



Madhya Pradesh CM  
Shivraj Singh Chouhan  
passes floor test  
page 12



Anti-CAA protesters  
removed from Shaheen  
Bagh, other places  
page 12



Bangladesh says it will  
release jailed former  
PM Khaleda Zia  
page 15



Albert Uderzo, a creator  
of French hero Asterix,  
dies at 92  
page 15

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## NEARBY

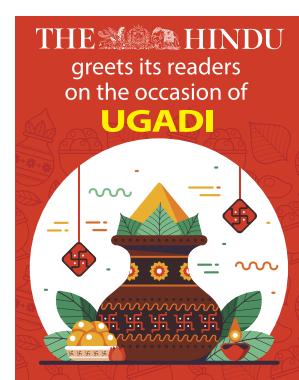


Kejriwal assures regular supply of essential items

NEW DELHI  
Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, in the wake of the 21-day nationwide lockdown announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday evening, sought to assure citizens that the supply of essential items would not be affected. Earlier in the day, he announced that the Delhi government will give ₹5,000 to each construction worker as their livelihood has been affected due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

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OPPORTUNITIES ▶ PAGE 5

## PM announces 21-day lockdown as COVID-19 toll touches 10

Govt. allots ₹15,000 crore to beef up infrastructure for treatment of patients

NISTULA HEBBAR

NEW DELHI

As the death toll from COVID-19 rose to 10, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday announced a 21-day lockdown for the entire country, stating that it was the only way for the country to break the chain of infection. The lockdown will be in effect till April 14.

In a nationwide television broadcast, Mr. Modi said the pandemic was a huge challenge to every country and even countries like the U.S. and Italy, considered to have good health infrastructure, were struggling to control the situation.

"In such a situation we have learnt from the experience of the countries that have managed to get some control over the surge in cases, and these show that a lockdown for a sustained period of time is the only way to break the chain of infection," he said.

India on Tuesday recorded 564 positive cases, with the number of positive patients in Kerala and Maharashtra crossing 100.

Stating that it was the priority of both the Centre and State governments to set up health infrastructure as fast as possible to deal with the pandemic, Mr. Modi said

### Staying in

During the "containment" period of 21 days beginning March 25, the following services...

#### ...will remain open

- Shops dealing with food, groceries, fruits and vegetables, dairy products, meat and fish and animal fodder, including ration shops
- Banks, insurance offices & ATMs
- Print and electronic media
- Telecom services (internet, cable, IT enabled services)
- Delivery of food, pharmaceuticals and medical equipment through e-commerce
- Petrol pumps, LPG, petroleum and gas retail and storage outlets
- Power and electricity services

#### COVID-19

the government had allotted ₹15,000 crore for the purchase of Personnel Protection Equipment for healthcare workers, setting up testing laboratories and quarantine centres.

"Draw a Laxman Rekha outside your house door and do not step outside of it. Stay

where you are. This will be the decisive battle against coronavirus," he said.

Sounding a note of caution, he said: "If we are not able to adhere to this lockdown sincerely for 21 days, believe me, India will go back 21 years.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 12  
MORE REPORTS ON ▶ PAGES 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15

 There is absolutely no need to panic. Essential commodities, medicines etc. would be available. Centre and various state governments will work in close coordination to ensure this. Together, we will fight COVID-19 and create a healthier India



Made in India testing kits

In a major development in the fight against novel coronavirus, Pune-based MyLab has become the first indigenous manufacturer to be approved for deploying its kits for COVID-19 testing. ▶ PAGE 9

Ensure tight surveillance, States told

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Centre warned of an "increasing trend" in COVID-19 cases – 519 active ones by Tuesday evening – in the country and called upon State governments to enhance surveillance and contact testing of those who may have been infected.

Meanwhile, complaints of shortage of Personal Protection Equipment for doctors and health workers poured in from across the country, indicating critical gaps in efforts to contain the pandemic.

In a Twitter post that soon went viral, Kamma Kakkar, a government doctor in Haryana's Rohtak, addressing the Prime Minister's Office, said: "Please don't send me to war without weapons @PMOIndia. Please arrange #PersonalProtective Equipment for us doctors ASAP. We need #N95masks #HazmatSuits to defeat #Corona. Sincerely yours, an Indian Doctor". Following the tweet, the Congress attacked the government over the inadequate supply of equipment.

Enforcing stringent curbs, cases were booked against several people for violating prohibitory orders. CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 12



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman along with MoS for Finance Anurag Thakur addressing the media on Tuesday. ▶ PTI

## Government extends tax deadlines to June 30

ATM withdrawal charges waived

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Deadlines for filing income tax and GST returns have been extended to June 30, with the interest rate on delayed payments reduced to 9% from 12%. The last date for linking Aadhaar with PAN has also been extended from March 31 to June 30.

The changes had been prompted by the shutdown of large parts of the country in a bid to control the spread of the COVID-19 viral infection, so that taxpayers were not forced to endanger their health in a bid to meet compliance requirements, she said.

Bank account holders would not be charged extra for using a debit card to withdraw money from the ATMs of other banks for the next three months, and charges for not meeting minimum balance requirements would also be waived. Bank charges for digital transactions were al-

so being reduced.

Income tax returns for the financial year 2018-19 can now be filed until June 30, with the interest rate on delayed payments reduced to 9% from 12%. The last date for linking Aadhaar with PAN has also been extended from March 31 to June 30.

The changes had been prompted by the shutdown of large parts of the country in a bid to control the spread of the COVID-19 viral infection, so that taxpayers were not forced to endanger their health in a bid to meet compliance requirements, she said.

The deadline for filing GST returns for March, April and May, as well as for opting for the composition scheme, has been extended to June 30 for smaller companies – with less than ₹5 crore aggregate annual turnover – without any interest, late fee or penalty being charged.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 12

## Omar Abdullah released after 232 days in detention +

PEERZADA ASHIQ

SRINAGAR

Former Chief Minister and National Conference (NC) vice-president Omar Abdullah, who was released on Tuesday from a Srinagar sub-jail after 232 days, demanded the release of other detainees in Jammu and Kashmir and

called for a joint fight against COVID-19.

"We face the fight of our lives over the next few weeks and months as we come to terms and work to defeat COVID-19. I will do everything in my individual capacity to help the authorities overcome this challenge and I appeal to all of you to do the same," he said.

Mr. Abdullah was detained on August 5 last ahead of the Centre's decision to revoke J&K's special status and later booked under the Public Safety Act (PSA) and kept in the Hari Niwas sub-jail. Earlier on Tuesday, J&K spokesman Ro-

hit Kansal announced that Mr. Abdullah's detention order had been revoked.

Sporting a long flowing white beard, Mr. Abdullah, who turned 50 in the jail on March 10, called for the release of other detained persons.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 12



Preparation Uninterrupted

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Tokyo Olympics moved to 2021 over virus scare

REUTERS  
TOKYO

The 2020 Tokyo Olympics, originally scheduled to be held from July 24 to August 9, has been postponed to 2021, the first such delay in the Games' 124-year modern history, as the COVID-19 crisis wrecked the last international sporting showpiece meant for this year.

Though a huge blow to Japan, which invested \$12 billion in the run-up, the decision was a relief to thousands of athletes fretting over how to train.

Pressure had been building on the International Olympic Committee and its president Thomas Bach, with some athletes and sporting bodies critical of the time taken to make a seemingly inevitable decision.

MORE REPORTS ON ▶ PAGE 17

Medical staff told to vacate their homes

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN  
NEW DELHI

Medical staff from across India working with COVID-19 patients appealed to the Union Health Ministry for help on Tuesday stating that they are being harassed, with several of them told to immediately vacate their rented accommodation by landlords because of the fear that they could spread the virus.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 2

  
Shri Narendra Modi  
Hon'ble Prime Minister

**Warm Ugadi Greetings to the people of Karnataka!**

I pray before the almighty that the beginning of Sharvari Samvatsara will bring peace and prosperity to the people of Karnataka.

Let the people of Karnataka leave the bitterness behind and carry only sweet memories with them into the New Year.

Karnataka is the land of Sharanas, Santhas, Dasas and hence, the power of evil will not succeed in this land. Thus, I believe that people of the State would overcome the evil COVID-19 and the virus would be wiped out from the state soon.

In the name of the festival, let the people not go for any outdoor celebrations together.

Once again I wish the people of the State a happy Chandramana Ugadi.

  
Shri B. S. Yediyurappa  
Hon'ble Chief Minister

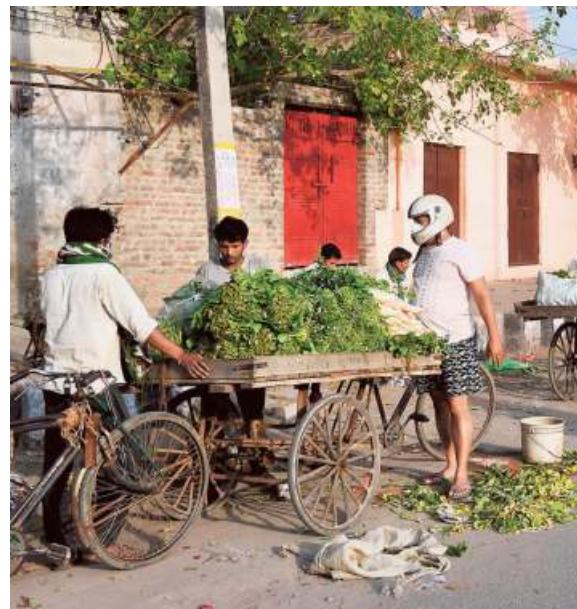


To protect and respect our varied culture and traditions - is the fundamental duty of every Citizen of our Country. Enshrined in the Constitution

karnataka information  
Department of Information and Public Relations



**Locked down:** Policemen checking IDs of motorists at a barricade put up at INA as restrictions are in place in the Capital till April 15; a man buying vegetables from a vendor; air passengers walking from the IGI Airport. ■ V.V. KRISHNAN/ SANDEEP SAXENA



## Medical staff treating COVID-19 patients told to vacate homes

AIIMS doctors issue appeal to Health Ministry over harassment by landlords

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN  
NEW DELHI

Medical staff from across India working with COVID-19 patients appealed to the Union Health Ministry for help on Tuesday stating that they are being harassed, with several of them told to immediately vacate their rented accommodation by landlords because of the fear that they could spread the virus.

The Resident Doctors' Association of All India Institute of Medical Sciences has written to the Ministry seeking urgent intervention.

"Doctors, nurses and other hospital staff involved in COVID-19 care are being asked to vacate their rented homes for the fear that they may spread the virus. Many doctors are now stranded on the road with their luggage with nowhere to go. This is happening across the country and we condemn such attitude and seek urgent intervention. Also with the lockdown in place, not

**C**Many doctors are now stranded on the road with their luggage with nowhere to go

**LETTER**  
enough public transport is available for hospital staff to travel from their residence to various hospitals," said the letter.

### Ministers react quickly

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan tweeted expressing deep anguish, saying he noticed such reports pouring in from Delhi, Noida, Warangal, Chennai, etc., and asked people not to panic. He said all precautions are being taken by doctors and staff on COVID-19 duty to ensure they are not carriers of infection in any way.

"Any harsh steps will demoralise them, derail the system. On Sunday, the nation applauded their selfless service. It's our duty to keep their morale high," Mr. Vardhan said.

han said. Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh also tweeted in support of the doctors.

"The Centre must immediately step in to ensure protection of doctors and paramedics, who are putting their lives on the line for our sake, from such harassment. Necessary protective gear should also be provided for their safety," he said.

AIIMS RDA general secretary Srinivas Rajkumar said Home Minister Amit Shah has assured that any such issue of ostracisation will be taken seriously and action taken immediately.

### Help pours in

After AIIMS doctors issued an appeal for help in procuring personal protection gear for medical staff and released a list of equipment immediately required, help started pouring in on Tuesday itself. "After our communication with the Health Ministry, several people and companies

have offered support through various possible means," noted a statement issued by the RDA.

It added that to help the AIIMS administration fast-track COVID-19 preparedness, public sector unit Bharat Dynamics has come forward to help with manufacturing, funds and logistics. "We have secured the AIIMS administration a sum of Rs. 60 lakh from the CSR corpus of Bharat Dynamics (Rs.50 lakh) and POSCO India Pvt Ltd. (Rs.10 lakh). We also asked the chairman of Preventive Wear Manufacturers' Association of India to show the samples and enable easy availability," said Dr. Rajkumar.

"We are extremely thankful to all those who extended support to battle the pandemic," the AIIMS RDA general secretary added.

The Delhi Health Department has said that legal action will be taken against those obstructing essential work.

## Chaos and confusion outside DCP office for travel passes

Exemption seekers complain of complicated procedures

HEMANI BHANDARI  
NEW DELHI

Hundreds of people gathered outside the Deputy Commissioner of Police (West) office to procure passes for movement in the Capital. They were a complaining lot, criticising everything from a lack of clarity of procedures and measures in the wake of COVID-19 outbreak to blasting the police for not having a system in place.

Moreover, they stood close to each other outside the office, apparently for several hours, unsure of whether they would get a pass or not. First, they had to register their names to officials who were sitting with a register kept on a desk outside the office, before they were called inside the office. By 2.30 p.m., nearly 300 people had registered and allegedly about 40-odd were called inside to submit documents.

Charan Singh, a 41-year-old resident of Patiala, who stood with Hari Nagar resident Gurpreet Singh, said he



People complained of absence of hand sanitiser and unruly queues. ■ HEMANI BHANDARI

was returning from Nasik on Monday to his residence in Patiala but stopped in Delhi last evening because there were no transport services. "I don't have any relatives in Delhi. I went to the Gurudwara Bangla Sahib but that was closed for people to stay. I met Gurpreet there who offered to help me and bring me to his house," he said.

Mr. Gurpreet, a complete stranger for Mr. Charan, went to Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital to get the COVID-19 test done before they returned to Mr. Gurpreet's house.

Police, on the other hand,

complained that people are crowding outside despite of officials asking them to stand away from each other and displaying the list of people and services allowed on the road outside the office.

## Delhiites take to police's Twitter for queries

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Queries related to issuance of "curfew passes", problems faced by delivery boys, and documents required for commuting were some of concerns raised by people on Twitter after Delhi Police on Tuesday said it will be responding to queries regarding the curbs in the Capital through social media.

"Hi! Delhi. If you have any question on the #Lockdown, tweet your query with the hashtag #LockdownQuery between 5-6 PM today and we will answer it for you. #StayAtHome-SaveLives," the Delhi Police tweeted using its official handle earlier in the day.

Following this, several people posted their queries on Twitter. When people asked Delhi Police about food and medicine delivery boys being thrashed by policemen at barricades, a senior police officer said that any such issue will be taken care of in future and fresh instructions will be issued regarding it.

## Nosy neighbours track 'infected persons'

Delhi Police claims they received more than a thousand calls in the last two days

SAURABH TRIVEDI  
NEW DELHI

Sushant Sharma (name changed), who lives on the fifth floor of a society in south-west Delhi, was shocked to see health department officials and policemen at his door on Sunday. When asked what they were doing at his home, Mr. Sharma was told that they got a call from the housing society about "COVID-19 infected persons" in the building.

"My son had come back from London a few days ago and my neighbour knew

about it. But he was allowed to come out of the airport only after the screening process and was declared fit. But some neighbours made the call. We showed the documents to the team and they went back," said Mr. Sharma.

On Tuesday, Delhi Police said they have received more than a thousand calls giving "information" about "COVID-19 infected persons" living in their vicinity in the last two days. "We transfer all such calls to the health department for action. A police team is also sent to the location for assistance. But

most of these calls were found fake and made by some nosy neighbours," said a senior police officer.

Several residents and resident welfare associations have taken on a vigilante role after the outbreak of the pandemic with reports on social media suggesting that doctors and airline staff are special targets in many areas.

### Entry banned

"We have banned the entry of newspaper vendors, food-delivery boys, courier boys and any other person except

the residents. It has been kind of a self-imposed family quarantine to prevent residents from getting infected. We communicate through WhatsApp groups and keep residents well informed about any new safety provision," said Munna Kunar, an RWA member in east Delhi.

Another RWA member said they are keeping watch on houses marked "home under quarantine" by the health department. Security guards have been ordered to keep watch if any person of the marked house comes out.

## 'The protest ends, but movement lives on'

Twitter handle 'Shaheen Bagh Official' vows to keep the movement going

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

"The Shaheen Bagh Protest May have ended, but our movement lives on." So goes the title of a two-page statement issued by the Twitter handle Shaheen Bagh Official.

**C**Although we understand the need for a stricter imposition of curfew, the ruthless dismantling and thoughtless destruction of the markers of our physical protest reeks of strong vendetta...

### STATEMENT

"Although we understand the need for a stricter imposition of curfew and enforcement of pertinent restrictions, the ruthless dismantling and thoughtless destruction of the markers of our physical protest especially the structures whose placement is in question is a matter that is sub-judice in the SC reeks of strong vendetta and ill-feelings towards our innocent protesters, locals and sympathisers of the protest. It also called for withdrawing cases against Jamia Millia Islamia students and for a court-monitored inquiry into the crackdown at the university on December 15, besides requesting the court to take cognisance of alleged hate speech over social media directed at protesters, and which contributed to the conflagra-

tion" in north-east Delhi. The statement also highlighted the impracticality of ensuring 'social distancing' in the poorer localities of the country and urged the government to take measures to ensure the safety of citizens in such localities.

"We have come a long way in our fight against injustice. Our efforts have brought practical and tangible sources of dissent in the system itself. When we began, only four States had passed a resolution against CAA-NRC-NPR. Today, the number stands at 12. Although, the sit-in by the women of Shaheen Bagh was the fundamental form of the protest, its essence, however, far transcends its physical form. Shaheen Bagh is no longer just a physical space, but an idea, a warm sentiment, a symbol of indefatigable spirit and democratic force. When we return on the other side of this pandemic, we hope to emerge stronger, braver wiser, and even more resolute," it said.



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# Delhi govt. to give construction workers ₹5,000 each, says CM

Kejriwal says step taken as their livelihood has been affected due to COVID-19

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday announced that under the Construction Workers Welfare Board Fund, the Delhi government will give ₹5,000 to each construction worker as their livelihood has been affected due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

He also said that the number of night shelters in the city has been increased and more food is being distributed to the homeless.

#### No new case reported

The Chief Minister sought to reassure residents that Delhi did not record any new case of COVID-19 in the last 40 hours but plans needed to be put in place to confront the possible progression of the virus epidemic to Stage 3.

"Today, I want to tell you that in the last 40 hours there has been not a single new COVID-19 positive case in Delhi. Earlier, we had a total of 30 such positive cases and among them, many people are getting better and going home. Till now, five people have survived and gone home. Right now, we have only 23 positive cases in Delhi," Mr. Kejriwal said.

"Yesterday, I requested the residents of Delhi to come together and help each other in this tough time. To-day, I am very happy that many people are coming forward and helping each other. In Delhi, nobody should suffer of hunger and it is our collective responsibility to stand beside each other," he said.

It was to address this "alarmingly situation worldwide" that the Delhi government had imposed such tough restrictions like a lockdown and a curfew.

He said, these restrictions may have brought many difficulties in the lives of citizens, but this was something that was required because we want to save the average resident of Delhi, their families and neighbours.

"Yesterday, I requested the residents of Delhi to come together and help each



The Delhi government has started to build a 'foolproof health system' to combat the situation if the city ever got into stage three of this pandemic, the Chief Minister said.

because the number of cases can increase any time if we do not put proper restrictions in place or if you do not follow the restrictions. In Italy, in the last 24 hours, more than 600 people have died and in America, in the last 24 hours, more than 150 people have died," he said.

#### Night shelters

"We have already started distributing food in all the night shelters of Delhi where any person can come and eat. We have witnessed that the number of people is increasing, therefore, we have also decided to increase the number of such night shelters and we will also increase food distribution," Mr. Kejriwal tweeted.

## Supply of essential items to remain unaffected

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, in the wake of the 21-day nationwide lockdown announced by PM Narendra Modi on Tuesday evening, sought to assure citizens that the supply of essential items would not be affected.

"The 21-day nationwide lockdown announced by the Prime Minister is very important to prevent corona from spreading. I assure every person of Delhi that there will be no reduction in the supply of essential items for the next 3 weeks," Mr. Kejriwal said.

city ever got into stage three of this pandemic.

The Chief Minister said a doctors' team had been constituted which will make all the preparations and submit a report within 24 hours. "We do not want to get into stage three but we have to be fully prepared in terms of medical support," he said.

compliances such as filing of income tax, GST and other Acts, the traders' body said that it would help to withdraw interest for the extended period instead of lowering the rate of interest.

The traders' body also called for the extension of the current financial year up till June 30, extension in repayment of bank loans, EMIs and other banking obligations till September 30, with

a waiver on interest or penalty for the extended period.

Apart from this, it also called for the deferring of payment on all government utility bills such as electricity, water, property tax. It also suggested that the government bear the employee's share of the provident fund for six months, and extension of a corona cash loan at reduced rates of interest to ensure an uninterrupted supply chain.

It also demanded a subsidy to traders for paying wages to their workers for the duration of the lockdown. The CAIT also highlighted the risk of use of cash in transmitting the virus and appealed for the use of digital transactions with removal of bank charges.

The union also said that it would "religiously follow" the 21-day lockdown declared by the Prime Minister.

## Traders hail Centre's relief measures

They demand subsidy for paying wages to workers during shutdown phase

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) on Tuesday welcomed various announcements for relief announced by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and was eagerly looking forward to the economic package to be introduced.

While appreciating the extension of various statutory

## Extend benefits of advocates' welfare scheme

Lawyers move High Court against restrictions in Delhi govt.'s novel scheme

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Several lawyers have moved the Delhi High Court seeking direction to the city government to extend the benefit of 'Chief Minister's Advocates' Welfare Scheme' to all lawyers enrolled with the Bar Council of Delhi (BCD), irrespective of whether their names appear in the voters list of the Capital or not.

The plea said that in November 2019, the Delhi government had announced the scheme for the welfare of all practising advocates of the national capital who are on the rolls of BCD.

grant towards the scheme and the government had accepted the recommendations given by the panel, it said.

The petitioner advocates have challenged the Delhi government's decision to restrict the scheme to only those members of BCD who

are in the voters list of Delhi. The petitioners said they are enrolled with the BCD and have membership of the Delhi High Court Bar Association and while they practice in courts here, they do not reside in the Capital and their exclusion from the scheme is arbitrary and not

in conformity with the constitutional scheme and policy. Another plea on the issue has sought to quash the Delhi government's circular on providing benefits to lawyers, on the ground that it was discriminatory and arbitrary and violates the provisions of the Constitution.

city ever got into stage three of this pandemic.

The Chief Minister said a doctors' team had been constituted which will make all the preparations and submit a report within 24 hours. "We do not want to get into stage three but we have to be fully prepared in terms of medical support," he said.

50-crore grant

A 13-member committee of advocates was set up to give recommendations for the utilisation of the ₹50-crore

## 2 in Noida, one in Greater Noida test positive

NOIDA

A husband-wife duo in Noida and a man in Greater Noida on Tuesday tested positive for COVID-19, taking the total number of COVID-19 cases in Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddha Nagar district to 11, officials said. PTI

## THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF ADVANCED LEGAL STUDIES (NUALS)

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No. NUALS/F(T)/01/2020

Dated 20.3.2020

### NOTIFICATION FOR ASSISTANT PROFESSORS

Applications in the prescribed format are invited for appointment to the two vacancies of Assistant Professors (Tenure Track) in Law (Open-1 & Ezhava Reservation - 1) in NUALS. The last date for receipt of applications is 20.04.2020. For details, visit [www.nuals.ac.in](http://www.nuals.ac.in)

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Biju Prabhakar IAS,  
Secretary,

Social Justice Department

## Kirana store owners stay open to stop panic

Many big chains are running out of stock

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Scenes of empty shelves at walk-in grocery shops that were doing the rounds on social media due to panic buying in several European countries and the U.S. has started becoming a reality in the Capital with several grocery stores on Tuesday morning running out of stock.

Gurugram Deputy Commissioner Amit Khatri has also decided to address the residents live through the Facebook account of the district administration at 8 p.m. everyday and also take the questions of the residents.

highway was just 1% and around 2-3% on the internal roads, but made a request to the residents to further curtail their movement for their own safety. "If we found the cooperation is not complete we will be forced to order curfew under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code. The authorities don't want any such step to be taken like in Delhi, Punjab and Chandigarh. We want our people to have minimum sufferings," said Mr. Akil.

He said the crime rate had also gone down drastically over the past few days and only 10%-15% cases were re-

gistered compared to earlier days. He said that he wanted it to reduce further.

Mr. Akil said that authorities had little difficulties in implementing the lockdown directions since in many cases, the industries required time for shut down and domestic helps were also allowed in some cases as the elderly needed a support system.

Gurugram Deputy Commissioner Amit Khatri has also decided to address the residents live through the Facebook account of the district administration at 8 p.m. everyday and also take the questions of the residents.

Meanwhile, the number of positive cases in Gurugram increased to 10 with two more cases confirmed on Tuesday. A total of 232 samples have been taken so far and the results for 50 are awaited. As many as 172 are negative.

After collection, such waste will be transported to the Waste to Energy plant in Okhla for incineration.

Train gardeners

Currently, while nurses and DBC workers with the SDMC were engaged in surveillance of passengers, who visited Delhi from abroad via door-to-door surveys, the civic body is also planning to train about 400 gardeners employed by it in this work.

They will be trained to

conduct household surveys

and prepare a list mentioning the number of patients suffering from COVID-19-like symptoms.

Curtail movement

Addressing a press conference, Mr. Akil said the movement of vehicles on the

highway was just 1%

and around 2-3% on the internal roads, but made a request to the residents to further curtail their movement for their own safety. "If we found the cooperation is not complete we will be forced to order curfew under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code. The authorities don't want any such step to be taken like in Delhi, Punjab and Chandigarh. We want our people to have minimum sufferings," said Mr. Akil.

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**'I have more time for my son'**

**Richa Vatsala, 41**  
Resident of Gurugram, an employee at a media company

"I am enjoying working from home. We all should see it as paid leaves in a way," says 41-year-old Richa Vatsala, national head of revenue in WittyFeed and STAGE, a media company. The transition from a hectic professional life to working from home, however, has not been smooth for Ms. Vatsala, mother of a seven-year-old.

With her boy running around the house and the door bell ringing constantly, Ms. Vatsala says it is not "easy to create a work environment at home". "My phone network is also patchy on our 12th-floor flat, so I need to go downstairs several times a day to take calls. Sometimes, I make do with WhatsApp calls," she adds.

Her full-time domestic help went to Bihar for Holi and has not returned yet. "Had he been here, I would not have faced so much difficulty," Richa says, adding that the solution is to remain positive: "all problems can be managed if you are strong, optimistic, and positive."

There are some plus points to being home all the time. "I am able to enjoy small breaks between work and have some time for my terrace garden. I have around 300 plants," she says. She is also able to spend more time with her son, and focus on her painting. "My son was initially happy about me working from home, but is now wondering why I am not going to office. He is not allowed to play with his friends to maintain social distance, though he can cycle. He plays boards games, and watches informative videos. It is like a summer break for him," says Ms. Vastala.

Asked whether her husband was also working from home, she chuckles: "He is going to office, which is even better. If we both stay at home, we might end up fighting."

### 'I am holding online classes... my routine has not changed much'

**Pooja Sabherwal, 37**  
Resident of Gurugram, assistant professor at NorthCap University

Holding online classes from her home for the past over one week now, Pooja Sabherwal, an assistant professor at Gurugram's NorthCap University, says her routine has not changed much.

"I get ready everyday at my usual time, but instead of going to the university I go to my room to hold online classes as per the earlier schedule," says Dr. Sabherwal, who works in the electronics and communication department.

"The only difference is that now I can see my children more. They are happy that I am at home," says the 37-year-old mother of two, adding: "With no need to commute, I have more time for my family."

The university discontinued traditional classes from March 15 and started "live lectures" for its students in the wake of the COVID-19 scare. "We already had a system in place for holding live classes. Faculty members as well as students had laptops and other necessary equipment for online classes," says Dr. Sabherwal, who has been teaching for over a decade.

Despite being at home, she needs to work from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., holding live classes and laboratories for the students. "The students can also ask questions if they have any," adds Dr. Sabherwal.

Holding virtual classes is a good solution

for the current situation, but Dr. Sabherwal says she misses "emotionally bonding" with her students. On whether she misses interacting with her colleagues and socialising with them, Dr. Sabherwal says: "We still hold departmental and other university-level meetings online. So, we still socialise, but online."

Dr. Sabherwal did not face much difficulty in adjusting to working from home as they already had a system in place for the care of their children. "My kids enjoy seeing me hold live classes. They listen to the replies of my students. My elder son, a Class IV student, said that his teacher should also conduct online classes," she chuckles.



**'It has been a busy few weeks'**

**Shikhar Gupta**  
A resident of south Delhi, owner of a chemist shop

Its 9.30 p.m. on Saturday at the Defence Colony market in south Delhi and most of the shops have barely seen any visitors over the past few days due to the COVID-19 scare.

However, there has been a din of activity outside 3G Chemists which recently received a new consignment of face masks and hand sanitisers. Between attending to a steady stream of customers and unpacking his consignment, Shikhar Gupta, the owner of the shop, says he has been counselling shoppers and dispelling myths about the virus.

"We are a market that is frequented by expats. While most Delhiites can do social distancing, we chemists cannot... Back in early February, when the scare started, people who were scheduled to travel would come to buy masks, but since then so much has changed. We are trying to keep a stock. There are many who are trying to make a quick buck by selling subpar products at a high price. As chemists, people trust us with their health and we have to deliver on that trust," he says.

On what steps he and his staff are taking to stave off infection, Mr. Gupta says: "We are following basic hygiene such as frequent washing of hands and using sanitiser. We had a customer come in a few days ago who was coughing and showed signs of the virus. We immediately gave the person a mask and told him about the precautions."

Though most people are well informed about the virus some customers come into the shop in a panic as they have been misinformed. "Some customers feel that the city is about to shutdown and want to buy in bulk. We assure them that the messages on social media are false."

# Life in the times of COVID-19

Delhi-NCR residents talk to *The Hindu* about the wholesale adjustments they have had to make in their lives due to the various measures taken by authorities to contain the spread of the deadly virus

TEXT BY: ANUJ KUMAR, ASHOK KUMAR AND JAIDEEP DEO BHANJ

### 'Working from home is a pain but I am getting more time with my family'

**Vaibhav Sharma, 37**  
Resident of Gurugram, an employee at a software company

Working in the sales and marketing department of a prominent software company, Vaibhav Sharma feels that "going to office is a much better option than working from home".

"In India, going to office is in our DNA. What we are doing now is learning a new way of living life. It is a pain," says Mr. Sharma, who has been working from home for nearly three weeks.

Working from home is a challenge with the children and family members around.

"When you are physically present at home you have to participate in household activities. You cannot just shut the door and continue to work. You can do it for an hour or two when you are doing critical work, but not for nine straight hours. Especially, when you are part of a family. If you are just husband and wife, it is probably a bit easier," says Mr. Sharma, whose wife is also working from home.

"When at home, you tend to get distract-

ed by television or social media. You are more productive when at office," Mr. Sharma believes, adding that he misses learning and dealing with his colleagues.

But the flexible working hours and more time to connect with family has been a boon.

"I have conference calls at odd hours, but since I am working from home I manage to catch some sleep. It is an advantage. Besides, you have more time to connect with your family emotionally," Mr. Sharma smiles.

### 'I have two children and parents living with me, I cannot afford to sit at home'

**Baboo Khan, a barber and Shahrkhan, a welder**

Residents of Ghaziabad  
The road to Sahibabad Railway station is one of the most crowded spots in Ghaziabad, but it has been wearing a deserted look since last week.

Baboo Khan, who runs a salon on the busy road, is nonplussed. "Before COVID-19 emerged on the scene, I used to earn at least ₹1,000 every Sunday, but this weekend I made only ₹350. This is the impact of the virus. I see people walking around with long hair or

beards, and here I am looking into the mirror," rues Mr. Khan.

"I have two children and parents living with me. I have to devise a new plan to make ends meet," he sighs, wondering whether his decision to shift from Hathras, U.P., was right. "I shifted three years ago. Back home, the business is not as much affected," he adds.

A small television perched on the wall blares out a message promoting online shopping during this period. "Can I do this? Is the government thinking of us? They are closing down our weekly haats

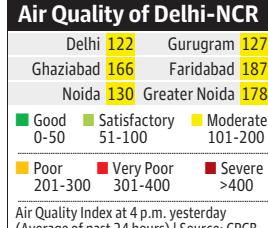


(markets)," he says, adding: "The keeda [virus] does not differentiate between the rich and the poor but I guess our policymakers do. We are losing now. I cannot afford to sit at home for a single day."

As the conversation shifts towards personal hygiene, Shahrkhan walks into the shop to get his beard shaved. "I work at a welder's workshop. How am I expected to wash my hands every hour? Our realities and behaviour are not going to change overnight. How can Baboo maintain distance while shaving my beard," he asks.

What will they do if they show symptoms of COVID-19? "We will go to the neighbourhood doctors in Shyam Park," says Shahrkhan, referring to the quacks who practice in the area. Neither know about the sample collection centres in Ghaziabad.

Mr. Khan says they still offer Friday prayer standing shoulder to shoulder, and innocently wonders: "Does the keeda [virus] affect you even when one is not facing the other?", not knowing that people must maintain a distance of one metre to avoid infection.



**NGT seeks report on brick kilns**

**STAFF REPORTER**

NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) to furnish a report on whether brick kilns can be permitted to operate in Delhi-NCR.

The directions came after a report submitted by the CPCB showed that in the months when the brick kilns were operational, the air quality was not within the prescribed limits.

A Bench headed by NGT chairperson Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel noted, "The question is not merely of an individual brick kiln not emitting pollution or the extent of contribution of the brick kilns taken separately, but of the capacity of the area being already air polluted and unable to take the load of more pollution."

The bench however, said, "We find it difficult to accept the submission that the individual brick kilns maintaining the prescribed standards for discharge of emissions are entitled to operate."

"Brick kilns add to air pollution and thereby affect right of citizens to breathe fresh air," it added.

**NGT asks committee to study damage done to environment by dump sites**

Delhi govt. told to set up a panel for managing waste

**STAFF REPORTER**

NEW DELHI

While observing that the delay in clearing legacy waste was adversely affecting the environment and public health, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed a committee comprising of a representative from the Central Pollution Control Board and IIT Delhi, to carry out a study to assess the amount of damage caused to the environment due to the dump sites in Delhi.

A Bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel directed also directed representatives from



The Safdarjung weather station recorded 0.6 mm of rainfall in New Delhi on Tuesday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

above normal for the season; and the minimum settled at 18.6 degrees Celsius, one degree above normal.

The forecast for Delhi reads "partly cloudy sky with very light rain/thunderstorm. The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded were 33 degrees Celsius, two degrees

likely to settle between 32 and 19 degrees Celsius".

Strong surface winds between 20-30 kmph accompanied by rain are forecast for March 26 and partly cloudy sky with light drizzle is forecast for March 27, the Met department said.

While food was not delivered at the night shelter next to gate number 1 of AIIMS in the afternoon, the other three complained that food was delivered late. Inhabitants and caretakers of the four shelters admitted that the food was less and every day 10 to 30 people who came to the facility had to return without food.

Moreover, multiple homeless people said they were unaware of the scheme. On Tuesday evening, Mr. Kejriwal said that they have noticed that the number of people at night shelters has been increasing since the programme's launch. "We will make arrangements for food to be distributed at more locations soon," he added.

The NGT also warned of coercive action against the entire administrative chain at each civic body and other officials responsible for management and supervision, in case of non-compliance of orders.

the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) to be a part of the committee and furnish a report within two months.

#### Legacy waste

"It may be necessary to determine such cost for delay in clearing legacy waste at every dump site as well as for delay in complying with other rules and failure to treat sewage and recover the same from persons responsible for action in the matter," the Bench observed.

The Delhi government was also directed to set up an integrated Special Pur-

ose Vehicle (SPV) for scientific management, processing and disposal of legacy waste dump sites at Ghaziabad, Balswa and Okhla.

The green panel specified that the SPV would be headed by the Delhi Chief Secretary, civic body officials and a nominee of the Delhi Lieutenant Governor among others.

The NGT also warned of coercive action against the entire administrative chain at each civic body and other officials responsible for management and supervision, in case of non-compliance of orders.

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# Many unaware of govt. scheme providing free food at shelters

Caretakers say they have had to turn away people as there was insufficient food

NIKHIL M BABU

NEW DELHI

Several homeless people are not aware of the Delhi government's scheme which provides for free food at night shelters.

On Saturday, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had announced the scheme in light of the COVID-19 outbreak so that anyone could get food from the 220 government-run night shelters across the city. A ground reality check by *The Hindu* at four night shelters, however, revealed many shortcomings.

While food was not delivered at the night shelter next to gate number 1 of AIIMS in the afternoon, the other three complained that food was delivered late. Inhabitants and caretakers of the four shelters admitted that the food was less and every day 10 to 30 people who came to the facility had to return without food.

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People at a night shelter outside the All India Institute Of Medical Sciences in New Delhi on Tuesday. ■ V.V. KRISHNAN

she said, standing outside night shelter number 584.

"Yesterday there was dal chawal, but today they did not supply food here," said Rani, who had come with her family to Delhi for her elder brother's treatment.

Moreover, multiple homeless people said they were unaware of the scheme. On Tuesday evening, Mr. Kejriwal said that they have noticed that the number of people at night shelters has been increasing since the programme's launch. "We will make arrangements for food to be distributed at more locations soon," he added.

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Inside the shelter, Ajay Kumar, 35, and his wife, who has a kidney problem, is sharing chivda mixed with water and sugar in a steel bowl. "They did not give us food today and even my son is eating this," he said.

Sixty-year-old Ameena Khatoon from Bihar, who stays near a lift outside gate number 1 of AIIMS, has been surviving mostly on

Timings

DELHI

WEDNESDAY, MAR. 25

RISE 06:19 SET 18:36

RISE 07:02 SET 19:28

THURSDAY, MAR. 26

RISE 06:18 SET 18:36

RISE 07:32 SET 20:19

FRIDAY, MAR. 27

RISE 06:17 SET 18:37

RISE 08:03 SET 21:13

**Delhi Weather** max min  
Delhi City 31 16  
Safdarjang 31 16  
Palam 31 17

**Delhi Palam Today**  
32°C A spell of dust storm or thundershower is likely in parts. A partly cloudy sky and warm day is likely.

**Delhi Palam Tomorrow**  
31°C A comfortable morning is likely. A mainly sunny sky and warm day would continue.

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**THE HINDU**

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# Curfew violators arrested in Punjab; confirmed COVID-19 cases touch 29

232 cases registered, 111 persons in net; 2 cases of quarantine violation reported

VIKAS VASUDEVA

CHANDIGARH

The Punjab police on Tuesday dealt with a firm hand with those violating the curfew orders, enforced by the State government to curb the spread of COVID-19, even as the number of positive cases touched 29.

The police registered as many as 232 cases and arrested 111 persons for violating the curfew orders. While the maximum of 38 FIRs for curfew violation were registered in Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar (Mohali), 34 were registered in Amritsar (rural), and 30 each were reported from Tarn Taran and Sangrur.

## 43 arrests in Tarn Taran

As many as 43 persons were arrested from Tarn Taran, while 23 were held in Kapurthala and 15 in Hoshiarpur. Thirteen persons were arrested in Bathinda and five



Police personnel punishing offenders flouting curfew guidelines in Patiala on Tuesday. • PTI

each in Ferozepur and Patiala. Four were arrested in Gurdaspur, while two were held in Ludhiana Rural.

"Two cases of violation of quarantine restrictions were also reported during the day," said Director General of Police Dinkar Gupta.

Across the State, 38,160

police employees in different ranks have been deployed on the ground for enforcement of curfew, including sealing of affected clusters (S.B.S Nagar district), besides maintenance of essential supplies and law and order. These include 981 volunteers.

According to the State's health department, six new cases of COVID-19 were reported in Punjab on March 24, taking the total number of cases to 29. Three patients are from Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar district and all of them are family member of a positive case, which was reported last week. The other three patients are from Phillaur in Jalandhar district. All of them were in close contact of a positive case.

Chief Minister Amarinder Singh said it was imperative to trace and test all those who had returned from Corona-affected countries. Over 94,000 NRIs and foreign-returning persons had entered the State in recent days. Most of them had been tracked and around 30,000 had been placed under isolation. All-out efforts are being made to trace the remaining, he said.

# Doctor's outbursts catch Twitterati's fancy

Rahul Gandhi also endorsed her views

ASHOK KUMAR

GURUGRAM

Her Twitter handle @drkannakkakkar describes her as "100% sarkari dactarni (cent per cent female government doctor)" who writes "poetry and other s\*\*\*", and now her emotional outburst through a series of tweets over lack of protective gears for the doctors in the forefront of the fight against COVID-19 pandemic, and the pathetic condition of the health infrastructure in Haryana has caught the imagination of the twitterati in a big way.

Her followers have tripled in a few hours, the media is vying for her comments and even senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has endorsed her views through a tweet.

## Scathing tweets

Pursuing MD in anaesthesia and critical care at PGIMS, Rohtak, Dr. Kamna Kakkar, in one of her scathing tweets tagging the Prime Minister's Office, wrote:

"Please don't send me to war without weapons @PMOIndia. Please arrange #PersonalProtectiveEquipment for us doctors ASAP. We need #N95masks #HazmatSuits to defeat #Corona. Sincerely yours, an Indian Doctor (sic)".

Accompanying the tweet was a video where a doctor was seen putting on the protective gear before presumably going for work. "This attire ensures we doctors, nurses, healthcare workers go back home alive. If you care about #coronavirus, please ask the policy makers to provide us #PersonalProtectiveEquipment as shown in the video at the earliest. #CoronaIndia

#StayHomeIndia @PMOIndia@WHO (sic)," she stated in another tweet.

Highlighting the delay in procurement of the protective gear for the State doctors, she tweeted, "When they arrive, please send N95 masks and gloves to my grave. Taali aur thaali b baja dena waha! Regards, frustrated sarkari doctor narendramodi @anilvijminister @DrRebellious @cmohry @drharshvardhan @UMY 35 (sic)." This prompted a reaction from Mr. Gandhi who tweeted that he was feeling sad and the "situation was completely avoidable".

Her another tweet read: "Plz tell if I should intubate a Corona patient if my lachaa sarkari hospital has not provided me personal protection items like N95 mask or gloves? (P.S. I have life plans and no social intent!) @anilvijminister @PMOIndia @DrRebellious @PMOIndia @drharshvardhan @anjaonmkashyap. (sic)".

Tagging film stars Salman Khan, Shahrukh Khan and Amitabh Bachchan and Indian cricket captain Virat Kohli, she demanded to know whether they could help them procure the protective gear and masks.

However, she also put a disclaimer as a pinned tweet saying she was only a doctor and did not endorse the views of any political party and religious organisation.

Her tweets, mostly posted over the past 24 hours, have been retweeted hundreds of times and earned thousands of views.

Her followers have increased from around 4,000 to over 12,000. Dr. Kakkar could not be reached for comments.

Tejashwi offers bungalow for quarantine centre

AMARNATH TEWARY

Leader of the Opposition in Bihar Assembly Tejashwi Yadav has offered his official residence to the government to make it either a quarantine camp or COVID-19 testing centre. He also said he would donate one-month salary to the Chief Minister's relief fund.

"As the leader of opposition, I have been allotted the 1, Polo road government bungalow. I would like to put it (bungalow) to better use. The bungalow could be used as a quarantine camp or a testing centre, or for setting up isolation wards and increasing the number of beds.

It can also be used in any other manner to fight against the Coronavirus outbreak," tweeted Mr. Yadav on Monday. He further wrote, "A person's life has already been lost in the state due to COVID-19 and there should not be any more death. We will support the state government's every positive move in its fight to prevent the spread of Coronavirus. We will not allow any laxity at any stage as every life counts".

Besides hospitals, the Bihar government, though, has made facilities of isolation ward for COVID-19 suspected cases at Hotel Patliputra Ashok and Haj Bhawan in Patna. On Monday, the government also announced to convert government schools in the State into isolation wards.

Chief minister Nitish Kumar has announced that one-month ration will be given free to all ration card holders.

# Jharkhand govt. passes resolution against NPR, NRC

Most people won't be able to answer questions about date and place of birth of parents, says Minister

STAFF REPORTER

BHUABANESWAR

The Hemant Soren government in Jharkhand has urged the Centre to conduct the National Population Register (NPR) survey as per the 2010 format and not implement the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

A three-line resolution in this regard was passed by the State Assembly amidst opposition from the BJP members on Monday.

"In the present format with 15 points, people will be

asked about date and place of birth of parents. Most people in Jharkhand will not be able to answer these questions. In Jharkhand, many people don't even know their own date of birth," Alangir Alam, Jharkhand Rural Development Minister and Parliamentary Affairs Minister, told *The Hindu*.

He said the State government was of the view that the NPR was the first step; it would be followed by the NRC and finally the Citizen (Amendment) Act (CAA).

MLAs and political parties had been demanding the rejection of the NRC and the NPR. So we have passed this resolution," said the Minister.

"When the Nitish Kumar government in Bihar, in which the BJP is an alliance partner, passed the resolution rejecting the present NPR format, the saffron party remained silent. But, they are making a hue and cry in Jharkhand," he said.

Recently, Jharkhand Janadikar Mahasabha (JJM), a forum of different civil socie-

ty organisations, had demanded that the Jharkhand government should stop all NPR-related activities and pass a resolution in the Assembly against the CAA and NRC.

Stating that the main purpose of the NPR was to lay the ground for the NRC, the JJM had said that the NRC was a "wasteful exercise" that was bound to lead to the exclusion and harassment of a large number of people, especially the poor as had already happened in Assam.

"People did not want the NRC to be conducted in the present format. People from different sections of society,

asked about date and place of birth of parents. Most people in Jharkhand will not be able to answer these questions. In Jharkhand, many people don't even know their own date of birth," Alangir Alam, Jharkhand Rural Development Minister and Parliamentary Affairs Minister, told *The Hindu*.

Recently, Jharkhand Janadikar Mahasabha (JJM), a forum of different civil socie-

there." On his side, the team leader should clearly lay down the objectives and key results, and let every team member know what is expected of them, and let them do it without needless micro-managing. "The manager should avoid activity-based managing, and focus on objective-based managing," explains Abhishek.

Saundarya Rajesh, founder-president, Avtar Group, points out that there are any number of digital platforms where members of a team can connect and have a virtual meeting room, and having a virtual meeting every working day is indispensable way of creating a sense of being in an office environment.

Saundarya believes there has to be external and striking evidence that everyone treats work-from-home seriously, and that alone can solidify the foundation on which the arrangement stands.

"Members of a team that works from home should dress the part, togged in clothes that are readily associated with work – which will be noticeable when the team meets on any video platform – and keep to timings. There is a certain sanctity to treating that time at home, as real work for which you prepare. Secondly, there should be engagement with one another, which means team members don't get cooped up in their work and forget that there is a team out there which works with

them. It is necessary for someone on a remote-working arrangement to communicate its inherent demands, to their family, and that though they are home, they should be treated as if they were really far from it."

Work-from-home can blunt our ability to appreciate the human side of business; and remote-working have to watch out for that.

Saundarya says this current work-from-home scenario arising out of efforts to check the spread of the novel Coronavirus, is hardly business-as-usual, and therefore it is necessary to lift up one's spirits by setting aside some time to connect with colleagues for a light banter.

## GENERAL

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7	Risk Analyst / (DoS-DNBS)	1
8	Risk Analyst / (DEIO)	2
9	IS Auditor	2
10	Specialist in Forensic Audit	1
11	Accounts Specialist	1
12	System Administrator	9
13	Project Administrator	5
14	Network Administrator	6

2. For all other details such as eligibility criteria, reservation of vacancies, scheme of selection, submission of on-line application and other instructions, please refer to the detailed advertisement to be published on the Bank's website ([www.rbi.org.in](http://www.rbi.org.in)) on March 27, 2020. Candidates can apply for these posts only by online mode through the Bank's website.

# Manipur records first COVID-19 case

Lockdown in Northeast; Assam MLAs to donate salary for anti-virus fund

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI/ IMPHAL

Assam became the last of the eight northeastern States to go into lockdown mode on Tuesday after a 23-year-old woman from Manipur became the region's first to test positive for COVID-19 pandemic.

The woman was found infected with the virus on Tuesday morning following a medical examination conducted at a laboratory in Imphal's Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences. Her parents, both college lecturers, and other family members have been quarantined with the police cordon off the house.

Officials in Manipur said the woman, a student of biomedicine at Bristol University in United Kingdom, had arrived in Kolkata via Delhi on March 19. Her brother joined her in Kolkata from Atlanta, U.S. Both stayed in a hotel in Kolkata and arrived in Imphal on March 21 by a flight via Agartala, Tripura.



A girl buying surgical masks in Imphal. ■ FILE PHOTO

Last week, the Manipur government had made a list of 99 people who had arrived from various COVID-19-hit countries. The woman's name was not on the list.

**Attended a wedding**  
"She fell sick on Monday and was admitted in the hospital. We have taken away 12 members of her family and others and kept them under close observation," said K. Rajo, the State's Director of Health. Reports suggest she had attended a wedding before she tested positive.

Later, Chief Minister N. Biren Singh took to social me-

dia requesting the people to shut themselves in for their own good. "I urge those who returned from foreign countries to honestly declare their travel history," he said.

The authorities in southern Assam's Haikandi district filed an FIR against a man who had arrived from abroad on Monday but did not report at the nearest police station or health station as mandated. "Departmental action for immediate suspension is also being drawn against the father, a government employee, for concealing information," Deputy Commissioner Keerthi Jalli

said.

Members of the family had misled the authorities by saying he would arrive after three days but an enquiry revealed he had already reached home.

Officials said 721 people, who had come from abroad and other parts of India, have been home quarantined.

All the 126 legislators in the Assam Assembly on Tuesday pledged a month's pay for a fund set up by CM Sarbananda Sonowal to combat COVID-19.

The authorities in Meghalaya capital Shillong on Tuesday introduced the odd-even formula for private vehicles to enable people to fetch essentials. Such vehicles bearing even and odd registration numbers would be allowed to move within a limited area on even and odd dates.

The All Manipur Newspaper Distributors and Hawkers Association on Tuesday announced they will stop delivering newspapers to homes and offices till March 31.

■

## Corrigendum-1

The following changes have been made in Tender No. DYC1-MLG-MAINTAIN-20-01 published vide Tender Notice No. CON/MLG/2020/MARCH/01. Please read as: The approximate value of the Tender will be ₹2,05,13,191.05 instead of ₹2,05,13,186.79 and the complete information and Tender document of e-Tender will be available at [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in) from 27-03-2020 to 10-04-2020 instead of 24-03-2020 to 10-04-2020.  
Dy. Chief Engineer/CON-I, Maligaon Northeast Frontier Railway (Construction Organisation)  
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## Commissioning of tunnel lighting, power supply system etc.

E-Tender Notice No. DY.CEE/CON/SCL/07/2020; Dated: 19-03-2020. Open tender through e-Tendering system is invited from experienced and reputed Contractor(s)/firm(s) having valid electrical contractor and supervisor license for the following work. Tender No.: EL/CON/SCL/18/2019/JI. Name of work: Supply, erection, testing and commissioning of tunnel lighting, power supply system and lighting & socket system for technical building cum power house for tunnel no. 1, 2, 3, 4, 4A, 5 & 7 (Tutup - Imphal) in connection with Jiribam - Imphal New BG line project. Tender value: ₹17,49,79,597.20, Earnest money: ₹10,24,900.00, Completion period: 180 days. E-tender will be closed at 14:30 hrs. on 16-04-2020 and opened at 15:30 hrs. on 16-04-2020. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available in website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in).  
Dy. Chief Electrical Engineer/CON/SCL, Maligaon Northeast Frontier Railway (Construction Organisation)  
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## DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN & CHILD DEVELOPMENT GOVT. OF NCT OF DELHI

Maharana Pratap ISBT, Kashmere Gate, Delhi-110006

Website: [www.wcddelhi.nic.in](http://www.wcddelhi.nic.in)

### Public Notice

Department of Women and Child Development, Govt. of NCT of Delhi has shifted its Head Quarter from Sewa Kutir Complex, Kingsway Camp, Delhi-110009 to Maharana Pratap, ISBT Building, Kashmere Gate, Delhi-110006. All concerned are requested to note down the new address.

Director (Department of Women and Child Development)  
DIP/Shabdharth/1498/19-20

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## PUBLIC NOTICE

PUBLIC NOTICE  
Indraprastha Gas Limited ("IGL") has issued a Letter of Intent for setting up of CNG Station at the site located at former location and to be operated by following Operating Company and soon Application from the Operator and conducting due diligence and following due process.

Name of Applicant - Mrs. Pawandeep Kaur

Address of proposed station - Khasra No. 3811, Village Prahdup Banger, Main Bawana-Badli Road, District North West Delhi, Sub Division-Narela, Delhi-110042.

However, if any person has any objection to the proposed station, kindly contact us within 7 days from the publication of this notice, with the relevant and appropriate documents to substantiate the objection/claim. It may be noted that it shall be deemed that there is no objection to the setting of CNG station at the said site.

A 58-year-old male, who

returned from Egypt, and one female, 55, who

returned from the U.K. recently tested positive on Sunday, but no deaths were reported. The Egyptian returned patient had tested negative earlier. Both of them are in isolation at the Infectious Diseases and Beliaghata General Hospital in north Kolkata.

However, one man, who

used to work with a person

who died on Monday, was

admitted in a State hospital

owing to breathing difficulty.

New passengers enlisted

for observations dropped

from 284 on Monday to 31

on Tuesday. Secondly, the

number of new home isolation cases dropped too -

from 39 to 15, while the

number of suspected individ-

uals whose reports

were received went up

from 17 on Monday to 48

on Tuesday, which indicated

that there is no significant

rise with only two tested

positive. However, sample collection was also

less on Tuesday. It was 44

on Monday, but 18 on

Tuesday.

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## OFFICE OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

ITANAGAR SMART CITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LTD., BLOCK IV, 1ST FLOOR, ROOM NO.1, CIVIL SECRETARIAT ITANAGAR

File No.ITA/SC/SPV-92/2020-21/ Dated Itanagar, the 24th March 2020

### NOTICE INVITING E-TENDERS

1. The Joint CEO (Technical), Itanagar Smart City Development Corporation Limited (ISCDCL) invites online e-tender (items rate tenders) in selection of agencies Supply and Installation of Water ATMs at 11 locations in Itanagar under Smart City Mission in two bid system, from eligible bidders who are registered in appropriate class in any Central Govt Department / State Government Department/ PSU/ Local Bodies for below mentioned work :-

NIT No. : No.ITA/SC/SPV-92/2020-21/ 01

Name of the work: Supply and Installation of Water ATMs at 11 locations in Itanagar.

ESTIMATED COST : Rs. 27,41,640/-

EARNEST MONEY : Rs. 27416/- ( For APST Contractor)

: Rs. 5,4832/- ( For Non-APST Contractor)

Cost of Tender Paper : Rs. 10000.00

Period of Completion : 2 Months.

Start date and time of submission of bid: 25/03/2020 from 1500 Hrs.

Last date and time of submission of bid : 04/04/2020 up to 1600 Hrs.

2.The interested bidders can purchase bidding papers online from the departmental e-Tendering website <http://ddud.ar.tenders.in>. The full details of work with scope are uploaded in website. The press notice is also available in the same website.

Sd/-

Joint Chief Executive Officer (Tech)

Smart City Dev.Corp.Ltd

Itanagar

DIP/ARN/9510-12/19

इतारखण्ड शरकार

कार्मिक, प्रशासनिक सुधार तथा राजभाषा विभाग

### प्रेस विज्ञप्ति

एतद् द्वारा सूचित किया जाता है कि इतारखण्ड संघीय सेवा में सिंचित जज (जनियर डिपीजन) के पद पर नियुक्त होने वाले आयोग द्वारा विज्ञापन संख्या 12 / 2018 के विरुद्ध अनुसूचित सभी 107 अध्यार्थियों के शिक्षणिक एवं अन्य विविध प्रमाण-त्रैत्रों की जाँच एवं उन संवादपत्र का दिनांक 30.03.2020 पर्यंत 31.03.2020 को निर्धारित कार्यक्रम को लागेन्दार वायरस के संक्रमण के हतहियातन रद्द करते हुए अब यह दिनांक 15.04.2020 एवं 16.04.2020 को निर्धारित किया गया है। शेष शर्तें पुर्ववत हैं।

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12010663	12000102	12004485	12000876	12001720	12003873	12001376	12005945	12011024
12008956	12001857	12004284	12004077	12010618	12010557	12000134	12010414	12009241
12011765	12011515	12000683	12003343	12007004	12006011	12006457	12000754	12007

# Patients are being cured, don't create atmosphere of fear: Tope

Food and Civil Supplies Minister Chhagan Bhujbal asks people not to panic as State has food stocks to last for six months, report those involved in black marketeering

ALOK DESHPANDE

MUMBAI

On Tuesday, the eve of Gudi Padwa, the Marathi New Year, Health Minister Rajesh Tope appealed to all religious leaders to work as 'messengers of health' and educate people on joining the fight against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

In his address to the State on social media, Mr. Tope said only two of the positive COVID-19 cases in the State are serious. He said, "It is extremely satisfying for me to inform you that patients with the novel coronavirus patients are being cured. We can discharge 15 patients at any time. Only two patients are in the intensive care unit. The rest are stable."

## COVID-19

Since the maximum positive cases of the disease have been detected in Pune and Mumbai, Mr. Tope urged people living in other areas to stop ostracising those arriving from these two cities.

Mr. Tope said an environment of unnecessary fear has been created in the State and it should not persist. He said, "Having cough and cold does not mean the patient is suffering from the novel coronavirus. There are reports that private medical services are being closed and refusing to treat patients with cough and cold. This should be avoided at all costs."

Meanwhile, in response to



Tight vigil: People queue up at Sitabuldi police station for passes to make trips to buy essential commodities in Nagpur on Tuesday. ■ S. SUDARSHAN

We request citizens to file complaints against those involved in hoarding or black marketing essential commodities

CHHAGAN BHUJBAL  
Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Rights Protection Minister

Mr. Tope's appeal to people to come forward and donate blood, the Maharashtra Youth Congress has started organising blood donation camps. Satyajit Tambe, president of the Maharashtra Youth Congress, said, "It was noticed that there was an increasing shortage of blood in medical centres in the State. So we have started blood donation camps at various centres, blood banks and hospitals. To avoid crowding, we have started a registration process." He said tokens will be issued and the donor can arrive at the centre at the designated time. "Our target is to collect 10,000 bottles of blood," Mr. Tambe said.

Food available Meanwhile, Chhagan Bhujbal, Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Rights Protection Minister said people need not worry about food supply as the State has enough stocks to last for six months. He said despite the restrictions on movement of vehicles, the supply of essential commodities will not be affected. He also urged people not to resort to panic-buying.

Mr. Bhujbal said, "We appeal to citizens not to go in groups to purchase vegetables. People should avoid crowding as there will be no lack of supplies. We request citizens to file complaints with the police and the revenue and consumer protection units against those involved in hoarding or black marketing essential commodities such as masks and hand sanitisers."

On Tuesday, Chief Minis-

## MSEDCL staff won't collect meter readings this month

Bill will be computed based on average usage over 12 months

AJEEET MAHALE

MUMBAI

Amid the current lockdown in the State due to the rising number of cases of the novel coronavirus, the Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Limited (MSEDCL) will not be sending its staff to collect meter readings this month.

Instead it will compute the month's bill on the average meter reading for each consumer over the last 12 months. Consumers also have the option of recording their meter readings using the Mahavitaran app.



Consumers can record their meter readings using the Mahavitaran app. ■ FILE PHOTO

electricity. We have set up 17 control rooms across the State," a senior MSEDCL official said.

MSEDCL will also not disconnect the meters of any of their consumers until March 31. A senior MSEDCL official said, "The bill payment

centres of MSEDCL will function. We have taken adequate measures to ensure that social distancing is maintained. We have also ensured the availability of hand sanitisers at the centres. Other payment centres such as banks will take a call on whether they want to provide this service."

The official said there was an excess supply of power as peak demand had reduced from around 20,000 MW in the first week of March to around 18,000 MW. He attributed this dip to many industries suspending operations due to the lockdown imposed across the State. The MSEDCL is the State's largest power distribution company and caters to nearly 2.6 crore consumers.

The 21-day all-India lockdown came as a shocker to many in Goa as citizens of the coastal State have not stocked up on essential groceries and vegetables since the Janata Curfew was widely expected to be lifted on Wednesday.

The Opposition parties and locals pointed out that the State government had casually extended the Janata Curfew from one day on March 22 to three days. On Tuesday, it was extended to March 31 by Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, who said a necessary system to ensure the supply of essential services will be in place in the next three days.

All major municipal markets in the capital city, Panaji, and the towns of Mapusa, Margao, Vasco and Ponda, which were shut down since Sunday, were allowed to re-

main open from 6 a.m. to 11 a.m. After holding an all-party meeting, Dr. Sawant said Goa has had no positive cases and the government wants to keep it that way. While the fish markets were officially shut, some vendors sold kingfish and mackerel for a premium at ₹800 and ₹400 a kg, way above their usual prices.

"After taking suggestions from all political parties, we have decided that it is time to take some hard steps. Goa will have a 100% curfew. No shops, including milk, fish, vegetables vendors, will be open. Only government emergency services will be available," Dr. Sawant said. Admitting that people of the State will face issues, the Chief Minister said the steps were taken for the betterment of people's health.

As many people had been unable to stock household essentials, Dr. Sawant in-

formed that given that it was a total lockdown with social distancing and arresting community spread of COVID-19 being the aim, district collectors and mambaldars would be meeting to finalise a mechanism to ensure the supply of milk and groceries to the people of Goa. "A system will be



Racing against time: Gaons make last-minute purchases at Panaji Municipal Market on Tuesday. ■ ATISH POMBURFEKAR

worked out over the next two to three days," he said.

Last week, the Goa government had locked down its inter-State borders to passenger and tourist traffic as well as imposed Section 144 of the CrPC to prevent mass gatherings. "Tourists should not come to Goa before March 31. Beaches, restaur-

rants and many public places will remain closed in the wake of COVID-19," Dr. Sawant said.

Leader of the Opposition and Margao Congress MLA Digambar Kamat said the all-party meeting demanded that the government ensure supply of basic commodities and see that no one remains hungry. "I have urged the Chief Minister to address the State as contradictory statements have emerged creating confusion in the minds of people," Mr. Kamat said.

Goa Forward Party president Vijai Sardesai, who was part of the all-party meeting, said the announcement of a lockdown should have been accompanied by clarity on how people will be provided with groceries. "I told the CM it is ethically wrong to make the announcement to Goans after 11 a.m. when the markets were shut," Mr. Sardesai said.

## Petrol pumps in Pune directed to stop sale of fuel

Only vehicles ferrying people involved in dispensing essential services will be allowed to fill fuel

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE

PUNE

The Pune district administration on Tuesday directed all fuel pumps to stop supply to all vehicles not engaged in dispensing emergency and essential services till March 31 in a bid to eliminate vehicular movement on roads and compel the public to obey lockdown orders.

Issuing a directive under the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, the Maharashtra Police Act 1951, and the Disaster Management Act, 2005, Pune District Collector Naval Kishore Ram said only those vehicles ferrying people involved in dispensing essential services or engaged in emergency services to contain the pandemic or carrying persons in urgent need of medical help would be allowed to fill fuel at petrol pumps.

**'Freedom of action'** Deputy Chief Minister and Pune's Guardian Minister Ajit Pawar said the State police and district authorities have been given complete freedom of action to enforce implementation of lockdown orders and carry out State blockade, district



No sale: A petrol pump on Laxmi Road in Pune wears a deserted look after the administration directed all fuel pumps to stop supply till March 31. ■ JIGNESH MISTRY

blockade and communication shutdown as they deemed fit in order to check the spread of the virus. Reiterating that the supply of employees of companies and industries exempted from the lockdown, the Pune Police will be issuing digital permits to such persons.

Such employees can mail the authorities at Pune City Police, grievance

market yards and grocery stores. @gmail.com to seek their digital permits, which will be issued after furnishing requisite personal and company details as well as that of the official necessary for the operation of services. If stopped by the police, the employee concerned will need to show a copy of the email with his ID card.

The Pune Police have also

activated four dedicated WhatsApp numbers to answer queries and entertain requests regarding the lockdown orders with respect to permissions for vehicular movement. The numbers are +91 9145003100, 8975283100, 9168003100 and 8975953100.

**Cracking the whip** Meanwhile, police authorities across the State were seen enforcing the lockdown, often brandishing sticks and using force to drive off two-wheeler and four-wheeler riders and sending them packing to their homes.

Police and home guards were seen hitting violators with batons and sticks in Aurangabad, Nashik, Kolhapur and Hingoli while a mild lathi charge was carried out in Nagpur to break up an assembly of more than five persons.

Likewise, in Washim and Parbhani districts, the district administration on seeing heavy vehicular traffic, cracked down on errant drivers, forcing them to turn to their homes and stay indoors to avoid catching and spreading infection.

## Patients booked for not disclosing contacts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

AHMEDABAD

An FIR was registered on Tuesday against a couple, both COVID-19 patients, and one of their relatives in Gandhinagar for allegedly not disclosing the names of two people who came in contact with them and later tested positive for the novel

coronavirus, an official said.

The couple's uncle, who was among the two people who later tested positive, was also booked for not informing health authorities that he came in contact with his nephew after his return from Dubai, the official said.

The couple returned from Dubai on March 16. The 28-

year-old man tested positive for the novel coronavirus March 20, while his wife was also diagnosed with the disease the next day. Both of them and their family members had to disclose names of the people they met after their return from Dubai, as per a notification of the health department.



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# Karnataka should brace for 1 lakh cases: Dy.CM

It is seen as State's first acknowledgement of the gravity of the COVID-19 pandemic

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BENGALURU

Karnataka could have to brace itself for about one lakh cases of COVID-19 in the days to come, said Deputy Chief Minister and IT/BT Minister C.N. Ashwathnarayana on Tuesday.

"We are expecting requirement of about 20,000 beds and a need for 2,000

## COVID-19

ventilators to tide over the crisis," he said.

The Minister's statement on the floor of Legislative Council is being seen as the government's first acknowledgement of the gravity of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Isolation hospitals will be set up in all districts and they have been set up in nine districts already. About 20,000

hotel rooms will be taken to establish quarantine facilities," the Deputy Chief Minister said.

He said that fever clinics will be established so that people need not crowd hospitals directly and hospitalisation will be based on referrals. Trying to allay fears on shortage of ventilators expressed by Leader of Opposition S.R. Patil, the Deputy Chief Minister said: "Of the ventilator requirement, 1,000 ventilators have been ordered while the government currently has 300 ventilators. Private hospitals have assured to give 100 ventilators to the government and Infosys Ltd. has promised to buy 100 ventilators."

### 'Don't create panic'

However, some pulmonologists and experts in respira-



People going to Ballari by tractor on Tuesday after the Karnataka government announced a lockdown. ■ SUDHAKARA JAIN

tory diseases have said that the need of the hour is to cut transmission and not create panic.

One well-known pulmonologist, requesting anonymity, said he was not sure on what basis the estimated numbers were being arrived at. "The next one week is critical for us and our focus should be on cutting transmission and not creating panic," said a senior govern-

ment doctor, who is an expert in communicable diseases.

"If we pass this month without a surge in numbers, we are confident Karnataka will be able to contain the spread of the infection in the coming days. This is possible if people follow strict home quarantine," he said.

Tarun Bhatnagar, scientist at Indian Council of Medical Research, said there is no da-

## Govt. makes U-turn, no free food at Indira Canteen

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BENGALURU

Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa on Tuesday said all Indira Canteens would remain closed during the lockdown period to avoid gathering of large number of people.

On Monday, the State

government had announced that Indira Canteens would provide food free of cost for the benefit of daily wage workers and poor people in the wake of a complete lockdown.

On the first day of lockdown, Indira Canteens provided idli free of cost.

ta yet to make the projections. "But as India started preventive measures at an early stage and has stepped up surveillance, we hope there will be a positive impact on containing the infection," he said.

However, Devi Prasad Shetty, chairman of Narayana Health, who cautioned that over 80,000 persons are likely to be infected in Karnataka, told *The Hindu* that the

prediction was based on how the virus behaved in Italy. "In a State like Karnataka with a population of over 6.5 crore, we need to plan for the worst," he said. "I may be wrong and I wish I am. But what if I am right?" he asked.

Pointing out that countries like Iran, France, Germany, and Spain took long to contain the infection, he said India clamped down on visitors early.



TELANGANA



KARNATAKA



ANDHRA PRADESH



KERALA



Market watch: (From top) Due to lack of buyers, flower vendors discarded their wares ahead of the Ugadi festival in Hyderabad; people buying vegetables at the Central market in Mangaluru; a busy Rythu Bazar in Vijayawada; and Corporation personnel disinfecting the Broadway market in Kochi on Tuesday. ■ NAGARA GOPAL, SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT, K.V.S. GIRI & H. VIBHU

## A.P. postpones SSC exams by two weeks

### STAFF REPORTER

VIJAYAWADA

The Board of Secondary Education, Andhra Pradesh, has postponed the SSC (Secondary School Certificate) examinations scheduled to commence on March 31. The examinations have been postponed for two weeks.

Education Minister Adimulapu Suresh on Tuesday said that the examinations were put off keeping in view the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown.

The new or revised SSC examination dates would be released soon, the Minister said.



Pinarayi Vijayan

two from Kozhikode and one case each from Thiruvananthapuram, Alappuzha, Ernakulam, Kottayam, Palakkad and Malappuram.

Apart from the healthcare personnel and three contacts, eight persons had come from Dubai and one

each from Qatar and the U.K. Another 8,140 persons were added to the COVID-19 surveillance network in the State on Tuesday, taking the total number under surveillance to 72,460.

The Chief Minister said the situation at Kasargod, which has notched up the maximum number of COVID-19 cases so far in the State – 44 out of the 106 reported cases in the second wave – is a matter of grave concern.

It is possible that community transmission has happened here even though documented evidence is yet to surface, he said.

The law enforcement went into overdrive on the first day of the State-wide

shutdown to ensure that the people stayed indoors and maintained social distance. Uniformed officers wearing protective masks and wielding batons staged flag marches in several districts.

The enforcement of regulations was a notch harsher in Kasargod, which has notched up the maximum number of COVID-19 cases so far in the State – 44 out of the 106 reported cases in the second wave – is a matter of grave concern.

Across the State, the police warned of gatherings of more than five people and allowed people to venture out only to buy groceries, milk or medicine. They issued warnings to tea stalls, hotels, eateries, convenience stores to close down shutters.

## Three new cases in Telangana

### STAFF REPORTER

HYDERABAD

Three more COVID-19 positive cases were confirmed in Telangana on Tuesday, taking the total number of cases in the State to 36. The government is exploring the possibility of taking up fever surveillance in the entire State.

The fresh cases are a 49-year-old man who has a travel history to London, a 39-year-old woman who has a travel history to Germany and a 61-year-old woman who has a travel history to Saudi Arabia.

Till Monday night, 33 cases have been reported in the State.

## Warangal doctors denied houses on rent

Fearing spread of COVID-19, many landowners decline to accommodate them

### GOLLAPUDI SRINIVASA RAO

WARANGAL URBAN DT

At a time when the whole world is lauding the efforts of doctors, some paranoid residents in Warangal are refusing to give houses on rent to people in the medical profession, fearing the spread of coronavirus.

Scores of house surgeons of a new batch who joined duties on Monday and Tuesday and their seniors, who were located around the MGM Hospital, are facing severe problems due to non-availability of accommodation.

When the issue was brought to the notice of Telangana Panchayat Raj Minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao and district Collector Rajiv Gandhi Hanumanthu, they said the Kakatiya Medical College (KMC) authorities have allocated a new building to both senior and junior house surgeons.

"Even the hostel rooms



People do not understand the risks we undergo to keep them healthy, say doctors. ■ REPRESENTATIONAL PICTURE

have been converted into quarantine wards and hence the problem. But it is now addressed," the Collector said.

Most of these interns who hail from various parts of Telangana stay in rented houses near the hospital in the surroundings of Bhadrakali temple opposite KMC, Pochamma Maidan and Gopala Swamy temple until they



complete their one-year internship in the MGM hospital.

In the wake of virus pandemic, the house owners are reportedly asking them to vacate their houses.

A house surgeon working in MGM hospital has shared their woes on Facebook.

The post is now going viral on social networking sites. The post said that one of the owners called the doc-

tors 'dirty' because of work in the hospital. "Our campus hostels are converted into isolation wards by the State government. We are working without any protective equipment during this pandemic, without any holiday, without any stipend since five months while the nation is in lockdown," the post read.

On condition of anonymity, one of the house surgeons described certain house owners as insensitive.

"They do not understand the risks we undergo to keep them healthy. It is really demoralising," he said.

Meanwhile, GWMC Commissioner Pamela Satpathy responded to the viral post on Twitter and said "Few similar posts have come to our notice. The issue of accommodation has been resolved already. All Doctors/Medical Fraternity facing any such issue, are kindly requested to contact KMC Principal."

## Green fencing



Residents placing shrubs on the road to prevent outsiders from entering Abdullahpurmet on the outskirts of Hyderabad on Tuesday. ■ NAGARA GOPAL

## Kerala to take the lead in fight for Central funds

It will evolve consensus among States

### N.J. NAIR

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala is yet again set to take the lead in evolving a consensus among Finance Ministers of other States to mount pressure on the Centre for wresting an assistance to tide over the crisis triggered by COVID-19.

Finance Minister T.M. Thomas Isaac is learnt to have made preliminary arrangements for holding a conference of the Finance Ministers for evolving a course of action to compel the Centre to share its available resources with the States that are reeling under an acute resource crunch.

A videoconference of the Ministers of non-BJP ruled States has been planned as a

## Lockdown total in this A.P. village

Residents of Peddaganjam in Prakasam district practise social isolation religiously

### S. MURALI

ONGOLE

Taking social distancing to a higher level, residents of Peddaganjam in Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh practise social isolation religiously to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

The elders in Peddaganjam, a hamlet of Upugundur village, went into huddle after the authorities declared a lockdown across the State, and decided not to go out of the village.

The lockdown is total in the coastal village with the residents, many of them fishermen, voluntarily confining themselves to their homes.

"We will not allow outsiders to enter our village as well till such time the health situation improves," says a group of villagers in a con-



versation with *The Hindu* after putting thorny bushes across the road leading to the village close to the east coast highway to prevent entry of vehicles from outside. "We are Hale and hearty.

The dreaded disease can spread only if someone comes from outside. Hence the decision," they say, making a mention of the disease spreading fast across the country after infected non-

## Karnataka HC makes use of virtual court facility

Case was heard via live video link

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BENGALURU

The Karnataka High Court on Tuesday turned the concept of virtual court into reality by digitally reaching out to an advocate in a remote location, straight from the court hall, for live hearing of arguments in a case.

"We will not hesitate to isolate any person infected with communicable disease till such time he or she recovers. This is how they tide over difficult health situations," adds another village elder A.M. Reddy, while justifying the hard decision taken to tide over the difficult situation. Taking a cue from them, people of neighbouring Pallepalem village have followed suit.

of a division Bench are at different locations.

### Digital mode

In view of restrictions imposed on entry to the court complexes due to COVID-19, the High Court on March 21 notified temporary availability of virtual court facility to enable the advocates and litigants, who appear in person, to argue cases of extreme urgency through digital mode.

A Division Bench comprising Justice B.V. Nagarathna and Justice Pradeep Singh Yerur on Tuesday heard the arguments on an appeal arising out of an order passed by a family court through digital mode in court hall 2.

IN BRIEF



Railways may produce medical items

NEW DELHI  
The Indian Railways is exploring the possibility of manufacturing select essential medical items such as hospital beds, medical trolleys and sanitizers at its various production units. In a communique to general managers at its production units, the Railway Board on Tuesday asked them to "assess the feasibility to manufacture these items in large quantities (as may be required) at short notice. Items identified thus may be communicated to Board along with its likely production rate."

**HC asks ICMR to give no discharge instructions**

JAIPUR  
The Rajasthan High Court on Tuesday directed the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) to consider the issue of discharge of coronavirus-infected persons from hospitals without proper testing and instruct all agencies not to send patients back home unless they were found virus-free. The court said cases had been noticed where the infected persons were hospitalised again after their discharge that they were infection-free.

**Passengers flock to airport before lockdown**

CHENNAI  
Hundreds of passengers thronged the Chennai airport in T.N. to leave the city and flight fares went up manifold as the city prepared for a lockdown. Domestic flight operations will be suspended from midnight. As soon as the announcement came, by around 5.30 p.m. on Monday, many rushed to the airport and by midnight, nearly 10,500 people flew out to different destinations and about 8,500 people arrived here. This continued on the whole of Tuesday as well, airport sources said.

**WEATHER WATCH**

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



**Forecast for Wednesday:** Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning, hail and gusty wind very likely at isolated places over Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra and with lightning at isolated places over Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Kerala, Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Delhi.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	....	31.8	19.2	Kozhikode	....	36.8	26.0
Ahmedabad	....	37.7	25.3	Kurnool	....	38.6	24.8
Aizawl	....	25.6	13.7	Lucknow	....	32.7	18.5
Allahabad	....	34.8	19.5	Madurai	....	38.2	25.6
Bengaluru	14.8	34.4	20.8	Mangaluru	....	35.2	25.5
Bhopal	....	36.1	20.4	Mumbai	....	32.0	22.5
Bhubaneswar	....	34.2	20.5	Mysuru	....	35.1	23.0
Chandigarh	....	29.4	18.4	New Delhi	32.2	19.2	—
Chennai	....	33.6	24.0	Patna	....	31.7	22.6
Coimbatore	....	35.5	24.0	Puducherry	....	32.8	23.8
Dehradun	....	—	—	Pune	....	37.8	21.9
Gangtok	13.2	14.3	8.3	Rajpur	....	35.4	20.0
Goa	00.0	00.0	00.0	Ranchi	....	31.2	18.8
Guwahati	00.0	00.0	00.0	Shillong	0.6	19.2	14.4
Hubballi	....	34.0	21.0	Shimla	0.2	18.2	9.2
Hyderabad	....	34.6	22.4	Srinagar	7.6	11.8	9.6
Imphal	14.2	26.6	12.4	Thiruvananthapuram	....	33.7	25.4
Jaipur	....	29.8	20.7	Tiruchi	....	36.7	24.0
Kochi	....	32.4	25.8	Vijayawada	....	—	—
Kohima	4.2	20.4	10.7	Visakhapatnam	0.4	32.2	24.2
Kolkata	29.0	32.5	17.1				

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

**Pollutants in the air you are breathing**

Yesterday

CITIES SO. NO. CO PM2.5 PM10 CODE

Ahmedabad 61 45 17 .54 100 ■■■■■

Bengaluru 10 49 23 .52 100 ■■■■■

Chennai 06 12 40 .65 ■■■■■

Delhi 25 50 14 .213 .107 ■■■■■

Hyderabad 02 29 23 .68 ■■■■■

Kolkata 17 20 64 .44 50 ■■■■■

Lucknow 04 24 47 .252 ■■■■■

Mumbai 07 18 10 .45 100 ■■■■■

Pune 37 13 62 .46 44 ■■■■■

Visakhapatnam 18 49 40 .67 84 ■■■■■

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■■ Moderate ■■■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

SO: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

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

PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease



No man's land: A deserted Sassoon Dock during the lockdown in Mumbai on Tuesday; personnel from the Fire Department disinfecting the KEM Hospital premises in central Mumbai; and an aerial view of Anand Vihar-Kaushambi metro (Delhi-U.P. border), during the lockdown in New Delhi. ■ EMMANUEL YOGINI, PRASHANT NAKWE & R.V. MOORTHY



## Doctors cautious over use of malaria drug as virus preventive

### ICMR warns against its unrestricted use

R. PRASAD

CHENNAI



It is still at an experimental stage, the Council said. ■ AFP

"The recommendation is for empirical use of the drug based on available evidence and is restricted for use by only two categories of people and under strict supervision of a doctor," Director-General of ICMR Balram Bhargava told *The Hindu*.

The clarification comes as none of the drug approving agencies across the world,

including the FDA, has cleared the drug for prophylaxis or for treating COVID-19 patients.

The available evidence of the efficacy of the drug is a small study by French researchers involving 26 COVID-19 patients. The study found "significant" reduction in viral load in over half the number of patients at end of six days of therapy. The results were published on March 17 in the International Journal of Antimicrobial Agents even before the 14-day follow-up was completed.

During a White House press briefing a few days ago, asked if there was any evidence that the drug can be used as a prophylactic or as treatment for COVID-19 patients, Director of the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Anthony Fauci, said: "The

answer is 'no' as it is [based on] anecdotal evidence."

Despite Dr. Fauci's clarification, two Nigerians are reported to have over-dosed on the drug after hearing U.S. President Donald Trump saying the drug could help treat people with COVID-19. A man in Arizona, U.S., died and his wife was hospitalised after they self-medicated with a home remedy of hydroxychloroquine.

Prof. Gagandeep Kang, executive director of the Translational Health Science and Technology Institute (THSTI) in Faridabad, told *The Hindu*: "At this moment there is no evidence available [about its effectiveness]. There are on-going trials. They must have waited for the results. Even the trials are for treating COVID-19 patients and not for prophylaxis."

In an order issued on Monday, the Ministry has said proper functioning of the media network is essential to create awareness among people, to disseminate important messages and also keep the nation updated on the latest status.

## States must facilitate media outlets to fight fake news: govt.

Ensure smooth supply and distribution chain, says directive

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

In a bid to fight "fake news", rumours and speculation that have been doing the rounds on the social media in connection with the COVID-19 outbreak, the Union Information and Broadcasting Ministry has issued directions to all State governments to facilitate functioning of all print and electronic media outlets.



Proper functioning of the media network is essential, the Ministry said. ■ AFP

down across the country limiting the movement of people and shutting all institutions and offices. Issuing the six-point directive, the Ministry has said all operators and their intermediaries should be permitted to remain operational.

It has urged the State governments to facilitate "smooth supply and distribution chain".

### Provisions facilitated

The media facilities should be permitted to be manned by the staff of the service providers.

"The movement of the accredited staff of service providers need to be promoted and these networks play a pivotal role in ensuring the same," the Ministry said in its directive.

The Ministry orders come in the backdrop of the lock-

ed, the order says.

## CRPF readies 19 quarantine centres

### VIJAYA SINGH NEW DELHI

The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) has readied 19 quarantine centres across the country as COVID-19 spreads rapidly.

The centres have been placed at the disposal of the Ministry of Home Affairs, an official said. The capacity of the isolation wards is around 2,000. They are located in Haryana, Assam, West Bengal, Odisha, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Bihar, Karnataka and Kerala.

Briefing the press, Joint Secretary, Health Ministry Lav Agarwal said the Centre has asked the States to ensure adequate, earmarked hospitals and ventilator facilities are made available.

"We are also procuring more ventilators and looking at a prototype made at All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) to increase the availability of this essential commodity. The Government is also in talks with personal protection

equipment manufacturers to ensure that we have enough and steady supply of these commodities," he said.

Meanwhile, Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare Harsh Vardhan, visited National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) Control Room and the testing laboratories on Tuesday.

Dr. R. Gangakhedkar, head, epidemiology and communicable diseases, ICMR said that currently 118 laboratories are testing for COVID-19.

"Our capacity to test has gone up to 12,000 samples per day. Also as per our study we have estimated that India may be able to reduce its COVID-19 cases by up to 62% if social distancing and quarantines are strictly observed," he said.

"We are also procuring more ventilators and looking at a prototype made at All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) to increase the availability of this essential commodity. The Government is also in talks with personal protection

## Pune lab gets approval for COVID-19 diagnostic kit

Several labs had applied to NIV, Pune, to get their kits vetted

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Pune-based MyLab is the first indigenous manufacturer to be approved for deploying its kits for COVID-19 testing.

"Congratulations to our Biotech innovators first make in India COVID 19 diagnostic kit," Renu Swarup, Secretary, Department of Biotechnology, tweeted. Ms. Swarup also leads the government's Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) which supports biotechnology companies, and MyLab was one of them.

While diagnostic tests for COVID-19 are largely reliant on foreign companies, several labs in India had applied to the National Institute of Virology, Pune, for

getting their own kits vetted. Written guidelines by the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) require that only diagnostic kits that have been approved by the United States Food and Drugs Administration or certified by the European Union be allowed to offer commercial tests for

The immediate action from regulatory bodies (CDSCO/FDA), evaluation centre of ICMR, NIV, BIRAC and the Central and State governments during this national emergency was commendable, he said.

The Managing Director of MyLab Discovery Solutions, Hasmukh Rawal, told trade magazine *BioSpectrum India*: "With emphasis on 'Make in India' and support from local and Central governments, COVID-19 kit has been made as per WHO/CDC guidelines. It was developed in a record time".

Due to outbreak of COVID-19 and Government decision to lock down, the e-auctions for disposal of Ferrous scrap, Non-Ferrous scrap, Coarse river sand, Other miscellaneous scrap, condemned wagons, coaches & Locos, scrap Rails and other permanent way materials scrap which are scheduled to be conducted from 24.03.2020 to 03.04.2020 stands cancelled.

The official said around 350 CRPF doctors were sent to these centres, having been trained in treating COVID-19 patients. He said the CRPF had asked its personnel to declare if their family members had recently returned from abroad. "We got to know of 6-7 cases. The families have been quarantined," he said.

Several labs had applied to NIV, Pune, to get their kits vetted

for COVID-19 testing.

ICMR has issued directions to all the labs to submit their applications for the following position at NIV on contract basis for three years.

### GENERAL MANAGER (FINANCE)

Qualification : Graduate (full time) with C.A.  
Experience : Minimum 10 years working experience in Corporate / Public Sector Organizations after CA.  
Age Limit : 53 Years (as on 01.03.2020)  
Salary : Rs.1,50,00/- (Consolidated per month) 10% increase in 2nd & 3rd Year  
Period of Contract : 3 years

Apart from Consolidated Salary, the selected candidate will not be eligible for any other pay/allowances/bonus etc. except for Conveyance Allowance. Eligible candidates may send their resumes within 15 days to:



## The reign of Shivraj

The BJP government will have to manage the changed political dynamics in M.P.

**T**he Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, who was sworn in as the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh on Monday night, proved his majority in the Assembly on Tuesday. This is his fourth term as Chief Minister. After three consecutive terms, he had lost the election in 2018. He mustered the support of 112 MLAs for the trust vote which was hurriedly organised overnight and was missed by 92 Congress MLAs and two independents. Two BSP MLAs, one of the SP, and two independents who were earlier supporting the Congress government that collapsed last week, voted in favour of the trust vote. Mr. Chouhan has said his government's immediate focus would be in tackling the coronavirus crisis that is testing the capacity and will of the State. He has also asked all MLAs to leave for their constituencies and take the lead in managing the crisis. The downfall of the Congress government was engineered by the resignation of 22 of its MLAs. These and two more seats in the 230-strong State Assembly remain vacant. The actual strength of the government will be tested in and after the by-elections to these seats. It is a different question whether the Congress can regroup itself and challenge the government.

With the return of the BJP government in M.P., the political turn in the State in 2018 has been proven short-lived. The party had faced a setback in M.P., Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh where it lost power to the Congress before bouncing back in the 2019 Lok Sabha election. The Congress could not sustain its gains, and has now ended up losing a government. But it goes beyond that and shows the party as a weak challenger to the BJP. To begin with, the Congress victory was nebulous and narrow in M.P., and its fortunes were compromised by debilitating factionalism within. It cannot be a viable political alternative to the BJP unless it gets imaginative in building sustainable and strong social and class coalitions. In places where it has done so, the party has been effective in elections and governance, including in neighbouring Chhattisgarh. The exit of Jyotiraditya Scindia, who has since joined the BJP, could actually be used as an opportunity by the Congress to promote better rooted leaders from diverse social backgrounds, stepping beyond dilapidating feudal fortresses. The BJP in the State will also need to achieve a new equilibrium, now disrupted with the entry of Mr. Scindia. Mr. Chouhan has emerged as a strong leader, but there are others waiting in the wings too. The change of guard in M.P. will unsettle existing equations in both the parties, beyond State boundaries.

## Death by fireworks

Violations of rules in hazardous industries can be tolerated only at the cost of human lives

**U**nsafe working conditions and improper handling of inflammable raw materials continue to endanger lives in the fireworks industry. Last week, 11 workers were charred at a fireworks unit in Tamil Nadu's Virudhunagar district. Police data show that in the past decade, at least 239 people have perished and over 265 injured in 142 accidents in fireworks units. Such tragedies have not been confined to Sivakasi, deemed the fireworks capital of the world, where most such units are concentrated. Illegal cracker units functioning in a few other parts of the State have also led to loss of a significant number of lives. In and around Sivakasi, the manufacturing of firecrackers in makeshift unlicensed units, rough handling of chemicals by untrained and unskilled workers, spillage or overloading of chemicals during the filling process, and working outside permitted areas have been identified as major causes for past accidents. In the recent tragedy too, the workers were engaged in manufacturing 'fancy aerial crackers' for which the unit did not have a licence. Preliminary investigations suggest that mishandling of chemicals could have triggered an explosion.

Occasional accidents in an industry dealing in explosive materials may seem inevitable. But the probability of such mishaps can certainly be reduced by adopting safe work practices, complying with rules and through cohesive monitoring by Central and State licensing and enforcement authorities. Crackdowns against violators have been few and far between despite illegal sub-leasing of works to unlicensed cottage units becoming a widely acknowledged practice in the industry. The Tamilnadu Fireworks and Amorces Manufacturers Association has also complained about the unlicensed units, a parallel industry in itself spread across a dozen villages. The Chaitanya Prasad Committee, which examined, among other things, statutory and administrative shortcomings that led to the death of 40 workers at Om Shakti Fireworks Industries in 2012, noted the "conspicuous absence" of proper inspection mechanisms at various government departments. It also found a lack of coordination between Central and State authorities dealing with the regulation of fireworks industries. The committee recommended making sub-leasing of works by licensed units a cognisable penal offence; mandated inter-safety distances between sheds covered with earthen mounds; and provision of a smoothed pathway with a width of 1.5 metres, as part of industrial safety measures. Ground reports suggest these recommendations continue to be ignored, with sub-leasing of works still rampant. Regulators understandably complain of a lack of manpower in checking violations. The number of players has exponentially grown since the 1980s with 1,070 licensed units employing an estimated 10 lakh workers now. But safety is non-negotiable. The governments must walk the extra mile to enforce rules in a hazardous industry and prosecute violators. The industry too must self-regulate in its own interest.

# Ironing out wrinkles in India's pandemic response

Some critical weaknesses in the country's health system can come in the way of a credible strategy to combat COVID-19



KRISHNA D. RAO &  
TARUN K. GEORGE

**M**uch concern about the novel coronavirus in India is understandably about the number of cases and related deaths. It is important to remember that the vast majority (80%) of COVID-19 cases will be mild. The estimated mortality rate varies considerably between 3% to 0.25% of cases, and is much higher among the elderly. Mathematical models and the experience of China, Italy, and now the United States, suggest that COVID-19 is likely to infect a significant number of Indians, though this can change due to current physical distancing and lockdown measures. Notably, wealthier countries with stronger and better financed health systems such as Italy and China have struggled with containing COVID-19. As such, it is prudent to understand how well India's health system can respond to COVID-19, especially since it is unclear how long this disease will persist. We believe that there are some critical weaknesses in India's health system that can prevent a credible response to COVID-19.

### State-to-State coordination

In truth, we do not really know how widespread the epidemic is in India because such a small number of people have been tested and many mild cases go undetected. To what extent India's ongoing efforts to control COVID-19 using physical distancing and isolation will be successful is yet unknown. It is likely that, as in other countries, there will be regional or sub-regional disease hotspots, rather than a nationwide outbreak. The higher number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in States such as Kerala and Maharashtra suggest this (though this could also be due to

more testing). This highlights the importance of approaching India's COVID-19 response from the perspective of State health system capacity. Second, it is unlikely that States which experience a COVID-19 hotspot will have the resources to manage the outbreak independently. As such, it is critically important to put in place well-functioning between-State and within-State coordination mechanisms that enable efficiently leveraging resources such as doctors, nurses, equipment, supplies from elsewhere and direct them to regional/sub-regional hotspots.

### Ramping up hospital capacity

Addressing the scarcity of hospital and intensive care unit (ICU) beds in India is critical for providing clinical support to severe COVID-19 cases. Without flattening India's COVID-19 epidemic curve, our current hospital capacity is so low that it will be quickly overwhelmed if infections surge. India has around 70 hospital beds and 2.3 ICU beds per 100,000 people. To put this into perspective, China (Italy) has 420 (340) hospital beds and 3.6 (12.5) ICU beds per 100,000 people, and both these countries struggled to care for the severely sick. According to our rough calculations, based on estimates from recent studies, in a hypothetical State with a population of 50 million (about the size of Andhra Pradesh), with the national-level endowment in hospital and ICU beds and bed occupancy of 50%, assuming there are currently 10 COVID-19 cases with a doubling rate of five days (5% of the cases hospitalised and 16% of hospitalisations need ICU care, median length of stay 12 days), without any mitigating measures, the ICUs will fill up in six weeks and hospital beds in about eight weeks from now. This will happen sooner in States with lower hospital capacity.

It is critically important that India puts in place a strategy to ramp up hospital and ICU capacity, as well as provision for essential equipment such as ventilators and personal protective equipment for



health workers. In both China and Italy, hospitals were rapidly constructed to accommodate infected patients. It is doubtful that we can construct new hospitals as quickly as China or even staff them adequately. Therefore, it is important to consider alternatives, such as, extending current hospital capacity, hospital trains that can easily move from one location to another, or converting university dormitories into treatment centres. Tapping the resources in the private sector is particularly important. India's health system is highly privatised and most of the country's health-care capacity in terms of human resources, hospital beds, laboratories, and diagnostic centres is in the private sector. Recognising this, several State governments have initiated action, such as enlisting private laboratories for testing and using the private hospital bed capacity to treat positive patients. More of this is needed, as well as, engaging private hospitals in planning and coordinating the COVID-19 response.

### Health workers are crucial

Health-care workers are a critical resource for the COVID-19 response. They go into communities to carry out preventive care, trace potentially exposed people, and treat the infected. The success of countries such as South Korea and Singapore in controlling the spread and mortality due to COVID-19 has been credited to the ability of health workers to locate, test and treat cases. This requires a substantial number of health workers, and India faces an acute shortage of them. India has around 3.4 qualified doctors and 3.2 nurses and midwives per 10,000 population; in contrast, China (Italy) has 18 (41) doctors

and 23 (59) nurses per 10,000 population. Moreover, health workers in India are mostly concentrated in the urban areas and there are huge disparities between States (Bihar has 0.3 and Kerala has 3.2 doctors per 10,000 population).

Importantly, nurses have been in the forefront of caring for infected people elsewhere; India, has far fewer nurses than both Italy and China. These characteristics of India's health workforce will affect its COVID-19 response, particularly in rural India and in States with fewer health workers. While increasing the health workforce in the short term is difficult, it is important to consider alternatives, such as, task shifting and multi-skilling strategies where a variety of health-care workers (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy doctors, nurses, as well as general and specialist doctors) are engaged. Because it is highly likely that certain regions in India will become COVID-19 hotspots, to contain these outbreaks it is important that human and other resources can be flexibly shifted to these areas from other parts of the country.

Primary-care providers, whether they are formally trained (e.g. medical officers, nurses, auxiliary nurse and midwives, pharmacists), or lay workers (accredited social health activists) or informal workers (rural (not registered) medical practitioners, or RMPs, drug shops) will likely be the first contact health workers for COVID-19 patients. For example, more than 70% of the outpatient visits in India are to private providers, the majority of whom are RMPs. Engaging these primary-care providers in the COVID-19 response is important. For one, they are critical for contact tracing, a strategy that has been successfully used in South Korea and Singapore to contain the virus. Because primary-care providers will encounter patients in early stages or with mild forms of the disease, they play a crucial role in treating and referring patients. While this may not be easy to accomplish, COVID-19 response strategies

should involve engaging these primary-care providers and providing them information on preventing the spread of COVID-19, danger signs or where to refer in case of serious illness.

### Health worker safety

Health workers also take on a disproportionate share of infections. Health worker safety is particularly important for India because it already faces a shortage of doctors and nurses. In China and Italy, the fight against COVID-19 has taken a huge toll on health workers. One of the enduring images from Italy is of an exhausted nurse lying face down on her desk. As a recent article in *The Lancet* notes, estimates from China's National Health Commission show that more than 3,300 health-care workers have been infected as of early March and, by the end of February at least 22 had died; in Italy, 20% of responding health-care workers were infected, and some have died. Health workers also face physical and mental exhaustion, which affects their morale, in addition to the infection risk. Protecting health workers in the forefront of the COVID-19 response will be critical. Procuring and ensuring the widespread use of personal protective equipment (e.g. masks, gloves, gowns, and eye wear) in the care of all patients with respiratory symptoms needs to be prioritised. Such actions will be particularly important if there is a prolonged response to COVID-19.

India like other countries faces important health system challenges in mounting a credible response to COVID-19. Many of these issues are not new. Addressing these health system issues will require much effort, financing, and, in some cases, not even entirely possible to remedy in the near future. How India deals with these health system issues in the days to come will make all the difference.

Krishna D. Rao is Associate Professor, Department of International Health, Johns Hopkins University. Dr. Tarun K. George is Associate Professor, Christian Medical College, Vellore, Tamil Nadu

## In riot aftermath, it's scorched health care too

As north-east Delhi shows, a population losing trust in the care system can affect other health-care indicators as well



ANUP AGARWAL

**T**he impact of riots on health services receives scant attention, more so when there is a communal angle to it. While the narrative around deaths receives some attention, the deeper insidious effects are glossed over. This will also impact not only the health of the population but also crucial medical responses in a time like the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. Here is one such story, although not unique.

After the riots in north-east Delhi, in February, a volunteer called our medical team: "Twenty-two-year-old Noor Jahan (all names have been changed), a pregnant woman, is scared to leave her house. Could you please send a doctor to examine her?" On visiting her, we learnt that the woman had lost all her belongings, including her prescriptions and medications, while fleeing her house in Shri Vihar as it was being torched.

Seeking refuge with her distant relatives and with her delivery date just a week away, she was gripped by fear and anxiety at the prospects of visiting the Guru Teg Bahadur (GTB) Hospital which was nearby. Anecdotes of the communal hostility her neighbours had faced at this hospital had left her unnerved. She ended up deliver-

ing her child at the faraway Sucheta Kriplani hospital, in an unfamiliar environment.

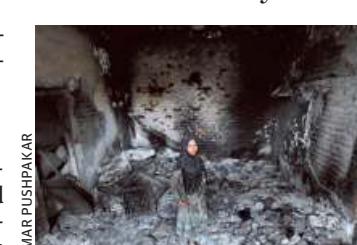
### A zone of poor health

North-east Delhi is the most underdeveloped region of Delhi and is marked by all the socio-demographic determinants of poor health outcomes: a significant proportion of the population is from the migrant and minority communities; there are high rates of illiteracy, rampant unemployment and poverty; overcrowding; unsanitary conditions, and a non-existent health-care infrastructure.

Yet, despite the fear, a medical camp in Chand Bagh, set up for a few hours using a mobile van, immediately draws the attention of more than 600 people. While the most common complaints are fever, a runny nose, and body aches, a disconcertingly high proportion of young adults complain of 'ghabrat' (anxiety). On further questioning, they report poor sleep and appetite, inability to concentrate, and experiencing constant worry, all signs of underlying mental health problems. Further, due to adverse social circumstances, many patients with chronic medical conditions have not been able to visit their doctors. We saw several of these patients who now have a worsening of chronic diseases such as elevated blood pressure and asthma.

Naeem, 25, was in agonising pain. He had a deep cut above his left eyebrow, and was bruised all over after having been beaten up by a mob. Yet, he did not see a doctor.

During our visits to the riot-affected localities, we noted many burned and looted houses. Even



tor, Alarmed by the large number of incarcerations, he had stayed at home. His fears were not unfounded. In the follow-up after the riots, the Delhi Police are estimated to have rounded up over 1,000 individuals, most of them young Muslim men. Interference of the police in health systems and a lack of patient privacy protection laws have changed the health-seeking behaviour of certain sections of the populace.

Zeehan, 36, had been admitted to hospital with fractures in both legs and a stab wound in his left arm. After two days of hospitalisation, they wanted to discharge him. His pleas to stay on as his house had been vandalised and his health was poor had to be turned down. The resident doctor had to tell him that despite their understanding of his concerns, he had received all the care needed and that as the hospital was overflowing with patients, beds were needed. Zeehan had to be told that the hospital could not do anything to help him even if he did not have a safe place to go back to.

During our visits to the riot-affected localities, we noted many burned and looted houses. Even

more malicious was that goons had damaged water pipes and looted water purifiers. With open drains and an unplanned sewerage system, there is a real threat of Salmonella bacteria seeding these pipes. Salmonella, the bacteria responsible for typhoid fever, will be hard to eliminate. If not managed properly, people will suffer from recurrent typhoid fevers and diarrhoeal infections, leading to downstream consequences such as child malnutrition and antimicrobial resistance.

### Way forward is collaborations

These examples demonstrate how the riots have exposed and deepened chasms in the health systems. A broken health system and a population that has lost trust in health-care providers will amplify the challenges of managing the COVID-19 epidemic in Delhi and worsen all other health-care indicators. Rectifying these shall necessitate a deliberate and comprehensive strategy by the State not only at the infrastructure and policy levels but also at the moral and philosophical levels.

The government must collaborate with local municipal bodies, partners in civil society and members of the local community to devise sustainable solutions. They must build a maternity ward with labour room services so that women do not have to travel to faraway, unfamiliar and hostile hospitals to deliver. A mohalla clinic for primary care is a must in the area as demonstrated by large queues outside the medical camps, which

are often organised in an ad hoc manner depending on available resources. Psychologists are needed to provide therapy to the riot-affected children, adults and citizens confined to their houses out of fear. Similarly, physiotherapists should be recruited to prevent long-term physical disability. The sewerage systems should be fixed, water pipes restored and measures such as chlorination for water hygiene instituted at a house-to-house basis.

People should be at the core of health systems and policy design. Systems and policies that drive citizens away from hospitals have to go. An initiative by the Delhi government, in the form of the "Farishte Dille Ke" (The Angels of Delhi), offers hope. Similarly, it ought to set an example for other States by changing health-care privacy laws to protect patients from police interference and also empower them to get medical care.

What is most shocking is the loss of trust in health-care providers on account of the communal underpinnings of the situation. In the short run, the medical community and the government should conduct peace marches in north-east Delhi to assuage fears. In the longer run, just like the "happiness curriculum" in schools, it should start a "humanities curriculum" for medical professionals so that they provide more empathetic and compassionate care.

Anup Agarwal is a medical doctor and a volunteer

## 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.

### Midst of a pandemic

We are lucky there was no Opposition-organised protest against the janata curfew on Sunday. Otherwise the Opposition has the general strategy or tendency to oppose any directive by the ruling party. A self-imposed, once-a-week curfew is a good thing to be practised; it will bring down pollution levels, in the big cities at least. Going forward, it would be a good idea to restrict private vehicles and some public transport

systems on Sundays. The Central and State governments should give thought to promulgating a weekly-once curfew for the betterment of citizens.

V.P. DHANANJAYAN,  
Chennai

■ Amid the gloom and trepidation following the COVID-19 pandemic, there is some cause for hope, in the form of a series of 'feel good' articles. Some have taken to writing on social media focusing on the positive aspects of the lockdown, by

imploring people to be positive, giving out tips for creative utilisation of one's time, and of experts sharing their knowledge on improving the environment, apart from highlighting cases of young and hardworking Samaritans helping people. These people are an example of new term,

"caremongering" – there is an article on the BBC's website on this subject. This is a part of the healing process and a component of the fight against the pandemic. The ruling

Moving ahead, such initiatives will be needed in these difficult times.

SUNNY GURUNG,  
Jodhpur, Rajasthan

**Mockery of democracy**  
The backdoor entry of Shivraj Singh Chouhan as Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, close on the heels of Justice Ranjan Gogoi's ignominious entry into the Rajya Sabha, should be perceived as yet another blow to the democratic and constitutional edifice of the nation. The ruling

establishment appears to have lost all sense of fair play and decency.

Our rulers have no qualms in mocking people by upturning their democratic will. Elections have lost their meaning. The judiciary cannot afford to be seen as losing peoples' faith. The inert Congress Party, which

is totally cut off from the

**CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:**  
The First battle of Panipat was fought in 1526. An Education Plus story titled "What History? Whose story?" (March 23, 2020) wrongly gave the year as 1556.

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# The race to find a cure for COVID-19

While efforts to develop an anti-COVID-19 vaccine are encouraging, safety issues are paramount



VIRANDER CHAUHAN



"The race for developing an anti-COVID-19 vaccine has begun." A researcher works on a vaccine against COVID-19 at Copenhagen University's research lab in Copenhagen, Denmark. • AFP

The novel coronavirus has infected more than 4,00,000 people worldwide and led to the deaths of more than 17,000. The epicentre of the pandemic has shifted from Wuhan district in China to the highly developed Western world. Countries such as Italy, Spain, France, Germany, the U.K. and the U.S., which have some of the most advanced health systems in the world, have come under tremendous pressure and seem unable to deal with this health crisis. With no specific therapy or vaccine available at present, it is imperative that we fast-forward the development of efficacious vaccines and drug therapies against COVID-19. However, it must be emphasised that because vaccines are given to large populations, safety issues are paramount. The world is dealing with an unprecedented and unimaginably serious crisis. Therefore, the speed of vaccine development is crucial.

## Encouraging developments

The race for developing an anti-COVID-19 vaccine has begun. Reasonable scientific rationale and the information needed for vaccine development are available to all stakeholders in academia and industry. A large number of candidate vaccines based on different vaccine platforms, including delivering the virus genetic materials (RNA, DNA) or using synthetic biology to produce key viral proteins, have already been developed. In fact, Phase-I safety trials of an experimental vaccine, jointly developed by scientists at the National Institute of Health and at Moderna, a biotechnology company, has already been administered to healthy volunteers for its safety and immunogenicity. Although based on some earlier experience of vaccines of other coronaviruses such as SARS and MERS, the speed with which the experimental vaccine has entered safety trials is unprecedented. Another vaccine jointly developed by China's Academy of Military Medical Sciences and CanSino Biologics has report-

edly been cleared for early-stage clinical trials in which more than 100 healthy volunteers are scheduled to receive the vaccine. The Serum Institute of India has also recently announced its readiness to start safety trials following animal experiments. According to a World Health Organization (WHO) report, more than 20 vaccine candidates are in advanced stages of development and will be ready for Phase-I safety trials. While these developments are encouraging, several questions will need to be answered for these candidates to move further.

Although it is quite evident that humans mount a strong immune response and clear the viral load, the nature of the immune response and how to trigger it safely through vaccination will be key questions to address. Some early, but limited, studies from China have suggested that monkeys can be infected with this virus but can be protected from reinfection. How long the acquired immunity in humans will last is another important question to be asked before experimental vaccines move forward. We will need to know this because if the immunity is transient, then humans will be susceptible to reinfections. Before moving to Phase-II trials in a large number of healthy volunteers, we also have to ensure that the immune response induced by vaccination does not lead to any disease enhancement, as has been observed in cases of some experimental vaccines against the den-

gue virus, and in animal studies with an experimental vaccine against the SARS virus.

It is absolutely imperative that anti-COVID vaccines are developed as fast as possible and by pushing all reasonable vaccine candidates through animal and human clinical trials. However, it is also clear that it will not be possible to roll-out any efficacious vaccine for at least another year. An all-out effort to develop a vaccine against COVID-19 must continue if we have to stop its spread.

With COVID-19 playing havoc across the world, therapeutic interventions, not only for curing severe cases of the disease but also for protecting all front-line healthcare workers, are urgently needed. Since developing new drugs is a complex and lengthy process, scientists and pharmaceutical companies have rushed to investigate and use drugs that have already been approved by regulatory authorities. Using available molecular and structural biology information on the virus, a group of scientists have analysed all interactions of the viral proteins with human proteins that are crucial for the virus to enter human cells and use the host cell machinery to rapidly reproduce itself. Of the nearly 70 short-listed molecules that may interrupt these key interactions, 24 happen to be already approved drugs which can now be tested in laboratory animal models as well as humans. However, the repurposing of several drugs, alone or in combinations to treat COVID-19

patients, have already been reported. There are many success stories of curing patients of COVID-19 doing the rounds in different parts of the world, but these have managed to create more confusion than hope. Without any appropriate controls, careful dosing and safety concerns, such small experiments can only do more harm than good.

## Controlled randomised trials

Given the urgency of finding a cure, it is absolutely necessary to find out unequivocally what works well and what does not. For that conducting carefully controlled randomised trials is the only way to go. In a welcome move, the WHO has announced clinical trials called the 'Solidarity Project'. Under this four drugs or drug combinations will be tested in many countries around the world. These candidates include the anti-Ebola drug, Remdesivir, Chloroquine, anti-HIV drugs, and the Ritonavir/Lopinavir combination, with or without Interferon-beta. Many countries have already signed up for these trials and all drug companies, including CIPLA from India, have agreed to supply sufficient quantity of drugs needed. The European counterpart of the trial, Discovery, will conduct these trials in countries including France, Spain, Germany and the U.K. The pharma company Roche has also decided to initiate large, randomised Phase-III trials of its arthritis drug Actemra for its safety and efficacy in adult patients with severe COVID-19 pneumonia. It is complex and tedious to conduct randomised, large multi-centric trials. Quickly getting all the stakeholders together is laudable and underscores the notion that everyone needs to fight the deadly virus together. Hopefully, these trials will lead to tangible drug therapies against COVID-19.

It is most heartening to see scientists in academia and industrial partners coming together to fight a monumental public health crisis. The battle between pathogens and humans will continue but let us hope that we win the present one sooner than later.

*Virander Chauhan is former Chairman of UGC and former Director of the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology where he currently holds the Arturo Falaschi Chair*

## COVID-19 and a city's anatomy

How the virus is changing the world and lives

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN

ing it through these times unscathed.

Some who could practise social distancing apparently chose not to. Groups of younger Washingtonians, dressed in green for St. Patrick's Day, were seen on the streets. Younger people have been criticised in the U.S. for a 'business as usual' approach to socialising and taking their Spring Break.

**Grey clouds and silver linings**  
People working in the gig economy or running small business have also been impacted. For instance, Uber drivers reported a loss of passengers and small business owners have had to grapple with letting go of employees to keep their businesses afloat.

At supermarkets, people jostled for space in the aisles, some buying what looked like a month's worth of groceries, emptying out certain categories of food. Department stores ran out of hand sanitisers, thermometers, and even toilet paper. Notices limiting purchases were seen at several stores in the city.

Last week, Mr. Trump appeared to step up the use of what some have called xenophobic language to describe the pathogen, making references to the "foreign" or "Chinese" virus. This has some foreigners in DC worried. A woman in her early forties, Ellen (last name withheld), whose senior citizen parents were visiting DC from Belgium, told *The Hindu* that her parents had decided to return to their home, despite Europe being the epicentre of the pandemic. "They didn't trust the health care system here and the political response," she said, concerned that ventilators, which the U.S. does not potentially have enough of, would be reserved for U.S. citizens.

However, there are some silver linings to the many grey clouds. People are stepping up to help. For instance, with restaurants closing, Chef Jose Andreas is converting his outlets into community kitchens. "People have to eat," Mr. Andreas said, as per *The Washington Post*. Some stores have reserved hours for those above 60 and other more vulnerable groups.

The virus is changing the world and lives, and DC is no exception.

*sriram.lakshman@thehindu.co.in*

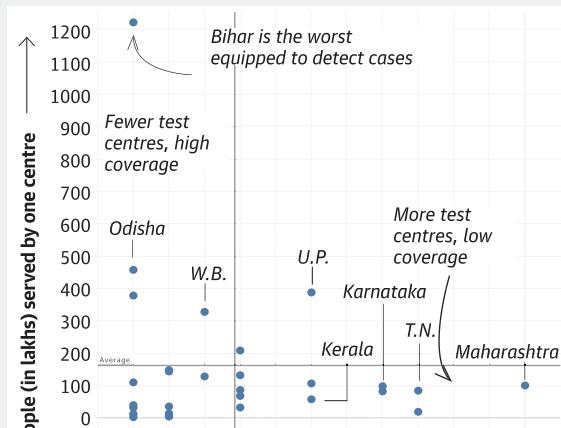


## DATA POINT

### Can our health infrastructure handle COVID-19?

With just one sample testing centre for 12 crore people, the lowest doctor-patient ratio and the least number of hospital beds per patient among States, Bihar is poorly equipped to deal with the COVID-19 crisis. Many other big States also have low beds-patient and hospital-patient ratios. By Sumanth Sen and Vignesh Radhakrishnan

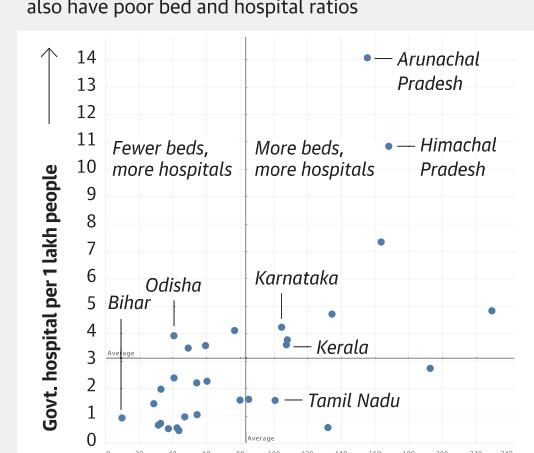
**1. STATE OF TESTING CENTRES** | The chart plots the number of COVID-19 sample testing centres against the average number of people served by one testing centre across States. While Maharashtra has the highest number of testing centres, the State is still under-equipped to detect cases as one testing centre is available for 1.02 crore people



**3. POOR DOCTOR RATIO** | According to WHO, there should be one doctor for 1,000 people. However, in Bihar, one allopathic doctor serves 43,788 people

State/UT	No.of govt. allopathic doctors	People served by one doctor
Bihar	2,792	43,788
Uttar Pradesh	10,754	21,702
Jharkhand	1,793	21,157
Madhya Pradesh	4,588	18,276
Chhattisgarh	1,626	17,829

**2. BEDS AND HOSPITALS** | The chart plots the number of government hospitals per 1 lakh population against the number of beds per 1 lakh population across States. Andhra Pradesh had the lowest hospital-population ratio while Bihar had the lowest bed-population ratio. Many big States also have poor bed and hospital ratios



**4. BETTER DOCTOR RATIO** | Delhi was relatively better with one doctor for every 2,208 people. However, all States fall short of the WHO's guideline on doctor ratio

State/UT	No.govt. allopathic doctors	People served by one doctor
Delhi	9,121	2,028
Goa	644	2,429
Sikkim	268	2,540
Manipur	1,099	2,774
Mizoram	437	2,797

*Source: National Health Profile 2019, NFHS-4, ICMR*

## Services at our doorstep

Similar to health workers, delivery workers are the new front-line force keeping citizens' lives running



ADITI SURIE

mute, working efficiently in the background. However, the bodies of delivery personnel remain unnoticed, invisible. Companies use this rhetoric to make consumers like us believe that they can't do more than these tasks, obfuscating the fact that they can and we can hold them accountable for more than they claim.

## Facing risks

It is only when such infrastructure breaks or is in decay that public concern around it grows. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates the risk faced by delivery agents. They are unable to take a break from work, work from home, or access the superfluous resources that white-collar and professionals in other fields are deriving from their employers. Delivery infrastructure or digitally enabled micro-logistics are key to how citizens navigate their 'social distance' lives during the pandemic. Delivery technologies are providing a key form of infrastructure that can be mobilised at short notice, dynamically and at scale. The mix of multi-side market economics, an on-demand workforce, and algorithmically managed tasks make this mobilisation possible. This is what enabled Didi to launch food delivery in 21 cities in response to the pandemic. Delivery workers, similar to health workers, are the new front-line force keeping citizens' lives running.

## New protocols

In India, how are companies navigating the threat their delivery personnel are under? Major delivery players in India have responded by publicising consumer awareness, restricting dynamic pricing (Amazon and Flipkart) and contact-less delivery protocols. Ola offers ₹1,000 a day for lost income for up to 21 days for drivers or their family members who contract the virus. Flipkart is reportedly mapping impacted areas to ensure that delivery agents are aware and least affected as they continue to offer relief to elite and middle-class households who have been the first-wave of likely infected citizens.

However, company follow-through is in question. Reports show that delivery platforms have not yet implemented some of these protocols. Indian mobility platforms have not yet offered to extend or waive loans and rental fees for lease drivers like Didi for China in the month of February.

Digital delivery infrastructure is novel in form because of its socio-technological nature. Companies like Uber, Didi and Swiggy have pushed out a notion that their responsibility is to maintain the 'technological' halo - hygiene on their apps, keep their algorithms working and offer 'decent' payouts to their flexible, contracted workforce. Like with other kinds of infrastructure it appears

## A new reality?

If governments around the world are ready to nationalise key infrastructure (like Spain's private hospitals), can we use the food delivery workforce to deliver tests or essential medicines to those affected? With the Delhi government banning all dining-in and allowing only delivery, is the pandemic a time to think about a new form of regulation that brings private, socio-technological infrastructure into the public fold in times of crises, eventually to be released back into the forces of the market? Can the app service and app worker's status as public infrastructure bolster better interpretation of social protection that lasts beyond this crisis?

*Aditi Surie is a sociologist at the Indian Institute for Human Settlements*

**The Hindu**

## FROM THE ARCHIVES

50 YEARS AGO MARCH 25, 1970

Leader and PM come near to blows

The Canadian Prime Minister, Mr. Pierre Trudeau, and a trade union leader almost came to blows in a corridor in the Parliament building last night [March 24, Ottawa]. A crowd in the corridor stepped between Mr. Trudeau and M. Michel Chartrand, of the Quebec-based Confederation of National Trade Unions, as they glared at each other and exchanged abuse. M. Chartrand called the Prime Minister "A Christ of a liar" and members of his Government "goons" and "prostitutes." The pair came close to throwing punches as Mr. Trudeau moved away after a heated conversation and M. Chartrand shouted that he was leaving with his "goons." Mr. Trudeau, angered by the jibe, wheeled round and said: "I don't need anyone to protect myself from you." Earlier the Quebec labour leaders and Government Ministers had an acid meeting in a room off the corridor. As the meeting ended and the participants left the room, M. Chartrand said a youth was imprisoned because he insulted Mr. Trudeau. He did not elaborate. Mr. Trudeau denied this and said M. Chartrand was inventing things. M. Chartrand then shouted: "You are raping the population. You are a Christ of a liar." Mr. Trudeau replied: "You are truly a fanatic."

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 25, 1920.

Our Rule in India.

Mr. R.C. Reginald Nevill writes: – Although almost every educated Indian desires a greater measure of political power for his fellow countrymen, there is much altogether outside the sphere of politics in India which must profoundly affect the future relations of Englishmen and Indians. In politics there are wide differences of opinion among Indians. The cleavage between Moderates and Nationalists now seems to be complete. Among Nationalists as represented in the Indian National Congress there exist also many grades of opinion. The Moderates gladly welcome the Montagu Reforms, and are prepared to do their utmost to make the Reform scheme a success. Some of the Nationalists also recognise gratefully the work which Mr. Montagu has done but while appreciating his efforts, and expressing their willingness to co-operate up to a point, they say frankly that they consider these reforms inadequate, and announce their intention of continuing to press for further and wider political power.

## FROM PAGE ONE

## PM announces 21-day lockdown as toll rises

"Several families will be destroyed. India is at a stage of the pandemic where our actions will decide our future," he said.

"While at home you must think of those endangering their lives to combat this pandemic — medical care workers, doctors, nurses, sanitation workers, ambulance drivers who are facing the challenge of treating the disease," the Prime Minister said.

"Pray for the sanitation workers cleaning up our neighbourhoods to keep you safe, please think of the media personnel who are braving infection to keep you informed, of policemen enforcing the law while facing, in some cases, your anger," he added.

Mr. Modi quoted figures on the spread of the pandemic to stress his point. "It took 67 days for the first 100,000 cases to come up, the next 100,000 came up in just 11 days, and it took only four days for the next

100,000 cases to appear," he said.

The rate of infection of the Corona virus is very fast and the only way to break the chain of infection is social distancing, staying indoors. This applies to every citizen of the country including the Prime Minister," he said.

## Resist rumours

Mr. Modi also cautioned against believing rumours.

He acknowledged that the challenge would be particularly hard for the poor and said that alongside the government, civil society organisations should also step up to mitigate some of the hardships.

"We have to prioritise what is required for saving lives. 21 days of lockdown is a long time but for the safety of your family this is the only way that we have. I am confident that every Indian will not only combat this difficult situation but will emerge victorious," he said.

## Ensure tight surveillance, Centre tells States

With the lockdown hitting the Indian industry hard and causing job losses, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman told reporters an economic package to help tide over the crisis will be announced very soon.

In a letter to Chief Secretaries on Tuesday, Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba asked them to ensure that no suspected or high-risk person was left out of surveillance efforts to prevent the spread of the pandemic.

He also called upon chief secretaries to make sure that hospitals are earmarked for treating COVID-19 cases and in a state of "full readiness" to deal with the situation in the event of a "further spike in the num-

ber of confirmed cases."

Meanwhile complaints of discrimination against healthcare workers, airline staff and people who have been quarantined have also emerged.

As journalists and workers associated with the media faced police action amid the lockdown in some parts of the country, the Centre advised States to facilitate functioning of all print and electronic media outlets.

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (I&B) said in an advisory, "false and fake news need to be avoided and good practices need to be promoted and these networks play a pivotal role in ensuring the same."

## Government extends tax deadlines to June 30

For bigger companies, only interest would be charged at the reduced rate of 9%.

The date for filing annual GST returns for 2018-19 has also been extended to the last week of June.

Deadlines for the Vivaad se Vishwas and Sabka Vishwas schemes for defaulting taxpayers are also being extended.

**Threshold raised**  
The Centre has also decided to raise the threshold of default under Section 4 of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016, from ₹1 lakh to ₹1 crore in order to prevent triggering of insolvency proceedings against Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.

"We will continue to watch the situation. If it improves, there is no reason to worry. However, if the current situation continues

beyond April 30 we may consider suspending Sections 7, 9, 10 of the IBC for a period of 6 months to stop companies at large from being forced into insolvency proceedings in such force majeure cases of default," said Ms. Sitharaman.

Statutory corporate requirements are also being relaxed at this time, including filings in the MCA-21 registry, mandatory board meetings, residency requirements for independent directors and deposit reserve requirements.

The Finance Minister added that customs clearance operations would run around the clock, all seven days of the week, till the end of June.

For fisheries imports, the validity of sanitary permits were being extended, while other requirements were being relaxed.

## Omar Abdullah released after 232 days

"There is a lot to talk about. It's a very different world today to the one that existed on 5th August 2019. J&K is now two Union Territories. But that is later. For now, I believe all those arrested or detained should be released, even those who don't belong to any party. High-speed 4G Internet services must be restored forthwith so that people can access sites and learn how to fight the COVID-19," he said.

Later, Mr. Abdullah posted pictures of reunion with his family, including mother and father, on the social media. "I had lunch with my mum and dad for the first time in almost eight months. I can't remember a better meal even though I've been in a bit of a daze

and don't remember what I ate," he said.

Several political parties welcomed the decision. "I am glad he is released. For all their talk of women emancipation, it seems this regime fears women the most," said Iltija Mufti, daughter of incarcerated ex-CM and Peoples Democratic Party president Mehbooba Mufti.

CPI(M) leader M.Y. Tarigami said Mr. Abdullah's release was a step to correct one wrong among many wrongs. "The government should release all, including PDP's Mufti and J&K People's Movement chief Dr. Shah Faesal," he said.

J&K Apni Party chief Altaf Bukhari said, "it will help in creating conducive political atmosphere."

## Chouhan wins trust vote in M.P.

BSP, SP and two Independent MLAs vote in favour of BJP government

STAFF REPORTER  
BHOPAL

The Shivraj Singh Chouhan government in Madhya Pradesh secured the support of 112 MLAs, including those of the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and two Independents, during the trust vote in the Assembly on Tuesday.

Mr. Chouhan, who took oath as the Chief Minister on Monday, moved the confidence motion in the House, which was unanimously passed. The 92 Congress MLAs were not present at the session, which was adjourned to March 27 after the vote.

"Our entire focus is on tackling [novel] Coronaviruses," Mr. Chouhan said later. "However, it is a constitutional necessity to secure the trust vote, which we did today, so that with full force we can combat the disease now."

BSP MLAs Rambai Parihar and Sanjeev Kushwah, Independents Surendra Singh Sheria and Rana Vikram Singh and SP MLA Rajesh Shukla, who had previously backed the Kamal Nath government, voted in favour of Mr. Chouhan. The remaining two Independent MLAs were not present.

Though the SP had issued



Taking charge: Shivraj Singh Chouhan, wearing a protective mask amid the COVID-19 pandemic, interacting with officials of the Assembly in Bhopal on Tuesday. ■ PTI

a whip to its MLA for the March 16 Assembly session, this time it did not issue one. Three days ago, SP president Akhilesh Yadav attacked the BJP saying, "The BJP has murdered democracy in Madhya Pradesh."

BSP chief Mayawati has suspended the party membership of Ms. Parihar last December for violating the party's stand by supporting the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

Congress MLA and former Minister Jitu Patwari had said, "The notification for the session was issued at

12.07 a.m. When there is a lockdown and curfew, then how can MLAs reach the Assembly at such a short notice?"

On Monday night, Speaker N.P. Prajapati tendered his resignation to the Deputy Speaker. In his resignation letter, he wrote that he was resigning on moral grounds.

## Nath questions urgency

Former Chief Minister Kamal Nath questioned the urgency with which the session was called.

"On the one hand, several decisions such as imposing a lockdown and cur-

few have been taken in view of the Coronavirus, and on the other, the decision by the Shivraj Singh Chouhan government around night to flout its own measures to call for a Vidhan Sabha session during a curfew is beyond my understanding," he wrote on Twitter. He also wrote that as there was time to secure trust vote, why this urgency.

The Congress postponed its legislature party meeting scheduled for Wednesday until further notice.

## Floor test sends a wrong signal: Tankha

Congress should rebuild itself, he says

SANDEEP PHUKAN  
NEW DELHI

Senior Congress leader and Rajya Sabha member Vivek Tankha on Tuesday criticised the newly sworn in Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan for taking a floor test amid the lockdown due to the Coronavirus outbreak.

In an exclusive interview with *The Hindu*, Mr. Tankha said, "A wrong gets legitimised, in a wrong manner and at a wrong time, which sends a very wrong signal to society."

Mr. Tankha was also forthcoming about the shortcomings of his party in M.P. and the Kamal Nath government that lasted 15 months. "The Congress should rejoin and rebuild itself, remembering that it was the BJP that had lost in 2018 [Assembly Elections] and we had not won the battle convincingly," he said.

He said that not all 22 MLAs were loyalists of Congress rebel-turned BJP leader Jyotiraditya Scindia.

"While all of them may have been lured, the MLAs fell into three categories. One group was die-hard Scindia loyalists, while the second group was the lot made up by senior Congress leaders who were disenchanted. The third group was the one that is supposed to have gone entirely because of alleged allurements," he said.



wrong. The first principle of politics is sharing and we had seven alliance partners. From day one, I had been saying about accommodating them more than our own people. But there were no takers for this argument," he said.

**Wrong start**  
Though civil society groups, activists and farmers ensured the "ascendancy of the Congress", the State leadership did not quite reward them by making them stakeholders in the government.

"The start itself was

## Opposition welcomes Omar's release

Free Mehbooba Mufti and others too, says Tharoor; Yechury calls for full access to Internet in J&K

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Opposition parties have welcomed the release of National Conference leader Omar Abdullah from eight months of detention. They have also called for the release of other political leaders, including Mehbooba Mufti of the Peoples Democratic Party.

Though the Congress has not issued any official statement, many of its leaders have welcomed Mr. Abdullah's release.

Party MP Shashi Tharoor wrote on Twitter, "Welcome the release of @OmarAbdullah, which we have been calling for."

Glad @OmarAbdullah is being released after his illegal & unjust detention. All others should be released too. Not that they can go anywhere. #COVID19," Salman, son of Mr. Soz, wrote on Twitter.

Congress leader and former Home Minister P. Chidambaram said Mr. Abdullah's case would remain a shocking example of the failure of

the justice delivery system. "The Supreme Court should restate the cardinal of a Writ of Habeas Corpus so that citizens and judges will have no

misunderstanding of the law," he wrote on Twitter.

Glulam Nabi Azad, a former Congress Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, said Mr. Abdullah's detention was "undemocratic and uncalled for".

CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury said political detainees outside Jammu and Kashmir should also be released. He also called for an unfettered access to the Internet in Jammu and Kashmir at a time of panic over COVID-19.

CPI general secretary D. Raja said the government should stop releasing the leaders piecemeal.

## 2 CRPF jawans found dead in Srinagar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
SRINAGAR

Two Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) men were found dead in an alleged case of fratricide in Srinagar in Jammu and Kashmir on Tuesday.

They reportedly opened fire at each other in a camp located on the Dal Lake.

Police and senior CRPF officials were at the spot, a

+ CRPF official said.

"We are collecting more details," an official spokesman said.

They have been identified as constables Siju and Jala Vijay.

(With PTI inputs)

## Shaheen Bagh site cleared, 9 held

Protests at Nizamuddin, Turkman Gate and Seelampur also cleared



Test of strength: Security personnel clearing the protest site at Shaheen Bagh in Delhi on Tuesday. ■ PTI

discharge of his duty) of the Indian Penal Code, was being registered. Nine persons, including six women, were detained.

Around 7 a.m., policemen and paramilitary forces reached the site and asked the 50-odd protesters to vacate the area.

"The step has been taken because of the current health situation. The protesters were informed that Section 144 has been imposed in Delhi and most important, the route needs to be cleared because it links Noida and Delhi. In case of

any health emergency, vehicles should be able to move," said Mr. Meena.

The protesters alleged that they were manhandled by police and their belongings were thrown away.

A tent put up outside Jamia Millia Islamia University was also removed. Abdur Rehman, a second-year student, said the graffiti on the walls were painted over. "By 8 a.m., the police removed the tent and people not in uniform had started painting over the walls. Last night, we had decided to leave the protest site because of the situation, therefore, no student was inside the tent.

Two locals who were there protecting the relief material for riot victims were detained," he said.

## Interlocutors' plea to authorities, protesters

'It is not a question of win or loss'



Interlocutors appointed by the Supreme Court, advocates Sanjay Hegde and Sadhana Ramachandran. ■ BIBEK CHETTRI

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Supreme Court interlocutors Sanjay Hegde and Sadhana Ramachandran on Tuesday issued a statement urging both the authorities and the Shaheen Bagh protesters to do nothing that may exacerbate the situation at a time when the nation is focussing its resources to fight the Corona-virus scare.

The statement was issued after the authorities cleared the Shaheen Bagh protest site.

## Different priorities

"We request everyone to see the issue not as a question of win or lose. The country has a grave pandemic threatening it and currently that must receive priority in terms of everyone's attention. We request the administration and the protesters to now not do anything that will exacerbate the underlying tensions that culminated in the street protests," the statement said.

"Some rigours of the blockade were relaxed by the protesters clearing some peripheral roads. Today the few remaining Shaheen Bagh protesters have been finally dispersed peacefully with minimal force," it added.

## Parliamentary panels defer meetings

Travel restrictions in view of COVID-19 pandemic preventing movement of MPs

SOBHANA K NAIR  
NEW DELHI

All meetings of parliamentary standing committees have been deferred indefinitely because of the lockdown to curb the spread of COVID-19.

The meetings will not be held till the lockdown announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is in place.

The Rajya Sabha Secretariat has ordered a total shutdown till Friday and the Lok Sabha Secretariat till March 31.

The meetings of the committees on commerce and government assurances,



Speaker Om Birla had asked committees to defer all meetings till April 3.

scheduled for Tuesday, were cancelled.

Finance committee chairperson Jayant Sinha told *The Hindu* that at least two com-

mittee meetings, scheduled for March 19 and 26, had to be deferred. "We will resume our meetings once travel restrictions are lifted."

A meeting of the committee on information and technology, scheduled for Wednesday

# Amid lockdown, foreign embassies worry about stranded tourists

Diplomatic missions are dealing with twin challenges of keeping staff safe while ensuring their nationals are able to return, given the ban on commercial flights

SUHASINI HAIDAR  
NEW DELHI

Germany is hoping to fly out the first batch of an estimated 3,000 to 5,000 tourists who have been stuck in India since the government banned commercial flights a week ago to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus.

The special flights, starting on Wednesday and expected to operate all week, are being coordinated by an "embassy crisis centre" being run 24/7 at the Embassy in Delhi, which is registering all German tourists and travellers in India so as to evacuate them.

"As an act of solidarity in these difficult times, we are also taking some European Union citizens with us. We will keep on working to facilitate for all who want to fly back," Germany's Ambassador to India Walter Lindner told *The Hindu*.

**Close to airports**

In a video broadcast in German on social media on Tuesday, Mr. Lindner also told citizens that they should try and move to hotels near the Delhi airport in preparation for the flights.

Apart from the challenge of dealing with the large numbers of Germans in India, is the fact that many are individual travellers, including some who are travelling in remote mountains, embassy officials explained.

As the lockdown in Delhi over the pandemic continues, several embassies say

they are dealing with the twin worries of keeping their own staff safe while ensuring their nationals are able to return.

The government announced on March 17 that it would not allow any nationals from 37 countries to come to India, and has banned all commercial flight operations from March 22. However, the External Affairs Ministry says it will "facilitate requests for special flights by resident missions on a case by case basis."

The government has also been coordinating with missions so that flights coming in to evacuate foreigners can bring in Indians stranded in their home countries as in the case of a KLM flight from Amsterdam and an Air Asia flight from Kuala Lumpur. The Home Ministry announced last week that it would extend all visas for foreign nationals until April 15.



Nowhere to go: Planes stationed on the runway at the Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport in Mumbai after all domestic and international flights were cancelled. • VIJAY BATE

Another worry a number of embassies say they are facing is the harassment of, and discrimination against, foreign nationals. One European diplomat said their citizens had been denied rooms at hotels when they arrived in Delhi, over fears they might carry the virus.

Rishikesh, and need to stay in Delhi," said a Spanish Embassy official.

**Face stigma**

"Many of them say that Europeans are being identified and targeted particularly, taunted by bystanders who call them 'corona'. It is very unusual for them, when this is normally such a friendly country," he added.

The U.S. Embassy in Delhi, which has among the largest citizen populations in India, is also working on ways for Americans to be transported back. "We are working with airline companies and Indian authorities to identify transportation options for U.S. citizens to return," an embassy spokesperson said.

# No curbs on essential goods: Centre

States will act against those violating measures, will send a daily report to Union government

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Home Affairs issued a slew of guidelines to be followed by the States to contain COVID-19 and asked all "enforcement authorities to note that these strict restrictions fundamentally relate to the movement of people, but not to that of essential goods."

Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said in a tweet that the "list of essential services remains unchanged since March 22nd Janata Curfew."

The Ministry of Home Affairs said all commercial and private establishments shall be closed, except "ration shops (under the PDS), dealing with food, groceries, fruits and vegetables, dairy and milk booths, meat and fish, animal fodder." "However, district authorities may encourage and facilitate

home delivery to minimise the movement of individuals outside their homes," the guidelines said.

## COVID-19

The Ministry said "delivery of all essential goods, including food, pharmaceuticals and medical equipment through e-commerce" would be allowed.

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) issued an order asking the States to act against any person violating the containment measures as per provisions of Section 51-60 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, besides legal action under Section 188 of the IPC, punishable by up to two years in jail and a fine.

In another letter addressed to the Chief Secre-



Stocking up: People waiting at a pharmacy to buy medicines in Mumbai on Tuesday. • AFP

taries, Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla asked the States to send daily reports on the implementation of the strict measures as "lack of uniformity in the measures adopted as well as their implementation may not serve the purpose of containing the spread of the virus." The guidelines were similar to the measures be-

ing taken by the States. According to the guidelines, the district magistrates will deploy executive magistrates as "Incident Commanders" in the respective local jurisdictions for the enforcement of the 21-day lockdown as announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The guidelines said offices of the government of India,

its autonomous subordinate offices and public corporations shall remain closed. But the offices of defence, Central armed police forces, treasury, public utilities (including petroleum, CNG, LPG, PNG), disaster management, power generation and transmission units, post, the National Informatics Centre and early warning agencies would be exempted.

"Hospitals and all related medical establishments, including manufacturing and distribution units such as dispensaries, chemist and medical equipment shops, laboratories, clinics, nursing homes and ambulances, will continue to remain functional. The transportation for all medical personnel, nurses, para-medical staff, other hospital support services be permitted," the Ministry said.

# In letter to PM, Sonia seeks help for construction workers

She also urges Congress CMs to come to their aid

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Congress president Sonia Gandhi has asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to roll out emergency welfare measures for construction industry workers following the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 outbreak, the party said on Tuesday.

In a March 23 letter, she told Mr. Modi that the construction industry employed over 44 million people, and the workers should be given wage support. She wrote to the Chief Ministers of party-ruled States on the issue.

In the letter to Mr. Modi, she said: "Over the last week, lakhs of migrant workers in major cities across India have left for their home towns and villages, fearing a



Sonia Gandhi

prolonged economic downturn. As the second largest section of employees in India, over 44 million construction workers are now faced with a precarious future.

In letters to Congress Chief Ministers, she said the construction industry that was reeling under the impact of demonetisation and GST had been hit afresh by the pandemic. +

# Students stranded at border crossing

They were on their journey home from medical colleges in Bangladesh

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE

NEW DELHI

A group of 75 Indian medical students from Kashmir were stranded at the Benapole border crossing of Bangladesh on Tuesday as India shut all land crossings with neighbouring countries.

The students were returning home from medical colleges in Mymensingh and Dhaka and were scheduled to reach Kolkata to board afternoon Kolkata-Srinagar flights, which they missed as they remained stranded at Benapole in Bangladesh's Jessor district.

"We journeyed for 10 hours in buses to reach the Benapole-Petrapole crossing and we learnt of the closure of the border check-posts on the way," said a fourth year student, explaining that the medical colleges in Bangla-



Virus scare: Checkpoints along the India-Bangladesh border have been closed as a safety measure. • AFP

desh had asked students to vacate hostels in view of the COVID-19 crisis. "We were assured by authorities that they would let us enter India but now we are being denied," the student, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, added.

Bangladesh has so far detected 33 cases of COVID-19 infection. Out of that, three patients had died and five had recovered fully while the rest remain under observation. The medical student said that they required urgent help in view of the total

transport halt that India was set to begin from the midnight of Tuesday. Apart from the Indian decision to suspend rail and air services, Bangladesh too will suspend train services from Tuesday evening.

That apart, Bangladesh will also suspend domestic air services from midnight of Tuesday. In view of the unprecedented suspension of air, road transport and railways in both India and Bangladesh, the students urged for prompt action from the Indian authorities to help them reach Srinagar.

Of the stranded students, a few are from institutions in Dhaka while most are from the Community Based Medical College of Mymensingh, which is a private medical college popular with students from India.

# Labour Minister urges CMs to pay workers directly

Release funds into their accounts to mitigate a crisis'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Union Labour and Employment Minister Santosh Kumar Gangwar on Tuesday wrote to all Chief Ministers and Lieutenant-Governors asking them to directly release funds into the accounts of construction workers using the cess collected by their respective Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Boards.

The Minister wrote that the government was taking various measures to provide relief to workers in view of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For construction workers, who tend to rely on daily wages, the government issued the advisory to all



Hard life: Construction workers rely on daily wages. • RAJEEV BHATT

States and Union Territories to use the cess fund, a statement from the Ministry said. The Ministry said about 3.5 crore construction workers were registered with the

# SC adjourns sitting of two Benches

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has adjourned the sitting of two Benches scheduled to hear a few cases through video-conferencing on Wednesday after the announcement of a 21-day lockdown on account of the COVID-19 scare.

A circular issued late on Tuesday informed that the cases for hearing before the two Benches of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud, Surya Kant, L. Nageswara Rao and Aniruddha Bose have been adjourned.

The circular has not given any future date for hearing. The court, on March 23, had decided to further restrict its functioning and resort to the digital mode to prevent spread of infection. +

# Polls to 18 Rajya Sabha seats deferred

Situation to be reviewed after March 31

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Elections to 18 Rajya Sabha seats that were scheduled to take place on March 26 have been deferred due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Election Commission of India (ECI) said on Tuesday.

On February 25, the ECI announced elections to 55 Rajya Sabha seats spread over 17 States that were to be vacated in April due to the retirement of MPs. Candidates for 37 seats in 10 States had been elected uncontested.

Polling for the remaining 18 seats in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya and Rajasthan were to take place on Thurs-

day, as per the ECI's schedule.

Taking into account the World Health Organization's declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic on March 11 and various advisories from the Centre on containing the spread of the disease, the ECI on Tuesday decided to defer the elections.

In a statement, the ECI noted that the States had also issued lockdown orders.

A senior ECI official said polling for the seats, which will be vacated in April, had been postponed and the situation would be reviewed after March 31.

The decision comes after several State Assemblies curtailed their sessions.

# Who will help the poor, asks Congress

Party welcomes lockdown, but says that the announcement has come late

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

I am feeling sad, because this was completely avoidable. We had time to prepare. We should have taken this threat much more seriously and have been much better prepared

RAHUL GANDHI, Congress leader



RAHUL GANDHI, Congress leader

vide cash to the poor that they need for the next 21 days," Mr. Chidambaram asked.

## Open letter

Hours before the lockdown announcement, former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday had appealed to citizens to adopt strict social isolation.

"I strongly appeal to each of you to follow strict social isolation and distancing

measures. Containing the virus requires us to minimise our contact with people as much as possible," Mr. Gandhi said in his open letter to citizens.

"The public health personnel have displayed exemplary courage, even at great personal risk to themselves... The COVID-19 pandemic is a test of our ability to work together and collectively fight against unpredictable crises. This is the time

for national solidarity and unity. I strongly appeal to all of you again to heed all the public safety advisories being issued and remain vigilant," Mr. Gandhi said.

His open letter came just hours after he had tweeted that the Narendra Modi government didn't realise the magnitude of the crisis and wasted time.

"I am feeling sad, because this was completely avoidable. We had time to prepare. We should have taken this threat much more seriously and have been much better prepared," Mr. Gandhi tweeted in response to a tweet from a Haryana-based doctor Kamna Kakkar who said hospitals faced an acute shortage of essential personal protective equipment.

# ED officials to attend office on rotation basis

Probes into important cases continue

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate has directed its officials to attend office on a rotation basis to avoid crowding in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak.

"Necessary instructions have been given to ensure skeleton staff in offices across the country. However, officials required for urgent court proceedings have to be present," said a senior official, adding that the agency had taken all precautionary measures, as directed by the government.

The ED's probe into all important cases is continuing as before. Although there is no written order pertaining to the issuance of

summons to witnesses and suspects, sources said the agency may not mandate anyone's presence during the lockdown period. Statements of those turning up may be recorded as per procedure.

Last week, the Department of Personnel and Training had issued a directive to the heads of Ministries and Departments to ensure that 50% of Group B and C employees attended office every day, and the remaining worked from home. They were also told to draft a weekly roster of duty for Group B and C staff, and ask them to attend office on alternate weeks. Working hours of officials have also been staggered.

**No safe place**

Kerala is one of the few States to publish activity trails of people who were identified as infected with the novel coronavirus. This was useful for contact-tracing purposes. An excerpt from one such actual activity trail of five patients from Pathanamthitta is presented below (images are representational and not of one person alone). Before their symptoms peaked, those infected visited a variety of places including hotels, post offices, banks, shopping centres and bus stops. Around the time the trail ended, only 11 people were under home isolation in Pathanamthitta. The number grew to 4,565 as of Monday, and many of whom could have been in contact with these patients. The more the infected persons travelled, the higher the risk of the spread.

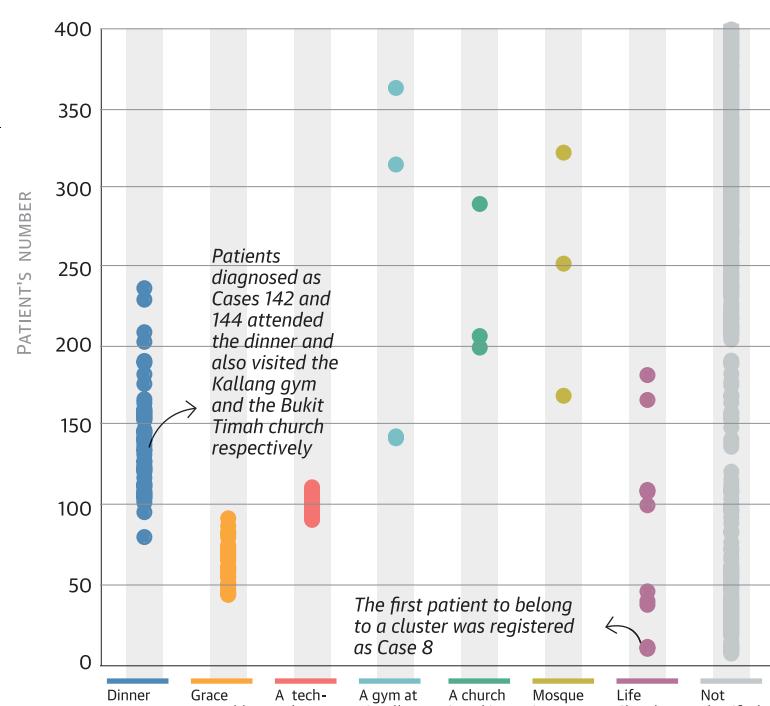


# No option but physical distancing

South Korea had just over 30 COVID-19 cases in the 28 days after it reported the first. But when contact-tracing was done for patient-31, a Pandora's box was opened. In the next 17 days, the number of cases crossed 6,000. Similarly, cases in Singapore would have been much lower if not for a dinner party. Infected persons in Kerala travelled to many places where people congregate before getting diagnosed. Essentially, all it took for the novel coronavirus to spread was one infected person who didn't maintain physical distance. By **Vignesh Radhakrishnan** and **Srravya C**

**The Singapore clusters**

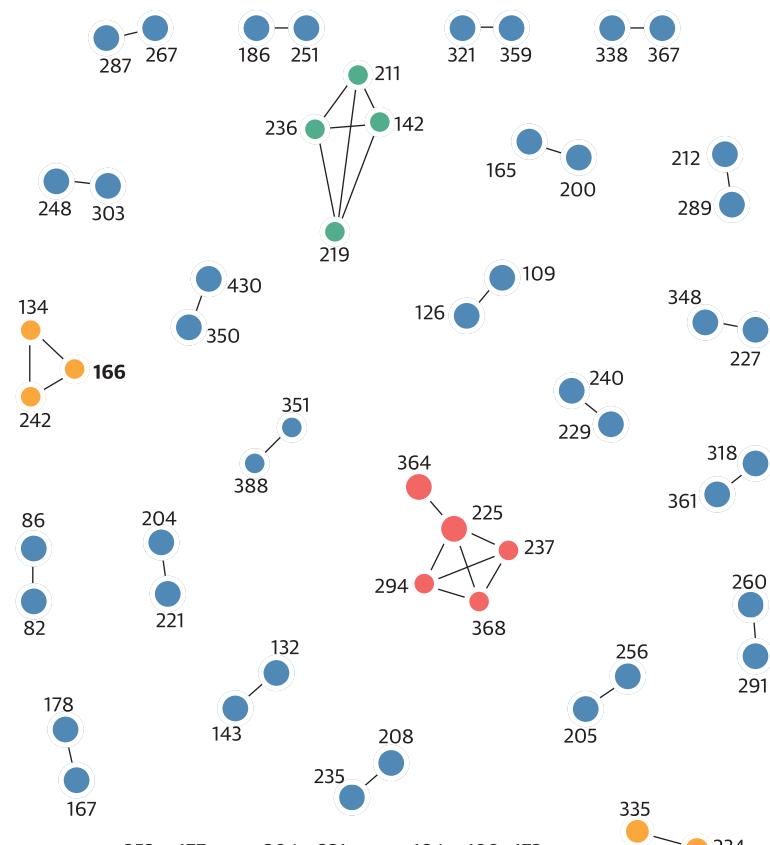
As of March 23, Singapore has identified seven clusters responsible for 50% of its cases. The graph plots cases in each cluster. Each dot corresponds to a case. Close to 47 cases originated from a dinner party on February 15 at a restaurant in Safra Jurong club



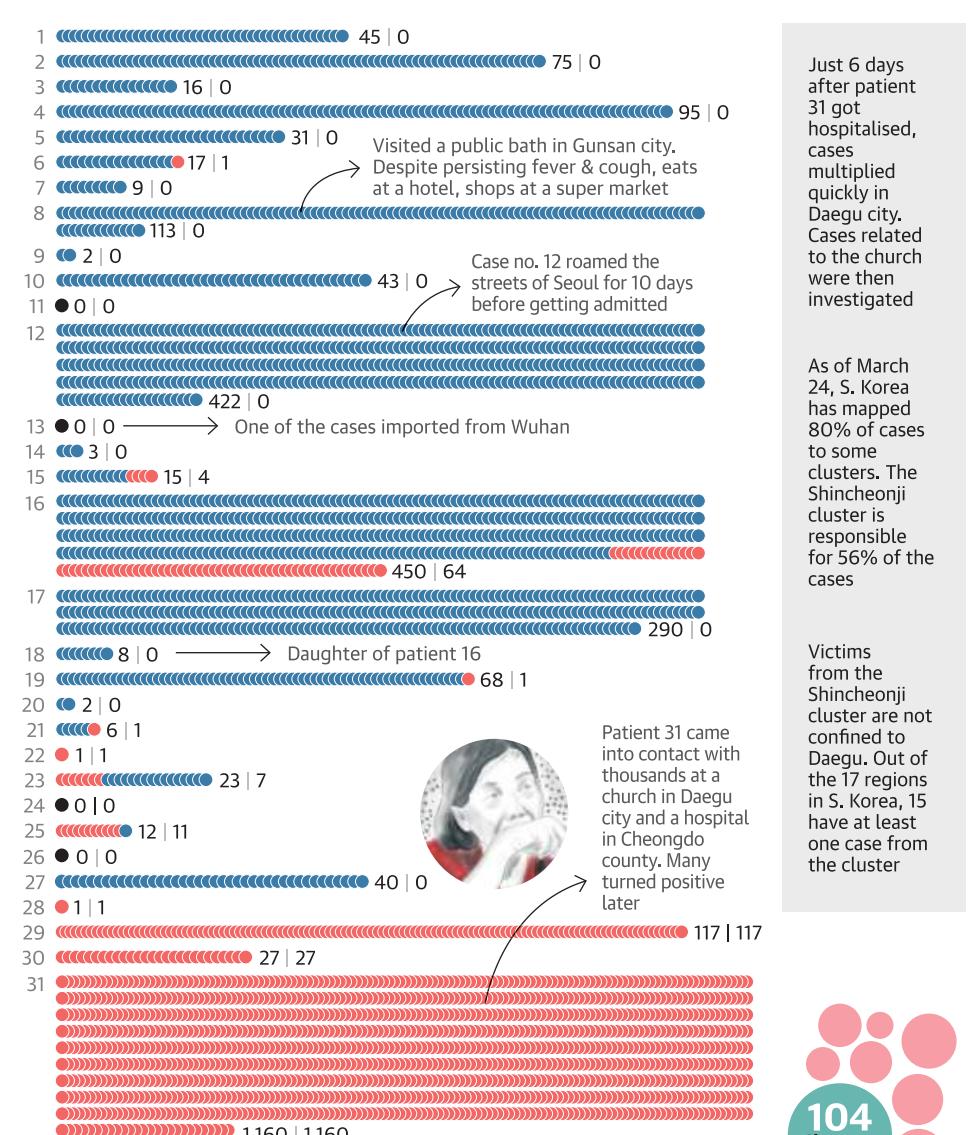
While some from the dinner party were declared as confirmed cases early (Cases 94 and 96), there were many who were declared much later (Cases 218 and 224). Some attendees of the dinner party (Cases 142 and 117) were confirmed as cases about 20 and 22 days after February 15 - the day it was organised.

**Leaking out of the Singapore clusters**

Case 142, a 26-year-old male, visited two clusters, the dinner party and the gym. The virus spread from him to three others, Cases 211, 236 and 142, not connected to any clusters. So while only 50% of cases are directly connected to the clusters, there are many who indirectly contracted the virus from those who were part of such clusters.

**How S. Korea's Case 31 ignored symptoms, attended church****The South Korea clusters**

Patient 31 came into contact with 1,160 people, by far the largest cluster in South Korea. The graph traces the contact history of the first 31 cases. Isolated contacts are in red. For instance, Case 1 came into contact with 45 people, but none were isolated



Just 6 days after patient 31 got hospitalised, cases multiplied quickly in Daegu city. Cases related to the church were then investigated

As of March 24, S. Korea has mapped 80% of cases to some clusters. The Shincheonji cluster is responsible for 56% of the cases

Victims from the Shincheonji cluster are not confined to Daegu. Out of the 17 regions in S. Korea, 15 have at least one case from the cluster

**A cluster of clusters**

The Shincheonji cluster is responsible for 5,028 cases in South Korea as of March 20. There are many similar clusters. The second biggest cluster was made up of health workers and patients in the Cheongdo Daenam Hospital (119 cases)

According to a New York Times report, South Korean officials have learnt that Patient 31 visited Cheongdo too, in early February. Investigations to link the clusters are ongoing

75 Hansarang hospital  
110 Guro call center

718 contacts of cases

**5,028**  
NUMBER OF CASES LINKED TO THE SHINCHEONJI CHURCH CLUSTER

# U.S. could become virus epicentre: WHO

Trump says he wants to reopen the country for business in weeks, not months; U.K. enforces lockdown

REUTERS  
GENEVA/LONDON

The World Health Organisation said on Tuesday that the U.S. could become the global epicentre of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Britain joined the ranks of countries in lockdown to try to hold back the virus, and data showed business activity collapsing from Australia and Japan and Western Europe at a record pace in March, with the U.S. showing expected to be just as dire.

But amid the gathering gloom, the Chinese province of Hubei, where the virus was first identified in December, said it would lift travel restrictions on people leaving the region as the epidemic eases there.

Confirmed COVID-19 cases around the world exceeded 3,77,000 across 194 countries and territories as of early Tuesday, according to a Reuters tally, more than 16,500 of them fatal.

**'Very large acceleration'**  
WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris said there had been a "very large acceleration" in infections in the U.S.

Over the previous 24 hours, 85% of new cases were in Europe and the U.S., and of those, 40% were in the U.S. As of Monday, the virus had infected more than 42,000 people there, killing at least 559.

Asked whether the U.S. could become the new epicentre, Ms. Harris said: "We are now seeing a very large acceleration in cases in the U.S. So it does have that potential."

Some U.S. state and local officials have decried a lack of coordinated federal action, saying that having localities act on their own has put them in competition for supplies.

President Donald Trump



Looming crisis: U.S. President Donald Trump addressing the media in Washington. •AP

## Pak. officials in soup for selfie with patient

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
KARACHI

Pakistan has suspended six civil servants after they posed for a selfie with a COVID-19 patient in a quarantine centre, an official said Tuesday.

The selfie – widely shared on social media – pictured a group of men around the apparent patient, several of them smiling broadly and none wearing face masks. The picture was taken at a quarantine facility in Sindh province..

said on Monday he was considering how to restart business life when a 15-day shutdown ends next week.

"America will again and soon be open for business," Mr. Trump told a White House news conference on Monday. "We are not going to let it turn into a long-lasting financial problem."

## In Europe, retirement homes are a 'timebomb'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
MADRID

In Italy, Spain and France, old people's homes have been ravaged by COVID-19 with the elderly and the infirm taking the brunt of the epidemic as it spreads like wildfire across Europe.

"When the virus enters these places, it inevitably turns into a massacre, as unfortunately is already happening in different parts of Italy," Italian pensioners' union SPI-Cgil said this weekend.

"Retirement homes are

ticking time bombs, with 500,000 elderly people in very fragile conditions at risk of being infected."

And there is a similar situation in Spain. "In some places, the Army found some elderly people completely abandoned, sometimes even dead in their beds," said Spanish Defence Minister Margarita Robles.

In France, the epidemic "could end up causing more than 1,00,000 deaths," the main associations representing elderly care homes have warned.

"We can't have the cure be worse than the problem," Mr. Trump said. "We have to open our country because that causes problems that, in my opinion, could be far bigger problems."

Of the top 10 countries by case numbers, Italy has reported the highest fatality rate, at around 10%, which at

least partly reflects its older population. The fatality rate globally is around 4.3%, though national figures can vary widely according to how much testing is done.

Britain on Tuesday began curbs on movement without precedent in peacetime after PM Boris Johnson ordered everyone to stay at home.

## Mahinda convenes all-party meet on COVID-19 preparedness

MPs suggest reconvening of House for better coordination

MEERA SRINIVASAN  
COLOMBO

As Sri Lanka's Parliament stands dissolved since early March, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa convened an all-party leaders' meeting on Tuesday to discuss the government's ongoing strategies in combating COVID-19 that has affected over 100 persons so far.

"I emphasised the need of working together to successfully battle COVID-19. All present were in agreement and pledged full support. #TogetherWeCan #CVID19SL," Mr. Rajapaksa said in a tweet.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa dissolved Parliament and announced general elections for April 25 that now stand indefinitely postponed.

Sri Lankan public health authorities, along with a national task force being head-

liance spokesman M.A. Sumanthiran said in a tweet: "Reconvening Parliament was raised at the Party Leaders' Mtg by @Rauff\_Hakeem [Sri Lanka Muslim Congress Leader] and myself. It is not necessary to meet physically in one place but it is important to have an active Parliament so that feedback from the people are received and for better accountability." While there has been no official response yet, Mr. Sumanthiran tweeted that there was a "favourable response" to his suggestion.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has asked legal experts and the Department of Prisons to explore the possibility of granting some relief to the prisoners who were charged with minor offences.

ed by the Army commander, has implemented various measures, including an enforced curfew in the country. Over 2,000 people have been arrested since Friday for violating it.

When the curfew was temporarily lifted on Tuesday morning, long queues were seen outside supermarkets but adequate arrangements were made to manage the crowd.

The government said it is organising door-to-door delivery of essentials in capital Colombo, Gampaha and Kaluthara districts.

Meanwhile, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has asked legal experts and the Department of Prisons to explore the possibility of granting some relief to the prisoners who were charged with minor offences.

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China's move was the latest in an escalating diplomatic feud between the Chinese government, led by President Xi Jinping, and the

news organisations that preceded this action," the publishers said in the statement. "The media is collateral damage in a diplomatic dispute between the Chinese and U.S. governments, threatening to deprive the world of critical information at a perilous moment."

On Wednesday, China announced that all American

Trump administration. The ouster of the American journalists followed the Trump administration's decision to limit to 100 the number of Chinese citizens who can work in the U.S. for five state-run Chinese media organisations.

The letter from the three publishers emphasized the need for a free flow of information during the coronavirus crisis. "This move – made in retaliation for recent expulsions by the U.S. government – is one that we would protest under any circumstances," the publishers said.

"But it is uniquely damaging and reckless as the world continues the struggle to control this disease, a struggle that will require the free flow of reliable news and information." NY TIMES



Media freedom: NYT's journalist Steven Lee Myers, centre, with other journalists in Beijing, in this file photo. •AP

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## China told to reverse decision to expel scribes

NYT, WSJ and Post emphasise the need for free flow of information from Country

MARC TRACY

The publishers of *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post* on Tuesday released a statement critical of the Chinese government's decision to bar American journalists for the three publications from working in China.

The unusual statement, signed by A.G. Sulzberger of *The Times*, William Lewis of *The Journal* and Fred Ryan of *The Post*, was released online early Tuesday and was scheduled to appear in the rival newspapers' Tuesday print editions.

"We strongly urge the Chinese government to reverse its decision to force the Americans working for our news organisations to leave the country and, more broadly, to ease the growing crackdown on independent



Media freedom: NYT's journalist Steven Lee Myers, centre, with other journalists in Beijing, in this file photo. •AP

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"But it is uniquely damaging and reckless as the world continues the struggle to control this disease, a struggle that will require the free flow of reliable news and information." NY TIMES

## Spain toll rises by 514

REUTERS  
MADRID

Another 514 people have died in Spain, raising the death toll to 2,696, as the number of infections surged towards 40,000. As health authorities step up the number of tests, the number of people with COVID-19 rose by nearly 20% to 39,673. At the same time, the death toll increased by 23.5%, the Health Ministry said.

## Death rate drops in Italy

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
ROME

Italy on Monday reported a second successive drop in daily deaths and infections that has nevertheless claimed more than 6,000 lives in a month. The daily fatalities come down from a world record 793 on Saturday to 651 on Sunday and 601 on Monday.

## Iran toll inches closer to 2,000

REUTERS  
DUBAI

Iran's death toll from the coronavirus outbreak increased by 122 in the past 24 hours to 1,934, Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said on Tuesday. The total number of people diagnosed with the disease increased by 1,762 to 24,811, he added.

## Bangladesh to release Khaleda Zia

Former PM's family had sought her release following the virus outbreak



A file photo of Khaleda Zia in Dhaka. •AP

immediately but officials familiar with the process said the Home Ministry would take subsequent steps for the former premier's temporary release under a criminal procedure code (CrPC).

He said the decision was taken in line with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's directives and considering the age of the former Prime Minister.

### Freedom for 6 months

"... Zia will be released for a period of six months and she must stay in her own house," the Minister said.

He declined to elaborate

State-run specialised hospital, "as soon as" they receive the file from the Law Ministry.

The development came a day after Zia's family sought her release over the COVID-19 outbreak.

"This is a decision we welcome," BNP leader Ruhul Kabir Rizvi told reporters in brief comments at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University here.

She was convicted in another corruption case later the same year, though her party claims both cases are politically motivated.

## Albert Uderzo, co-creator of Asterix and Obelix, is dead

He and Rene Goscinny together created 24 comic books

Associated Press PARIS

Albert Uderzo, one of the two creators of the beloved comic book series *Asterix and Obelix*, who captured the spirit of the Gauls of yore and grew a reputation worldwide, died on Tuesday. He was 92. The French press quoted family members as saying that Mr. Uderzo died of a heart attack in the Paris suburb of Neuilly.

Asterix, portrayed as a short man with a droopy mustache always wearing a helmet with wings, was created in the early 1960s by Mr. Uderzo and Rene Goscinny. The character lived in a village in Gaul, present-day France, resisting Roman

conquerors, along with his inseparable big-bellied friend, Obelix.

"Albert Uderzo died in his sleep at his Neuilly home of a heart attack with no links to the coronavirus," the French press quoted his son-in-law, Bernard de Choisy, as saying. "He had been very tired for several weeks."

Mr. Uderzo initially illustrated the characters created along with writer Rene Goscinny. Together, they created 24 comic books. After Goscinny's death in 1977, Mr. Uderzo also took over the comic books' writing duties, deciding to continue without his creative partner. Goscinny's daughter, Anne, called the two men "brothers". "They were as different as fire and water, but they lived something that few among us could live," she told the French daily *Le Parisien*. "They were the kind of friends you don't often have in life."



Media freedom: NYT's journalist Steven Lee Myers, centre, with other journalists in Beijing, in this file photo. •AP

news organisations that preceded this action," the publishers said in the statement. "The media is collateral damage in a diplomatic dispute between the Chinese and U.S. governments, threatening to deprive the world of critical information at a perilous moment."

China's move was the latest in an escalating diplomatic feud between the Chinese government, led by President Xi Jinping, and the

news organisations that preceded this action," the publishers said in the statement. "The media is collateral damage in a diplomatic dispute between the Chinese and U.S. governments, threatening to deprive the world of critical information at a perilous moment."

On Wednesday, China announced that all American

Trump administration. The ouster of the American journalists followed the Trump administration's decision to limit to 100 the number of Chinese citizens who can work in the U.S. for five state-run Chinese media organisations.

The letter from the three publishers emphasized the need for a free flow of information during the coronavirus crisis. "This move – made in retaliation for recent expulsions by the U.S. government – is one that we would protest under any circumstances," the publishers said.

"But it is uniquely damaging and reckless as the world continues the struggle to control this disease, a struggle that will require the free flow of reliable news and information." NY TIMES

On Wednesday, China announced that all American

## MARKET WATCH

	24-3-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	26674	2.67
US Dollar	75.94	0.34
Brent oil	27.79	6.88

## NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	231.75	23.95
Asian Paints	1524.85	26.40
Axis Bank	303.15	-5.50
Bajaj Auto	1937.15	1.60
Bajaj Finserv.	4497.75	-123.30
Bajaj Finance	2474.20	20.05
Bharti Airtel	404.05	-3.30
BPCL	262.85	-6.50
Britannia Ind	2364.70	226.85
Cipla	377.45	2.20
Coal India	127.85	0.00
Dr Reddys Lab	2857.95	89.55
Eicher Motors	14208.50	502.60
GAIL (India)	76.45	-1.55
Grasim Ind	400.10	-33.15
HCL Tech.	442.05	-24.90
HDFC	1505.10	-15.60
HDFC Bank	767.70	-3.85
Hero MotoCorp	1627.05	11.05
Hindalco	88.75	0.85
Hind Unilever	2027.85	158.15
ICICI Bank	296.50	12.50
IndusInd Bank	312.35	-24.10
Bharti Infratech	141.95	-1.45
Infosys	589.80	63.35
Indian Oil Corp	79.70	-1.05
ITC	149.70	-4.60
JSW Steel	147.10	2.70
Kotak Bank	1152.90	54.65
L&T	707.90	-16.15
M&M	269.00	-24.40
Maruti Suzuki	4846.45	266.10
Nestle India Ltd.	13478.35	533.70
NTPC	77.55	1.15
ONGC	62.50	2.10
PowerGrid Corp	147.30	-5.70
Reliance Ind	943.40	59.35
State Bank	183.20	1.60
Shree Cement	16980.20	20.60
Sun Pharma	335.15	10.65
Tata Motors	68.55	2.35
Tata Steel	271.90	0.75
TCS	1703.15	33.45
Tech Mahindra	503.50	16.30
Titan	816.10	15.15
UltraTech Cement	3018.10	-36.75
UPL	262.05	7.45
Vedanta	62.80	0.15
Wipro	176.35	6.20
Zee Entertainment	119.15	-2.85

## EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	75.68	76.00
Euro	82.20	82.55
British Pound	89.04	89.44
Japanese Yen (100)	68.29	68.58
Chinese Yuan	10.71	10.76
Swiss Franc	77.57	77.94
Singapore Dollar	52.27	52.50
Canadian Dollar	52.37	52.60
Malaysian Ringgit	17.06	17.16

Source: Indian Bank

## IN BRIEF

**Dr. Reddy's to raise funds via commercial paper**  
HYDERABAD  
Dr. Reddy's Laboratories said it was considering raising funds. The board of directors is likely to meet on March 27 to consider raising funds by issuance of commercial paper.

## RBI advances variable rate term repo auction

Central bank bid to meet liquidity needs

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to advance the first of the two variable rate term repo auctions to March 26 from March 30.

The central bank had announced two such auctions of ₹25,000 crore each on March 30 and March 31 to address the additional demand for liquidity.

"On a review of the rapidly evolving financial conditions and taking into account the impact of disruptions caused by COVID-19, it has been decided to advance the first auction scheduled for March 30, 2020 to March 26, 2020" the RBI said in a statement.

There is no change in the

## Economic package soon, says FM

Task force still not constituted, but FM speaks of multilayered sub-groups holding consultation

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

An economic package to deal with COVID-19 situation will be announced soon, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman promised on Tuesday afternoon, adding that the government and regulators are constantly monitoring the state of the economy, markets and rupee depreciation.

However, she still offered little clarity on the composition of an economic task force announced by the PM last week, and explained the delay in announcing an economic package by saying extensive consultations were needed, and till yesterday, Parliament was in session and the Finance Bill had to be cleared.

"Work is going on and we are very close to coming out with an economic package, which will be announced sooner rather than later," she said, adding that the Centre, the Reserve Bank and the regulators have been jointly monitoring the volatility in the stock markets thrice daily. "Every attention is being



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman addresses the media via video conferencing, in New Delhi on Tuesday. ■ PTI

given to the economy. The Prime Minister himself is closely monitoring the situation. A multi-layered composition of the task force is already working."

As *The Hindu* had reported on Tuesday morning, the economic task force announced in the PM's address to the nation on March 19 has still not been constituted, with the Finance Ministry saying the PM's Office or the Cabinet Secretariat would be responsible for issuing an order to create it. On Tuesday

evening, after the FM's press conference, a Finance Ministry spokesperson once again confirmed to *The Hindu* that no order has yet been issued to set up the task force.

Ms. Sitharaman was more ambiguous about the status of the task force, saying that sub-groups of MPs, academics and industry leaders were already generating ideas for the task force, but refused to elaborate on its composition or specific mandate. "The Finance Ministry is working intensively on all

these suggestions which are coming in from the various sub groups within the multi-layered task force that exists," she said. "So the work of the task force which is multi-layered is already almost nearing a conclusion. So the task force and the task force based report and the action following the task force's report are almost at its peak and that is why I have said we will announce the economic package sooner rather than later."

She did not respond to specific queries on how the economic package would provide relief for millions of informal sector and daily wage workers who have been hit the hardest by the shutdown.

Ms. Sitharaman attributed the delay in announcing an economic package to the need for extensive consultations and to first pass the Finance Bill. "I appreciate that you would have liked the package to be announced last week. But most things which are as big as an economic package for this kind

of unusual situation requires a lot of consultation to get it right," she told journalists.

## No intention to delay'

"We had no intention to delay, we don't want to delay, but then let us be realistic. Till yesterday, the Parliament was in session and the Finance Bill had to be cleared," she said adding that she would have been happy to announce the package in the House if it was ready and the Finance Bill had been passed. "And once the Finance Bill got cleared, it was important for the MPs to recognise there is a lockdown in this country, so everyone had to go where they had to go and serve and be of use for their own constituents. So the Parliament adjourned sine die."

In the final hours of the Lok Sabha session on Monday, a number of opposition MPs had been pressing the Finance Minister to make a statement on the COVID-19 situation and the government's package before the Finance Bill was passed.

## Markets look up a day after worst fall

India VIX index jumps another 14%

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Equity benchmarks opened on a strong note on Tuesday, a day after registering their worst single-day fall, but failed to maintain the levels as the underlying weakness in investor sentiment led to some amount of selling pressure. The benchmarks fell into the red briefly before ending the day on a strong note, which was in line with the positive global cues on the back of measures announced by the U.S. Federal Reserve to boost U.S. economy.

Incidentally, stocks pared some of the gains after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a slew of relaxations in compliance and reporting requirements even as no economic stimulus was included in the announcements.

On BSE, nearly 1,400 stocks were in the red as against 890 gainers. Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) continued selling with Tuesday's net sales pegged at nearly ₹2,153 crore while their domestic counterparts bought shares worth ₹1,553 crore.

## FMCG companies see a spurt in 'COVID-19 sales'

Consumers on panic buying spree stock up essentials; firms step up production of soaps, liquid handwashes, cut prices

ASHISH RUKHAIYAR  
MUMBAI

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a spike in the demand of consumer staples like milk, milk products and biscuits along with hand sanitizers as people are stocking up essentials amid a complete lockdown like scenario.

Companies like Amul, Parle and Godrej Consumer Products have seen a 10-15% jump in demand across product categories and ramped up production to meet the growing demand.

This assumes significance as more States initiate a com-

plete lockdown amid a growing number of confirmed cases of the virus, which would only push up the demand for such staples.

"We have seen an increase of 15-20% in our average daily sales across most product categories

R.S. SODHI,  
MD, Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation

stern restrictions on people movement, along with a lockdown, which has made consumers wary of essential products going out of stock, thereby leading to panic buying.

The popular Parle G biscuit has also seen a notable

increase in demand on the back of panic buying.

"There is a bit of panic buying and we have seen around 10-15% increase in our average weekly sales of Parle G," said Parle Products category head Mayank Shah.

Apart from food essentials, products like hand washes have also seen an increase in sales as authorities have been highlighting the importance of sanitising hands at regular intervals.

"In some categories, such as hand washes and sanitizers, we have seen temporary spike in demand, driven by

the impact of COVID 19," said

Rajeev Gambhir, MD and CEO, Godrej Consumer Products.

"We have also heard of some instances of consumers trying to hoard essentials. Retailers have begun to put restrictions on quantities being purchased. We believe that there should be no reason to panic as there should be sufficient supplies available," Mr. Gambhir added.

## Production ramped up

To meet the increased demand, companies have also ramped up their production as the virus threat is not

showing any signs of abating as of now. "We have recently ramped up production of soaps by 30% and have increased production of liquid hand washes by 3.5X at our units as well as through our vendor partner units," Mr. Gambhir said.

In a similar context, Mr. Shah said that the company had increased production by 15% while closely working with governments to ensure there is minimal logistical issue and all its trade partners have sufficient stock.

Incidentally, Hindustan Unilever (HUL), which is the

country's largest pure play fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) company, has also reduced the prices of Lifebuoy sanitizers, Lifebuoy Liquid handwash and Domex floor cleaners by 15% and said that the products with the reduced prices would be available in the market in the next few weeks. The company has also ramped up the production of Lifebuoy sanitizers, Lifebuoy Handwash liquid and Domex Floor Cleaners and will be scaling it up even further in the coming weeks, it had said in a statement issued last week.

## RBI advances variable rate term repo auction

Central bank bid to meet liquidity needs

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to advance the first of the two variable rate term repo auctions to March 26 from March 30.

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There is no change in the

## Auto sector loss per day estimated at ₹2,300 cr.

Many auto/component makers closed

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

With manufacturing plants temporarily shut to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the automobile sector has estimated a loss of over ₹2,300 crore per day.

"As per quick estimates by the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM), it is expected that plant closures of auto OEMs and component makers will lead to loss of more than ₹2,300 crore in turnover for each day of closure," Rajan Wadhwa, president, SIAM said.

The manufacturers include market leaders Maruti Suzuki and Hero MotoCorp, Chennai-based TVS Motor, Kia Motors, General Motors, India Yamaha Motor, Reliance Industries, Hyundai Motor, Honda Cars, Fiat Chrysler Automobiles and Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India.

## Moody's downgrades Indiabulls

# Tokyo 2020 will now be held next year

Japan and IOC take decision with aim to safeguard health of athletes and all involved in the Games

## SUMMER OLYMPICS

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
LAUSANNE

The 2020 Tokyo Olympics has been postponed to no later than the summer of 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic sweeping the globe, the International Olympic Committee announced on Tuesday.

The Games were scheduled for July 24-August 9, but after telephone discussions between IOC president Thomas Bach and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, a historic joint decision was taken for the first postponement of an Olympics in peacetime.

Abe said Bach was in "100% agreement" when Japan asked the IOC to push back the Games and said the delayed Olympics "held in a complete form will be a testament to mankind's defeat of the new virus".

In a joint statement, the pair said that based on current World Health Organization information, the Tokyo Games "must be rescheduled to a date beyond 2020 but not later than summer 2021, to safeguard the health of the athletes, everybody involved in the Olympic Games and the international community".

The leaders agreed that the Olympic Games in Tokyo could stand as a beacon of hope to the world during these troubled times and that the Olympic flame could become the light at the end



**Momentous:** A man walks past a billboard promoting the Tokyo Games. The unprecedented, but anticipated, decision to postpone the mega event was taken on Tuesday. ■ FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

of the tunnel in which the world finds itself at present.

### Flame to stay in Japan

"Therefore, it was agreed that the Olympic flame will stay in Japan. It was also agreed that the Games will keep the name Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020," the statement concluded.

Bach later said he did not discuss new dates with Abe and the exact dates is a question for the Tokyo organising committee and an International Olympic Committee panel overseeing the preparations.

The torch relay, due to start on Thursday from the Fukushima, will be post-

poned and the flame will remain there for now.

The move would be a devastating blow for Tokyo, which had won widespread praise for its organisation, with venues finished well ahead of time and tickets massively oversubscribed.

The Olympics, which has experienced boycotts, terrorist attacks and protests, but has been held every four years since 1948, would be the highest-profile event affected by the virus that has killed thousands and closed sports competitions worldwide.

The IOC has come under increasing pressure in recent days to postpone the Games, scheduled to start on July 24,

with 1.7 billion people across the planet in lockdown to prevent the further spread of COVID-19.

### Preparations affected

Training has become impossible for many athletes and exposes them to the risk of contracting or spreading the disease.

Competitions and qualifiers have been scrapped, while international travel is severely limited.

On Sunday, the IOC had initially given itself a deadline of four weeks to come up with a proposal to postpone the Games, a Herculean task that touches on every aspect of Tokyo 2020 planning from venues to security to ticketing.

Tokyo was spending some \$12.6 billion to host the Games, according to its latest budget, and experts believe a postponement could cost it some \$6 billion in the short-term before recouping it when it eventually goes ahead.

It will also be a bitter blow to sponsors and major broadcasters who rely on the four-yearly extravaganza for critical advertising revenue.

It is not the first time Tokyo has seen unscheduled changes to the Games – it was due to be the first Asian country to host the Olympics in 1940 before pulling out due to international pressure over its war with China.

But Tokyo 2020 organisers point to the unparalleled complexity – not to mention cost – of shifting the Games.

It is not even clear venues will be available and tens of thousands of hotel rooms will need to be cancelled and rebooked.

### Logistical issues

Squeezing in the 16-day Games into what will already be a hugely crowded 2021 calendar is another major headache, with arguably the two biggest sports, swimming and athletics, due to hold their World Championships that summer.

However, World Athletics has already said it was prepared to shift its World championships, scheduled for August 6-15 next year in Oregon, to accommodate the move.

## Athletes relieved, says IOA

### PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) on Tuesday welcomed the decision to postpone the Tokyo Olympic Games, saying the country's athletes have been relieved of having to train during a global health crisis.

"IOA welcomes the decision of IOC. Discussions were held by IOC with organisers and all stakeholders prior to this," IOA secretary-general Rajiv Mehta told PTI.

**Meeting**  
"Soon after the lockdown is over, IOA would be

holding meetings with athletes, federations, sponsors, etc. to revise plans."

"This decision today, relieves our athletes of worries of having to train now during epidemic and perform their best in four months from now," he added.

## Appropriate decision: Sindhu

Gopi Chand welcomes move, awaits new guidelines

### V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM HYDERABAD

World badminton champion P.V. Sindhu has welcomed the decision to postpone the Tokyo Olympics.

"I think it was the most appropriate decision given the prevailing critical situation.

"The organisers have shown concern for the health of every one involved by not going ahead with the original schedule," Sindhu told *The Hindu* on Tuesday.



**Wait to continue:** Gopi and Sindhu arrive in Hyderabad after the latter's silver-winning show at 2016 Olympics. ■ FILE PHOTO

duct the Games given the uncertainty shrouding the situation. Athletes would have found it extremely challenging to make it to the Games if they were to be held as per the original schedule in July.

"I don't know what kind of impact it (the postponement) will have on badminton players, for first we have to know the BWF guidelines and the new qualification norms. Whether they will go ahead with the existing norms or not," Gopi said.

**More time, new challenges**  
"Yes, the move also gives the coaches and athletes time and at the same time new challenges too," said Gopi, who is in self-isolation on return from the All England championship.

## Life always comes first: Mary Kom

Indian stars concur that well-being of athletes is paramount

### PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

Life comes first, sport can wait. This was the collective view of India's top Olympic-bound athletes, including M.C. Mary Kom and Saina Nehwal, as they lauded the Games' postponement on Tuesday.

"The situation right now is not good. Life always comes first, everything else can wait. Players' safety is paramount. Everyone who took this decision factored this in. I think it's good," said boxer Mary Kom.

Saina, who was racing against time to qualify for Tokyo, said, "happy that it's postponed even though some of us haven't qualified."

India's only individual Olympic champion Abhinav Bindra welcomed the decision and stressed on the need to immediately suspend training camps and guard the athletes in the wake of the pandemic.

Wrestler Bajrang Punia said training had been thrown haywire and the postponement is welcome.

"It's a good decision because everyone is disturbed. Athletes' health is paramount. No one is training properly. We first have to save people from this epidemic," said Punia.



Mary. ■ FILE PHOTO: VIVEK BENDRE



Bindra. ■ FILE PHOTO

We are eager to know what the qualification (process) would be like going ahead."

"We were prepared for Olympics. We were ready but what do you do when something like this happens. It's beyond control," grappler Ravi Dahiya said.

### Hockey coaches' view

Indian men's hockey coach Graham Reid said the team is gutted by the postponement but understands the gravity of the health crisis.

"It is very disappointing that the Olympics will not go ahead, but given the unprecedented circumstances facing the world at present it is totally understandable and expected," Reid said. The view was shared by women's team coach, Sjoerd Marijne.

## Tough, but smart move: Paes

### SHAYAN ACHARYA MUMBAI

India's tennis ace Leander Paes has termed the decision to postpone the Tokyo Olympics a 'smart move'.

Paes, who won a bronze at the Atlanta Olympics in 1996, told *The Hindu* that it was the right call.

"The Olympic movement stands for good health and is about the global community coming together. At a time like this, when the corona pandemic has touched almost every corner of the world, including Tokyo, full credit to the Olympic committee for postponing the Games," Paes said.

In December last year, Paes had announced that 2020 would be his farewell year from tennis and he wanted to sign off after featuring in the Tokyo Games. On his plans following the postponement, he said: "My team and I are evaluating."

Paes said every aspect had to be considered before taking such a tough call.

"It's a very tough decision to take, because millions and millions of sporting commerce goes into the Olympics. Given the effort the Olympic movement takes to run the Games, it was a hard decision," Paes said.

In December last year, Paes had announced that 2020 would be his farewell year from tennis and he wanted to sign off after featuring in the Tokyo Games. On his plans following the postponement, he said: "My team and I are evaluating."



Leander Paes. ■ FILE PHOTO

## Shooting fraternity hails decision

### SANTADEEP DEY CHENNAI

The Indian shooting team has welcomed the postponement of the Tokyo Games.

Apurvi Chandela, who has been training at her own shooting range at home, said she was taken aback by the decision. She, however, said this doesn't affect her preparations. "We have to look at our preparations and stay focused."



Apurvi. ■ FILE PHOTO

Abhishek Verma, who has self-quarantined at his Chandigarh home, said: "This is an important decision keeping the public interest in mind. It was necessary to ensure public safety. All the countries will be able to participate in full swing next year."

Manu Bhaker, though disappointed by the decision, echoed the shooters' "health above all" opinion.

### COVID-19 IMPACT

#### Bajrang donates salary in fight against pandemic

##### NEW DELHI

Star wrestler Bajrang Punia has donated his six months salary towards fight against the coronavirus pandemic. "I have donated my six months' salary towards relief fund for COVID-19 patients set up by Haryana Chief Minister M.L. Khattar," Punia, who works with the Railways as an officer on special duty (OSD) said in a

tweet. He also called upon people to make contributions towards the "Haryana corona relief fund." IANS

#### Senior National badminton put on hold

##### NEW DELHI

The 84th senior National badminton championship, scheduled to be held in Lucknow from April 27 to May 3, has been put on hold, Badminton Association of India

(BAI) said on Tuesday. "We have put on hold the 84th senior Nationals and 75th inter-State inter-zonal in light of the coronavirus outbreak. We have advised the state secretaries not to book any ticket for the Lucknow event," BAI secretary Ajay Singhania said. PTI

#### Bayern Munich and other Bundesliga clubs take pay cuts

##### BERLIN

Footballers at Germany's top teams, including Bayern Munich, have agreed to take pay cuts to help clubs survive the economic impact of the coronavirus, media reports said Tuesday. *Bild* reports that players and club officials at champions Bayern, currently on top of Bundesliga, have accepted a 20% in their salaries. Bayern has a massive wage bill which reached €36 million last year, almost half of club turnover. Players at Borussia Moenchengladbach were the first in the Bundesliga to propose a pay cut. Borussia Dortmund and Bayer Leverkusen players are in talks over pay cut proposals with management. AFP

## SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to puzzle 12891

C	E	M	S	F
I	R	O	C	A
N	L	E	O	A
L	E	N	O	A
E	N	O	A	R

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

1	2	4	5	3	9	7	6	8
6								

# Mbanda tackling a different opponent now



**Kind gesture:** The strong Maxime Mbanda helps patients to be carried from a wheelchair. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

## Holding weighs in on Sandpapergate

March 24, 2018, a dark day for Australian cricket

AYAN ACHARYA  
CHENNAI

"Faf is being held together by... I was going to say by sticky tape, but that's probably not the right thing," So began the announcement, nearly four days after the Newlands incident in 2018, of the then South Africa coach Ottis Gibson, who had a dig at Australia's ball-tampering weapon of choice.

Australia had its moments when it was exceptionally good, but this was one of its lowest points. Eventually, the players would come good and they would be strong again. It was just one of those things, but March 24 marked two years since Australian cricket was thrown into turmoil by the Cape Town Sandpapergate scandal.

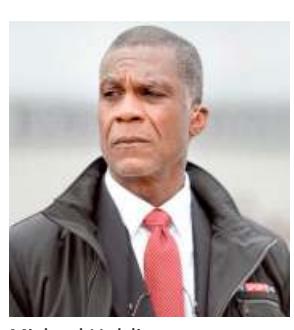
Steven Smith and David Warner, formerly captain and vice-captain of Australia, were banned from playing international and domestic cricket for 12 months by Cricket Australia for their roles in the scandal while Cameron Bancroft, the player caught tampering the ball, was banned from playing for nine months.

The reception Australia has got since that fateful Test against South Africa has usually oscillated between

disgust and awe. Michael Holding, West Indies fast-bowling great who was part of the commentary team during the Test, dismisses the notion that the fallout was over the top.

**Comparison**  
"I don't think so," said Holding, "considering the level of punishments meted out to individuals and teams whose crime was to not bowl enough overs in a day. And I think the bigger crime was to try and cover up what took place instead of just taking it on the chin and apologising."

Holding did not see the incident live. He had just come off commentary when a broadcasting colleague brought it to his attention. "I went outside the Super-sports commentary box only to be asked by a commentator from another network if I had seen what happened,"



Michael Holding. ■ FILE PHOTO



Bancroft... caught in the act! ■ FILE PHOTO

Holding recalled. "I went back and watched all the replays from various angles. My immediate reaction was dismay. I couldn't believe anyone could be so naïve to do what he [Bancroft] did in today's world."

Holding has "no idea" whether Smith and Warner are better for their experience. "I remember seeing an advertisement that Smith did while under suspension, referring to his involvement in the scandal which, in my opinion, was in poor taste. It didn't suggest to me that there was any remorse. I don't know either gentleman, so can only go by what I see."

## Former India footballer Abdul Latif passes away

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD

Former India footballer Abdul Latif passed away in Guwahati on Monday. He was 73 and had a son and two daughters.

Latif, who played as a midfielder, represented India in the 1970 Asian Games where the team won a bronze.

Earlier, he played for State Bank of Hyderabad in the A-Division Rahim League here. Later, he moved to Bengaluru where he played for HAL before settling down in Guwahati.

Latif was also the coach of the Assam team which won the junior and the sub-junior national titles under his guidance.

He also played for the two famous Kolkata clubs Mohd. Sporting and Mohun Bagan.

Former India captain Victor Amalraj said that Latif was his coach with Mohd. Sporting in 1978 and his strategies were brilliant.

Former internationals Shabbir Ali, Mohd. Habib, Amalraj, Aleem Khan, G. Palguna were among those who expressed their condolences.

The Italian rugby international is now an ambulance driver for Yellow Cross with other volunteers from the Yellow Cross in Parma, in Emilia-Romagna, one of the areas most affected by the coronavirus.

"When everything was cancelled in rugby, I wondered how I could help, even without medical expertise," Mbanda, who plays for Zebre Rugby, the Parma club, said.

"I found the Yellow Cross,

which had a transport service for medicine and food for the elderly."

**Physical strength used**  
After delivering masks, food and prescriptions one day, the physical strength of the 26-year-old forward was put to good use where it was most needed, "on the front line, at the heart of the problem".

"I found myself transfer-

ring positive patients from one local hospital to another. I help with the stretcher or if there are patients to be carried from a wheelchair. I also hold the oxygen," he explained.

"If people see what I see in the hospitals, there wouldn't be a queue in front of the supermarkets anymore," he said. "They would think two, three or four times before leaving home, even to go running," he said.

"I started eight days ago, without a day's break and with shifts of 12 or 13 hours.

But faced with what I see in the infectious disease rooms, I tell myself that I can't be tired," he said.

Accustomed, as an Italian international, to tackling stronger opponents, Mbanda said he won't give up.

"As long as I'm strong, I'll keep going. I'm here and I'm staying here. As long as there's an emergency, I'm here and I'm staying here."

Mbanda has had to become a psychologist in con-

## Nepomniachtchi ahead

### CANDIDATES

SPORTS BUREAU  
YEKATERINBURG

Ian Nepomniachtchi scored his second win in as many days to consolidate his lead at the Candidates chess tournament.

The Russian defeated second seed Ding Liren of China in the sixth round and took his tally to 4.5 points.

He is now one point

ahead of the second-placed Maxime Vachier-Lagrave of France.

Top seed Fabiano Caruana of the United States is third with 3.5 points.

**The results (sixth round):** Alexander Grischuk (Rus) 3 drew with Fabiano Caruana (USA) 3; Kirill Alekseenko (Rus) 2 lost to Anish Giri (Ned) 3; Ian Nepomniachtchi (Rus) 4.5 bt Ding Liren (Chn) 2; Wang Hao (Chn) 3 drew with Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (Fra) 3.5.

## Postponement an athlete's nightmare

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM  
HYDERABAD

Rescheduling of a major event is an athlete's nightmare, says 1996 Atlanta Olympics hockey goalkeeper Aloysius Edwards.

Months of planning and preparation go for a toss. Edwards, who represented India in 147 internationals between 1989 and 2000, including the 1994 World Cup, told *The Hindu* on Tuesday on receiving news of the Tokyo Olympics being postponed.

"The worst-hit will be those who are on the verge of making it to the Olympics. And, the Games not being held as scheduled will be a huge dampener," he said.

Different challenge  
Edwards should know what it means to miss an Olympics! For, after attending the one-month preparatory camp in Brisbane before the 2000 Sydney Olympics and even being presented the official No. 12 jersey (which he exchanged with Jude Felix's No. 1 on the latter's request), the Hyderabadi was sent home and Devesh Chauhan preferred.

"There will be some who may miss the bus for the simple reason that there will be fresh guidelines and qualifying standards, especially in individual disciplines. Young contenders who cannot be ignored will emerge.

"Most athletes prepare



Aloysius Edwards.  
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

with the specific objective of peaking at the right time for a major event, especially the Olympics. And, the Games not being held as scheduled will be a huge dampener," he said.

Edwards should know what it means to miss an Olympics! For, after attending the one-month preparatory camp in Brisbane before the 2000 Sydney Olympics and even being presented the official No. 12 jersey (which he exchanged with Jude Felix's No. 1 on the latter's request), the Hyderabadi was sent home and Devesh Chauhan preferred.

"However, postponement was the only sensible option left for the Olympics organisers, given the grim scenario across the world. After all, athletes' health and safety are paramount."

## Nothing decided yet: Ganguly on IPL-13

SHAYAN ACHARYA  
MUMBAI

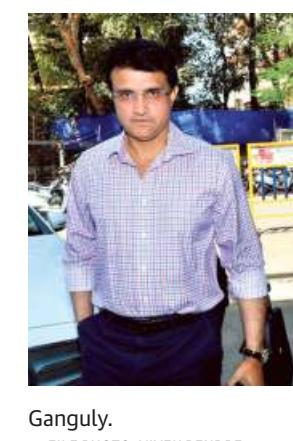
BCCI president Sourav Ganguly said there was no clarity on the fate of IPL-13 as the country has gone into a 21-day lockdown owing to COVID-19.

"Nothing has been decided yet. There is no clarity," Ganguly told *Sportstar* from Kolkata on Tuesday. "Things remain as it was (on March 14) when we decided to postpone the IPL (to April 15). There is no update."

Will the tournament be called off? "We have not decided on that yet. Let's see how things go in the next few days," Ganguly said.

The franchise officials had a conference call last week, raising eyebrows.

Ganguly, however, made it clear that he has not spoken to anyone so far. "What



Ganguly.  
■ FILE PHOTO: VIVEK BENDRE

change have you seen in the last one week? Nothing! We have not spoken to any of the franchises yet."

Does the BCCI plan to donate any fund to the union government for COVID-19 relief?

"We haven't decided on that yet," Ganguly said.

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### BETWEEN WICKETS

SURESH MENON

Authorities the world over tell us not to panic. But sometimes a little panic can be useful if it saves lives. It may be necessary to frighten adults with the bogeyman, the way children are scared into eating their vegetables, if all of us are to survive.

The insouciance with which many continue to go about their business as if nothing is happening – partying, gathering in public places – seems to be a sign that asking people not to panic is a way of telling them to act irresponsibly.

The five-minute plate-banging and clapping on the Sunday was followed on Monday by crowds on the streets and in marketplaces. It was, as one writer pointed out, as if India had won the World Cup. Citizens concluded that the coronavirus had been driven away.

What has all this got to do with a sports column you might ask, and the answer is, "everything." Sport does not exist outside of normal human practice; it is not something that happens independently of life. Any man's death ought to diminish us for we are involved in mankind, as the poet pointed out.

#### Ill-prepared

The worst is yet to come, and we are ill-prepared. The responsibility falls on each of us to follow the rules. Stay home. Wash hands. Avoid people.

The Olympic Games have been postponed. And there is very little chance of the IPL being held any time soon. We might as well accept this and not waste

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