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NEARBY



Capital reports 4 new cases; total number 39

NEW DELHI Four new cases of COVID-19 were reported in the city on Thursday, taking the total number to 39. Case 10, a 38-year-old woman who travelled to Saudi Arabia, has proved to be a conundrum for the Delhi government, with her contacts reaching 1,400.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

3 more test positive for COVID-19 in Noida

GAZIABAD Three more persons tested positive for COVID-19 in Noida on Thursday, taking the total count in Gautam Buddha Nagar to 14, the highest in Uttar Pradesh. Confirming the report, the Chief Medical Officer of Gautam Buddha Nagar said, "The three seem to be related to each other."

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

Constable suspended for vandalising carts

NEW DELHI A Delhi police constable posted was suspended on Thursday for allegedly vandalising vegetable carts during lockdown, officers said. The incident happened in Nehru Nagar where a constable posted under Ranjit Nagar police station asked vegetable vendors to leave.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

₹1.7 lakh cr. lockdown package rolled out

Rations doubled for three months; we do not want anyone to remain hungry: Nirmala Sitharaman

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Centre on Thursday announced a ₹1.7 lakh crore relief package in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and countrywide lockdown, providing free food and cash transfers to support the poorest and most vulnerable citizens during the crisis.

Announcing the details, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the food-grain rations for 80 crore poor people would be doubled for the next three months and supplemented by 1 kg of local pulses.

Cover for healthworkers

The Centre will provide ₹50 lakh medical insurance cover for the next three months for about 22 lakh health workers in government hospitals, including ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) staff, medical sanitary workers in government hospitals, paramedics, nurses and doctors.

The Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana had been announced within 36 hours of the lockdown and it would take care of the needs of poor and migrant workers, farmers, women, pensioners, widows and the disabled, said Ms. Sitharaman.

"We do not want anyone to remain hungry, so we will be giving enough to take care of their foodgrain require-

Booster dose

Insurance cover of ₹50 lakh per person for doctors and medical workers fighting COVID-19

80 crore poor people will receive 5 kg wheat or rice and 1 kg of preferred pulses for free every month for the next three months. Free grains can be availed of in two installments

▪ Increase in MNREGA wage to ₹202 a day from ₹182 for 13.62 crore families
▪ 20.4 crore Jan Dhan account holders to get ₹500 per month for next three months

Main features of the economic relief package announced by the Finance Minister on Thursday



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announcing the measures in New Delhi on Thursday. ■ PTI

8.3 crore below the poverty line families to receive free cylinders for the next three months

Wage-earners below ₹15,000 per month in businesses having less than 100 workers to receive 24% of their monthly wages into their PF accounts for the next three months

Ex-gratia of ₹1,000 to 3 crore senior citizens, disabled and widows among the poor
Government to front-load ₹2,000 to 8.7 crore farmers in the first week of April under the existing PM Kisan Yojana

The Centre has directed the State governments to use the Construction Workers Welfare Fund to give relief to 3.5 crore registered workers

Will fully back Centre: Sonia

Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Thursday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressing solidarity with his lockdown call. "We will support and collaborate fully with every step taken by the Union government to ensure the containment of the pandemic," she said. Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi called the package the "first" step in the right direction but criticised the government for offering insufficient cash transfer.

► PAGE 8

G20 commits \$5 trillion

The G20 countries committed on Thursday to inject more than \$5 trillion into the global economy, and contribute to the COVID-19 solidarity

response fund led by the WHO. "The pandemic is a powerful reminder of our interconnectedness and vulnerabilities. Combating this pandemic calls for a robust and coordinated global response...," said a joint statement at the end of the summit. ► PAGE 8

'Rate of spread has slowed relatively'

COVID-19 toll touches 16,694 cases



Safety zones: A Corporation worker marking waiting spaces at a wholesale vegetable market in Coimbatore on Thursday to ensure that buyers maintain distance. ■ M. PERIASAMY

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Briefing the press, Mr. Agarwal said while these trends were not definitive indications of a reduction, the measures including social distancing, contact tracing and quarantine were important deterrents to the spread of the virus and could even enable India to keep community transmission away or delay it.

Reports from the States put the number of deaths at 18 with Maharashtra, Karnataka and Jammu and Kashmir each reporting a fatality. The total number of positive cases stood at 712 – Kerala had the highest number at 137, followed by 125 in Maharashtra and 52 in Karnataka.

With 16 deaths and 694 COVID-19 positive cases, India is now showing a relatively slower spread of COVID-19 infection rate, Joint Secretary, Union Health Ministry, Luv Agarwal said on Thursday. But he added, "We cannot be relaxed about restrictions put in place to contain the virus."

He added that measures had been put in place through the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, to educate doctors online about care of patients to ensure uniform treatment availability.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

1,000 DEATHS IN U.S. ▶ PAGE 10

Lockdown forces migrant workers to leg it home from Manesar

The 21-day lockdown has suddenly left several thousand workers in the informal sector without jobs and any means of sustenance

ASHOK KUMAR
GURUGRAM

It is around 3 p.m. Carrying luggage on their backs and wearing black masks, seven men, visibly fatigued, are signalled to stop by a policeman who hurriedly jumps out of his vehicle at Rajiv Chowk on the Delhi-Gurugram highway. The officer makes a few inquiries before letting them off, asking them to walk in twos and threes and maintain a proper gap.

The men used to work as loaders at an automotive company in Bilaspur village in Manesar. But the nationwide lockdown to check the spread of the novel coronavirus, announced on March 24, has suddenly left them without jobs and little money to survive. Running out of money and with no means of support, the men, mostly from Shahjahanpur district in Uttar Pradesh, decided to walk close to 400 km back to

their villages. When this reporter met them, they had been walking for six hours.

"Yeh hartal abhi kaafi din chalne wali hai. Hamare pass khane ka bhi paisa nahi bacha hai (This lockdown is going to last for quite a few days. We have no money left even for food)," said Ramesh, the eldest in the group. He says seven other workers also set off on foot for Uttar Pradesh but he has lost contact with them.

Mr. Ramesh said policemen at several barricades stopped them, but let them off after questioning. He claimed no help had come from the administration or the automotive company they worked for.

"We hope to reach in at least five-six days," he said with a straight face when asked how long it might take them to reach home.

The youngest in the group, his hair dyed maroon, smiled as he said he was from Nepal and had no clue how long it would take him to reach home.

cash to pay the room rent, and some of them had not had food for the past 24 hours.

Deepak said they hoped to find some work in their villages since it is the harvest season; they can tend to livestock and be with their families in these testing times, he said.

Mr. Ramesh said policemen at several barricades stopped them, but let them off after questioning. He claimed no help had come from the administration or the automotive company they worked for.

"We hope to reach in at least five-six days," he said with a straight face when asked how long it might take them to reach home.

The youngest in the group, his hair dyed maroon, smiled as he said he was from Nepal and had no clue how long it would take him to reach home.



Such a long journey: Daily wage earners returning to their homes in Uttar Pradesh on foot from Manesar. ■ BIBEK CHETTRI

In Delhi, 15 to a room, without a morsel to eat

SIDHARTH RAVI
NEW DELHI

Scores of migrant workers in the Capital find themselves stuck in their dwellings without work, money, access to food and are wary of stepping out to try and get some rations for fear of being attacked by police personnel following the imposition of the 21-day lockdown, they said on Thursday.

Fazlur Rahman, 22, is holed up in a shanty in Vishwas Nagar, having arrived here only a week ago to start working at a construction site. "We hadn't even worked for a day before the project was called off be-

cause of the [janata] curfew," he said over the phone. He and 15 other people are now stuck in their room at the construction site. They ran out of food on Wednesday evening, said Mr. Rahman.

"We're afraid to step out because we've seen the police beat up people," he said. In a video, he shared, Mr. Rahman is seen with folded hands, speaking in Bengali, appealing to the authorities, including the West Bengal government, to help them return home.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 9
MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 2, 3 & 4

Sri Lanka frees soldier who killed 8 Tamils

MEEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on Thursday pardoned and released an Army man who was on death row for killing eight Tamil civilians, including a five-year-old and two teenagers, in 2000 during the civil war.

The President has instructed the Ministry of Justice to release Sgt Ratnayake from prison," a spokesman at the Presidential Media Division said, confirming local media reports.

TNA SLAMS DECISION ▶ PAGE 10

New Parliament design will take more time

Nationwide lockdown likely to affect deadline; architect says MPs' concerns being addressed

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI

The design for the new Parliament building that the Centre is hoping to complete by August 2022 could be delayed by a few weeks as the country remains in lockdown, according to sources.

The Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry's construction agency, the Central Public Works Department, was expecting to prepare the detailed project report for the building in March and present the same to the Lok Sabha Speaker and the Vice-President soon after, according to CPWD officials.



The draft masterplan envisages a triangular-shaped building opposite the existing Parliament House. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

The tender inviting bids for the construction of the building would have been issued shortly after, in keeping with the May deadline set by the Ministry earlier, officials said.

The timeline could be pushed back due to the lockdown... Many calls and video conferencing are ensuring

Bimal Patel, director of the Ahmedabad-based HCP Design, Planning and Management, which was selected by the CPWD in October 2019 as its consultant for the project, told *The Hindu* that though the pandemic was "disruptive", he hoped it would not change the final deadline of the project.

"The COVID-19 pandemic is a time of much distress in the world. Yes, it is disruptive but MoHUA, CPWD, HCP DPM and all the onboard consultants are continuing to work in this period of lockdown... Many calls and video conferencing are ensuring

that we continue to work at our best possible pace in these tumultuous times. We hope to not let this disruption affect the final deadlines of the project," he said.

The draft masterplan drawn up by the HCP envisages a triangular-shaped building opposite the existing circular Parliament House. However, the design process would "continue in the coming few weeks", Mr. Patel said, adding that concerns raised by MPs at a recent meeting would be addressed.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

A ND-NDE

Shops selling essentials to operate 24x7

e-commerce companies allowed to deliver commodities at home during lockdown period

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Shops and factories associated with essential services can operate 24x7 and e-commerce companies can home-deliver essential commodities during the ongoing 21-day lockdown to contain the COVID-19 epidemic in the Capital, the Delhi government announced here on Thursday.

These announcements were made at a joint digital press conference by Lieutenant Governor Anil Baijal and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal after a meeting with senior administrative and police officers.

No restriction

"We have ordered that there will be no restriction on e-commerce companies providing essential services. We have also formulated a plan by which we can check if the essential services providers are working on the ground and if they have enough stock or not," Mr. Kejriwal said.

"The SDMs and ACPs will ensure that all shops in their area providing essential services are open and they have



People maintain social distancing at a store on the second day of the 21-day lockdown, on Thursday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

enough stock of essential commodities. We have witnessed that the shops providing essential services are facing huge crowds and therefore, we have decided that shops selling essential items will be allowed to remain open 24x7," he said.

COVID-19 cases

According to Mr. Kejriwal, Delhi currently reported a total of 36 COVID-19 positive cases and, in the last 24 hours, only one new case was reported.

Among the 36 cases, he said, 26 pertained to individuals who had travelled from virus-affected coun-

tries and 10 people got the virus through local transmission.

Mr. Baijal emphasised on adherence to social distancing at all times and urged people to stay at home and fully comply with lockdown advisories.

The L-G, Raj Niwas said, further instructed the district administration to ensure strict compliance of home quarantine and initiate action against violators and to create a mechanism to check if home quarantine is being followed properly.

"RWA office bearers, neighbours may also be informed about the persons

COVID-19

SDMs and ACPs will ensure that all shops in their area providing essential services are open and they have enough stock of essential commodities

ARVIND KEJRIWAL
Chief Minister

under home quarantine in that residential complex/area. He also advised proper monitoring of quarantine facilities and coordination with agencies," Raj Niwas quoted the L-G as having said.

Mr. Kejriwal said special requests had been made to facilitate people engaged in the supply and distribution of five basic essential items or like milk, vegetables, ration shops, chemists and pharmacists.

Mr. Kejriwal said he had requested the police that if they see any essential service provider on the road who does not have a pass,

the police should allow them to commute.

"The government is working relentlessly to provide passes to all the essential service providers...the Delhi government has decided and issued orders that the e-commerce delivery of essential services should not stop in Delhi," he said.

"The company ID cards of these delivery people will be accepted as their proof and they will be allowed to travel... many State governments are working in very innovative ways to tackle this pandemic and that they are constantly in touch with those State governments," he said.

Many of the city pharmacists added that even though medical shops were supposed to stay open, delay in issuance of the passes to the staff were affecting the supply as the shops had to keep their shutters down.

Online passes

Mukul Rajvanish of Vinayak Medicos, a pharmacy near GB Pant Hospital said, "The stocks are affected because we haven't been able to open our shops in the first place, the primary reason being the delay in the issuance of curfew passes. We had applied two days ago but we still have not heard anything from authorities. We had even visited the DCP's office but again, we were told that we'll get the

passes online. There is a lot of confusion and because of this even the staff are unable to come."

Meanwhile, Bittu, a mineral water vendor based in south Delhi said, "We could not step out today [Thursday] as we don't have the passes yet. We have applied for the same and have been told that we will get it by Friday. We are now waiting for it so that we can start the delivery again."

However, for Rinku Kumar, a vegetable seller, business is usual. "I have not yet faced any issues. The regular passes which we had earlier, to enter colonies, are still with us. So we are continuing going from colony to colony," he said.

Delay in issuance of curfew passes hits vital goods business

Staff unable to come to shops as a lot of confusion prevails

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Several people who come under the essential services category, on Thursday, said that their respective businesses were getting hampered even as they waited for the curfew passes to be issued.

The company ID cards of these delivery people will be accepted as their proof and they will be allowed to travel... many State governments are working in very innovative ways to tackle this pandemic and that they are constantly in touch with those State governments," he said.

Many of the city pharmacists added that even though medical shops were supposed to stay open, delay in issuance of the passes to the staff were affecting the supply as the shops had to keep their shutters down.

Supply of medicines has been affected due to delay in issuance of curfew passes. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Meanwhile, Bittu, a mineral water vendor based in south Delhi said, "We could not step out today [Thursday] as we don't have the passes yet. We have applied for the same and have been told that we will get it by Friday. We are now waiting for it so that we can start the delivery again."

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Make available essentials at ration shops: BJP leader to CM

LoP suggests steps to prevent hoarding, black marketing

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Leader of the Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri on Thursday wrote to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to suggest that milk, vegetables and fruits be made available at ration shops being operated by the government so that people did not have to suffer hoarding or black marketing.

Full support
In a letter to the Chief Minister, the leader said that the BJP sought to give "full support" to the Delhi government in dealing with the ongoing virus epidemic that has gripped the Capital.

Mr. Bidhuri suggested sev-

eral measures on behalf of his party to extend the reach of government services to the needy in Delhi more effectively. "Our first suggestion is to streamline the network of ration shops run under the public distribution system and give comprehensive information to the public about these... People should also be told the time of opening and closing of these shops," Mr. Bidhuri said.

"...It is also our suggestion that milk, vegetables and fruits should also be made available at these ration shops so that people do not have to suffer any hoarding or black marketing. They will get everything they need at a reasonable price at one place," he said.

Mr. Bidhuri also sought to remind Mr. Kejriwal about the Delhi government's announcement of providing assistance of ₹5,000 to poor workers, daily labourers and construction workers and demanded that this be done as soon as possible.

He has also demanded that the government ensure that the amount of pension to be given to senior citizens. "I also suggest to the Chief Minister that a helpline number be issued and wherever there is a demand to provide food to the poor, it should be transported via government vehicles," he said.

His appeal came as a reaction to an information that Muslims in some areas like Old Delhi, Zakir Nagar, Seelampur and Jafarabad were lax about social distancing and the restrictions imposed by the government to control and contain the virus epidemic.

Mr. Khan asked Muslims in these neighbourhoods to strictly obey the curfew restrictions, adhere to social distancing norms and ap-

Minorities panel appeals to Muslims to obey curfew norms

DMC asks them to adhere to social distancing guidelines

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Delhi Minorities Commission chairman Zafarul-Islam Khan on Thursday appealed to Muslims in the city to strictly obey curfew restrictions and adhere to social distancing norms.

His appeal came as a reaction to an information that Muslims in some areas like Old Delhi, Zakir Nagar, Seelampur and Jafarabad were lax about social distancing and the restrictions imposed by the government to control and contain the virus epidemic.

He has also demanded that the government ensure that the amount of pension to be given to senior citizens. "I also suggest to the Chief Minister that a helpline number be issued and wherever there is a demand to provide food to the poor, it should be transported via government vehicles," he said.

His appeal came as a reaction to an information that Muslims in some areas like Old Delhi, Zakir Nagar, Seelampur and Jafarabad were lax about social distancing and the restrictions imposed by the government to control and contain the virus epidemic.

Mr. Khan asked Muslims in these neighbourhoods to strictly obey the curfew restrictions, adhere to social distancing norms and ap-

proach hospitals if symptoms were noticed and follow quarantine rules.

"Imams and mosque committees must strictly adhere to the current restrictions and restrict congregational prayers to a maximum of four persons including, the imam and muezzin while others must pray at home. Preservation of human life is a primary duty of all. People must not pay attention to fake videos

offering doubtful advice and cures," Mr. Khan said.

He added that authorities, especially police, must deal firmly with violators, while allowing people to procure essential supplies or to go to chemists and hospitals.

"Action, in particular, must be taken against imams and mosque committees members who are adamant to flout the current restrictions," Mr. Khan said.

Echoing his views, Maulana Abul Qasim Nomani, Mohamadum (vice-chancellor) of Darul Uloom, Deoband, also advised students to stay indoors and offer prayers.

Local sources said most of the mosques in the town are locked. "It took people a couple of days to come to terms to the magnitude of the virus outbreak. Now, the focus is that the 'azaan' should continue," said a source.

In Aligarh, Shehar Mufti Mohd. Khalid Hameed also appealed to the faithful to offer 'namaz' at home. The Aligarh Muslim Teachers' Association also requested people to stay indoors and strictly follow the government-imposed restrictions.

Animal protection groups call for regulating meat markets in the country

Five national organisations urge Central government to shut shops which do not follow food safety guidelines

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Five national animal protection organisations on Thursday appealed to the Central government to regulate all meat markets in the country in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic. They urged for immediate closure of meat markets and shops which do not follow food safety guidelines.

The organisations, which

include People for Animals (PFA) said, "The rise of antimicrobial resistance, along with the emergence of new, highly pathogenic viral strains, have been linked to live animal markets, including pet and wildlife trade and meat production systems".

"Live animal markets and facilities that confine animals in crowded conditions are fertile hotbeds of zoonotic

pathogens," Gauri Maulekhi of the PFA said adding, "The meat, fish and egg industry in India confines millions of animals in crowded facilities, transports them in similar conditions, and slaughters them in the most unhygienic manner".

Apart from the PFA, Humane Society International/India, Mercy for Animals India Foundation, Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organisations, and Ahimsa

Trust, have collectively appealed to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to work with the Ministry of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries to regulate intensive animal agriculture.

Public health crisis
They also called for closure of meat markets and shops which do not follow the Food Safety and Standard Authori-

ty of India guidelines. Claiming that often, the meat of diseased and infected animals enter the food market and is invariably consumed by the public, the animal protection groups said, "Allowing the meat industry to flourish in such uncertain times of public health crisis will have widespread and debilitating ramifications upon public health and safety".

The poorest of the country are the ones hit most hard by the restrictions

As inevitable as the shuttering step was to contain the pandemic, it came as a body blow for the unorganised sector in the country, making their lives more vulnerable

ANJALI BHARDWAJ

Estimates suggest that more than 70% of the population of Delhi works in the unorganised sector. Often, the poorest from villages migrate to the city in search of livelihoods and work as daily wagers, with minimal or no savings to dip into in times of crisis. It is not surprising, therefore, that the 21-day curbs announced by the Prime Minister, albeit necessary, is pushing these residents of Delhi into abject destitution.

Reassurances by the Prime Minister and the Chief Minister that essential commodities will continue being available in neighbourhood shops, mean little to those who have no money to buy them. Heart-wrenching pictures of families carrying their young on their backs, walking towards villages hundreds of miles away during the nation-wide curfew,

are a grim reminder of their economic fragility. Lack of social infrastructure and recurring expenses – the average rental for a jhuggi in Delhi is around ₹3,000 – make it unviable for them to continue living in the city without any source of income for extended periods of time.

A large number of Delhi's children are not strangers to hunger. The post-mortem of three sisters aged two, four and eight, who died in east Delhi two years ago revealed that they succumbed to starvation – there was zero gram of fat on their little bodies. Since schools and anganwadis have been shut down due to the pandemic, children in the Capital are being denied their mid-day meals on which many subsist – putting them at grave risk.

The Finance Minister on Thursday announced a financial package to mitigate the disastrous consequences for the poor. While the mea-

sures are welcome and much needed, they are mainly focused on providing relief to those who are already covered in the food and social security net of the government. The supply of additional foodgrains to existing ration card holders and enhancing pensions of existing beneficiaries, while necessary, is in no way sufficient. These measures ignore the poorest, especially migrant workers, who have been excluded from the ambit of social security programmes of the government because they do not possess the necessary documents and proof of address.

No identity cards

Only 40% of Delhi's population has a valid ration card, leaving lakhs of deprived residents out of the ambit of the Public Distribution Sys-

tem. Similarly, the pension scheme excludes a very large number of the old and the handicapped, who desperately need social security benefits. Now, more than ever, is the time for Delhi to learn from the experience of Kerala and other States which

have universalised their social security programmes to ensure no deserving family is excluded.

In the meantime, it is incumbent upon the Delhi government to immediately deploy its resources to assist those who are left out. In ad-

dition to making sure that foodgrains and pensions are efficiently delivered to all, the government must set up proper shelters for the poor who are rendered homeless during this crisis and provide cooked food to those who need it.

COVID-19 hotspot

Thousands have been congregating at meal times making these places hotspots for the spread of the dreaded COVID-19. Also, not everyone who needs food is able to reach these centres during curfew conditions. There is an urgent need to decentralise the distribution of cooked food. The network of anganwadis and government schools must be used to enable easy access and prevent



Pictures of families carrying their young on their backs, walking towards villages hundreds of miles away during the lockdown, are a grim reminder of their economic fragility. ■ REUTERS

overcrowding. It is critical that the mid-day meal scheme, and support to pregnant and lactating mothers, be immediately resumed.

There is no excuse for putting the already vulnerable at greater risk. This would also be in line with the recent Supreme Court judgment directing States to promulgate policies to immediately ensure provision of these meals. Implementation of curbs in a city like Delhi, with its teeming, poor and vulnerable population was never going to be anything short of a herculean task.

Lack of proper planning and prompt implementation of requisite emergency measures could hurl the national capital into an economic and health abyss.

(The author is a social activist associated with Satark Nagrik Sangathan, a citizens' group working to promote transparency and accountability)

AN-NDE

Timings**DELHI**

FRIDAY, MAR. 27
● RISE 06:17 SET 18:37
● RISE 08:03 SET 21:13
SATURDAY, MAR. 28
● RISE 06:16 SET 18:37
● RISE 08:36 SET 22:06
SUNDAY, MAR. 29
● RISE 06:15 SET 18:38
● RISE 09:12 SET 23:02

Delhi Weather max min
Delhi City 30 18
Safdarjung 30 18
Palam 31 18**Delhi Palam Today**
28°C A cloudy and comfortable day lies ahead. There are chances of rain and thunder-shower activities.**Delhi Palam Tomorrow**
28°C A dry and warm day with partly cloudy sky to prevail. Night will be pleasant and hazy.© Copyright Skymet Weather 2019
All rights reserved.**IN BRIEF****City likely to get rainfall, hailstorms today**

The Met department on Thursday said that under the influence of a western disturbance, the city could get rain and gusty winds accompanied by hailstorms on Friday. The maximum temperature which dipped below the 30-degree mark to settle three degrees below normal on Thursday at 29.2 degrees Celsius, is likely to fall to 27 degrees on Friday. The minimum temperature is likely to settle at 19 degrees.

Constable suspended for vandalising vegetable carts

A Delhi police constable posted in Central district was suspended on Thursday for allegedly vandalising vegetable carts during lockdown, officers said.

The incident happened in Nehru Nagar area where a police constable posted under Ranjit Nagar police station asked vegetable vendors to leave. There were customers and vendors were busy dealing with them. The constable asked the vendors to leave again and an argument broke when vendors said food items come under essential services. The policeman then overturned three vegetables carts and threatened to arrest the vendors.

“We got to know about the incident after he received a video of the incident from a local resident. Constable Rajbir of Ranjit Nagar police station, seen in the video, has been suspended with immediate effect for his misconduct. All other police staff in the district have been sensitised in this regard,” said Sanjay Bhatia, DCP (Central).

The police said that the video surfaced online on Wednesday, following which the constable was suspended on Thursday.

However, there were numerous complaints of policemen beating people associated with essential services, like delivery boys, vegetable vendors and newspaper hawkers.

“We have set up a platform for e-commerce websites where they can share with us difficulties faced by them, so that we can solve them,” said Mandeep Singh Randhawa, Delhi police PRO.

Curfew passes have been issued to them and the police have assured the delivery agents associated with e-commerce of ensuring smooth movement of essential goods, he added.

THE HINDU

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People queue up to fill water from a tanker at Seemapuri; an e-rickshaw plying on the road and daily-wage workers cooking meal at a shelter in New Delhi on Thursday ■ R.V. MOORTHY, SANDEEP SAXENA, BIBEK CHETTRI

Delhi reports 4 new COVID-19 cases; total number 39 now

National capital currently has 32 active cases and reported 1 death so far

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

Four new cases of COVID-19 were reported in the city on Thursday, taking the total number of cases to 39 with 32 active cases and one death.

All the four new cases have travel history to affected countries. Case 36, a 32-year-old man, who is a resident of Jamia Nagar in Delhi, has a travel history to Dubai.

Case 38, 39, and 39 are residents of Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana and Bangalore respectively and they have a travel history to Iran, Spain, Paris, and Canada, respectively.

Also, Case 10, a 38-year-old woman, who travelled to In-



People standing in a queue to buy essential items from a store at Bali Nagar in west Delhi on Thursday. ■ SHIVKUMARPUSHPAKAR

dia from Saudi Arabia, has proved to be a conundrum for the Delhi government, with her contacts reaching 1,400 and still increasing.

“As many as 1,400 people came in contact with the woman and officials have asked

all of them to be in home quarantine for 14 days. Most of them are from 500 houses in her area,” a Delhi government official said.

“Also, around 1,100 people came in contact with the 49-year-old male Mohalla Clinic

doctor [Case 28] and we have asked them to home-quarantine themselves for 14 days,” the official said. Most of the contacts are his patients.

“We have told all the people, who have been home-quarantined, to report to us if they show any symptoms. Currently they are asymptomatic,” a doctor said.

Case 28 had also come in contact with Case 10, when she consulted him at a private clinic. He was later tested positive on Sunday.

BLK Super Speciality Hospital and Max Healthcare will start admitting COVID-19 patients from Friday.

(With inputs from Bindu Shajan Perappadan)

3 more test positive for COVID-19 in Noida

Total cases in Gautam Buddha Nagar stands at 14, the highest in Uttar Pradesh

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GAZIABAD

Three more persons were found to be infected with COVID-19 on Thursday in Noida, taking the total count in Gautam Buddha Nagar to 14, the highest in Uttar Pradesh.

Confirming the report, Anurag Bhargav, Chief Medical Officer (Gautam Buddha Nagar) said the three persons have been shifted to Pediatric Hospital and Post Graduate Training Institute in Sector 30, Noida. “The three seem to be related to each other,” he said.

“We got to know about the incident after he received a video of the incident from a local resident. Constable Rajbir of Ranjit Nagar police station, seen in the video, has been suspended with immediate effect for his misconduct. All other police staff in the district have been sensitised in this regard,” said Sanjay Bhatia, DCP (Central).

The police said that the video surfaced online on Wednesday, following which the constable was suspended on Thursday.

However, there were numerous complaints of policemen beating people associated with essential services, like delivery boys, vegetable vendors and newspaper hawkers.

“We have set up a platform for e-commerce websites where they can share with us difficulties faced by them, so that we can solve them,” said Mandeep Singh Randhawa, Delhi police PRO.

Curfew passes have been issued to them and the police have assured the delivery agents associated with e-commerce of ensuring smooth movement of essential goods, he added.

At night shelters, food for most but not for all

Despite government increasing the quantity of food, it is proving inadequate

NIKHIL M BABU

NEW DELHI

Days after the Delhi government started distributing free lunch and dinner at its 220-odd night shelters, in the wake of COVID-19 outbreak, the programme drew mixed response from the homeless.

The authorities, meanwhile, stated that they have increased the amount of food being served at these shelters. Though the food sufficed for those in the three-night shelters, *The Hindu* visited, people and caretakers complained that more food is needed to serve homeless people who come to the shelter for just food.

nication. “The food was mistakenly dropped off at AIIMS last night and then we had to get it from there and that caused the delay,” he said.

Food portion

“Everyday we are increasing the number of meals we are serving. Today, we gave lunch to more than 20,000 people in our night shelters,” Bipin Rai, a member of the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB), which runs the night shelters, said.

On Thursday afternoon, hundreds of people lined up for free lunch at a night shelter in Yamuna Pushta in east Delhi. But people sat close to each other and some complained that the portion of food being served was less.

A caretaker admitted that the food would never suffice as more people are flocking to the tents during the curbs.

No food at Gurugram night shelter: inmates

At least 40 people didn't eat for last 2 days

ASHOK KUMAR

GURUGRAM

Sitting on the benches laid haphazardly under a tree at a Municipal Corporation of Gurugram-run night shelter at Bheem Nagar here on Thursday afternoon, around 40-odd people, all daily-wagers, have not had meals for the last two days.

“I brought rice for ₹200 two days ago. We all cooked and shared,” said Bablu, 48. He claimed that many of them have not had food for even longer. “The work stopped around five days before the people's curfew. After the curbs on Monday, the police did not allow us to stand at Labour Chowk,” added Bablu, who had migrated from Bihar a decade ago and is a regular to the night shelter.

The inmates claimed that most of them were daily-wagers going to Bhuteswar Mandir Labour Chowk everyday and somehow making a living before the restrictions were imposed. Inder Kumar, a guard at another night shelter in Kadipur, said the facility was ready, but not formally taken over by the MCG and therefore, he had stopped allowing anyone inside. “It has space for around 100 people, but it got ready in January only. Not many people know about it. Only a dozen people were coming for night stay. But now I have been told by my company, who constructed the shelter, to not to allow anyone. The MCG should take it over first,” said Inder.

Dhara, a scavenger, said that he was managing the meals helped by the scrap-dealers known to him. But it was now getting difficult.

“Earlier, we got free meals at gurdwaras and mandirs, but now they have also been shut. There is no help from the administration either. We will die of hunger before we are infected by the deadly virus,” said Ashish, 26.

Inder Kumar, a guard at another night shelter in Kadipur, said the facility was ready, but not formally taken over by the MCG and therefore, he had stopped allowing anyone inside. “It has space for around 100 people, but it got ready in January only. Not many people know about it. Only a dozen people were coming for night stay. But now I have been told by my company, who constructed the shelter, to not to allow anyone. The MCG should take it over first,” said Inder.

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COVID-19 poster outside west Delhi house keeping people away

Relatives bringing us essential items: quarantined family

HEMAMI BHANDARI

NEW DELHI

“COVID-19. Do not visit. Home under quarantine,” read a poster outside a house in a west Delhi locality. People walking past were seen taking a closer look of the poster after they noticed it, before quickly walking away.

The poster also has a name, the address, and the number of persons advised quarantine written on it besides the duration of quarantine – March 15-31. The six members of the family have been asked not to step out of their house to avoid legal action against them.

The house is owned by a 40-year-old who had returned from the United States on March 15. Employee of a multi-national company, who requires to travel for work often, the owner said that all that the poster had done was scaring people around them.

The neighbours, however, are now both concerned and apprehensive.

A 62-year-old, who did not wish to be identified, said that the man's father had come out to throw garbage in the morning and a few people in the area “took a step back”. “We have called them to say that if they need something, they should let us know. But people are obviously scared to go near the house,” he said.

The owner of the house said that he had been buying everything online till a few days ago, but since Wednesday

threat was real. It has been 10 days and I am absolutely fine. What it really does is scare people,” he said. Whoever he asked, including his friends, to even come outside the house, turned him down, he added.

COVID-19

He said that on Wednesday, as soon as the poster was pasted, they had clicked it along with a message on their residential colony's group saying that the man is fine and that this was a precautionary measure being taken by the government and there was nothing to panic.

The members of the family have been taking precautionary measures even inside the house that include sleeping in separate rooms and washing utensils as and when they are used.

A government official said the Airport authorities is sharing a list of details of people who landed in the country, with the District Surveillance Officer (DSO). The DSO is tasked with putting up the posters and informing the police. “Several complaints have been received about people not following the quarantine orders and the police are being informed in such cases who are then warning people of legal action if they step out of the house,” he said.

Delhi police DCP and staffers quarantined

His daughter has returned from abroad

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

A senior Delhi police officer along with his staff has been quarantined on Thursday.

A Delhi police officer confirmed that a DCP-rank officer was quarantined after it was found that his daughter has returned from the foreign country on March 18.

She complained of fever and cough and was admitted to a hospital. As per guidelines, the officer and his staff members were sent to home quarantine. The decision was taken after they were screened by doctors.]

“We have issued clear instructions to all staff members to immediately inform seniors if they develop any of COVID-19 symptom or feel unwell while on duty,” said the officer.

The owner of the house said that he had been buying everything online till a few days ago, but since Wednesday

hospital. As per guidelines, the officer and his staff members were sent to home quarantine. The decision was taken after they were screened by doctors.]

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3. Details of Essential service/purpose
4. Period
5. Time.
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East District:	8447200084, 8375878007
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Central District:	7428336279, 7428210711
New Delhi District:	9540675392, 9873743727
North District:	8595298706, 8595354861
Shahdara District:	8595272697, 8595274068
South East District:	8595246396, 8595258871
West District:	9414320064, 8595252581
South District:	9599649266, 9643150027
South West District:	9971518387, 9971526953
North West District:	8595559117, 8595543375

You can also contact us at Help Line No. **1031**





Miles to go: (From left) Migrant labourers from Andhra Pradesh walking towards the T.N.-A.P. border; people trying to move to the safety of their homes in Bengaluru; labourers on their way to their villages in Nanded district in Maharashtra from Landasangvi in Adilabad and workers from Tamil Nadu seen at the Kannur Collectorate in Kerala seeking permission to return on Thursday. ■ M. VEDHAN, PTI, S. HARPAL SINGH & S. K. MOHAN

No evidence of community spread in Kerala, says Pinarayi

19 more positive cases reported, taking the total to 137

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

As many as 19 more COVID-19 positive cases were reported in Kerala on Thursday, taking the total number of cases to 137. The number of persons currently under treatment in various districts is 126.

Briefing media here on Thursday, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said of the 19 new cases, nine were from



Reaching out: A policeman distributing bananas to the poor in Kochi on Thursday. ■ PTI

mitted in hospital isolation wards.

He said there was no evidence of community spread in the State so far. Though the situation in Kasaragod district had given rise to such concerns, things seemed to be under control as of now. However, the issue of people violating home quarantine continued to be a headache in the district.

Mr. Vijayan said preparations had been made on an intense scale to meet any possible emergency, including an escalation in the number of cases that the health system might have to manage. The COVID-19 package

declared by the Centre would be utilised suitably to augment the State's own plans.

Apart from fully utilising the public sector hospitals, the government has identified 69,434 beds in all in 879 private hospitals in the State. These include 5,607 ICU beds. A total of 15,333 rooms had been identified in 716 hostels, which would be renovated as isolation/ hospital beds.

The Health Department was collecting details of retired doctors whose experience could be put to use when the State was facing a health emergency, he said.

Mr. Vijayan also cautioned the public against unnecessary travel.

COVID-19: police tighten clampdown

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala police on Thursday attempted to limit vehicular and pedestrian movement by placing barricades at junctions and main thoroughfares.

They intensified checks and turned back hundreds of people who they reckoned had no reason to be out of their homes. They booked 2,094 persons for violating lockdown regulations imposed to control the spread of COVID-19 epidemic.

Health workers, LPG delivery persons, owners of essential businesses and their staff, fish vendors, and those transporting milk and perishable goods were caught in the clampdown.

The stepped up enforcement drew a measure of criticism from Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan later in the day.

Mr. Vijayan also cautioned the public against unnecessary travel.

Drama on A.P.-Telangana border as police act tough

Students stopped from entering Telangana at Panchalingala

STAFF REPORTER
VIJAYAWADA

The stand-off at the Garikapadu checkpost in Krishna district on the Andhra Pradesh-Telangana border has been partly resolved following high-level consultations between the two governments.

As per official sources, 44 persons who came from Telangana had been sent by buses to a quarantine facility at Nuzvid. A few others returned to the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad. Arrangements were made to shift about 200 others to various places.

The Andhra Pradesh police were not allowing those seeking entry since the early hours of Thursday, except those having valid reason to travel, including medical grounds and other urgent work.

Students' plea

Students hailing from Telangana and undergoing coaching for bank examinations in an institution at Nandyal in Kurnool appealed to the authorities concerned to allow them return to their State.

Over 100 students staged a protest near the checkpost



No entry: Students protesting near the border checkpost on Thursday. ■ U. SUBRAMANYAM

at Panchalingala on Thursday and urged the authorities to allow them to return to the State. However, the police refused to let them into Telangana and dispersed the students.

Vineeth Reddy, 24, a student from Warangal said that they should be allowed to return to their hometowns as the hostels in Nandyal were being closed down. "The students here are from various parts of Telangana," he said. "We reached the checkpost but the police did not allow us. They asked us to return to

Nandyal," Mr. Reddy added.

The students later spoke to their professors and convinced their hostel management to keep it open. "The hostel authorities have said that they will prepare food too," he added.

On the other hand, people returning from Telangana to Andhra Pradesh were spotted walking back to their hometowns.

"My native is Nandyal and I work in Hyderabad. We have been walking from Jadarlera," said a person who was walking back to Nandyal.

Kerala prisoner dies after drinking sanitiser

PALAKKAD
A remand prisoner died at a hospital in Kerala's Palakkad district on Thursday after allegedly drinking sanitiser which he mistook for alcohol, officials said. Ramankutty was admitted to the district hospital on Tuesday after he collapsed inside the prison. "We suspect that he drank a bottle of sanitiser manufactured on the jail premises," an official said. PTI

150 German tourists to return home from Kerala

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
The 150 German tourists stranded in Kerala following the ban on international flights into the country due to the COVID-19 outbreak will fly back home this week. The Centre has given the nod to operate a chartered flight from the Thiruvananthapuram International Airport to Germany to enable the return of the tourists, who are housed in resorts and yoga centres in different districts.

Telangana police to monitor air passengers

HYDERABAD
In the backdrop of the increasing number of COVID-19 cases, the Telangana police will start the online monitoring of the movements of all persons who had flown into Hyderabad from different parts of the world. Central intelligence agencies have passed on the details of international air passengers who landed in Shamshabad from March 1.

More foreign returnees under isolation in A.P.

VIJAYAWADA
The number of persons under home isolation in Andhra Pradesh following the COVID-19 outbreak has gone up to 27,000 from 15,000 in just one day with the government identifying more foreign returnees. As per a bulletin from the State Health Department on Thursday, there are 27,015 persons, mostly foreign returnees, under the surveillance of ground-level staff.

Students of classes 6 to 9 to be promoted in A.P.

VIJAYAWADA
The Andhra Pradesh government has asked officials of the Education Department to cancel final exams for Classes 6 to 9 in view of the COVID-19 outbreak. The students of these classes will be promoted to the next class without writing any exams. Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy held a review meeting with the Department officials on Thursday.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



Forecast for Friday: Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning, hail and gusty wind likely over Arunachal Pradesh and with lightning and gusty wind at isolated places over Assam and Maharashtra and with lightning at isolated places over Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Odisha and Sikkim.

CITY RAIN MAX MIN CITY RAIN MAX MIN

Agartala..... 33.1..... 20.0 Kozhikode..... 0.0..... 0.0..... 0.0

Ahmedabad..... 36.2..... 24.5 Kurnool..... 38.7..... 24.2

Aizawl..... 26.1..... 21.8 Madurai..... 37.3..... 25.2

Allahabad..... 36.3..... 19.8 Mangalore..... 34.9..... 25.5

Bengaluru..... 32.8..... 20.6 Mumbai..... 34.9..... 24.6

Bhopal..... 6.6..... 19.4 Mysuru..... 35.7..... 22.9

Bhubaneswar..... 35.7..... 22.9 Chandigarh..... 17.5 New Delhi..... 32.8..... 19.4

Chennai..... 33.2..... 25.6 Patna..... 33.6..... 20.6

Coimbatore..... 36.5..... 24.4 Port Blair..... 33.0..... 22.8

Dehradun..... 29.7..... 16.3 Puducherry..... 33.0..... 24.0

Gangtok..... 0.6..... 10.6 Pune..... 9.2..... 35.5..... 19.0

Goa..... 24.6 Raipur..... 34.5..... 22.8

Guwahati..... 18.8 Ranchi..... 32.4..... 17.5

Hubballi..... 36.0..... 23.0 Shillong..... 0.4..... 22.2..... 16.0

Hyderabad..... 20.5 Shimla..... 18.0..... 9.6

Imphal..... 27.0..... 14.3 Srinagar..... 15.1..... 4.1

Jaipur..... 6.0..... 20.7 Tiruchirappalliy..... 3.6..... 32.2..... 25.2

Kochi..... 32.0..... 25.0 Tiruchirappalliy..... 37.1.... 29.3

Kohima..... 24.2..... 11.0 Vijayawada..... 25.5 Visakhapatnam..... 32.8..... 25.6

Kolkata..... 25.5 Visakhapatnam..... 32.8..... 25.6

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing Yesterday

CITIES SO₂ NO_x CO PM_{2.5} PM₁₀ CODE

Ahmedabad..... 54.43 16.86 86.00 ■■■■■

Bengaluru..... 06.12 28.73 91.00 ■■■■■

Chennai..... 02.16 23.66 91.00 ■■■■■

Delhi..... 17.16 20.138.91 ■■■■■

Hyderabad..... 01.28 18.64 68.00 ■■■■■

Kolkata..... 10.13 24.78 68.00 ■■■■■

Lucknow..... 04.05 50.119.00 ■■■■■

Mumbai..... 05.23 10.41.84 ■■■■■

Pune..... 19.07 60.24.23 ■■■■■

Visakhapatnam..... 25.5 ■■■■■

In observation made at 6.00 p.m., Kalyan, Maharashtra recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 271 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Narmada, Haryana recorded a healthy AQI score of 29.

Action against landlords asking doctors, paramedics to vacate

Officials asked to submit reports on such cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

Following complaints that landlords and owners are asking doctors and paramedical staff to vacate their houses, the government has directed all district, city, and police authorities to initiate strict action against such people under relevant provisions of the law.

In a Government Order issued on Thursday, officials have also been asked to submit action-taken report daily to the office of the Additional Chief Secretary in the Home Department.

Additional Chief Secretary (Health and Family Wel-

fare and Medical Education) Jawaaid Akhtar said in the order, "We have received a lot of complaints from doctors, paramedical staff, and other health workers. The behaviour of landlords and house owners amounts to obstructing public servants in discharging duties. In this context, the government of Karnataka has issued the Karnataka Epidemic Disease (COVID-19) Regulations, 2020 under the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 and Hyderabad Infectious Disease Act, 1950 for prevention and containment of COVID-19."

Meanwhile, doctors and healthcare professionals are irked that although they are braving all odds to attend to patients during this crisis, people are treating them with disregard.

Expressing displeasure over the attitude by some house owners, U.S. Vishal Rao, chief of Head Neck Surgical Oncology and Robotic Surgery at Healthcare Global Cancer Centre, said the medical fraternity is going out on one limb to serve society. "In this hour of need, we need support from society. We have distanced ourselves from our family as we have put our life at risk. Society should stand behind us," he said.

He is believed to have roamed around for over a week even after returning from Jeddah on March 13. He visited several mosques and two hospitals. The dis-

Man booked in Palakkad for 'endangering society'

STAFF REPORTER
PALAKKAD

A man from Karakurissi in Palakkad district of Kerala who tested positive for COVID-19 on Wednesday has posed a threatening puzzle for the health authorities and the district administration. The police registered a case against him for deliberately endangering society.

The 51-year-old man is believed to have had interaction with many people even after he contracted the virus. He is suspected to have contracted the virus from Saudi Arabia.

He is believed to have roamed around for over a week even after returning from Jeddah on March 13. He visited several mosques and two hospitals. The dis-

trict administration, after a rough estimation, said that he could have interacted with at least 300 people.

Flouting the instructions given by the Health Department that all passengers coming from abroad should remain in home quarantine, the man in question had visited several public places.

He attended mass Juma prayers at Karakkum Juma Masjid near Karakurissi on March 13 and 20. He attended group prayers at Anakaparamba Aisha Masjid five times almost every day. He visited a tailor shop, a vegetable shop and a grocery shop at Mannarkkad.

He was forcibly put under quarantine by the health and police authorities after local people complained.

According to her, one of the reasons is presence of spike protein in the virus and its affinity to ACE2 receptors in human cells

whatever one wants to, but it is extremely absurd to claim that it prevents a disease," she says.

Her first talk was at the

meeting of a Rotary Club chapter she is part of. Her father, who saw her presentation, asked her to do the same for his college alumni group. A person, who attended that talk, in turn made her

speak at a meeting organised by the Tamil Nadu Science Forum (TNSF).

The video of her talk at TNSF was noticed by few journalists and calls from the media asking her to talk about the pandemic has not stopped ever since.

Ms. Pavithra, a B.Tech graduate in Biotechnology from Alagappa College of Technology, is now the Director of Care Health Diagnostic Center. Admitting that she has always been a nerd, she says that it was her fascination with viruses that led her to pursue a Ph.D from the Biodesign Institute in ASU.

"Everyone studying viruses will have their own favourites and their reasons for the fascination with viruses that led her to pursue a Ph.D from the Biodesign Institute in ASU.

"Everyone studying viruses

SARS-CoV-2 virus is a strain, was its ability to make RNAs without DNAs," she says.

Explaining that while the synthesis of RNAs happened in most organisms through an enzyme called DNA-directed RNA polymerase, it happened in coronaviruses (



Standing with the needy

The relief package is a good start, but more might need to be done sooner than later

The ₹1,70,000 crore relief package announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday – Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) – is a good first step towards alleviating the distress caused to vulnerable sections of the population by the 21-day lockdown imposed to combat the spread of the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). What is noteworthy about the package is not the amount but the innovative ways in which the government is seeking to offer relief. It covers various sections of the vulnerable, ranging from farmers and women Jan Dhan account holders, to organised sector workers, to the most important of all – healthcare workers, who will now get a sizeable insurance cover of ₹50 lakh. The doubling of foodgrain allocation offered free is a good idea that privileges the hungry poor over rodents and pests devouring the stocks in Food Corporation of India godowns. So is the move to provide free cooking gas refills to the underprivileged who are part of the PM Ujjwala scheme. The offer to pay both employer and employee contributions to the Provident Fund for very small business enterprises is welcome and will offer relief to those businesses that have been forced to shut down operations, and also to employees earning small salaries for whom the PF deduction may hurt at this point in time. The salary limit could have been set higher at ₹25,000 per month – there's no cash outgo for the government anyway because this is just a book entry transaction.

The effort appears to be to keep the funding within the budget as much as possible and retain control over the deficit. For instance, the PM Kisan transfer has been already budgeted for and the increase in MGNREGA wages can also be accommodated within the budget. Ditto with the Jan Dhan account transfer of ₹500 per month for the next three months which will cost the government ₹30,450 crore. It is possible to argue here that the transfer could have been a little more generous – at least ₹1,000 a month. The government may have wanted to stay within the budget for now. It could also be to preserve firepower, as there is no saying how long this uncertainty will last. But, at some point soon, the government will have to break the fiscal deficit shackles. Also, it needs the financial bandwidth to support businesses in trouble. In fact, ideally the government ought to have announced a relief package for the corporate sector and the middle class along with the PMGKY. It should now turn its focus towards businesses that are running out of cash and may soon default on even salaries and statutory commitments if relief is not given. There are enough ideas to borrow from others such as the U.S. which is in the process of finalising a \$2 trillion package. Part II of the economic relief package should not be delayed beyond the next couple of days.

Terror unlimited

The IS attack is another reminder that there is no end to the Afghan violence in sight

The attack on a gurdwara in Kabul on Wednesday that killed at least 25 people, mostly members of Afghanistan's persecuted Sikh minority, is a bare-faced attempt by the Islamic State (IS) to revive its fortunes in the country at a time when it is politically divided and the peace process is hamstrung by the Taliban's continuing violence. The IS, which is concentrated in the eastern parts of Afghanistan, carried out several attacks in the past targeting the country's minorities. But, in recent months, the jihadist group suffered setbacks in the wake of sustained military operations by both Afghan and U.S. troops. In some parts, the Taliban had also attacked the IS, as the insurgents, who are tribal Islamist nationalists, see the latter as a threat. But the war-torn country's security situation is as fluid as ever. It now has two governments, one led by Ashraf Ghani, who was declared winner of the September presidential election, and the other by Abdullah Abdullah, who has disputed the results and formed a rival administration. The peace agreement reached between the Taliban and the U.S. failed to bring any halt to violence, with the insurgents and the government not being able to reach an understanding even on a prisoner swap. Besides, the country has also seen a jump in the number of SARS-CoV-2 infections, with the Herat province, which shares a border with Iran, emerging as the epicentre. The attack couldn't have come at a worse time.

Afghanistan is notorious for violence against its minority communities. The Hazara Shias were brutalised during the Taliban regime in 1996-2001. Most Hindus and Sikhs, once spread across the country in hundreds of thousands, have fled the country. With the resurgence of the Taliban and the fear of the insurgents taking over Kabul and undermining the Constitution, which at least in theory guarantees rights to all communities, the remaining minority groups are already in an abandoned state. By attacking the gurdwara and an adjacent housing complex, the IS has not just terrified the country's minorities further, but sent a message to the Afghan authorities that it remains a potent security threat. Afghanistan has too many problems, ranging from terrorism to the breakdown of the administration, which demands absolute resolve from the government. But, unfortunately, the country's political leadership appears to be concerned less about resolving any of them than about keeping power. The leadership should realise the magnitude of this crisis, and take a united approach to tackle it. It should kick-start the peace process with the Taliban, fight the IS cells more aggressively and work towards at least ensuring the minimum rights of its citizens guaranteed by the Constitution.

Devising a people-centric response to COVID-19

We urgently need an economic stimulus to protect livelihoods in the period of lockdown



PINARAYI VIJAYAN

India is at an extremely critical stage in its fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. A lockdown was inevitable. About 21 States, including Kerala, had already announced lockdowns of various durations before the Prime Minister's announcement. It is important that we stand united in facing this grave crisis.

As we make our way through the lockdown, the State has major responsibilities. It must take a leadership role in enforcing the lockdown while upholding the rights and dignity of people, it must educate the citizens on the dos and don'ts of rules to follow, and it must take all sections of society with it.

The health machinery has to work round the clock. At the same time, it is imperative that citizens shoulder their responsibilities and follow the rules of the lockdown strictly and diligently. Each life is precious, and any drop in our guard can quickly raise the number of the infected, thereby undermining the gains achieved.

The lockdown period should be used by the Centre to not just break the infection chain, but to isolate the infected from the general population and treat those who require it with varying degrees of hospitalisation, including intensive care. I welcome the announcement of the Prime Minister to set aside ₹15,000 crore for emergencies. However, we need clarity on how this money will be spent and on how States will be helped by the Centre in the expansion of health infrastructure.

Working together on Health

The Union Government has made some important announcements on March 26. While I welcome the relief package, I also urge that it be

expanded in the coming days.

While we must build up national-level preparedness, we must also remember that health is a State subject, and that State governments are an integral part of the governance of the nation. Fiscal federalism, decentralised governance and flexibility to the States to meet their particular needs and requirements should be a part of the fight against the virus, including coping with the lockdown and the economic recovery to follow. The Central government should create consultative bodies consisting of Union and State Ministers to identify bottlenecks and assess progress. My colleagues in different States are taking different initiatives. We may all have something to learn from each other.

In Kerala, we are making the utmost efforts to ensure that the supply of essential commodities, particularly food and medicines, is maintained and that the vulnerable sections of society are specifically protected. As soon as the Kerala government closed pre-schools and schools on March 10, our Women and Child Development Department made available, without missing a day's allotment, the mandated quantities of rice, pulses, broken wheat/semolina, peanuts, jaggery, oil to all pre-school children in each anganwadi centre. It also took steps to distribute 'Take Home Ration' for pregnant/lactating mothers and children aged six months to three years. We undertook this intervention for 33,115 centres, and we were able to protect the nutritional needs of close to 8.3 lakh children. In some anganwadis, vegetables and eggs were also distributed. We are happy to note that the Supreme Court of India expressed appreciation for our efforts in this regard.

The Kerala approach

Kerala will ensure availability of essential goods and services, and our government will not permit a single person to starve during the lockdown. We have energised our Public Distribution System (PDS)



to ensure that all households that do not figure in the priority list get 15 kg of free food supplies for a month. This is in addition to the allocation of 35 kg per household for those in the priority category. We also plan to distribute food kits, with basic grocery items and vegetables. To the deserving people now in quarantine, the government is already distributing such kits. Home delivery is being arranged to avoid crowding of people in PDS outlets and grocery shops. We plan to engage our local bodies to lead this effort at the ground level. Further, nutritious meal plates at ₹20 per plate are being served through 1,000 canteens of the State government.

Our Industries Department directed its public sector enterprises (PSEs) to raise the production and supply of hand sanitiser bottles; they immediately responded by producing an additional one lakh bottles per day. The Kerala State Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Ltd., a PSE, has been provided with ₹25 crore to ensure adequate supply of medicines required for COVID-19 treatment. Inmates of our prisons, self-help groups under the government's Kudumbashree Mission, and enterprises operating from our rubber parks were mobilised to increase the production of N95, triple layer and double layer face masks as well as surgical gloves. Our Khadi PSEs have been asked to supply adequate number of bed sheets and towels for disposable use in the hospitals. We have asked

Internet Service Providers in the State to increase their network capacity by 30% to 40% to ensure that people can work from home.

While we enforce the lockdown in all its seriousness, we should not lose sight of the other major challenge in front of us. India has a high share of poor in its population, most of whom suffer from multiple economic and social deprivations. They earn their livelihoods from the informal and unorganised sectors, where there is neither job security nor continuity of income flows. Their livelihoods have to be protected through the lockdown period.

Economic package

This is where the Kerala government has taken an initiative and come forward to announce a ₹20,000 crore economic revival package. We have a borrowing capacity of about ₹25,000 crore during the financial year 2020-21. We have requested the Central government to allow us to borrow half of this debt (about ₹12,500 crore) in April 2020 itself. This will be a major source of the ₹20,000 crore package the government has announced. This frontloading should not mean less expenditure later in the year. So, we are also requesting the Central government to provide us with flexibility under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act. We are hoping that the Centre will permit this.

Our economic package of

₹20,000 crore will be spent roughly as follows. Two months of welfare pensions will be paid in advance to the pension beneficiaries. For those not eligible for welfare pensions, ₹1,320 crore has been set aside for providing an assistance of ₹1,000 per family from the BPL and Antyodaya sections. Another ₹100 crore has been set aside for providing free food grains to families in need, while ₹50 crore has been set aside for the provision of subsidised meals at ₹20 per meal. Around ₹500 crore has been set aside for a comprehensive health package, where focus will be on improving public health infrastructure and equipping the State to face such epidemics. Loans worth ₹2,000 crore will be distributed through the Kudumbashree Mission. ₹2,000 crore has been set aside for the expansion of the employment guarantee programme. Further, around ₹14,000 crore has been set aside to clear all the arrears of the State government till April 2020.

Passenger vehicles have also been given tax relief. Autos and taxis have been given relaxation on payment of fitness charges. There is relaxation in the deadlines of water and electricity bill payment for affected firms. Entertainment taxes for cinema halls have been reduced.

Let this be the period in which we end fiscal conservatism. Extraordinary times require extraordinary action. The strict rules of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act should be set aside. We urgently need an economic stimulus to protect the people and livelihoods in the period of lockdown.

Today the world must stand together in the battle for the safety and well-being of humanity. We must draw strength and lessons from global and national experiences even as we redouble our efforts in building a people-centric response to the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pinarayi Vijayan is the Chief Minister of Kerala

Safeguarding the vulnerable among us

The effectiveness of our response will be judged by what we do to protect the weakest sections of our society



GUY RYDER

The human dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic reach far beyond the critical health response. All aspects of our future will be affected – economic, social and developmental. Our response must be urgent, coordinated and on a global scale, and should immediately deliver help to those most in need.

From workplaces, to enterprises, to national and global economies, getting this right is predicated on social dialogue between government and those on the front line – the employers and workers, so that the 2020s don't become a re-run of the 1930s.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that as many as 25 million people could become unemployed, with a loss of workers' income of as much as \$3.4 trillion. However, it is already becoming clear that these numbers may underestimate the mag-

nitude of the impact. This pandemic has mercilessly exposed the deep fault lines in our labour markets. Enterprises of all sizes have already stopped operations, cut working hours and laid off staff. Many are teetering on the brink of collapse as shops and restaurants close, flights and hotel bookings are cancelled, and businesses shift to remote working. Often the first to lose their jobs are those whose employment was already precarious – sales clerks, waiters, kitchen staff, baggage handlers and cleaners.

Weak safety nets

In a world where only one in five people are eligible for unemployment benefits, lay-offs spell catastrophe for millions of families. Because paid sick leave is not available to many carers and delivery workers – those we all now rely on – they are often under pressure to continue working even if they are ill. In the developing world, piece-rate workers, day labourers and informal traders may be similarly pressured by the need to put food on the table. We will all suffer because of this. It will not only increase the spread of the virus but, in the longer-term, dra-



matically amplify cycles of poverty and inequality.

We have a chance to save millions of jobs and enterprises, if governments act decisively to ensure business continuity, prevent layoffs and protect vulnerable workers. We should have no doubt that the decisions they take today will determine the health of our societies and economies for years to come.

Unprecedented, expansionary fiscal and monetary policies are essential to prevent the current headlong downturn from becoming a prolonged recession. We must make sure that people have enough money in their pockets to make it to the end of the week – and the next. This means ensuring that enterprises – the source of income for millions of workers – can remain afloat during the sharp

downturn and so are positioned to restart as soon as conditions allow. In particular, tailored measures will be needed for the most vulnerable workers, including the self-employed, part-time workers and those in temporary employment, who may not qualify for unemployment or health insurance and who are harder to reach.

Flattening the curve

As governments try to flatten the upward curve of infection, we need special measures to protect the millions of health and care workers (most of them women) who risk their own health for us every day. Truckers and seafarers, who deliver medical equipment and other essentials, must be adequately protected. Teleworking offers new opportunities for workers to keep working, and employers to continue their businesses through the crisis. However, workers must be able to negotiate these arrangements so that they retain balance with other responsibilities, such as caring for children, the sick or the elderly, and of course, themselves.

Many countries have already introduced unprecedented stimulus packages to protect their societies and economies and keep cash flowing to workers and businesses. To maximise the effectiveness of those measures, it is essential for governments to work with employers' organisations and trade unions to come up with practical solutions, which keep people safe and to protect jobs.

These measures include income support, wage subsidies and temporary lay-off grants for those in more formal jobs, tax credits for the self-employed, and financial support for businesses. But as well as strong domestic measures, decisive multilateral action must be a keystone of a global response to a global enemy.

In these most difficult of times, I recall a principle set out in the ILO's Constitution: "Poverty anywhere remains a threat to prosperity everywhere." It reminds us that, in years to come, the effectiveness of our response to this existential threat may be judged not just by the scale and speed of the cash injections, or whether the recovery curve is flat or steep, but by what we did for the most vulnerable among us.

Guy Ryder is Director-General, International Labour Organization

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.

Locking out the virus

While the Centre deserves praise for unveiling a slew of measures to prevent the COVID-19 outbreak in India from escalating to alarming levels, there are some critical gaps in healthcare infrastructure which need to be plugged (Editorial, "A long road," March 26). If the overwhelming response to the 'janata curfew' was any indication, the citizens can easily surmount the present health crisis. However, while making people stay home-bound, there should be no disruption in supply of essential commodities. More importantly, the police should not go overboard while enforcing the rules but act with great restraint in dealing with

delivery workers and health volunteers while they are on their routine move.

P.K. VARADARAJAN,
Chennai

Mental health concerns

At a time when people have been advised to stay at home and practise social

distancing as part of measures to combat the spread of the virus, concerns about the toll such an unprecedented lockdown would take on mental health of people at large are real and cannot be taken in a lighter vein. There is proven scientific

evidence pointing to the inextricable link between prolonged periods of social isolation and high levels of depression. While practising social distancing, we also need to cultivate a sense of togetherness. The mental and emotional toll caused by the virus is as much a threat to public health as the virus itself.

M. JAYARAM,
Sholavandan

CARTOON

Some readers have objected to the cartoon published on March 26 as 'Islamophobic'. Any link to Muslims in the attire of the virus was completely unintentional. The point of the cartoon was to show the world being taken hostage by the virus. However, we agree that the virus should have

Editor

evidence pointing to the inextricable link between prolonged periods of social isolation and high levels of depression. While practising social distancing, we also need to cultivate a sense of togetherness. The mental and emotional toll caused by the virus is as much a threat to public health as the virus itself.

Uncertainty and danger

No dramatic event in recent history has affected us as profoundly and pervasively as the COVID-19 pandemic has done. It has turned the entire world topsy-turvy, thrown daily routines out of gear, wreaked havoc on plans, and left a serious

concern on financial markets and the economy of the world over. The pandemic has affected our psyche in multiple ways and influenced how we think. The combination of uncertainty and danger is a recipe for severe angst.

R. SIVAKUMAR,
Chennai

The pandemic's destructive potential

It will shake the foundations of India's social and economic edifices. It required a Marshall Plan to reconstruct the shattered economies of the Second

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS: >>In the Business page story titled "Banks get ready for merger, albeit reluctantly" (March 26, 2020), there was an erroneous reference to Oriental Bank of India. It should have been Oriental Bank of Commerce.

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How can India contain the economic impact of COVID-19?

PARLEY

The government must focus on health and livelihood issues at the same time

The COVID-19 pandemic has effectively brought normal life to a halt in India. The importance of social distancing and a lockdown in curbing the spread of the virus cannot be stressed enough, but these measures also have huge repercussions on livelihoods and the economy at large, which has already been seeing a slowdown over the past year. In a conversation moderated by Vikas Dhoot, Naushad Forbes and M. Govinda Rao talk of ways in which India can tackle this humanitarian and economic crisis. Edited excerpts:

Do you see a parallel in recent history to the situation we face globally due to the novel coronavirus?



Naushad Forbes
is former president of the Confederation of Indian Industry and co-chairman of Forbes Marshall



M. Govinda Rao
has been a member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister and the Fourteenth Finance Commission



Scan the QR code to listen to the full interview online

Trump's inadequate response

After underplaying the COVID-19 threat for a while, the U.S. President then changed the narrative

R. PRASAD

On January 20, both South Korea and the U.S. reported their first case of the novel coronavirus. Two months later, while South Korea has largely contained the spread, the U.S. is grappling with an exponential increase in the number of cases. On March 26, with 69,197 cases, U.S. surpassed Spain (49,515) to have the second highest case load outside mainland China. Now it is inching closer to Italy's case load of 74,386. On the other hand, South Korea has reported 9,241 cases, six times fewer than the U.S.

A tale of two countries

The difference in availability of reliable testing kits in large numbers is mainly why there is such a striking difference in case load in these two countries. While South Korea approved the first coronavirus test on February 7, when there were just a few cases, the U.S. floundered. In early February, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) distributed about 1,60,000 testing kits to labs across the country. However, only about 200 of them were used. In February, testing was stalled due to various problems. The narrow criteria for testing suspect cases also made it extremely difficult to identify the silent spread of the virus in the community. It was only on February 27 that CDC expanded the criteria allowing doctors to test hospitalised patients with symptoms compatible with COVID-19 as well as other vulnerable populations.

When tests weren't available and the testing criteria remained narrow, U.S. President Donald Trump did nothing to get the tests from the World Health Organization or allow companies to produce them. Instead, he lulled people into believing that the virus spread was under check. Unfortunately, the top priority for Mr. Trump does not seem to be public health but the stock market and his re-election prospects.

On January 22, when the WHO was meeting to decide if the SARS-CoV-2 outbreak was a 'public health emergency of international concern', Mr. Trump said in an interview, "We have it totally under control". He reiterated

this on several occasions. On March 9, when the number of cases in the U.S. crossed 500 and the number of deaths rose to 22, Mr. Trump tweeted that the SARS-CoV-2 "risk is low to the average American". To make matters worse, he appointed Vice President Mike Pence to lead the U.S. response to the pandemic. This was despite Mr. Pence being responsible, as the Governor of Indiana, for the largest HIV outbreak in the state's history. Worse, government health officials and scientists are required to seek Mr. Pence's approval before speaking about the virus.

War on science

Mr. Trump has often waged a war on science. In the past, he has made false claims on evolution, called global warming a "total, and very expensive, hoax", and stated that vaccines cause autism. However, he seems to have taken a U-turn now, urging pharma companies to come up with a vaccine quickly. "Do me a favour, speed it up, speed it up," he said. In response, a strongly worded editorial in *Science* said: "Do us a favour, Mr. President. If you want something, start treating science and its principles with respect."

As the number of cases started climbing, Mr. Trump changed the narrative. First, he lashed out at the Democrats, calling the virus their "new hoax". Then he blamed China and referred to SARS-CoV-2 as a "Chinese virus". When the term angered Chinese officials and others, he defended it saying, "It's not racist at all. It comes from China, that's why." Later he said he wished China "would have told us earlier". But according to *The Washington Post*, U.S. intelligence agencies had raised concerns about the virus in January-February, but the President continued to downplay the risk and failed to act.

Mr. Trump is known for undermining scientists, institutions and the media. He shut down the White House National Security Council's entire global health security unit in 2018, an error that is perhaps going to cost him dearly now. He can only sincerely hope that "one day, it's like a miracle, it will disappear".

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NOTEBOOK

Of Chinese statistics and the Keqiang Index

Is there reason to believe China is covering up new infections?

ANANTH KRISHNAN

Evaluating the accuracy of official data is a challenge for journalists in every country. When that country is China, the problem is especially acute. Over my nine years reporting from there, figuring out how to use official numbers was a constant dilemma. Every three months, journalists would shuffle to the State Council Information Office in Beijing for the quarter's GDP numbers. The news wires would compete madly to be the first to file the figures. Having done so, reporters would later shrug that the numbers were probably massaged, but that was all we had to go by.

What may come as a surprise is that this view is widely shared by both the Chinese establishment and public. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang was quoted as saying in a WikiLeaks cable that GDP figures were "man-made". He made

these candid remarks in 2007 when he was a provincial leader. Rather than GDP numbers, Mr. Li turned to three more reliable indicators: electricity consumption, railway cargo volume and bank lending, now famously called the 'Keqiang Index'. As the cable put it, "By looking at these three figures, Li said he can measure with relative accuracy the speed of economic growth. All other figures, especially GDP statistics, are 'for reference only,' he said smiling".

Leaving aside sceptics who would insist even this approach is pointless because all Chinese data are "made up" (that's neither entirely accurate nor an argument one can engage with), a more helpful question to ask is, how do you mitigate for the fudging?

Most of the fudging happens at the local level by politicians with an eye on furthering their careers. The National Bureau of Sta-

tistics (NBS) in Beijing has been finding ways to use technology to bypass them.

Economists find it useful to assess indicators that officials have either less incentives or ability to fudge, which include freight volume and energy data. The general consensus is official data are actually getting more reliable in suggesting trends, even if actual figures are massaged. Consider, for instance, that on March 16 the NBS itself said industrial production shrank a record 13.5% in the first two months of the year with the COVID-19 shutdown, an estimate worse than most economists' forecasts. This would have been unthinkable a decade or two ago.

I thought of the 'Keqiang Index' amid the questions surrounding China's most recent COVID-19 numbers, with authorities saying for several days now the country had zero local infections – a claim that made

headlines around the world, even if greeted by scepticism by many both outside and inside China.

Is there reason to believe China is covering up thousands of new infections every day? Let's apply the Keqiang Index test, for instance, by looking at the number of medical workers still working in Wuhan, or the number of makeshift hospitals still functioning. On March 10, Wuhan closed the last of its 16 makeshift hospitals (which the authorities wouldn't have done without good reason considering the stakes),

while on March 18, 49 medical teams comprising 3,787 medical workers were sent home. More than 42,600 personnel had been parachuted into Wuhan during the peak of the crisis. Both indicators strongly suggest a trend of declining infections, even if the official numbers might be, to borrow a phrase, "for reference only".

Rajahmundry, March, 22. - Under the joint auspices of the Rajahmundry People's Association and Anjuman-i-Himayat Islam a public meeting was held on the 22nd instant under the presidency of Mr. B. Ramalingam when Miss Mary J. Campbell of Pathankot spoke on the "evil of the drink habit" before a large gathering of ladies and gentlemen.

Miss Campbell said she had been working in India for over 34 years and her work chiefly related to the education of girls. But she had a call from the people of Pathankot, who requested her to take up the temperance work in India. She thought it was a noble mission and therefore started it. She started at first with the co-operation of a few Muslim friends to combat the drink evil and eventually the Government officials also, though at first reluctant to offer her help, joined her organisation and successfully worked with her to bring down the revenues of Government, which meant less drink. She wanted the people to agitate and see that liquor shops were abolished totally. She also spoke at great length upon the evils of drink. The drink habit, she said, damned a person morally physically and spiritually.



GETTY IMAGES

the desired outcome with an assumption of limited state capacity. For example, I would like to see a massive publicity campaign on what social distancing means and why it's important to do. Regardless of what announcement comes, people should know not to crowd outside a shop together.

And if my action in announcing something is going to prompt just this, let me first send out all the reassurances that grocery stores will be open. The government has said that, but if you read the actual notification, it doesn't say how groceries will get to homes. There are some vague references to it being delivered. That sounds to me like a horrendous task to take on if state capacity is limited... delivering groceries to 1.3 billion people. Instead, rely on people going and doing the right thing. So, you say, 'grocery stores are going to be open and here are the rules under which people can go and buy groceries. Grocery stores can decide for themselves if they wish to be open 24 hours. We will allow a maximum of so many people per square foot. We are counting on the grocery stores themselves to maintain this for their own health. We will encourage everyone not to go in a group.' You can specify all of this ahead of time and reassure people that there's going to be no issue.

There has been a lot of clamour for shutting down the stock markets.

GR: A lot of things can now be done at home with online trading. To the extent that crowds can be avoided, it is important. But that doesn't mean that you should shut down the stock market. It is a barometer... in the immediate context, it may not tell you what your economy's doing if something is happening the world over. But you don't kill the messenger, it gives you a message.

Three weeks from now, what would be the best-case scenario for us to be in?

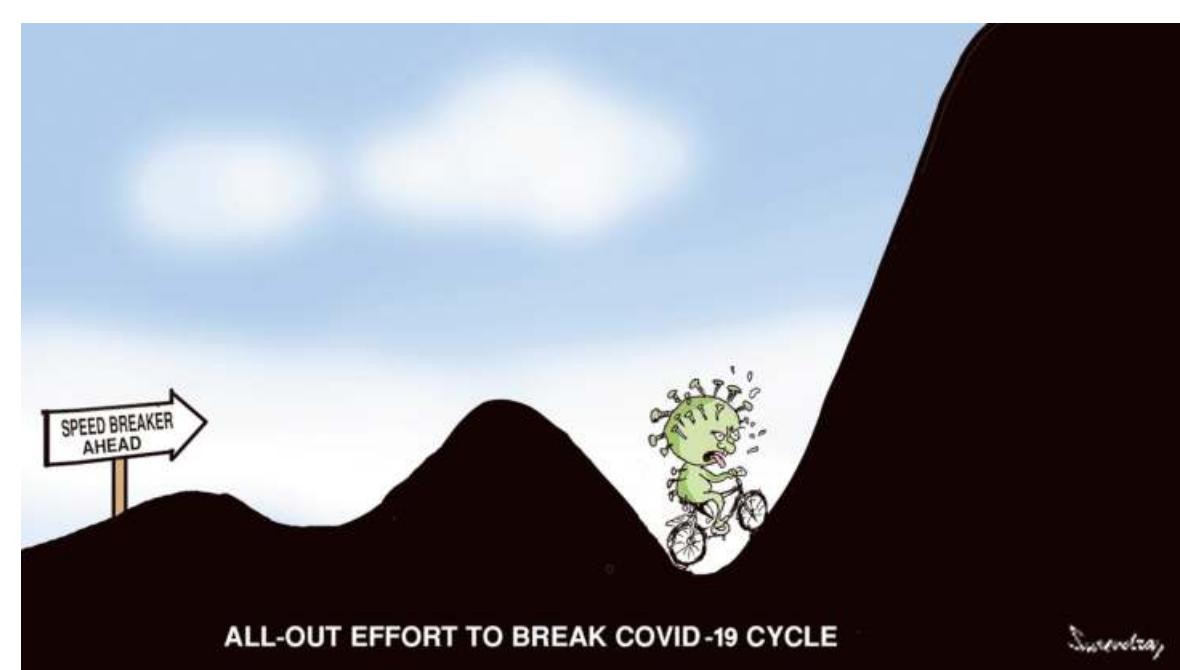
NP: We should, by the way, do some scenario planning for what's the best- and worst-case scenario and what's in between. For those scenarios, we must have action plans in place that are transparent so people can prepare accordingly. The best-

case scenario to me is that the three-week lockdown delivers. We shouldn't expect the rising trend of cases to change for a minimum of 10 days before a successful lockdown can have an effect (because of the gestation of the virus). The best-case scenario is that 10 days from now, we start seeing a flattening of the growth rate. A few more days later, we see the curve starting to turn down. Then we can say the lockdown is working, now how do we start working towards recovery. We should put those plans in place now.

We will not go back to normal from day one, where everyone can do whatever they wished. Can all manufacturing start again? Does everyone show up at work all at once? If you have the curve pointing down sharply, maybe 50% can come back and we'll see for another two or three weeks how that sustains. Shops can open again, but with limited operations and all the social distancing in place. You probably should not allow anything which involves mass gatherings of people even in the best-case scenario. So, you're not going to have large conferences, movie theatres, sports stadiums. Those will come last. I really think there's a lot of value in this plan being as transparent as possible.

GR: The first thing that the government will have to do immediately is massively ramp up testing. We have not done enough testing as yet and do not know the magnitude of the problem. Even if you take the best-case scenario after three weeks, this will be different in different places. You may have to look at differential relaxations in a calibrated and transparent manner and say that areas with these trends can allow some of these activities. My own feeling is that after 21 days, there will be some areas where you can have economic activities without much movement, and restrictions will have to continue elsewhere. But we should be prepared for the long haul. Life is not going to be easy.

My big concern is about children not going to school. Some from well-off families may learn on the computer, but what about those children who cannot go to school, can't play, or do anything. About 40% of the population is in the age group of zero to 14. We really have a crisis brewing there.



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FROM PAGE ONE

Government rolls out lockdown package

However, many States have in fact closed down MGNREGA worksites to curb the spread of COVID-19, leaving it unclear how many workers would be able to benefit.

For land-owning farmers, there is only the promise that the first instalment of ₹2000 due to them under the PM-KISAN income support scheme will be paid in April, the first month of the financial year.

For small companies with 100 employees or less, of whom 90% earn less than ₹15,000 a month, the Centre will bear the cost of both employer and employee contribution (a total of 24%) to the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) for the next three months. This will benefit 80 lakh employees, and incentivise four lakh establishments.

In a move to provide relief

to all 4.8 crore organised sector workers registered under the EPF, the scheme's regulations will also be amended to allow non-refundable advance of 75% of the amount standing to the credit of the member, or three months wages, whichever is lower.

Collateral free loans provided for women self-help groups under the National Rural Livelihood Mission are being doubled to ₹20 lakh, potentially benefiting seven crore households.

The Centre is directing the States to use the ₹31,000 crore sitting with the Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Boards to provide support to the 3.5 crore registered workers. The States can also use the money under district mineral funds for medical screening, testing and treatment.

Rate of spread has slowed relatively: govt.

"The National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences (NIMHANS) has been roped in to provide behavioural health modules while training is being offered to ASHAs and grassroots-level health workers to educate, help in surveillance and assist with care of patients," said Mr. Agarwal.

Stating that this is the biggest challenge that country faces Mr. Agarwal said the "mistake of even a single individual not complying with the rules laid down by the government could prove costly for him and his family."

He said there is no evidence of this so far and added that India is still not registering any community transmission.

Joint Secretary, Home Ministry Punya Saliha Srivastava, said measures have been put in place to ensure the

Patna govt. doctors seek home quarantine

"We're on duty without all necessary kits and masks, which makes many of us vulnerable to infection...many of us have developed symptoms of COVID-19...but nobody is here to listen to us," said Ravi Ranjan Kumar Raman, president of the NMCH Junior Doctors Association.

A recent incidence of Nalanda Medical College in Patna, Bihar has been brought to our notice where 83 resident doctors who had history of exposure to positive patients are now having symptoms and are suspected of being positive. No tests have been done, nor the said doctors have been quarantined which may complicate the situation. We request you to kindly direct authorities not to ignore such grievous situations," the letter said.

On March 23, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar had announced a monetary incentive equal to one month basic salary for doctors and paramedical staff for their contribution to fighting COVID-19. However, the junior doctors have written to the

regular supply of essential goods and health services to even remote area of India with special flight to northeast.

Head of Epidemiology, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) Raman Gangakhedkar, said the Council had not still felt the need to test all health care workers and that there is no trend to indicate that elderly in India are at added risk.

We have further increased our laboratory strength by roping in 25 private labs. They have nearly 20,000 collection centres. However, testing has not been majorly expanded as these labs are still getting their testing kits and also we don't have the numbers yet to press all of them into action."

The number of cases in Gujarat increased to 44 on Thursday, officials said.

New Parliament design will take more time

"Design as a process requires regular feedback from the end-users, in this case the Members of Parliament, the Vice-President and the Speaker. After presenting the design to this gathering, a few concerns were raised and now the design is evolving with the intention to accommodate them," he said.

The MPs raised concern about the fact that the new building would not have a separate Central Hall.

"The Central Hall serves as an important lounge and meeting space for all MPs when the joint session is not in progress. They want to see how the activities in this space are going to continue in the new facility. In the proposal, a lounge in the periphery of the courtyard is being developed to address

these concerns," he said.

Another concern of the MPs was the design itself.

"The present Parliament building, despite its discomforts, is cherished by all its users. The MPs have an emotional connect with this 'temple of democracy', which resonated with all the citizens. The design of the new proposed facility is being developed so that its interiors and aesthetics are evocative of the present facility," he added.

Announced in October 2019, the government's redevelopment plan includes revamping the 3-km-long Central Vista, constructing a new Parliament building and demolishing post-Independence era government offices to make way for a common Central Secretariat by 2024.

G20 commits \$5 trillion amid COVID-19 scare

PM calls for bigger mandate and more funding for WHO that has 'failed to adapt itself to deal with the new challenges'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The world needs to "redefine" its conversations on globalisation to include social and humanitarian issues such as terrorism, climate change and pandemics along with financial and economic discussions, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi, speaking at a video-conference of leaders of the world's top 20 economies, the G20, hosted by the Saudi King, Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, to discuss the novel coronavirus pandemic.

According to a release, the G20 countries committed on Thursday to inject more than \$5 trillion into the global economy, and contribute to the COVID-19 solidarity res-

ponse fund led by the World Health Organization (WHO).

"The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic is a powerful reminder of our interconnectedness and vulnerabilities. The virus respects no borders. Combating this pandemic calls for a transparent, robust, coordinated, large-scale and science-based global response in the spirit of solidarity," said a joint statement issued at the end of the extraordinary summit.

"We will share timely and transparent information; exchange epidemiological and clinical data; share materials necessary for research and development; and strengthen health systems globally, including through support-

ing the full implementation of the WHO International Health Regulations."

In his opening remarks, King Salman spoke of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on global growth and financial markets. He said that the G20 must send a "strong signal to restore confidence in the global economy by resuming, as soon as possible, the normal flow of goods and services, especially vital medical supplies."

In the effort to control the pandemic, most countries have acted individually he said, stressing the need for a more coordinated effort.

Prime Minister Modi, who had first suggested the video-conference, also called for a bigger mandate and more funding for the World Health Organisation, which he said had failed to "adapt



ing the full implementation of the WHO International Health Regulations."

More interactions

The leaders agreed to have more interactions of G20 Foreign Ministers, health officials and the respective Sherpas before the Riyadh Summit of the G20 nations in November 2020.

itself to deal with the new challenges the international community has faced."

WHO's 'failure'

Many countries have been critical of WHO's failure to alert the world quickly enough of the potential threat from the pandemic, even after it had been informed of its spread in Wuhan by China on December 31 last year.

Others, most notably the United States, have been particularly critical of China for not having been transparent and shared information about the pandemic, and have even called for the virus to be named the "Chinese virus" or the "Wuhan virus," a move China has opposed

strongly.

Finally, there have been differences in the approach by G-20 countries towards lockdowns in order to control the pandemic spread through social distancing.

Last week, Mr. Trump had hinted that he wanted to lift the shutdown in the US as it was impacting the economy, saying that the "cure cannot be worse than the problem itself." Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has called state-imposed lockdowns a "crime," while countries like India have imposed a stringent 21-day lockdown across the country.

Sources said that there had been no "effort to ascribe blame or responsibility" for the pandemic.

PMO calls for daily virus updates

Union Ministers allotted States to oversee measures to combat COVID-19

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday directed several of his Cabinet colleagues to take up the responsibility of coordination between the States and the Centre in the fight against the novel coronavirus pandemic.

The move comes on Day Two of the nationwide lockdown even as disruptions in supply chains and anxieties with regard to migrant workers being left destitute across cities in India were widely reported.

Ministers in charge of various States have been told



to speak to the District Magistrate (DM) of every district and keep themselves and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), Union Home and Health Ministries updated.

"Monitoring will be done every day and the PMO will

be kept updated daily as well. This would include keeping track of the number of positive cases in a district, number of those quarantined, how many people were under home quarantine, how many people had arrived in the district from outside, whether there are any hiccups in supply of essential commodities, what was the state of testing and whether enough supplies were there for testing," said a senior source.

Ministers assigned

Under the plan, Water Resources Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat has been given charge of Rajasthan;

Minister of State for Road Transport V.K. Singh of Assam; Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Mahendranath Pandey and Kishan Pal Gujjar of Uttar Pradesh; Highways and Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari and Information Minister Prakash Javadekar of Maharashtra; Dharmendra Pradhan of Odisha; Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi of Jharkhand; Arjun Munda of Chhattisgarh; and Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad and Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan of Bihar.

Minister of State in the PMO Jitender Singh will be in charge of 22 districts in Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

Mixed response to Centre's package

Economists back move to double ration allocations, but say cash transfers low

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Economists and social scientists on Thursday welcomed the Centre's move to double ration allocations as part of a welfare package to help poor communities deal with the impact of COVID-19 and its economic repercussions. However, they felt that the cash transfers, which form a key part of the welfare package, may be too little and also failed to include in the safety net some particularly vulnerable groups.

"One problem is whether we have covered all vulnerable groups," observed D.K. Srivastava, chief policy advisor for Ernst and Young India and a member of the advisory council to the 15th Finance Commission.

"Essentially, this package



Ground realities: Experts worry that informal workers may not get any benefit from the package. • GETTY IMAGES

seems to reach those who are connected to bank accounts and formal payment systems. But certain groups of daily wagers and informal workers may be left out," he said, adding "these amounts will also have to be revised upwards once these schemes unfold and we have a better sense of how long this crisis will last".

However, he felt the bigger challenge would be the financing of the announced welfare measures as well as a more comprehensive stimulus package that would be needed for industries.

"The government has tried to strike a balance between the available resources and the needs," he said, adding that the fiscal deficit li-

mit would need to be relaxed to cope with the situation.

CARE Ratings Chief Economist Madan Sabnavis noted that globally, many countries had announced stimulus packages involving 10-12% fiscal expansions.

"In comparison, this package is only about 0.75% of India's GDP, which is marginal. It is a good beginning but more needs to be done," he added.

He added that the real challenge would come in implementing these measures. For example, while there was sufficient surplus foodgrains available in government warehouses and an existing system for further procurement, the system for procurement of pulses needed to be created in most States.

First step in the right direction, says Rahul

But Congress hopes that the government will offer more

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Congress cautiously welcomed the ₹1.7-lakh crore package announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi called it the "first" step in the right direction, but criticised the government for offering an insufficient cash transfer.

In a series of tweets, former Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram called it a "modest plan" and hoped that the government would realise that it should do more.

"The plan does not put enough cash in the pockets of the poor. Some sections have been left out altogether

Rahul Gandhi
FORMER CONGRESS PRESIDENT

Plan II shortly," he said. Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala pointed to many "lapses" in the package. He flagged the need for declaring grain procurement an essential service.

"If the farmer is to delay harvesting till April 14, he will stand to lose 40% of the crop. A loss from which he will never recover," he said.

Paltry sum

The one-time cash help of ₹1,500 spread over three months to 20.4 crore women having Jan Dhan Yojana accounts was a paltry sum, he said. The Congress demanded waiver of all EMIs and the interest thereof for all salar-

ried class up to June 30. CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury said the package was inadequate and missed out on migrant workers. He said if the government could airlift Indians from foreign shores, it should have given these workers food and shelter or transport to their home States. He also criticised the government for offering just one kg of pulses a family.

He said the government had uprooted the lives of people, despite a warning two months ago.

CPI general secretary D. Raja said the package had ignored the poorest of the poor.

It also referred to the Supreme Court's March 16 order directing all the States and Union Territories to constitute high-level committees to consider releasing prisoners and under-trials for offences entailing up to a seven-year jail term, on parole or interim bail to decongest jails to contain COVID-19 pandemic.

The Home Department said the decision to extend the ban till April 3 was taken after considering the overall security and the reports of the law enforcement agencies inter alia.

"The Internet speed shall

be restricted to 2G only. The post-paid SIM card holders shall be provided with access to the Internet. However, such access shall not be made available on pre-paid sim cards," read the order.

Recently released National Conference vice-president Omar Abdullah had also demanded restoration of 4G to help people stay alert.

"We are being told to learn through Internet how to stay safe from the pandemic, but what would we learn, when we cannot open anything on the net with 2G speed," he said.

APPEAL
Name of Patient: Chitra, V, 28 years.
Hospital Name: Christian Medical College.
Diagnosis: Acute Promyelocytic Leukaemia.
This is a type of Blood Cancer for which she Chemotherapy. The estimated cost of Chemotherapy, bed charges, blood product, Antibiotics is likely to be about Rs. 6,00,000/-
We request kind-hearted Philanthropists to save her. Kindly send donation by Cheque / D.D. / M.O. favouring Save Poor Lives and on the back of Cheque write A/C Chitra V.
S/B Account No. 20000913487, State Bank of India, Raja Annamalaiapuram Branch and FSC CODE: SEIN0001855, which is exempted under 80G of I.T. Act.
Contact: SAVE POOR LIVES REGISTERED PUBLIC CHARITABLE TRUST, (ADMIN DIVISION), Flat No. A1, Ceebos Garden, Ground Floor, Old No. 76, Kamrajar Salai, Raja Annamalaiapuram, Chennai-600028, Ph: 044-42044165, Mobile: 9884607377, E-mail: www.savepoorlives.com Our website: www.savepoorlives.com
DONATION GIVEN TO PATIENTS UPTO MARCH 2019 FOR Rs. 4,26,89, 334/-

Patna govt. doctors seek home quarantine

"We're on duty without all necessary kits and masks, which makes many of us vulnerable to infection...many of us have developed symptoms of COVID-19...but nobody is here to listen to us," said Ravi Ranjan Kumar Raman, president of the NMCH Junior Doctors Association.

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Head of Epidemiology, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) Raman Gangakhedkar, said the Council had not still felt the need to test all health care workers and that there is no trend to indicate that elderly in India are at added risk.

The move comes on Day Two of the nationwide lockdown even as

e-commerce firms slowly coming back on stream

They had suspended earlier deliveries as many staff were stopped and even beaten up by police for violating the lockdown

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI
Following assurances of safe passage for their delivery agents from local authorities, online delivery services such as Flipkart and Grofers on Thursday began resuming operations.

"After a few hiccups, we have resumed operations in Delhi, Gurgaon, Faridabad, Noida, Ghaziabad, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, Lucknow and Kanpur with the help of local authorities...We are taking every measure to ensure the delivery of essential items to our customers," Co-founder & CEO, Grofers Albiner Dhindsa said.

He added that for these cities, the company would be ramping up capacities in the coming days to fulfil the backlog of orders. "For the remaining cities, we are working closely with the respective authorities and shall resume operations as soon as we get the necessary per-



Patient wait: People waiting to buy essentials in Delhi and, right, a food delivery agent goes about his work in Kochi. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR & THULASI KAKKAT

missions." Most e-commerce firms were forced to suspend deliveries as many delivery executives faced challenges, including getting stopped by the police, and some even getting beaten up by policemen.

In a statement, Flipkart said it was grateful for the clarification provided by the government and State authorities on the functioning of e-commerce as "essential service".

"We have been assured of

safe and smooth passage of our supply chain and delivery executives and are resuming our grocery & essentials services..." Flipkart Group CEO Kalyan Krishnamurthy said.

On Thursday, Commerce



and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal held a virtual meeting with the e-commerce and logistics industry to discuss the challenges faced by them.

Among those who participated were Snapdeal CEO Kunal Bahl, Shopclues CEO

Sanjay Sethi, Mr. Dhindsa (Grofers), Delhivery CEO Shail Barua, NetMeds founder Pradeep Dadha, PharmEasy CEO Dharmil Sheth, and Amazon India CEO Amit Aggarwal and Big Basket CEO Hari Menon.

IN BRIEF



Govt. allows doorstep delivery of medicines

NEW DELHI
The Central government on Thursday allowed doorstep delivery of medicines by persons holding a licence under the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945. "The government is satisfied that retail sale of drugs to the doorstep of consumers is essential to meet the requirements of the emergency arising due to COVID-19 and in the public interest, it is necessary and expedient to regulate the sale and distribution of drugs for their delivery to the consumers," said the order.

SpiceJet to ferry 142 Iran returnees to Jodhpur

NEW DELHI
SpiceJet on Thursday said it would operate a special flight from Delhi to Jodhpur on Friday to ferry 142 Indians evacuated from Iran to a quarantine facility there. The airline said in a statement that it would deploy its Boeing 737 aircraft for the service, which is being run at the request of the government. The passengers will reach New Delhi on a Mahan Air flight. The SpiceJet flight will take off from New Delhi at 1.40 a.m. and land in Jodhpur at 2.55 a.m. on Friday. The Army has set up one of its quarantine facilities in Jodhpur for Indians returning from abroad.

Pay and accounts units to ensure salaries on time

NEW DELHI
Although work in government offices not engaged in essential services has come to a standstill, their pay and accounts divisions are functioning to ensure that the employees get salaries on time. "The pending salaries of contractual workers are also being cleared by supervisory officers on a priority basis," said an official in the Income Tax Department. In an addendum to the guidelines for the lockdown, the Home Ministry exempted the Pay & Accounts Offices, apart from the field offices of the Controller-General of Accounts, with a bare minimum staff.

Air India carries medical supplies

NEW DELHI
Air India carried the first bulk consignment of face masks and medical equipment from Mumbai to New Delhi on Thursday as the focus in the aviation sector shifts to transport of essential medical supplies after the ban on passenger flights. Air India operated its Boeing 787 Dreamliner, which landed in Delhi at 4 p.m. on Thursday, with 6.5 tonnes of cargo, according to the airline's spokesperson. The airline has only passenger aircraft in its fleet and carries cargo in the aircraft's belly which has limited capacity as compared to freight aircraft.

15 to a room, without a morsel

Across India, migrant labourers share a similar predicament after lockdown

SIDHARTH RAVI

NEW DELHI

Scores of migrant workers in the national capital find themselves stuck in their dwellings without work, money, access to food and are wary of stepping out to try and get some rations for fear of being attacked by the police following the imposition of the 21-day lockdown.

Fozli-ur-Rahman, 22, is holed up in a shanty at Vishwas Nagar, having arrived here only a week ago to start working at a construction site.

"We hadn't even worked for a day before the project was called off because of the [janta] curfew," he said over the phone. He along with 15 others have been stuck in their room at the construction site here for almost a week and ran out of food on Wednesday evening, Mr. Rahman said.

"We are afraid to step out because we have seen the police beat up people," he said. In a video he shared, Mr. Rahman is seen with folded hands, speaking in Bengali, appealing for help from authorities, including the West Bengal government, to return home, while others around him hold up



Fortunate few: Migrant workers and their families boarding a truck in Ahmedabad to return to their village on Thursday. ■ VIJAY SONEJI

their Aadhaar cards as proof of identity. "There are about a hundred like us [from Uttar Dinajpur district] in different parts of Delhi and nearby," he said. The young migrant worker reported that attempts to call various helplines had so far been unsuccessful. They have had no contact with their employer either, he said. The one request labourers here made was to some how help them get back home.

Police target
In Ghazipur, Sorful Jahan, who worked at a slaughterhouse, has found himself without work since March 20. About 40 others were

staying at rooms provided by their employer at present, he said. "We have to step out stealthily even to go get some food," Mr. Jahan said. A nearby canteen run for the workers at the slaughterhouse is still reportedly in operation and serving them food. However, there was apprehension of being targeted by the police, he said, adding, "one of our friends went outside and returned beaten up yesterday".

Labourers in Greater Noida, staying in slums near the Ek Murti Chowk, narrated tense encounters with the police. "We had some dal and roti but that has run out... We just had some biscuits today, if we could get some food, that would be very helpful," said Maksood Ali (22), also from Uttar Dinajpur, on the phone. Mr. Ali said he had called everyone from his local panchayat heads to some local helplines but had not received any help. Others from the same area were also stuck in different parts of Gurugram, he added.

Workers from Jharkhand, employed at factories in Narela, face a similar problem.

Almost 400 people from different parts of Jharkhand are without work and occupying tiny rooms which are suffocating, said Ramesh Verma (33), who is staying here.

DRDO develops ventilators

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has developed a ventilator and is working with the industry to produce 5,000 of them per month to treat COVID-19 patients, Chairman G. Satheesh Reddy said on Thursday.

"Some time back, the DRDO developed a ventilator along with the Society for Biomedical technology (SBMT), its technology has been transferred to the industry. An industry in Mysuru is producing the secondary version of that ventilator now," Dr. Reddy told news agency ANI.

He said the industry currently has a capacity to manufacture 5,000 ventilators per month and this could be scaled up to 10,000 per month.

The Defence Ministry said in a statement the DRDO laboratories had manufactured 20,000 litres of sanitiser and supplied to various organisations, including 10,000 litres to the Delhi police. "The DRDO has also supplied 10,000 masks to Delhi police personnel. It is tying up with some private companies to make personal protection equipment such as body suits and also ventilators," it said.

Attend to transport issue of health workers, says Centre

Vardhan reviews preparedness with State Health Ministers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Thursday held a meeting to review the actions and preparedness for COVID-19 management through videoconferencing with the Health Ministers and Chief Secretaries of the States and the Union Territories and other officers of the Health Departments.

Dr. Vardhan urged the States/Union Territories to attend on priority to the issue of health workers' transport so that there was no shortage of doctors, nurses and other health staff in medical facilities.

He advised the States to make common travelling arrangements for doctors, nurses and other health workers and took up the



matter of effective coordination with the AIIMS portal for COVID-19 patient care and active coordination with the Indian Medical Association and other associations of nurses and paramedics.

Directive to landlords
Pointing to some recent reports of some landlords and owners evicting doctors/pa-

ramedics who were serving the country in combating COVID-19, he strongly advised the States to issue a directive to landlords not to evict doctors, nurses and other health workers.

The Health Minister also stated that the government today announced a ₹50 lakh insurance cover for doctors, paramedics, healthcare workers dealing with the coronavirus outbreak. He advised the States to provide funds under the National Health Mission to medical colleges for procuring COVID-19-related items.

Stressing the need to ensure the mental health of those in quarantine, Dr. Vardhan advised the States to start a helpline for those already in quarantine (psychologists).

IAF sets up nine quarantine facilities

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BENGALURU

The Indian Air Force (IAF) has created nine quarantine facilities offering several hundred beds at its nodal bases across the country for exclusively handling cases of COVID-19.

Each facility can house 200-300 patients at a time, according to a release by the

Ministry of Defence in Bengaluru on Thursday.

"The Indian Air Force continues to take measures to provide all possible assistance to the civil administration across the country in containing the spread of COVID-19," the release said.

The Command Hospital,

Air Force, Bengaluru, has been designated as the first laboratory in the IAF to undertake COVID-19 testing. "It will greatly enhance the region's ability to carry out quick testing of suspected cases and allow prompt and timely intervention where required." These measures will support the government's efforts to stop the spread of coronavirus infections, the IAF said.

SOP issued for supply of essential goods

e-commerce sites will be operational

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) issued the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for maintaining supply of essential goods through retail and e-commerce platforms.

Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla wrote to all the States and Union Territories to let e-commerce remain operational and encourage home delivery of essential goods as the 21-day lockdown was enforced to break the transmission chain of coronaviru-

s. should not be closed because they also stored non-essential items.

The persons engaged in the supply shall be allowed to commute on the basis of e-pass issued by the local authorities, and the employees shall carry a valid photo identification card.

In the case of the unorganised sector, the persons involved in supply chain may be allowed to commute based on approval or an authorisation letter issued by the local authorities. "These facilities should carry out regular health and sanitation checks of employees and will provide them with protective gear," the SOP said.

It asked the States to open 24/7 control rooms to register complaints and grievances. The SOP covers suppliers of essential goods, including restaurants supplying cooked food items.

U.S. to consider favourably teleworking for H1-B workers

Firms have moved to teleworking after COVID-19 pandemic

SIRRAM LAKSHMAN

CHENNAI

The United States administration has said that H-1B visa (skilled temporary) workers can expect to be treated with "very reasonable consideration," for requests to telework as part of their companies' current work policies, a senior official in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said on a briefing call with reporters earlier this week.

U.S. companies across many States have moved to teleworking in wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The official, who was responding to a question from Asian News International (ANI) news agency, said that while they would not be able to comment on the specific direction of policy without consulting the United States Citizenship Information Service (USCIS), they expected it to have a "very reasonable" view of the situation.

"...we are supporting, across the department, steps for safer working environments in light of the Coronavirus, so I would be expecting to see that extended

A new H-1B petition is needed before a worker changes to a new site.

to the terms and conditions enforced with respect to H-1B visas," he said.

"I think you can expect to have a very reasonable consideration from USCIS in all of these sort of circumstances that are only caused by the Coronavirus."

Generally, an amended or new H-1B petition needs to be filed prior to a worker starting work at a new site. Once the amendment is filed, the worker can start working at the new location immediately, without having to wait for a final decision on the petition.

USCIS offices have been closed to the public since March 18 and will remain shut until April 17, unless the pandemic situation does not permit it. Emergency appointments may be scheduled via the USCIS contact centre.

Visa over-stayers

If you are in the U.S. now and your visa is expiring and you are unable to leave because there are no flights to your home country due to the pandemic, you can apply for an extension to the USCIS, the official said.

"So visas, for instance, where an extension is being requested today and you're going to a country where the flights have been taken down, can readily be expected by USCIS, whereas say two months ago that would not have been the case..."

SC to hear cases via video

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court issued a circular on Thursday informing that it would continue to hear cases of "extreme urgency" through videoconferencing during the lockdown, keeping in

mind physical distancing norms.

A Bench, led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde, recently used its extraordinary powers under Article 142 to lift the limitation period for all cases until further notice.

Editors Guild upset at police action

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Editors Guild of India was upset at the "high-handed" and "arbitrary police action" against journalists during the lockdown to curb the spread of novel coronavirus. Such an action would be "self-defeating", it said.

There are reports from Mumbai, Kolkata and other cities of the police beating journalists though news-gathering, an essential service, is allowed.

"Such an action is self-defeating when media freedom is critically important for covering the outbreak and the state response," the Guild said. It said the police should know that their job was to facilitate media coverage and not to impede it. "The Guild, therefore, urges all law enforcement agencies to let the media play its role as smoothly as possible."

JAWAHAR INSTITUTE OF POSTGRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION AND RESEARCH (JIPMER)

(जावहर एवं प्रसिद्ध शासकीय संस्थान)
(An Institution of National Importance under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare), Dhanvantri Nagar, Puducherry - 605 006
Phone: 0413 - 2296022 Website: www.jipmer.edu.in
Dated: 23.03.2020

CORRIGENDUM

In the advertisement for recruitment of faculty posts on contract basis for AIIMS (Bhubanagar) by JIPMER published in dailies on 26.03.2020 vide Advt. No. JIP/AIIMS(Bhubanagar)/2020/Circular 01, the name mentioned in the column 6 should be read as ASSISTANT PROFESSOR.
DIRECTOR

KSEB

KERALA STATE ELECTRICITY BOARD LIMITED E-TENDER NOTICE

Coronavirus deaths cross 1,000 in U.S.

Senate passes \$2.2 trillion economic package steering aid to businesses, workers & healthcare systems

ASSOCIATED PRESS
NEW YORK

U.S. deaths from the COVID-19 pandemic topped 1,000 in another grim milestone for a global outbreak that is taking lives and wreaking havoc on economies and the established routines of ordinary life.

In a recognition of the scale of the threat, the Senate late on Wednesday passed an unparalleled \$2.2 trillion economic rescue package steering aid to businesses, workers and health-care systems.

The unanimous vote came despite misgivings on both sides about whether it goes too far or not far enough and capped days of difficult negotiations as Washington confronted a national challenge unlike it has ever faced. The 880-page measure is the largest economic relief bill in the U.S. history.

Worldwide, the death toll climbed past 22,000, according to a running count kept by Johns Hopkins University.

COVID-19

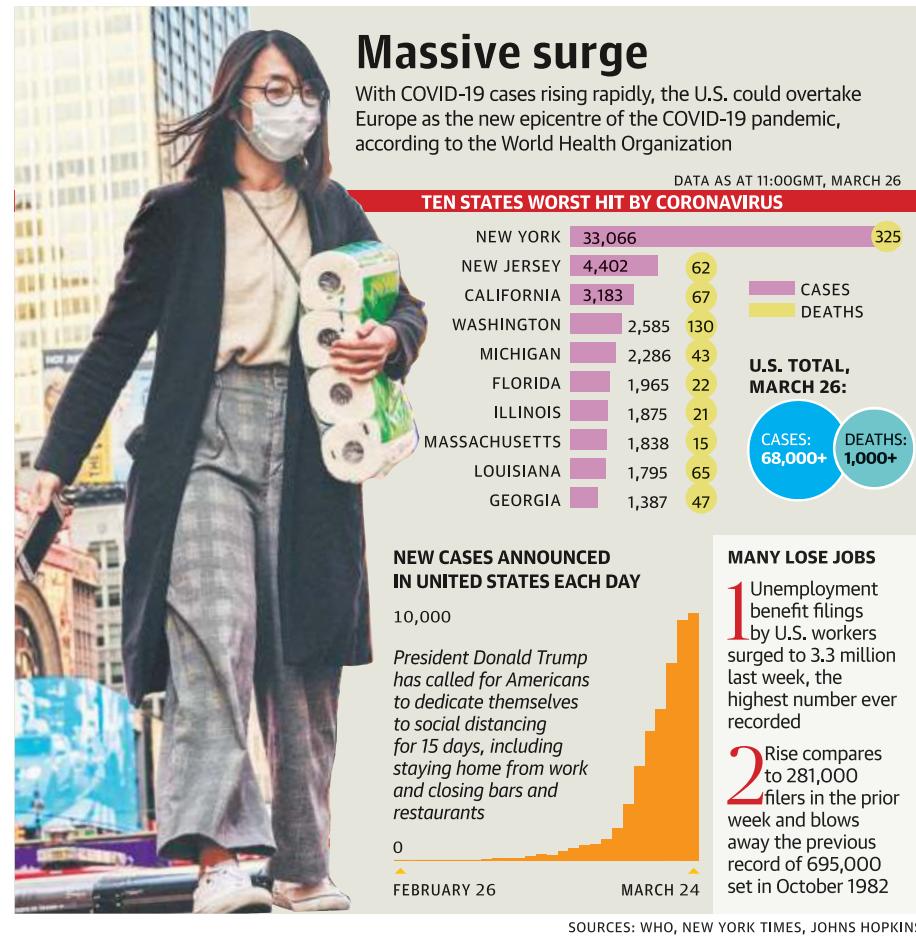
iversity, and the U.S. had 1,050 deaths and nearly 70,000 infections.

New York is the epicentre of the outbreak in the U.S., accounting for more than 30,000 cases and more than 300 deaths, most of them in New York City.

Hospitals swamped

Public health officials in the city hunted down beds and medical equipment and called for more doctors and nurses for fear the number of sick patients will overwhelm hospitals. A makeshift morgue was set up outside Bellevue Hospital, and the city's police, their ranks dwindling as more fall ill, were told to patrol nearly empty streets to enforce social distancing.

In Washington, President Donald Trump called for Americans to dedicate themselves to social distancing for 15 days, including staying



WHO Europe sees 'encouraging signs'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
COPENHAGEN

Director for Europe, Hans Kluge, told a press conference. "Italy, which has the highest number of cases in the region, has just seen a slightly lower rate of increase, though it is still too early to say that the pandemic is peaking in that country," he added.

WHO Europe said that to date over 220,000 cases of COVID-19 had been reported on the continent, along with 11,987 deaths.

home from work and closing bars and restaurants to help try to stall the spread of the disease.

Yet, he has also grumbled that "our country wasn't built to be shut down" and vowed not to allow "the cure be worse than the problem" – apparently concerned that the outbreak's devastating effects on financial markets and employment will harm

That means that globally, roughly six out of every 10 cases and seven out of 10 deaths have been reported in Europe, with the number of confirmed infections worldwide now over 4,00,000.

Mr. Kluge cautioned governments and citizens to be aware of the "new reality" created by the pandemic and prepare for the long term impact. "This is not going to be a sprint, this is going to be a marathon."

his chances for re-election later this year.

"I'd like to say, let's get back to work next Friday," said Joe Biden, the front-runner for the Democratic presidential nomination. "That'd be wonderful. But it can't be arbitrary."

Mr. Biden said the congressional aid package addressing the outbreak "goes a long way," but that "meticulous oversight" is required.

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Ex-FBI agent missing for 13 years died in Iran: kin

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

A former FBI agent who mysteriously vanished in 2007 died in Iranian custody, his family has concluded, saying U.S. intelligence had made them give up 13 years of hope.

President Donald Trump did not confirm Bob Levinson's death, saying that Iran had not communicated any news on the former agent, who would have turned 72 this month.

But Mr. Levinson's family said on Wednesday that it had learned that he was dead, although it gave no information on how or when.

The father of seven vanished in March 2007 in Kish, an island that has more le-

nient visa rules than the rest of Iran, and was said to have been investigating cigarette counterfeiting.

But *The Washington Post* reported in 2013 that Mr. Levinson, who had retired from the FBI, was working for the CIA and had gone on a rogue mission aimed at gathering intelligence on Iran.

It said at the time that the CIA paid \$2.5 million to Mr. Levinson's wife Christine, accepting responsibility for his disappearance.

Iran implicitly denied on Thursday that Mr. Levinson had died in its custody, restating its longstanding position that he left the Islamic republic "years ago for an unknown destination".

TNA condemns pardon of murder convict

Sri Lankan President pardoned an Army officer who was on death row for killing eight Tamil civilians

ted," the TNA tweeted.

Sri Lanka has been on a near-total lockdown and enforced curfew for a week now, with a total of 104 COVID-19 patients reported so far.

In 2015, Staff Sergeant Sunil Ratnayake was tried before a three-member bench at the Colombo High Court. He was convicted for the murder in Mirusuvil, Jaffna Peninsula, and sentenced to death. In 2019, the Supreme Court affirmed the conviction and the sentence.

Rare instance

The case is widely cited as a rare instance of accountability, amid lingering concerns over impunity for war

crimes committed during Sri Lanka's three-decade civil war.

Asked to comment on the

President's pardon, Nimal Siripala de Silva, Minister of Justice, Human Rights and Legal Reforms, said a report

had been called from his Mi-

nistry. "The final decision is with the President. He can overrule anything. He has the absolute power to grant pardon, no one can question him," he told *The Hindu*, adding that the constitutionally mandated procedure for the pardon was followed.

M.A. Sumanthiran, former Jaffna MP and a senior lawyer, said the executive pardon in the "rarest of rare cases" that ended in a conviction confirms that the Sri Lankan state "will never" exercise accountability for wartime atrocities.

"All the institutions of the state will eventually conspire together and let the offenders go free," he told *The Hindu*.

U.S. indicted Maduro for 'narco-terrorism'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

The US Justice Department announced the indictment on Thursday of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and offered a \$15 million reward for information leading to his capture.

The Justice Department called Mr. Maduro the head of a cocaine trafficking group called "The Cartel of the Suns" that exported hundreds of tonnes of drugs working hand in hand with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, which the U.S. has officially labelled a "terrorist organization."

Also indicted were more than a dozen other officials of the Maduro regime, including members of the Venezuelan military and judi-



Venezuelan President
Nicolas Maduro

cary, including the country's Chief Justice.

"For more than 20 years, Maduro and a number of high-ranking colleagues allegedly conspired with the FARC, causing tons of cocaine to enter and devastate American communities," said Attorney General Bill Barr. "It's time to call out this regime for what it is," he said.

Amazon said it was hiring 100,000 warehouse workers to meet surging demand. Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook's chief executive, said traffic for video calling and messaging had exploded. Microsoft said the numbers using its software for online collaboration had climbed nearly 40% in a week.

With people told to work from home and stay away from others, the pandemic has deepened reliance on

services from the technology industry's biggest companies

Amazon has muscled in on brick-and-mortar retailers for years, but shoppers now reluctant to go to the store are turning to the e-commerce giant for a wider variety of goods, like groceries and over-the-counter drugs.

New audience

Streaming services like Netflix have dampened box office sales for movies in recent years. Now, as movie theatres close under government orders, Netflix and YouTube are gaining a new audience.

Companies were already dumping their own data centres to rent computing from Amazon, Microsoft and

Google. That shift is likely to speed up as millions of employees are forced to work from home.

Even Apple, which once appeared to be among the U.S. companies most at risk from the coronavirus because of its dependence on

Chinese city eases lockdown but life is far from normal

Warnings remind people that the virus still poses a threat

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
HUANGGANG

Banners warning that playing cards together is suicide and guards yelling at crowds to separate: a Chinese city near the coronavirus ground zero remains far from normal even after emerging from a two-month lockdown.

1

Huanggang, home to 7.5 million people, was among the worst-affected areas in Hubei, the province where the new coronavirus first emerged late last year.

The country has more than 36,000 declared cases of the virus, but has managed to avoid the high death rates seen in hard-hit Italy and Spain. At 0.54%, Germany's death rate is far lower than Italy's rate of around 10% and Spain's fatality rate of 7.3% percent.

Experts say widespread testing and tracing of cases is key to limiting the spread of the disease, an approach adopted in South Korea, where the outbreak has largely been contained.

'Not safe'

But warnings were prominently displayed across Huanggang city to remind people that the virus still posed a threat. "If you don't wear a mask, the virus will fall in love with you," said a banner.

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MARKET WATCH

	26-03-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	29947	4.94
US Dollar	75.16	1.03
Brent oil	27.52	3.97

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	248.20	-7.40
Asian Paints	1616.95	23.80
Axis Bank	341.40	14.60
Bajaj Auto	2106.85	16.10
Bajaj Finserv	5147.25	316.95
Bajaj Finance	2793.70	208.10
Bharti Airtel	470.70	41.60
BPCL	282.30	8.55
Britannia Ind	2588.45	137.05
Cipla	386.15	9.70
Coal India	123.25	-1.25
Dr Reddys Lab	2948.55	26.55
Eicher Motors	14757.95	241.35
GAIL (India)	73.10	-2.45
Grasim Ind	471.40	20.05
HCL Tech	447.70	-9.90
HDFC	1733.25	87.20
HDFC Bank	901.10	44.35
Hero MotoCorp	1801.90	134.25
Hindalco	94.55	0.00
Hind Unilever	2194.90	106.75
ICICI Bank	330.25	13.35
IndusInd Bank	435.90	134.60
Bharti Infratel	156.50	9.00
Infosys	643.00	36.80
Indian Oil Corp	78.00	0.15
ITC	156.40	9.05
JSW Steel	149.80	-2.00
Kotak Bank	1372.95	82.80
L&T	838.00	72.25
M&M	285.50	7.65
Maruti Suzuki	4878.00	-127.95
Nestle India Ltd.	14919.65	475.55
NTPC	79.65	-0.05
ONGC	64.75	3.20
PowerGrid Corp	158.35	8.10
Reliance Ind	1066.20	-16.05
State Bank	192.75	2.85
Shree Cement	17554.05	115.80
Sun Pharma	338.30	-9.35
Tata Motors	70.80	0.55
Tata Steel	284.45	-2.35
TCI	1790.95	40.65
Tech Mahindra	515.20	-11.50
Titan	928.30	47.50
UltraTech Cement	3229.15	55.55
UPL	312.55	19.75
Vedanta	65.80	1.60
Wipro	182.60	7.95
Zee Entertainment	128.75	3.25

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	74.95	75.27
Euro	82.08	82.44
British Pound	89.70	90.10
Japanese Yen (100)	68.25	68.55
Chinese Yuan	10.58	10.63
Swiss Franc	77.16	77.50
Singapore Dollar	52.08	52.32
Canadian Dollar	52.93	53.18
Malaysian Ringgit	17.28	17.38

Source: Indian Bank

Exchanges cut commodity trading hours

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Leading stock exchanges BSE and NSE, on Thursday, cut down trading hours for the commodities derivative segment so as end trading at 5 p.m., instead of the current practice of allowing it up till midnight, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trading will begin at 9 a.m. and close at 5 p.m. and the new timings will be effective from March 30 till April 14, the exchanges said. In separate statements, commodity exchanges MCX and ICEX announced the reduced trading hours.

Commodity markets allow trading between 10 am and 11.50 pm, while the equity markets close at 3.30 pm.

"In view of the novel COVID-19 outbreak, the nationwide lockdown of 21 days and pursuant to discussions with SEBI, it has been decided to revise the trading timings, BSE and NSE said in similar-worded circulars.

Narinder Wadhwa, president of the Commodity Participants Association of India (CPAI), said the move would provide great relief to all the members, given the 21-day nationwide lockdown.

Damanis raise holding in India Cements

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI
Investor Radhakishan Damani has once again raised his stake in the India Cements Ltd. (ICL), this time by 4.73 percentage points, taking his total to 20.73%.

Mr. Damani, along with Gopikishan Damani and Shrikantadevi R. Damani and Derive Investments (partners - Mr. Gopikishan Damani and Mr. Radhakishan Damani) have been aggressively purchasing ICL shares from December 2019 through open market purchases.

On Thursday, ICL shares rose 6.94% to close at ₹102.50 on the BSE.

Sensex climbs 5% on stimulus

FM's announcement of package calms investor jitters amid lockdown

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

Equity benchmarks surged for the third straight session on Thursday, logging their best three-day gains in years, after the government's much-awaited stimulus measures for COVID-19 lockdown-hit segments lifted sentiment.

The BSE gauge Sensex surged 1,410.99 points, or 4.94%, to settle at 29,946.77, while the NSE barometer Nifty shot up 323.60 points, or 3.89%, to 8,641.45.

After the worst-ever crash on Monday, the Sensex has recovered by 3,965.53 points, or 15.26%, over the last three sessions. Likewise, the NSE Nifty has regained 1,031.20 points, or 13.55%, in three days.

On the Sensex chart, IndusInd Bank was the top gainer, rallying up to 46%. Other winners were Bharti Airtel, L&T, Bajaj Finance, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman



Traders say market volatility remained during the day as March derivatives contracts expired. ■ PAUL NORONHA

HUL and HDFC – rising up to 10%.

On the other hand, Maruti Suzuki, Tech Mahindra, Sun Pharma and Reliance Industries closed with losses.

The broader markets also gained momentum with the Nifty Midcap and Smallcap indices rising 3% each.

In an effort to cushion the economic blow of the 21-day lockdown in wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman

announced a slew of measures worth ₹1.70 lakh crore to help citizens survive the crisis.

Paras Bothra, president of Equity Research, Ashika Stock Broking, said domestic markets zoomed for the second day on the trot, driven by optimism on the \$2 trillion package to the U.S. economy and also in anticipation of an economic package for the Indian economy.

He said that measures ad-

dressed to corporates or SMEs 'are still missing' in the package. "Perhaps this will be followed by a monetary stimulus by RBI, along with forbearance on loan repayments."

According to traders, volatility remained during the day as March derivatives contracts expired.

Rupee climbs

The rupee appreciated 57 paise to 75.37 against the U.S. dollar in intraday trade.

In positive news for India's fiscal health, crude oil prices continued to trade below \$30 a barrel amid a steep fall in demand due to COVID-19-led lockdowns in major parts of the world. The international oil benchmark, Brent crude futures fell 2.15% to \$26.80 per barrel.

Bourses in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Tokyo and Seoul ended significantly lower. Benchmarks in Europe were also trading in the red.

Crisil cuts growth estimate

Cites pandemic, lowers FY21 outlook to 3.5% from 5.2%

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Rating agency Crisil has cut the country's GDP growth forecast for the next financial year to 3.5% from 5.2% projected earlier, due to the spread of COVID-19.

"We have slashed our base-case gross domestic product (GDP) growth forecast for fiscal 2021 to 3.5% from the 5.2% expected earlier. This assumes two things: a normal monsoon, and the effect of the pandemic subsiding materially, if not wearing out, in the April-June quarter," said Dharmakirti Joshi, chief economist Crisil.

sectorial ramifications because, and unlike the global financial crisis of 2008, it has not only slammed the brakes on economic activity and jeopardised financial stability, but also brought with it enormous human suffering not seen in decades.

"Since our last forecast of 5.2% GDP growth for fiscal 2021, the scenario has worsened notably. S&P Global has marked global growth down significantly, predicting a likely recession in the U.S. and the Eurozone, and lowering China's growth to 2.9% from 4.8% with dominant downside risks," the rating agency said.

According to the rating agency, COVID-19 is now the foremost risk for the world economy with multi-dimen-

risk to India's economic outlook. The impact of social distancing and decline in discretionary spending will aggravate the downturn in the April-June quarter, and the sharp slowdown in key trading-partner economies will hit exports.

Services, which account for 41% of total exports, have been resilient so far, but a recession in the advanced economies would dampen the prospects for IT-ITES, tourism and bring down services' exports growth.

"On inflation, Crisil said it may soften in FY21 for three reasons; one, the abnormal surge in food inflation in 2019 has started to correct; two, core inflation will remain moderate with slowing growth; and three, the sharp drop in crude prices will keep fuel inflation soft.

"With base effect also kicking in, the second half of next fiscal should see a perceptible drop in inflation," the rating agency said.

Board okays Yes Bank plan to raise ₹5,000 cr.

To raise funds in one or more tranches

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The newly-constituted board of Yes Bank held its first meeting on Thursday, approving additional fund raising of ₹5,000 crore.

"The board, at its meeting... has approved, subject to receipt of requisite approvals, raising funds for an additional amount aggregating up to ₹5,000 crore in one or more tranches," the bank said in a communication to the stock exchanges.

The State Bank of India and other banks and financial institutions have already infused ₹10,000 crore into the bank after a scheme of reconstruction was announced by the government.

Yes Bank reported a ₹18,564-crore loss for the third quarter.

ment. The bank was put under moratorium earlier this month following a deterioration in its financial health and later, the government announced a reconstruction scheme to aid the lender's revival.

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Centre, States splurge on COVID-19 advertisements

Union Health Ministry tops the list

MINI TEJASWI

BENGALURU

There has been a tremendous increase in social advertisements on TV, higher than that seen in regular ads, courtesy COVID-19.

The pandemic has influenced the advertising behaviours of governments, both the Centre's and States', as per data made available exclusively to *The Hindu* by TAM Media Research, a media monitoring, measurement and analytics firm.

With the outbreak of COVID-19, there has been a big surge in the virus-related advertisements.

For COVID-19-related messages on TV, the Minis-

try of Health and Family Welfare tops the list with 28% share in ad volumes.

More than 65% of the ad volume share of social ads related to COVID-19 were from the State governments over the last seven weeks (cumulative), says L.V. Krishnan, CEO of TAM.

Delhi tops States
Among State governments, the Government of Delhi leads all other State governments – in communicating to the audience about the virus on TV – with 14% of the ad volume.

In all, there were 16,744 minutes of Coronavirus-related ads over seven weeks, TAM Media data showed.

For COVID-19-related messages on TV, the Minis-

Ensure smooth transfer of funds to Jan Dhan accounts, banks told

Replenish ATMs regularly to meet requirement: FinMin

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The Finance Ministry has asked all the banks to ensure smooth transfer of ₹500 per month to Jan Dhan accounts of all women account holders, announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday to support families due to the nationwide lockdown to halt the spread of COVID-19.

"You are requested to ensure that the said amount is transferred smoothly, to the targeted accounts, so that the beneficiaries can get access to the funds during the difficult time to carry on their livelihood without facing hardships," the Finance

Ministry said in a communication

Does the idea of a lockdown make you anxious? You are not alone. The Features Team talks to people who are in self-isolation all over the world to hear their inspiring tales. From creating recipes with limited grocery to hula hooping, here is what's keeping them busy



Giulia Grimaldi, Turin, Italy; Digital Content Editor

I have been locked down in my apartment since Wednesday, March 11. I live alone, with my laptop, a few cactuses and a stuffed cat. I am on the fourth floor of a used-to-be-lively neighbourhood in Turin, Northern Italy. On the first Sunday, I woke up at sunrise and sneaked out for a quick run. I hate running. But the urge of moving and watching the city still half asleep was so big I didn't really think about it. I guess I just wanted to fool myself into believing everything was normal.

Well, it isn't. But going out is not the answer. It is crystal clear now that we have to stay at home. It doesn't matter if I am healthy and young: I have to do my part and not put others at risk, not compromise the weakened healthcare system. From questioning reality to looking for a conspiracy theory is a quick step when you spend the whole day sitting alone with your thoughts. I have decided to limit my news reading to a few selected sources and to speak about it only with a few informed people.

My recipe is one hour of trusted newspaper reading in the morning, a news update around 6 pm and, sometimes, wine and talks with friends on the Zoom app. Once I have made my home safe (from germs and misinformation) I work on my routine like never before. I am finally getting up early, eating a healthy breakfast and exercising everyday. Most importantly, the excuse "I don't have time" has expired. I have time to read all those books I bought and never opened, watch all the movies on my list, write all the books I have been playing in my head.

Some days can be harder than others and it is just fine to take care of ourselves in different ways. I call my grandma every day, and am now wondering why I didn't do it before. She is in lockdown too, scared and bored, so I ask her to guide me over the phone while cooking, learning a lot and reminding myself why I need to stay at home. Because I want this thing to end soon so she can cook me a proper meal. And I can hug her.

Instagram: @meddrop

Fran Gillespie, Fortingall, Scotland; Senior citizen

My husband David and I are retired and live in Fortingall, a small village in the Scottish Highlands. With its picturesquely thatched cottages and an ancient tree reputed to be the oldest in Europe, it draws thousands of visitors a year. Now it seems bizarre and unreal to see the place deserted, and everyone keeping to their homes. Our own lives have not changed significantly, we've just started gardening after a long, cold wet winter, and I'm tackling the spring-cleaning jobs I'd be doing anyway at this time.

A couple of weeks ago, when the government advised the British population to stay at home as much as possible, to keep a minimum of two-metre distance when talking to anyone and to look after the 'elderly and vulnerable', my immediate reaction was to call some of my neighbours who are frail and in their 80's, and offer to do shopping or collect prescriptions.

Then we were suddenly inundated by offers from people to do the same for us, and I realised with surprise that as we are in our late 70's we come into the 'elderly and vulnerable' category ourselves! It is the first time I've been made to feel old. A crisis like this brings out the best in almost everyone, and the worst in just a few. The hotel owner offered to do shopping for anyone who needed help, as did the girl who delivers our post. Together with others in the village we've set up a WhatsApp group so anyone who needs any help can alert the group.

A local bakery announced that they would be coming round all the villages in this area with a van twice a week to deliver bread and essentials and would collect anything else needed and deliver it free of charge. How has our life changed? Visits by our grandchildren during the Easter holidays are of course cancelled, as is our holiday in Turkey in May. We miss the social activities – in my case, the weekly church services, community choir practice, a lunch club, committee meetings for various societies, meeting friends for coffee and chat. Now we phone each other frequently to make up for the social gatherings.

(As told to Nahla Nainar)

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(As told to Nahla Nainar)

Art at your home desk

From printable stencils to doodle worksheets, museums and galleries across India aim to interact with art enthusiasts through digital intervention



GOWRI S.

Be it a Degas, replete with the fleeting beauty of an Impressionist painting or a Padamsee, narrating stories in bright tones, colours and abstract figures – it is imperative that visual arts take up the online space now more than ever, as the country's cultural life inevitably heads towards a standstill. While the Met and MOMA are embracing this change by asking its connoisseurs to revisit popular attractions through virtual tours (in the former's case, the magnificent Neo-Classical Grand Hall, the Gothic Cloisters in Fort Tryon Park and the more-than-2,000-years-old Temple of Dendur can be viewed through 360-degree videos), Indian galleries are introducing interactive digital interventions aimed at children and adults alike.

During these long, unexpected bouts of self-isolation, art continues to be a medium that a lot of people turn to. This does not come as a surprise. The therapeutic qualities of the arts – be it visual or performa-

tive – are time and again proven to be tools of self-expression in a possibly 'lonely' time. Digital galleries and physical ones that are under closure, are tapping into this aspect to make their presence felt online and are trying to be informative while doing so.

Imagine you are stuck within the four walls of your home and are magically gifted with stencils that you could fill colour into. What if these very stencils come with little nuggets of information that describe the genre of art it is done in? Mumbai-based Sarmaya, a digital museum with a diverse range of Indian art and artefacts, built from the private collection of Paul Abraham (founder), has introduced downloadable stencils of their folk and indigenous art collections – Gond art and *thol bommalattam* puppets, to be precise. "How do we create something that is fun and also has a learning opportunity and scope for reference? This was the idea behind creating the stencils," says Aveshi Menon, archive director at Sarmaya.

At Mumbai's Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation (JNAF), which had been closed since March 14, specially curated content is being doled out on social media, as a response to the needs of the time. They recently initiated an interactive activ-



Embracing change
(Clockwise from left) A filled-out doodle worksheet, a reference image, a Gond art reference picture and its stencil

■ SARMAYA AND JEHANGIR NICHOLSON ART FOUNDATION



ity on Instagram aimed at those who worked from home. Titled 'What's on your lunch table', the activity invited people to doodle on a line drawing of a table which was taken from an FN Souza painting, part of JNAF's collection. The responses that they received, which were consequently put out as Instagram stories, were varied to say the least – while some had plated dishes on the tables, others portrayed laptops and work material on their dining table, which currently doubles up as a work table; some even drew hand sanitizers as an integral part of their table. In addition to this, an online exhibition of Akbar Padamsee's work, titled Akbar Padamsee: A Tribute, is also accompanied by impressively curated information which is consolidated as Instagram stories. "He had done these retro graphic works in the late 90s. We have made colour sheets inspired by them that can be downloaded and used in screens or otherwise," Kamna Anand of JNAF, adds. A Women's History Month (March) campaign is also underway – "Every weekend, since March 8, we have put up a work by one of the women artists from our collection with relevant information," adds Kamna.

In the following weeks, such creative interventions will undoubtedly be on the rise. As much as these exercises are therapeutic, they also encourage adults to minimise their screen time. So, now is the right time to dive in and seek respite in colours.

For details Inaf.org and Sarmaya.in

■ SARMAYA AND JEHANGIR NICHOLSON ART FOUNDATION

PEANUTS



POOCH CAFE



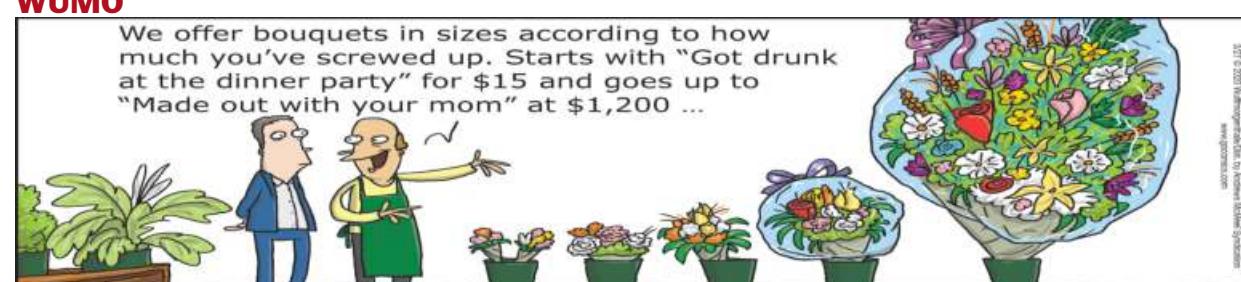
HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



TIGER



WUMO



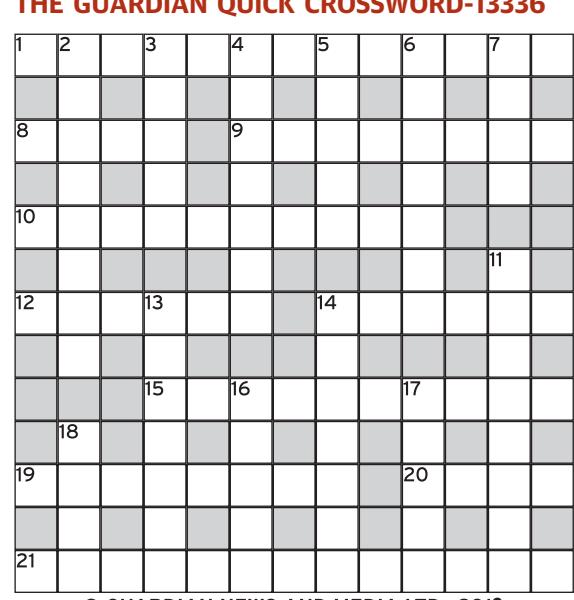
PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



CALVIN AND HOBBES



THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13336



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

6 Reformed (7)

7 Senior service (4)

11 Showing profound respect (8)

13 Group of motionless figures – dramatic scene (7)

14 Wrinkled (7)

16 Bury (5)

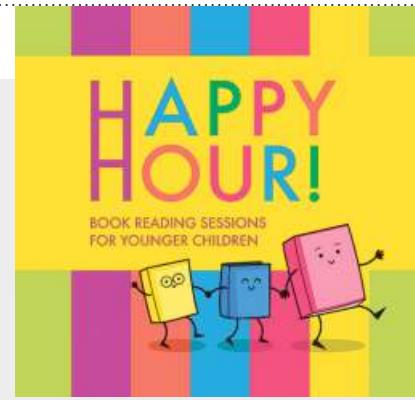
17 Spanish wine (5)

18 Modish (4)

The solution will appear on March 28, 2020.

Solution No. 13335

A	P	H	R	O	D	I	S	A	C
O	E	R	H	B	D				
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It's story time on the Internet

Amid the lockdown, popular children's authors and storytellers are also going live on social media

SUVASINI SRIDHARAN

It is nearly 2.30 p.m., and my four-year-old is jumping around. "Is it time, is it time?" she squeals excitedly. "A couple of minutes more," I tell her, as I check the Instagram handle. Soon, my daughter is sitting in front of my phone, engrossed as freelance graphic designer Shradha Mohan reads aloud from *Handa's Surprise* by Eileen Browne. I get 10 minutes of peace and quiet to drink a cup of tea.

In the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic, fractious children – and parents – are more home-bound than they are used to. But that does not mean story time stops. A number of storytellers are taking to social media, especially Instagram, to do online reading sessions.

Parents are feeling the pressure in having to engage their children in meaningful activities while balancing work, leaving them with very little 'me time', says Dipna Daryanani, who uses storytelling, something she incorporates in her theatre and dance workshops, to help parents out by doing readings online.

Shradha has been doing informal storybook readings since August last year. "We usually meet at someone's home, where I read a book out loud and then do an activity based on the story," says Shradha. "But when schools closed down early due to COVID-19, we decided to stop the meet-ups."

But the kids missed the stories and since she would read a book (or three) to her five-year-old daughter, Aadhyा, every day, she decided to read on Instagram instead, so that others could join in. And so started Happy Hour Reading. "So many kids tune in," says Shradha. "They send me voice notes after, which is my favourite part, telling me what they liked and felt about the book."

When Janaki Sabesh, in collaboration with Lil Trails, did an enactment of *Gajapati Kulapati* by Ashok Rajagopalan on Instagram, the response was immense. Avanti Natarajan, who runs the Instagram handle Lil Trails, which she runs with her husband Rajavel Sundar, says, "We had 500-odd views during the Instagram live and, when the video went up, around 6,000 views over two-three days."

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Playing together
Many of these sessions are followed by activities related to the book

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

WHO AND WHEN

Shradha Mohan reads on the Instagram handle @happy.hour.reading (Age 3-6 years). Everyday at 2.30 p.m.

Dipna reads on the Instagram handle @lovetheworldtoday.in (Age 3-8 years). Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 11.30 a.m.

The Online Story Fest, hosted by Lil Trails and Golpo – Tales Unlimited, will take place on the Instagram handles @littrails and @maajanaki (All ages welcome, from toddlers to grandparents). Every evening till March 31 at 5 p.m.

#ThodaReadingCorona features a host of children's authors and illustrators, on Facebook at The Reading Racons and Instagram handle @bam_books, (Toddlers to 12 years old, depending on the book). Everyday at 11 a.m.

Bijal Vachharajani, a children's book writer, says, "I put the word out on a children's book group, asking if any writers and illustrators would like to read online." Almost immediately, Bijal had nearly 15 volunteers. This led to #ThodaReadingCorona. The line-up has children's book author Venita Coelho, author and illustrator Anupam Arunachalam, and author Anita Roy, among others.

"They will all be reading from their own works," says Bijal. The sessions will be on Instagram and Facebook. There will also be storytelling, dramatised readings, and sing-alongs. As Dipna puts it, "You know how they say it takes a village to raise a child. In this case, it's a digital village lending a hand."

- Across
- 1 Sparkling French wine (neither red nor white) (4)
- 2 Butt (4)
- 3 German car maker, d. 1948 (4)
- 4 Severe and retaliatory (8)
- 5 Sheep that leads the flock – we tell Herb (anag.) (10)
- 6 On the house (6)
- 7 Afghan capital (5)
- 8 Unfortunate (7)
- 9 Chomp (5)

A	P	H	R	O	D	I	S	A	C
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T	S	A	E	T	T	S			
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M	Y	S	L	P	R	O	O	L	A
Y	P	L	A	Y					

AN D-NDE

Five legends for whom 2021 could be a bit too far

All, except Tiger Woods, have won gold medals in the Games gone by

OLYMPICS

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
PARIS

With the 2020 Olympics postponed until 2021, there are fears the delay will shatter the gold medal hopes of many ageing athletes. A looks at five evergreen stars for whom a delayed Tokyo Games might be a step too far.

ROGER FEDERER: The 20-time Grand Slam champion, who will be 40 in August 2021, won the Olympic gold when he partnered Stan Wawrinka to the men's doubles title at the 2008 Beijing Games.

Federer was a quarterfinalist in singles in China, silver medallist in 2012 in London before injury forced him to skip the 2016 Games in Rio.

In Sydney, in 2000, Federer made the semifinals in singles but he still remembers Australia fondly as the place where he first started his romance with Mirka Vavrinec, who is now his wife.

"Overall, it was probably the most unbelievable Olympics I ever had," said Federer, who was also Switzerland's flag-bearer in Beijing and in Athens in 2004 where he



One more time: Serena and Federer would love to hear their national anthems again. ■ FILE PHOTO

had exited in the second round.

SERENA WILLIAMS: The US great will be 40 in September next year although her desire to play in Tokyo might not be as pressing as that of Federer's. Serena already has four gold medals – singles at London in 2012 and women's doubles with sister Venus in 2000, 2008 and 2012.

The sisters lost their opening round match in Rio in 2016 while Serena's gold medal defence in singles ended

at the hands of Elina Svitolina in the third round.

TIGER WOODS: Woods, who will turn 45 this December, would have struggled to make the US team for the Games had it remained in its 2020 slot. He is currently only the sixth-ranked American, with just the top four guaranteed to make the

squad. Woods, the winner of 15 Majors, has been fighting a recurrence of a back injury so at least the delay to 2021 for the Olympics gives him

renewed hope of a golden swansong. Organisers would be desperate for Woods to play after he missed the return of golf at the 2016 Games in Rio due to injury.

LIN DAN: The colourful and controversial Chinese badminton superstar will be 37 by the time the next Games roll around. Lin already has gold from Beijing and London to add to his five World titles.

However, there is a hint of unfinished business for Lin who was defeated in the bronze medal match in Rio in 2016 by great rival Lee Chong Wei, the man he had beaten in two finals.

ALLYSON FELIX: The only female track and field athlete in history to win six Olympic gold medals, Felix had spent the last two years preparing for a golden farewell at the Tokyo Olympics.

Felix, who turns 35 at the end of this year, will be racing against Father Time as she attempts to improve her tally in what will be her fifth consecutive Olympics appearance. The American star can take comfort from the fact she is by no means the oldest woman to chase Olympic glory in sprint events. Merlene Ottey was 40 when she anchored Ja-



The ultimate prize: Tiger Woods, winner of 15 Majors, will be gunning for an Olympic medal. ■ AP

India paddler stuck in Spain after lockdown

Takeme's return flight was on March 24

AMITABHA DAS SHARMA
KOLKATA

India No. 14 and Railways table tennis player Takeme Sarkar is stranded in Spain because of the lockdown in Europe owing to the novel coronavirus.

Takeme had gone to Spain to train and play a few matches for Hotel Museo Patria Chica, a club which takes part in the Spanish league.

"I came here on February 25 and my club had arranged for the return tickets on March 24. My flight got cancelled because of the lockdown and now I can return only on May 11," said Takeme from Priego de Cordoba in Spain. "The club is taking great care of me. I am in constant touch with my family and coaches Amit Dam and Tapan Chandra,

who have been giving me the courage to endure this difficult situation."

Fake news

A few days ago, India No. 22 Raj Mondal landed in trouble after returning from Spain, where he had been playing in the league. Some social media posts claimed he had tested positive for coronavirus and had been taken away by the police.

Mondal, who put himself in self-quarantine, said he had to approach the police authorities to stop the fake news from spreading.

"I want you to know I am safe under home quarantine and I don't have any symptoms of the virus. He also mentioned that some people are 'trying to create panic' by spreading false news about him.



COVID-19 IMPACT



France evokes Tour de France spectator ban

PARIS

French sports minister Roxana Maracineanu says this year's

Argentine cyclist Max Richeze discharged

WASHINGTON

Argentine cyclist Max Richeze has been released from a UAE hospital, where the UAE Team Emirates rider spent 18 days after testing positive for the virus following the cancellation of the UAE Tour. He wrote on Instagram that tests had come back negative. AP

Tour de France could be staged without spectators in a bid to combat the coronavirus pandemic. The government is in talks with organisers about the future of the June 27-July 19 edition of world cycling's top event which draws more than 10 millions fans annually to the roads of France. All options are being considered including postponement or cancellation of the event which has been raced every year in peacetime since 1903, the minister said. AFP

Spanish MotoGP postponed

PARIS

The Spanish MotoGP due to be staged on May 3 has become the latest sporting casualty of the coronavirus pandemic. The postponement of the race at the Jerez circuit follows the cancellation of the elite category season-opening MotoGP in Qatar. AFP

Laing's country's doctors and healthcare workers battling the pandemic, New Zealand captain Kane Williamson on Thursday said these are the people who truly understand what it means to

Stokes preparing for IPL despite the uncertainty

'I have to think I will be playing on April 20 and expect the body to be ready for it'

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
LONDON

England all-rounder Ben Stokes says he is preparing to play in the Indian Premier League (IPL), even though he knows the tournament is unlikely to go ahead.

Stokes has signed to play for Rajasthan Royals and is one of 13 English players set to feature in the IPL.

But the Twenty20 tourna-

ment has already been delayed until April 15 in response to the pandemic.

"At the moment my next competitive cricket is going to be in the IPL," Stokes told the BBC on Wednesday.

"That hasn't changed yet so I have to think I will be playing on April 20."

Last week, England and Wales Cricket Board announced that English county

season would not start until at least the end of May, while England's tour of Sri Lanka was also postponed.

With IPL chiefs yet to call off or further delay their event, Stokes has to continue to keep himself in shape to play in the unlikely event if he is asked to travel to India.

"I have to get my head round that I am playing even though in the back of my mind I know I am probably not," he added.

"I have to build up and get myself physically in a position that if it does happen I am good to go. I cannot take three weeks off and expect the body to be ready for April 20 because it doesn't work like that. It might happen and if it does I don't want to be behind. There will be a lot of advice given to us."

COVID-19 AID



Sindhu donates ₹10 lakh

HYDERABAD

PV. Sindhu donated ₹10 lakh as her individual contribution to the State Governments of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh to help in their measures to curb Coronavirus. Sindhu said ₹5 lakh each would be contributed to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund. Her father-cum-mentor P.V. Ramana told The Hindu that the 24-year-old is in self-isolation along with him on return from the All England Championship.

MCA to give ₹50 lakh for COVID-19 fund

MUMBAI

Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) has decided to contribute ₹50 lakh to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The decision was made by the MCA apex council on Thursday during its meeting via video conferencing.

PCI staff to contribute a day's salary

NEW DELHI

The Paralympic Committee of India (PCI) on Thursday decided to donate a day's salary of its staff to help the country fight COVID-19. PCI chief patron Avinash Rai Khanna has donated a month's pension to the cause. PTI



Solid support: Takeme Sarkar says her family members and coaches have kept her spirits up. ■ FILE PHOTO: G. RAMAKRISHNA



Stranded Iain O'Brien resorts to crowd-funding

CHRISTCHURCH

Desperate to reunite with his family in the UK, stranded former New Zealand pacer Iain O'Brien has resorted to crowd-funding to arrange for his tickets after his flights were cancelled. The 43-year-old from is seeking donations through social networking site Twitter to fund his way back home. "Ok, so trying to raise some money to pay for this flight back to the UK," O'Brien wrote on his handle. PTI

SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

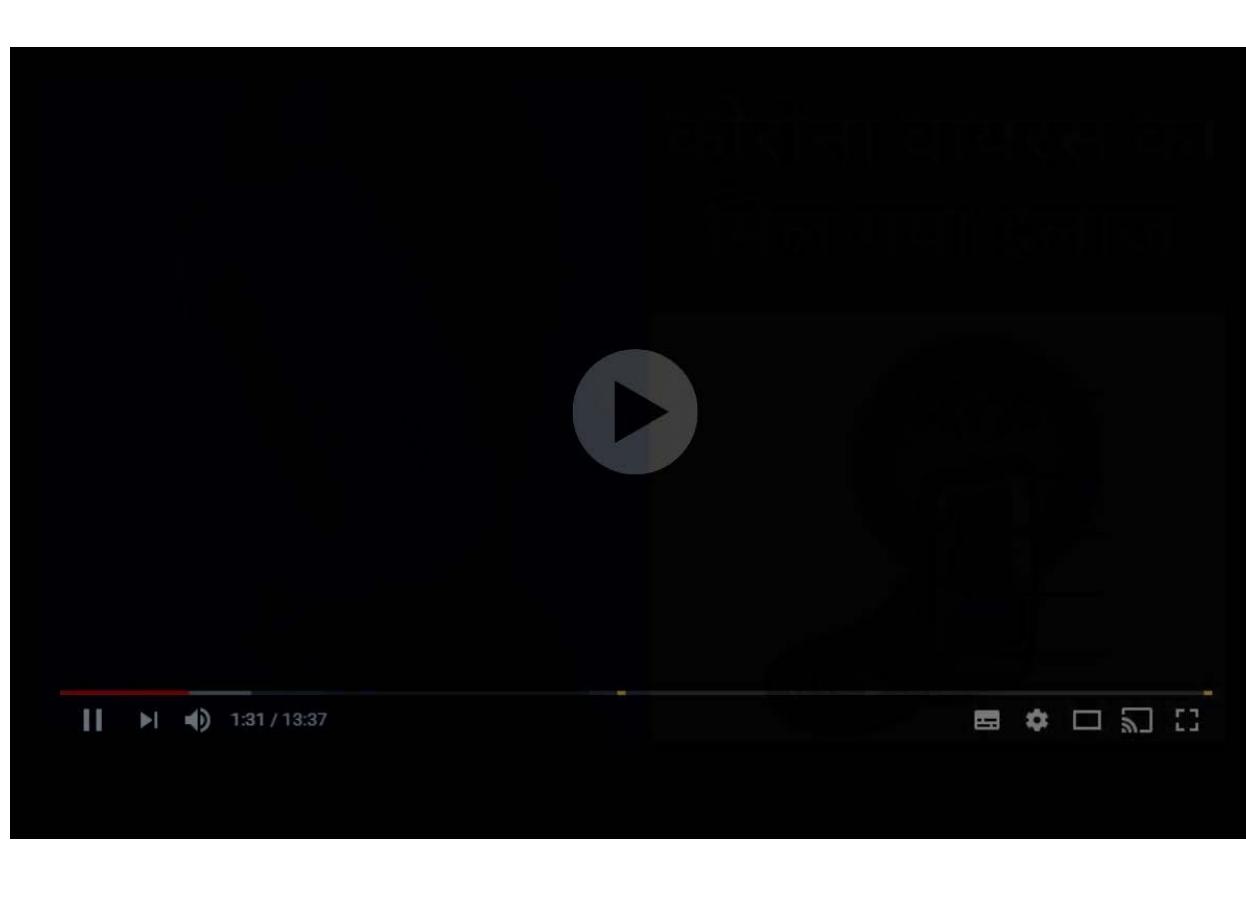
FAITH

Many avatars

The Lord appeared as Nara and Narayana in Badrikasrama. Pillai Lokacharya, in his Mumukshuppadi, gives the reason for this avatar, said P.T. Seshadri in a discourse. Samsaris do not know about the Lord. They do not know why they have been born. They do not know what kainkarya they have to do for the Lord. Samsaris are like a man who has lost something, but does not even know what he has lost. The Lord did not want them to continue to suffer in samsara. So, He came as Nara Narayana, did penance in Badrikasrama and gave us the Ashtakshara mantra.

Thirumangai Azhwar also records this in his Peria Thirumozhi. While Narayana was the Acharya, Nara was the sishya. While it is understandable that the lord should have come as an Acharya, why did He have to come as a sishya as well? Pillai Lokacharya answers this question also. He explains that we do not know how to be model disciples. To show us how a sishya should behave, He came as a sishya too. So, in his very first avatar as Nara Narayana, He shows the world how to be an ideal Acharya and an ideal sishya. In His next avatar, He came as a swan, to save the Vedas. This was followed by the Dattatreya avatar, Sanatkumara avatar and Rishabadeva avatar. These four were amsa avatars, that is partial incarnations.

Then comes the Hayagreeva avatar, says Dhrumila, one of the nava yogiswars. In this avatar, the Lord killed Madhu and Kaitapa and retrieved the Vedas, which had been stolen. Then came the Matsya avatar. In this avatar, He asked king Satyavrata to protect all life forms during the deluge. Dhrumila also talks of the avatars He took to save Gajendra, the elephant. Dhrumila tells king Nimi that the Lord will soon be born as Krishna.



MODIFIED	GARLIC	4	9	2	1	6	8	7	5	3
AJINU	DWIO	1	6	8	3	7	5	9	2	4
TAGALOG	ELASTIN	5	3	7	2	9	4	6	1	8
UEML	MRETE	3	8	4	9	5	2	1	7	6
RISHI	INORDERTO	9	2	1	7	8	6	3	4	5
ETTN	NSAU	6	7	5	4	1	3	2	8	9
CASHREGISTER	SATCTSI	7	1	3	5	4	9	8	6	2
SATECHNICON	AESLGB	8	4	9	6	2	7	5	3	1
MACEDONIA	ARETE	7	1	3	5	4	9	8	6	2
MADRINTTINR	ISOLATEINITIAL	2	5	6	8	3	1	4	9	7
NISSTFELLOOOU	GHETTOINUNISON	3	2	6	7	4	5	8	9	1

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'A lot to learn from this crisis'

Being a sportsman has helped me face tough situations with equanimity: Kapil

CRICKET

VIJAY LOKAPALLY
NEW DELHI

Lockdown – a word that needs to be drilled into the minds of citizens. "A word," as former India captain and one of the game's greatest all-rounders Kapil Dev observes, "that has become the lifeline for mankind. You are supposed to stay at home, so stay at home! It is the least one can do to help the competent and relevant authorities to fight this life-threatening virus."

Positive attitude

As Kapil elaborates: "It can be taken in a positive way. Lockdown or Stay at Home. You have to challenge yourself to accept this situation. You have the world inside your home – your family. You have means of entertaining yourself – books, TV, music. Best of all is the interaction you have with your family."

Personal tasks

To stay focused, Kapil has taken up various tasks inside the house. "I sweep the house, clean the garden. My little garden is my golf course. I am getting to spend so much time with my family. Something that I had missed in the last several years. I give the cook a break. I cook for everyone. I take turns to do the dishes. I learnt all this when playing in England and Romi joined me."

Being a sportsman has helped him face tough situations with equanimity, Kapil says. "I always believe in being positive. In cricket you get out for zero after scoring a century in the preceding innings. You end up wicketless after having done your best in previous spells. I have read and



Legends both: Kapil Dev says Sunil Gavaskar would have been a sought-after batsman in T20s.

• FILE PHOTO: PTI

C Bedi taught me the joy and importance of being large-hearted. Sunil taught me to plan. He would keep planning

heard how the human race has fought and set examples when dealing with crises. India's strength lies in our culture – looking after each other and caring for elders. We have to look to help the seniors. I know we will win this battle by staying together and strengthening the hands of our government and doctors by staying indoors."

This tough phase, believes Kapil, will make people more responsible. "People will remember the lessons in hygiene now. They will learn to wash their hands and not to spit and urinate in public. We have to keep our surroundings clean. Wish we had learnt these lessons earlier,

but hope this generation will not make those mistakes. I was lucky I could learn from my seniors and am thankful to them."

Kapil picked Bishan Singh Bedi and Sunil Gavaskar for special mention. "Bedi taught me the joy and importance of being large-hearted. Life becomes simple when you are large-hearted. Sunil taught me to plan. He would keep planning.

"Even when he was batting against me, he was sporting enough to advise me. He told me to bowl from close to the wicket because he found it difficult to pick my out-swinger. What a lesson I learnt from the artist. Also, my generation of cricketers did not criticise youngsters," he says.

Masters of the game

Reflecting on colleagues from his playing days, Kapil talked of how some of them would have been superstars in current times too. "Sunil

would have been a sought-after batsman in T20. Srikant started T20 in 1985 when he was smashing Imran Khan and Wasim Akram over cover and mid-off. We used to wonder 'what is this guy doing'. Yashpal, with his bottom-hand shots over midwicket would have been a hit. He could hit from cover to midwicket with such ease.

Belter of the ball

"Take Sidhu (Navjot Singh). Belter of the ball. Once, in the nets, he hit the ball in the air and Bedi ordered him to run six for that shot. Madan Lal had the game for T20s. Bowlers like Bedi and Venkatraghavan would have shackled batsmen. Prasanna would have beaten the batsmen with his art in the air. I have not forgotten (Gundappa) Viswanath. He would have made a mockery of the field by picking gaps with ridiculous ease. I could go on and on," he says.

Donate generously, CAB tells units

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

The Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) on Thursday appealed to its affiliated units to donate generously to the West Bengal State Emergency Relief Fund to help in the fight against COVID-19.

"After our wedding in England and Delhi last year, I spent time with Sam during Christmas. Was with her briefly at the Australian Open, but had not met her thereafter. The current situation has given us time to be together. Unlike London, in Manchester we can go out for a run or exercise once a day. There is a lawn in our backyard. The LTA (Lawn Tennis Association) has also sent some gym equipment for Sam," said Divij, explaining the favourable turn of events in an unpleasant situation.

Divij was also happy that wife Samantha had won the singles and doubles titles at the \$25,000 ITF women's event in Potchefstroom, South Africa.

With wife for company, tennis star keeps himself fit in verdant Manchester

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI

Most sports stars today are happy to be at home, as virtually the whole world is under lockdown tackling the coronavirus pandemic.

Divij Sharan, winner of the tennis doubles Asian Games gold with Rohan Bopanna, is in Manchester, and happy to be there. The verdant beauty of the place and the presence of wife Samantha Murray makes him a very happy man.

Plans go for a toss

After the Davis Cup tie against Croatia in Zagreb, where he was the only Indian not to get to play, Divij did return home to Delhi for a few days.

"After Indian Wells was cancelled, I discussed with Rohan about playing the clay court events in Marakech, Budapest and Estoril in April. After three days in Delhi, I decided to head for the

UK for three weeks of training," said Divij. "All the plans have gone for a toss, as the ATP circuit is closed till the first week of June.

"After our wedding in England and Delhi last year, I spent time with Sam during Christmas. Was with her briefly at the Australian Open, but had not met her thereafter. The current situation has given us time to be together. Unlike London, in Manchester we can go out for a run or exercise once a day. There is a lawn in our backyard. The LTA (Lawn Tennis Association) has also sent some gym equipment for Sam," said Divij, explaining the favourable turn of events in an unpleasant situation.

Divij was also happy that wife Samantha had won the singles and doubles titles at the \$25,000 ITF women's event in Potchefstroom, South Africa.

"She lost in the first round

A privilege training under PK: Vijayan

P.K. AJITH KUMAR
KOZHIKODE

He may have quit professional football a decade and a half ago, but I.M. Vijayan's romance with the beautiful game continues.

"I consider myself lucky that I could train under P.K.," said Vijayan, paying tributes to the legend who passed away recently.

"He had coached me at Mohun Bagan and at the national camp."

Lament
"As a footballer it is indeed disappointing to find that the standard of the sport has come down hugely in India. It is a pity that we don't find incredibly talented players like the late Krishan Dey (who was known as the Indian Maradona). It was a privilege playing along with, and against, him."



Healthy and happy: The current situation has given Divij Sharan and wife Samantha a chance to spend some quality time with each other. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ICC Board to discuss contingency plans

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The members of the ICC Board will meet via video conference on Friday to discuss contingency plans for its multiple tournaments in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While a couple of ICC Board members confirmed to PTI that no concrete decisions are expected during the conference call, it became imperative that a meeting was necessary to be ready with plans if this lockdown continues for two more months. The complete FTP will be topsy turvy," an official of a member nation said.

which are part of the World Test Championship. The points system in case of cancelled series will be a topic of discussion. One such series, England's away tour of Sri Lanka, has already been postponed.

"Right now, the situation is such that no decision can be taken as no one knows when normalcy returns. Obviously the members will give a lowdown of the situation in their respective countries. But we need to be ready with plans if this lockdown continues for two more months. The complete FTP will be topsy turvy," an official of a member nation said.

Candidates chess tournament stopped

SPORTS BUREAU
YEKATERINBURG

The Candidates chess tournament was stopped on Thursday. FIDE, the world chess governing body, announced that the remaining seven rounds would be played later.

The Russian government's decision to ground international flights left FIDE with no option but to stop the event.

The players agreed to carry forward the current standings when the tournament reopens.

France's Maxime Vachier-Lagrave and Russia's Ian Nepomniachtchi will be in pole position when the

event resumes.

Vachier-Lagrave defeated Nepomniachtchi in the seventh round to catch up with the Russian. That board produced the only decisive result of the round.

The results (seventh round): Fabiano Caruana (US) 3.5 drew with Wang Hao (Chn) 3.5; Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (Fra) 4.5 bt Ian Nepomniachtchi (Rus) 3.5; Ding Liren (Chn) 2.5 drew with Kirill Alekseenko (Rus) 2.5; Anish Giri (Ned) 3.5 drew with Alexander Grischuk (Rus) 3.5.

The standings: 1-2 Nepomniachtchi and Vachier-Lagrave 4.5; 3-6 Caruana, Giri, Hao and Grischuk 3.5; 7-8 Liren and Alekseenko 2.5.

'Olympics postponement a blessing for me'

Triple jumper Arpinder Singh says he now has time to try out a new technique

STAN RAYAN
KOCHI

The postponement of the Tokyo Olympics, from this July to next year, must have been shattering for many. But triple jumper Arpinder Singh considers it a blessing.

"Yes, this postponement is a kind of blessing for me. I felt I wasn't ready for the Federation Cup in April," said the Asian Games champion in a telephone chat with *The Hindu* from Amritsar on Thursday.

"If I would be ready only by the time of the inter-State meet (June-end, in Bengaluru). So, this one year's delay in the Olympics will help me a lot."

Arpinder, the first Indian to win a Continental Cup medal (bronze, in the Czech Republic in 2018), has a personal best of 17.17m which came in the Lucknow inter-State Nationals in June 2014.

But it had been a big struggle for him to cross 17m after



Big opportunity: Arpinder, surprised at the deferment, is happy at the chance to tune himself. • FILE PHOTO

that. His next 17m came four years later in the 2018 Guwahati inter-State Nationals a few months before the Jakarta Asian Games where he won the gold with 16.77m.

Very tough

The Tokyo Olympics entry standard is 17.14m and since he had planned his season late, it would have been very

tough for Arpinder to make the cut, had the Olympics been held this year.

"Now, I've got a lot of extra time to try out the changes I had made in my technique," said Arpinder, a bronze medallist in the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

Arpinder didn't think a major event like the Olympics would be postponed.



THE HINDU GROUP

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Lowering risk: A humanoid robot being tested at the SMS Hospital in Jaipur on Thursday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Jaipur hospital tries out a serving robot

It uses a tray to ferry food, medicine

MOHAMMED IQBAL
JAIPUR

The Sawai Man Singh (SMS) Government Hospital here is conducting a series of trials on a humanoid robot to check if it could be pressed into service for delivering medicines and food to COVID-19 patients admitted there, allowing doctors and nurses to maintain a safe distance.

A committee of experts, which saw the demonstration on Thursday, will shortly submit its report on a proposal to use the robots to serve the patients in the isolation ward, SMS Hospital's Medical Superintendent D.S. Meena told *The Hindu*. The hospital is the biggest government health facility in the State.

Dr. Meena said that medical and paramedical staff use protective gear like masks and gloves but risks could be further reduced if robots could render some services.

A Jaipur-based entrepreneur, who assembles robots locally, has offered to supply them free of cost to the hos-

pital as part of a corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative to help patients and the staff. The robot sent to the hospital is battery-operated and has a life span of four to five years.

We have our own strict measures to prevent inflow and outflow of the virus but we are sticking to improving the situation without using drastic measures such as closing off our cities or our borders.

I can say Korea is now in full control of the spread of the disease. The number of new confirmed cases per day has been showing steady decline since hitting a peak at 989 in February to double-digit figures as of mid-March.

I believe, more importantly, that Korea might be the only country that hasn't imposed a lockdown within its territories or even of its international borders.

What is the latest situation with the COVID-19 pandemic in South Korea?

How has this been possible?

■ We call the 'Korean model' is grounded on concentrated testing of high-risk areas and clusters. Korea found out at the beginning of the spread of the virus that a certain religious cult and its gathering was the cause of a large portion of the spread in a certain area of the country. This group had massive gatherings in a closed-off space. The government listed all members of the group across the country, tracked their whereabouts and conducted tests on a massive scale, leading to the rapid increase in the number of confirmed cases. However, Korea succeeded in identifying and isolating potential cases at a very early stage and finally flattened the curve.

Anybody in Korea can get the test within minutes at 'drive-thru' or 'walk-thru' centres and receive the result by text message the very next day. Korea made available over 650 testing centres nationwide.

This is the essence of the 'Korean model'.

Are there best practices you would like to share?

■ The moment the virus DNA pattern was confirmed in Wuhan, Korean medical teams and bio-companies were able to develop new testing kits with surprising speed. This made it possible for Korea to conduct mass-scale testing of 18,000 cases a day. Anybody in Korea who has symptoms or reasons to be tested can get the test within minutes at 'drive-thru' or 'walk-thru' centres and receive the result by text message the very next day. Korea made available over 650 testing centres nationwide.

I understand the need for lockdowns given India's demography and medical infrastructure. However, openness and transparency is important to tackling this situation, and identifying and isolating the core of the spread of the virus with full medical capacity at the earliest possible stage is key.



Anybody in Korea can get the test within minutes at 'drive-thru' or 'walk-thru' centres and receive the result by text message the very next day

This is the essence of the 'Korean model'.

How are India and Korea cooperating and sharing information during this crisis? Has India made specific requests for testing kits/medical equipment so far?

■ The Korean government has repeatedly communicated

ed to the Indian government on what is going on in Korea and how we tackle the virus. Though India has not asked for help regarding testing kits or medical equipment, we are always ready to extend a hand. Already, nine Korean companies have received export licenses of testing kits and the Embassy as well as Korean Trade Agency (KOTRA) are willing to facilitate the communication between the Korean companies and those who want to import the kits.

What kind of impact has the virus had on functioning of South Korean companies based in India?

■ Many Korean companies like Samsung, LG, Hyundai and Kia have ambitious plans for India, the biggest emerging market in the world. Samsung – which has the world's largest smartphone factory here in Greater Noida – as well as other companies, were looking to have

greater production and more aggressive strategy to be part of the 'Make In India' policy, but they have been hard-hit with this extraordinary situation. Kia Motors, for example, has been another success story in India by setting up a 3,00,000-unit production plant last year. This year, they were planning to install large facilities for its new small-sized SUV, Sonet, but it is now uncertain if they can move ahead on schedule as engineers and construction experts are unable to receive visas to travel to India.

I hope the Indian government can grant visas to those who have compelling reasons under the condition that health certificates are presented and self-quarantine is enforced. I have often seen crisis turn into opportunities. I believe it is the Indian government's difficult task to efficiently tackle the pandemic while saving the economy.

(For full interview, go to bit.ly/SeoulEnvoyInterview)

Nimmi, doe-eyed star of the 1950s, passes away at 88



Grace and gravitas: Nimmi with Rajendra Kumar in director H.S. Rawail's *Mere Mehboob*. ■ THE HINDU ARCHIVES

She made her debut in *Barsaat* in a lead role opposite actor-director Raj Kapoor

NAMRATA JOSHI
MUMBAI

Nimmi belonged to an era in Hindi cinema when actresses came with their own distinct *adaa* (style). Acting was all about quicksilver turn of expressions. A raised brow or the quiver of the lips could say it all. Nimmi was known for graceful presence, doe eyes that were a pool of emotions and a voice layered with gravitas.

One of the leading stars of yesteryears, Nimmi passed away in Mumbai on Wednesday at the age of 88.

She was born Nawab Ba-

noo and it was filmmaker-actor Raj Kapoor who gave her the name Nimmi and introduced her on screen. She met him on the sets of *Mehboob Khan's Andaz*, which is when he decided to cast her as the second lead in *Barsaat*. Her debut performance as a naive shepherdess in love with a reckless city slicker went on to define her persona.

Nimmi straddled genres and had a substantial number of hits (a clutch of them with superstar Dilip Kumar) to her credit but could not quite get her due.

Despite successes like *Aan*, *Deedar*, *Daag*, *Amar*, *Kundun*, *Uran Khatola* and *Basant Bahar*, she didn't get counted in the top league among Meena Kumari, Nargis and Madhubala.

Family friend and music director Madan Mohan's daughter Sangeeta Gupta, who also acted with her in *Bhai Bhai*, remembers her as an educated, well-spoken, sensitive and charming person.

Nimmi straddled genres and had a substantial number of hits (a clutch of them with superstar Dilip Kumar) to her credit but could not quite get her due.

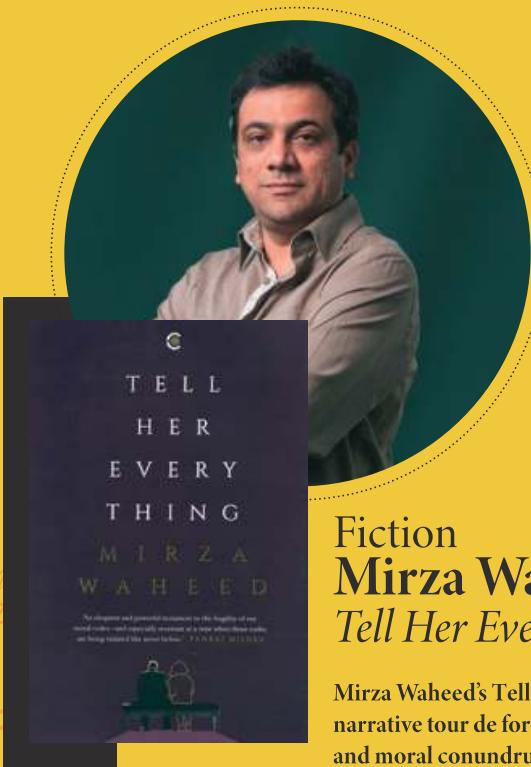
Nimmi had slipped into

obscurity after the death of her husband Ali Raza. It was a rare interview in 2013 (*Guttagoo with Irfan*) on Rajya Sabha TV that the reclusive star revealed lots of unknown facets about her personal and professional life.

Like how at the London première of *Aan* she received four Hollywood film offers, including one from none other than Cecil B. DeMille.

Actor Rishi Kapoor tweeted: "RIP, Thank you, Nimmi aunty, for all the blessings and love for *Bobby* on its première release. You were part of the RK family."

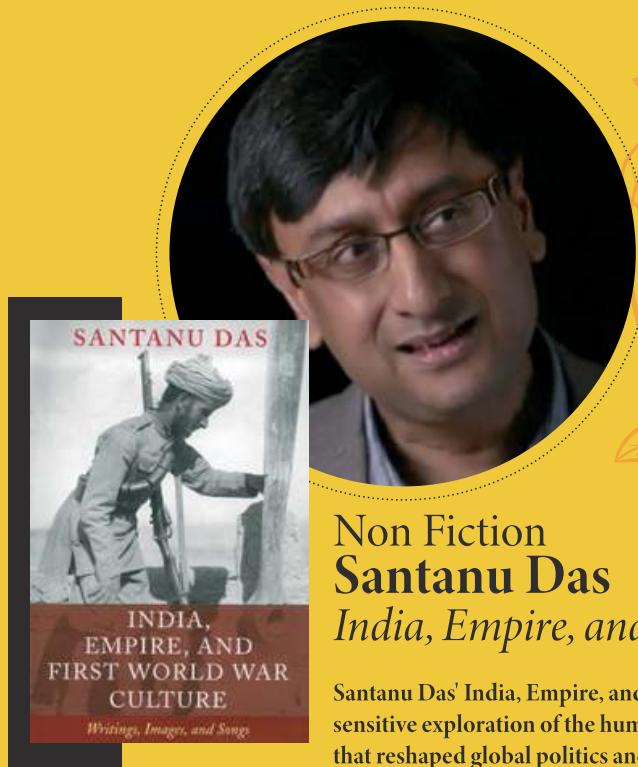
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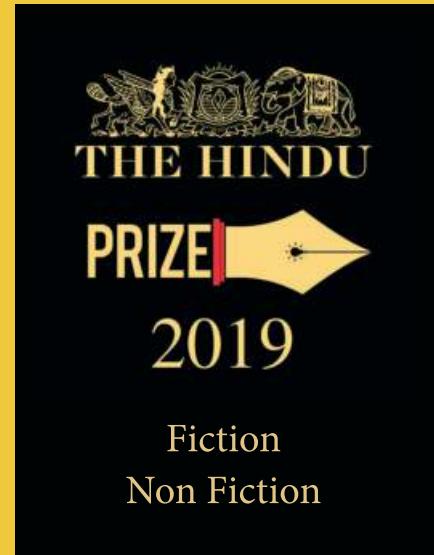
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