



West Bengal left with no testing kits, says Mamata Banerjee  
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I am confident we will win this battle soon: Shivraj Singh Chouhan  
page 10



Stress and anxiety rising amid coronavirus pandemic, say experts  
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Move to suspend issuance of green cards will help our citizens, says Donald Trump  
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## NEARBY



No decision on Amarnath Yatra yet: shrine board

Srinagar  
The Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board on Wednesday said it had not yet decided whether to hold the Amarnath Yatra or not due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A spokesperson of the board said the members expressed apprehension over conducting the yatra this year.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 11

Maruti Manesar plant gets nod for operations

GURUGRAM  
Exactly a month after Maruti Suzuki India Limited shut down production and office operations across Haryana on March 22, its Manesar plant has been given permission to resume operations in a single shift with restricted number of staff and vehicles. The company is yet to decide on resuming production.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 11

U.P. to allow other States to take people home

LUCKNOW  
The Uttar Pradesh government will allow other States to take home their residents if they want, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Wednesday. "If the governments of other States wish to recall their citizens stranded in U.P., we will cooperate," he said.

NORTH & EAST ▶ PAGE 4

## Confirmed cases cross 20,000; nearly 4,000 people recover

With 50 new deaths, toll jumps to 652; 1,383 fresh cases reported in 24 hours

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN  
NEW DELHI

India on Wednesday reported 50 new COVID-19 deaths and the recovery of 3,959 patients, taking the recovery rate to 19.36% from 17% previously.

The Union Health Ministry said 20,971 individuals have been confirmed positive as of now, while the death toll stood at 652. Since Tuesday, 1,383 new cases were reported.

However, reports from the States put the toll at 683 and the total number of positive cases at 21,324, out of which 16,489 are active. Maharashtra has the most number of cases (5,649), followed by Gujarat (2,407) and Delhi (2,248).

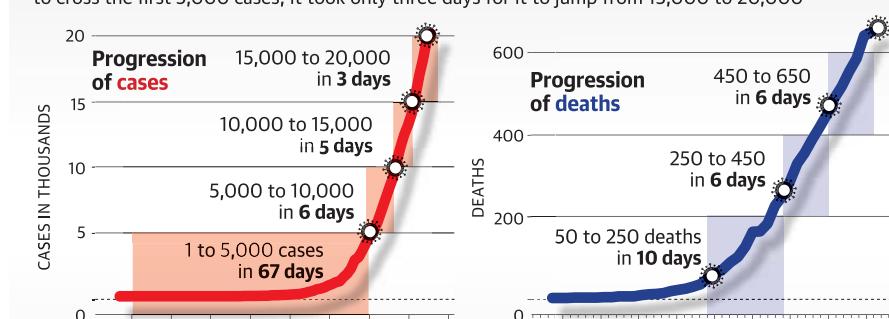
### COVID-19

The Ministry said the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) had promised to collect data from the States to assess the scope and extent of the utility of the rapid antibody test in field conditions.

"It [ICMR] shall keep advising the States on a regular basis. The States have also been advised to follow the prescribed protocol for this test and use it for the pur-

### Viral impact

COVID-19 cases in India have increased at a quick pace over the last two weeks. While it took 67 days to cross the first 5,000 cases, it took only three days for it to jump from 15,000 to 20,000.



pose for which it is meant," said a release issued by the Ministry. The ICMR had reiterated that the rapid test was largely to be used as a tool for surveillance.

"Globally also, the utility of this test is evolving and it is currently being used for detecting the formation of antibodies in individuals. The test results are also dependent on field condi-

tions," the release noted and asserted that the test cannot replace the RT-PCR test to diagnose COVID-19 cases.

The Ministry said it had directed State Chief Secretaries and the UT administrations to ensure the safety of health workers. "Their skill and service amongst all professionals place them in a unique position to save people in present times. The

States and the UTs have been advised to take up various measures, including human resource and capacity-building training, medical safety, timely payments, psychological support, training of front-line workers and life insurance cover," it stated.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8  
MORE REPORTS ON ▶ PAGES 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 14

## Attacks on health workers to attract up to 7 years in prison

Union Cabinet approves promulgation of ordinance

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the promulgation of an ordinance to amend the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, making acts of violence against medical staff a cognisable and non-bailable offence and to provide compensation for injury to healthcare personnel or for damage or loss to property.

The ordinance proposes that in cases of attacks on healthcare workers, the investigation will be completed within 30 days and the final decision arrived at within one year.

The punishment for such attacks will be three months to five years and the fine ₹50,000 to ₹2 lakh.

In severe cases, where there are grievous injuries, the punishment will be six months to seven years and the fine ₹1 lakh to ₹5 lakh.

### 'Zero tolerance'

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan, in a series of tweets after the announcement, said that as per the "new ordinance, there shall be zero tolerance to any incidents of violence against healthcare service personnel and/or damage to property. All offences of violence will be cognisable and non-bailable".

The Ministry of Home



Battle ready: Medics performing a mock drill in Ernakulam district of Kerala on Wednesday. ■ PTI

## IMA calls off protest plan

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) on Wednesday withdrew a protest planned against the attacks on doctors and healthcare professionals after the Union government promised that all necessary steps, including relevant legislation, would be introduced for their safety and dignity.

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) on Wednesday withdrew a protest planned against the attacks on doctors and healthcare professionals after the Union government promised that all necessary steps, including relevant legislation, would be introduced for their safety and dignity.

Affairs (MHA) asked the States to appoint nodal officers to redress any safety issue related to medical professionals 24/7. In a letter, Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla asked the States to take strict action against those who obstruct last rites of a medical professional and provide security for the final rites. ■ PAGE 8

highlighted daily. Portrayal as potential spreaders of COVID-19 pandemic played havoc with the confidence of the medical community which is demanding protection," the Health Minister tweeted.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

## Four militants killed in J&K encounter

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
SRINAGAR

Four militants were killed by security forces in a village in south Kashmir's Shopian district on Wednesday. "The identities of the militants are being ascertained," the police said.

The militants were encircled during a search and cordon operation at Melhora village on Tuesday evening.

"The operation was launched after a tip-off. The militants opened fire on the search party, triggering a gunfight," said the police.

The operation was carried out jointly by the Army, the police and the Central Reserve Police Force.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

## Back to work



Against all odds: Workers resuming construction on the Mahatma Gandhi Setu in Patna, Bihar, on Wednesday following relaxation of restrictions during the lockdown imposed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. ■ RANJEET KUMAR

## Most sectors will be open by May 3, says Sanjeev Sanyal

Downturn could last years, says Principal Economic Adviser



Sanjeev Sanyal

ed to dole out support in incremental doses, rather than spend all its resources in one go.

Mr. Sanyal acknowledged that many other countries announced huge stimulus packages, running into trillions of dollars, even before announcing shutdown measures to prevent the spread of the infection. However, most of these countries "wasted" their money on a "big bang" and felt the Indian approach of first announcing the lockdown, and then taking "calibrated" measures to protect and revive the economy was more effective in the long run.

With regard to an economic stimulus, Mr. Sanyal exhorted industry leaders to view the process as a "marathon, not a sprint." He warned that the economic downturn was expected to last a long time. "Not weeks, but possibly years, and certainly months," he said. So the government also expect-

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

## Migrant workers give a gift of warm colours

Quarantined labourers help community in Rajasthan with free repairs to school



A new bond: The team at work in the school near Sikar, brightening up the main building. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

to an increase in retail prices of diesel and petrol by almost ₹6 per litre, officials said. From April 21 midnight, the price of diesel increased from ₹65.07 to ₹70.5 per litre and of petrol from ₹71.61 to ₹77.46 per litre.

The fuel price hike followed State Finance Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's fears that Assam might not be able to meet its expenditure in June, including paying salaries to about 5 lakh government employees, if there is no infusion of funds.

Assam Congress spokesperson Gaurav Somani termed the State government's decision "regressive, especially at a time when prices of essentials are already at increased levels".

The steep hike when global oil prices are at a record low is unacceptable," said CPI(M) secretary Deben Bhattacharya.

Though none had COVID-19 symptoms, the

panchayat asked them to complete the 14-day quarantine period in the school. Food and medical assistance were arranged.

Palsana Naib Tehsildar Vipul Chaudhary told *The Hindu* on Wednesday that the labourers were surprised at the hospitality.

Good food and essential items were offered readily.

Medical teams from the block headquarters visited them for a regular check-up.

Decade old structure

The workers could not help noticing that the old school building, which had not been painted for a decade, was in bad shape and the premises could do with a clean-up. They offered to

deploy their skills, to paint and repair the building, clean up the compound, and plant saplings.

Buckets of paint, brushes, polish and tools came through a fund-raiser by the teachers, panchayat staff and villagers. Shankar Singh Chauhan from Haryana, a painter, led the team while Tara Chand, Om Prakash and others took up repairs.

The workers wanted to do something for the village which cared for them in a crisis, when they were emotionally shattered and had no money.

Palsana Sarpanch Roop Singh Shekhawat said the school's alumni campaigned to raise funds for the infrastructure and collected ₹1.15 lakh.

"The money is funding repairs. The villagers are overwhelmed by the gesture of the labourers," he said.

## Facebook buys ₹43,574 cr. stake in Jio Platforms

WhatsApp to link JioMart, shoppers

PIYUSH PANDEY  
MUMBAI

Mark Zuckerberg's Facebook Inc. on Wednesday announced that it had agreed to buy a 9.99% stake in the Mukesh Ambani-led Jio Platforms Limited for ₹43,574 crore, valuing the subsidiary of Reliance Industries Ltd. (RIL) at an enterprise value of ₹4.62 lakh crore.

The transaction, which will need regulatory approval, will help the RIL unit to leverage Facebook's WhatsApp in accelerating business on the JioMart platform and connecting neighbourhood grocery stores with consumers. "In the near future, JioMart and WhatsApp will empower nearly 3 crore small Indian kirana shops to digitally transact with every customer in their neighbourhood," Mr. Ambani said in a video message.

Jio Platforms, which

houses all of RIL's digital businesses, intends to use a part of the funds invested by Facebook to reduce debt. "Jio Platforms has debt of ₹40,000 crore," Anshuman Thakur, head of strategy at Reliance Jio, told *The Hindu*. "About ₹15,000 crore of proceeds will stay in Jio Platforms and the remaining will be used to pay for optionally convertible preference shares investments made by RIL in this company," he added.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8



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CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

**Timings****DELHI**

THURSDAY, APR. 23
RISE 05:48 SET 18:52
RISE 06:05 SET 19:08
FRIDAY, APR. 24
RISE 05:47 SET 18:53
RISE 06:37 SET 20:02
SATURDAY, APR. 25
RISE 05:46 SET 18:53
RISE 07:12 SET 20:57

<b>Delhi Weather</b>	max	min
Delhi City	36	19
Safdarjung	36	19
Palam	37	19

**Delhi Pilm Today**  
34°C Weather will be very warm with partly cloudy sky. Short spell of duststorm and thundershower and lightning with gusty winds is likely.

**Delhi Pilm Tomorrow**  
36°C Weather will be warm with partly cloudy sky. Short spell of duststorm and thundershower is likely.

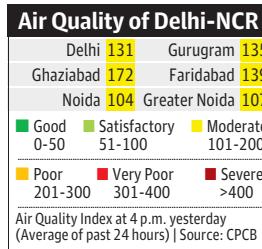
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**THE HINDU**

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**IN BRIEF****BSES initiative to connect with consumers**

**NEW DELHI**  
Electricity discom BSES launched a virtual initiative, "BSES Aap ke Saath" to connect with consumers during the lockdown, the company said on Wednesday.

**HIMACHAL PRADESH PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT**  
Ph. No. 01907-266245, E-mail: ee-sun-hp@nic.in  
**INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)**

The Executive Engineer, HPPWD Division Sunder Nagar (HP) on behalf of Governor of H.P invites the item rate bids, in electronic tendering system from the eligible class of contractors registered with HPPWD for the works detailed in the table.

Sr. Name of work No.	Estimated cost (In Rs.)	Starting Date for downloading Bid	Earliest Money	Deadline for submission of Bid
1. Annual Surfacing on Pander Tappani road (Rural Road) (SH: Providing and laying 30mm thick bituminous concrete including profile correction layer, V-shape drain and road marking in KM 12/0 to 14/0).	₹19,26,241/- only	23.04.2020	₹ 36,500/- only	05.05.2020
2. Annual Surfacing on Jachh Pressi Pangri (Rohara) road (VR) (SH: Providing and laying 30mm thick bituminous concrete including profile correction layer, V-shape drain and road marking in KM 1/0 to 3/0).	₹19,26,241/- only	23.04.2020	₹ 36,500/- only	05.05.2020
3. Annual Surfacing on Sundernagar Circular road (VR) (SH: Providing and laying 30mm thick bituminous concrete including profile correction layer, V-shaped drain and road marking in KM 0/0 to 1/0 and 6/0 to 7/630).	₹25,33,028/- only	23.04.2020	₹ 45,500/- only	05.05.2020
4. Annual Surfacing on Bhawana to Maloh road and Link road to Village Bhawani (VR) (SH: Providing and laying 30mm thick bituminous concrete including profile correction layer, V-shape drain and road marking on Bhawana Maloh road Km 8/0 to 9/0 and Link road to Village Bhawani in KM 0/0 to 1/0).	₹19,26,241/- only	23.04.2020	₹ 36,500/- only	05.05.2020
5. Annual Surfacing on Link road road from Bahot to Nahungi via Saghi (VR) (SH: Providing and laying 30mm thick bituminous concrete including profile correction layer, V-shape drain and road marking in KM 0/0 to 1/0).	₹9,63,166/- only	23.04.2020	₹ 19,000/- only	05.05.2020
6. Annual repair and maintenance of NH-21 (new NH-154) Chandigarh Mandi Manali road between KM 156/70 to 178/300 (SH: Providing and laying renewal coat with 30mm bitumen concrete at RD 173/900 to 178/300).	₹97,13,004/- only	23.04.2020	₹ 1,30,000/- only	05.05.2020
7. Annual Surfacing on Maloh Kateru road (VR) (SH: Providing and laying 30mm thick bituminous concrete including profile correction layer, V-shape drain and road marking in KM 2/0 to 5/0).	₹28,89,408/- only	23.04.2020	₹ 51,000/- only	05.05.2020
8. Annual Surfacing on Pungh Ghangroo road (PMGSY) (SH: Providing and laying 30mm thick bituminous concrete including profile correction layer, V-shape drain and road marking in KM 0/0 to 2/0).	₹19,26,241/- only	23.04.2020	₹ 36,500/- only	05.05.2020
9. Annual Surfacing on Pungh Ghangroo road (PMGSY) (SH: Providing and laying 30mm thick bituminous concrete including profile correction layer, V-shape drain and road marking in KM 0/0 to 8/0).	₹28,89,408/- only	23.04.2020	₹ 51,000/- only	05.05.2020
10. Annual Surfacing on Chowki to Kamard road (VR) (SH: Providing and laying 30mm thick bituminous concrete including profile correction layer, V-shape drain and road marking in KM 0/0 to 2/0).	₹19,26,241/- only	23.04.2020	₹ 36,500/- only	05.05.2020
11. Annual Surfacing on Chowki to Kamard road (VR) (SH: Providing and laying 30mm thick bituminous concrete including profile correction layer, V-shape drain and road marking in KM 3/0 to 5/0).	₹19,26,241/- only	23.04.2020	₹ 36,500/- only	05.05.2020
12. Annual Surfacing on Link road to Nihri Bazar (VR) (SH: Providing and laying 30mm thick bituminous concrete including profile correction layer, V-shape drain and road marking in KM 0/0 to 1/250).	₹12,03,866/- only	23.04.2020	₹ 24,500/- only	05.05.2020
13. Annual surfacing on Khurhal to Sun road (VR) (SH: Providing and laying 20mm thick premix carpet including profile correction layer, V-shape drain and road marking in KM 1/0 to 2/500).	₹9,56,324/- only	23.04.2020	₹ 20,000/- only	05.05.2020

The bidders are advised to note other details of tenders from the department website [www.hptenders.gov.in](http://www.hptenders.gov.in).  
Executive Engineer,  
Sunder Nagar Division,  
HPPWD Sunder Nagar-175018  
On behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh

HP/0089/20-21

# Delhi riots: FIR names former JNU student

Umar Khalid not charged under UAPA yet: police officer

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

Former Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) student leader Umar Khalid's name appears in an FIR registered by the police on March 6 over his alleged involvement in the north-east Delhi riots.

Mr. Khalid on Wednesday said he has not been contacted by the Delhi police yet. It is not yet clear whether he has been charged under the draconian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

**'Conspiracy' probe**

On Tuesday, the Delhi Police Special Cell unit investigating a "conspiracy" behind the communal violence in February charged Jamia Millia Islamia students Meera Haider and Safoora Zargar under the stringent UAPA. Mr. Haider is also the Delhi unit president of the Rashtriya Janata Dal youth wing.

On March 6, on a complaint of a Delhi policeman, an FIR under IPC sections of rioting was registered and the former JNU student and Danish, a resident of Bhajanpura, were named. The FIR was registered at the Crime Branch and transferred to the Special Cell for further investigation.

The FIR reads that the riots took place in Delhi on February 23, 24 and 25 and were a part of a conspiracy. The plan to organise the riots was hatched by Mr. Khalid and his friends, it reads. In the FIR, it is mentioned that Mr. Khalid made hate speeches and disseminated propaganda in two



## Suspended AAP leader booked under UAPA

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

Suspended Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) councillor Tahir Hussain was booked under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) over communal violence in north-east Delhi, a police officer said on Wednesday.

Mr. Hussain was arrested earlier in connection with the alleged killing of Intelligence Bureau official Ankit Sharma during the communal violence in February.

Advocate Akram Khan, representing Mr. Haider in the case, said that they withdrew his bail application on Monday after the police informed the court that Mr. Haider has been charged under IPC Section 302 (murder).

A senior police officer said that Mr. Khalid's name is in the text of the FIR but he is not an accused "yet" and has not been charged under the UAPA.

The case is "under investigation", he said.

Mr. Haider and Ms. Zargar, arrested for allegedly hatching a conspiracy to incite the communal riots in February, are in judicial custody. Ms. Zargar is an M.Phil

student in Jamia.

In the FIR, the police claimed that the communal violence was a "premeditated conspiracy". The students have also been booked for the offences of sedition, murder, attempt to murder, promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion and rioting.

Former JNU student union leader Shehla Rasheed tweeted, "Yet another bogus case! It's shameful how the government of India is exploiting the lockdown [no protest] to target progressive activists, intellectuals, journalists. Stay strong."

## Over 3,000 people held for violations

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
NEW DELHI

Over 100 cases were registered and 3,392 people detained in the Capital on Wednesday for violating government orders during the lockdown imposed to control the COVID-19 outbreak, the police said.

The data shared by the police show 115 cases were registered under Section 188 (for disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) of the IPC till 5 p.m. A total of 3,392 people have been detained under Section 65 (persons bound to comply with reasonable directions of police officers) and 259 vehicles have been impounded under Section 66 of the Delhi Police Act, they stated.

The High Court said nor-

mally is not likely to return overnight and the court functioning can be resumed only in a structured or phased manner which would require formulation of a plan in advance keeping in mind social distancing norms and other restrictions.

**Urgent matters**

Following the lockdown, the functioning of the High Court and trial courts have been suspended till May 3 and only the matters of extreme urgency are being heard through videoconferencing.

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**COVID-19**

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**Arrests in time of lockdown**

## Online exams get JNU approval

Teachers call online meeting of Academic Council illegal

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) on Wednesday said that the Academic Council (AC) had endorsed a resolution over e-mail validating the conduct of online classes and holding online semester examinations keeping in mind the difficulties of following the normal academic calendar due to the COVID-19 lockdown.

The statement from the university added that the Academic Council has also authorised the Vice-Chancellor "to approve any additional suggestions/requests that may come from any school or special centre for completing the current academic session and for starting the new academic session."

The JNU Teachers' Association (JNTA) said that it takes strong exception to the university administration's attempt to secure the approval of the AC through e-mail and that the regulations of the university have no provisions of this kind.

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**'Illegal meeting'**

"The powers of the Academic Council cannot be delegated to the Vice-Chancellor, even by the AC itself," the JNTA said, calling the meeting "illegal".

"The JNU demands that the proceedings of the AC 'meeting' be declared null and void and the issue of completion of the winter semester be discussed in duly convened meetings after proper discussion at all le-

vels," the teachers said.

**Internet connectivity**

The teachers had earlier said that completing the semester online and conducting examinations online would reduce it to a farce and pointed out that several of the students do not have access to proper Internet connectivity at home.

The teachers have suggested the use of the summer vacations to complete the winter semester.

The JNU Students' Union had on April 21 written to the Union HRD Minister saying that if classes and exams were to be held online, it would simply be impossible for many students to engage with their academic responsibilities.

**DU Dean against online education, writes to V-C**

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

The Dean of Faculty of Technology at Delhi University (DU) on Wednesday wrote to the Vice-Chancellor highlighting issues with online modes of education and recommended alternative routes.

With regard to efforts taken by teachers to extend educational resources through digital platforms, the Dean, Sachin Maheshwari, asserted that they could only supplement classroom teaching and had to be made available to all students. However, he argued that many students of the university would not be able to access computers, smartphones or high speed Internet, thus, being deprived. Besides this, he highlighted that effective teaching and conducting of experiments could not take place through such modes.

Mr. Maheshwari also raised concerns of a possible "rat race" wherein restoration of teaching-learning and online evaluation may be proclaimed for "nefarious reasons involving financial, political interests." This could, thus, prove detrimental to academics, he argued.

Mr. Maheshwari said that the need of the hour was to successfully weather the pandemic and consequently cover lost ground with "holistic team efforts". He also pointed to other institutions such as IITs which had advanced their summer vacations instead of going through online evaluations.

Denying arrestees these rights, and any chance to even argue for their liberty before a court, is a violation that goes to the very core of our fundamental right to life and liberty, rendering it a nullity.

40 quarantined as CRPF man tests positive for virus

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Around 40 people were placed in quarantine after a 43-year-old nursing assistant of the CRPF tested positive for COVID-19 in Noida.

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

"Due to the unprecedented situation, the personnel who were on leave were asked to join duty at their nearest location. He developed some symptoms on April 17 and a test confirmed the infection on April 21," a CRPF official said. The constable has been admitted to the Rajiv Gandhi Hospital here and around 40 persons who came in contact with him have been placed under quarantine.

The official said it was not clear how he contracted the infection.

# One death and 92 new COVID-19 cases in city; active cases decrease

Govt. adds two more areas, both in south Delhi, to its list of containment zones

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

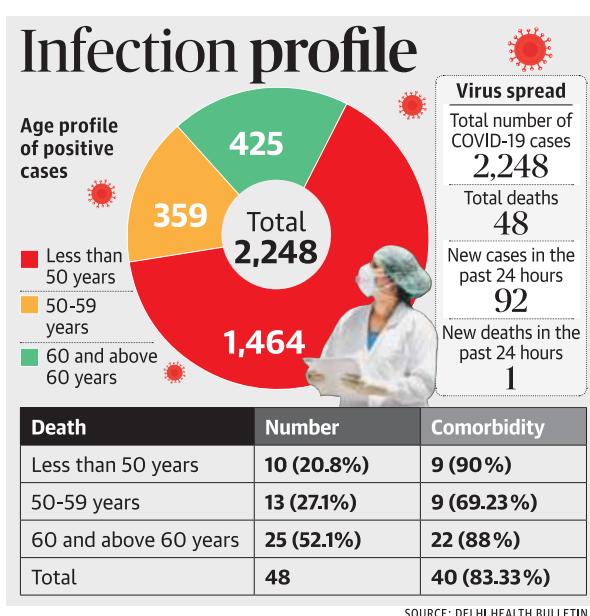
One death and 92 new COVID-19 cases were reported in Delhi on Wednesday, taking the toll to 48 and total number of cases to 2,248, according to the Delhi government health bulletin.

Of the total cases, 724 people have recovered and there are 1,476 active cases.

On Wednesday, 113 people recovered and the total number of active cases decreased compared to Tuesday. Also, Delhi has 213 "non-traceable" cases, according to the central government.

Earlier in the day, the All India Government Nurses Federation wrote to Home Minister Amit Shah stating that nurses and other healthcare workers are facing problems in crossing the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border to reach hospitals and other healthcare facilities, including COVID-19 centres.

The United Resident Doctors Association demanded



also permanent protection for doctors under the law and not a "temporary relief".

## Ramzan month

"Holy month of Ramzan is starting from April 24-25 and

some of inmates may be observing fasting, all District Magistrates are advised to supply them food as per their schedule to avoid any confusion at the last moment," read a Delhi government order regarding COVID

care centres.

"Uber Taxi has offered services of 200 taxis for 12 hours free of cost to the Delhi government till May 3 to help manage COVID-19. An order has been issued to use these vehicles to transport non-COVID, non-critical patients to and fro hospital in coordination with CATS Ambulance Helpline 102," an official statement read.

## Containment zone

The Delhi government on Wednesday added two more areas, both in south Delhi, to its list of containment zones, taking the total number of such zones in the city to 89.

A containment zone has a stricter form of lockdown and entry and exit of people are not allowed in these zones. Also, people in these zones are not allowed to step out of their houses and authorities help in supply of essentials and official carry out door to door screening in these areas.

# Nurses, family allege lapses by govt. hospital after COVID-19 death

Kin say dialysis was not done; quarantine delayed; nurses

NIKHIL M BABU  
NEW DELHI

Following the death of a 40-year-old woman with kidney problems, after which she was tested positive for COVID-19 in Baba Saheb Ambedkar Hospital, doctors and nurses of the hospital claimed there was more than a day's delay to quarantine the staff.

A doctor and a nurse also alleged multiple lapses on the hospital's part including not providing proper isolation for the woman, once she was suspected of having the virus, which could have infected other patients and staff too. Meanwhile, the woman's husband, who is differently abled, told *The Hindu* that the government-run hospital did not do dialysis and didn't immediately inform them that she had tested positive.

The woman died on Saturday and was tested positive for COVID-19 on Monday. It was only on Wednesday, the hospital ordered 57 doctors, nurses, and technicians, to

be quarantined and samples were being taken, according to a hospital order.

"Both her kidneys were not functioning. Once she was suspected of corona, they did not do dialysis," the woman's husband said. "Jab se uska test hua, doctor aur guard log use aise dekh rahe the jaise koi bhoot agarha ho emergency [ward] main," he said.

The hospital authorities [On Tuesday] asked me and our two children to get tested. But we were turned away from another hospital," the husband, who is a street vendor in Jahangirpuri said.

## Lapses by hospital

Though the hospital said in the order that the patient was admitted in an "isolation cubicle" in the emergency ward, a doctor and a nurse said that there was no "proper" isolation.

"The cubicle is part of a 35-odd-bed emergency ward. The cubicle has about six beds and while the woman was admitted, there were at least three more pa-

tients. Also, the woman's sister stayed in the cubicle," the doctor told *The Hindu*.

"Isolation should have been proper and the family should not have been allowed to meet her. Also, the oxygen supply came from a common line and it could infect other patients," the doctor added.

The nurse said that the doctors were not using full-body PPE kits while attending to the woman, though she was suspected of CO-VID-19.

Medical Director of the hospital, M.M. Kohli, and Secretary of Health and Family Welfare Department, Padmini Singla, did not respond to phone calls and messages.

"On Tuesday, we had sent emails to the Hospital Director, Health Secretary and CM's office that quarantine is not done. But they quarantined the staff only on Wednesday. This is blatant negligence on the part of the authorities," said Jagdish Kulkarni, President of Federation of Delhi Govt. Nurses.

71 officers sent into quarantine as policeman tests positive

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

After a Delhi Police Head Constable tested positive for COVID-19, 71 officers have been advised quarantine for 15 days, the department said on Wednesday.

The Head Constable tested positive on Monday, they said. A senior police officer confirmed that the 71 officers who came in contact with the Head Constable before April 10 have been asked to go into quarantine as a preventive measure. So far, more than 13 police personnel have tested positive for COVID-19.

# Officials trace contacts of mandi trader who died of COVID-19

Their samples will be taken and sent for testing, says DM

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

People who had come in contact with the Azadpur Mandi trader who died of COVID-19 on Tuesday were traced by Wednesday evening, the District Magistrate has said. Their samples will now be collected and sent for testing, he added.

The drive to trace the high risk contacts of the 57-year-old trader had been initiated on Tuesday evening, the official said. The trader, who worked at Azadpur Mandi, Asia's largest fruit and vegetable market, tested positive for the virus on Monday and

passed away from the infection on Tuesday. The Delhi government had earlier announced that the vegetable market would remain open 24 hours in order to ensure smooth supply of provisions and allow for easy adherence to physical distancing guidelines.

Volunteers, staff and members of the YMCA have been providing food, household provisions and safety kits in collaboration with district and local officials in various areas, the National Council of the YMCA of India said.

According to a statement issued by the organisation, volunteers also reached out to the homeless, and packag-

# YMCA distributes 1 lakh ration, food packets

It is providing food, safety kits in collaboration with district and local officials

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

The Young Men's Christian Associations (YMCA) on Wednesday crossed the 1-lakh mark in the number of ration and food packets distributed to the needy in the last one month in the wake of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Volunteers, staff and members of the YMCA have been providing food, household provisions and safety kits in collaboration with district and local officials in various areas, the National Council of the YMCA of India said.

"Our YMCA work closely with the local community in their normal work on vocational education, sports and cultural activities. So, it is only natural that in such a time of national crisis, we should



YMCA ration and food packets being distributed.

\* SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

lend a hand to the less privileged members of our communities," said Bertam Devadas, National General Secretary of the YMCA in India.

## COVID-19

While the YMCA multisports complex project at Faridabad distributed food packets to a shelter home, the National YMCA Project, Vythiri, provided relief material to the tribal community. Similarly, around 500 COVID-19 safety kits were distributed to needy families across the Kanyakumari district by the YMCA Marthandam Project, said Mr. Devadas.

Movement restricted



Autorickshaws parked along the Delhi-U.P. border which has been sealed. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

Centre plans to convert North Block and South Block into museums

DAMINI NATH  
NEW DELHI

The Centre's plan to convert North Block and South Block into museums as a part of the larger revamp of the Central Vista has some former top officers of the Ministry of External Affairs, which is located in South Block, concerned about preserving the historic nature of the offices in the building.

Former Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao, who retired in

2011, on Monday said in a series of tweets that the proposal. She said the Central Vista was emblematic of New Delhi and the "stately sweep and openness" of the area should remain.

"And making North and South Blocks into museums? I hope not. These stately buildings are an embodiment of the living history of our Republic. They have not reached expiry date. As a citizen and a former civil servant, I am disturbed (sic)," she wrote.

In response to a Twitter user, she said the Foreign Secretary's room was "one of the most beautiful historic offices there could ever be".

Ex-Foreign Secretary Sushma Singh, who retired in 2015, agreed with Ms. Rao, saying that South Block had had a "ringside view of history". "Most officers who have worked in South Block will think it's not a good idea to turn it into a museum. It is a part of our history, our history after 1947. It does need maintenance and a more efficient use of space," she said. Architects could be asked to redesign the interior for better utilisation of space.

On the larger revamp of Central Vista, Ms. Singh said since the area "belongs to the people" and acted as the green lungs of New Delhi, it should be left undeveloped.

Another former top officer, Kanwal Sibal, who retired as Foreign Secretary in 2003, said there was need to balance tradition and modern requirements.

"All these buildings have a history and to that extent, there is some nostalgia. Undoubtedly, the Foreign Secretary's room is exceptional. It is a difficult choice to make - preserving a building that may not be functional or redesigning to make it more suitable to modern use," he said.

North Block and South Block, with their wide corridors and layouts, were suitable for museums. Giving ex-

# Do not charge for power for three months: Cong.

People are falling short of funds'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Congress on Wednesday reiterated its demand that the Delhi government should provide relief to the people of the city by not charging them for electricity for three months.

"Due to the ongoing lockdown, people have been forced to sit at home and many are falling short of money to even buy essential goods. Shops, showrooms, businesses, factories and other establishments are shut, but people have been getting power bills to the tune of thousands of rupees on account of fixed charges," said Delhi Congress chief Ch. Anil Kumar.

He added that the traders and businessmen have suffered double blows due to the lockdown... they have been given hefty power bills in the name of fixed charges

Ch. ANIL KUMAR  
Delhi Congress chief

pay the wages of their employees. "Over and above, they have been given hefty power bills in the name of fixed charges, and therefore business people are in great distress," Mr. Kumar said.

He also announced that a 'Congress Ki Rasoi' would be launched on April 23 at the DPCC office to provide healthy and nutritious meals to the needy.

Mr. Kumar alleged that the Delhi government has failed to provide healthy, nutritious and hygienic food to the poor and needy.

## HELPLINE NUMBERS

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

Give financial assistance to civic bodies: Bidhuri 'Govt should release grant-in-aid'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the Delhi Legislative Assembly, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, on Wednesday urged Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to immediately give financial assistance to the North, East and South Delhi Municipal Corporations.

As the first step, Mr. Bidhuri said, the Delhi government should immediately release the grant-in-aid and transfer duty for the first quarter of the financial year 2020-21.

This, the LoP said, had already become due and must

be paid without loss of time in view of outbreak of COVID-19. Mr. Bidhuri claimed that he had, at two personal meetings and a recent video conference, made requests to the Chief Minister to provide financial assistance to three civic bodies at the earliest, but to no avail.

"The financial condition of the North civic body is the most serious. Due to the acute shortage of funds, it has not been able to pay salaries to staff. The government help thousands of the civic bodies' COVID-19 warriors come out of the grave financial crisis," he said.

# Central Vista: former top officers of MEA express concern

Centre plans to convert North Block and South Block into museums

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NEW DELHI

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## Concern over threat to scribe in Arunachal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI

The media fraternity in Arunachal Pradesh has expressed concern over a barrage of online attacks at a senior journalist for reporting on a spike in wildlife hunting in the State due to COVID-19 lockdown.

The Arunachal Press Club, Arunachal Pradesh Union of Working Journalists, and Arunachal Electronic & Digital Media Association have in a joint statement asked the police and the State administration to take note of the threats to Tongam Rina, the associate editor of the Itanagar-based *The Arunachal Times*.

Ms. Rina had reported on wildlife officials identifying animal and reptile hunters from viral videos. The report allegedly rubbed a few of the wrong way.

# U.P. govt. to allow homeward journey of stranded people

Open to requests from other States, says CM; home quarantine for Kota students

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government will allow other States to take home their residents if they want, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Wednesday.

"If the governments of other States wish to recall their citizens stranded in Uttar Pradesh because of the lockdown, our government will give permission and cooperate," the Uttar Pradesh CM said during a review meeting on novel coronavirus with senior officials.

He also said the students brought from Rajasthan's Kota should be told to stay quarantined in their homes through the CM helpline 1076. The CM said he will personally contact them and enquire about their well-being.

Taking stock of the situa-



Health officials conduct screening of people during lockdown in Mathura on Wednesday. ■ PTI

tion, he also told officials to take strict action against those violating the lockdown and not adhering to the social distancing norms. "A lockdown means total lockdown," he said.

The CM told officials to take all necessary precautions for the holy month of Ramzan, beginning next

week. He said it should be ensured that there is no gathering at the time of "sehri" and "iftar" (early morning and late evening meals), an official press release said.

10 virus-free districts

Mr. Adityanath was informed by officials that 10 districts, earlier affected by the disease, have no active

case now.

As of now, 32 districts of the total 75 are free from novel coronavirus, the CM was told.

Mr. Adityanath, however, directed officials to remain extra vigilant and reiterated the need to test all those involved in the supply of essentials.

### Testing labs

Aligarh, Saharanpur and Moradabad districts are sensitive and so testing labs should be set up there, he said.

He also directed to seal private hospitals that do not follow safety norms and guidelines.

The Chief Minister said industrial units in the districts not affected by the virus should be allowed to function as per the guidelines of the Centre.

# Youth jumps into canal in U.P. after police seize his motorcycle

The BSc student had gone to purchase pesticides for farming

OMAR RASHID  
LUCKNOW

Vimal's motorcycle was seized by an inspector of the Mahmudabad police station because he did not have the vehicle documents with him and failed to provide a proper explanation," said Additional Superintendent of Police (South) Sitapur, Mahendra P. Chauhan.

ing him about the incident and that he was going to jump into the Sharda Canal.

"As per his message, we went to the location, on the bank of the canal, and found his things, mobile, purse, chappal and gamcha," said Mr. Kumar.

Vimal's elder brother Nirmal Kumar said the bike he was driving belonged to him (Nirmal). "I had got it as dowry," he said.

Mr. Nirmal said Vimal was a second-year B.Sc student, possessed a sound mind and helped his family in outdoor work associated with farming.

"Police compelled him to do this," said Mr. Nirmal.

ASP Chauhan said further action will be taken after a probe by the circle officer of Mahmudabad.

Divers were deployed to retrieve the body but it was yet to be recovered.

## Law is for everyone, it has to be followed: Shanta Kumar

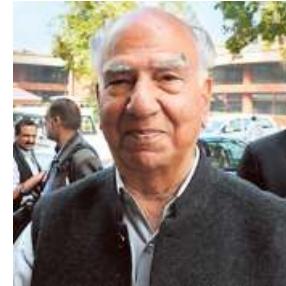
Two BJP MPs had travelled to Himachal amid lockdown

VIKAS VASUDEVA  
CHANDIGARH

Amid a controversy over the entry of two BJP MPs in Himachal Pradesh from New Delhi last week, senior party leader and former Union Minister Shanta Kumar has said that law is for everyone and has to be followed.

"... a few friends have raised right question about our two MPs. About this, I am absolutely clear that law is for everyone and law has to be followed," he wrote on his Facebook page. "They (MPs) have stated that they had obtained due permission," he added.

Hitting out at the BJP MPs, Himachal Pradesh Congress Committee president Kuldeep Rathore on Wednesday



Shanta Kumar. ■ FILE PHOTO

"It's not only the Opposition but even the BJP leaders have pointed fingers at BJP MPs' entry into the State. Veteran leader Shanta Kumar too has raised question about their (the two MPs) entry," he added.

**Disregarded PM's appeal**  
Mr. Rathore said the two MPs even disregarded the appeal by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Last week, two BJP MPs – Ram Swaroop Sharma (Mandi constituency) and Kishan Kapoor (Kangra) – were allowed to enter Himachal Pradesh. In their defence, both said they had obtained necessary permission to return to the State and did not violate any lockdown law.

## Anganwadi workers go the extra mile

They are turning out to be an essential link between public and Punjab govt.

VIKAS VASUDEVA  
CHANDIGARH

As the battle against COVID-19 continues, anganwadi workers in Punjab are not just turning out to be an essential link between the public and the government, but are fearlessly shouldering responsibility with the frontline warriors.

Manpreet Kaur, an anganwadi worker from Patti Dhaliwal Sudhar village in Ludhiana district, told *The Hindu* over phone that she and other helpers have been distributing homemade masks by visiting houses across the village. "Those who can't afford to purchase or make masks, they are on our priority list. These masks are stitched by many



Anganwadi workers making face masks in Amritsar. ■ FILE PHOTO

women in the village. I myself stitch them at home and then distribute them to vegetable vendors, migrant labourers," she said.

Ms. Kaur believes that this is not the time to run away from one's duty. "I feel even more obligated towards society. I feel lucky as I believe

home unless it's very urgent," she said.

"Doctors, police, nurses – all are working without fear and so am I," she said.

### Nutritional food

"I have been providing ration to the children and nutritional food to pregnant women right at their doorsteps," said Shamsher Kaur of village Kamauli district in Fatehgarh Sahib. "I am also informing the people about the ways to keep the novel coronavirus at bay by regularly washing hands and covering mouth as well as nose while sneezing and coughing. Also, many of us are distributing sanitary napkins to promote menstrual hygiene."

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## 6 days salary cut for next 5 months in Kerala

It would also apply to PSUs, and government-aided and quasi-aided institutions

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has said the government is temporarily setting aside a part of the salary of State employees to help it tide over the COVID-19-induced financial crisis.

At a briefing on Wednesday, Mr. Vijayan said the State government would deduct the salary of employees for six days every month for the next five months. The cut also applied to public sector units, government-aided and quasi-government institu-

tions. Ministers, legislators and members of various boards would give up 30% of their monthly salary for the next year.

#### Expert panel mooted

The government would constitute an expert committee to study the economic fallout of the pandemic and suggest means to come out of economic recession.

Mr. Vijayan said the pandemic had adversely impacted the global economy. The outbreak happened when the country's economic

growth had slowed from 9% to 5%. It had laid low the economies of wealthy nations.

COVID-19 had hit Kerala close on the heels of the catastrophic floods in 2018 and 2019. The State's impressive 7.5% growth rate could plummet. Remittances from non-resident Keralites had already slumped, he said.

Tourism and construction had ground to a halt. Exponentially increasing unemployment had robbed people of purchasing power.

Kerala is predominantly a consumer State and had to

import its food and a range of essential commodities. Ensuring food security was paramount, he added.

Mr. Vijayan unveiled a plan to restart the economy by focusing on self-sufficiency in food production. The government would not allow fallow land to languish without cultivation.

The State would adopt cage farming to grow mussels, clams, crabs, shrimps and lobsters. It would also promote fish farming in inland water, lagoons and water bodies, he said.

## Fish eye



**Sea view:** (Clockwise from top) A bird's eye view of Thengaithittu fishing harbour in Puducherry; fishermen bringing a 30 kg sailfish to the Kollam fishing harbour; and hectic activity seen at Jalaripeta after the demand for fish soared in Visakhapatnam. Centre had exempted fishing from the purview of the national lockdown. ■ T. SINGaravelu, C. SURESHKUMAR & K.R. DEEPAK

### IN BRIEF



## MGR Medical University makes 'vaccine candidate'

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

Godavari water from Kaleshwaram via Annapurna reservoir, located at the border of Siddipet and Siricilla, reached here on Wednesday. Water can be pumped here once the water level at Annapurna reservoir stands at 1.75 tmcft.

The authorities are making efforts to fill 1.5 tmcft water into Ranganaiakshgar reservoir, which has a total capacity of 3 tmcft, in a phased manner. The reservoir systems would be tested during pumping.

### 'Expats should have COVID-19 certificate'

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM Expatriates from Kerala settled in various countries, especially the Gulf, should mandatorily carry a COVID-19-negative certificate if they want to return home once the Centre gives its nod for bringing them back, the State government has said. Keen to avoid fresh cases after successfully containing its spread in the State, the government issued an order stating that expats with certificates showing they tested negative can register with NORKA department.

### Two sent to juvenile home for murder in Kerala

PATHANAMITTA A juvenile court here sent two 16-year-old boys who have been identified as the accused in the killing of their friend at Kodumon on Tuesday to the Juvenile Home in Kollam on Wednesday. According to the police, the accused confessed to having an altercation with the deceased over the exchange of a mobile phone to the former towards compensation for a shoe destroyed by the latter. They pushed the boy to the ground and struck his head with a piece of rock.

polypeptide, she added.

Dr. Seshayyan, along with the heads of the Departments of Immunology and Microbiology and Epidemiology and a research student of the university, devised the model. "This is only the first phase but we have found that it is 70% the correct vaccine candidate. The work will take at least a year. We are going to collaborate with a U.S.-based centre for pre-clinical and clinical studies," she said.

Explaining the process of 'reverse vaccinology', she said, "Earlier, we had to do a viral culture in the laboratory to develop a vaccine, and this was time-consuming. We have identified a synthetic polypeptide which can bind the viral genome. In the next stage, we will have to test this polypeptide on tissue cell lines. We are planning for that, and designing protocols. Testing on tissue cultures will start after approval from regulatory agencies," Dr. Seshayyan said. The university is yet to name the

polypeptide, she added. Dr. Seshayyan, along with the heads of the Departments of Immunology and Microbiology and Epidemiology and a research student of the university, devised the model. "This is only the first phase but we have found that it is 70% the correct vaccine candidate. The work will take at least a year. We are going to collaborate with a U.S.-based centre for pre-clinical and clinical studies," she said.

In his petition, Mr. Chennithala sought a declaration that SARS-CoV-2 positive patients and those under observation, whose data had been uploaded on the U.S.-based company's server, were entitled to get reasonable compensation for the loss and impairment suffered by them. The deal with the company was in violation of their fundamental right of privacy guaranteed by the Constitution, thus

## A.P., Telangana report 3 deaths, Kerala records 11 new cases

Andhra Pradesh says it now leads States in tests per million people

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA/BENGALURU/ HYDERABAD/THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/CHENNAI

With two more persons succumbing to COVID-19 in Guntur district and 56 new cases as of Wednesday morning, the toll in Andhra Pradesh touched 24 and the tally of positive cases was 813.

On the brighter side, 24 patients - eight from Guntur, five from Anantapur, four each from Nellore and Kadapa, two from Krishna and one from Visakhapatnam - were discharged from hospitals after recovery. So far, 120 have recovered, and active cases stand at 669.

Acknowledged hotspots Kurnool and Guntur districts reported 19 new cases each taking the tally in the districts to 203 and 177 respectively.

The number of new cases in other districts was: Chittoor six, Kadapa five, Prakasam four, and Krishna three.

With 19 of 21 persons who had tested positive in Visakhapatnam recovering so far, there were only two active cases.

Meanwhile, the State claimed that it was ahead of other States in the COVID-19 tests per million, conducting 813 tests as of Wednesday.

So far, 41,512 samples had been tested and in the last 24 hours, 5,757 samples were taken up.

Rajasthan, which was leading until Tuesday, is now in the second position with 809 tests per million.

#### Baby tests positive

Nine new cases - including a four-month-old baby from Kalaburagi and the mother - were detected on Wednesday taking the total number of positive COVID-19 cases in Karnataka to 427.

The baby is the youngest

### Tough fight

State governments are striving hard to offer treatment to COVID-19 patients and bring them back to normal life



**Home-bound:** People discharged from a hospital in Tirupati after treatment for the virus on Wednesday. ■ K.V. POORNACHANDRA KUMAR

patient to date in Karnataka.

Among the new cases, while five were from Kallburgi, two each were reported from Bengaluru Urban and Nanjangud, Mysuru. While one had severe acute respiratory illness, the other four were contacts of previous positive patients.

Of the two positive cases from Bengaluru Urban district, which had not reported any cases for the last three days, one was a 54-year-old labourer from Bommanahalli slum, who had no contact or travel history.

This person reported with SARI symptoms. We have identified his 24 primary contacts and 50 secondary contacts," said Primary and Secondary Education Minister S. Suresh Kumar.

The Minister said a total of 3,279 samples were tested on Wednesday.

Validation of the rapid antibody blood-based test strips is under way at NIMHANS, and the Health Department would wait for a "green signal" from the ICMR before using them,

said Jawaid Akhtar, Additional

Two house surgeons and a nurse at Kozhikode Medical College were among the 11 new cases.

### 33 test positive in T.N.

Tamil Nadu reported another 33 cases of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on Wednesday, taking the total tally of COVID-19 cases to 1,629 (including three who died, two were counted in other States, and one person tested negative after death). The day also saw the discharge of 27 patients from hospitals across the State.

The majority of fresh cases were contacts of COVID-19 positive patients. Only three patients - a woman in Dindigul and two men in Madurai - were primary cases for whom detailed investigation was on.

Ten districts reported new cases. Among the 33 cases, 15 were in Chennai. Officials said four more mediapersons - from two television channels - tested positive.

Five new cases were persons who returned from abroad and three got the disease from imported infec-

## UDF, BJP seek HC help to stop data sharing with U.S. company

Separate petitions seek quashing of the pact with Sprinklr

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT KOCCHI

Leader of the Opposition Ramesh Chennithala and BJP State president K. Surendran on Tuesday filed two separate public interest petitions in the Kerala High Court seeking a directive to the State government to stop uploading the data of COVID-19 patients and those under surveillance on the server of Sprinklr or any server to which the U.S.-based company has access to.

In his petition, Mr. Chennithala sought a declaration that SARS-CoV-2 positive patients and those under observation, whose data had been uploaded on the U.S.-based company's server, were entitled to get reasonable compensation for the loss and impairment suffered by them. The deal with the company was in violation of their fundamental right of privacy guaranteed by the Constitution, thus

causing substantial loss and injury to them.

He contended that the sensitive data of the quarantined and isolated persons had been illegally collected through ward-level field workers without authority of law and their informed consent. Therefore, they were entitled to get compensation.

Contending that sharing of health data with a U.S.-based company was violation of the fundamental right of privacy guaranteed by the Constitution, thus

VID-19 patients and suspects, Mr. Surendran sought a vigilance inquiry into the execution of the master service agreement on the sharing of database by the State government with the company.

Both the leaders sought to quash the data sharing agreement signed with the company.

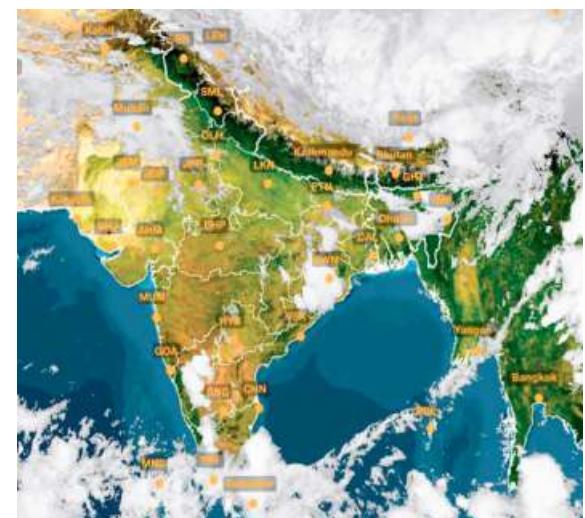
United Democratic Front (UDF) convenor Benny Behanan has demanded an investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation into the deal.

Addressing mediapersons at the Thrissur Press Club on Wednesday, Mr. Behanan said the investigation by a two-member committee, ordered by the government, was just an eyewash.

The government had not discussed with the Opposition about the appointment of the committee, he said.

### WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



(Rainfall



## Script of unity

The virus knows no caste or creed, but it is feeding existing social prejudices

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's reminder that COVID-19 does not recognise "race, religion, colour, caste, creed, language or border" before striking, was axiomatic but essential. The pandemic has fanned the flames of communalism instead of dousing them, as it has compounded economic woes. The Prime Minister has recognised the calamitous rage of the virus when he called for "response and conduct" that "should attach primacy to unity and brotherhood". He cannot be more right about the fact that countries and societies can no longer afford to face off with one another and the future can be secured only through togetherness and resilience. He spoke against the backdrop of criticism of the apparent communal strand in the response of some sections to the COVID-19 challenge. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and the UN expressed concern over stigmatisation, in India, of a particular community. India sought to reject these concerns as external interference, which they were. But then, as he noted, the virus threat has made borders irrelevant. There have been reports of religious discrimination towards patients. The situation was aggravated when a vocal section of the Indian diaspora, often touted as proponents of India's interests in their host countries, was seen as Islamophobic in the UAE.

Such odious digital behaviour routinely goes unquestioned in India, but in the UAE, the response has been quick. Many have lost their jobs for posting hateful content and this culture of diatribe now looms over a critical bilateral relationship that Mr. Modi has personally nurtured. The Indian Ambassador to the UAE reminded expatriates that discrimination was against "our moral fabric and the rule of law". Indeed. The narrative of the pandemic as a communal conspiracy against the nation began to take shape immediately after a Tablighi Jamaat congregation in Delhi in March turned out to be a prodigious source of the contagion. The Centre and the Delhi government appeared to be using the unfortunate episode scripted by an irresponsible and ignorant group to fend off scrutiny of their own shortcomings. A section of the media continues to play a dishonourable role in amplifying it. In an environment that is already rife with fear and uncertainty, the official communications strategy must focus on building trust and offering reassurance. The extremely inadequate messaging has led to stigmatisation of patients and their families, and despicable incivility towards even the bodies of unfortunate victims. All this makes the Prime Minister's statement timely. His call for unity in the face of this calamity must be translated into firm action, and a good place to begin is the government's own messaging.

## Exploiting a pandemic

Trump's immigration policy is more campaign point than response to impact of the virus

United States President Donald Trump has announced that he would be using an executive order to suspend, for 60 days, legal immigration into the country that he has a little more than six months left to govern through his first term in office. In a tweet, he said this was in light of "the need to protect the jobs of our GREAT American Citizens", even though the order is not expected to halt visa processing for many thousands of temporary employees, potentially including a sizeable number of Indian nationals in the H-1B skilled worker category; and seasonal workers in areas like landscaping, agribusinesses, and service jobs in hospitality, who fall into the H-2B category. The executive order, which he is expected to sign this week, will also likely carve out exemptions for certain categories of essential workers, including those in health care and who have a critical role to play in fighting the ongoing pandemic, and those who seek to immigrate via their immediate relatives. The question that Mr. Trump's action begs is whether this is a genuine attempt to mitigate the impact of the accompanying economic crisis for American workers, or whether it is a diversionary tactic designed to shore up the President's flagging political capital in the wake of what many have described as his ineffective crisis management strategy.

For example, what impact does the White House expect this policy to have on the job market given that immigrant and non-immigrant travel into the U.S. has anyway fallen considerably over the past month, as the coronavirus toll has soared in the country to over 8,26,000 people infected and over 44,000 dead? Second, why target immigrants, who are anyway vastly outnumbered each year by job-seekers entering through the temporary visa route, when the approximately 22 million Americans who have filed for unemployment in recent weeks have done so less due to immigration and more due to the cessation of business activity in the face of the pandemic? One possibility is that the executive order is only the first of several policy salvos that the Trump administration will introduce to bolster the collapsing U.S. labour market. Yet if such a comprehensive strategy does not emerge in the coming weeks and months, then that only suggests that the President has pivoted to his signature campaign issue of immigration – like he did effectively during the 2016 election – to animate his core constituent base of blue-collar workers across the 'red states' of the country. If the latter theory about Mr. Trump's motivations for announcing an immigration ban is true, then not only should Americans expect that his administration's bumbling early response to the crisis and reckless attempts to open the economy prematurely will impose a deadly human cost on the population but also that his strident policy rhetoric on immigration will exacerbate the deep divisions in American society in the months ahead.

# The village is still relevant

As the pandemic crisis shows, villages have a right to flourish as habitations with their own distinctive future



KRISHNA KUMAR

The upheaval caused by the novel coronavirus should inspire a review of past choices and policies. Some of these policies had gained so much acceptance that one felt there was no point left in questioning them. Public health and education are two areas in which India took a decisive turn in the 1990s. When several States decided to stop giving permanent appointment letters to doctors and teachers in the mid-1990s, they were guided by an ideological shift at the national level towards allowing health and education to be opened up for private enterprise. This was viewed as a major policy reform, a necessary part of the bigger package of economic reforms. They were presented as a package, offering little choice for specific areas.

### Taking a back seat

The new buzz was public-private partnership. It covered everything from roads to schools. The form it took made it amply clear that the state would take a back seat after issuing a set of rules for private operators while the state's own infrastructure will shrink. Soon enough, cost-effective measures became the priority in both health and education. Chronic shortage of functionaries became the norm while young persons learned to wait for years for vacancies to be announced. Working on short-term contracts, with little security or dignity, became common.

As we begin to imagine the post-

coronavirus scenario, a key question to contemplate is whether we should revisit the policies put in place during the 1990s. Some will doubtless argue that the clock cannot be put back, and that we should not waver from the path we had chosen, no matter what hardships people have to endure. Certain policies were specific to domains such as health and education. Others were more like frameworks within which policies for specific areas emerged and evolved. One such framework had to do with villages.

For a long time, a view had been gathering support that villages were no more viable as sites of public investment. A generalised logic had surfaced to justify and thereby encourage emigration from rural areas to cities. According to this logic, providing basic amenities such as running water, electricity and jobs to rural people becomes easier if they move to a city. This kind of thinking had considerable academic support. Modernisation was a dominant paradigm of social theory that saw nothing wrong in the growth of vast slums in mega-cities and depletion of working-age people in villages. Some social scientists did not mind declaring that the village as we had known it in Indian history was on its way to extinction. They argued that agriculture, the main resource of livelihood in the countryside, was no longer profitable enough to attract the young. And handcrafts too were destined to die, they said, as craftsmen and women cannot survive without state support. Only pockets of support survived the powerful wave of market-oriented economic reforms.

All such arguments and the data they were based on provided a comfortable rationale for policies that encouraged emigration of a



vast section of the rural population to cities. It was something 'natural' that happens in the course of economic development in countries like ours. Students were taught that shrinking of rural livelihoods was a universal phenomenon and it was, therefore, inevitable in India.

Acceptance of historical destiny implied that we could simply sit back and let history take its familiar course. The only thing the welfare state might do was to mitigate the misery of the masses. As they faced the decimation of the rural people's economy, safety nets could be thrown at them to provide subsistence-level provision of food, literacy and disease control. Special measures were designed to select the 'best' among rural children and make them competitive enough to survive in the urban world that was treated as mainstream.

### Imbalance and invisibility

This general framework justified discriminatory funding in every sphere, including health and education. No serious public investment could be made in villages. Even as medical education and teacher training became increasingly privatised, the availability of qualified doctors and teachers willing to work in villages dwindle.

Ideologically-inspired pursuit of economic reforms swept State after State, leaving little room for dissent or longer term thinking. A veneer of welfarism was maintained. It allowed the expansion of essential facilities of a rudimentary kind in villages. They served as sites for special schemes for the poor and provided minimalist provisions. The goal was to keep the poor alive and occupied. Privately-run facilities burgeoned, creating an ethos that boosted commercial goals in health care and schooling. Stuck between state minimalism and commercial entrepreneurship, villages lost what capacity they had for regenerating their economy or intellectual resources.

No words can compete with recent pictures that cast a delayed doubt on this policy scenario. These are pictures of urban workers marching with their families to their native villages hundreds of miles away. There is more than one way of interpreting these pictures. On one hand they encapsulate desperation and apprehension. On the other, these same pictures reveal a story that generations of policy makers and scholars have been reluctant to acknowledge. The photographs captured by the media show men, women and children walking on highways designed to provide high-speed connectivity to cities. In the absence of trains and bus, these families decided to embark on foot. With no prospect of work and income, they felt vulnerable in their shanty towns. They wanted to go home. In the city where they had lived for years, they were part of the informal economy which offers no protection against exigencies. The new urban architecture denies them visibility too. That is perhaps why no one thought about them till they

emerged on the wide highways.

### Obsolete debates

The novel coronavirus has demonstrated that unsustainable this socio-economic arrangement was, apart from being ethically indefensible. It was characterised by sharp and growing regional disparities. No matter how hard we will try to rebuild the world as it was before the virus struck it, its unsustainability will not go away. It is rooted in the structural imbalance between the urban and the rural on one hand and the predominance of a skewed vision of economic growth on the other. In this vision, the village has no future other than becoming a pale copy of the urban and eventually dissolving into it.

Once upon a time, there were debates over the nature of India's rural society – on whether it was intrinsically good or bad. These debates are no longer relevant. The village is, however, still relevant, at least for the vast number of urban workers. Similarly, while the problem of defining a village in an academic sense has ceased to matter, its existential reality has asserted itself, and we need to recognise this assertion. If we do, we might agree to notice a problem in policies that do not acknowledge the right of villages to flourish as human habitations with their own distinctive future. They deserve to have new sites and forms of livelihood. They also deserve systems of health and education that are not designed as feeders to distant centres. Initiatives in this direction will make both cities and villages more sustainable and capable of coping with the kind of crisis we are currently facing.

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

## A time for planetary solidarity

Rather than fortress worlds, nations need to focus on building shared programmes of knowledge and collective welfare



SUJATHA BYRAVAN &  
SUDHIR CHELLA RAJAN

Self-help gurus say it takes 21 days to develop a new habit. However, in a crisis, we may learn quite few overnight. The microscopic SARS-CoV-2, by causing a global pandemic, has forced much of humanity to cease everyday practices and jump-start new ones. It has also reminded us of certain tenets that we have always known. For instance, it is possible for individuals, communities, and nations to respond to a planetary crisis within days. The nature of the response in different settings, however, depends on leadership, the quality and strength of local institutions, resources deployed and the ability to deliver straightforward and meaningful messages regarding behavioural change.

More reassuringly, empathy for fellow travellers around the world turns out to be at least as widespread as avarice and insularity. Compassion and structured forms of support by different kinds of non-state actors have been amply demonstrated across the world, with people enduring personal threats to life to assist the most vulnerable.

As in any crisis, the poorest – daily-wage workers, the homeless, migrants and operators of micro-enterprises – are the worst affected.

Even so, in the present instance, their fate is especially dire. Any person whose livelihood is directly connected with their physical labour has been left with zero options unless they are somehow connected with health care, food or sanitation. It is the old privileging of mental over manual labour, but the inequities and disparities are starker now in and in more brutal circumstances than ever before.

### Learning lessons

For knowledge workers, one of the new social norms being created is extensive Internet use for learning and work. While some of this was happening earlier, the scale of international video meetings and virtual classes taking place now is unprecedented. In certain sectors such as accounting, desk-based research and software development, working remotely turns out to be profitable to companies.

There are some guidelines to infer from this. The drastic reduction in flights, for instance, has affected the airline industry adversely but also highlighted the fact that many flight trips during 'normal' times are in fact unnecessary.

Before the pandemic, business meetings, including international conferences and climate change meetings, were responsible for a bulk of flight travel. For example, a return flight, economy class, from Delhi to New York releases about 0.9 tonnes of carbon dioxide (it is twice as much in premium economy). This is half of India's per capita annual emissions.

The same can be said of many



vehicle trips. The lockdown has shown that up to half of these trips are dispensable, especially if commuting and education trips can be cut down severely.

For a sizeable fraction of the workforce, conducting tasks from home ought to be encouraged, better organised and provide more freedom for people, not less. It should be the norm in many sectors and people could work from home at least half the time, thus reducing travel needs, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and simplifying child care and other domestic services.

An even more revolutionary approach to education and learning is conceivable. Online schooling and college education without paywalls is already available, but if it were expanded to develop open access schools and universities, the scam of high admissions fees can be altogether eliminated.

Industrial production and electricity generation also do not have to go back to pre-COVID-19 levels. Life under lockdown has already demonstrated that there are essentials, superfluous items and luxuries. Responsible consumer action and new social norms to li-

mit the last two can make a dent on greenhouse gas emissions while promoting simpler and potentially happier ways of life.

### Fundamental change

There are many encouraging signs of truly 'green' alternatives to the current economic system and the beliefs that govern it. Becoming sustainable is vital for ensuring that the worst effects of climate change – another planetary crisis lurking just over the horizon of the present one – also do not fall on the already underprivileged.

Unfortunately, the popular version of 'green growth' is flawed because it assumes that normal business activity can be made more sustainable merely by adding renewable technology and trees to it, for instance. But such spiritless measures often harm economic or social welfare even if they improve environmental outcomes. Sustainability will need not just decoupling economic growth from pollution but ultimately decoupling planetary welfare from economic growth while fostering social progress.

U.S. President Donald Trump's \$2-trillion stimulus plan turns out to be mostly another corporate bailout. India cannot afford to do the same. The true losers are low wage and daily wage earners, who need assistance along with the farming community. Vehicle manufacturers, fossil-fuel companies, airlines and large businesses and even banks should not even be on the bailout queue.

For the vast majority of the working class, the provision of un-

iversal basic income would be the first step towards reducing their precarity. Such change requires bold measures to reduce financial speculation and the hoarding of wealth by the rentier class by reintroducing the estate tax and putting brakes on high-speed trading, for instance.

A transformation of work is also needed for the entrepreneurial class, where greater flexibility, coordination and access to markets are made easier. In addition, social measures must be strengthened to protect the health and safety of the poorest. Public hospitals need to be improved and have the capacity to respond to pandemics and related crises. Access to care in the emergency and beyond should be equally available to all. By focussing on the delivery of basic services, we will discover new opportunities for equitable action.

What is also quite clear, and shared with the climate change crisis, is that if you ignore science, it will come back to bite you. Mixed and confusing messages from the government add fuel to a flaming pandemic. Ignoring or denying the science of climate change does the same. United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said: "This is, above all, a crisis that calls for solidarity." That implies building shared programmes of knowledge and action for collective welfare, not fortress worlds.

**Sujatha Byravan** is a scientist based in Chennai. **Sudhir Chella Rajan** is Professor, Indian Institute of Technology-Madras

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

### Case spike

Whatever be the mathematical model adopted, the stark reality of micro-demographics will be a key deciding factor (Page 1, "Huge spike in cases likely in Mumbai: Central panel", April 22). Dharavi, for example, has been described by various sources as a 2.1-2.6 sq.km zone with a population estimated at about 15 lakh. There are also an estimated 15,000-25,000 tiny industries. Thus if we set aside 15% of the area for "roads" and industries, the area per resident is about 1.5 sq. m at worst or an area of about 4.5ft x 4.5ft per resident. It is all very well to lay emphasis on social

distancing, but where is the distance in such areas in Mumbai which cannot be wished away? The rich do not care as they can afford to observe many precautions and have ample facilities and opportunities to be safe. Whatever be the steps being taken by the government, the contagion will grow at a rapid rate in such specific areas and eclipse the number of cases in the rest of the State of Maharashtra.

D.M. MOHUNTA,  
Chennai

### Testing kits

The data shared by the Indian Council of Medical Research is perhaps an

indicator that asymptomatic infections are on the rise (Page 1, "ICMR asks States to stop using rapid tests for the next 2 days", April 22). This makes epidemiological and surveillance exercises tougher in hotspots as such patients would be silently spreading the infection. Contact tracing would become extremely difficult and mapping containment zones would not be possible. Though guidelines have been laid down clearly by the ICMR on who should be tested, random testing in hotspots may be what is needed. The ICMR needs to revise its testing strategies.

H.N. RAMAKRISHNA,  
Bengaluru

It was no surprise to read the report, especially after the Health Ministries in countries especially in Europe have called out the quality of kits, many being of Chinese-make. The complaints are that results are widely inaccurate. India must look at indigenous solutions and encourage Indian manufacturers to make kits with local components. Inaccurate tests giving false positives are more dangerous than the disease. This could lead to wrong treatment options.

NAGARAJAMANI M.V.,  
Hyderabad

### In the e-cart

In the decision about e-commerce companies and

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footwear and bicycles for those who had relied on public transport so far? Of course, the list may become endless and the imagination is the limit. So won't it be better to limit the number of products and deliveries in a given period for a particular residential address? With some modifications in software, e-commerce giants should be able to implement these restrictions.

**A. VENKATASUBRAMANIAN,**  
Tiruchi, Tamil Nadu

### CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

A front-page story titled "T.N. not to relax lockdown" (April 21, 2020) wrongly gave the number of active COVID-19 cases in the State as 1,406. The correct figure was 1,043.

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# There may be no going back

The 'normalcy' that China is returning to may provide a snapshot of our post-COVID-19 world



ANANTH KRISHNAN



"As offices, restaurants and even trains resume service, people in China are finding that the normalcy they were waiting to return to is, in fact, anything but normal." A shopping mall in Wuhan in Hubei province. ■ AFP

May 4 is the date marked on many calendars, the day we in India hope some semblance of normalcy may return to our lives. We may well have to wait a lot longer – lockdown or no lockdown – if the “normalcy” that people across the border in China are returning to, after two long months of isolation, is anything to go by. From January 23, when 50 million people in Hubei province were kept in one of the biggest quarantines in history, much of China, where the COVID-19 pandemic first began, was placed under some form of restrictions. By one estimate, more than 750 million people were effectively under a strict lockdown. Since late March, as the number of cases outside of the Hubei epicentre in China began to subside, some restrictions were eased. On April 8, the government said Hubei would finally end its 76 days of isolation.

## The new normal

As offices, restaurants and even trains resume service, people in China are, however, finding that the normalcy they were waiting to return to is, in fact, anything but normal. The shadow of COVID-19 is still hanging over every aspect of daily life. In constant fear of the possibility of a second wave of infections, authorities are continuing with a range of physical distancing measures as a precaution.

For the rest of the world too, this may be the new normal that awaits us. An April 14 study by Harvard researchers suggested physical distancing measures may be here to stay, perhaps on an on-and-off basis, until 2022, because one-time lockdowns will not be enough to control the pandemic. Some are suggesting this could continue even longer until the world achieves ‘herd immunity’, which most scientists say can only be achieved through widespread vaccinations, which could take years. The post-COVID-19 world may be here to stay for a while yet.

Conversations I have had in recent

days with acquaintances in Beijing and Shanghai have painted a picture of what this world may look like, a world where all those new words and phrases that have now become a part of our vocabulary – nucleic acid testing, social/physical distancing, and temperature screening – are becoming an integral part of day-to-day life. A friend who works in a start-up in Beijing’s Zhongguancun tech district told me offices now have to choose which employees go into work every day. Offices are reorganising their staff so every department is split into several teams, to ensure that one infection won’t paralyse the entire team. In some buildings, offices cannot hold more than a specified number of people on a given day, which may range from five to 10 depending on the size of the office, according to rules imposed by the property management.

Health is no longer a private matter. Your health QR code is now the most important passport to get you anywhere in any Chinese city. An app that every citizen has to download marks you green (safe), while orange or red may mean you can’t enter a shopping mall or restaurant. The colour depends on your travel history and who you have been in contact with, among other things.

Then there is temperature screening. Getting half-a-dozen temperature checks a day is now the norm. Building authorities check every employee’s temperature every time they enter or leave the building. So do shopping malls, railway stations and airports. A high temperature means an ambulance may be called and you’ll have to go to hospital, whether you like it or not. If you are running a fever, even if you don’t have COVID-19, you may not be able to board a subway, or catch a train, or enter a shopping mall. Some businesses require every employee to take a nucleic acid test before returning to work. And of course, you cannot leave home without a face mask. Not wearing a face mask in public is now a punishable offence.

Social gatherings aren’t what they used to be. Weddings are being put on hold. Restaurants have reduced the number of tables by half, and you can only seat three at a table. In some restaurants, you will be sprayed with disinfectant before entering. Forget about ambience, too – plastic sheets separate every table. In China, the way people eat isn’t what it used to be either. On April 12, the National Health Commission said diners will have to be served meals in separate dishes. So if three diners order a

dish, it will be served to each separately to prevent the risk of infection. Shops and restaurants are opening, but many other establishments remain closed. Bars and pubs now firmly limit the number of patrons who can be present at any given time. Some bars in China are openly barring foreigners, because of what the government calls a rise in “imported infections”, which is fanning a new kind of health-triggered xenophobia.

## Transformative changes

While some businesses have opened, gyms, swimming pools, cinema halls, and not to mention most schools and colleges, remain shut. Perhaps the most transformative changes are being seen in education and tourism. Some 300 million Chinese students in schools and universities are now taking classes online every day, and all kinds of new e-learning platforms, teaching everything from classical music to Pilates, are now booming. Travel and tourism have been the hardest hit. In Beijing, starting April 12, a nucleic acid test certificate has to be produced when you check into a hotel. If you don’t, you can’t get a room. (If you’re a foreigner, you may not get a room anyway, according to the policies some hotels are following). Inter-city travel is now a costly exercise. Travelling to another city for work may bring you a 14-day mandatory quarantine when you return home. Then there is air travel. Travel for pleasure may become a thing of the past. And forget about travelling in pleasure. In China, most airline passengers are now decked out in not just masks, but full hazmat suits and goggles. Some airlines, such as Emirates, have started testing passengers for COVID-19 before boarding. Results are issued in 10 minutes.

As a result of the continued closures and restrictions, many businesses are floundering. To get consumers to support them, some cities in China are now issuing 30-day spending vouchers to encourage people to support small businesses and retail. They are also making two-and-a-half-day weekends the norm – perhaps one small sliver of a silver lining to hold on to amid all the dark clouds.

*ananth.krishnan@thehindu.co.in*

# No transparency in West Bengal

The State government's handling of the COVID-19 crisis leaves much to be desired

## DIVYA GUHA

Level 4 hospitals. How many are succumbing in general wards, homes and villages? Who is checking?

West Bengal’s numbers come under further doubt as the State government is instructing doctors to be cautious while recording COVID-19 as the cause of death in the case of those patients who have other underlying medical conditions. This is not in keeping with international standard practices. In the U.K., doctors record a wider set as having succumbed to COVID-19, including deaths strongly suspected as being by COVID-19, even if no laboratory test has taken place, or if there are co-morbidities such as kidney, lung or heart disease. West Bengal authorities are telling doctors to do the opposite.

As more healthcare workers test positive, their calls for testing much more are stonewalled. Authorities, they say, have “no intention” of doing enough tests. This is unconscionable, a galling failure of the State government’s duty of care towards medical professionals and the public.

Then there is the newspeak: how do surveillance, quarantine and being under observation differ? Do these numbers (31,023) include those in self-isolation? Who collects, collates and checks these figures from hospitals and District Collectors’ offices before they reach the panicking public? Is it only up to the hospitals to track COVID-19 deaths?

**More questions than answers**  
Is there bureaucratic delay in reporting or are there other unforeseen limiting circumstances such as a State budget shortage or delays from the Central government in releasing funds? If there are inevitable delays, how long will the delays be on average? Can the gaps be narrowed and closed for better estimates? Can the true numbers then be higher? There are many questions, but no answers. The lack of transparency indicates that true figures are being suppressed to appear low. Why is Mamata Banerjee’s Cabinet and the Centre unable to answer such specific questions even though citizens and businesses are eager to know?

Divya Guha is a Kolkata-based independent journalist

# Pre-retirement judgments and post-retirement jobs

Enacting a law barring appointments of retired judges by the government will restore confidence in the judiciary



N.G.R. PRASAD &amp; K.K. RAM SIDDHARTHA

nourable men, who are an exception, wants a job after retirement. If we (Parliament) don’t create it, they themselves create it. The desire of a post-retirement job influences pre-retirement judgments. It is a threat to the independence of the Judiciary and once it influences pre-retirement judgments, it adversely impacts on the functioning of our Judiciary.” It is in this context that the appointment of Mr. Gogoi has to be perceived.

An interview that Justice Gogoi gave after assuming office as member of the Rajya Sabha made the situation worse. When asked whether his nomination was a quid-pro-quo for his having delivered judgments in favour of the Central government, his answer, that he was not the only judge but there were other judges too, was damaging. His view that membership of the Rajya Sabha was not a job but a service, and that once the President nominated him the call of duty required him to accept it, only created the impression that the judiciary is pliant. A bare reading of Article 80(3) of the Constitution only envisages the President to nominate “persons having special knowledge... in literature, science, art and social service” as members to the Rajya Sabha. It is difficult to imagine that the Constitution-makers had in mind a retired CJI while framing this provision.

## The Gogoi example

It was thought that on retirement from high constitutional office, judges would lead a retired life. Nobody ever expected them to accept plum posts. But the clear demarcation between the judiciary and executive got blurred as many judges over the years began to accept posts offered by the government. A few years ago, a former Chief Justice of India (CJI) was made a Governor by the ruling BJP government. Now, we have the case of a former CJI, Ranjan Gogoi, being nominated by the President to the Rajya Sabha and taking oath as Member of Parliament. During his tenure as CJI, Justice Gogoi presided over important cases such as Ayodhya and Rafale where all the decisions went in favour of the government. This gave rise to the impression that his nomination was a reward for these ‘favours’. Thus his appointment – and that too within a few months of his retirement – not only raised eyebrows but drew severe condemnation from varied quarters.

People are fast losing confidence in the so-called independent judiciary. In 2013, former Union Minister Arun Jaitley, who was also a senior Advocate, ironically said on the floor of Rajya Sabha: “I think, we are going a bit too far now, in every legislation, in creating post-retirement avenues for Judges. Almost everyone, barring a few notable, ho-

undoing the damage

Therefore, appointments of persons who have held constitutional office will undermine the very constitutional values of impartiality in the dispensation of justice. It will also go against the clear demarcation of separation of powers. It is true that there are no rules which stood in Justice Gogoi’s way of being appointed to the Rajya Sabha. But such matters cannot be left to the individual vagaries of judges. If post-retirement appointments are going to undermine confidence in the judiciary and in constitutional democracy, it is time to have a law in place either by way of a constitutional amendment or a parliamentary enactment barring such appointments. This is the only way to secure the confidence of the people and prevent post-retirement appointments. Judges can be compensated by being given their last drawn salary as pension. Also, the age of retirement for judges can be increased by a year or two. This will undo the damage caused by post-retirement jobs. It is important to remember that judges are constitutional servants, not government servants.

N.G.R. Prasad and K.K. Ram Siddhartha are Advocates, Madras High Court

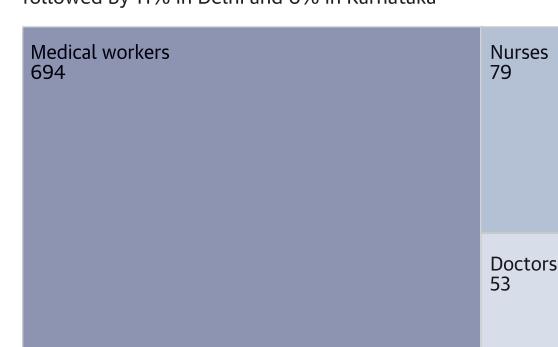


## DATA POINT

### In the front line of the battle

At least\* 96 doctors and 156 nurses have tested positive for COVID-19 across India as of April 22. As most of these infections were transmitted by patients in a hospital environment, at least 826 medical workers who came in contact with the infected personnel had to be quarantined and at least 20 hospitals had to be fully or partially closed. In the graphs, when the occupation of the infected/quarantined could not be ascertained, the patients were labelled as “medical workers” (it may include doctors and nurses). By Vignesh Radhakrishnan, Sumanth Sen and Naresh Singaravelu

**QUARANTINED MEDICAL WORKERS** | The chart depicts the number of doctors, nurses and medical workers who were placed under quarantine across India. Maharashtra accounted for close to 83% of all doctors quarantined, followed by 11% in Delhi and 6% in Karnataka

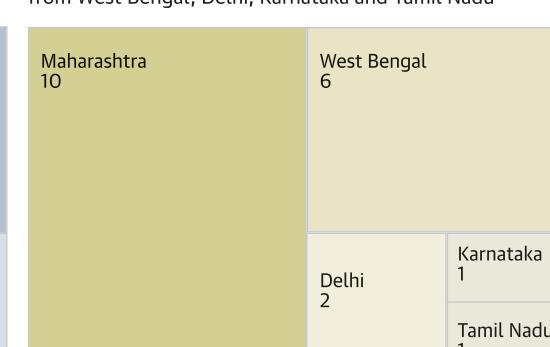


\*The figures are a conservative estimate based on information collated from The Hindu news reports, reports from news agencies such as PTI and ANI, statements from hospitals, numbers cited in government press conferences etc.

**INFECTED MEDICAL WORKERS** | The chart depicts the number of infected doctors, nurses and medical workers. Maharashtra accounted for close to 42% of infected doctors, 70.5% of infected nurses and 84% of infected medical workers (does not include administrative staff)



**HOSPITALS AFFECTED** | Close to 10 hospitals in Maharashtra had to be completely or partially shut down after many of their staff were quarantined following exposure to COVID-19 patients. Closures were also reported from West Bengal, Delhi, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu



A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 23, 1920.  
The Scientific Study of Labour.  
(From the Editorial)

The proposed establishment in England of a National Institute of Psychology and Physiology to make a scientific study of labour, discussed in the Engineering Supplement to the Times of March, deserves the careful attention of all employers and workmen. It is a well-recognised fact that by the choice of a profession with little or no experience for guidance, through accidental circumstances irrespective of mental and physical qualifications, many of our young men often find themselves engaged in professions for which they are quite unfit, bringing failure on themselves and disappointing lesson to the employer. In view of the disastrous consequences to the employers and employee caused by the unscientific and often perverse arrangements in the labour world, both physical and intellectual, the necessity for an institution of expertise in experimental and industrial psychology to give advice in the proper selection of vocations and the scientific handling of labour problems will be readily admitted by all thinking persons.

The Hindu  
FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 23, 1970

Visvanath – batsman of the year

G. R. Visvanath, the Mysore State cricketer, is very much a national hero to-day. He received the biggest ovation for any player when he made his maiden appearance at the Brabourne Stadium in Bombay in the semi-final of the Ranji trophy championship between Bombay and Mysore last month. His 95-run knock in the second innings, played on Holi day, was described by one critic as having “heralded spring.” The cricket season in the country had been a plentiful one. Amidst a mass of performances in batting the one that stands out is the century knock of Visvanath in the third Test match against Australia at Kanpur. This singular performance entitles Visvanath to the encomium of the batsman of the year. Visvanath’s century was in the second innings of his maiden Test. Though he was out for a “duck” in the first innings, in cricket parlance he has earned a name in the record book as having scored a century in his Test debut. In the first innings, Visvanath making his first entry into a Test match arena, was hustled by A. N. Connolly with a variety of deliveries – two quick ones, two bouncers and, then, a slower ball, which the young man touched for a catch at short leg by Redpath.

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FROM PAGE ONE

## Confirmed COVID-19 cases cross 20,000

The Central government would conduct a telephonic survey, where citizens will be contacted on their mobile phone from the number 1921, through the National Informatics Centre (NIC), it said.

"This is a genuine survey. All citizens are requested to participate to help get proper feedback on the prevalence and distribution of COVID-19 symptoms. Also, please be aware of any other calls by pranksters or calls from any other number in

the guise of such a similar survey. The States/UTs are requested to inform the public about the survey through media. They are also requested to inform people about the official nature of this exercise and create awareness of any other calls by pranksters or phishing/fishing attempts from any other number. They are also to host the information about this survey on the Health Departments' home pages and other Depts," the release stated.

## Attacks on health staff to attract up to 7 years in jail

A government release said the ordinance is intended to ensure that during any situation akin to the current pandemic, there is zero tolerance to any form of violence against healthcare service personnel and damage to property.

It said several States had enacted special laws to offer protection to doctors and other medical personnel in the past.

However, the COVID-19 outbreak has posed a unique situation where harassment of the healthcare workforce and others working to contain the spread of the disease has been taking place at all fronts, in various

places, including in cremation grounds," the release said, adding the existing State laws do not have such a wide ambit.

In this context, the Union Cabinet, at its meeting on April 22, 2020, approved the promulgation of an ordinance to amend the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, to protect healthcare service personnel and property, including their living/working premises, from violence during epidemics. The President has given his assent for the ordinance, the release said.

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) said it welcomed the move.

## Most sectors will open by May 3: Sanjeev Sanyal

"International investors are impressed by what we are trying to do... We should not at all be apologetic about this approach," he said.

The steps announced by the Finance Ministry and the Reserve Bank of India so far were only meant to "cushion the blow" so that the economy stays alive to the other side of the lockdown, so that limited resources could be saved for the rebuilding phase.

**Larger package soon**  
"Our first few efforts are to make sure you have enough working capital to keep yourself alive through this shock," said Mr. Sanyal. A larger package was in the works and would be announced "sooner rather than later."

"Of course, we are not going to solve poverty by giving ₹500... But we are just

cushioning the hit, so that everyone has some money and some food," he said, responding to widespread criticism that the Centre's initial ₹1 lakh crore welfare package was insufficient to deal with large-scale distress.

**Opportunity to rebuild'**  
The Principal Economic Advisor also said India would use the opportunity to implement "large-scale reforms" in the economy. "We must remember that the world on the other side of this crisis will be very different," he said. Geopolitical realities, supply chain structures and the use of technology would all have changed.

"This is not the end of the world... India should see it as an opportunity not just to rebuild ourselves, but also participate in the rebuilding of this new world," he wrote.

## 4 militants killed in Shopian encounter

Inspector General of Police (IGP), Kashmir, Vijay Kumar said, "We have taken DNA samples of the killed militants. We are conducting their burial in the presence of a magistrate. So far, the family of one of them has come forward. We will show them. If they identify, then two to three family members will be permitted to participate in the burial.

Those who make the claim later, their DNA samples will be taken for further course of action."

The IGP did not disclose the identity of the outfits the militants belonged to.

However, police sources said it was a joint group of the Lashkar-e-Taiba, the Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) and the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen.

## FB buys ₹43,574 crore stake in Jio Platforms

Facebook's investment in Jio will be the largest foreign direct investment (FDI) in the technology sector in India.

Facebook, which counts India as one of its largest markets, said the investment "underscores our commitment to India and our excitement for the dramatic transformation that Jio has spurred in the country". By investing in RIL's digital business, the U.S. social media company aims to deepen its engagement with users in Asia's third-largest economy.

Reliance Jio Infocomm,

which provides connectivity to more than 388 million subscribers, will continue to be a wholly owned subsidiary of Jio Platforms.

"Our goal with this investment is to enable new opportunities for businesses of all sizes, but especially for small businesses across India and create new and exciting digital ecosystems that will empower, enrich and uplift the lives of all 1.3 billion Indians," RIL said in a statement.

RIL shares rose 10.3% on the BSE on Wednesday to close at ₹1,363.65.

## IMA withdraws protest plan

Centre promises action to prevent attacks on healthcare professionals

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) on Wednesday withdrew a protest planned against the attacks on doctors and healthcare professionals after the Union government promised that all necessary steps, including relevant legislation, would be introduced for their safety and dignity.

The Union Home Ministry asked the States to appoint nodal officers to redress any safety issue faced by medical professionals round the clock.

### States alerted

In a letter, Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla asked Tamil Nadu to take strict action against those who obstructed last rites of a doctor. He asked the States to provide security for the final rites.

"...any single incident of violence against healthcare professionals is likely to create a sense of insecurity



**Solidarity hour:** Ministers Amit Shah and Harsh Vardhan during a videoconference with IMA representatives. ■ PTI

among the entire healthcare community," the letter said.

The IMA should be apprised of the measures taken to create a sense of security and confidence among the health fraternity, it added.

The States were asked to invoke Section 51 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, which provides for strict penalties against such obstructions.

There have been several instances of medical teams coming under attack as they

went about collecting samples of suspected COVID-19 patients in many parts of the country.

In Tamil Nadu, the funeral party of a doctor who died of COVID-19 infection was attacked. His colleagues were also assaulted.

### Amit Shah's assurance

Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Health Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan convened a videoconference with IMA representatives and other

doctors on Wednesday to address the issue. "The way our doctors are performing their duties in these testing times is exceptional. I urge every Indian to cooperate with doctors in this fight against COVID-19. Safety and dignity of our doctors at their work place is non-negotiable. It is our collective responsibility to ensure a conducive atmosphere for them at all times. I have assured doctors that Modi govt is committed to their cause and appealed to reconsider their proposed protest," Mr. Shah tweeted after the meeting.

The IMA said in a statement, "Considering the immediate high-level response of government and solid assurance given by the Home Minister himself, it is decided that the white alert protest of April 22 and Black Day [protest] of May 23 stands withdrawn to maintain the unity and integrity of the country."

## Cabinet approves ₹15,000-cr. package

Three-phase plan to limit virus spread

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a ₹15,000-crore investment package for the COVID-19 emergency response and health system preparedness, the government said in a statement.

Post facto approval was given to the package at a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, said Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar at a press conference.

The funds will be used in three phases, with ₹7,774 crore for immediate use and the rest for medium-term support, that is one to four years, the statement said.

"The key objectives of the package include mounting emergency response to slow and limit COVID-19."

The plan includes developing diagnostics and COVID-19-dedicated treatment

facilities, centralising the procurement of essential medical equipment and drugs, strengthening the healthcare systems nationally and in States, bio-security preparedness and pandemic research.

Phase one of the plan has already been rolled out by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, with ₹3,000 crore in additional funds being released to the States and the UTs for strengthening facilities, it said. The network of diagnostic laboratories had been expanded and orders for 13 lakh diagnostic kits had been placed.

Health workers, including ASHA workers, have been given insurance cover under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana. "Personal protection equipment, N95 masks and ventilators, testing kits and drugs are being procured centrally," the statement said.

### IN BRIEF



#### Rahul invites ideas for MSME stimulus package

NEW DELHI  
Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi has called for ideas on social media on a possible stimulus package for the medium, small and micro enterprises (MSME) sector.

"#COVID19 has devastated our micro, small & medium businesses (MSME). The Congress party needs your help. Send us suggestions & ideas for what an MSME stimulus package should cover on," Mr. Gandhi said. The Congress has repeatedly criticised the Modi government for ignoring the plight of migrant workers and for offering a minuscule stimulus package.

#### Wadhawans out of quarantine: Minister

MUMBAI  
Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh said the State police had written to both the Enforcement Directorate and the CBI stating that the quarantine period of Kapil Wadhawan and Dheeraj Wadhawan – accused in the Yes Bank and DHFL fraud cases – and their family members ended at 2 p.m. on Wednesday and the agencies could come and arrest them. "Till such time, the State police will keep a watch on them," Mr. Deshmukh said. The ED had recently issued summons against both in the Yes Bank case.

#### Cong. seeks legal action against Arnab Goswami

NEW DELHI  
The Congress reacted sharply to Republic Editor Arnab Goswami's "condemnable comments" against party president Sonia Gandhi in the context of the Palghar lynching incident and sought legal action against him. "His comments were disgraceful and condemnable. Mr. Goswami claims to be an independent journalist but the deplorable language that he is using certainly matches that of the BJP," general secretary organisation K.C. Venugopal told *The Hindu*.

Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala told *The Hindu* that the party would pursue all legal options.

#### Aadhaar seeding deadline extended

NEW DELHI  
Farmers in Assam, Meghalaya, J&K and Ladakh have been given a one-year extension to provide Aadhaar data to avail themselves of income support benefits under the PM-KISAN scheme. The new deadline will be March 31, 2021. The decision to relax the mandatory requirement of Aadhaar seeding of data for beneficiaries in these States and the Union Territories was taken by the Union Cabinet on Wednesday. This will benefit about 38 lakh farmers who have already received at least one instalment of PM-KISAN support.

## Centre cuts non-urea fertilizer subsidy

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Centre has cut the subsidy for non-urea fertilizers this year to ₹22,186 crore. That is about 3% lower than the ₹22,875 crore which was the estimated expenditure on the nutrient based subsidies in 2019-20.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on Wednesday decided to reduce the subsidy for nitrogen-based fertilizers to ₹18.78 per kg, for phosphorous-based fertilizers to ₹14.88 per kg, and set the subsidy for potash-based fertilizers at ₹10.11 per kg, according to

## 101 arrested in Palghar lynching case

STAFF REPORTER  
MUMBAI

an official statement. And while the subsidy for sulphur-based fertilizers had been raised last year to ₹3.56 per kg, from ₹2.72 per kg, this year it has been slashed to just ₹2.37 per kg.

The CCEA also approved the inclusion of a complex fertilizer, ammonium phosphate, under the nutrient-based subsidy scheme. The scheme was set up in 2010 to ensure the availability of phosphatic and potassic fertilizers to farmers at an affordable price, as the retail prices of such non-urea fertilizers are decontrolled and set by manufacturers.

## No 100% quota for tribal teachers: SC

Bench says it is an 'obnoxious idea'

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL  
NEW DELHI  
A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court held it unconstitutional to provide 100% reservation for tribal teachers in schools located in Scheduled Areas across the country.

A 152-page judgment by a Bench led by Justice Arun Mishra said it was an "obnoxious idea" to have only three things: name, date of birth and place of birth, which are already mentioned in their passports, said the official.

**e-visa loopholes**  
Another government official raised questions over the manner in which e-tourist visas were granted to so many foreigners who participated in the congregation.

There is no system of verification of e-visa applications, which directly go to the server and are processed automatically. The applicants have to provide correct information about only three things: name, date of birth and place of birth, which are already mentioned in their passports, said the official.

The official said: "However, in this case, the foreign nationals in question applied for, and got, e-tourist visas. We suspect that they were specifically told to apply under this category."

The trend was detected

## 101 arrested in Palghar lynching case

STAFF REPORTER  
MUMBAI

Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh on Wednesday made public the list of 101 accused arrested in the Palghar mob lynching of three persons, including two sadhus.

The Minister, while declaring the list, categorically said that none of the arrested accused was Muslim and once again appealed to everyone not to communalise the incident.

In a statement on social media, he said: "Palghar mob lynching is a grotesque incident which happened due to rumours on social media about child kidnappers and thieves prowling in the area. A high-level inquiry is going on and, meanwhile, people are requested not to fall for rumours and verify facts from trusted sources."

Three people were lynched at the remote Gadchinch village in Palghar district on the night of April 16. The three were trying to cross the border to Gujarat and were refused entry at Dadra and Nagar Haveli Union Territory. The villagers stopped the car as the area was rife with rumours about a kidnap gang and thieves. A mob of over hundred lynched them.

## No 100% quota for tribal teachers: SC

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## Centre, State can fix sugarcane price, says SC

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The advised or remunerative price shall be higher than the minimum price in accordance with the provisions of the Sugarcane (Control) Order, 1966, issued under Section 16 of the Uttar Pradesh Sugarcane (Regulation of Supply and Purchase) Act, 1953. The case revolved around a petition by the Western Uttar Pradesh Sugar Mills Association questioning if the State had the power to fix a minimum price when a similar price had already been set by a Central legislation.

However, the five-judge Bench, led by Justice Arun Mishra, said that even though a State cannot fix a "minimum price" if the Centre has already fixed it, the State is always welcome to fix the "advised price".

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## Bengal left with no testing kits: Mamata

'Centre not giving required numbers'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA

Raising the issue of paucity of COVID-19 testing kits in West Bengal, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday blamed the Central government for creating a "health hazard" in the State.

The State and the Centre have been at loggerheads for the past few days as the number of cases see a jump in the State and in the country.

On Wednesday, Ms. Banerjee said the Centre was not supplying an adequate number of kits. There are three types of kits, she said. One is rapid testing kit and the other is BGI Group's real-time reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR), while the third one is antigen kits. "The BGI RT-PCRs are withdrawn as per the email from NICED, received yesterday [Tuesday]. Antigen KITS are not available in the Bengal Hospital. Therefore, the



**☛ All rapid testing kits which were sent to our State have been withdrawn**

State would not even have one kit currently in stock. All rapid testing kits sent to our State have been withdrawn," said Ms. Banerjee.

"The Health Department had made previous orders, but we do not know when we will receive those orders," she said. "While 2,500 viral transport kits were provided by the Centre, we did 7,037 tests. We required 14,000 kits."

The Inter-Ministerial Cen-

## Centre continues Bengal study

Team asks the State government to provide information on nine aspects

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Central team visiting West Bengal has demanded that the State government provide information on nine aspects, which include testing criteria and instances of COVID-19 among health care workers.

Additional Secretary Apurva Chandra, who was rushed to Kolkata on April 20 to take stock of the State's preparedness in the wake of the pandemic, shot off a letter to the Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha on Wednesday seeking a detailed presentation on the level of testing, protocol adopted for testing, availability of personal protective equipment and masks for health professionals, availability of oxygen beds, ICUs, number of surveillance teams and COVID care hospitals, instances of COVID in healthcare workers and system of approval of cause of declaration of death of COVID patients by a committee.

The Inter-Ministerial Cen-



**Wait and watch:** The scene at a quarantine centre in Kolkata on Wednesday. ■ RAJEEV BHATT

tral Team (IMCT) also wanted to know about the procedure for identifying and quarantining people, supply of essential commodities, condition of the relief camps and "support required from the Government of India" in this regard.

The team asked the State government to arrange visits

**Doctors seek protective measures for staff**

KOLKATA

More than half a dozen doctors' associations in West Bengal have written to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee urging her that the State provide protective measures to front line medical staff and increased testing for COVID-19. "Healthcare workers working relentlessly in different categories should be provided with necessary protective measures as per the ICMR, WHO guidelines," it said. "More testing centres should be opened at least in every region and testing done as per ICMR guidelines," the letter said.

Responding to a letter by Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla, Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha said in a letter that he had shared up-to-date reports with them. "The teams arrived without any prior consultation, so there was no opportunity to provide logistic help, [and] neither did they ask for any help."

to quarantine centres, hot-spots and market places and wanted an opportunity to interact with health care workers on the ground.

Earlier, refuting the claims of the Union Home Ministry, the State government said "it is not a fact" that there was no cooperation.

## Death toll in Gujarat increases to 103

Total number of cases climbs to 2,407

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
AHMEDABAD

Gujarat's death toll due to COVID-19 infections has climbed to 103, with 13 new deaths reported on Wednesday, while the number of positive cases have jumped to 2,407, with 229 new cases added on the same day.

The State continues to see a higher number of cases and casualties, a trend that began a week ago.

On Wednesday, as many as 30 patients were discharged after full recovery, bringing the number of patients who have recovered to 179 so far. Of 13 deaths recorded, nine were from Ahmedabad, three were from Vadodara and one from Surat.

In Ahmedabad, the total number of cases have climbed to 1,501, and 62 deaths, the highest tally in the State. On Wednesday, besides nine deaths, Ahmedabad also reported 128 new positive cases, continuing



**Keeping an eye:** Policemen in protective suits patrolling an area in Ahmedabad. ■ PTI

the trend of over 100 cases per day since a week. So far, 86 patients have recovered and have been discharged in the city. In Surat, the total cases have jumped to 415, with 12 deaths and 13 recoveries, while in Vadodara, the total number of cases has reached 208, and ten patients have succumbed to the infection.

Meanwhile, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation has decided to set up another COVID-19 care centre with a 4,000-bed capacity.

### IN BRIEF



**4 new cases in Odisha, total mounts to 83**

Bhubaneswar

Four new COVID-19 cases were detected in Odisha, taking the State's total number to 83 on Wednesday as Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik administered an oath for sarpanches to discharge their duties with a commitment to protect villages from the virus. The number of active cases stood at 50 in the State and the number of recovered patients increased to 32. The State has reported only one death due to COVID-19. Interacting with the sarpanches, Mr. Patnaik asked them to ensure strict observance of lockdown rules, compulsory use of mask for all, frequent hand washing, social distancing and zero tolerance for spitting in public.

**Ministry of Civil Aviation employee tests positive**

NEW DELHI

An employee of the Ministry of Civil Aviation has tested positive for COVID-19 and his colleagues have been asked to go into self-isolation. "An employee of the Ministry who had attended office on 15 April 2020 has tested positive for COVID-19 on 21st April. All necessary protocols are being stringently followed on the premises. All colleagues who came in contact are being asked to go into self-isolation as a precaution," the Ministry said on Twitter. The Delhi government was taking appropriate steps to conduct tracing, it stated.

**Assam gives three days for inter-State travel**

GUWAHATI

The Assam government has announced a three-day window for certain categories of people to travel from one district to another. State Finance Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said people stranded in various parts of the State would be allowed to travel back to their native places from April 25-27. Such movement would be allowed only if permission was taken from the district authority concerned and the traveller possessed an e-pass, he said.

**Haryana cancels order for Chinese testing kits**

CHANDIGARH

Haryana has cancelled an order placed with two Chinese companies for 1 lakh Rapid Testing Kits, State Health Minister Anil Vijo said on Wednesday. "We have instead placed a fresh order with a South Korean company that is preparing the kits at Manesar near Gurugram," he said in a statement. The company had so far handed over 25,000 kits. "We are getting the kits at almost half the price quoted by the Chinese companies, and the kits are of better quality," he said.

## Maharashtra to ramp up fight after Centre's report

State believes cases can be restricted to under 1,00,000

SHARAD VYAS  
JYOTI SHELAR  
MUMBAI

Taking cognisance of a Central report that has projected a staggering spike in COVID-19 cases in Mumbai, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Wednesday directed officials to ramp up the State's response accordingly.

A day after *The Hindu* reported on a Central report projecting a spike of 6.5 lakh cases in Mumbai by May 15, Mr. Thackeray ordered converting the tertiary care GT Hospital and multi-speciality St. George Hospital into COVID-19 facilities on the lines of Nair Hospital.

In a presentation, senior State health officials said Maharashtra's peak – taken at a doubling rate of 7 as opposed to the Centre's assumption of 3.8 days – will result in 80,000 to 90,000 cases in the financial capital by May 15. The State is not completely discarding the projections made by the Centre but believes numbers could be restricted to under 1,00,000 by stringent measures, said an official present during the meeting at Mayor's Bungalow.

"We are in the process of ramping up facilities at the GT and St. George Hospitals in line with the decision to convert the tertiary care Nair Hospital into a COVID-19 facility. The decision was taken by the Chief Minister," said Principal Secretary Manisha Mhaiskar, currently in charge of the State's response to the pandemic.

Earlier, a mathematical modelling study carried out by a Deputy Director General (DDG) rank officer from the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare on April



**Surveying the scene:** Members from the Inter-Ministerial Central Team visiting Dharavi on Wednesday. ■ VIJAY BATE

16, projected COVID-19 cases to touch an estimated count of 42,604 by April 30 and jumping to 6,56,407 cases by May 15 in Mumbai alone. The State has countered the methodology and tools used for the latest projection and gap analysis, and raised the "discrepancies" in the modelling with the visiting Inter-Ministerial Central Teams (IMCT).

**'Don't discard figures'** During the meeting at Mayor's Bungalow, Mr. Thackeray urged officials not to discard the Central figures even if they appear to be on a higher side. By substantially increasing contact tracing exercise in slums, the State will be able to achieve a doubling rate of 7 and later to 10, he said. "We are not discarding the Central report completely but are only scaling our response, especially contact tracing, to increase doubling rate to 7 and much higher to 10 by May. This way, the numbers will be controlled," said an official present during the meet.

The Central projections raised a heated debate among experts who argued that the report seems to have completely ignored the State's efforts to tackle the virus.

Subhash Salunkhe, technical adviser to Maharashtra on pandemic control, said: "The projections look as if the virus has a free hand. The aggressive quarantining activities in Mumbai, the lockdown, social distancing, treatment and recovery of patients and the impact of all these efforts have not been factored in at all," said Dr. Salunkhe, adding that the projections were made when the city's case doubling rate was at 3.8 days while it had now come to nearly 7 days.

A former public health official agreed that predictive mathematical models can be uncertain but questions must be asked how prepared is the State even if 15% of the predicted figures are to come true. "A lot of focus has been given to creating new COVID-19 facilities. It will be sensible if the government takes over private healthcare facilities that already have good infrastructure and a team of doctors who are not working at their full capacity," he said.

431 fresh cases in Maharashtra with 18 more deaths

STAFF REPORTER  
PUNE

The number of fresh COVID-19 cases in Maharashtra continued to soar relentlessly, with 431 new cases reported from the State on Wednesday, taking the cumulative tally to 5,649. Eighteen new deaths took the death toll to 269.

According to State health officials, 10 of these deaths were from Mumbai city, while two deaths each were reported from Pune and Aurangabad districts. Kalyan-Dombivli, Solapur, Jalgaon and Malegaon in Nashik recorded a death each. Maharashtra accounts for more than 30% of the country COVID-19 death toll.

Mumbai's death toll now stands at 161, while that of Pune district has risen to 57. While the number of cases in Aurangabad has remained in check thus far, the deaths of a 76-year-old woman and a

60-year-old man in the past 24 hours have sparked alarm among authorities, who have tightened lockdown measures. The district has recorded five deaths so far.

"More than 60% of the deaths reported had high-risk co-morbidities such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma and heart disease," said State Surveillance Officer Pradeep Awate. Alongside the surge in cases, a total of 67 persons were discharged on Wednesday, taking the figure of persons recovered till date to 789.

Mumbai reported 232 of the 431 new cases, as its cumulative tally touched 3,683,

while Pune city witnessed a spike of 68 new cases to take its tally to 755.

**Heartening fact** Pune Divisional Commissioner Deepak Mhaisekar said as many as 115 patients had recovered and were discharged. A heartening fact, he said, was that among

those recently recovered were a 92-year-old grandmother and a three-year-old child.

Areas in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (excluding Mumbai city) reported fresh cases with 18 new cases recorded in Thane district, to take its tally to 190, while Navi Mumbai reported seven more to touch 101. Another spurt was witnessed in Nagpur city which reported as many as 21 new cases, taking the district's tally to 100.

### INSTITUTE OF WOOD SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY (INDIAN COUNCIL OF FORESTRY RESEARCH AND EDUCATION)

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E Tender ID: 2020\_KMRL\_353282\_1. Last date of submission: 08.05.2020

2. Name of work: SELECTION OF PROOF CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR THE DETAILED STRUCTURAL DESIGN OF THE VIADUCT AND ONE ELEVATED STATION FROM S.N. JUNCTION TO THIRUPURATHURA OF PHASE 1B OF KOCHI METRO RAIL PROJECT

E Tender ID: 2020\_KMRL\_353290\_1. Last Date of Submission: 29.05.2020

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INTERVIEW | SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN

# 'I am confident we will win this battle soon and Indore will set the ideal'

Initially, there were fewer cases in Madhya Pradesh, but the number went up with a rapid increase in the infection around major cities'

NISTULA HEBBAR

**Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan** has had a trial by fire in his current tenure, having been sworn in after much drama and on the eve of the nationwide lockdown that left him without an opportunity to get a large Ministry in place. The situation in the State is also serious with COVID-19 cases soaring.

Indore and Bhopal continue to be huge areas of concern with spiking rates of cases. Why hasn't the situation been under some sort of control till now? Do you think Madhya Pradesh was fatally late in waking up to the challenge due to its political instability all of March?

■ No, we cannot say that. One should try to avoid jumping to conclusions without going into the details. Initially, there were fewer cases found in Madhya Pradesh, primarily in Jabalpur, and after that, a rapid increase in the number of cases around major cities like Indore and Bhopal raised the index. Tablighi Jamaat members of Madhya Pradesh, who attended this event in Delhi, came back and scattered into

many core and prime areas of the State. They are also the reason for this sudden rise as they responded reluctantly and did not come forward willingly and thus indirectly spread it among others.

Indore is the prime commercial centre and densely populated city. It is a place where a big number of people travel abroad for business and commerce. Initially, such people hid their travel histories and somehow came into contact with others and as a result, this infection spread from one to another. For now, we are taking a special care in this regard, special attention is being paid to cases found here. In Indore, the entire staff, including the police and the administration, with the cooperation of public representatives, social workers,



Our medical system and infrastructure are ready and well prepared and in a better condition than a month and a half before

house. In order to ensure that the vegetables and fruits of farmers are not spoiled, decentralised purchase of their fruits and vegetables can be arranged outside the city in a protective manner. As per the instructions of the Central government, a containment plan is ready, and it is being implemented.

A large number of infected patients are recovering. Till yesterday [Tuesday], 31 infected patients in Bhopal and 71 infected patients in Indore recovered and went home. Similarly, there is not a single

local COVID-19-positive patient in Gwalior and Shivpuri. Reports of 193 samples from Bhopal came negative yesterday. More than 50% of the districts are completely free from the virus. Right from the moment I was sworn in as the Chief Minister, I started monitoring and doing work for preventing the spread of the virus, along with the Health Department and administrative bodies.

What is your plan for ramping up health infrastructure and testing facilities and how soon do you think there will be an exit from the lockdown?

■ Well, our medical system and infrastructure is ready. We are well prepared and in a better condition than a month and a half before.

Tests are being conducted in 10 laboratories in the State. There has been an increase in daily checks, now we are doing around 1,800 tests daily. The process to start a few other laboratories is underway. Testing kits are available and are being supplied continuously to all the dis-

tricts. Talking about testing equipment, we have 22,520 RTPCR, 14,200 manual RNA. PPE kits are around 1 lakh, with kits distributed daily to different districts. The availability of N95 masks is around 1.77 lakh, of which more than 1,60,000 have been distributed so far. The availability of hydroxychloroquine tablets is more than 3.3 million. There are 2,776 oxygen cylinders. Over 20,243 isolation beds are available. There are about 783 ICU beds available, with 690 ventilators. We are continuously increasing the facilities.

What is your exit plan?

■ It may seem premature to ask with rate of infection being the way it is, but still?

■ As far as the exit plan is concerned, it is a simple plan – to follow the guidelines of the lockdown and cooperate with each other. Do not leave your houses. I appeal to everyone to follow the lockdown sincerely; it is for your safety. Keep maintaining the rule of social distancing. Stay at home, stay safe. No entry, no exit in the containment

zones. Continuous, State-wise surveys are being conducted. It is a question of life and death. Safety and security of the common man is our top priority. As soon as the situation comes under control, the lockdown will be lifted; things will be back on track soon. We are consistently trying to overcome the hazard and trying to stabilise the situation. I request everyone to have patience; we will soon overcome this pandemic.

With new Ministers, what will be the status of the committee appointed under V.D. Sharma for the management of the crisis?

■ The task force or the committee appointed under V.D. Sharma includes senior and experienced leaders of the State who are very well known to the State and who are eligible to manage the challenges coming out of the situation. They are also here for additional help and suggestions to control the situation at different levels and places and they will be surely supporting the new Minis-

ters and the government with their experience. Many of them are in touch with many social organisations and self-help groups across the State, they are in consistent touch with the government and will be helping us till this fight is over.

You have five Ministers now and you have also notified their portfolios. Are you anticipating any restiveness and resentment among those not accommodated?

■ As you know, the day after I was sworn in as CM, we had the lockdown, and so, in order to manage the situation I have done this small expansion of my Council of Ministers. I will go in for a bigger exercise once the lockdown is eased, and I don't think that this is the time when people will think in this manner. Everyone in the Ministry is a senior member and well experienced to deal with the situation. Portfolio allocation has been done after due consultation. Our prime focus right now is to safeguard the State and get control over the pandemic.

## Policemen in virus fight have no insurance

States using CM Relief Fund to compensate victims' families

VIJAITA SINGH  
NEW DELHI

In the absence of a specific Central insurance scheme for policemen and paramilitary personnel who may die from COVID-19 infection while on duty, the States are customising policies for the frontline workers.

On March 29, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare announced the 'Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package: Insurance Scheme for Health Workers Fighting COVID-19'. The package provides an insurance cover of ₹50 lakh to around 22.12 lakh public healthcare providers, including community health workers, who may have to be in direct contact and care of COVID-19 patients and who may be at risk of being impacted by this.

Since the Central package does not include policemen who are working on the frontline, the States are using the Chief Minister's Relief Fund or other budget heads to compensate the families of those who die on



**Safety net:** Policemen sanitising their hands in a COVID-19 containment zone in New Delhi on Monday. ■ PTI

duty. Punjab said it would pay ₹50 lakh from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund to the family of Assistant Commissioner of Police Anil Kohli (52), who died in a Ludhiana hospital on April 18. The State Cabinet approved an insurance policy in this regard.

Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have also announced similar relief measures for police personnel.

"They [police] are the first point of contact and on some occasions have also come under attack. Yet they are not covered under the Central scheme," a senior

police officer said.

The paramilitary or the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) personnel who are killed on duty are entitled to ₹60 lakh ex-gratia relief but no specific policy has been announced by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) for COVID-19 related deaths.

On March 14, the MHA issued an order to treat COVID-19 as a "notified disaster" for the purpose of providing assistance under the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF). The SDRF is the primary fund available with the States for responses to notified disasters.

An amount of ₹3,600.85 crore had been disbursed in 10.02 lakh claims, of which ₹1,954 crore were for the COVID-19 claims.

## Don't deport foreigners with Tablighi link: Centre

MHA tells States to book them under NDMA, other Acts

S. VIJAY KUMAR  
CHENNAI

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has written to all States that foreign nationals who came on a tourist visa and took part in Tablighi Jamaat activities in India should not be deported after the COVID-19 quarantine period.

In a letter to all Chief Sec-

retaries, Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla said punitive action under the National Disaster Management Act, 2005, The Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, Sections 13 and 14 of the Foreigners Act, 1946 and other relevant provisions of the IPC should be taken against them, police sources told *The Hindu* on Wednesday.

About 1,000 foreign nationals from various countries came to India on a tourist visa and took part in the Tablighi Jamaat conference

in the Markaz Mosque, Nizamuddin, Delhi in early March. After the religious congregation, the foreign missionaries visited different States and camped there to preach the religious values of Islam. Many of the delegates along with scores of Indian nationals were linked to the spread of COVID-19 across the country, the sources said.

In Tamil Nadu alone, at least 125 foreign nationals, from countries like Indonesia, Bangladesh and Thai-

land, were reportedly camping in mosques to preach.

### 111 held in T.N.

At least 111 of them have been arrested and remanded in judicial custody in an isolated Borstal School. Of the 11 Bangladeshis, two tested positive to COVID-19 after their arrest and prison officials moved the whole group to a quarantine facility.

Security agencies and im-

migration authorities zeroed in on the foreign delegates of Tablighi Jamaat based on their travel documents. The MHA directed the States to take legal action against all the foreigners and Indian nationals for the offences committed under various provisions of law. The Home Secretary called for a detailed report on the action taken from the States, police sources said.

"Even if bail is granted, the foreigners will not be allowed to be deported. They have to face trial by staying in a special camp...," a senior police official said.

## Indian test kits must for reliability

Seven manufacturers awaiting approval from the National Institute of Virology

JACOB KOSHY  
NEW DELHI

For reliable antibody testing kits, India will have to make its own, according to independent epidemiologists and biotechnologists.

A day after the Rajasthan government said that it would stop antibody tests because they were returning inaccurate results, the Indian Council of Medical Research announced that it had advised putting such tests on hold because it was generating widely varying results. The ICMR on Wednesday said it had forwarded a "protocol" for rapid antibody tests to all States, but did not specify the details.

### Quick results

Much like home-based pregnancy tests, antibody tests are valuable because they give results quickly and only needs a pinprick's worth of blood. However, they can only detect antibodies produced by the immune system in response to the virus and this can take as many as seven to 14 days to manifest. "The initial expectation was that an antibody test would soon be available. But it was the PCR technology that



### BACKGROUNDER

came first. That's also due to the fast moving nature of the virus," said Iype Joseph, epidemiologist with the Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Biotechnology, Thiruvananthapuram.

The ICMR has underlined that tests are a surveillance tool. The utility of the test was evolving and its value was dependent on field conditions. They were not a replacement for RT-PCR tests.

However, with the accuracy widely ranging from 5% to 71%, there are questions on whether they can reliably help indicate the spread of the infection.

An antibody test only tells you whether a person has ever been infected by the virus. These antibodies that are produced are not necessarily specific to SARS-CoV-2 and could even be generated by a variety of other pathogens.

There are other four other common coronaviruses and antibodies could be generated to that too. So far, nobody has found a protein that is specific to SARS-CoV-2."

**Surveillance tool** The ICMR's current recommendation is to test those who show symptoms such as cough, fever and breathlessness and even a sore throat.

After quarantining for 14 days, an antibody test is to be done and if positive, the person ought to be tested by RT-PCR.

The ICMR has underlined that tests are a surveillance tool. The utility of the test was evolving and its value was dependent on field conditions. They were not a replacement for RT-PCR tests.

However, with the accuracy widely ranging from 5% to 71%, there are questions on whether they can reliably help indicate the spread of the infection.

All kits need to be validated by the National Institute of Virology, Pune. They test two things: are the kits detecting antibodies at specified intervals after an infection, mirroring when antibodies actually show up

in people with confirmed COVID infections? And do they falsely respond to the presence of other pathogens? It is not clear how tests validated by the NIV began showing widely discordant results for them to be paused by the ICMR. "We need tests that are locally developed and validated," Dr. Joseph said.

"The need of the hour is to have rapidly deployable RT PCR kits. If we can reduce the time taken for analysis, or have a paper-based strip that can detect the virus, it would be more useful," said Asha Kishore, Director, Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology, Thiruvananthapuram. The institute has developed a rapid PCR test that awaits final approval from the ICMR.

Renu Swarup, Secretary, Department of Biotechnology, said that India's challenges with diagnostic kits were temporary. "There are at least seven Indian manufacturers of these kits awaiting approval from the National Institute of Virology and we are hoping to be able to produce at least a million kits by end May."

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**STEP COACH**

# Stress and anxiety rise amid pandemic

Now is the time to put suicide prevention strategies in place for the vulnerable, say psychiatrists

JAGRITI CHANDRA  
NEW DELHI

"Every morning I wake up with a panic attack. I sweat profusely even when my air conditioner is on full blast because I am worried how my day at work will be. While there have been no job cuts in my office, the environment has suddenly become very hostile. It is as if the organisation is forcing us to resign," says a communication professional in her thirties.

With her old parents dependent on her, Rithika can't afford to lose her job especially after a medical emergency wiped out all her savings.

Psychiatrists say there is a universal presence of anxiety due to COVID-19, but certain categories of people are highly vulnerable. The first category involves those dealing with poverty and unemployment and the second category includes those with psycho-social issues such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, etc. There is also a small minority of people



**Listening ear:** Empathy is the key ingredient when helping those suffering from mental health issues. • R. RAVINDRAN

ing help, this will have a long term impact. There are fissures in our society on religious lines as well as caste and gender, and if these widen there will be a long-term impact on us as a community."

**Multi-pronged approach**  
Mental health issues will not be solved merely by counselling, but through a multi-dimensional approach that includes financial support. This will help solve the real problems facing the people today, the doctor says.

The real problems are hunger, shelter and clothing, explains Soumitra Pathare, consultant psychiatrist and Director of Centre for Mental Health Law and Policy at ILS Law College in Pune. He also emphasises on devising a policy without any delay, including one to prevent suicides.

The senior doctor recommends that policymakers ensure that relief services are delivered with empathy. "Whoever is providing help to people must ensure that people's dignity is not challenged. If they get humiliated through this process of seek-

ing to see definitely. Now is the time to put suicide prevention strategies in place."

A study conducted by Oxford University researcher Aaron Reeves, and published in *The Lancet* in 2012, estimated that the U.S. had suffered 4,750 "excess suicide deaths" after the recession hit in 2008. Some studies have found that suicides are four times higher among men as they feel "greater pressure and shame" due to financial problems. But the majority of suicides were found to be among those who already suffered from depression.

Experts warn that the relationship between the COVID-19 and mental health problems are "bi-directional": such illnesses are not merely consequences of the pandemic but an inability to deal with them can lead to the spread of COVID-19 infection.

(Helpline for suicide prevention: Sanjivini, Society for Mental Health, OII-40769002, Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m. - 7.30 p.m.)

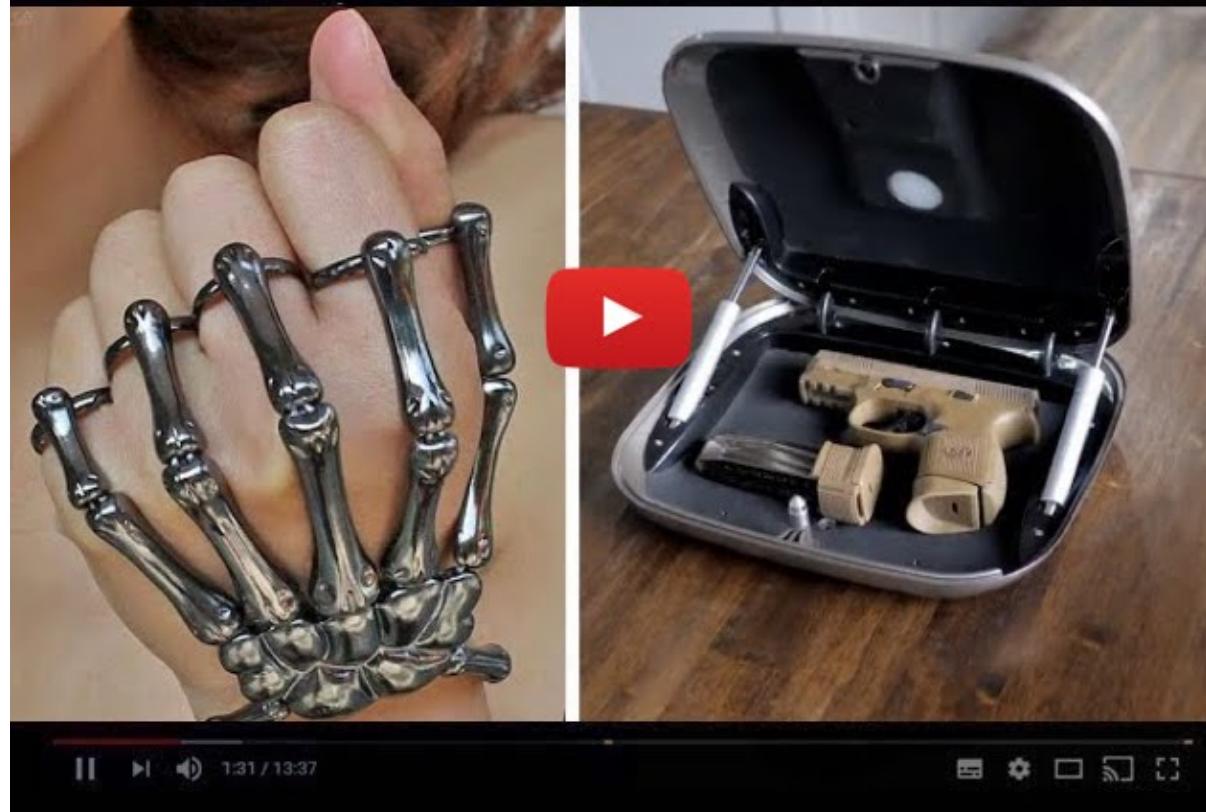
## Norm for tests for pregnant women

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Pregnant women residing in clusters/containment areas or in large migration gatherings/evacuee centres in hotspot districts and presenting in labour or likely to deliver in five days should be tested even if asymptomatic.

Releasing a new guideline, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) noted that asymptomatic pregnant women should be tested in the health facilities where they were expected to deliver and all arrangements should be made to collect and transfer samples to the testing facilities. Women should not be referred for lack of testing facility, ICMR said.

## Now the video will play in Newspaper



## Maruti's Manesar plant gets green light for operations

However, a decision to resume production is yet to be taken, says company spokesperson

ASHOK KUMAR  
GURUGRAM

Exactly a month after Maruti Suzuki India Ltd. shut down production and office operations across Haryana on March 22, its Manesar plant has been given permission to resume operations in a single shift with restricted number of staff and vehicles.

The company's spokesperson, however, said the decision to resume production had not been taken yet.

The certificate to resume operations said the "authorised strength" of the company during the lockdown period would be 4,696 persons and 50 vehicles and it could run a single shift. However, it later said the application was recommended for permission to operate for 600 employees.

Additional Chief Secretary V.S. Kundu told *The Hindu* that the company could resume operations after they

put in place measures for social distancing and safe management of the workers. He said it depended on the company as to how long they took to prepare their premises for it.

The company spokesperson said no decision was taken on the resumption of production because the Gurugram and Manesar plants were interlinked and the permission was not granted for the former. The company

could also not function in isolation without its vendors.

There was confusion over the number of staff members allowed as well, since different numbers were quoted, and "our team was in talks with the government on this and other related issues," he said.

In a press statement on March 22, the company announced the shutting down of its all private and corporate establishments till further

orders. Manesar Industries Welfare Association vice-president Manmohan Gaind welcomed the grant of permission to Maruti Suzuki, but added that the administration was slow in clearing applications by the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises seeking to resume operations.

He said around 500 applications were pending with the administration and they should be disposed of fast.

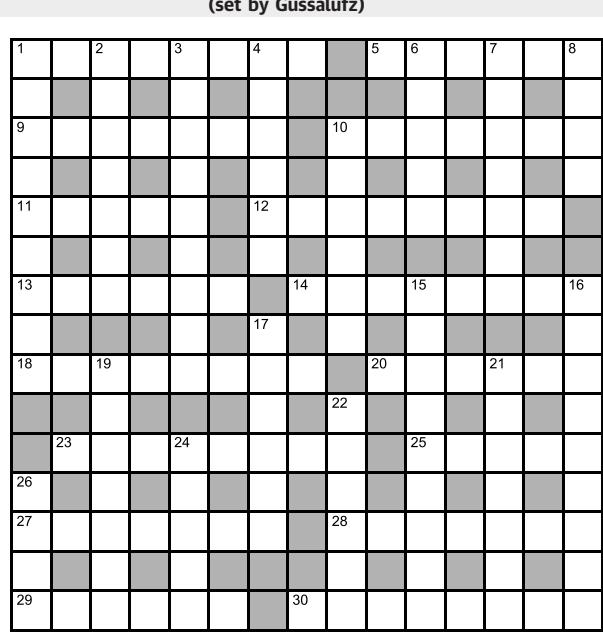
- 13 Vicious, horrible flu is going around, partner! (6)
- 14 Creatures love going to a small stream to break wind (8)
- 15 A key partner refusing to yield to pressure? Progress seems difficult in this situation (8)
- 20 Loot locomotive, dropping rupees in bag (6)
- 23 "Srinagar Ban": Zoya's filmed pulse! (8)
- 25 "Revert properly but briefly, please!" (5)
- 27 Shrink starts to appreciate the repercussions of psychosis haunting you (7)
- 28 Chap with a shirt showing a creature (7)
- 29 Bad mood contributes to retreat by fine creature (6)
- 30 I'd somehow lessen unemployment (8)

### ■ DOWN

- 1 Turned to invest in dead organization (9)
- 2 Reverend's request to honour a Star Wars star creature (7)
- 3 Dummy's useless without my blank spades king unblocking, for starters (9)
- 4 Last piece of pashka confiscated by waving gun? Yes, in Russia – some country! (6)
- 6 Chance, in the end, leads to rare triumph, after gangster gets warning (5)
- 7 To a male cooking breakfast: ... (7)
- 8 See, Carwardine, pancakes + syrup = yummy, ultimately! (4)
- 10 Choose to cycle while wearing a formal accessory? Go quietly! (6)
- 15 Mail can be sorted for uneven distribution (9)
- 16 Under anaesthesia – injured lens in eye over the weekend (9)
- 17 Drop outlined using pen that is thin (6)
- 19 She's fainted as well? Bet – is one of these wild Beatles fans? (7)
- 21 Turning feet up, man shows he has lost a toe, unfortunately (7)
- 22 Hopeless revolutionary protest after act (6)
- 24 Woman, perhaps getting imp. limits included in dream platform (5)
- 26 Score that my bad cricket regularly produces? (4)

## TH CROSSWORD + 12917

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### ACROSS

- 1 Commercial retreat swept back dirt to end matter (8)
- 5 In abundance in Senegal or Egypt? (6)
- 9 Mildew nearly spoiled mother's jam (7)
- 10 Fruits and leaves may be placed underneath this entree to promote selection (7)
- 11 Spirit of the ones cycling? (5)
- 12 Dispute totals involving online seconds (8)

## SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Solution to puzzle 12916

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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CRISIL. The main wheat producing areas of Punjab and Haryana had not yet begun harvesting during this period.



**Labour lost:** Litchi farmers anticipate huge losses due to the ongoing lockdown as the supply chain will be disrupted during the peak season. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

## Lockdown leaves Bihar's litchi growers in the lurch

No buyers for the crop with just weeks left for peak season

AMARNATH TEWARY  
PATNA

The prolonged lockdown to contain the COVID-19 pandemic has put Bihar's more than 45,000 litchi farmers in a bind as they stare at imminent losses amounting to almost ₹1,000 crore this year. Bihar, especially Muzaffarpur district, accounts for almost 40% of the total litchi production in the country.

"Last year our litchi business was severely hit by rumours that its consumption leads to encephalitis," litchi farmer Bhola Nath Jha told *The Hindu* over telephone. "And this year, the prolonged lockdown is threatening huge losses for us...we appeal to the government to look at our problem immediately," he added. Mr. Jha owns several large litchi orchards with 600 trees in north Bihar's Muzaffarpur district. He estimates that the losses to the State's litchi farmers this year would likely amount to not less than ₹1,000 crore. Litchi is grown on more than 32,000 hectares of land in the State

with annual production totalling to about 0.30 million metric tonnes.

Normally, by this time of the year, the litchi traders, middlemen and agents from major cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Ludhiana, Uttar Pradesh, Bengaluru and Nepal would have come to Muzaffarpur ahead of the plucking season to tie up produce from litchi orchards with local farmers while paying money in advance. "But, due to the lockdown no one has come yet and our fruits are about to ripen in the next 20-25 days," said Bachha Singh, president of the Bihar Litchi Growers Association.

And the marginal farmers of litchi are an even more worried lot. "The big farmers can somehow survive the lockdown, but for us it will be a hard hit," said Surendra Singh, a farmer with an anchor in the Bochaha block. "We cannot sell the fruit on carts," he added. The other problem for the growers is the lack of availability of wooden boxes in which the fruit is packed for export. "The sawmills are all closed," rued Mr. Jha.

## Poor prices for rabi crops at markets bode ill for farmers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Arrivals of wheat, mustard and other major rabi crops at markets during the first two weeks of April were more than 90% lower than during the corresponding period last year, according to an analysis by research and ratings agency CRISIL.

However, increase in the prices have not been very high. Fruit farmers have been hit the hardest with prices down 9%, despite 85% fall in arrivals.

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the rabi or winter season harvest has been brutal, despite government efforts to facilitate agricultural activities. The CRISIL research showed that only one lakh tonnes of major rabi crops – wheat, gram, rapeseed and mustard – arrived in *mandis* between April 1 to 12, 98% less than the 51 lakh tonnes that arrived in *mandis* during the same period in 2019.

"While there are four primary reasons for this – delayed rabi harvest, labour shortage, lack of transport, and reduced *mandi* operations – grains are also said to be hoarded by farmers/traders to be sold at a later date when *mandi* operations and logistics normalise," said

Mandi prices for these crops were about 29% higher than the previous year. "Going forward, bumper crop output, lower industrial demand and limited exports [will] exert downward pressure on wheat prices," said the analysis.

The arrivals of pulses and oilseeds were also 93% lower than the previous year, while prices were 28% higher. The situation is slightly better with regard to winter paddy and coarse grains with a 68% drop in arrivals. However, prices are also down about 2%, due to a drop in demand for coarse grains.

## FAITH

### Dangers of desires

Everyone has desires, and desires can lead to misery. The story of Yayati shows us that even the old have inappropriate desires, said Kidambi Narayanan in a discourse. Yayati was worried that he was ageing. Ageing is a natural process and a right-thinking person would not worry over something like this. But Yayati was concerned about his age. He wanted to enjoy the pleasures of youth. So, he asked his sons to exchange their youth with his (Yayati's) old age. One after other, his sons refused to heed him.

But one of his sons,

# Meet the SCENE STEALERS

Lockdown should not deter you from marvelling at inspiring locales. Here are five foreign films that coupled with captivating plots take you across continents in under 150 minutes



**Chungking Express** (Cantonese/Mandarin)

Crowded streets rapturous with activity, brightly-lit neon lights, fast food joints and a swarm of people are the images that cross your mind when you think of Hong Kong as a potential travel destination. This romantic drama captures the hustle-bustle culture of the city, which, according to director Wong Kar-wai, was done on purpose. Narrated in a non-linear fashion, *Chungking Express* tells two stories dealing with two police officers and their romantic encounters, stitched together as one movie. The characters wander around the happening streets of Lan Kwai Fong and have a meal at the popular fast food joint, Midnight Express, which forms a dominant part of the storytelling.

Lan Kwai Fong is one of the busiest places and is known as the heart of Hong Kong; it houses fast food joints, fancy restaurants, bars, and the place is synonymous with nightlife. Kwun Yam Temple, HK Accidental Art Tour and Hong Kong Walking Tour are a few suggestions. If you want to get the real taste of Hong Kong food and its culture, you know what is the first stop. Of course, never miss an opportunity to taste Dim Sum.

SRIVATSAN S

Making travel plans may not be advisable at the moment, especially at a time when taking a trip to the grocery store and avoiding human contact are deemed significant accomplishments. But here is what you can do: watch movies set in scenic locations and marvel at the beauty. Here is a list of five non-English travel movies that might perhaps help you create your itinerary as soon as the pandemic ends.



**Certified Copy** (French/Italian)

*Certified Copy*, starring the French icon Juliette Binoche, is a solid entry point to the subliminal works of the Iranian auteur Abbas Kiarostami. The French drama is a melancholic meditation of art, its authenticity and gender politics among other things. The plot is deceptively simple: a British author arrives in Italy to hold a press conference on the launch of his latest book, ironically titled *Certified Copy*, where he meets She (the unnamed character played by Binoche), a single mother who runs an art gallery and who is a fan of his work. They flirt, argue and debate endlessly – all over art. They walk through the streets of Cortona, Tuscany, drive through the vineyards of Lucignano, rummaging through memories, and visit the famous MuseoComune di Lucignano, where they chance upon an 18th-Century painting which was believed to be an original for over 200 years. But here is the twist: what starts off as an innocent meet-cute date between two strangers turns into a heated argument as the couple behave as though they have been married for years, dissolving the lines of reality and fiction. The museum of Lucignano has become a major tourist attraction for The Golden Tree aka The Tree of Love, an ornamental Gothic jewellery crafted between 1350 and 1471, considered to be one of the greatest masterpieces of Italian goldsmiths, Ugolino da Vieri and Gabriello D'Antonio. The Tree is believed to bring luck to lovers, according to their culture. If you are planning a holiday to Italy, do check out these places where the movie was shot: Piazza Della Repubblica, Florence, Albergo Osteria Da Toto, Venice and Frazione Pieve Vecchia, Toscana.



**Amelie** (French)

This light-hearted fantasy drama directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet stood out for its distinctive use of colours and has since become a must-watch for every aspiring cinematographer. The movie follows the life of the titular character, a loner-waitress. She works at the now-famous Cafe des 2 Moulins in Montmartre, Paris. One day, Amelie decides to live others' lives, bringing the much-needed joy to their otherwise mundane lives. What follows next is a rollercoaster ride and a mini cultural trip to Paris as we hop on Amelie's shoulders and join her entourage. We take multiple stops to marvel at the beauty of Notre-Dame de Paris, a medieval Catholic cathedral, which, according to reports, draws over 13 million visitors a year. The cathedral was severely damaged in a fire that broke out last year and efforts are currently on to restore the 800-year-old landmark. The bustling Abbesses Metro Station, a warm evening by the riverside of Saint-Martin canal, and the quiet streets of Rue Saint-Vincent opposite Montmartre's vineyards are some of the other places to look out for.



**Portrait of a Lady on Fire** (French)

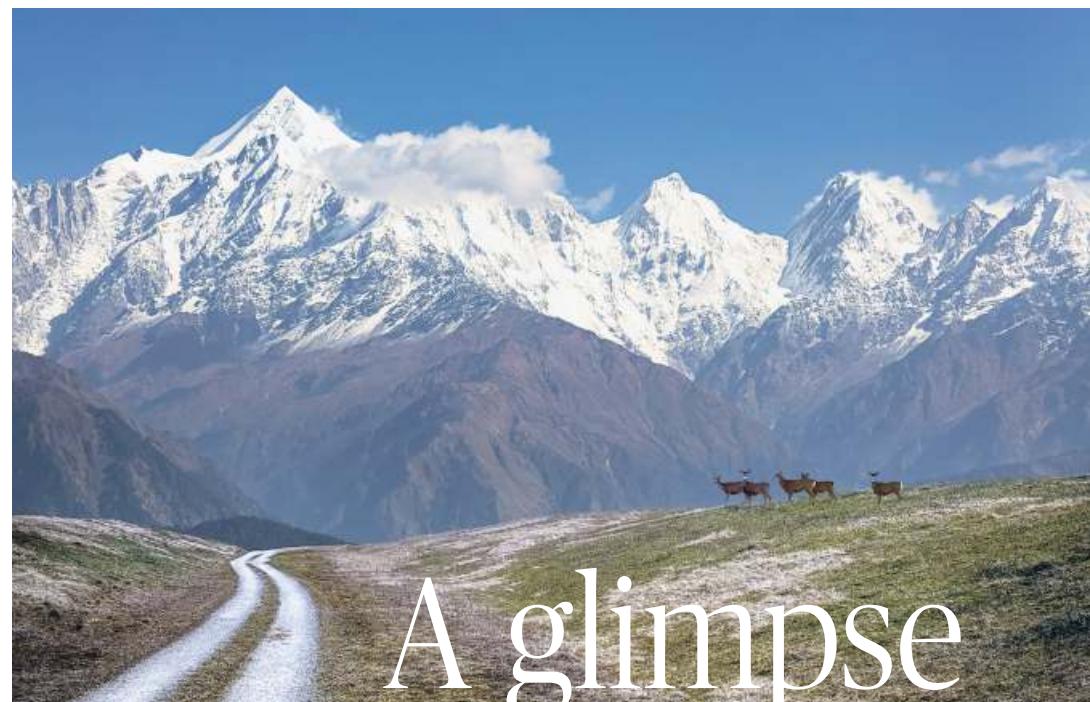
The waves come crashing at the bay of Quiberon, as Marianne (Noémie Merlant) and Héloïse (Adèle Haenel) take a quiet stroll by the shore in their second meeting, seeking comfort in each other's existence. With the lush of the sea and two beautiful actors in the foreground, the scene, if anything, has a painterly nature to it. For a similar portrait, you will have to head to the mesmerising peninsula of Saint-Pierre-Quiberon in Brittany, France. At Saint-Pierre-Quiberon, you can indulge in a sea of activities including diving, kite surfing, sea kayaking and hiking trails by the sea.

Set in 18th-Century Brittany, the film is a gorgeously-shot lesbian love story that explores the relationship of an artist (Marianne) and her subject (Héloïse). Director Céline Sciamma employs land and sea as metaphors to get into the emotional state of her characters. Much of the film's portion was filmed at the castle of La Chapelle-Gauthier in the town of Seine-et-Marne in France, which has been recognised as a historic monument since it was constructed as far back as the 17th Century. La Chapelle-Gauthier has now become more popular, thanks to *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* and its subsequent award at the Cannes Film Festival last year.



**Burning** (Korean)

Filmmaker Lee Chang-dong captures the vast expanse of South Korea, offering a rich look into the twin worlds his characters inhabit – the lively, urbanised lanes of Paju and its rural neighbourhood. Based on the short story *Barn Burning* by Haruki Murakami, the movie is both drama and thriller, and examines the lives of three central characters, Jong-su, Hae-mi and Ben. They share a meal together at one of South Korea's famous restaurants, Gopchang Jeongol Restaurant, and spend a chilly evening on the outskirts of Paju and near the border of North Korea, where Jong-su lives. The dynamics change when Hae-mi disappears one day and Jong-su begins to suspect Ben. If you have decided on Paju as your next travel destination, after having watched *Burning*, make sure you visit Provence Village, Heyri Art Village, Soulone Botanical Garden and Sanmeoru Farm.



## A glimpse of eternal snows

Nestled in the Uttarakhand Himalayas, Parvada, rich in heritage and culture, is a spot for uninterrupted star-gazing

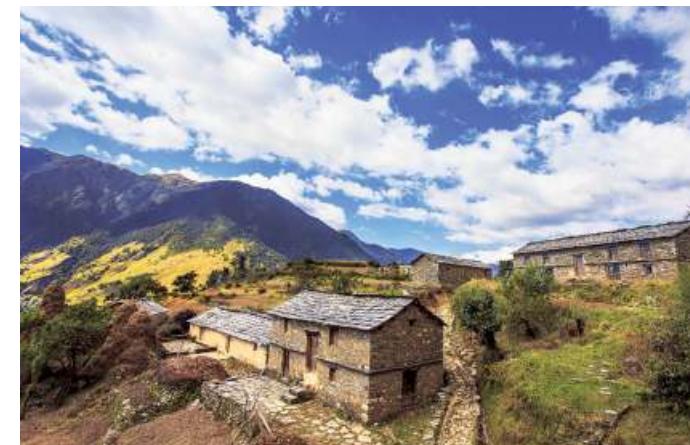
I had booked my stay at Parvada Bungalows, in Parvada, for three days. It was post-3 pm when I checked in, but it was not too late for a fresh glass of rhododendron juice and a wholesome Pahadi meal. The highlights were *bhaang-jeere ki chutney* (hempseed and cumin paste), *bhat* lentil, brinjal *bharta*, cucumber yoghurt and *jhangore ka kheer* (barnyard millet pudding). After the hearty meal, I could have easily fallen asleep but the views of the mountain-smothered village and the forests from my room were winsome.

"The summers are windy in the day and chilly in the night, winter temperatures hover between 5°C and -8°C. And the village received unpredictable snow in February," he added.



the home-stay. She directed me towards the "shroth", a natural source of water which was used for drinking and agriculture. "While potato is grown in abundance, the villagers grow a lot of peach, pears, apples, apricots, plum and walnuts," she said. We reached a

**Moving mountains** (Left and below) Snapshots of Uttarakhand; (bottom) Parvada Bungalows • GETTY IMAGES/STOCK AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



stream where the locals perform Ganesh Visarjan. Before I could head for the upper reaches, it began to rain and I had to forgo the bonfire and snuggle into bed.

The next morning, I spotted a number of birds like the blue jay, Rufous treepie, warbler, and the Himalayan bulbul. Girls in school uniforms were carrying plates full of rice, jaggery and flowers for the festival called Phool Dei, that takes place mid-March. The children extend good wishes to their neighbours by offering them flowers at their door. At the end of the festival, the neighbours pamper the kids with gifts.

### Bear haven

On the second day, I visited Bhalu-gaad waterfalls. After a drive of 45 minutes, a hike of 1.5 kilometres through stones, streams and bridges took me to the gorgeous falls. This place was opened for tourists a few years ago. In the evening, three local boys came to sing around the bonfire. They had formed a group of more than 40 people, from the nearby villages and aimed at reviving their local music and songs. In the near future, they plan to open a studio in Bhatelia.

The next day I headed out towards Jageshwar Dham temple near Binsar valley. The day was bright and on the way I had clear views of the Shivalik ranges.

Amidst the dense deodar trees, the complex of more than hundred 12th-Century stone temples at Jageshwar made for a lovely sight. Jageshwar has a lot of religious appeal for Hindus being the eighth *jyotirling*. I also visited the Archaeological Museum, a treasure house of 160 rare sculptures, ranging from the 8th-16th Centuries, collected from Jageshwar, Kuber and Dandeshwar temples.

I was back in Parvada to meet women from the village's SEAKHO group, which teaches local women knitting and crafting, who had come to the home-stay to display their hand-made shawls, caps, stoles, socks, infinity scarves and more. In the evening, Trilok drove me to the Mukteshwar temple and guided me to the purple-pinkish sunset view at Chauli Ki Jaali. That night was about great food and star gazing. On the last day, I attended a yoga class under the guidance of a local teacher. Later in the afternoon, I left by train for Delhi thinking about this village where I had lost a piece of my heart.



## Calling wildlife enthusiasts

Children and adults, especially wildlife enthusiasts, have something to add to their lockdown list of things to do apart from online school classes or working from home. The Kruger National Park in South Africa is doing two game drives a day (morning and evening), which are live-streamed on YouTube. Questions that pop up are answered by the game rangers. On YouTube, check out the 'WildEarth' channel for live sessions at 9.30 am and 7 pm IST, or tune in at your convenience as the videos are available on the channel's feed. The WildEarth sunrise safari on April 13, 2020, has garnered more than 1,11,576 views. Some of these safaris throw up surprises. For instance, during a trip, the wild rangers discovered a hyena who has pups barely three or four days old!



## Fiaker for food delivery

Under COVID-19 lockdown, horse-drawn carriages are delivering meals to those most at risk during the pandemic – the elderly and medical care workers in Vienna. The horse carriages called 'fiaker', derived from the French term 'fiacre', are a tourist attraction and bowler-hatted drivers offer visitors tours of the city centre in normal times. With Austria now under lockdown, there are no tourists. However, the horses need to move around, and hence, three fiaker drivers joined the effort to deliver 250 to 300 meals a day, according to a Reuters report, prepared by InterContinental Vienna hotel, which now has no guests.

IN OUR BACKYARD



ABHISHEK GULSHAN

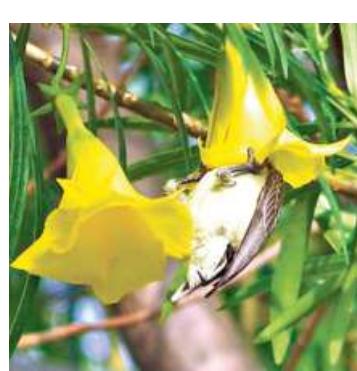
Maya Angelou, an American poet, singer, and civil rights activist once said, "A bird doesn't sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song."

I am sure you've often heard a sweet, loud and strident t-k-t-k-t-k che-wing, che-wing che-wing mostly accompanied by a crackling rattle around your house. When you stepped out onto your balcony perhaps you couldn't see who was making the sound. That's because the Purple Sunbird is tiny. Many confuse this with a hummingbird, which doesn't live in India.

The Purple Sunbird (*Cinnyris asiaticus*) flits about all around the year, not as clearly visible as its song identifiable. Come spring, March or April, breeding season begins, and you'll see the plumage of the males transform into a beautiful dark purple with a metallic purplish-to-green-blue head, mantle, and breast – which can sometimes have a maroon shine. It'll turn back to its original colour approximately by June, once the breeding season ends, with blackish-blue upperparts and yellow underparts, a metallic blue shoulder patch with a glossy bluish-black central band running down from the throat all the way till the abdominal area.

## The bright side of life

Listen for the Purple Sunbird, one of the most common and most beautiful birds in Delhi's urban gardens



**Myriad avatars** (Top) The Purple Sunbird; a female drinking nectar from a yellow oleander flower

■ WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/IMRAN SHAH/ACHAT

around flowers like hummingbirds do, to sip on their nectar, helpful in pollinating these trees. They'll usually perch themselves near the base of the flower.

Their diet is nectar-rich, but they may swoop down to pick up insects in flight, feeding on spiders, stealing their web silk to build their own nests. Their size does not deter them from joining other bird species in raucously mobbing predators. In order to woo the females, the males flutter their wings and sing. The bond between the male and female is strong and males do assist in feeding the chicks but the females have a more extensive involvement as only they incubate the eggs.

The nests are usually suspended from branches of thorny plants (a defence mechanism to safeguard the nest), but considering the commonness of this bird in urban settlements, we see them making optimum use of wires and other manmade things for nesting quite frequently. They may even choose an indoor space, in places that are not frequented.

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

## Security RISK

How guards in medical facilities and residential complexes in Delhi are working through the lockdown, to keep us safe

MADHUR TANKHA

An invisible enemy is a difficult entity to guard against, especially if it's your job to ensure the safety of others. Guards in medical facilities and residential complexes commute to work daily, bereft of public transport, and work through the heat, to ensure that people without masks don't enter, and when they do, they sanitise their hands.

**Mukesh Sharma, 31, AIIMS**

Mukesh Sharma reaches his security room at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi, by trudging from home about a kilometer or two away. He lives alone, in Kotla Mubarakpur, a congested low income settlement, preparing his lunch before stepping out at 6 a.m.

He goes about his job of checking each person who enters the hospital with a digital thermometer. Some come maskless. Every day, he knows that he is putting his life in danger - he's very likely to come into contact with those who have the COVID-19 virus. So he's cautious.

"If one helps others, then others will help you. Our heroic doctors, nurses, and para medical staff are all working hard. If I leave them at this crucial juncture, then they will be demoralised. We have to get rid of the virus from the county, even if that means somebody, including me, has to sacrifice his life," says Mukesh, who is an employee with Security and Intelligence Services, an agency that posts guards at various locations.

"Every day five to seven



people come for testing," he says, with his N95 mask and gloves on. "We wash and dry masks daily, and every mask has a number."

**Hiramani Deorari, 44, Ekta Gardens, I. P. Extension**

Hiramani Deorari, who mans a 256-house complex in I. P. Extension, says "If a non-resident comes to the gate we ask him to make a call to the resident and cross-check on the intercom. We check the temperature of healthcare workers who come to provide services to seniors. If they have a temperature, we politely turn them away." He says the families keep him going with their positive attitude and by following the rules of physical distancing and mask-wearing fairly easily, despite the fact that the markets are closed and there is no house help.



**Sattee, 40, Sarvapriya Vihar**

Sattee, comes from Mandigram near Chhattarpur daily by scooter. He says he sits out in the open, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. since there is no guard room. If people visit, "We call residents from the gates. We have been given Dettol soap and a mask. I prefer using a handkerchief, as a mask needs is more problematic to wash. People are still ordering pizza," he says, puzzled as to why people would want to increase their risk.

**Guarding angels** (Top)

Mukesh Sharma, Hiramani Deorari

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

POOCH CAFE



### BLANG BLANG BLANG

PEANUTS



HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



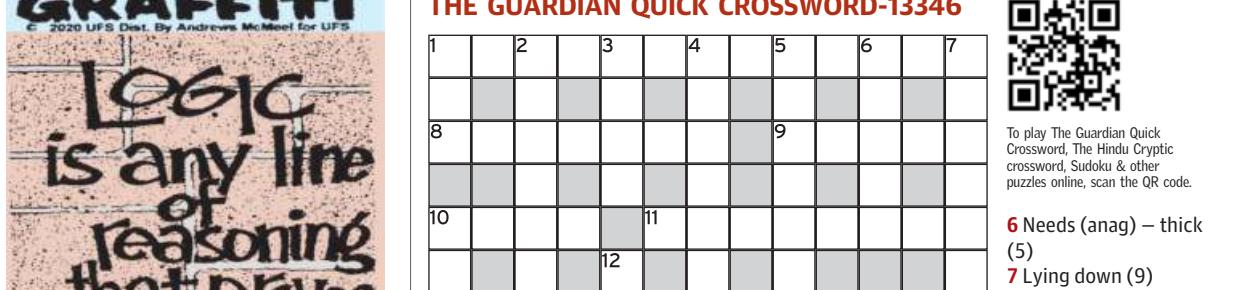
CALVIN AND HOBBES



TIGER



GRAFFITI



WUMO



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WHAT'S THE BENEFIT OF DANDELION ROOT?  
It's thought a highlight of all parts of dandelion has long been a part of traditional medicine as an appetitive stimulant, a digestive aid and laxative.

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THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13346

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

6 Needs (anag) – thick (5)

7 Lying down (9)

10 Ancient city on the Sea of Marmara (9)

12 Long bitter row (8)

15 Removed contents (7)

16 Dodged (6)

18 John Buchan used 39 of them (5)

20 Circle of light around the moon (4)

23 Sticky black stuff (3)

The solution will appear on April 25, 2020.

Solution No. 13345

PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



O	D	A	S
E	X	T	R
M	Y	P	A
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G	O	U	U
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# Trump set to sign immigration order

'Decision to suspend issuance of green cards will help put unemployed Americans first in line for jobs'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump confirmed he would sign an order later on Wednesday partially blocking immigration to the U.S., in a move he argues would protect workers from the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. Immigration is a key issue for Mr. Trump's conservative base, which he is keen to energise ahead of the November election.

"I will be signing my Executive Order prohibiting immigration into our Country today," he said in a tweet.

The President said on



**Pushed back:** Mexican immigrants in Ciudad Juarez on Tuesday after they were deported from the U.S. ■ REUTERS

attention away from Mr. Trump's failure to stop the spread of the coronavirus and save lives".

The Supreme Court has in recent months offered several significant victories to the Trump administration on immigration.

A month ago, the court allowed the federal government to maintain a policy that will send more than 60,000 asylum seekers back to Mexico.

Mr. Trump added in his tweet on Tuesday that "even without this order, our Southern Border, aided substantially by the 170 miles of new Border Wall & 27,000 Mexican soldiers, is very tight".

Mr. Trump's administration is keen to get America back to work and has said there are enough coronavirus tests for each State to move to "phase one" of a gradual reopening, ending some stay-at-home restrictions.

But several State Governors have complained of a lack of testing capacity and a fear of sparking a fresh surge in infections.

## Second wave in U.S. may be worse, says CDC chief

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
WASHINGTON

A second wave of the novel coronavirus in the U.S. could be even more destructive because it will likely collide with the beginning of flu season, one of the country's top health officials said on Tuesday.

Robert Redfield, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), called on Americans to use the coming months to prepare – and get their flu shots.

"There's a possibility that the assault of the virus on our nation next winter will actually be even more difficult than the one we just went through," he was quoted as saying in an interview with *The Washington Post* published late Tuesday.

"We're going to have the flu epidemic and the coronavirus epidemic at the

same time," he said.

The U.S. has recorded at least 8,26,250 confirmed cases of COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic, according to a tally from Johns Hopkins University, with 45,150 deaths – the most reported of any country.

### Flu season

Mr. Redfield said the virus arrived in the U.S. just as regular flu season – which itself can strain healthcare systems – was waning.

If the two diseases had peaked at the same time, he told *The Post*, "it could have been really, really, really, really difficult" for health systems to cope.

Getting a flu shot ahead of next flu season, he said, "may allow there to be a hospital bed available for your mother or grandmother that may get coronavirus".

## Germany to test vaccine

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
BERLIN

Germany has authorised its first clinical test of a vaccine for the novel coronavirus, the country's regulatory body said on Wednesday, green-lighting trials on human volunteers for an RNA vaccine developed by German firm Biontech and U.S. giant Pfizer. "The Paul-Ehrlich-Institute... has authorised the first clinical trial of a vaccine against COVID-19 in Germany," said the regulatory body PEI. The trial, only the fourth to have been authorised, was a "significant step" in making a vaccine available, the institute added.

## Missouri sues Chinese leaders

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
WASHINGTON

The U.S. State of Missouri has sued China's leadership over the coronavirus, prompting an angry rebuke from Beijing Wednesday over the "absurd" claim. Missouri is seeking damages over what it described as deliberate deception and insufficient action to stop the pandemic. The state lawsuit comes amid calls in Congress to punish China. Missouri – led by the Republican Party – filed a lawsuit in a federal court seeking damages and an injunction on continuing actions by China that are alleged to include hoarding of protective equipment.

# Amid pandemic crisis, President returns to his favourite agenda

Immigration is a hot issue among Trump supporters

STANLY JOHNY

With his decision to temporarily suspend issuance of green cards, U.S. President Donald Trump has taken his administration's war on immigration to the next level. The Republican President said it's needed to protect American jobs at a time when the unemployment crisis in the U.S. is worsening amid the COVID-19 pandemic.



A traffic sign on the U.S.-Mexico border. ■ REUTERS

2019, the U.S. had issued about 5,77,000 green cards.

### Rationale behind ban

About 22 million Americans lost jobs over the past month as the pandemic has devastated the economy. "By pausing immigration, we will help put unemployed Americans first in line for jobs as America reopens. So important," said the President, explaining the rationale behind his decision.

### NEWS ANALYSIS

Administration officials painted the move as a healthcare emergency step. National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien said on Tuesday, before Mr. Trump's briefing, that the President's decision was to protect the American people's health.

### Political calculations

The administration has already restricted immigration to the U.S. in the wake of the pandemic. It has barred travel to the U.S. from China and much of Europe and sealed off the land borders with Canada and Mexico for non-essential travel. In March, the State Department suspended visa

processing at its Consulates and Embassies overseas, which has practically brought issuance of new visas to a halt. Illegal immigrants being apprehended on the country's southern border are being sent back.

The administration has also announced visa sanctions on countries that do not take back their citizens being deported from the U.S. With the new move, Mr. Trump has not only tightened his immigration policy but also sent the boldest message yet to his support base that the President is committed to crack down on both legal and illegal immigration, a hot issue among the conservative and right-wing voters.

It also gels with Mr. Trump's strategy of building counternarratives to the mounting criticisms of his administration's handling of the virus crisis. The U.S. has the most number of confirmed infections – 8,26,250 cases so far and rising. The country has also seen at least 45,150 deaths.

Mr. Trump faces criticism for failing in moving fast in containing the outbreak in the early days and in mobilising resources to fight its spread. But he has rebounded such criticism and blamed China and WHO for the crisis. He first called the virus "Chinese virus" and then suspended funding for the WHO. He attacked the "stay-at-home" orders issued by State Governors and even endorsed protests organised by his supporters to end the restrictions in States.

Now, by suspending immigration, he's back to his favourite agenda in an election year in the midst of the severest economic crisis in decades.

## China tightens restrictions in Harbin as cases spiral

The northeastern city has air links with Russia

REUTERS  
BEIJING

A northeastern city of 10 million people, grappling with what is now China's biggest COVID-19 outbreak, further restricted inbound traffic on Wednesday to contain the spread of the highly contagious disease.

Harbin, the provincial capital of Heilongjiang and its biggest city, has banned entry to residential zones by non-locals and vehicles registered elsewhere, state media said. It had already ordered isolation for those arriving from outside China or key epidemic areas.

Heilongjiang has been in the forefront of China's latest efforts to identify infected citizens arriving from Russia, with which it shares a border, to curb the spread of the virus. "All confirmed cases, suspected cases, close contacts of asymptomatic people, and close contacts



**On high alert:** A checkpoint in the border city of Suifenhe, in China's northeastern Heilongjiang province. ■ AFP

of close contacts should be quarantined and tested," state media cited the city government as saying.

Harbin said this month it was ordering 28 days of quarantine for all arrivals from abroad, with two nucleic acid tests and an antibody test for each. It also set 14-day lockdowns for residents

where confirmed and asymptomatic cases are found. Harbin, which has air links with Russia, reported seven new confirmed cases on Tuesday, taking its local infections to 52.

By Tuesday, Heilongjiang reported 537 local confirmed cases, including 470 discharged from hospital.

Remittances are crucial in low and middle income

## Global remittances will see a sharp fall: WB

In India, remittances for 2020 are likely to fall by 23% to \$64 billion, it says

SIRRAM LAKSHMAN  
CHENNAI

Global remittances are projected to experience their sharpest decline in recent times – 20% – owing to migrants losing jobs and wages because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Bank Group said in a report released on Wednesday.

The pandemic and declining oil prices are likely to reduce remittances from the U.S., the U.K., and EU countries to South Asia, resulting in a projected fall of 22% in remittances to \$109 billion. This is in stark contrast to 2019 when they grew by 6.1%.

### At risk

In India, remittances for 2020 are projected to fall by 23% to \$64 billion. They grew 5.5% in the previous year to \$83 billion, the report, "COVID-19 Crisis Through a Migration Lens", said.

This is especially true at a time when households were tackling food shortages and



**Grim projection:** COVID-19 and declining oil prices are likely to reduce remittances to South Asia. ■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

countries, financing household and family expenses – such as on higher education.

As studies have shown that higher remittances improve nutritional outcomes by increasing investments in higher education, a fall in these remittances puts these outcomes at risk, warned the Bank.

Remittances are crucial in low and middle income

financing livelihood needs. "Remittances are a vital source of income for developing countries. The ongoing economic recession caused by COVID-19 is taking a severe toll on the ability to send money home and makes it all the more vital that we shorten the time to recovery for advanced economies," World Bank Group President David Malpass said in a statement.

Quick actions that make it easier to send and receive remittances can provide much-needed support to the lives of migrants and their families. These include treating remittance services as essential and making them more accessible to migrants," the brief's lead auth-

or, Dilip Ratha, said.

### Low cost

While remittance costs for some channels in South Asia are below 3% – the SDG (Sustainable Development Goal) target and South Asia has the lowest remittance costs of any region – in some corridors in South Asia, they were above 10% due to a lack of competition, regulatory concerns and low volumes.

"Quick actions that make it easier to send and receive remittances can provide much-needed support to the lives of migrants and their families. These include treating remittance services as essential and making them more accessible to migrants," the brief's lead auth-

### ELSEWHERE



**North Korean media silent on Kim's health**

SEOUL  
North Korean state media on Wednesday made no mention of leader Kim Jong-un's health or whereabouts, a day after intense international speculation over his health was sparked by media reports he was gravely ill after a cardiovascular procedure. "I just hope he's doing fine," U.S. President Donald Trump said on Tuesday. ■ REUTERS

### Taiwan leader apologises for infections on ship

TAIPEI  
Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen apologised Wednesday for "major shortcomings" within the military after a cluster of COVID-19 infections emerged on a Navy vessel that returned from a mission to Palau. So far 28 people on board the frigate *Panshi* have tested positive. ■ AFP

## Chinese media target West for its handling of virus crisis

Official news outlets used words like 'purgatory' and 'apocalypse' to describe the tragic hospital scenes in Italy and Spain

LI YUAN

Trevor Noah, the host of *The Daily Show*, has won praise on the Chinese Internet for his searing criticism of the Trump administration's mis-handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. So has Jerry Kowal, an American who makes Chinese-language videos chronicling the dire situation in New York.

China's response to the virus has its own sharp-eyed critics at home, and they have found a vastly different reception. One resident of the virus-struck city of Wuhan, who writes under the name Fang Fang, documented despair, misery and everyday life in an online diary and has endured withering attacks on social media.

The pandemic unfolded

dramatically differently in China from the way it has in the rest of the world – at least, if one believes state-run Chinese media. Chinese news outlets used words like "purgatory" and "apocalypse" to describe the tragic hospital scenes in Italy and Spain. They have run photos of British and American medical workers wearing garbage bags as protective gear.

A lot of the same miseries happened in China, but those reports were called "rumours" and censored.

For the Communist Party, keeping up a positive image for the Chinese public has long been an important part of maintaining its legitimacy. That facade was broken during the outbreak in late January and February, as dying



**A battle of perceptions:** When the U.S. and other countries bungled in their responses to the COVID-19 outbreak, China's media saw an opportunity. ■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

patients flooded hospitals and medical workers begged for protective gear on social media.

Some people started asking why the government suppressed information early on

and who should be held accountable. The death of Li Wenliang, the whistleblower doctor in Wuhan, on February 6 galvanised many Chinese people into demanding freedom

for many people in China, speech. Online sentiment became much more sceptical, and many young people openly challenged the party's message.

Then the U.S. and other countries bungled their own responses, and China's propaganda machine saw an opportunity.

**Free flow of news**  
Using the West's transparency and free flow of information, state media outlets chronicled how badly others have managed the crisis. Their message: Those countries should copy China's model. For good measure, the propaganda machine revved up its attacks on anybody who dared to question the government's handling of the pandemic.

For many people in China,

the push is working. Wielding a mix of lies and partial truths, some young people are waging online attacks against individuals and countries that contradict their belief in China's superior response.

The website of *Global Times*, a tabloid controlled by the Communist Party, added Chinese subtitles to a video from Mr. Noah's show that featured President Donald Trump and many Fox News personalities, showing how for weeks they played down the risks of the coronavirus.

The subtitled video was widely distributed by Chinese official news outlets. Many of them used the same headline: "Blood is on their hands and they should all be sued!" ■ NYTIMES

## Military satellite launched, claims Iran

This comes after threat from U.S.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
TEHRAN

Iran said it put its first military satellite into orbit Wednesday, making it an emerging "world power", as U.S. President Donald Trump issued a new threat. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps broke the news of what it said was its own satellite launch, hailing it as a milestone for the country's space programme.

"Today, we are looking at the Earth from the sky, and it is the beginning of the formation of a world power," the Guards' commander Hossein Salami said, quoted by Fars news agency.

U.S. President Donald Trump took to Twitter on Wednesday to say he had instructed the United States Navy to shoot down and destroy any and all Iranian gunboats if they harass our ships at sea". Sepahnews, the Revolutionary Guards' website, said the satellite dubbed the Nour – meaning "light" in Persian – had been launched from the Markazi desert, a vast expanse in Iran's central plateau. The satellite "orbited the Earth at 425 kilometres" above sea level, said Sepahnews.

Iranian state television aired footage of a rocket blasting off into the sky. The rocket bore the name Qassed, meaning "messenger", in what appears to be the first time Iran has used a launcher of this type.

Iranian state television aired footage of a rocket blasting off into the sky. The rocket bore the name Qassed, meaning "messenger", in what appears to be the first time Iran has used a launcher of this type.

## MARKET WATCH

	PRICE	CHANGE
Sensex	31,380	2.42
US Dollar	76.68	0.20
Brent oil	20.68	-0.96

## NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	271.90	6.70
Asian Paints	1813.00	87.00
Axis Bank	431.15	10.50
Bajaj Auto	2379.70	56.45
Bajaj Finserv	4775.75	180.70
Bajaj Finance	2148.25	48.50
Bharti Airtel	501.40	0.90
BPCL	356.70	1.45
Britannia Ind	2952.65	89.40
Cipla	587.20	-4.90
Coal India	140.70	1.70
Dr Reddys Lab	4056.80	40.40
Eicher Motors	13703.30	208.30
GAIL (India)	84.20	1.70
Grasim Ind	510.40	0.85
HCL Tech	462.40	6.70
HDFC	1664.15	-5.55
HDFC Bank	928.60	6.95
Hero MotoCorp	1887.65	60.10
Hindalco	108.30	1.20
Hind Unilever	2386.15	68.75
ICICI Bank	335.95	4.10
IndusInd Bank	415.90	15.05
Bharti Infratel	167.55	4.50
Infosys	641.85	8.65
Indian Oil Corp	83.00	0.00
ITC	182.25	2.65
JSW Steel	161.20	1.60
Kotak Bank	1152.15	22.00
L&T	852.60	-17.75
M&M	340.20	8.15
Maruti Suzuki	5180.85	179.75
Nestle India Ltd.	17642.05	626.70
NTPC	97.60	0.30
ONGC	65.35	-4.00
PowerGrid Corp	162.20	-0.45
Reliance Ind	1363.60	126.25
State Bank	188.70	3.95
Shree Cement	1921.15	388.70
Sun Pharma	474.35	1.20
Tata Motors	75.90	1.25
Tata Steel	268.35	2.40
TCS	1769.50	31.85
Tech Mahindra	518.30	5.35
Titan	951.40	14.70
UltraTech Cement	3441.15	37.90
UPL	353.65	7.70
Vedanta	76.10	-2.35
Wipro	178.55	0.50
Zee Entertainment	151.85	22.60

## EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	76.47	76.79
Euro	83.05	83.40
British Pound	94.46	94.90
Japanese Yen (100)	71.00	71.30
Chinese Yuan	10.80	10.84
Swiss Franc	78.90	79.24
Singapore Dollar	53.60	53.83
Canadian Dollar	54.07	54.30
Malaysian Ringgit	17.51	17.61
Australian Dollar	48.11	48.31

Source: Indian Bank

## IN BRIEF



## IOB's working capital loans for agriculture

CHENNAI  
Public sector lender Indian Overseas Bank (IOB) has launched an exclusive credit facility for agriculture and allied activities. Titled WCDL-Agri (working capital demand loan - agriculture), these loans will be available to all existing borrowers enjoying cash credit/OD facilities, from sectors such as agriculture, poultry, dairy, fisheries and allied activities, said the bank. Borrowers will not be charged any processing fee or pre-payment penalty.

## AITD institutes award for young IRTS officers

CHENNAI  
The Asian Institute of Transport Development (AITD) has announced an award of ₹50,000 to young IRTS officers for development and managing SETU. This platform offers an opportunity to provide transport solutions in this hour of crises. AITD, headed by K.L. Thapar, IRTS, is an institute based in Delhi working on transport issues. It has got consultative status with the UN.

## Kotak bank to raise up to ₹7,800 cr. equity capital

Uday Kotak's holding may inch lower

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI  
Private sector bank Kotak Mahindra Bank will be raising between ₹7,500 - ₹7,800 crore equity capital by issuing 6.5 crore shares, the lender informed the exchanges.

"...the board has accorded its approval for raising of capital by way of issue of equity shares, by the bank for up to 6,50,00,000 equity shares of ₹5 each, through a private placement, follow-on public offering (FPO), qualified institutions placement (QIP) or a combination [of both]," the lender said.

"At current market prices, the bank can raise anywhere between ₹7,500 crore and ₹7,800 crore, which will boost its tier-I capital by 300 bps [basis

## Facebook, Jio to work on 'major projects'

With communities around the world in lockdown, many entrepreneurs need digital tools: Zuckerberg

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg on Wednesday said that following the ₹43,574 crore investment in Jio Platforms, the two firms would work together on 'major projects' that would open up business opportunities for people in India.

In a Facebook post, Mr. Zuckerberg said, "With communities around the world in lockdown, many of these entrepreneurs need digital tools they can rely on to find and communicate with customers and grow their businesses. This is something we can help with – and that's why we're partnering with Jio to help people and businesses in India create new opportunities."

He added that India, which is home to the largest communities on Facebook and WhatsApp, and a lot of talented entrepreneurs, is in the middle of a major digital



Status update: India is in the middle of a major digital transformation, says Mark Zuckerberg. ■ M. SUBHASH

transformation, and organisations such as Jio have played a big part in getting hundreds of millions of people and small businesses online.

"This is especially important right now, because small businesses are the core of every economy and they need our support. India has more than 60 million small businesses and millions of people rely on them for jobs," he said.

The two executives of the U.S.-headquartered firm added that India was in the midst of one of the most dynamic social and economic transformations the world

had ever seen, driven by the rapid adoption of digital technologies. In just the past five years, more than 560 million people in India had gained access to the Internet.

"Facebook's goal is to enable new opportunities for businesses of all sizes, but especially for the more than 60 million small businesses across India. They account for the majority of jobs in the country, and form the heart and soul of rural and urban communities alike," they said.

Separately, Facebook's chief revenue officer David Fischer, and VP and MD, India, Ajit Mohan, said in a joint blog that the \$5.7 billion, or ₹43,574 crore, investment in Jio Platforms, makes Facebook its largest minority shareholder.

The focus of Facebook's collaboration with Jio, they added, would be creating new ways for people and businesses to operate more effectively in the growing digital economy. For instance, bringing together JioMart with the power of WhatsApp, can enable people to connect with businesses, shop and ultimately purchase products in a seamless mobile experience.

"India is a special country for us. Over the years, Facebook has invested in India to connect people and help businesses launch and grow. WhatsApp is so ingrained in Indian life that it has become a commonly used verb across many Indian languages and dialects... And Instagram has grown dramatically in India in recent years as the place where people follow their interests and passions," Mr. Fischer and Mr. Mohan said in the blog.

Noting that in less than four years Jio had brought more than 388 million people online, the Facebook executives said, "We are excited about furthering our investment in India's vibrant digital economy. Our efforts with Jio will be focussed on opening new doors and fuelling India's economic growth and the prosperity of its people. We look forward to working with Jio, and to future collaborations in India to advance this vision."



Complaints galore: SEBI received representations that current pricing guidelines are onerous for investors. ■ REUTERS

Fund-raising to get easier for stressed firms  
Preferential allotment rules relaxedSPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

Markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has made it easier for listed, stricken companies to raise money from potential investors.

SEBI has relaxed the pricing norms for preferential allotment by such companies while also exempting investors in such issuances from making open offers if they acquire a substantial stake in the listed entity.

"It has been represented that the pricing guidelines are too onerous for any financial investor to consider investments in a stressed company," stated the SEBI discussion paper.

The regulator has proposed that preferential allotment can be done at a price that is not less than the average of the weekly high and low of the volume weighted average prices of the shares during the two weeks preceding the relevant date.

The Sensex pack comprised 16 gainers with stocks such as Nestle India, IndusInd Bank, Maruti Suzuki, Hindustan Unilever and Hero Motocorp gaining between 3% and 4% each.

see massive erosion in their value. Further, the regulator has proposed that if an investor had acquired more than 25% in the company by way of preferential allotment, he will be exempted from making an open offer for further 26% shares.

However, as a safeguard, SEBI has proposed that the allotment can only be made to entities that are not part of the promoter group and the resolutions related to the allotment and the exemption from making an open offer will have to be approved by a majority of minority shareholders.

## Lock-in period

Further, the shares allotted will have a three-year lock-in period. Meanwhile, for a company to qualify as a stressed entity, it should comply with at least two of the three criteria, namely default on its payment obligations for two consecutive quarters, credit rating of listed securities downgraded to D and existence of inter-creditor agreement in terms of Reserve Bank of India (Prudential Framework for Resolution of Stressed Assets) Directions 2019 dated June 7, 2019.

## Permit retail in non-virus zones'

Sans consumption, manufacturing will be meaningless: RAI

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Retailers Association of India (RAI) has asked the government to provide the subsidy of up to 50% for payment of the salary of employees earning up to ₹25,000, 25% additional working capital credit line to pay salaries, working capital loans of three months of sales at a very low rate of interest and a moratorium of six to nine months for repayment of loans which will help in achieving normalcy in nine to 12 months.

They said all earlier loans should get a similar moratorium and GST across the

board for retail should be reduced to boost consumption and reboot the economy.

## Open shops, multiplexes

"Twenty-five million people working in the sector will be impacted if shops selling non-essential goods remain closed. If retail does not open, then manufacturing will be [hit]. Malls, shops and multiplexes must open," said B.S. Nagesh, chairman, RAI. He said RAI has come out with safety standards to be implemented across all retail units to provide safe shopping experience to customers.

## Rupee recovers after hitting fresh lows

Weak dollar, rising indices aid currency

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The rupee hit a fresh low on Wednesday but recovered later, supported by a rise in domestic equities and some weakness in the dollar.

The rupee opened weaker at 76.90 a dollar compared with the previous close of 76.83 and then touched an all-time low of 76.92. The previous all-time low was reached earlier this month when the rupee touched 76.87 to a dollar.

The rupee finally closed the day at 76.68, up 15 paise from the previous close.

The rupee closed up 742.84 points, or 2.42% higher, compared with the previous close. Currency dealers said there would be pressure on the rupee going forward as the domestic unit should breach the 77-a-

llar mark in the near term. "Despite some gains in today's session, the sentiment still remains skewed on the downside as the global economy is reeling under the impact of COVID-19 and there is no end in sight to this pandemic."

"In case the level of 77 is taken out, then rupee looks to quickly resume a down-hill move towards the 77.50 mark. On the flip side, the zone of 75.30-75.20 will act as a strong hurdle for the domestic currency," said Sugandha Sachdeva, analyst, Religare Broking.

The PPE kit includes a wrap-around gown, a cover-all, head and shoe covers, face shield, gloves and a biodegradable disposable bag.

inner layer has anti-bacterial-treated fabric, outer layer gets water-repellant treatment and the middle layer is treated with silicon.

For SS 96, the middle layer is replaced with non-woven, five-ply melt-blown composite for higher bacterial filtration efficiency.

Devadas Dhamodarawamy, chief technology officer of the firm, told *The Hindu* that the company started with a single-layer knitted mask which undergoes silver nano ion anti-bacterial treatment.

It was decided to focus on affordable and reusable, high-standard products.

Made in the garment factories of the company at six locations in Tamil Nadu, Kovalpatti, Arasanur, Cuddalore, Mayavaram, and Madurai – and supplied under its brand Supera Shield (SS), the masks come in four variants.

The PPE kit includes a wrap-around gown, a cover-all, head and shoe covers, face shield, gloves and a biodegradable disposable bag.

Supera Shield 72 is a three-layer woven fabric mask made of combed, BCI-certified organic cotton. The

# Venkat was all style, grace and ruthlessness

The complete cricketing personality turned 75 in a riveting journey that saw him donning varied roles with panache

## TRIBUTE

S. DINAKAR

CHENNAI

He is picture perfect with his flowing action when you scan through old photographs. His long mane flowing back, him classically side-on with the pivot and the hip-drive, and the ball, with serious revs, leaving his supple fingers in a manner that is timeless.

Srinivas Venkatraghavan was an amalgam of style and grace, impeccable but also ruthless on the field.

Venkat turned 75 on Tuesday and it marked an important landmark in a riveting journey that saw him donning different roles with panache and sincerity.

### Nine roles

"I thank the Lord for the opportunities he gave me and I was fortunate to have nine different roles in my career, and I enjoyed each one of them equally," said the off-spinning great in a conversation with *The Hindu*.

A member of the legendary Indian spin quartet that peaked in the 70s, Venkat al-

so captained India in a Test series in England and at two World Cups. He was, among others, an administrator, selector, manager, coach, match-referee, a part of a bio-mechanical panel, and a famous international umpire.

"I am the only one to captain one's country at Lord's and also umpire at the Mecca of cricket. I am immensely proud of that," he said.

Venkat looked back with affection and happiness at his former spin partners, Erapalli Prasanna, Bishan Bedi, and Bhagwat Chandrasekhar.

### Great bonding

"Exchanging ideas with them was wonderful. When one of us had an off-day, the other would step up. We had great bonding."

Venkat, who spun the ball sharply, was both parsimonious and attacking. There was this bite and bounce for him off the surface because of his height, high-arm action and work on the ball.

Venkat played a major role – he scalped 22, choking the run-flow and making inroads



S. Venkatraghavan.  
• PHOTO: K. PICHUMANI

**I am the only one to captain one's country at Lord's and also umpire at the Mecca of cricket. I am immensely proud of that**

– in India's sensational maiden Test series triumph in the West Indies over Garry Sobers' formidable side in 1971.

Then, Venkat performed a crucial role as a foil for an inspired Chandrasekar as India ambushed England in England for its first Test series win in the Old Blighty. Venkat gave skipper Ajit Wade-

kar control from one end, and also captured 13 wickets.

### Changed dynamics

Venkat, though, is hesitant to compare eras. "There are some fine young spinners now. The dynamics of the game has changed."

He said, "For instance, I have seen Sunil Gavaskar face some menacing West Indian fast bowlers at their peak on the quick Caribbean pitches. And when Gavaskar took on the Aussies at Perth, the pitch was real fast, not like now." He added, "Now, you cannot hold that against Sachin, because he did not get to face those bowlers on those wickets."

Similarly, Venkat wonders what Don Bradman might have accomplished had he played on covered pitches.

### Quest for perfection

Venkat's was a quest for perfection – he was outstanding at gully – in the various roles he took up. "I did not reach perfection all the time, but I tried," he said.

A complete cricketing personality Venkat certainly is. He is still only 75.



**A purist's delight:** S. Venkatraghavan played a major role in India's sensational maiden Test series triumphs in the West Indies and England. ■ THE HINDU ARCHIVES

## 'In chess, you don't have to turn a pro'

Anand had an interaction with SAI administrators



**Valuable advice:** Viswanathan Anand says children should not make a decision on a full-time career in chess till the age of 18. ■ FILE PHOTO: BIJOY GHOSH

RAKESH RAO

NEW DELHI

"I get worried if 12-13-year olds want to take up full-time chess careers. In all professions, uncertainty is very high and parents should give their children the flexibility to decide what they want to do."

The advice, from five-time World chess champion Viswanathan Anand, came during his online interaction with Sports Authority of India administrators on Wednesday.

Answering questions from Bad Soden in Germany, Anand said, "Children should not make a decision on a full-time career, in chess, till the age of 18 and till you finish your studies. In chess, you do not have to turn professional."

In response to another

question, Anand said, "Online chess has always been popular but we are hearing far more of it now because of the pandemic and the lockdown."

"However, what needs to be seen now is if we can improve the level of these online competitions. In a few weeks from now we will compete in the Online Nations Cup which will see teams from four countries and two continents participating. With technology, everything is possible now."

Speaking on the importance of fitness for chess players, Anand pointed out, "Fitness is not a problem when you are young, but it becomes a factor when you start getting older. Go for a week to a SAI facility and take up fitness with athletes from other sports."

## Anand helms strong Indian team

Kasparov to lead Europe in six-team online Nations Cup

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

NEW DELHI

Five-time World champion Viswanathan Anand is set to lead the strongest possible Indian team while former champion Garry Kasparov returns to join the elite chess players when the six-team Online Nations Cup takes place from May 5-10.

As per the announcement made by FIDE, Russia, United States, China, India, Europe and "Rest of the World" forms the field in this \$180,000 event. *Chess.com* will provide the playing platform.

Kasparov is set to captain Europe. Initially, Vladimir Kramnik was named to be "captain" of the Indian team. But the Russian clarifies his position and declines to accept the role.

World champion Magnus Carlsen, too, will not be part of this event.

**Humpy, Harika included** India's squad will comprise Anand, Vidit Gujrathi, P. Hari Krishna and B. Adhiban. Since it is mandatory to have a woman player in the team, K. Humpy and D. Harika will complete the squad. The final list of participants, from all teams, will be released shortly.

Each match will comprise four boards, including one reserved for the women. The matches will follow the rapid format – 25 minutes on the clock plus 10-second increment for ev-

ery move. After the league stage, the final will be held on May 10.

Since it is an online, cash-rich event, FIDE-appointed international arbiters will keep an eye on the players to ensure they don't get any help from an outside source.

The players' webcam, computer screen and their location will be under constant supervision.

In a statement, the FIDE President Arkady Dvorkovich said, "The reasons why an official tournament like this has to be conducted online are very unfortunate – but we are happy to see that chess is providing solace to millions of people who are under a home lockdown."

## Caruana in second spot

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

NEW DELHI

Fabiano Caruana and Ian Nepomniachtchi bounced from one-point deficits to complete 3-2 wins over Ding Liren and Maxime Vachier-Lagrave in the third round of Magnus Carlsen Invitational online chess tournament on Tuesday.

After the first two games ended in draws, Liren took the third to move within a draw of winning the best-of-four game encounter.

But Caruana, who now shares the second spot, drew level by winning the fourth. In the tie-break Ar-

mageddon game, Caruana played black and was declared the winner for denying his rival a win with white pieces.

**The results: Third round:** Fabiano Caruana (USA) bt Ding Liren 3-2; Ian Nepomniachtchi (Rus) bt Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (Fra) 3-2.

**Standings (after three rounds):** 1-2. Magnus Carlsen (Nor), Fabiano Caruana (USA) (5 points).

3-5. Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (Fra), Hikaru Nakamura (USA), Ding Liren (Chn) (4 each).

6. Ian Nepomniachtchi (Rus) (2), 7-8. Alireza Firouzja (Iri) and Anish Giri (Ned) (0 each).

## Finance expert-cum-bhajan singer raising funds for lockdown-hit artistes

Ramesh Subramanian has formed a WhatsApp group for his initiative

BISHWANATH GHOSH

KOLKATA

Ramesh Subramanian likes to call himself "Kolkatar chhele" (boy from Kolkata), having been born and raised in the Tollygunge area of the city. He moved to Chennai – then Madras – when he was 17, and today, at the age of 47, he is an expert in finance and accounting, having studied at UCLA, Harvard and Stanford.

But finance is his day job. Mr. Subramanian is also a bhajan artiste, performing 'namasankeerthanam' across India and the world for the past 28 years despite his professional commitments. Today he is doing his bit for fellow artistes, whose livelihood depends solely on performances, which now stand cancelled or postponed indefinitely due to the lockdown.

It was on his initiative that 'Naamasankeerthanam', a WhatsApp group of 65 people drawn from across the globe, decided to raise funds for full-time bhajan artistes, including vocalists, mridangam players and dholak players.

"We kept the process transparent by asking sponsors to directly transfer funds to beneficiaries."

As a result, these people are finding it difficult to run their families.

"There are about 1,000 such people, of which we have so far been able to help 80 with amounts ranging from ₹7000 to ₹10,000 each, totally disbursing about ₹7,50,000 within a span of one week starting April 2, on the auspicious day of Ram Navami," Mr. Subramanian told *The Hindu*.

**Most deserving**

"We were able to do this due to the commitments we received from over 100 people from across India, the UK and the UAE. These are people within the WhatsApp group or connected with them."

"We kept the process transparent by asking sponsors to directly transfer funds to beneficiaries."

"Albeit a logistical challenge, we chose this path to keep questions at bay. The artistes were chosen by recommendations from various quarters and cross-validated to ensure they were indeed the most deserving," he said.

"A few sponsors have already indicated that they would be willing to make donations for the month of May as well."

"We will analyse the needs and take a call on the next steps – we hope reaching out to a wider audience," Mr. Subramanian said.

To raise funds, the group formed a core team that included Shankar Hariharan, C.S. Hariharan, S. Krishnagopal, Bombay Anand, Melarcode Ravi, Palghat Karthik, Palghat Saji, Dubai Mahadevan and Palghat M.R. Ramachandran.

## JNTBGRI to play key role in sequencing of Indian species

T. NANDAKUMAR

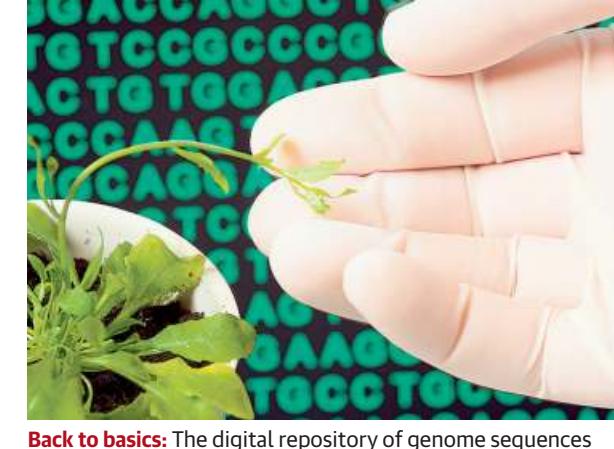
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (JNTBGRI) here is gearing up to play a key role in a nationwide project to decode the genetic information of all known species of plants and animals in the country.

The Institute has been selected as one of the Biological Knowledge and Resource Centres of the Indian Initiative on Earth BioGenome Sequencing (IEBGS). It will join hands with other premier research institutes to utilise cutting edge technologies for genome sequencing. The Union Department of Biotechnology has allotted ₹43.80 lakh for JNTBGRI to take up the project.

### 24 institutes

The whole genome sequencing of 1,000 species of plants and animals will be taken up in the initial phase of IEBGS to be completed over a period of five years at an estimated cost of ₹440 crore.



**Back to basics:** The digital repository of genome sequences will help in biodiversity conservation. ■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

The National Institute of Plant Genome Research, New Delhi is the coordinating centre for the nationwide project involving a total of 24 institutes.

JNTBGRI Director R. Prakashkumar said the project was part of the Earth BioGenome Project, an international initiative to catalogue life on the planet. "This will eventually lead to the generation of the genetic blueprint of all living forms," he said.

## BCCI looks to make inroads into ICC boardroom

AMOL KARHADKAR

MUMBAI

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) is likely to act during the COVID-19 pandemic to not only try and help smaller cricket nations stay afloat financially but also regain its clout within the International Cricket Council (ICC).

The chief executives of the ICC's full members are set to discuss the possibility of deferring the World Test Championship (WTC) and the ODI Super League during Thursday's meeting of the Chief Executives Committee (CEC).

As a result, the BCCI has been sidelined in the ICC boardroom. "If other boards are assured of a tour by the Indian team, that income coupled with the appearance money the BCCI pays every board for releasing its players for the Indian Premier League, may result in other members toeing BCCI's line in the ICC," said an observer.

Manohar's successor is scheduled to be elected during the ICC Board meeting in June but the pandemic could result in the process being delayed. If the BCCI can garner substantial votes, it can re-emerge as the kingmaker in the ICC in the post-pandemic world.

## Federer suggests merger of tours

REUTERS

PARIS

Roger Federer on Wednesday called for a merger between the ATP and WTA Tours, as tennis wades through a lengthy shutdown.

"Just wondering ... am I the only one thinking that now is the time for men's and women's tennis to be united and come together as one?" tweeted the Swiss.

"I am not talking about merging competition on the court, but merging the 2 governing bodies (ATP and WTA) that oversee the men's and women's professional tours ..."

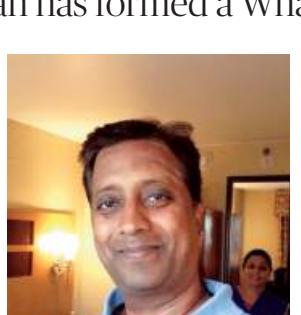
boxers wear headgear during training. The other point is without the headgear, incidents of head-butting have increased. It inflicts serious injuries on boxers."

According to Karanjeet there were favourable opinions in the meeting about the return of headgear for men.

Coming to injury management during lockdown Karanjeet said, "It is important to stay hydrated and avoid muscular cramps and spasms. The boxers should follow the coaches' advice and train accordingly while staying safe at home."

## Vijender live!

Catch India's Olympic medalist and boxing ace Vijender Singh in a live chat on *Sportstar's* Instagram handle (@Sportstarweb) on April 23 (Thursday) at 6.30 p.m. IST.



Ramesh Subramanian

CM

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