user will be able to tell how many samples they want tested, and we will give corresponding pool-

ing instructions," explains Dr Gopalakrishnan. Being a non-adaptive test, all the RT-PCR tests in Tapestry pooling are conducted at one go. This could take four hours to perform typically. An adaptive test which has two rounds of testing, can take twice the amount of time.

Graceful failure mode

The protocol also has a so-called graceful failure mode. "It estimates actual prevalence rate in the batch and if this is much higher than the projected prevalence so that the algorithm is not able to identify all positives exactly, it returns a list of suspected positives which includes all the positives, and possibly a few false positives which can be eliminated in round two of testing," explains Dr Gopalakrishnan.

The group is in the process of drafting and obtaining permissions for a clinical trial in collaboration with Tata Memorial Hospital, Kasturba Hospital and P.D. Hinduja Hospital, in Mumbai, Malabar Cancer Centre, in Thalassery, Kerala, and NCBS, Bengaluru.

Broad-spectrum antiviral inhibits novel coronavirus

There was a dose-dependent reduction in novel coronavirus infections in human airway epithelial cell cultures

R. PRASAD

Broad-spectrum antivirals for emerging zoonotic infections become particularly important when specific interventions do not exist. Researchers have found that a ribonucleoside analogue (beta-D-N4-hydroxycytidine or NHC) that has previously shown to be effective against influenza and Ebola is also potent against coronaviruses, including the novel coronavirus that is currently causing the pandemic.

The drug was found to be effective in both cell lines and primary human airway epithelial cultures against SARS, MERS and SARS-CoV-2. It was also effective against three closely related bat coronaviruses that were capable of replicating in human cells without undergoing

any adaptation, suggesting potential direct transmission from bats to humans.

In vitro analysis
The NHC drug is highly active against all three coronaviruses – 2002 SARS, MERS and the novel coronavirus. While it was not toxic to human cells, there was a dose-dependent reduction in SARS, MERS and novel coronavirus infectious virus production in human airway epithelial cell cultures.

The team led by researchers Timothy P. Sheahan and Ralph S. Baric from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in a paper published in *Science Translational Medicine* found that the antiviral activity of NHC arises from increased mutation rates, the authors say that NHC gets incorporated

during RNA synthesis and then subsequently misread leading to enhanced mutation.

Prodrug tested
Encouraged by these results, the researchers tested an orally bioavailable prodrug of NHC designed for improved oral bioavailability in humans and non-human primates and better pharmacokinetics. The prodrug was tested *in vitro* using the 2002 SARS coronavirus. Lung haemorrhage was significantly reduced and there was a dose-dependent reduction in virus titer. When the amount of NHC used was increased to 10 microMolar, the error rate increased sixfold and virus titer reduction increased 26,000-fold.

Explaining the process that leads to increased mutation rates, the authors say that NHC gets incorporated

into the RNA during synthesis and then subsequently misread leading to enhanced mutation.

When treatment was initiated 24 or 48 hours after infection, it did not confer any protection. "Collectively, these data demonstrate that NHC prodrug robustly reduces MERS-CoV infectious titers, viral RNA, and pathogenesis under both prophylactic and early therapeutic conditions," they write.

The data provided in this manuscript suggest that EIDD-2801 should be quickly evaluated in primate models of human disease using

immediate models for MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV-2 pathogenesis or newly described cynomolgus and rhesus macaque models for SARS-CoV-2," the authors write.

Other viruses

"Our data support the continued development of NHC prodrug as a potent broad-spectrum antiviral that could be useful in treating contemporary, newly emerged and emerging CoV infections of the future," they note.

The authors have not been able to test the efficacy of the drug against novel coronaviruses using animal models. Also, it is known that disease severity increases with age, but the authors were not able to test the drug against coronavirus using aged mouse models.

Using human sweat as diagnostic tool and source of power

A recent breakthrough brings in an e-skin patch with six sensor probes



SPEAKING OF SCIENCE

D. BALASUBRAMANIAN

Recall those early days when the family physician was called home to treat a patient. The first thing he'd do was to touch the skin on your face, temples and chest. This would let him diagnose quickly. If the skin feels hotter than usual, you have fever; if it is paler than the usual, you are dehydrated and must drink more water; if it has a bluish tinge, you need to breathe more oxygen; and if it feels wet, you need to exercise less or cut your physical stress and so on. Then you are given what he considers the appropriate medicine as pills or potion, or an injection. Alas, we have now replaced him with a doctor sitting in a clinic, who asks you to go to a commercial centre for diagnostics and prescribes the medicine based on the report. Skin-based diagnosis is a gone thing for general practitioners.

These days, skin specialists do an interesting procedure, in which they attach a thin polymer-based sheet which contains the desired drug, stick it to the skin on your arm or chest and deliver the drug past the sweat fluid directly into the body, using a tiny electric current on the patch. This is thus a wearable technology for personalised medicine – no pills or potions. And with the advent of microelectronics and bio-compatible polymers, we now have 'electronic skin' (e-skin), and nanoscale wires that can be attached and an external electric power supply using micro-scale batteries.

Role of sweat

Notice in all this, the active body fluid, namely, the sweat, is ignored or treated as an inert carrier of no other value. The role of sweat fluid in our body and the chemicals it contains are becoming increasingly understood and utilised only recently. Sweat comes out of three types of glands distributed across all over our skin, secreting water and substances that help keep our body at the optimum temperature of 37 degrees C (or 98.4 degrees F). Our brain has temperature-sensitive nerve cells (neurons) which control the sweat glands in releasing the fluid depending on the temperature and physical and metabolic activity of the body. Sweat is thus our body's thermo-regulator.

What does sweat contain? It is 99% water containing sodium, potassium, calcium, magnesium and chloride ions, ammonium ions, urea, lactic acid, glucose and other minor components. An analysis of the sweat fluid in a patient and how it compares with that of a 'normal' individual will thus be of diagnostic value (just as much as other body fluids do). For example, in the illness called cystic fibrosis, the ratio of the sodium to chloride ions in the sweat is different from that of a normal individual. Likewise, the amount of glucose in the sweat of a diabetic is higher than normal. But the problem is the amount of sweat available from the skin.

Diagnosis based on e-skin

It is here that modern-day technology has become of value. Now that microelectronics and e-skin patches are both available, scientists have been using them for real-time measurements of some chosen component in the sweat, using the appropriate probe (sensor) in the patch in order to detect and measure the level of the component. But would it not be much better if we can measure as many components as we desire if the e-skin patch be loaded with probes not for one but several components simultaneously? A breakthrough on this was made by a group of biologists, material scientists, computer experts and electrical engineers from California (Stanford and Berkeley), and was published with the title: "Fully integrated wearable sensor arrays for multiplexed *in situ* perspiration analysis" (*Nature* 2016 January 28; 529 (7587): 509-514. doi:10.1038/nature16521. free access on the web). They put in not just one but six sensor probes – for Na, Cl ions, lactate, glucose and the temperature of the sweat – all six of them embedded on a e-skin patch, such that a stable sensor-skin contact is maintained. Signals coming from each sensor measuring the sweat component as a tiny electrical signal are then converted into a digital form, and sent to a micro-controller, and from there to a Bluetooth transceiver, which can be seen on a mobile phone or other screen, and passed on through SMS, email, or uploaded to the Cloud interface.

The Californian Group followed it up with another paper in 2017 titled: "Autonomous sweat extraction and analysis applied to cystic fibrosis and glucose monitoring using a fully integrated wearable platform" in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, 114(18), 4525-4630; <https://www.pnas.org/content/114/18/4625>. Since the amount of sweat accessible in sedentary people is too low, the group resorted to what is called iontophoresis, wherein one can stimulate local secretion of sweat at chosen sites, thus getting enough of the fluid, analysing its relevant components in normal (control) individuals, and people with cystic fibrosis and also monitoring glucose levels in the sweat – all this in a similar integrated platform as was used in their *Nature* paper. In a control individual, they found 26.7 mM of Na ions and 21.2 mM of Cl ions (note that the Na level is higher than Cl level here), while in a CF patient, Na level was 2.3 mM and Cl level 95.7 mM (far higher than the Na level), in keeping with what CF specialists have found in their routine ("classical") practice. The group further found that oral glucose consumption while fasting led to increased glucose levels in sweat and in blood.

Sweat as power supply

Note that in all these assays, the probes and sensors need to be powered externally using microbatteries. If these e-skin platforms are to be used in robotics and other devices, can we do away with this external, and have the material in the sweat itself be used as a biofuel generator of electric power? The group showed in their paper that just appeared 10 days ago in the journal *Science Robotics* (Yu et al., *Sci. Robot.* 5, eaaz7946(2020)). On a patch on the individual's e-skin patch they added the enzyme Lox which would react with the lactate in the sweat and oxidise it to pyruvate in a biocathode, thus generating electrical energy that is sufficient to drive the patch with no external energy source – what a brilliant idea!

Finally, in these COVID-19 days, it is good to know that sweat does not carry any pathogen (bacteria or virus); on the contrary it carries a germ-killer protein called dermcidin (Schittek et al., *BMJ* 2001, 323(7323);1206). One wonders if dermcidin or its modification can be anti-viral.

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GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Debt and mutual funds

Why has the Reserve Bank of India opened a liquidity window for mutual funds? What are the concerns about the industry?

ASHISH RUKHAIYAR

The story so far: In view of the possible redemption pressure that the mutual fund industry may face after the abrupt winding up of six debt schemes of Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday announced a special liquidity window of ₹50,000 crore for mutual funds. Under the scheme, the RBI will conduct repo (repurchase agreement) operations of 90-day tenor at a fixed repo rate of 4.40% for banks. According to the RBI, banks can avail funds under this facility exclusively for meeting the liquidity requirements of mutual fund houses by extending loans and undertaking outright purchase of and/or repos against the collateral of investment grade corporate bonds, commercial papers (CPs), debentures and certificates of deposit (CDs) held by the fund houses. The scheme will be open till May 11 or up to utilisation of the allocated amount, whichever is earlier.

Why was it needed?

The trigger for the liquidity window was Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund's decision to wind up six debt funds that had a combined assets under management (AUM) of almost ₹26,000 crore. The fund house said that it decided to wind up the schemes to preserve the value at prevailing levels – their value had eroded because of redemption pressures and mark-to-market losses due to lack of liquidity on account of the COVID-19 pandemic. That led to fears that the debt funds of many other fund houses could face redemption pressure accentuated by the panic sparked by Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund's sudden move.

Are mutual funds' debt schemes under pressure?

While the mutual fund industry clarified that what had happened at Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund was an isolated case, wider liquidity and other concerns persist. A couple of fund houses have already seen huge erosion

in the net asset values of a few debt schemes post the Franklin Templeton episode due to markdowns of their holdings. Incidentally, till date, banks have borrowed about ₹2,000 crore through the RBI liquidity window for mutual funds. Market observers say debt schemes are under pressure due to a combination of factors.

How much debt assets do mutual funds manage? The AUM of debt schemes of the mutual fund industry is about ₹15-lakh crore, which is more than half of the total AUM of Indian fund houses. The worst affected sub-category of debt funds is Credit Risk funds that account for only 5% of the overall debt assets. Investors, however, are sceptical about the overall credit quality of the assets; hence debt schemes are likely to see a spike in redemptions. Mutual funds are allowed to borrow up to 20% of their assets to meet liquidity needs for redemption or dividend pay-out. As of April 23, four mutual funds – of a total of 42 fund houses – had a cumulative borrowing of ₹4,427.68 crore, according to the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI). Fund managers say that while such borrowings are common in March – there are huge redemptions due to advance tax payment and other quarter-end obligations – a spillover of such borrowings to April is a cause for concern.

What is the quality of debt securities held by mutual funds? Fund managers are of the view that more than half of the assets in debt schemes have a rating of AA or above. They say that while about 20% to 30% of total debt AUM would be AAA rated or in cash, another 30% to 50% would be in AA+ or AA rating. While the overall debt quality, based on current ratings, looks good on paper, the ongoing nationwide lockdown has impacted cash flows of most corporates, and investors are expecting defaults especially from the mid and small-sized corporate segment.

What are the regulators doing? The regulators are aware of the potential risk and are monitoring the situation closely. Market participants have already written to the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to take action against Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund including appointing a high-powered committee to take over the management of the fund house while examining its investment decisions. The Association of National Exchanges Members of India (ANMEI), an umbrella body representing about 900 brokers, has written to the Ministry of Finance and SEBI that as much as 64.73% of the total AUM of Franklin India Low Duration Fund was in securities rated A or below, while in Franklin India Short Term Income Plan, such securities accounted for almost 59% of total assets. The brokers' association says Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund invested in long duration securities even though SEBI norms state that ultra short duration funds can only have bonds with a tenure between three and six months.

Can antibody tests help tackle COVID-19?

Why have States complained about the tests being inaccurate in many cases? And, should India use both RT-PCR and antibody tests?

JACOB KOSHY

The story so far: In the COVID-19 fight, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) had advised States to use antibody testing for surveillance and reiterated that the focus has always been on real time RT-PCR (or real-time reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction) tests for diagnosis. The rapid testing kits that State governments had been using to detect antibodies to the novel coronavirus were throwing up unreliable results. In Rajasthan for example, rapid testing kits failed to detect antibodies even when the laboratories had confirmed patients to be COVID-19 positive.

What is the difference between rapid antibody tests and the RT-PCR tests?

There are two ways to detect the presence of a virus, directly or indirectly. Antibody tests, also called serological tests, have usually been the time-tested approach to finding out the presence of a virus in the body. They do so by detecting the presence and quantity of antibodies that are produced by the immune system to battle an infection. It is an indirect test because it cannot find the virus, but it can determine if the immune system has encountered it.

Antibodies can show up between nine to 28 days after an infection has set in; by that time, an infected person, if not isolated, can spread the disease. Sometimes the antibodies may be produced in response to a closely-related pathogen and sometimes they may not be the right kind to counter the infection. These are the factors that can make an antibody test erroneous.

In an RT-PCR test, a nasal or throat swab is taken from a patient suspected of having the disease. The test involves extracting RNA or ribonucleic acid, the genetic material of the virus, and checking if it shares the same genetic sequence as the SARS-CoV-2 virus. If it is a match, the sample is deemed positive. The only way such tests turn negative is if the actual sample does not have the virus or the swab was not properly administered and too little of the virus was gleaned.

As the sequencing of genomes is now widespread and the technology well understood by experts in several countries, China, and subsequently others, were quickly able to determine the structure of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus and learn what differentiates it from related viruses. This is why it was possible to prepare accurate tests to detect the virus relatively quickly, almost in the middle of a pandemic, and the RT-PCR tests began to be followed as the 'gold standard' in detecting the virus. As not enough research hours have been spent studying the antibodies and the profile of recovered patients, the antibody tests we have for COVID-19 are imperfect.

Why is there a clamour for antibody kits?

Antibody tests are fast and relatively inexpensive. The current RT-PCR technology requires RNA extracting machines, a specialised laboratory, and trained technicians. And at least a minimum of 30 samples are needed to make the process economically viable. The tests are done in batches and it can take up to four hours to confidently test for the presence of a virus from a batch. If one adds the time taken to isolate the RNA from swabs, this could again take a couple of hours. The scale of logistics involved can mean that it can practically take a day for results from a sample to be known. If one adds the cost of chemicals needed to perform these tests and the vagaries of importing practically every element of the paraphernalia involved, in the midst of a pandemic when demand far exceeds supply, it results in the test not being cheap. It can cost at least ₹4,500 depending on whether one is tested at a public or privately-run facility. Antibody



tests are portable, can be administered on-site, conducted en masse and give quick answers. However, these answers are useful in-so-far as those who are using them are asking the right questions.

What do antibody tests reveal?

Given that they are not useful for directly detecting the presence of the virus, antibody tests can be used to gauge the extent of infection in a community or a large group of people who may have had exposure to the virus. Much like pregnancy detection kits, rapid-test kits change colour when particular molecules are detected. Two kinds of antibodies result from an infection: Immunoglobulin M and Immunoglobulin G (IgM and IgG). In response to an infection, the IgM is first produced within a week of infection. Two weeks later, the levels of IgM reduce and are replaced by IgG. The latter is a longer-lasting antibody and, depending on the infectious agent involved, can offer different durations of immunity. Antibodies to the chickenpox virus last for decades.

Those that influenza viruses and even other coronaviruses (that cause the common cold) last no more than a year or two. This is why people need flu shots at regular intervals, and one of the reasons why it is practically pointless to have a vaccine for the common cold. It is too early in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic to determine how long

immunity lasts. Nevertheless the presence of IgM, IgG can in a sample of the population determine whether the virus is present in certain clusters. Ideally, this can help government authorities decide on what regions in a lockdown can be opened up if the aim is to get regular life back on track as soon as possible.

This is what happened when infections had reached frightening proportions in the United States and Europe. It was apparent that the limitations of the RT-PCR combined with the virus's ability to spread even through those who were not visibly sick would mean large numbers would be infected without being detected. Rapid antibody tests can also play a role in determining the degree of "herd immunity" in a population. That is, the true number who may have been infected; when a sizeable fraction of the population has been infected, the

virus ceases its pace of spread. Current research expects herd immunity to have been achieved when 55% to 80% of the population has been infected – only careful serological surveys can establish that. Studies in India too have shown that for every symptomatic positive, there are two asymptomatic or presymptomatic (those who do not visibly manifest the disease). Thus, antibody tests could also be used for such estimates in India. The ICMR had laid out the strategy to use antibody tests to gauge the degree of COVID-19 presence in the country. The plan involved using a combination of both RT-PCR and antibody tests to establish infection levels.

What happened to India's rapid testing plan?

Two Chinese companies, Wondfo and Livzon, got licences to sell 500,000 rapid antibody kits to the ICMR. Several of these were to be given to States and some were for the ICMR's own use. A first batch was deployed in some States and soon complaints began pouring in over inaccurate results. The ICMR then asked States to stop using these kits for two days. After two days, the ICMR advised States to stop using the kits altogether. The Health Ministry has cancelled the licences given to the companies that were importing these kits from China. So far, the ICMR has not clarified what was wrong with the kits. The Chinese companies have also claimed that the kits were validated by the ICMR's expert body, the National Institute of Virology (NIV). However, the NIV only clears batches of kits that are submitted for testing. It is possible that even if a company's kits get cleared, it ends up supplying kits on the field that are not up to the mark.

Another feature of the kits is their sensitivity (in percentage terms, the times the tests correctly identify people as positive for an infection) and specificity (in percentage terms, the times the test correctly rules out those not carrying the virus). Specificity refers to its ability to accurately distinguish between the target virus and other viruses. It is a well-established feature of tests that in regions of low actual prevalence of a disease, they can, depending on the kit's specificity and sensitivity, misclassify vast numbers of those tested. It is not clear if these were factored in in tests using kits blamed as faulty by States. India is not the only place where complaints over Chinese kits have been raised. The United Kingdom and Spain have also raised such issues with these kits. In either event, there is no clarity if the ICMR has ordered more kits. The Health Minister, Dr. Harsh Vardhan, has said that by the end of May, the country will have kits that are made in India for antibody and RT-PCR tests.

When will a COVID-19 vaccine be ready?

With clinical trials beginning in Oxford, what is the protocol being followed? When are the results expected?

R. PRASAD

The story so far: On April 23, Oxford University initiated a phase-1 human clinical trial of its vaccine – ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 – against the novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2. A single dose of the candidate vaccine will be administered to 1,112 healthy volunteers to study the safety, ability to produce immune response and efficacy of the vaccine. Oxford University is optimistic of a positive outcome of the candidate vaccine and has planned to get millions of doses of the vaccine before the end of the year even as results of the final phase of the trial (phase-3) are awaited. The vaccine candidate was developed by the University's Jenner Institute which began trials in humans on April 23 jointly with the University's Oxford Vaccine Group.

How was the vaccine being tested constructed? The vaccine, ChAdOx1 nCoV-19, uses the common cold virus (adenovirus) that causes infections in chimpanzees. The adenovirus has been genetically altered so that it does not grow once injected. The construct carries the genetic material of the novel coronavirus that makes the spike protein. The spike protein is found on the surface of the virus and plays a crucial role in binding to specific human receptors found on cell surfaces and entering the cells.

By introducing the genetic material of the spike protein, the candidate vaccine will help the body recognise it and make antibodies against the spike protein. The antibodies produced will help mount an immune response and prevent the virus from entering the human cells and causing an infection.

Oxford University has used vaccines made from the adenovirus construct to over 320 people and has found it to be safe and well tolerated. It does cause transient side effects such as a fever, headache or a sore arm but is otherwise safe.

Has it been tested on animals? The adenovirus construct has been used by Oxford University researchers to test safety for both the 2002 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). Once the safety of the MERS vaccine was proven in a trial carried out in the U.K., a trial began in December last year in Saudi Arabia, where MERS outbreaks occur frequently.

The safety of the candidate vaccine was earlier tested on six rhesus macaque monkeys.

A single dose protected all the six animals for nearly a month even when exposed to high levels of the virus,



boosting the confidence of the researchers.

What is the process of the clinical trial?

Up to 1,112 healthy volunteers from Oxford, Southampton, London and Bristol have been recruited for the phase-1 trial. Volunteers, both male and female between 18-55 years, are being recruited for the trial. A single dose of the candidate vaccine will be administered to volunteers. The participants will be randomly assigned to receive either the candidate vaccine (ChAdOx1 nCoV-19) or a 'control', the MenACWY vaccine, for comparison.

Oxford University is using the MenACWY vaccine – that protects against four strains of meningococcal bacteria – rather than a saline control. The participants will not know if he or she received a candidate vaccine or not. The university researchers will also be testing two doses of the candidate vaccine given four weeks apart on a small group of 10 volunteers to assess the dosage and immune response.

For the control group, why is a vaccine for meningococcal bacteria being used and not saline?

The MenACWY vaccine is a licensed vaccine given routinely to teenagers in the U.K. since 2015. The MenACWY vaccine is being used as an "active control" vaccine to help understand participants' response to ChAdOx1 nCoV-19. The reason for using this vaccine,

rather than a saline control, is because researchers expect to see some minor side effects from the ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccine such as a sore arm, headache and fever. Saline does not cause any of these side effects. If participants were to receive only this vaccine or a saline control, and went on to develop side effects, they would be aware that they had received the new vaccine. It is critical for the study, says Oxford University, that participants remain blinded to whether or not they have received the vaccine, "as, if they knew, this could affect their health behaviour in the community following vaccination, and may lead to a bias in the results of the study".

While all participants will be told how to reduce infection risk, it is necessary that participants receiving both vaccines are exposed to the virus and some get infected. Only then will it become possible to understand if the vaccinated group remained protected or not compared with the control arm. For this purpose, keeping the participants in the dark about the vaccine received makes the trial robust.

What is the timeline for the trial?

The phase-1 trial is expected to be completed in end-May if transmission remains high in the community. The phase-2 trial may be completed by August-September. According to Suresh Jadhav, Executive Director of the Pune-based Serum Institute of India Pvt. Ltd., phase-2 and phase-3 trials may get combined if the phase-1 trial results are encouraging.

When will Pune's Serum Institute start manufacturing the vaccine?

According to Mr. Jadhav, the company will start manufacturing the vaccine the moment the phase-3 trial or the combined phase-2/phase-3 trial begins. If the last two stages of the trial are combined then it would start manufacturing the vaccine by end-June and be ready with millions of doses by the end of the year. The company is confident of manufacturing 60-70 million vaccine doses by the end of the year. He says, "Since we will begin manufacturing when the last phase of the trial is initiated, we will have millions of vaccine doses ready by the time the trial ends."

How much will it cost?

In a tweet on April 30, Oxford University said it is partnering with AstraZeneca to manufacture and distribute the vaccine as quickly as possible. It said the vaccine will be made available on a "not for profit basis" for the duration of the coronavirus pandemic".

No country for migrant workers

Remittances to developing nations are set to fall as migrant workers are hit hard by the virus crisis

DHAKA



Mohammad Osman Goni, a migrant worker, shuttered his tiny green grocery shop in Malaysia and flew home to Bangladesh, a day before the Southeast Asian nation locked itself down on March 18 amid the coronavirus rampage.

Malaysia started the nationwide "movement control order," as it is officially known, hours after it reported its first fatality from the disease. It was a moment of reckoning for Mr. Goni. He feared that he would end up paying a hefty fine for keeping his shop open.

"I realised it's time to go home," Mr. Goni, 41, said in an interview from his home in the central district of Munshiganj. "My earnings col-

lapsed. I suffered a big loss." Mr. Goni's case offers insight into migrant workers' struggle in times of crisis as global remittances are projected to decline sharply by about 20% this year due to the economic crisis induced by COVID-19. It also shows the depth of economic chills consuming the entire migrant community and the countries that largely depend on remittances to keep up economic growth momentum.

Mr. Goni is one of about 19,000 migrant workers who returned to Bangladesh from Malaysia between February 18 and March 18. About 2,00,000 Bangladeshi workers returned home in the same period, mostly from West Asian nations, before the country shut its airspace. The projected fall in remittances, which would be the sharpest in recent history, is largely due to a decline in the wages and employment

of migrant workers, the World Bank said in a report on April 22.

Remittances to low- and middle-income countries may fall by 19.7% to \$445 billion, representing a loss of a crucial financing lifeline for many vulnerable households.

Remittances to Bangladesh and other South Asian nations are forecast to decline by 22% to \$109 billion in 2020, following the growth of 6.1% in 2019.

The slowdown is likely to directly affect remittance outflows from the U.S., the U.K., and EU countries to South Asia. Falling oil prices will affect remittance outflows from West Asian countries and Malaysia, which together supplied \$10.88 billion to Bangladesh last fiscal year. Signs of a deceleration are already on the horizon in the country. Inward remittances in March dropped 13% year-on-year to \$1.29 billion, lowest in 15 months, according to data from the central bank.

"As countries respond to the COVID-19 crisis, there is a strong case



for supporting the migrant workforce, which is vital to many economies. There are several interventions governments should consider," Dilip Ratha, a World Bank economist, wrote in a report. Mr. Ratha recommended supporting stranded mi-

grants and their access to health, housing, and other social services, and offering incentives to reduce the cost of remittance services.

In the medium to long-term, policies should encourage the interoperability of online remittance systems and support efforts to reduce remittance costs, which remain far too high for some of the poorest regions, according to Mr. Ratha.

Digital transfers

The coronavirus crisis may have one upside – more people may start sending money home digitally, which the World Bank says can be 50% cheaper than traditional transfers, where recipients have to go to a shop to pick up the money.

In Bangladesh, bKash saw a surge

in remittance transfers through its channel. Expatriates sent around 150% more remittances on a daily average in April, compared to the first three months of this year through online and wallet-based money transfer companies from around the

world, bKash, Bangladesh's largest mobile money company, said in a statement.

Much about the pandemic is maddeningly unclear. Economies have nosedived, societies have paused. And the impacts of the disease on migrant workers in parts of the world are swift and severe. For Mr. Goni, the job loss is not the central torment, but uncertainty over a future job is. He pleaded with his friend, a university teacher in Dhaka, for help, but a job is hard to come by anytime soon.

Just after Mr. Goni arrived home on March 17, he had another battle to fight: his wife was pregnant and the delivery date loomed. He worried that the nationwide lockdown in Bangladesh that shut public transport would delay his wife's access to a hospital. "It's an uncertain time."

Days later, Mr. Goni's wife gave birth to their second child. He is now staying at home, nervously watching over the newborn, the only good news in the midst of gloom.

Hunted by a virus, ignored by government

Blacks and browns, who make up 23% of those hospitalised with virus, account for 35% of deaths

SAO PAULO



After working for 12 straight hours, Everaldo Fonseca, 62, rushed to see his wife at a hospital in Gravataí in Rio Grande do Sul State. During the night, as he sat by his sick wife's bed, a nurse's phone went missing. Soon, a crowd formed around the lanky, black man. He was dragged out and beaten as his wife ran after him and collapsed. A few hours later, the nurse found the phone in her office and "apologised" to Mr. Fonseca for any "misunderstanding". By that time, his wife was dead. "Not even a dog deserves to go through this... I thought things like this used to happen 50 or 100 years ago," said Mr. Fonseca. "They told us that black people are not citizens."

As the coronavirus roars through Brazil, with a high case fatality rate, its racial fault-line is rattling. Amid the deluge of news about the virus, which has infected 92,000 and killed 6,400 people so far, the cries of a poor, black man barely made headlines.

But these numbers hide an inconvenient truth: the virus is killing black people in large numbers; and they are being pushed to the brink by the government.

Like in the U.S., the deadly virus is making a distinction on the basis of race in Brazil too. According to the Ministry of Health data, the virus is more lethal among black and brown people, who form 52% of the population. While these groups form just 23% of those hospitalised with infections, they account for 35% of fatalities. With the whites, according to government figures, the situation is



opposite: 73% of hospitalised cases but 62% of deaths. "The blacks and brown generally have a worse social condition. This population is often malnourished, not monitored medically and more likely to have other co-morbidities," said Dr. Patricia Ta-

wares, a longevity expert in São Paulo.

While blacks (Afro-Brazilians) and browns (a mix of Africans and Europeans) form the majority of Brazilian population, they mostly live in the poorer areas on the margins of cities. As the virus was brought here by upper- and middle-class people who travelled abroad during the pandemic, most victims are still white. But the infection is trickling down fast, especially in São Paulo. According to a study by the Faculty of Medical Sciences, blacks living in São Paulo "have a 62% greater chance of dying from COVID-19 than whites".

Spread across States

Brazil reported its first COVID-19 case in São Paulo on February 25. For a few weeks, the virus circulated only in the rich areas. But in the past two months, with just 50% of the population practising social isolation, the virus has spread across States and cities and invaded the poor communities on the periphery.

Aney has reached the need as President Jair Bolsonaro delayed signing the order and technical glitches blocked the transfer of money. "The President is forcing us to work by denying the aid. Bolsonaro keeps saying the government doesn't have money. They never have money for the black people," says Mr. Moreno.

As if to add insult to injury, Mr. Bolsonaro on Monday met a federal Congressman, who is the son of an evangelical missionary, and a top Treasury officer to discuss how to "give a break" to the church on its debts. The evangelicals make less than 30% of Brazil's population but form the core of Mr. Bolsonaro's political base. Groups linked to some of these churches have been accused of attacking Afro-Brazilian religious sites. In 2019, after Mr. Bolsonaro assumed the presidency, there was a spike in hate crimes as more than 100 such places of worship came under attack. As COVID-19 hunts them, Brazil's blacks get ignored by their government.

Businesses pitch in to help fight pandemic

From luxury hotels to distilleries, Sri Lanka's private sector has joined the fight against virus

COLOMBO



In the world's four-month battle against the COVID-19 pandemic, one reality remains unchanged. It has been an unequal fight with a tiny, but significantly stronger and resolute opponent.

On the frontline are health workers, with the military aiding them in Sri Lanka's case, toiling day and night in stifling full body suits, just so someone can breathe a little more and live. Given that no country was prepared for this, their best efforts are proving inadequate. Like everywhere else, Sri Lanka too is dealing with many gaps – some new and others owing to the many fractures in society that the pre-COVID-19 world was largely indifferent to.

Identifying a few immediate needs, Sri Lanka's business sector has been pitching in.

Luxury hotels are modifying their rooms for quarantine patients and large garment manufacturers – who are about to sack some of their labour force with export prospects collapsing – are busy making face masks with part of their workforce. Meanwhile, engineers and tech solutions companies are developing robots and ventilators. Sri Lanka's relatively small businesses are also thinking on their feet, even if it has meant diversifying into related, but not necessarily familiar terrain.

Healthy twist

Sri Lankan authorities ordered that liquor outlets remain shut for much of the past month. There is little scope for exports as well. But the nearly-century old Rockland Distil-

leries, best known for its arrack, decided to give its core product a healthy twist to suit the times. The family-run business is now producing alcohol-based hand sanitiser that have an urgent demand. "So far, we have produced the equivalent of 10,000 x 700 ml bottles of Ceylon Arrack," Amal de Silva Wijeyeratne, CEO and managing director of the company, told *The Hindu*. The sanitiser are being supplied to frontline health professionals and other essential workers free of charge. "We had many requests from various organisations and individuals to purchase the bottles at very high prices given the shortage of hand sanitiser, but not a single bottle was sold for commercial gain," he said.

The company's existing bottling plant was adapted to "ensure there was no cross contamination" with its usual arrack production. A semi-automatic filling unit was used to fill the bottles with the sanitiser alcohol that were later hand-carried to the capping and labelling line, avoiding the

regular, automated line. "Our factory has been closed since the lockdown which meant staffing the production line was an issue, however we had many kind volunteers and staff who lived nearby to the distillery come forward to help manage the project," Mr. Wijeyeratne said.

Rainco, Sri Lanka's best-known umbrella and rainwear brand, had also closed its factory after the government imposed a near-total lockdown in March. "The pandemic caught all of us unawares," the company's managing director Fazal Fausz told *The Hindu*. But the company got several calls from those who wanted "umbrella material" for protective gear that was washable.

"We heard the need was so urgent that in some cases nurses had begun sewing masks. We sought government permission, reopened our factory, and began distributing fabric and some suits to the health sector workers and Army personnel." Mr. Fausz said he hasn't kept accounts of what has been distributed free of

charge until now but estimates it would be worth about LKR 2 to 3 million. "It was the right thing to do at this time. It was also a way of keeping our staff motivated, they take pride in producing something that can be of use at such a crucial time."

the company has been donating the supplies so far, more business enquiries are coming in that "down the line, it may turn into a business."

Further, as a big question mark looms over exports, Mr. Fausz said the next three to six months are likely to set the ground for new supply chains.

Doing what businesses do best to survive and stay relevant, with the hope that they can later thrive, some are already looking at potential opportunities in this crisis. For instance, while Rainco is preparing for the monsoon months, when demand for their core products will rise, the group company – which also has businesses in outdoor shades and blinds – is keenly watching the space for what might open up for such businesses.

"Post COVID-19, our entire landscape will change. We are going to need modified entrances to buildings, and perhaps disinfectant chambers outside. This is the time for product innovation," Mr. Fausz said.

What went wrong with Japan's COVID-19 response

The country remains badly placed to deal with a potential escalation in infections

TOKYO



On a global scale, Japan's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic is passable. Even without a total lockdown, the country has avoided an explosion of cases and has a relatively low mortality rate. As of April 26, the number of deaths per million people in Japan stood at 2.85 compared to 164.5 in the U.S. and 490 in Spain.

The reasons for Japan's less virulent brush with the novel coronavirus remain up for debate. Explanatory contenders include a culture of wearing facemasks, elevated standards of hygiene, relatively warm weather, and even the propitiation of plague-fighting Shinto deities. But one factor glaringly missing on this list is political leadership.



gatherings took place despite some weak pleas for the public to avoid these. Even Akie Abe, the first lady, was photographed attending a blossom party in contravention of the government's own social distancing advice.

The consequence was a predictable spike in infections, which had the authorities scrambling to respond, as hospitals began to warn that they were in danger of being overwhelmed. Mr. Abe finally declared an emergency on April 7. As businesses were asked to close, schools and nurseries were shut and people self-isolated, an anxious citizenry awaited concrete details of the government's plan to tackle the crisis.

'Abenomasks' for every house
Their bated breath was rewarded with the announcement that two cloth facemasks would be posted to every household in the country. The "Abenomask", a pun on the Prime Minister's signature economic policy that is dubbed Abenomics, was widely pilloried as an ineffectual waste of taxpayer's money. Once the masks began to be delivered, there were further complaints of the products being stained, damaged or contaminated with human hair and dust. A large number had to be re-

called. Mr. Abe then addressed the nation via a video meant to persuade the nation about the small pleasures of staying at home. It featured the PM cuddling his dog in his spacious apartment, winding down with a large, presumably warm, beverage and watching TV.

The majority of Japanese live in cramped accommodations and are struggling to cope with balancing childcare with making a living in an uncertain economic environment. At a time when the Governor of Osaka was pleading for raincoat donations because doctors had resorted to wearing trash bags as protective gear, Mr. Abe's video struck some as a tad tone-deaf. "You look so elegant at a time when many people feel they are being strangled slowly (with the virus). Why don't you go and see hospitals that have been the battleground?" asked one tweeter.

But in a nation governed largely by a cabal of dark suit-wearing older men, Mr. Abe has company in acting clueless. Last week, the Mayor of

Osaka, Ichiro Matsui, came in for flak after suggesting that women stay at home and send men to do the grocery shopping instead, since men were more directed and less likely to dawdle in shops. Speaking to reporters, he said women "take a long time as they browse around and hesitate about this and that," adding, "Men can snap up things they are told (to buy) and go, so I think it's good that they go shopping..."

Social media was once again less than appreciative. "When I hear remarks like this... I feel the need for people with diverse backgrounds to participate in politics," read a tweet.

Despite a long window for preparation having been affected by COVID-19 relatively early, Japan remains badly placed to deal with a potential escalation in infections. It has only half as many ICU beds per 1,000,000 people as Spain. Germany has six times more. More is needed from the leadership than sops in the form of masks or feel-good videos about cuddling pets.

Mithali live!

Catch India ODI Captain and Padma Shri awardee Mithali Raj in a live chat on Sportsstar's Instagram handle (@sportstarweb) on May 3 (Sunday) at 5 p.m. IST.

IN BRIEF**Relive India's victorious WCC journey on Sony Six**

CHENNAI The Blue Revolution, a 12-part series that revisits India's triumph in the 1985 B&H World Championship of Cricket, will be telecast from May 4 on Sony Six and Sony Six HD from 8.30 p.m. IST. The final, played between India and Pakistan, will be aired on May 16.

Equal pay: setback for US women footballers

LOS ANGELES A federal judge dismissed the United States women's football team's bid for equal pay, rejecting claims the players had been underpaid. Judge Gary Klausner of the US District Court for Central California tossed the World champion's claim of pay discrimination, ruling in favour of the US Soccer Federation. AFP

**Nakamura gets past Caruana, reaches final**

NEW DELHI Hikaru Nakamura outplayed Fabiano Caruana 4-2 to reach the final of the \$250,000 Magnus Carlsen online chess tournament on Friday. After the first two games were drawn, Nakamura took the lead in the third. Caruana held his nerve to clinch the fourth. In the two-game blitz tie-breaker, Nakamura proved superior.

The result: Semifinal: Hikaru Nakamura (USA) bt Fabiano Caruana (USA) 4-2.

Discus thrower Kumari banned for four years

NEW DELHI Discus thrower Sandeep Kumari has been slapped with a four-year ban by the Athletics Integrity Unit for flunking a dope test, nearly two years after her sample was deemed clean by the NDTL. Kumari had won the gold at the National Inter-State championships in June 2018 at Guwahati. Her results from June 26 to November 21, 2018, will now be annulled and Kumari's four-year ban will begin from June 26, 2018, the date of her sample collection. PTI

ITTF extends suspension of activities till July end

LAUSANNE The International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF), on Saturday, extended the suspension of its activities till the end of July due to the COVID-19 pandemic. PTI

'It's not the players' job to find a way'

Nagal and Prajesh feel tennis' governing bodies should raise money for relief fund

N. SUDARSHAN

India's top-ranked singles tennis players, Prajesh Gunnswaran and Sumit Nagal, aren't entirely in agreement with the player-driven model to help lower-ranked competitors weather the coronavirus pandemic crisis. They agree in principle with the idea of creating a relief fund, but feel the game's governing bodies should have taken the lead instead.

Nagal (ranked 127) and Prajesh (ranked 132) are in a bracket where they would neither be expected to contribute nor receive help from the fund, but both have toiled long enough to understand the rigours players go through.

Not the right thing

"Ideally the ATP, the ITF and the Slams should raise the money," Nagal told *The Hindu*.

"The \$10,000 promised is certainly going to be nice for some, but taking it from the



Experience: Nagal and Prajesh have toiled long enough to understand the rigours players go through. ■ FILE PHOTO & R. RAGU

players isn't the right thing. It is not the fault of the guy ranked 30 that a player at 400 is not making money."

While Prajesh stated that it was important in these stressful times to look out for fellow players, he pointed to the need for better targeting of beneficiaries.

"Players ranked outside 250 are surely losing money because they spend more than they earn," Prajesh said. "But a contributing

player may like to know what has changed now because they are not spending. It is a tough question to ask but not all players ranked outside 300 make a living purely by playing."

Tough ask

"Some may play club matches, do some coaching or travel only when there is money. Maybe breaking even is tough now because of constant expenses but no earnings. So we need solid criteria to determine who needs support, like career prize money, federation support."

Players who consistently appear in the main draw of Grand Slams — a solitary first-round appearance can fetch as much as \$55,000 — will be in a better position to contribute, Nagal believed.

"They should have taken the average singles cut-off for the past five years and drawn the line well inside that. It is fair for people who are consistently making the main draws of Slams but not others," Nagal opined.

Prajesh said that paying players better in normal times will help cushion them from future disruptions.



Experience: Nagal and Prajesh have toiled long enough to understand the rigours players go through. ■ FILE PHOTO & R. RAGU

"The right way is for the governing bodies to raise the money or create a system where they pay the players more so that such a situation doesn't arise. It's not the players' job to find a way."

ITF issues guidelines for post-pandemic events

No doubles, handshakes, signing autographs and taking selfies

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE PARIS

No shaking, no showering, no sharing, no signing!

Welcome to what the world of tennis could look like once government restrictions caused by the coronavirus pandemic have been lifted.

On Friday, the International Tennis Federation (ITF) issued a set of guidelines for local and National-level competitions.

"They emphasise that decisions made by governments take precedence and that tennis (either competitive or recreational) should not be played until governments have sufficiently relaxed any restrictions that are currently in place," said an ITF statement.

The guidelines include arriving at venues already dressed and leaving immediately after the match. "Do not use the locker rooms or

showers," says ITF.

Masks are to be worn while off-court, players and officials should maintain at least two metres between each other and handshakes are banned.

Each player is asked to use a personal set of balls — separately numbered. Ball boys and girls to wear rubber gloves, while at changeovers players must go around opposite sides of the net.

Players are also discouraged from signing autographs, taking selfies and warned not to share equipment, water bottles or food.

Tournaments should also only be singles and played without spectators.

"While following measures such as these will ensure that the risk from COVID-19 is minimised, the guidelines are clear that it cannot be eliminated altogether," added ITF.

England tour of Sri Lanka rescheduled

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA COLOMBO

England's Test tour of Sri Lanka, which could not be completed in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic, has been rescheduled to January next year, SLC CEO Ashley de Silva has said.

England had spent around 10 days in Sri Lanka in March and played a warm-up match before the tour was called off. It was supposed to be a two-Test series as part of the World Test Championship.

However, England is scheduled to tour India in January for a five-Test series, so it remains to be seen how the scheduling will work out.

Batra continues push for outdoor training

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

Indian Olympic Association president Narinder Batra on Saturday said he will again request the government to allow national campers to undergo outdoor training inside the country's major sports centres during the coronavirus-forced lockdown.

Batra said the IOA had earlier requested the government in this regard but was not successful in eliciting a positive response.

Some athletes at the NIS-Patala had also written to the Sports Ministry to allow outdoor training by observing government's social distancing guidelines.

"We have made some efforts trying to convince the Ministry of Home Affairs to allow athletes to train outdoors with all social distancing guidelines," said Batra.

Batra suggested the AI consider extending the contracts of the coaches till the



Batra. ■ FILE PHOTO: PTI

2022 Asian Games and Commonwealth Games.

"Please take a decision on the extension of contracts of High Performance Directors or coaches. Let me know if I can be of any help. I will intervene whenever required and try to sort out the issue (with sports ministry).

"I think in some sports, the Asian or Commonwealth Games are 2024 Olympics qualification events or will offer ranking points for qualification. So, federations can even think of that on the extension of contract of coaches."

ICA raises ₹39 lakh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

Cricket legends Sunil Gavaskar and Kapil Dev have pledged their support to Indian Cricketers Association's (ICA) initiative to financially help around 30 needy players amid the nationwide lockdown, said its president Ashok Malhotra.

ICA has so far raised ₹39 lakh to help former cricketers who are in dire need of funds.

Gavaskar, Kapil, Gautam Gambhir and Gundappa Viswanath have joined us. A corporate from Gujarat has also offered its support, Malhotra said.

The ICA will continue to accept donations till May 15, following which it will shortlist five to six players from each zone (north, east, west, south and central).

AFI targets September return

Holds its SGM on Saturday via videoconferencing

UTHRA GANESAN

NEW DELHI

The Athletics Federation of India (AFI) is officially targeting a return to action by September even as the tenure of its office-bearers was extended till physical elections could be held when situation becomes conducive.

The AFI held its Special General Meeting via videoconferencing on Saturday to take stock of the road ahead in terms of planning and preparation of events and athletes. The extension of tenure had already been approved by AFI members ear-

lier and was ratified during the SGM. AFI president Adil Sumariwalla was authorised to decide on fresh date of AGM and elections.

Prospective calendar

High Performance Director Volker Hermann, Chief Coach Bahadur Singh and Deputy Chief Coach Radhikram Nair shared a prospective competition calendar, assuming resumption of domestic events in September.

"We had planned for competition in two phases but have had to draw up in one,

breaking a negative thought chain," said Ankita.

Ramkumar Ramanathan recalled how he used to play tournaments every week when he trained in Spain, not bothering about results. And, how satisfied he used to be to go back and win the same tournaments after having worked on his game.

Mind trainer Dr. Janki Deole took the example of Roger Federer who blossomed from a talented kid throwing tantrums, to the most

delayed phase," AFI Planning Committee chairman Lalit Bhanot said. IOA president Narinder Batra, attending the meeting, assured the AFI of support in securing contract extensions for overseas coaches and support staff.

The meeting also saw tributes paid to legendary coach Joginder Singh Saini, who passed away on March 1, and Sumariwalla announcing an online pre-Level 1 coaching module to provide proper guidance to parents and coaches of young athletes and avoid over-training and burnout.

And Chennai's Sai Prithvi made the best use of it to tally a maximum of 252 points over the five rounds to emerge Season Two's undisputed champion.

He enjoyed four victories

which was sufficient enough to give him the crown and testing in a Volkswagen Motorsport race car.

They walked for another two hours to reach the spot where clusters of beehives hung from protruding rocks on a steep mountain.

Body of knowledge

"We shot the film over a few trips in June-July 2018. What struck me while filming was that smoking the bees out with certain leaves and twigs and collecting the beehives was not the only skill under threat. An entire body of knowledge of making ladders, spatula, tongs and baskets with forest produce would go with these six men, who were in the upper mid-50s then," he said.

The honey harvesting — Mr. Thongdok prefers the "phonetically correct" Sherdukpen over the official Sherdukpen — has traditionally

been done twice a year. The bees make honey from wild flowers in June-July and primarily from rhododendron in October-November.

The winter variety has an intoxicating effect if consumed in larger doses, he said.

During the course of filming, Mr. Thongdok noticed that the inside of the baskets used by the honey-hunters for collecting the beehives was lined with a kind of indigenous rubber.

"It was neither factory-made rubber nor produced from the rubber tree. And I found out there aren't many around who know that art or the natural element from which it is made," he said.

Mr. Thongdok intends to document the art before it dies with the latex makers.

Documenting the last honey hunting group of Arunachal Pradesh

Award-winning film by Thongdok chronicles a skill likely to die with half-a-dozen men from the Buddhist Sherdukpen community



Fading into oblivion? Clusters of beehives hanging from protruding rocks on a steep hill near Thongri in Arunachal Pradesh; Producer-director Kuzang D. Thongdok flanked by the honey-hunters. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Thongdok told *The Hindu* from his hometown Rupa. "Very few venture out now because of better connectivity and access to medicines and food stores and the young are not interested in learning the tough skill," he

added. The six honey-hunters the 37-year-old film-maker had followed into deep jungles at about 6,000 ft above sea level are from Thongri and Jigaon villages that are about 25 minutes' drive from Rupa. While

Thongri has some 70 houses, Jigaon has 100.

Mr. Thongdok's four-member crew and the honey-hunters trekked for almost three hours from Thongri to a base camp where they stayed for the night.

They walked for another two hours to reach the spot where clusters of beehives hung from protruding rocks on a steep mountain.

Body of knowledge

"We shot the film over a few trips in June-July 2018. What struck me while filming was that smoking the bees out with certain leaves and twigs and collecting the beehives was not the only skill under threat. An entire body of knowledge of making ladders, spatula, tongs and baskets with forest produce would go with these six men, who were in the upper mid-50s then," he said.

The honey harvesting — Mr. Thongdok prefers the "phonetically correct" Sherdukpen over the official Sherdukpen — has traditionally

85 stars join concert to raise funds

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE MUMBAI

Over 85 celebrities from India and across the globe will unite to raise funds for the country's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

A.R. Rahman, Aamir Khan, Priyanka Chopra, Katrina Kaif and Aishwarya Rai Bachchan are among the Indian celebrities who will join global icons Will Smith, Mick Jagger and Bryan Adams for a Facebook home-to-home fundraiser concert titled 'I For India'.

The four-hour concert will be live globally on Facebook on May 3 at 7.30 p.m. All proceeds generated will go to the India COVID Response Fund managed by GiveIndia.

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