



Outdated Census data depriving 10 crore of PDS, says Jean Dreze
page 8



Ramp up testing in unaffected districts, Centre tells States
page 10



Social distancing has to be 100% during lockdown: Dhankhar
page 10



South Koreans back Moon Jae-in in pandemic poll
page 14

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NEARBY



Two deaths, 17 new COVID-19 cases in Delhi

NEW DELHI
Two deaths and 17 new COVID-19 cases were reported in Delhi on Wednesday, taking the toll to 32 and the total number of patients to 1,578, stated a daily bulletin released by the Delhi government.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

Rajasthan shifts focus to sample testing

JAIPUR
With the Ramganj locality in Jaipur's Walled City emerging as the biggest COVID-19 hotspot in Rajasthan, health authorities here have shifted their focus to sample testing after dividing the affected area into 30 clusters. Strict enforcement of curfew order has slowed down the spread of the virus.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 9

COVID-19 test kits for Valley moved to Jammu

SRINAGAR
The Directorate of Health Services, Kashmir, has stopped taking samples from potentially infected persons in the Valley after a senior official bypassed directions and diverted a Srinagar-bound consignment of boxes allotted by Indian Council of Medical Research, carrying 5,000 test kits, to Jammu.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 11

Industries operating in rural areas to reopen on April 20

Wearing masks in public places is compulsory & spitting is an offence, says MHA

VIIJITA SINGH
PRISCILLA JEBARAJ
NEW DELHI

Wearing face covers and masks is now compulsory in public places and workplaces, spitting in public is a punishable offence and selling liquor, gutka and tobacco is strictly prohibited. All industries operating in rural areas and the government's flagship rural jobs scheme will also be allowed to reopen from April 20 if they follow social distancing norms and other safeguards against the COVID-19 infection.

These are some of the directives in a fresh order issued on Wednesday by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to manage the pandemic. The lockdown is

Lockdown guidelines

A look at the activities which will be allowed post April 20 and those which will not be allowed until May 3



- What will be allowed**
- All agricultural and horticultural activities
 - MGNREGA works with strict implementation of social distancing and mask use
 - Postal services, including post offices
 - Bank branches and ATMs
 - Operation of animal husbandry farms
 - Collection, processing, distribution and sale of milk and milk products
- What will not be allowed**
- Public transport, taxis, autos and cab aggregators
 - All passenger movement by trains, except for security purposes
 - All domestic and international air travel, except for medical reasons and security purposes
 - Religious places, educational institutes, places of entertainment

Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla said.

Apart from rural industries, the guidelines permit the construction of roads, irrigation projects, buildings and industrial projects in rural areas. Construction of renewable energy projects will be allowed. In urban areas,

only in situ construction projects will be allowed if workers are available on site. Brick kilns in rural areas can resume work.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

MORE REPORTS ON ▶ PAGES 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11 & 14

STRESS TEST ▶ EDIT

Mandi at odds with odd-even

At Delhi's Azadpur Mandi, one of the largest markets for vegetables and fruits, the odd-even policy ordered by the AAP government remained a non-starter on Wednesday. The system seemed to be crumbling as only a small number of people were actually seen following the rules. Security personnel deployed there tried hard to bring order. ▶ PAGE 2

'Protect rights of vulnerable'

The National Human Rights Commission has asked the Centre to issue an advisory to all States and Union Territories to implement the lockdown without violating rights. It urged the Centre to ensure that public officials "behave in a sensible manner with the people, particularly those belonging to vulnerable sections, respecting human rights relating to their life, liberty and dignity". ▶ PAGE 11

170 districts identified as hotspots: Health Ministry

207 districts have been classified as 'potential hotspots'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Nearly one in five districts in India is a hotspot, the Health Ministry said on Wednesday, a day that saw at least 1,036 COVID-19 infections.

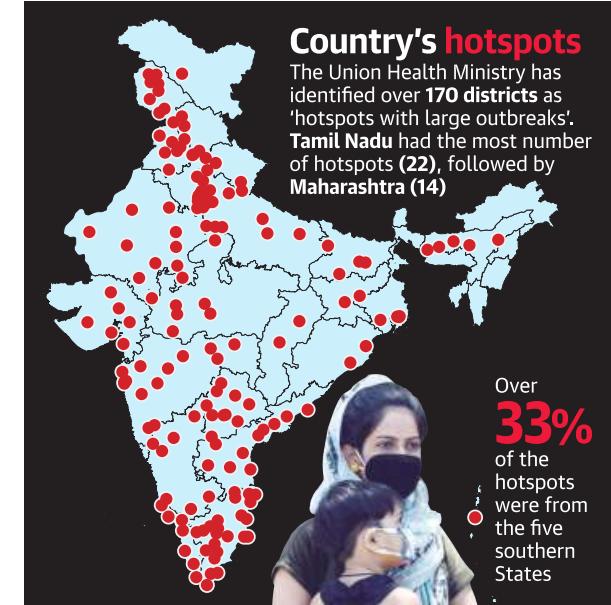
The government said it had classified every district into a hotspot, potential hotspot or a green zone. Of India's 736 districts, 170 were 'hotspots', defined as places with at least 15 confirmed infections or where there was an exponential rise in cases. There were 207 'potential hotspots', Lav Agrawal, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, said at the daily media briefing.

There were 11,439 confirmed cases and 377 deaths. A total of 1,306 people have been discharged after recovery.

Details of these districts were not shared but in all of these places – potential or not – testing would be ramped up to include checking even those who displayed 'influenza-like illnesses' and breathlessness.

According to reports from the State Health Departments, the total number of cases rose to 12,380, of which 10,566 were active ones. While 422 people have died of the disease, 1,392 have recovered.

Special teams had been



Only one fresh case in Kerala

Kerala has the highest COVID-19 recovery rate in the country, with 218 out of 387 patients so far recovering from the disease. Since the past week, the State has been registering more cases of recovery than positive cases. On Wednesday too, there was just one positive case, while the number of patients who recovered was seven. ▶ PAGE 5

U.S. freezes WHO funding + over coronavirus crisis

Trump alleges 'severe mismanagement'



AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump has ordered a freeze on funding for the World Health Organization (WHO) for 'mismanaging' the coronavirus crisis.

With the world battling to get on top of the pandemic that has killed 1,25,000 people, Mr. Trump fired a broadside at the WHO and halted payments amounting to \$400 million last year.

Funding would be frozen pending a review into the WHO's role in 'severely mismanaging and covering up the spread of the coronavirus,' said Mr. Trump, who accused the Geneva-based body of putting 'political correctness above life-saving measures'.

The outbreak could have been contained 'with very little death' if the WHO had

accurately assessed the situation in China, where the disease broke out late last year, charged Mr. Trump.

Beijing hit back, saying the move was bad for the global fight. 'This U.S. decision will weaken WHO's capacities and undermine the international cooperation against the epidemic,' said Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian.

TRUMP UNDER FIRE ▶ PAGE 14
DISASTROUS DECISION ▶ EDIT

Chain reaction



Raw deal: People waiting to receive a meal provided by a social group during the lockdown imposed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in Patna, Bihar, on Wednesday. ▶ RANJEET KUMAR

India to receive normal monsoon, forecasts IMD

'Above normal rain likely in Aug. & Sept.'

JACOB KOSHY

NEW DELHI
India will likely have a normal monsoon, with a chance of 'above normal' rain in August and September, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Wednesday.

The IMD issues a two-stage forecast: the first in April, followed by a more detailed one in the last week of May, which will also illustrate how the monsoon will spread over the country.

The IMD's confidence stems largely from global weather models pointing to negligible chances of El Niño, a warming of the central equatorial Pacific that's associated with the drying up of monsoon rain.

It has also officially redefined the definition of what constitutes 'normal' rainfall and reduced it by 1 cm to 88

cm. The June-September rainfall accounts for 75% of the country's annual rainfall. 'Quantitatively, the monsoon seasonal rainfall is likely to be 100% of the Long Period Average (LPA) with a model error of ± 5%. The LPA of the season rainfall over the country as a whole for the period 1961-2010 is 88 cm,' it said.

The expectation of excess rain comes from a forecast by the dynamical model or the Monsoon Mission Coupled Forecast System – that relies on supercomputers, mathematically simulating the physics of the ocean and the atmosphere. According to this forecast, there is a 'high probability (70%) for the rainfall to be "above normal" for the monsoon rain.'

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IN BRIEF

Delhi HC to restrict functioning till May 3

NEW DELHI
The functioning of the Delhi High Court and its subordinate courts in the Capital will continue to remain suspended till May 3, while restricting the hearing to urgent matters only in view of the extension of nationwide lockdown due to COVID-19, the circular, issued by Registrar General Manoj Jain, said.

JNU launches COVID-19 portal on its website

NEW DELHI
Jawaharlal Nehru University on Wednesday launched a COVID-19 portal on its website to provide information on the virus, steps taken by JNU and public institutions as well as research-related information.

Air Quality of Delhi-NCR

Delhi	155	Gurugram	142
Ghaziabad	194	Faridabad	186
Noida	184	Greater Noida	196
Good 0-50	■	Satisfactory 51-100	■ Moderate 101-200
Poor 201-300	■	Very Poor 301-400	■ Severe >400

Air Quality Index at 4 p.m., yesterday (Average of past 24 hours) | Source: CPCB

Odd-even policy at Azadpur Mandi a non-starter

Vegetable vendors, shoppers claim to be unaware of scheme as govt. officials deployed at market attempt to bring order

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI



Defying orders: Vendors at Azadpur sabzi mandi during the extended lockdown in the Capital on Wednesday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

At Azadpur Mandi, one of the largest markets for vegetables and fruits, cattle walked amid littered organic waste, horns blared due to a traffic jam and the odd-even policy ordered by the government was not being followed on Wednesday.

The Delhi government had on Monday announced that vegetables will be sold at staggered timings and sheds, which are numbered, will operate according to the odd-even policy. The Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee, on April 4, had already issued the detailed order to be implemented from April 6 to control the crowd.

The vegetable mandi is divided into four blocks (A, B, C and D) and 116 sheds. The fruits mandi has 19 sheds.

The order stated that blocks B and D and sheds 1-56 will operate on three days while blocks A and C and sheds 57-116 will operate the

remaining three days. Similarly, for fruits, even numbered sheds are to operate on even days and odd ones, the rest. Also, vegetables are to be sold from 6 a.m.-11 a.m. and fruits from 2 p.m.-6 p.m., according to the order.

No one follows rules
However, the system seemed to be crumbling as a minis-

cule number of people were found following the rules and many were unaware even as Civil Defence officials, Rapid Action Force, Delhi Police and government officials deployed at the mandi tried hard to bring order.

Vegetable vendors identified as Sanjay, Mahender Singh, and Jagga operating in D-Block claimed that they

were unaware of the odd-even policy. A labourer, aware of the rule, identified as Rampati said, "No one is really following the rules here. It's not possible to manage thousands of people. Policemen force them to leave and they come back again," he said.

An onion trader, Rakesh, said that while people aren't

following rules, restrictions have been put. "If we are four partners in the trade, only one is allowed," he said.

Madan Lal Rajeev Kumar, a fruit vendor in shed number 4 who adhered to the rule, said, "People are hardly following the rules. Fruits are to be sold from 2 p.m. but they are being sold in the morning. The place around is so dirty. This is probably the only place where there is traffic jam," he said.

Another trader said, "Fruits and vegetables are perishable, that's the reason it's tough to follow. If a truck full of vegetables or fruits arrives on an even day and the trader can sell on odd, what can be done".

However, the crowd had visibly lessened. The reason, though, didn't appear to be adherence to the policy but, that small vendors and retailers inside the mandi have removed by enforcement agencies.

Zakir held his seven-

month-old son, while his wife Bano took care of the small sack full of vegetables which they planned to sell in the next few hours but they were scared. "Every day we are beaten up by policemen but we come back because how else will we earn and feed our little sons. For how long will we depend on free food? We could have gone home but even that's not allowed," said Bano, hailing from Haryana's Palwal.

Guddu, who sells on a cart in Shalimar Bagh and had come to buy vegetables, said that he comes walking every day because now, his cart is not allowed inside. "All the rich traders are still doing fine, we are the ones who are suffering," he said.

A Delhi Police officer and another from enforcement squad walked around with sticks trying to control crowd and making sure people followed rules but they said that no one was willing to abide by law there.

Ambulance driver held for ferrying people

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Amid the nationwide lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Delhi Police on Wednesday stopped an ambulance in Vasant Kunj in which nine people were travelling.

The driver, Krishan Kumar, picked up the eight people from Manesar in Haryana, the police said. The nine people, including the driver, are residents of Basti, Uttar Pradesh.

The driver struck a deal for ₹16,000 to pick up the passengers from Manesar in Haryana and drop them off at Basti, a senior police officer said. When they reached Vasant Kunj, the police checked the ambulance and found no patient inside it. A case has been registered under relevant sections of the IPC against the driver, the police said.

The passengers have been sent to Mahipalpur shelter houses.

Workers paid wages only for workdays

Employers told them to return only after lockdown, paid them only till March 22

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Despite the government urging employers to pay workers their salaries during the COVID-19 lockdown, several employees have complained that they have been paid wages only till March 22 and have been asked to return after the end of the lockdown.

Kamli from Jharkhand, who works at a footwear factory in Narela Industrial Area, said that she and 200 other workers were asked to come on Wednesday to collect their wages but were paid only up to March 22, the last day that they worked.

"There were about 200

COVID-19

workers who were called and paid only for the period in March that they had worked and said that the account was now settled. How will we survive if we don't get paid?" Kamli said. She added that although she was willing to speak up against the factory, several colleagues were unwilling to protest and demand their wages.

"They may not pay us for two months, but when this lockdown ends, it is the same factory that will employ us again. If we upset the management, they will not take

us back. Then where will we find work?" said Babita, also from Jharkhand, who works at another footwear manufacturing unit.

Wage laws
A report by the Stranded Workers Action Network on the plight of migrant workers during the first phase of the lockdown, released on Wednesday, stated that there are wage laws which mandate that workers are entitled to full and timely payment of wages but it was the government's responsibility to ensure compliance of these laws for a safe and secure working environment for mi-

grant workers.
"A majority of stranded workers were not able to recall the name of the main builder or company they have been working for. Their only link to the city or town where they are working is through their contractor. In most cases, contractors have switched off their phones leaving workers to fend for themselves," the report said.

The report stated that 60% of the workers from Delhi and Haryana said they had been able to access cooked meals but were apprehensive of visiting food and relief centres fearing the spread of COVID-19 due to congestion.

BJP MLA launches drive to help senior citizens

NEW DELHI

Laxmi Nagar BJP MLA Abhay Verma on Wednesday launched a programme to provide two meals a day to senior citizens living alone in the area. According to Mr. Verma, the area had "many families" consisting of senior citizen couples whose children did not reside with them. "The objective is to feed such families at least two meals: lunch and dinner. We got 17 orders today and calls to book 70 more tomorrow," he said.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Almost 85% of the Capital's residents saw their incomes decline in the first few weeks of the COVID-19 lockdown, with casual workers being the worst affected, according to a survey carried out by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER).

About a third of households faced shortages of food, cooking fuel and medicine during the same period, raising concerns about the impact of an extended lockdown.

The survey, carried out between April 3-6, covered a representative sample of 1,750 people living in the rural and urban parts of the National Capital Region, in 31 districts spread across Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

Almost 55% of respondents in the survey said that the COVID-19 outbreak had reduced their income "very much", while another 30% said their incomes had fallen "somewhat". The situation was worse among casual workers, with almost 75% reporting that their income had fallen "very much", in comparison to 47% among salaried workers and 42%

HARD REALITY

Life in the first two weeks of the lockdown according to NCAER survey

Q: Did COVID-19 outbreak reduce the income or wages of your household in the last two weeks? Options:

- 1. Very much
- 2. Somewhat
- 3. Not at all

COVID-19 associated with substantial wage and income reduction

Not at all

16%

30%

Very much

54%

Income reduction for most people but greater for informal workers and for poorest households

CASUAL WORKERS AND BUSINESSES* MOST AFFECTED BY LOSS OF INCOME

POORER HOUSEHOLDS* ARE AFFECTED MORE

Extent of income drop	Very much	Some-what	Not at all
Total	55	30	15
Urban	57	28	15
Rural	53	31	16
Farmer	42	38	20
Casual worker	75	20	5
Business	65	25	10
Salaried worker	47	31	22
Other	51	32	17

*

CHI-SQUARE ASSOCIATION TEST COMPARING INCOME DROP ACROSS DIFFERENT ASSET QUINTILES SIGNIFICANT AT 0.001 LEVEL

■ About a third of households faced shortages of food, cooking fuel and medicine, raising concerns about the impact of an extended lockdown

SOURCE: NCAER

among farmers.

However, NCAER warned that "it is possible that the effect on farmers could be greater after the harvesting season is over [towards the end of April or May], given that the lockdown and social distancing may make it difficult for farmers to sell and deliver their produce."

urban areas. More than one in five of all households faced shortages of vegetables and fruits (25% in rural areas), while 14% faced shortages of grains and cereals.

Almost 9% of households faced difficulties in accessing medicines," said the report.

CENTRAL RAILWAY**NAGPUR DIVISION****E-TENDER NOTICE****SAND RELATED WORK AT****AMLA, TEEGAON AND****DHARAKHON STATIONS**

Name of Work: "Outsourcing of supply of Railway specified sand and filling of sand in sand boxes of AC and Diesel locomotives and also attending sanders at AMLA, TEEGAON and DHARAKHON Station/Yard around the clock on loco availability basis for a period of Four (04) years i.e. 1460 days alongwith fixing, fitting and erection of four sand storage cubicles". Value of Work: Rs 1,94,83,514.00 Date and time of closing of e - tender : 11/05/2020 (Monday) at 11:00 hrs. Complete details and instructions for e - tendering and online participation for the above work is available on railways website www.ireps.gov.in

TENDER NOTICE NO: NGP/TRO/SAND/AMLA-TEGO-DHQ-2020-24 dated 15/04/2020

All India Passenger Helpline: 139 NGP-12

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED

Sehnaj

General Public is hereby informed that one girl Namely: **Sehnaj, D/o: Gaffar Khan, R/o: Jhuggi No. 294, Kalander Colony, Bhalswa Dairy, Delhi** has been missing / kidnapped since **25.01.2019** at 5:00 pm from the area of P.S. Bhalswa Dairy, Delhi. In this regard a case vide FIR/DD No. 33/19 dated **26.01.2019**

has been lodged at P.S. Bhalswa Dairy, Delhi. The description of the missing girl are as under: Age: 15 years, Height: 4'6", Face: Long, Complexion: Wheatish, Built: Thin, Wearing: Blue colour suit and black colour pajami. Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the girl but no clue has come to light so far. Any person having any information or clue about this girl kindly inform to the following.

Website: <http://cbi.nic.in>

E-mail Id - cic@cbi.gov.in

Ph.: 011-24368638, 24368641

Fax No. 011-24368639

DP/160/ON/2020 Ph.: 011- 27811933, 7065036328

SEARCH FOR MISSING

Mofidunisha

General public is hereby informed that one lady namely **Mofidunisha W/o Md Firoj R/o Kureni Near Hanuman Dal Mil Narela, Delhi** Age-35 years, Height-5', Complexion-Fair, Face-Long, Built- Thin, Wearing- White Blue Suit & White Blue Salwar Relaxo Chappal in her feet has been missing since dated 02.03.2020 at 9:00 AM from the area of P.S. Narela, Delhi. In this regard a DD No. **54A Dated 13.03.2020** has been lodged at P.S. Narela, Delhi.

Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the

Timings
DELHI

THURSDAY, APR. 16
RISE 05:55 SET 18:48
RISE 02:13 SET 12:58
FRIDAY, APR. 17
RISE 05:54 SET 18:49
RISE 02:55 SET 13:53

SATURDAY, APR. 18
RISE 05:53 SET 18:49
RISE 03:31 SET 14:47

Delhi Weather	max min
Delhi City	40 24
Safdarjung	40 24
Palam	41 25

Delhi Palam Today
39°C A dry and hot weather with partly cloudy sky during the day. Night will be comfortable.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
36°C A partly cloudy to cloudy sky. Rain and thunderstorms with gusty wind may occur in parts.

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THE HINDU
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IN BRIEF

₹5,000 each to over 4,000 'needy' advocates

NEW DELHI
The Bar Council of Delhi (BCD), in an unprecedented move has decided to disbursed an amount of ₹5,000 each to 4,639 advocates who had sought financial assistance to tide over the lockdown imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19. BCD chief K.C. Mittal said the decision was taken after the Council "unanimously resolved to provide minimal financial assistance to needy advocates". For the purpose, he said, applications were invited through email till April 2 from advocates enrolled with BCD in Delhi/NCR.

Govt. partners with app for free medical consultation

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI
The Delhi government has partnered with CallDoc app to launch 24x7 free online medical consultation services in Delhi to help patients connect with doctors remotely via mobile app for their non-emergency medical needs.

"This will save the trouble of physical travel for regular OPD visits, especially to senior citizens. Over 100 doctors from Delhi who are offering their services for free via this app," Health Minister Satyendar Jain said on Wednesday.

CallDoc is a cloud-based platform created by Oncall Medicare Pvt. Ltd.. Users will be able to connect to doctors via video, audio, or chat. "Earlier, it was a paid service but we have made it free for the public now," a government official said.

Unofficial restriction on selling meat hits retailers

Some officials spreading rumours that consuming meat is linked to COVID-19, allege shopkeepers

JATIN ANAND
GREATER NOIDA
Meat retailers at one of the most prominent wholesale markets in Greater Noida complain they are reeling under a double whammy. First, it was the Navratras, when demand dips to non-existent levels; then came the inexplicable restrictions allegedly placed on sale of meat during the first installment of the nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of COVID-19.

Accusing the authorities of forcing them to shut shops, based mostly on alleged apprehension that consuming meat can lead to contraction of COVID-19, retailers said

Two deaths, 17 new COVID-19 cases

Delhi govt. adds one more area to list of containment zones, total now 56

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Two deaths and 17 new COVID-19 cases were reported in Delhi on Wednesday, taking the total number of cases to 1,578 and the toll to 32, according to a daily bulletin released by the Delhi government.

The Delhi government also added one more area to its list of containment zones, taking the total to 56. A containment zone has a stricter form of lockdown and entry and exit of people are not allowed in these areas.

Out of the total 1,578 cases reported so far, 40 people have been discharged and 1,505 are still in hospitals. A total of 16,605 samples have been tested for the virus in the city. Also, 2,517 people are in quarantine facilities and 11,987 people are under home quarantine.

Approval to use plasma enrichment technique

It will be used on trial basis to save lives

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Delhi has been given the go-ahead to use plasma enrichment technique on a trial basis to save the lives of critical COVID-19 patients, Lieutenant Governor Anil Baijal was told at a review meeting on Wednesday.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Deputy CM Manish Sisodia and Health Minister Satyendar Jain among others were part of the meeting, chaired by L-G, which was conducted via videoconference.

During the videoconference with health teams, Raj Niwas said, Mr. Baijal stressed on the requirement of a strong communication network between all hospitals and the Health Department.

The Health Department presented the patient man-

HELPLINE NUMBERS	
COMMON HELPLINE	+91-11-23978046
DELHI	— 011-22307145
GAZIABAD	— 0120 4186453
NOIDA	— 8076623612/6396776904
GURUGRAM	— 108/ 0124-2322412/ 991519296/ 7015523417/ 9654231756



A municipal worker seen spraying disinfectant at Old Seemapuri in New Delhi on Wednesday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

An order has been issued to all registered nursing homes and private hospitals that they shall not refuse treatment to the injured or

serious patients brought to them for any reason," an official statement said.

The government also said that house-to-house surveil-

Virus spread	
Total number of COVID-19 cases	1,578
Total deaths	32
New cases in the past 24 hours	17
New deaths in the past 24 hours	2

lance is being carried out in containment zones.

Meanwhile, the spokesperson of RML Hospital, where two female doctors have tested positive for COVID-19, said that the hospital was yet to ascertain how the two doctors were infected.

The Delhi government has also appointed 10 bureaucrats as nodal officers for coordination with resident commissioners of States to address the concerns of migrants in the city amid the ongoing lockdown.

A patient started hurling verbal abuses and passed vulgar comments on a female doctor. When objected upon by accompanying doctors, the patient gathered a large number of patients in the ward and started threatening the doctors and staff.

The healthcare workers had to hide in the duty room as

the patients tried to break the door open," read a letter written by the RDA to the hospital's medical director, J.C. Passey.

Calls unanswered

The RDA claimed that the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) on duty did not pick up crisis calls made by the doctors and when approached, she diverted the matter to the security officer posted at the casualty ward. "The security guard and the police officer posted a surgical block did not respond even after seeing and hearing the security alarms on the fifth floor," the RDA said in the letter.

The RDA also demanded "institutional FIR to be filed immediately against the patient concerned" and "suspension of the security offic-

er on duty at casualty".

It also demanded "letter of explanation and disciplinary action against the floor in-charges, Vivek Sachan and Azam Mohammed and the CMO on duty.

The incident happened in a COVID-19 ward and now the police deployment has been increased. The hospital has approached the police to file an FIR, but they said that the female doctor has to file a complaint first," an official at the hospital said.

The official and doctors at the hospital said that the people who allegedly abused the doctor were part of a religious congregation held in March here, who were evacuated by the government.

The police said that no FIR was filed till Wednesday evening.

Temperature crosses 40°C mark in Capital

Thundershowers likely on April 17, 18

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The maximum temperature in the city crossed the 40° Celsius mark for the first time this season on Wednesday to settle at 40.1 degrees, which is three degrees higher than the normal for this time of the year.

The minimum temperature settled at 24° Celsius, which is three degrees higher than normal.

Several parts of the national capital recorded temperatures over 40° Celsius earlier this week but it was the first time that the official reading of the Capital, given by the Safdarjung weather station, crossed the 40° Celsius mark, which is the first of the two criteria to declare a heatwave in the plains.

To fulfill the second criterion, the temperature must be 4-5 degrees higher than the normal for a particular time of the year.

However, thundershow-

ers accompanied by gusty winds has been forecast for April 17 and 18 that is likely to bring the temperature down by 2-3 degrees, said an official from the Met department.

The Met department said that there is a 40% probability that temperatures in Delhi which falls in the "core heatwave zone" in April-May-June (AMJ) period will be above normal.

The season's average mean temperatures are also likely to be warmer than normal by more than one degree Celsius in Delhi.

Arrival of monsoon

The India Meteorological Department has forecast a normal south-west monsoon season (June to September) and rainfall all over the country likely to be normal. The monsoon is likely to hit the coast of Kerala on June 1 and make its way to Delhi by June 27.

Religious event: foreign nationals to join probe

Police will start recording statements

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

More than 2,000 foreign nationals who attended a religious congregation here in March have completed their quarantine period and will be joining the investigation, said a senior police officer on Wednesday.

The nationwide lockdown has been extended till May 3 and all domestic and international flights remain suspended.

The centre here where thousands gathered for the congregation last month has turned out to be a COVID-19 hotspot not only in Delhi but the entire country.

The Delhi police on Wednesday said they have charged the chief of the centre for culpable homicide not amounting to murder.

Noida removes two hotspots, adds 7 others

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NOIDA

A residential society and a housing sector in Noida were on Wednesday removed from the list of COVID-19 hotspots in Gautam Buddha Nagar, while seven more places were added to the list, officials said.

With the latest changes, Gautam Buddha Nagar now has 27 hotspots, as defined by the district administration, which are completely sealed and any movement into or out of them except for emergencies is barred, the officials said.

So far, 80 COVID-19 cases have been detected across Noida and Greater Noida in Gautam Buddha Nagar district and 25 of these patients have been cured and discharged from hospitals, the officials added.



Retailers selling their stock clandestinely in Greater Noida.

■ JATIN ANAND

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THE HINDU
India's National Newspaper



'Curbs right medicine with painful side effects'

The poor should be priority, says ex-CM Parkash Badal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Former Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal on Wednesday said the nationwide lockdown is "the right medicine at the right time but with painful side effects which need to be attended to immediately before they become more dangerous than the disease itself".

"The poor, especially the daily wage earners, are the worst affected by these side effects and need immediate care. The other low income groups are also not far behind," he said.

The Shiromani Akali Dal leader lauded "the sense of national responsibility" shown by the people who responded wholeheartedly every single time Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked them to. "People have done their duty. Now, it is time for governments to ensure that their hardships are fully attended to," he said.

Describing poverty, unemployment and economic slowdown as three immediate, mid-term and long-term side effects of the pandemic, Mr. Badal called for a "graded strategy to fight all three".

The former Chief Minister said though the lockdown was the only option available to the government, "six weeks was a long time for the poor to survive without income, and particularly without regular supply of food".

'Efficient delivery'

"Most of us are not even familiar with the hardships faced by the poor even under normal circumstances. But now, their plight is desperate and needs to be the nation's immediate and number one priority. Everything else can wait," said Mr. Badal, adding that the government machinery must be more effective and more efficient in delivery of services.

es, especially food supplies, to the poor.

Mr. Badal said that the government must understand and respect the strong natural and human urge of the beleaguered millions to be in their ancestral homes with their families during this tough period.

"Governments must provide safe modes of travel to the migrants and others to go back to their homes, especially if the lockdown is to be extended further," said Mr. Badal. He described "containing and fighting unemployment" as the urgent long-term necessity.

The Akali leader emphasised the need for ensuring hassle-free harvesting and procurement of the wheat crop and said that the governments must ensure that no one engaged in these operations is harassed. He urged the Centre to give a "significant bonus" on wheat.

Congress targets Haryana govt.

'Cut in procurement centres exposed it'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Punjab on Wednesday reported 2 fresh cases of COVID-19, taking the total tally to 186 in the State, according to government statement.

13 deaths in the State

State health department said out of the two cases reported on April 15, one is from Patiala and the other is from Sangrur districts.

Till now, Punjab has seen 13 virus related deaths, while 27 patients have recovered.

Punjab Director General of Police Dinkar Gupta, meanwhile said 25 police officers have been selected across districts for the coveted 'Director General of Police Honour for Exemplary Seva to Society' for their exceptional community service on the frontlines of the COVID-19 operations and response in the State.



Cong. leader Randeep Singh Surjewala. ■ FILE PHOTO

curement," he said.

Referring to the two Food and Supplies Department, Haryana orders dated April 11 and April 13, Mr. Surjewala said that the earmarked 192 procurement centres were reduced to 163 just before start of the mustard procurement.

Mr. Surjewala said the government should answer the pertinent question on where farmers should go and when they would get to know about their new procurement centres.

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What are the profiles of these cases? Have you done

Continue social distancing: Odisha govt.

Any violation of restrictions by the people may result in contracting the disease'

PRAFULLA DAS
BHUBANESWAR

When extended lockdown period began on Wednesday, the Odisha government reiterated its appeal to the people to continue maintaining social distancing strictly to contain spread of COVID-19 in the State.

Thanking the people for following lockdown restrictions during the past 25 days, Mission Director of National Health Mission in the State Shalini Pandit cautioned that any violation of restrictions may result in contracting the disease.

Ms. Pandit informed that Odisha was ahead of many other States in the country in containing COVID-19. The rate of spread of the virus was less in Odisha as only 60 COVID-19 cases were detected after testing 5000-odd samples collected from all the 30 districts.

As a result of increase in testing facilities, 803 samples were tested on Tuesday, and testing would be further ramped up in the State in the coming days, she said.

Ms. Pandit further said that of the 60 patients while 18 had recovered and one

had died, the remaining 41 patients were also recovering fast.

Only two active cases were in need of proper medical care, she added.

Meanwhile, COVID-19 testing commenced at Ispat General Hospital, Rourkela and Institute of Life Sciences, Bhubaneswar on Wednesday.

COVID-19 hospital

Further, another exclusive COVID-19 hospital with 200 beds was made operational in Subarnapur district taking the number of such hospitals

to 21 in 19 districts, increasing the number of beds to 3620.

Besides, as many as 7034 temporary medical centres/camps have been completed in 6798 gram panchayats in the State with 1,63,528 beds, according to an official release.

With Bhubaneswar emerging as the hotspot in Odisha with 45 COVID-19 cases detected so far, the government has assigned senior administration officials to be in overall charges of containment and prevention of the disease in the city.

Amid lockdown, Rohtak boy marries Mexican girl

Niranjan and Danna met on a language learning app four years ago and fell in love

ASHOK KUMAR
ROHTAK

Fond of languages, he wanted to learn Spanish. She was keen on English. The two, thus, happened to meet on a language learning app four years ago and fell for each other. Transcending geographical boundaries, Niranjan, a resident of Rohtak, eventually married Danna Zavala, a Mexican woman, on April 13, amid the lockdown.

"She is very, very innocent," stressed Niranjan, 22, when asked what he liked the most about Danna, 21.

A head waiter, Niranjan joined "Hello Talk", a language app, in 2015 to learn a new language and the two ended up being partners. "She wanted to learn English.



Niranjan and Danna. ■

I was interested in Spanish. Since the app requires us to choose a learning partner, we chose each other. Gradually, we began talking and developed a liking. I spoke to her parents as well. In 2017, her family visited India and was impressed by the welcome accorded to them and the hospitality. They liked the In-

government had announced direct beneficiary transfer of Rs.1,000 per month to registered workers of labour department and unemployed daily wagers living in cities. Under these schemes, we've covered 7,843 and 6,012 persons in both categories respectively during lockdown and are continuing to add more beneficiaries. Also, ration is being provided to 25,577 beneficiaries including MGNREGS card holders for the next three months. We also have a district control room functioning 24x7 in the Collectorate where public can register any complaint through helpline number 0122-2304834.

(Home) had said DMs could change food menus and even instal TVs for entertainment. Anything on the cards in Hapur?

Presently, our six quarantine centres have 203 low-risk contacts of positive patients. These are being run in educational institutions, which we have temporarily acquired for this purpose. They are regularly inspected by me and subordinate officers to check quality of food being served, sanitation, electricity supply, supply of personal hygiene items and we speak to them to further ascertain their requirements. Also, round-the-clock magisterial and police duties have been deployed to prevent any untoward incidents.

In case of a sudden spurt in cases, is the district medical system well-equipped to deal with it in terms of isolation beds, PPEs and ventilators?

In order to gear up our healthcare system, we've converted the Community Health Centre, Hapur, into a 30-bed facility with trained medical personnel. The District Hospital has a 100-bed [CHC-level] attached facility for asymptomatic positive cases. Three private medical colleges of the district have readied 50 isolation beds, 87 ICU beds, and 698 quarantine beds. Fifty-one ventilators and 464 PPE kits, 2,408 N95 masks, 11,119 gloves, 10,744 triple-layer masks, 2,671 hand sanitiser are currently available with the health department. All health personnel and quarantined persons exposed to positive cases are being administered prophylactic dose of hydroxychloroquine phosphate. Timely supply of VTM [Viral Transport Medium] and PPE kits have to be closely monitored due to high demand. We're trying to enhance our testing capacity for better containment.

This pandemic cannot be combated without active and meaningful cooperation between government and civil society. Any person in the district who either needs food or has not got the benefits as per eligibility can approach the district administration and her grievances would be addressed swiftly.

BKU seeks economic package for farmers

'Cultivators should not remain quiet'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GHAZIABAD

The Bhartiya Kisan Union has demanded a comprehensive economic package for farmers and has appealed to peasants to celebrate the International Farmers' Day on April 17 by clicking and sharing their photographs while cleaning their farming equipment with the Prime Minister, Chief Ministers and the media on the social media at 5 p.m. "Farmers should remain at home, work in fields but they should not remain

quiet," said Rakesh Tikait, national spokesperson of BKU. "To fight the COVID-19, we demand from the government a separate package of ₹ 1.5 lakh crores for the farmers," he urged.

The pandemic, he said, had proved the weakness of the industry-oriented economy. "In these adverse conditions, farmers are feeding crores across the world. Hence governments should guarantee the safety of the interests of farmers," Mr. Tikait remarked.

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Remembering UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador

MADANJEET SINGH

(April 16, 1924 - January 6, 2013)

On his 96th Birth Anniversary

South Asia Foundation-India family Salutes the COVID-19 Warriors, who are in the forefront fighting the pandemic through sheer grit, dedication and determination

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Andhra Pradesh, Telangana to go for massive testing

Karnataka to help farm workers and migrants; Kerala mulls options to go easy on low-risk localities

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA/HYDERABAD/
BENGALURU/
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Chief Ministers of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Kerala on Wednesday announced measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 and provide relief to people in view of the Centre's fresh directives on extension of lockdown.

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy asked the officials to conduct tests on 32,000 people who had been identified in the recent door-to-door survey.

The State government has decided to double the COVID-19 testing capacity to 4,000 per day. As of now, more than 2,100 tests are being conducted per day. To increase the capacity, TrueNat TB testing equipment will be used.

Seeking details of the facilities at the quarantine centres, he directed the offi-

cials to provide ₹2,000 as financial assistance to the poor being discharged from them.

"Also, circulate the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to be followed at the quarantine centres and ensure that medical safety equipment is supplied to the frontline workers and emergency staff," the Chief Minister said.

The officials told Mr. Reddy that ₹500 was being spent on every person for their food, bed and blanket, ₹50 for sanitation, and ₹300 on transportation.

In Hyderabad, Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao announced that the State government is prepared to conduct COVID-19 tests for any number of people and extend treatment to the affected persons.

So far, 259 containment zones were created in the State based on the number of people affected by the coro-

navirus and were being monitored strictly. Serious efforts are being made to prevent the spread of COVID-19. An adequate number of test kits are ready to conduct tests for any number of people to confirm positive cases," he said.

COVID-19

Mr. Rao also made it clear that the lockdown would continue in the State in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Union government.

He said the government has taken many steps to ensure that no one suffered from hunger during the lockdown period. Cash incentives have been announced to those who deserved it.

The government has credited ₹1,500 into the account of every poor household while a scheme taken up to distribute 12 kg of rice to each

member was almost complete.

In Bengaluru, Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa discussed with his Cabinet colleagues issues related to management of supply chain in the farm sector, problems faced by farmers, rural daily wagers and migrants during the second phase of the lockdown.

Mr. Yediyurappa has constituted three ministerial teams for speedy containment of COVID-19 to help the people affected by the disease, and ensure continuation of essential services.

Central aid needed'

In Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said that Cabinet would on Thursday consider various options to ease the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions in low-risk localities from the shutdown.

Mr. Vijayan expressed concern that the Centre had

not announced its relief package for States. "Let us hope it is in the offing", he said.

The threat of the epidemic persisted. The State could not afford the virulence to outpace its health infrastructure, he said. The crucial period till April 20 required enhanced vigilance and the rigorous imposition of social distancing norms. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had flagged this in his address to the nation, he pointed out.

After April 20, the State would have more latitude in modifying its lockdown measures. However, the government would not allow public transport, gatherings of more than two people, religious and social or sporting events.

The clampdown on inter-State and inter-district travel would continue. The government had already exempted farm and plantation workers from the shutdown.

Four virus deaths in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka

Andhra Pradesh gets more cases, Kerala focus on recovery

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

VIJAYAWADA/HYDERABAD/
BENGALURU/
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/CHENNAI

Two COVID-19 deaths each in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka and a modest number of cases reported in the southern States stood in contrast to an improved situation in Kerala on Wednesday.

The pandemic gave Andhra Pradesh more worry as 23 new cases were reported on Wednesday, taking the total to 525 including 491 active cases. The death toll was 14, a bulletin from the Health Department said.

With 122 cases, Guntur district was at the top followed by Kurnool with 110. Nine districts had less than 60 cases while Srikakulam and Vizianagaram had no cases.

In Telangana the total stood at 650, of which 514 were active, 118 had been discharged and the death toll was 18.

Tough times

With the lockdown extended till May 3 and with no transport available, many labourers stranded in their workplace are setting off to their homes on foot.



Miles to go: Migrant labourers leaving for their homes in Bihar from Ongole in Andhra Pradesh. ■ K.V.S. GIRI

State	Total number of cases	Active cases	Cases discharged	Deaths
Andhra Pradesh	525	491	20	14
Karnataka	279	187	80	12
Kerala	387	167	218	2
Tamil Nadu	1,242	1,110	118	14
Telangana	650	514	118	18

On Wednesday, taking the toll to 12.

Kerala improves

Kerala highlighted its high recovery rate, with 218 out of 387 patients so far recovering from the disease. The State was progressing with COVID-19 testing and would expand facilities further, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan told the media.

In one week, the State had registered more cases of recovery than new positives. On Wednesday too, there was just one case of COVID-19, while the number of recoveries were seven.

The lone positive case was from Kannur, a contact of an imported case. So far, the State has reported 387 cases, of which 167 were under treatment. Kerala had tested 16,475 persons of whom, 16,002 were negative.

Fatal Karnataka cases
Two more COVID-19 deaths were reported in Karnataka on the third consecutive day

ter C. Vijayabaskar said a post-graduate doctor was among the 38 persons, who tested positive for COVID-19. Of the remaining, 34 patients were connected to the single source event, while three had contact history.

A 47-year-old man was admitted to the Government Stanley Medical College Hospital with severe acute respiratory illness (SARI). His sample was among 60 samples lifted from patients hospitalised with SARI, and returned positive for COVID-19. He died on Wednesday. Another patient, a 59-year-old man, admitted to a private hospital also died.

In one week, Tamil Nadu recorded 38 new cases of COVID-19, taking the total tally to 1,242. Two patients aged 47 and 59 years died in the State, while 37 more patients were discharged after treatment. Health Minis-

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In one week, Tamil Nadu recorded 38 new cases of COVID-19, taking the total tally to 1,242. Two patients aged 47 and 59 years died in the State, while 37 more patients were discharged after treatment. Health Minis-

38 new cases in T.N.

Two men died in Tamil Nadu, and the State recorded 38 new cases, 34 from a single source.

On Wednesday, Tamil Nadu recorded 38 new cases of COVID-19, taking the total tally to 1,242. Two patients aged 47 and 59 years died in the State, while 37 more patients were discharged after treatment. Health Minis-

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Why don't Any

Planes fly over Tibet

1:31 / 13:37

Lockdown grounds Maoists in forests

They're unable to go to Maharashtra

S. HARPAL SINGH
ADILABAD

The lockdown has impacted Maoists too. A group is reported to be stranded in the forests of the erstwhile composite Adilabad district as it is unable to return to neighbouring Maharashtra because of increased vigil on the inter-State borders due to the COVID-19 epidemic.

The Communist Party of India (Maoist) at Gadchiroli in Maharashtra and beyond in the Dandakaranya region is in the throes of a churning as local cadres and leaders are opposing the hegemony of seniors from Telangana. To prove the banned organisation's existence in north Telangana, the ageing leadership sent some nine to 12 armed cadres into old unit-Adilabad.

Police in Kumram Bheem Asifabad and Mancherial districts had sounded an alert as early as March 13,

much before the lockdown. The naxalites apparently moved into the forests of Tiriyani, Kawal, Kademp-Khanapur and Sirikonda, aware that the situation outside the jungles had changed.

Focused on territory growth, Maoist campaigner Mylarapu Adelulu alias Bhaskar, from old Adilabad district, had led the group of naxalites but left soon. The deployed group failed to impress villagers inside the forests, official sources said.

Due to the lockdown, the armed outlaws are finding it hard to enter the tribal habitations for food and shelter as the entrances to villages have been sealed.

"We are going ahead with area domination operations in the forests," said Adilabad Superintendent of Police Vishnu S. Warrier, who is also the in-charge SP of KB Asifabad district.

Padmarajan was charged under IPC Section 376 (F) (1) (repeated rape) and Section 5(F), read with (I)(3) with Section 6 of the POCSO Act. Police had come under flak for delay in arresting him.

Absconding teacher held in POCSO case

STAFF REPORTER
KANNUR

The Kerala police on Wednesday arrested a schoolteacher from Vilakkottur in the district on the charge of sexually abusing a minor student.

K. Padmarajan, alias Pappan, who is also a local Bharatiya Janata Party leader, was absconding after a case under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act was filed against him on the charge of sexually abusing a Class IV student of a school at Palathayi.

The police booked the teacher based on a report from ChildLine and a complaint filed by the child's relatives on March 18.

Padmarajan was charged under IPC Section 376 (F) (1) (repeated rape) and Section 5(F), read with (I)(3) with Section 6 of the POCSO Act. Police had come under flak for delay in arresting him.

Kerala CM dismisses charges on Sprinklr deal

'Devious minds trying to delude public'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Wednesday dismissed the Congress-led Opposition's charges of corruption against the government's deal with U.S.-based firm Sprinklr to collate and analyse the health data collected by field workers from nearly 1.75 lakh persons under surveillance for COVID-19 symptoms.

Mr. Vijayan said the dire epidemic situation had constrained the government to harness the latest IT solution to swiftly analyse health data. Sprinklr, headed by non-resident Keralite Ragi Thomas, had offered to provide its services free from March to September.

The government has a proprietary right to the personal medical information volunteered by the citizens. It had ensured the confidentiality of the data even as it

contracted the firm, the Chief Minister said.

The government had tasked CDIT with creating a cloud environment to store the data and procure the latest tools to crunch the information. Servers in the country would store the data. The government would keep the public informed about its use, he said.

Mr. Vijayan said certain "devious minds" were attempting to delude the public by alleging that the government had opened the door for the U.S.-firm to sell the data at a massive profit to players in the private pharmaceutical and private health care sector.

He clarified that Sprinklr was not a blacklisted firm. It was fighting charges of data theft in a U.S. court. Such cases were usual for firms like Sprinklr. Even Google and Microsoft faced such litigations.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



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

Forecast for Thursday: Thunderstorm accompanied by lightning, hail and squall very likely at isolated places over Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and West Bengal and Sikkim.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	—	34.7	24.8	Kozhikode	—	37.0	28.2
Ahmedabad	05	41.4	28.4	Kurnool	—	34.6	26.4
Aizawl	—	28.9	—	Lucknow	—	37.1	24.3
Altahabad	—	42.9	27.0	Madurai	—	38.7	26.7
Bengaluru	—	34.6	20.8	Mangaluru	—	36.6	27.5
Bhopal	—	39.8	24.6	Mysuru	—	35.1	23.3
Bhubaneswar	—	41.2	26.5	New Delhi	—	40.6	24.8
Chandigarh	—	37.4	24.7	Patna	0.2	33.4	23.3



Stress test

The pandemic battle will not end soon, but normalcy will have to be restored in phases

The revised protocol for the extended period of lockdown that is now scheduled to end on May 3 indicates its staggered rollback starting from April 20. A partial reopening of the economy is being proposed, but a lot will depend on the extent of success in containing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in particular areas. State and local administrations could continue with a tighter level of control on economic and social activities if required, according to the Centre's guidelines announced on Wednesday. It is now clear that the battle against the pandemic will be drawn out, and normalcy in life will have to wait until a vaccine or a treatment line is found. It is impossible to keep the economy shut and people at home indefinitely. The proposed relaxations are, hence, a step forward. Industries outside city limits, certain types of construction both in rural and urban areas, segments of the service sector, and manufacturing partially will reopen after April 20. Small service providers, such as electricians, plumbers, IT repair, motor mechanics and carpenters, will be allowed to operate, which will help them and those who need to hire them. It will be a good idea to add tailors to that list, an essential service now that masks are mandatory in public and workplaces.

New measures also include punishment for spitting and a ban on tobacco and gutkha at workplaces. Those violating the quarantine could face up to six months in jail. Coercive measures fall heavily on the poor, and the government's sledgehammer strategy for containment is pushing millions into a corner. Hungry and desperate migrants have rioted in several parts of the country. A more comprehensive strategy must involve helping people stay at home, incentives to employers to pay salaries, and expansion of welfare support for the most vulnerable. MGNREGA, which is meant to guarantee a minimum income to the poorest in situations of distress such as this, has completely collapsed. The programme will be allowed to restart now, but there must be proactive efforts to expand it. Another area in need of urgent attention of governments is the breakdown of general health care in many parts of the country, claiming several lives and leaving far too many begging for treatment. States such as Kerala and Rajasthan have involved local bodies and community organisations to provide food, medicine and other essential items to people at their locations, leading to near total compliance of lockdown guidelines. Going into the future, getting the country back on track will require mass education on mask use, hand hygiene and physical distancing to change social behaviour. The Centre must take the initiative to ensure that best practices from successful States are adopted across the country.

Disastrous decision

WHO must not be victimised for Trump's own failures in battling the virus

At a time when the World Health Organization has been seeking at least \$675 million additional funding for critical response efforts in countries most in need during the pandemic, U.S. President Trump has done the unthinkable – halting funding to WHO while a review is conducted to assess its "role in severely mismanaging and covering up the spread of coronavirus" and for "failing to adequately obtain, vet, and share information in a timely and transparent fashion". The decision comes a week after he first threatened to put funding on hold for the global health body. At over \$500 million, the U.S. is WHO's biggest contributor; America is also the worst affected country – over 0.6 million cases and nearly 26,000 deaths. But halting funding at a crucial time will not only impact the functioning of the global body but also hurt humanity. Many low and middle-income countries that look up to WHO for guidance and advice, and even for essentials such as testing kits and masks, will be badly hit for no fault of theirs. With a little over two million cases and over 1,27,000 deaths globally, the pandemic has been unprecedented in scale. When solidarity and unmitigated support from every member-state is necessary to win the war against the virus, withholding funding will not be in the best interest of any country, the U.S. included. Failures due to oversight or other reasons, by WHO or member-states can always be looked into but not in the midst of a pandemic.

Contrary to what Mr. Trump claims, WHO cannot independently investigate but can only rely on individual member-states to share information. There has not been one instance when it has been found "covering up" the epidemic in China. Rather, it has been continuously urging countries to aggressively test people exhibiting symptoms and trace, quarantine and test contacts to contain the spread. It repeatedly spoke of the window of opportunity, and once warned that it is narrowing. Historically, WHO has been against travel and trade restrictions against countries experiencing outbreaks, and its position was no different when, in January, it declared COVID-19 a public health emergency of international concern. But it did support China's large-scale mitigation measures to contain the virus spread. Faulting WHO for imaginary failings cannot help Mr. Trump wash his hands of many administrative failures in containing the epidemic. He has been blaming everyone else for his shortcomings in dealing with COVID-19. But moving beyond blaming and actually withholding WHO funding can have disastrous outcomes. If indeed he fervently believes that the U.S. has been misled, it is China that he must hold responsible for a delayed alert. Previously, he praised both China and WHO. Obviously, the change in line is linked to a desperate bid to hide his own failures.

Cease the distractions, seize the moment

The crisis provides several opportunities for real parliamentary change; a reduction in the pay of MPs is only symbolic



M.R. MADHAVAN

The government has issued two ordinances, Parliament has modified its rules to reduce the salary and allowances of Members of Parliament and Ministers, and the Union Cabinet has decided to cancel the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) for two years. These measures are purportedly to save costs as the nation tackles the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cosmetic cuts

The cuts in salaries and allowances are a distraction from the real issue: are our parliamentarians performing their constitutional roles during the crisis? Let us quickly consider the impact of the cuts. The 30% cut in the ₹1 lakh per month salary and the ₹27,000 cut in office and constituency allowances amount to savings of less than ₹5 crore per month. The cut in sumptuary allowances for Ministers results in a total savings of ₹25,000 per month; yes, you read that right. These amounts are immaterial for the Central government with an average monthly budget of ₹2.5-lakh crore. Interestingly, the United Kingdom has increased the allowance for Members of Parliament by £10,000 to help them manage extra costs of working from home.

During the crisis, Members of Parliament should be deliberating on the actions and policies to be taken to manage the epidemic,

and the costs and consequences of various alternatives. They should also be trying to figure out ways to have committee meetings and even the meetings of the full House through alternate mechanisms such as video-conferencing. For example, while the U.K. has also implemented a lockdown, its Parliament is connecting all Members through video-conferencing (by April 15) so that the session can resume virtually on April 21 after the Easter break. The British Parliament has created a page on its website tracking all government orders related to the pandemic, and its Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee is scrutinising the orders. Other Parliaments are also working to fulfil their role as oversight bodies. The New Zealand Parliament has formed an Epidemic Response Committee that will examine the government's management of the epidemic. This committee and other select committees are meeting through video-conference.

Parliament absent

The Indian Parliament adjourned on March 23, the day after the janta curfew, in view of the pandemic. In the previous week, even as the crisis was unfolding, Parliament was debating the establishment of a Sanskrit University and an Ayurveda institute, and that of regulatory boards for aircraft, Indian Systems of Medicine and Homoeopathy. The Finance Bill was passed without any discussion on the last day. There was no discussion on the possible implications of the coronavirus epidemic and policy measures to tackle it – this was the week when the Prime Minister made the first televised speech to the nation on the issue.



FILE PHOTO/V. KRISHNAN

Remarkably, there was no recognition of the pressures on the Budget when it was passed that week.

Since then, Parliament has not held committee meetings. There have been no official statements regarding the possibility of holding these through video-conference. Thus, the government's actions are going unchecked. In brief, Parliament has abdicated its role as the elected body that checks the work of government on behalf of citizens. Instead, we get the symbolic gesture of reductions in pay and allowances.

Good move on MPLADS

The cancellation of MPLADS for two years, on the other hand, is a welcome move. This scheme should not be resumed after the crisis. In financial terms, there are savings of nearly ₹4,000 crore per year. While this is not insignificant, the larger benefit is that this will help Members of Parliament focus on their roles as national legislators. MPLADS creates several issues of accountability and jurisdiction. It impinges on separation of powers, both horizontally across different organs of state, and vertically across different levels of government.

Other than making laws, Members of Parliament have two key duties. They sanction the size and allocation of the government bud-

get. They also hold the government accountable for its work, including that of spending funds appropriately. MPLADS brings in a conflict in both these roles. It asks them to identify and get specific projects executed rather than to focus on policy measures to achieve the same results and ensure that the government is implementing those policies. It distracts them from allocating and monitoring the Union Budget of ₹30-lakh crore to micro-managing the constituency fund of ₹5 crore. And since the financial audit of MPLADS is done by the Comptroller and Auditor-General and further examined by the Public Accounts Committee consisting of Members of Parliament, it adds another layer of conflict.

MPLADS is typically spent on capital works at the local level such as a bus stop, hand pumps, school rooms, etc. These fall within the domain of the panchayats and municipalities. Members of these bodies are elected to perform an executive role. MPLADS transforms the Member of Parliament from a legislator looking at national issues to an executive solving hyper-local problems. After all, if Members of Parliament spend a large part of their time on work that should be done by local-level government, how would they have time to inform themselves while making national laws and checking the work of the Central government?

Scope for reform

The current crisis provides several opportunities for reform. For example, Parliament should explore how technology can be used to improve its efficiency. Much of the daily paper work such as filing

questions and other interventions have been digitised while protocols and infrastructure may be needed if meetings have to be held through secure video-conferencing.

Other issues such as pay and allowances for Members of Parliament need to be discussed. The Members of Parliament should be provided with office space and research staff. They should be compensated in line with their duties as national legislators. For example, the pay (₹1 lakh per month) and allowances (₹1.3 lakh per month) pale in comparison to that of U.S. Senators (pay \$174,000 per annum plus allowances over \$3 million per annum). At the same time, hidden perks such as housing in central Delhi must be made transparent – few democracies provide housing for legislators or civil servants; they are paid well and expected to find housing on their own.

We need public debates on issues that impact the working of our legislatures. We need to ensure that we have the right compensation structures to attract the best people to make our laws and policies. We also need to hold them accountable for their work as national legislators, i.e., the positions they took on various issues and how they ensured the government remained accountable for its actions. Distractions such as MPLADS must be done away with. After all, a representative democracy functions only as well as its legislatures do. And our freedoms are safe only if we have a robust legislature and a fiercely independent judiciary.

M.R. Madhavan is President of PRS Legislative Research, New Delhi

Getting the containment strategy in India right

An effective response must consider not only pathogen behaviour but also socioeconomic and cultural characteristics



GEORGE THOMAS

The novel coronavirus infection is extremely contagious and spreads fast through respiratory droplets and contaminated surfaces. Although a very high proportion of infected individuals (around 85%) have mild symptoms, the sheer number of people infected means that large numbers become seriously ill. Social distancing and frequent handwashing were advised to slow the spread. Countries with well-established social security systems used lockdowns as a desperate measure.

Unplanned step

In India, the lockdown was sudden and not accompanied by effective social security measures. Migrant workers, in their millions, crowded into any available means of transport to return to their homes. No social distancing was possible. Many lakhs walked long distances to return home with little food and water. The morbidity and mortality that this has caused can only be guessed. It is likely that the virus has been carried to the hinterland which was largely protected since

the virus was brought into India by air travellers. The concept that the social situation forms an integral part of disease, most commonly attributed to the German pathologist Rudolf Virchow, came into prominence once again after the Second World War. Response to a pandemic has some worldwide elements, but it also has elements particular to countries. An effective response in India must consider not only the behaviour of the pathogen but also the socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of the country. Geoffrey Rose, a pioneer in preventive medicine wrote: "The primary determinants of disease are mainly economic and social, and therefore its remedies must also be economic and social. Medicine and politics cannot and should not be kept apart."

The pathogen in the present epidemic was identified very quickly. Only supportive treatment is available for the seriously ill. A vaccine will be ready only after the present crisis is over. India does not have the capacity to manage a large number of very sick patients simultaneously and cannot ramp up resources significantly in the short time available. Besides infrastructure, critical-care medicine requires a large number of highly skilled health-care workers. We simply do not have the numbers.

The Indian Council of Medical Research performed surveillance of Severe Acute Respiratory Illness at 41 sentinel sites between February 15 and March 19. Diagnostic kits and laboratories equipped to perform the Reverse Transcriptase-Polymerase Chain Reaction test were few. This limitation has hampered efforts to get a good estimate of numbers infected in India. The extent of testing required for better estimates may never be done considering the resources required. One of the principles of screening laid down by Wilson and Jungner over 50 years ago is that the cost of case-finding (including diagnosis and treatment of patients diagnosed) should be economically balanced in relation to possible expenditure on medical care as a whole.

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The Indian Council of Medical



AP

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India's poor are vulnerable

Imposing a lockdown as a means of enforcing social distancing ignores the reality that the poor have no option but to live in densely packed slums and tenements. Personal hygiene in the form of frequent handwashing is impossible in their present circumstances.

The World Bank estimates that there are over 650 million poor people in India (living on less than \$3.20). The current policy of geographical containment may protect the rich and the middle-class, but it ensures rapid spread of the infection among the poor because they have no chance of maintaining the recommended six feet distance.

Learning from success

South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Japan have been successful in containing the disease. South Korea relied on active, free and massive screening, closing schools and recommending remote working. Nearly 20,000 tests are done every day. There is widespread use of masks and sanitisers. No lockdown was imposed. In Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan, surveillance systems identified potential cases and their contacts. Diagnostic tests were developed early, and laboratory testing capacity was increased. In all these countries, costs are covered by the government. Countries which imposed lockdowns have very strong social security systems. In India, the lockdown has caused severe suffering among the poor, especially migrant workers, and has been unsuccessful in the primary objective of enforcing social distancing. The reports that over an estimated two lakh migrants returned to Uttar

Pradesh after the lockdown is only the most extreme facet of the problem. Without massive support from the government, chiefly in providing adequate shelter and food to all those who need it, social distancing is impossible. At present, the burdens of quarantine, lockdown and social distancing have been left to individuals. Worse still, in many rural areas and towns, governments have shut down small private clinics. All government health staff are now concentrated on COVID-19. Important primary health-care services including maternal and child health, immunisations, deliveries and tuberculosis care are on hold. It amounts to abandoning the poor to their fates.

The lockdown has imposed tremendous economic hardship on the poor, without any important benefit as they cannot practise social distancing or proper personal hygiene. If the Central government is serious about the containment strategy proposed by the Ministry of Health and saving lives irrespective of social class, it must provide economic and social resources on a massive scale. It has revealed no such plan. States and individuals cannot handle this crisis on their own. Exhortations to help oneself sound cruel when people have no means to do so.

Dr. George Thomas is an orthopaedic surgeon at St. Isabel's Hospital, Chennai

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.

Rumour mill

The public mind that is hostage to fear and anxiety is fertile ground for propagating rumours and conspiracy theories (Editorial page, "Halting the march of rumours", April 15). It is unfortunate that the large number of COVID-19 cases associated with the Tablighi Jamaat conclave in Delhi has fuelled the circulation of Islamophobic narratives. It is unfair to blame the entire community for the reckless behaviour of a few religious zealots who endangered public safety. At the same time, the fight against toxic propaganda should be a collective exercise, with society and the maligned community working together to counter the propagation of malicious and hateful falsehoods. The unrepentant behaviour of the organisers and the alleged crass behaviour of some of the delegates towards health workers also exacerbated public anger.

Community leaders and intellectuals failed to condemn the Tablighi Jamaat in unequivocal terms.

An overly defensive stance hardly helps to clear the fog of suspicion and mistrust.

V.N. MUKUNDARAJAN,
Thiruvananthapuram

■ The point about building trust with 'critical insiders' in a community to slow the spread of harmful rumours is well taken. There exists a successful and historical example of this being tried in another divided society: British Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel's institution of the Maynooth Grant in 1845 – given by the British government to a Catholic seminary in Ireland to improve relations between the Protestant establishment at Westminster and the majority-Catholic Irish population. Though controversial, it is credited with improving communal relations and dampening separatist fervour for some

time. Such outreach from the majority to minority communities might go a long way in restoring a measure of national cohesion.

JAY VINAYAK OJHA,
Patna

■ Sadly, Muslims are not the only ones being affected. People from northeast India too are facing racial discrimination. Rumours backed by fake pictures on social media that the novel coronavirus can be transmitted from poultry meat have left poultry farmers in distress. Borderline racist conspiracy theories and memes against the Chinese are flooding social media. There is even a Wikipedia article, "List of incidents of xenophobia and racism related to the 2019–20 coronavirus pandemic". A polarised nation is already a fertile ground for rumours. Unfortunately, our political leadership has remained suspiciously silent.

DEVAHISH KHANAYAT,
Haldwani, Uttarakhand

They show the way

The boy from Mizoram, the girl in grade 6 from Hyderabad and the pensioner college lecturer from West Bengal have all been able to translate their compassion into action to help the needy during the pandemic (Inside pages, "Girl raises ₹6.2 lakh for the needy", April 15). But those in charge in the government, and with vast resources at their disposal, feel satisfied and proud after sermonising from the pulpit. Some in the Opposition have raised the issue of tiding over the crisis at the grass-root level, one of the ideas being suspending construction of a new building for Parliament. However, it is odd that the tender will be called for soon after the lockdown is lifted. It is unlikely that the incumbent Indian government and similar regimes elsewhere will change their ways even after the pandemic subsides. A lesson from the pandemic is the need to follow the

essentials of people-oriented governance.

JAYARAMAN N.,
Chennai

No relief

It is outrageous that the rights activists, Anand Teltumbde and Gautam Navlakha, had to surrender before the NIA (Page 1, "Teltumbde, Navlakha surrender to NIA", April 15). This only points to vengeance and political vendetta when it comes to voices of dissent. It is disappointing that the judiciary has not made an intervention.

S.V. VENUGOPALAN,
Chennai

Coverage, on radio

Unfortunately, when the quartet was at its peak in the 1970s, for thousands of cricket lovers in this part of India, television was still a distant dream ('Sport' page, "Music from the string quartet that raised the level of Indian cricket", April 14). One had to depend entirely

on radio commentators to conjure up the scene. However, the commentary broadcast by All India Radio was not always of a high standard unless it happened to be someone like the legendary A.F.S. Talyarkhan, or Bobby Talyar Khan. Other commentators were unable to provide a nuanced account of the game, not to speak of an analysis of the finer points of the game. It was the commentary in the regional languages which was entertaining as the commentators were often unaware of even the fielding positions. There were often two commentators for the regional language show and their errors provided much humour. However, it was the hysteria generated by India's historic World Cup victory in 1983 that dramatically changed how one viewed and understood cricket. And relief from AIR.

M. JAMEEL AHMED,
Mysuru

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End the harassment of farmers now

Exemptions granted to farming and related activities during the lockdown must be followed in practice



COLIN GONSALES

Drafting orders without caring for implementation seems to be the nature of governance during the period of lockdown. An order dated March 28 said all agricultural, horticultural activities and those relating to harvesting, transportation, procurement, mandis, farming operations and the like are exempted from the lockdown. The order was made so that "harvesting would continue uninterrupted." The exempted categories included "agencies engaged in procurement of agriculture products, including MSP operations; mandis; farmers and farm workers in the field; custom hiring centres related to farm machinery; manufacturing and packaging units of fertilizers, pesticides and seeds; and intra- and inter-state movement of harvesting and sowing-related machines."

The order went on to say that "this decision has been taken with a view to facilitate unhindered activities related to agriculture and farming so as to ensure essential supplies and that farmers and common people do not face any difficulty."

In a press release on March 27, the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordinating Committee (AIKSCC), in a representation to the government, had asked the police not to stop peasants and said "there should be no harassment and violence against peasants, farmers, vendors and transporters." The committee demanded that all harvested crops, milk, poultry, meat and eggs should be procured and that regulated markets should operate at requisite strength, failing which, the panel feared, village-level procurement and supply "will rot and ruin the producer farmers."

Harvesting winter crops
Similarly, on April 1, the AIKSCC, in its letter to the Chief Minister of Punjab, warned that "these are the peak days of harvesting winter crops, wheat, barley, pulses and seeds; but all the farmers/workers are shut behind the doors. Sir, who will harvest the crops? What will be the fate of ve-



REUTERS

getables/fruit growers particularly the high value perishable crops, these can hardly be stored. With no means to transport, god knows what will be their fate. Imagine the fate of milk producers and of poultry. The unfortunate peasants are forced to spill milk in the canals. The poultry farmers don't know what to do with their products. The landless labourers and their families have absolutely no work. Who will provide them food on their plate?"

In Madhya Pradesh, the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) wrote to the Chief Secretary that despite the lifting of the lockdown, "all mandis at district level are closed," and complained that when farmers sent *tarbooz* (water melons), oranges and grapes to the mandis, the gates were closed and they had to return on foot. Hence, the traders were refusing to come to the fields to collect their produce. The NBA found it ironic that migrant labourers were facing starvation while agricultural and horticultural produce was rotting in the fields.

The All India Kisan Mazdoor Sabha (AIKMS), in its letter dated April 4, to the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, complained that "farmers have suffered losses in their mustard crop which could not be harvested in time and the local police have stopped the peasants from reaching their fields and harvesting and transporting the crop." It warned that "we are looking at very severe crisis in the coming days if this attitude continues. It will lead to a major crisis in food availability and may result in large numbers of hunger deaths." The panel pointed out that five lakh migrant la-

bours from Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh work in Punjab. However, many of them ran away due to the police.

In Odisha, the panel pointed out that MGNREGA has completely stopped, forcing lakhs of rural workers into distress. "Everything can wait" it warned, "but not farming as a season lost means a year is lost."

Assaults on forest dwellers

Equally ominous are the assaults on tribals and non-tribal forest dwellers by the police and officials in all the tribal areas of the country. Forest produce is by nature inherently seasonal. Officials have interfered with the collection of non-timber forest produce, as allowed by the Forest Rights Act, causing hunger and distress to millions of tribals.

Overzealous policemen and officials have lathi-charged farm workers and interfered with the movement of agricultural produce to the mandis. If harvesting is interrupted, if transportation of produce is halted on account of vehicles with passes not being available, if farmers and farm workers are lathi-charged on their way to work and if the mandis do not operate at full strength, there could be an unprecedented food crisis.

The judiciary must carefully review its approach of meekly following the executive while the latter makes blunder after blunder. The lockdown was introduced irrationally without ensuring the continuation of provisions statutorily mandated under the National Food Security Act, 2013. Consequently, the anganwadis were closed in panic and supplementary nutrition for children below 6 years and for pregnant women,

lactating mothers and adolescent girls came to an immediate stop. Chaos continued until the government issued an order, dated March 30, acknowledging "that in many States/UTs [Union Territories], the anganwadi centres are closed". Hurriedly, patchwork activities began, which resulted in provision of take-home rations, instead of hot, cooked meals.

Tens of thousands of those below the poverty line suffered terribly. Similarly, the mid-day meal, which reaches millions of school-going students, was abruptly discontinued. The provision of ₹6,000 to every pregnant woman and lactating mother, mandated under the Maternity Benefit Act, also virtually came to an end. Imperial in its announcement and in its execution, the lockdown caused untold pain to the poor.

A hastily imposed lockdown

This is not to say that some form of a lockdown was unnecessary; however, the harshness and arbitrariness and lack of thought and preparation in its execution was certainly avoidable. It is typical of governments run dictatorially and with lack of transparency that when mistakes are made, they turn out to be gigantic and irreversible. Further, to stifle criticism, we are now told by no less than the Solicitor General that it is not in public interest to highlight the human suffering and that the government's point of view should be accepted without demur because the crisis demands that everyone falls in line. What the learned law officer fails to understand is that Indians may be poor, and sometimes gullible, but they are not sheep to always fall in line with a military-like command. They have reserves of democratic resistance that will in the coming months perhaps surprise this government.

Starvation deaths on account of hunger and merciless police beatings have been reported from across the country. The judiciary must now shift track. For some time, the courts have deferred to the government in view of the unprecedented crisis. But now, with the crisis spreading to agriculture, the judiciary must abandon this hands-off approach.

Colin Gonsalves is a senior advocate at the Supreme Court

Harmonising with nature

We need to shed some of the chutzpah we seem to have acquired with achievements in science and technology



V. SUMANTRAN

after the pandemic? To start with, it would help to shed some of the chutzpah that we have allowed ourselves to adopt through the 20th century – that we can develop technologies to overcome nature and re-shape our environment. There is no doubt progress in science and technology has served humanity well over centuries and they will continue to be called upon to serve society for centuries to come. What we will need, however, is an outlook that seeks to harness our knowledge of science to work in harmony with nature, rather than attempt to bulldoze it. Is this merely a romantic theory with limited practical use? Not really.

NASA's Voyager mission to explore the edge of the solar system would have been impossible with even the most powerful rockets, without leveraging the slingshot manoeuvre using the gravitational fields of planets along the way. The growing appeal of renewable power generation stems from the fact that it can harness nature without damaging it. And most doctors treating COVID-19 patients vouch for the role of healthy living and robust immune systems as the best bet, so far, to protect ourselves. Wellness advocates have a number of useful suggestions on how we may fortify our natural immunity, even as we await the development and certification of vaccines. The approach suggested is certainly not novel. When Rachel Carson advocated use of microbes to combat agricultural pests instead of harsh chemical compounds like DDT, she was at the vanguard of our growing interest in bio-control. E.F. Schumacher's book, *Small is Beautiful – A Study of Economics as if People Mattered*, gained fame during the energy crisis, but quickly faded, as if that thesis did not matter anymore. Actually, in a world where the digital economy has unleashed the power for Davids to take on Goliaths, these ideas are even more relevant.

In all of this, nature seems to expect of us a certain economy of consumption and gentleness of impact. A human society that is sympathetic to and in harmony with our environment, and where humans listen to and nurture their selves, may be an enduring recipe for a safer future. India has a long heritage of nurturing one's inner self – yoga and meditation have been adopted globally as exercises for a more robust constitution. India also has a long tradition of dealing with frugality as a virtue and can easily relate to what in ancient Greece was revered as *gaia* – dealing with the earth as our mother. These can be timeless lessons as human society seeks closer harmony with nature, to take us on to a safer trajectory in a post COVID-19 world.

V. Sumantran is the Chairman of Celeris Technologies

In India's response, a communications failure

The messaging lacks transparency or empathy

CHAPAL MEHRA

As India grapples with COVID-19, a widely prevalent belief is that the crisis is purely driven by the disease. However, the truth is that confused, and often disempowering communication, has contributed equally to our present predicament.

That India has no crisis communication strategy was evident from the government's request to the Supreme Court to curb the media from publishing or broadcasting news on the pandemic, without checking facts with them. The question then arose, was the government giving the media or the people enough information? This is a time when the government needs to be forthcoming and transparent in its communications. It should also use the media as an ally to broadcast its messages and, at the same time, take steps to pull down fake, misleading and alarmist news. Every daily briefing should be used as an opportunity for engagement, not circumvention. The more information the government gives, the less speculation and rumours will circulate. The government has done the exact opposite. It has not created even a single central repository of public information and communication that speaks credibly, directly and continuously to people. As a result, there was and remains confusion, on the transmission data and facts; on the measures to self-protect; and most importantly, on the support, if any, the government is going to offer.

Media engagement strategy

The government should also have begun a media engagement strategy, along with a multilingual, information campaign on every aspect of the crisis. The response should have been communicated in painstaking detail to the implementers, the media and the public.

During times of crisis, the government has to over-communicate. It, however, chose to under-communicate. Those in charge should realise that poorly communicated or insuffi-



cient information directly impacts disease control. It results in stigma, fear and poor health-seeking behaviour, and increases vulnerability. It also causes lapsided reporting, theorising and fake news. In fact, during health crises, populations absorb health information better if it is communicated frequently, and from reliable sources. This is where our communications response is failing.

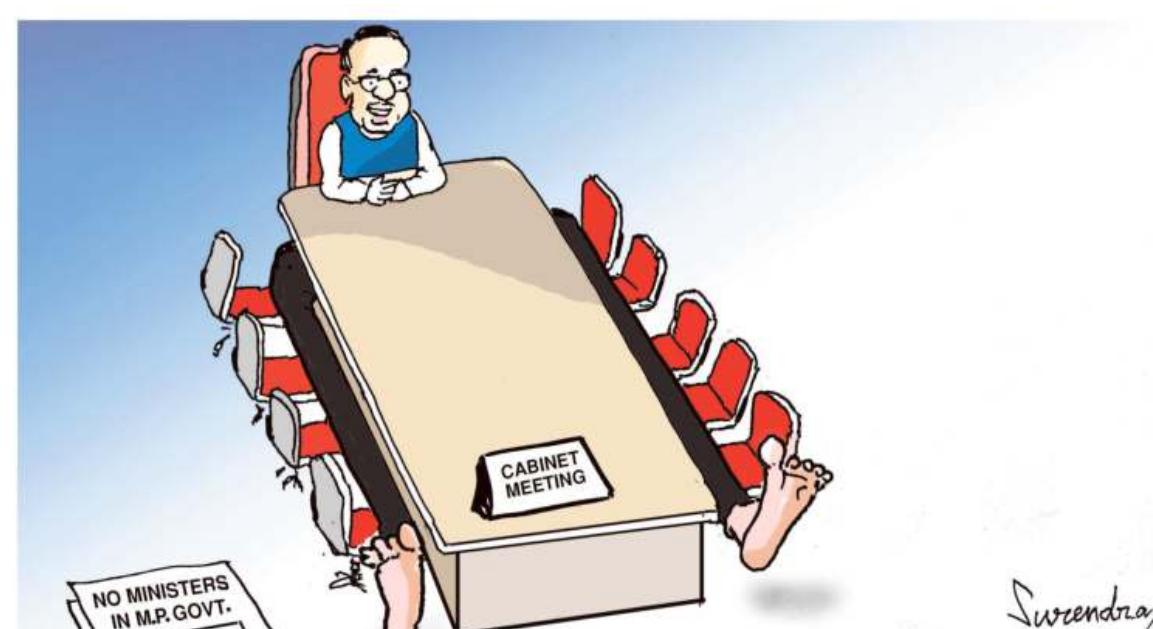
Also, missing in India's approach is empathy and efforts to improve social cohesion and connectedness. The media could be a critical ally here. Already, certain communities have become the object of blame. If India continues with this approach, all it will be left with is an atmosphere which makes everyone look out for themselves. Finally, the government should stop underestimating the audience. It doesn't seem to realise that

India's people are more vulnerable to incorrect information if the government and the media do not give them the right information first.

It's a mystery as to how with such a large and vibrant media landscape, the government wants to control information and, at the same time, give out unimaginative and disempowering messages. For a young media-centric country gripped by crisis, this strategy is all wrong. Underlying these actions is a belief that the media should report what the government wants them to and the people should trust and follow everything it says. All this even as the government keeps giving limited information.

It is still not too late. The government needs to revise its media and communications strategy around the COVID-19 crisis to build an atmosphere of trust, social cohesion and purpose – where the media and people are participants. It needs to be transparent, open about its limitations and accept criticism. If the government wants to control the crisis, it needs to stop controlling the media or patronising the public.

Chapal Mehra is a writer based in Delhi



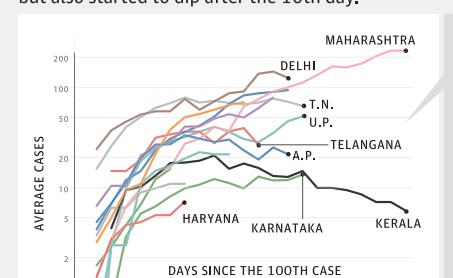
DATA POINT

Kerala flattens curve, but must maintain vigil

Kerala had the most number of COVID-19 cases 20 days back but reported only one new positive case on Wednesday. With high testing and low fatality rates, Kerala's numbers show promise but some concerns remain. Recent cases are still "imported" from outside India, even though international travel halted on March 22. **By The Hindu Data Team**

SIGNS OF RECOVERY

Graph shows the seven-day rolling average of COVID-19 cases since the 100th case in States. Kerala's curve not only flattened, but also started to dip after the 10th day.



RECOVERY TIME | Table lists days taken by the first 47 patients* to recover after hospitalisation. Close to 85% of patients recovered within 15 days of hospitalisation

Days spent in hospital	% of discharges
5 to 10	45%
10 to 15	40%
15 to 20	4%
20 to 25	11%

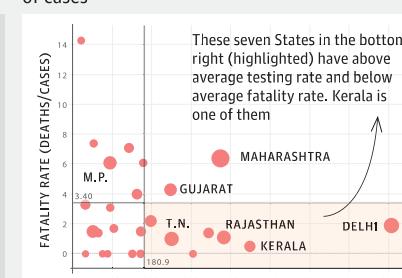
A NEW CONCERN | Table lists the patient's date of arrival in India, date of confirmation as COVID-19 positive for select "imported" cases in Kerala, and the days in between. In some patients' cases, it took 26 days to be identified. Lately, the no. of such delayed confirmations have increased

Arrival	Confirmed	Days
Mar 22	Apr 8	17
Mar 21	Apr 7	17
Mar 21	Apr 7	17
Mar 21	Apr 14	24
Mar 21	Apr 14	24
Mar 21	Apr 14	24
Mar 18	Apr 11	24
Mar 17	Apr 11	25
Mar 19	Apr 9	21
Mar 19	Apr 14	26
Mar 22	Apr 13	22
Mar 17	Apr 12	26

* This does not include the first three Wuhan returnees as the data for them is not accurate. Source: Kerala and Central Health Ministries, The Hindu news reports

TESTING RATES MATTER

Graph plots latest fatality rate against tests conducted per million people. The larger the circle, the higher the number of cases



Not only have the number of new cases reduced significantly in Kerala, the fatality rate is among the lowest even as the State's testing rate is among the highest

While Kerala has recorded a low number of new cases, many of them are "imported" cases. Considering international flights were stopped on March 22 and quarantines were enforced, these delayed confirmations are a cause for concern. Countries like Japan and Singapore which successfully flattened the curve initially are also seeing a second wave of infections

The hygienic condition of the food consumed in our towns is a matter of great importance, deserving the immediate attention of all concerned. Restaurants and hotels and indispensable concomitants of modern town-life. The enormous increase in their number and the immense danger they may cause to public health demand an ever-vigilant watch to be kept over their management by the guardians of public welfare. The existing sanitary officers are no doubt expected and supposed to exercise the necessary supervision. But the wretched condition in which most of these places are kept, the unsanitary state of the buildings, the unclean habits of the servants, the methods of adulteration employed in the preparation of the food-stuffs, the careless exposure of these articles to dirt and dust, the dirty washing of plates and cups and the general atmosphere of unhealthy stink pervading the whole place must convince the public and the Administration of the necessity for the exercise of a more

FROM PAGE ONE

Industries in rural areas to reopen on April 20

The States will decide the additional public activities to be allowed from April 20. They will have to be based on strict compliance with the existing guidelines on lockdown measures.

The relaxations will be implemented at the discretion of the State and district authorities in areas that have not been identified as infection hotspots or containment zones.

The standard operating procedure (SOP) for factories and office establishments from April 20 says medical insurance is mandatory for workers.

Workplace curbs
Workplaces should have a gap of one hour between shifts, and lunch breaks should be staggered to ensure social distancing. All organisations should sanitise workplaces. Thermal screening of all those entering and leaving the work premises is mandatory, states the SOP. Work units should encourage the use of staircases, stagger work hours to ensure social distancing and ban the entry of non-essential visitors.

Travel by air, rail, metro, public buses, taxis, cab aggregators will remain suspended. Cinema halls, malls will remain shut. All social/religious gathering are prohibited till May 3 and all industrial and commercial units, unless exempted, will remain shut.

The revised guidelines permit small service providers, such as electricians, plumbers, IT repair, motor mechanics and carpenters, to operate. This move is recommended by the Commerce and Industries Ministry.

Supply chain of essential goods, grocery stores, vegetable, fruit carts and e-commerce companies will be allowed to operate without time restrictions.

In addition to pharmaceuticals and other essential sectors such as agriculture, mining and fertilizers,

which are already exempted from the lockdown, several new industries will be permitted to function from April 20. IT and IT enabled services will be allowed to operate at 50% strength, while IT hardware manufacturing has been added to the list of exemptions. E-commerce companies, oil and gas exploration and refineries, food processing in rural areas and jute industries will be allowed to work.

Manufacturing and other industrial activities in Special Economic Zones, Export Oriented Units and other industrial estates and townships can also reopen, so long as arrangements are made for workers to stay within the premises or in adjacent buildings.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which provides 100 days of minimum wage work to rural households, is also being allowed, so long as social distancing and the use of masks are strictly enforced.

Goods traffic allowed
Transport of goods has been a major hurdle over the last two weeks. The new guidelines make it clear that all goods traffic will be allowed to ply, with two drivers and one helper allowed a truck. Truck repair shops and dhallas on highways will be allowed to function. E-commerce and courier services can be restarted.

Operation of utilities providing telecommunication and Internet services, will be allowed.

There will also be a phased return to office of the government's own workforce, with the new guidelines calling for 100% attendance from officers above the Deputy Secretary level, with junior staff attendance of 33%.

In another letter to the States, Mr. Bhalla said the guidelines would be withdrawn immediately if any of the lockdown measures were violated.

170 districts identified as hotspots: Health Ministry

"In order to break the chain of transmission, focus needs to be on contact tracing, monitoring and clinical management. States have been asked to uniformly implement the containment plan in every district across the country," an accompanying press statement added.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while announcing extension of lockdown on Tuesday, said all districts would have to strictly enforce quarantining until April 20, after which based on the 'performance' of districts in keeping the case count low or halting a rapid rise in infections, restrictions would begin to be eased. Were these regions to regress, restrictions would be reimposed.

Meanwhile, Health Minister Harsh Vardhan participated in a meeting with offi-

cials of the World Health Organisation to take stock of preparedness.

Pat from WHO
Praising India's response, Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia Region, Poonam Khetrapal Singh, said, "Despite huge and multiple challenges, India has been demonstrating unwavering commitment in its fight against the pandemic."

The WHO Representative to India, Henk Bekedam, said, "Our field personnel have been redirected to support the fight against COVID-19. The same team worked tirelessly along with the government and other partner organisations to help India become polio-free. I am confident that the WHO team can once again join hands with the government to help win this fight against COVID-19."

India to receive normal monsoon, forecasts IMD

Last year, the IMD said in April that the monsoon would be 'near normal' or a tad below normal. India instead ended up with excess rainfall – or the maximum rainfall in a quarter century – largely owing to torrential rain in August and September from the unusual warming in the Indian Ocean.

The dynamical model, while better at forecasting the state of the weather a week or two in advance, isn't yet considered reliable by meteorologists in forecasting the monsoon.

The statistical models, which the IMD relied on to

make its forecasts, had a 41% forecast probability of normal monsoon.

In any given year, there is a 33% chance which is why, said Madhavan Rajeevan, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, there was "high confidence" that the monsoon this year would be normal.

The Indian Ocean Dipole, a temperature anomaly in the ocean that can increase monsoon rain, was also expected to be in a "neutral" state during the monsoon, the forecast added.

The odds of excess rain or a drought are 9% each.

India steers clear of WHO funding row

At present, our efforts and attention are fully focused on dealing with COVID-19 pandemic'

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

India on Wednesday refused to criticise the United States defunding of the World Health Organisation (WHO), saying that it was currently occupied with the domestic campaign to defeat the COVID-19 pandemic.

A source indicated that India was not inclined to immediately join the controversy that erupted after the President Donald Trump declared a "halt" to American funding of the WHO.

"At present, our efforts and attention are fully focused on dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Once the world has addressed this crisis, we can revisit this question," said a source familiar with India's official decision-making on international organisations.

Mr. Trump on Tuesday suspended his government's funding of the multilateral body accusing it of "severe" mismanagement of the COVID-19 epidemic.

President's charge
He accused the WHO of opposing travel restrictions to China which he termed "disastrous".

"Today, I am instructing my administration to hold the funding of the World Health Organisation while a review is conducted to assess the WHO's role in severely mismanaging and covering up the spread of the coronavirus... As the organisation's leading sponsor, the United States has a duty to insist on full accountability," the U.S. President said at the White House.

The WHO's latest documents show that the United



There is no reason justifying this move at a moment when their efforts are needed more than ever
JOSEP BORRELL FONTELLES
EU representative

Contrary to India's stand, the European Union's top foreign policy representative Josep Borrell Fontelles has "deeply" regretted the U.S. decision, saying, "There is no reason justifying this move at a moment when their efforts are needed more than ever to help contain and mitigate the Coronavirus pandemic."

Bill Gates's stand
Microsoft founder Bill Gates too sounded a note of caution, saying "no other organisation can replace" the WHO.

Since March, India has taken the initiative to several countries in the region and beyond by supplying protective equipment and medicines.

According to the WHO's March 31, 2020 assessment, India committed around \$2

million, whereas China committed approximately \$28.7 million.

Budget contributions

The WHO's budget is funded by a mix of assessed and voluntary contributions. Assessed contributions mainly refer to financial support from the member-countries of the world body, which is relative to the member-state's wealth and population.

The WHO claims that contributions from the member-states had declined over the years and now accounts for less than one quarter of its programme financing. The rest of the resources, it says, is raised through voluntary donation.

The major European economies are among the bigger contributors to the organisation.

Tablighi chief faces culpable homicide case

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi police on Wednesday said they have charged the chief of the Delhi-based Tablighi Jamaat centre Maulana Muhammad Saad Khandalvi, under the section for culpable homicide not amounting to murder.

IPC Section 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) has been added to the FIR that was registered against Mr. Saad and six other office-bearers of the centre, after people who attended the religious gathering in Nizamuddin, died due to COVID-19.

The quarantine period of Mr. Saad has ended and he should join the investigation. Police would again send notice to all persons named in the FIR, an officer said.

Airlines start selling domestic flight tickets

Empty middle seats made mandatory

ADITYA ANAND
MUMBAI

In anticipation of no blanket extension of the lockdown across the country after May 4, airlines have started domestic flight ticket sales again.

A look at airline websites and ticketing portals on Wednesday revealed that – despite the new social distancing norms, including an empty middle seat, an earlier than usual closure of check-in counters and extended ground halt periods for sanitisation – fares were low to attract passengers.

Bookings from May 4 were on Wednesday available at return fare ranging from ₹4,829 to ₹7,438 on the Delhi-Mumbai sector, the busiest in the country. Fares on this sector, usually at a premium because of summer vacation, were available starting at ₹2,500 (one

way) by IndiGo. The lowest return fare on this sector was being offered by Air India at ₹4,829 while the highest return fare was on SpiceJet for ₹7,438. Air Asia has tickets in the range of ₹4,998 and ₹5,119 depending on flight timing.

GoAir and Vistara had tickets going for ₹6,150 and ₹7,438 respectively. IndiGo is selling tickets for 18 flights between Delhi and Mumbai, 16 to Bengaluru from Delhi and 11 to Chennai from the national capital.

Travel agents were quick to add a word of caution. Reji Philip, a south Mumbai-based corporate travel booking agent, said those booking tickets now should also be prepared for flights to be cancelled due to amended government rules or merging of flights due to poor loads.

Party blames 'official letter' from Railways

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday blamed an "official letter" from the Railways for Tuesday's large gathering of migrant workers at the Bandra station in Mumbai and asserted that there may have been an attempt to disrupt the communal harmony in Maharashtra.

"Whatever happened on Tuesday, there needs to be a thorough investigation into it. Some want to disturb the communal harmony in Maharashtra and negate the State's efforts to fight coronavirus," former Chief Minister and Congress leader Ashok Chavan told the media

about imposing President's Rule in Maharashtra hinted at a conspiracy.

Former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi urged the Centre to bring back Indian workers from the Middle East. "The Covid-19 crisis and shutting of businesses in the Middle East have left thousands of Indian workers in deep distress. The government must organise flights to bring home our brothers and sisters," he tweeted.

Mr. Chavan, who is the Minister in charge of Public Works Department in Maharashtra, read out an April 13 letter of the South Central Railway which said special trains would be run for migrant workers once the lockdown is lifted.

The migrant issue has snowballed into a major political controversy, with the BJP and the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi – formed by the Shiv Sena, the NCP and the Congress – engaging in a blame game. Mr. Chavan said social media posts talk-

ing about imposing President's Rule in Maharashtra hinted at a conspiracy.

The Railways has denied that it had any plans to run special trains for migrant labourers. An internal communiqué of the South Central Railway (SCR) had stated that there was a proposal to run 'Jansadharan Special Trains' for migrant workers. The Chief Public Relations Officer of SCR, C.H. Rakesh, said it was "an internal document that was taken out of context".

No plan to run specials for migrant workers: Railways

MUMBAI

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The Bench took note of the submission of Mr. Goncalves that the government's order of exemption was "not being fully implemented by the police".

Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta assured the Bench that there was "full monitoring and implementation of the guidelines" issued by the Ministry. Mr. Mehta said steps would be taken to ensure that the police followed the guidelines. The court recorded his assurances, on behalf of the government, before disposing of Agnivesh's plea.

Agnivesh said this would lead to food shortage, skyrocketing of prices and hoarding, especially in the wake of the harvesting of Rabi crops.

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With the 2021 census process being delayed due to the COVID-19 crisis, any proposed revision of PDS coverage using that data could now take several years.

Monsoon may be late in many States

It will exit many areas even later, says IMD update



A woman collecting branches that fell in the rain in Guwahati on Wednesday.

though, as an official said, the monsoon appeared to be lingering in many places until October. "We have been discussing this matter, of the monsoon's delayed withdrawal and whether we should have a different accounting system for monsoon rainfall keeping in mind the new withdrawal dates. No deci-

sion has been taken," said Madhavan Rajeevan, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, which oversees the IMD.

On time in Kerala
The onset over Kerala, which marks the arrival of the monsoon into mainland India, will continue to be June 1. However, the onset date in Mumbai – historically June 10 – will now be June 11. The official withdrawal date is now delayed by over a week to October 8, instead of September 29.

The onset over Chennai has been delayed by three days – from June 1 to June 4. Ahmedabad will see the monsoon arrive nearly a week late – June 21 instead of June 14. Bhopal, too, is seeing a similar delay – to June 22 instead of June 15. Delhi, too, will see a four-day delay in the monsoon's arrival to the

June 27. "New monsoon advance dates over States like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar and parts of Uttar Pradesh are delayed by three-seven days compared to existing normal dates," the IMD said in a statement.

A significant delay in the withdrawal of the monsoon over northwest and central India has been observed. "Monsoon withdraws from NW India almost 7-14 days later from the existing dates. There is no change in the final withdrawal date over south India, i.e., 15th October," the statement said. The new dates accounted for the vagaries of climate change as well as the increased number of data gathering stations that better accounted for the arrival and exit of the monsoon, Mr. Rajeevan said.

Outdated census data keep 10 cr. out of PDS: economists

The disastrous impact of this gap is being seen in the middle of a crippling lockdown, say Jean Dreze and Reetika Khera

Out in the cold

An estimated 2.8 crore people may have been left out of the Public Distribution System in Uttar Pradesh, the most in any State. The table lists the five States which may have the highest under-coverage under PDS:

State	Coverage (2011 population)	Coverage (2020 population)	Estimated under coverage
Uttar Pradesh	15.21	18.06	2.80
Bihar	8.71	10.48	1.77
Madhya Pradesh	5.46	6.42	0.90
Rajasthan	4.47	5.25	0.79
Maharashtra	7	7.66	0.66
India	81.35	92.19	10.84

Mumbai records two deaths, 140 more test positive

Maximum city reports a fall in numbers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI On Wednesday, Mumbai recorded a decline in the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths. Only two deaths were recorded in the city, taking the death toll to 114. The city also recorded 140 new cases taking the tally to 1,896.

On April 12, the number of deaths in Mumbai was 16, on April 13 the number was 9 and on April 14 it was 11. The number of cases on these days was 152, 242 and 216 respectively.

'Too early'

Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation officials said it was too early to read into the statistics. "We are all working to reduce the mortality but as of now it is too early to look at any trend," said



Frayed tempers: Staff of Cooper Hospital in Mumbai protesting after one of them was allegedly beaten up by relatives of a patient on Wednesday. ■ VIJAY BATE

Daksha Shah, Deputy Executive Health Officer, BMC.

A 65-year-old woman with diabetes and hypertension and a 50-year-old woman with no underlying conditions were the two fatalities reported by the BMC. Both the women had succumbed

at the Kasturba Hospital on Tuesday. A 55-year-old man from Dharavi who had tested positive succumbed on Wednesday, but his death was yet to be updated by the civic body.

With a new strategy that calls for testing of only symptomatic people, the number of cases may show a decline in the city.

The only exceptions will be pregnant women, patients of dialysis, chemotherapy and healthcare workers exposed to COVID-19 patients, who will be tested

Dharavi death toll rises to 8 amid five fresh cases

STAFF REPORTER

MUMBAI

Dharavi reported its eighth death and five new cases on Wednesday, bringing the total to 60. The deceased is an earlier reported case who had attended the Nizamuddin Markaz and later tested positive. The new cases are from Mukund Nagar, an area that makes up for one-fourth of Dharavi's cases.

Two people from among

the several Dharavi residents who had attended the Markaz and were placed under quarantine started displaying symptoms earlier this month. On April 10, they were moved to Sion hospital where they were tested positive. One of them, a 55-year-old man, lived opposite Dr. Baliga Nagar, a COVID-19 hotspot. He passed away at Sion Hospital on Wednesday.

even if they are asymptomatic. A task force appointed by the State has been asked to put all their focus on reducing the mortality.

"Based on the inputs we get from senior doctors on the task force, we will formulate protocols to reduce the

deaths," said Subhash Salunkhe, Technical Adviser to Maharashtra on pandemic control.

At present, the city has nominated six hospitals as critical care hospitals for COVID-19. These are Nanavati, St. George, Saifee, Wock-

'No separation of cases on religious lines'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

AHMEDABAD

The Ahmedabad Civil Hospital has reportedly segregated wards of COVID-19 patients along religious lines. The Health Department, however, has strongly rebutted the reports.

Officials of the hospital are tight-lipped after local media reported the issue, but insiders said the decision was taken after a large number of cases were reported from a cluster of a religious gathering in Delhi. In a tweet, the Health Department strongly rebutted the report. Patients were kept in different wards based on their medical condition, it said.

A doctor, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said that certain patients were not comfortable being in the same ward with patients of the minority community.

IN BRIEF



Tribal body disallows burial of victim's ashes

GUWAHATI

A tribal body in Meghalaya has disallowed the burial of a 69-year-old doctor who died of COVID-19 on Wednesday after another refused the cremation of his body fearing the spread of the virus. The doctor had died at a hospital he owned in Shillong, less than 48 hours after he was tested positive. "We are trying to negotiate and find a way out," said M.W. Nongbri, Deputy Commissioner, East Khasi Hills.

Man shot at for coughing during a game of Ludo

NOIDA

A 25-year-old man was shot at and injured at a village in Greater Noida on Tuesday when he coughed during a Ludo game. The assailant accused him of trying to spread COVID-19, the police said on Wednesday. Prashant Singh alias Praveesh and three others were playing Ludo at a temple at Dayanagar when Jai Veer Singh alias Gullu, 30, arrived there. As Prashant coughed, Gullu thought he was doing it deliberately. "As the argument intensified, Gullu pulled out a pistol and shot at Prashant," a police officer said. PTI

46 foreigners held for violating visa norms

PATNA

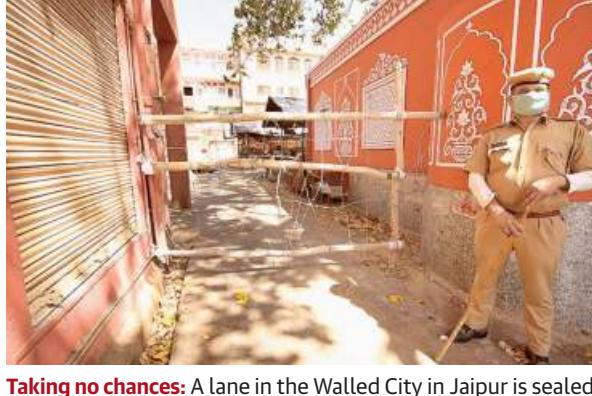
As many as 46 foreign nationals from Malaysia, Kyrgyzstan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Kazakhstan have been arrested from Bihar and sent to jail for violation of visa norms. According to the police, 18 foreign nationals were arrested from Araria, 17 from Patna, and 11 from Buxar. Among them, 20 are from Malaysia, nine each from Bangladesh and Kyrgyzstan, seven from Indonesia and one from Kazakhstan. "All had come to Bihar after the Tablighi Jamaat congregation at Nizamuddin," police said.

Rajasthan shifts focus to testing

Health authorities have divided Jaipur's Walled City into 30 clusters

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

JAIPUR



Taking no chances: A lane in the Walled City in Jaipur is sealed with barbed wire on Wednesday. ■ ROHIT JAIN PARAS

dal office for Jaipur city, said here on Wednesday that since 321 of the positive cases had been found in 13 clusters with a population of 70,000, they had been completely sealed and intensive screening and sample testing started there.

"No movement of residents will be allowed in these clusters and essential items will be delivered at their doorsteps," he said.

The first case in Ramganj

was reported on March 26, when a 45-year-old man who had returned from Oman on March 12 tested positive. After intense contact tracing, a large number of his family members and relatives were detected as having been infected with the virus and shifted to isolation facilities. Over 40 of them have since recovered after treatment.

Two battalions of the Rajasthan Armed Constabulary (RAC) were deployed in

Ramganj on Wednesday to assist the police force in ensuring strict compliance with the lockdown. The lanes in the area were sealed with barricades and barbed wire fencing. With a total of 476 patients found in Jaipur so far, the city accounts for 45.5% of the 1,046 COVID-19 positive cases detected in the State. In view of the increasing cases, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot has given instructions for identifying more space at places like educational institutions, hostels and empty flats of residential schemes for creating quarantine facilities.

Mr. Gehlot appealed to the people of Jaipur to come forward to be tested for the infection. "Do not fear anything. Among all the positive patients, many have recovered and [have been] discharged from hospitals.

The government has provided all facilities in the hospitals for treatment," he tweeted.

Hospital handed back to Bhopal gas affected

All five to die of virus were survivors

STAFF REPORTER

BHOPAL

The Madhya Pradesh government on Wednesday rescinded an order converting the Bhopal Memorial Hospital and Research Centre (BMHRC) into a COVID-19 dedicated facility, which denied healthcare to the 1984 gas tragedy survivors there.

The decision comes after five survivors, four suffering from respiratory ailments and one of cancer, died of the illness in Bhopal in the past 10 days. The ailments made them more susceptible to COVID-19 and they were left with no other super-specialty government

Majority of positive cases in UP. in 21-40 age group

Number of cases in State touches 727

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

LUCKNOW

The number of COVID-19 positive cases in Uttar Pradesh touched 727 on Wednesday with the largest chunk of the cases so far in the State coming from the 21-40 age bracket, according to the government.

The death toll climbed to 11, with fresh ones in Moradabad, Kanpur and Agra, said the State Directorate of Health Services.

So far, deaths have been recorded in Agra (4), Kanpur, Moradabad (2), Meerut, Varanasi, Basti and Bulandshahr.

A majority of the positive cases, 46.5%, fall under the

21-40 age-group, said Amit Mohan Prasad, Principal Secretary, Health Department.

Another 26% fall under the 41-60 age-group, while 17% were found among those aged 0-20 and 10.5% among the 60 and above.

However, Mr. Prasad said all those who died in the State had "links with comorbidity or old-age." To study the deaths due to COVID-19, the government had formed a committee, said Mr. Prasad. The findings would help the hospitals in pinpointing the shortcomings during treatment.

Meanwhile, the number of samples tested in Uttar Pradesh went up to 19,506.

Deputy SP (Puttur) D. Murali Dhar ordered the Chittoor check-post to allow the duo with their dogs. The Tamil Nadu police, too, were kind to the canines. After treatment, the group returned to the ashram.

But on March 31, Raja developed puss in the wound, while Rosy had eye complications. The vets advised a consultation and Mr. Yesupadam and Ms. Priya were back in Chennai.

Mr. Yesupadam calls the inmates 'bhairavas' and feels hurt if anyone calls them dogs. With COVID-19 cases spiking, the inter-State border was sealed. On March 27, Mr. Yesupadam and Ms. Priya decided to cross the border at Uthukottai in Tamil Nadu.

Chennai had scheduled the next post-surgical visit on March 27. Mr. Yesupadam, referred to as Bhairava Swami, cares for 49 canines, mostly strays rescued with injuries, besides abandoned and old animals. Six-month-old Rosy had eye swelling, while Raja, six years old, was in agony due to a spine tumour.

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Raja's sutures were to be removed early in April. "The surgeons asked us not to risk the lockdown again. We applied ointments and administered drugs. Rosy, too, is fine," Ms. Priya said.

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Centre asks States to ramp up testing

The government has sought testing of vulnerable groups in 353 districts that are yet to report a case

VIJAYA SINGH
NEW DELHI

The Centre on Wednesday asked the States to ramp up testing among vulnerable groups in the 353 districts that have not reported any COVID-19 cases so far.

The 'unaffected' districts need to be under enhanced surveillance for influenza-like illnesses (ILI) and severe acute respiratory illness (SARI), the Centre said. It recommended that the ILI and SARI cases be tested, and asked the States to make preparations to set up dedicated COVID care centres, health centres and hospitals in these districts as well.

Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba held a video-conference with the Chief Secretaries and Directors-General of Police of all the States on Wednesday where a presentation on 'COVID-19 Containment Measures' was shared. The States were also in-



Specific guidelines: The Centre has asked the States to open COVID care centres and hospitals.

formed about the revised guidelines issued by the Home Ministry that need to be implemented from April 20 to give relief to specified sections of people from the lockdown that has been extended to May 3. The Centre used the presentation to reiterate its recommendation that hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) be administered to "health workers in the field

and those working in hospitals" as the number of COVID-19 affected patients has crossed the 11,000 mark.

Emphasis was also laid on ensuring that "personal protection of health workforce is of prime importance and sufficient stock of PPE/N95 masks etc. to be made available in the districts" in accordance with the guidance on the rational use of personal

protective equipment (PPE). The Centre said that in severe cases where health-care professionals were infected, the patients "should be treated with HCQ in the prescribed dose".

The Union Health Ministry has repeatedly cautioned that HCQ is only for the specific use of healthcare workers and that it has "side effects".

Potential hotspot

The Centre noted that while there were 170 districts defined as "hotspots" or red zones, there were another 207 districts that have reported cases and could be a potential hotspot". It asked the States to undertake "pre-emptive action for cluster containment in all these districts".

A senior State government official, who attended the meeting, said they had been given a "tutorial" on the road

map as the States would have to chalk out a strategy to implement the guidelines. "States cannot be more liberal than the Centre, instead we will be stricter but some relief ought to be given to people to earn a livelihood," said the official. "Inter-State movement, however, is strictly opposed at this stage," the official added.

The "hotspots" have been divided into two categories -123 districts with "large outbreaks" and 47 districts classified as "clusters". A district could be excluded from the hotspot category if no cases were reported there in the last 28 days. The "large outbreak" category was defined as those districts reporting more than 15 cases that may not be epidemiologically linked and where "localised increase" in COVID-19 cases occurred within a defined geographic area - a village, town, or city.

The EPFO officials

Concern over automatic processing of EPF claims

Officers allege 'arbitrary preconditions' for settlement

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) processed around 2.88 lakh applications for withdrawal of advance by subscribers under the special scheme during the pandemic, while just under 2 lakh were being scrutinised for deficiencies, according to EPFO officials on Wednesday.



Fewer than 2 lakh claims are under various stages of processing.

scriber can apply for withdrawal of 75% of their account balance or three months' of their salary.

However, the EPFO Officers' Association has raised concerns about the automatic online processing system and the lack of staff for the manual scrutiny.

After the announcement by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on March 26 as part of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana, the EPFO rolled out the online application for non-refundable advance on March 29. A sub-

er Sunil Barthwal.

According to EPFO officials as well as a statement last week, the applications that are fully KYC (know your customer) compliant are being settled automatically within three working days. The applications that have deficiencies are being checked manually at field offices to prevent over-payment or fraudulent payments, an official said.

The EPFO Officers' Association has raised concerns about the auto and manual modes of processing. In a letter to Mr. Barthwal on April 11, it said there were "arbitrary preconditions" for auto-settlement of claims, including flagging PF accounts as 'suspect' based on certain transactions and putting a limit of ₹45,000 on the claim amount.

180 stranded Pakistanis to be sent back

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India will facilitate the repatriation of 180 Pakistani nationals stranded here because of the lockdown, sources said on Wednesday. This is the first time in recent weeks that India has made the special gesture for Pakistan's citizens.

"The Ministry of External Affairs is facilitating the return of foreign nationals now in India to their countries. These include those of Pakistan. We understand from the High Commission of Pakistan that 18 of their nationals presently in India want to go back," said a source who is coordinating the issue.

The official said 40 citizens would cross the Wagah border on Thursday, and the rest would follow soon.

11,077 freed from prisons, says NALSA

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) has said that as many as 11,077 undertrials have been released from prisons nationwide as part of the mission to decongest jails following the COVID-19 pandemic.

NALSA said it had been providing assistance to prisoners who were eligible to be released on parole or interim bail under the relaxed norms, through its panel lawyers.

"In most of the cases, their bail applications are being filed through legal aid counsel. Similarly, necessary assistance is being provided to the convicts. Till now, responses received from 232 districts reflect that around 11,077 undertrials and 5,981 convicts have been released," NALSA said.

Activists decry discrimination against vendors

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The National Hawkers Federation, the National Coalition for Inclusive and Sustainable Urbanisation and a group of activists, academics and lawyers on Wednesday, in a statement, condemned the reported "discrimination against Muslim vendors" during the lockdown.

It demanded that the government carry out awareness campaigns against discrimination, explaining the contribution of the vendors during the pandemic.

Russian firm to donate \$2 mn to PM CARES

The donation would be a first as India has so far not taken funds from foreign state-run entities

SUHASINI HAIDAR
DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI



The firm is set to supply the S-400 air defence systems.

from "NRIs, PIOs and international entities such as foundations".

"The transfer is yet to be made" the sources told *The Hindu* on Tuesday, while confirming that Rosoboro-

nexport – Russia's umbrella group for all defence exports and a subsidiary of the state-owned defence manufacturing company Rostec – had indicated its intentions to make the donation. The firm is the largest source of India's arms imports and is set to supply defence equipment including the S-400 air defence systems, stealth frigates and AK-203 assault rifles.

When asked if the donation would constitute a shift from past practice, the Ministry of External Affairs declined to comment. In August 2018, the Indian government had refused to accept offers of aid from several countries including the

United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar and the Maldives during the Kerala floods. At the time, the government had said that it was committed to meeting relief and rehabilitation requirements "through domestic efforts". Contributions to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund and the Chief Minister's Relief Fund from NRIs, PIOs and international entities such as foundations would, however, be welcome," the MEA spokesperson had added.

On March 28, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM-CARES) Fund, putting aside the Prime Minister's Na-

tional Relief Fund (PMNRF). Mr. Modi had made a personal appeal on social media and directed Indian missions to invite contributions for the fund. "What has been announced is that the PM CARES fund will simply accept donations and contributions from individuals and organisations that are based in foreign countries," gono-ernment sources said in a statement, and referred again to the 2018 decision to only accept foreign donations from Indians living abroad, NRIs, international foundations and UN agencies. As a result, the donation offer from Rosoboronexport is a departure from precedent for New Delhi.

Dial govt. helplines, SC tells health workers

'Work conditions being monitored'

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday urged healthcare workers fighting the coronavirus to dial government helpline numbers with their complaints and grievances.

Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta told a Bench, led by Justice N.V. Ramana, that control rooms were daily monitoring the work conditions of the healthcare workers.

"The Solicitor-General submits that the government has already set up helpline numbers/control rooms, and it is monitoring the position on a day-to-day

basis. In view of the above, we grant liberty to the petitioners to make complaint regarding their grievance on the helpline numbers/control rooms created/set up by the Government of India," the court said.

The short order was based on a petition filed by the 3.8 lakh-strong United Nurses Association, a Kerala-based organisation. The association said the government had not formulated any national management protocol for COVID-19 to address the concerns over the imminent and extreme risks posed to the health and safety of medical personnel.

INTERVIEW | JAGDEEP DHANKHAR

Social distancing has to be 100% during lockdown'

Bengal Governor says CM is in 'lockdown mode' with him

SANDEEP PHUKAN



I have urged her [Ms. Banerjee] to disable her political antenna, avoid focus on vote bank politicking

that can have disastrous impact. The cascading impact of the Nizamuddin episode is an eye-opener.

The CM is projecting only her political face all through. I have urged her to disable her political antenna, avoid focus on vote bank politicking and act in concert with the Central government's take on the corona pandemic.

Lockdown enforcement unfortunately has a political angle and religious congregations are tacitly allowed. ICMR NICED is best equipped but adequate samples for testing were not being given to it only because it is a Central body. This is a grave lapse and we cannot play like this with the lives and welfare of the people.

You have questioned West Bengal's record of testing very few people for COVID-19. Let me quote some figures Trinamool leader Derek O'Brien shared on Twitter – 'More than 65 hospitals have been set up in the districts, over 5,000 safe homes or quarantine centres where 50,000 people are quarantined. But until two or three weeks back, Bengal had received 40 testing kits.'

The testing and sharing of information are a cause for serious concern. Very low level of testing is being done. Information as regards COVID-19 deaths is controlled.

In the first week of April, there were no bulletins for

three days in a row. The enormity of the situation can be gauged from the fact that at one time, an expert committee held the number of deaths as seven but within minutes, the Chief Secretary brought it down to three by addressing another press conference. There is no confidence in the information being fed by the State. The situation is alarming.

Six hospitals in Kolkata and Howrah are shut as doctors and patients tested positive for the coronavirus. Over 300 health warriors in these hospitals are quarantined. According to the National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Diseases (NICED), there are adequate number of testing kits. Unfortunately, available kits are not being used and testing in adequate numbers is not taking place.

ICMR NICED is best equipped but adequate samples for testing were not being given to it only because it is a Central body. This is a grave lapse and we cannot play like this with the lives and welfare of the people.

You have made some serious charges against the Mamata Banerjee government here. Were they the basis of the MHA's communication to the State?

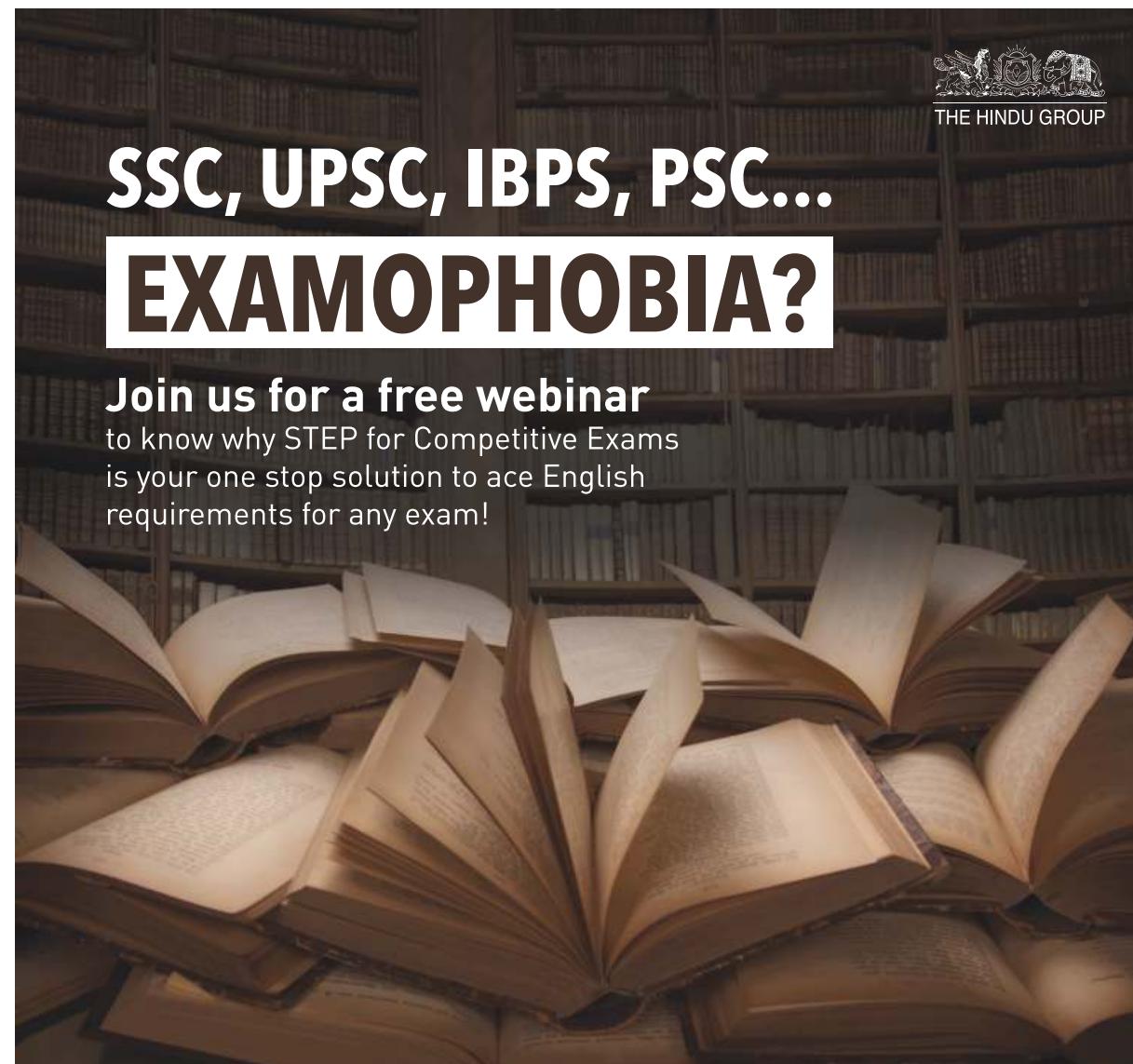
I am never on charges. I only indicate the ground reality which is available to me on account of my very extensive interactions. The people have a deep sense of worry and concern. They have taken the Home Ministry's communication as a timely warning. They are relieved by the concern shown by the Centre. As regard my input to the Union Home Ministry, I don't discuss that in the media.

SSC, UPSC, IBPS, PSC...

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In Maoist hotbed, security forces lead COVID-19 fight

In Odisha's Swabhiman Anchal, CAPFs, police conduct medical camps, awareness drives among tribal people

SIB KUMAR DAS
BERHAMPUR

A medical camp for tribal people with special emphasis on COVID-19 awareness was conducted by Border Security Force (BSF) personnel at Kurkunda village deep inside Tulasi reserve forest, a Maoist hotbed in Swabhiman Anchal of Odisha's Malkangiri district.

These security personnel involved in anti-Maoist operations are now the shield against COVID-19 for tribal people of Swabhiman Anchal.

Masks given

At Kurkunda on Tuesday, the tribal people were given masks prepared by tailors of Company Operation Base (COB) of the BSF's 160 battalion. They were also provided food material and taught basics of social distancing, and basic sanitation to fight the COVID-19 threat.

Security personnel screened all villagers at Kur-



BSF personnel teaching basic sanitation and social distancing to tribal people in Odisha's Malkangiri district. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

kunda with thermal sensors and the ones suffering from different common ailments were provided necessary medicines.

Odisha State police and Central Armed Paramilitary Forces (CAPF) personnel are

now actively involved in the fight against the deadly virus in remote Swabhiman Anchal.

With the Maoist threat temporarily ebbing after they announced a unilateral ceasefire in early April in

view of the novel coronavirus outbreak, the special helpline number introduced by the Odisha police for inhabitants of Swabhiman Anchal is now helping facilitate not only developmental activities but also enabling infor-

mation gathering about the health condition of the people. In the absence of mainstream healthcare system, the police outposts and COBs continue to provide primary health care and medicines to the locals.

Swabhiman Anchal was earlier the cut-off area of Balimela reservoir with no direct road link with the rest of the State. The Gurupriya bridge inaugurated on July 26, 2018, provided direct road connectivity to over 30,000 tribal people living in 151 villages of Swabhiman Anchal.

"The change brought through initiatives of the police personnel stationed there for long is helping in the COVID-19 fight," said Shefeen Ahmed K., Deputy Inspector General, south-western range.

Police outposts and COBs of the paramilitary forces at places like Jodambo, Badapada, Janabai, Jantapai, Hantalguda in Swabhiman Anchal

and the civil police officers attached to them have now become warriors against COVID-19.

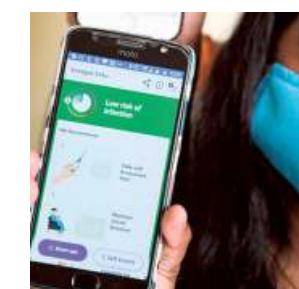
Direct interface

The direct interface of police and CAPF personnel with students, youths and village leaders through various activities is now helping in the awareness drive against COVID-19 infection.

In addition to this, security personnel continue to play a key role in the distribution of PDS, a major issue during the continuing lockdown.

The goodwill earned through facilitation of development projects and identification of beneficiaries for various schemes is being used to encourage people to accept the tough measures against COVID-19 pandemic.

Road connectivity to Jodambo, the heart of Swabhiman Anchal, is now helping in the transportation of goods in the fight against COVID-19.



The Aarogya Setu app is used to issue advisories.

ment, and the contact list of the user should not contain any reference to rank, appointment or service.

The location services and Bluetooth should be switched on only when they are visiting public places, managing "isolation centres", are called to assist the civil authorities or moving out of cantonments and military stations for essential administrative duties, the source said. The mobile operating system must be updated and an anti-virus application installed.

Test kits for Valley moved to Jammu

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

The Directorate of Health Services (DHS), Kashmir, has stopped taking samples from potentially infected persons in the Valley after a senior health official bypassed directions and diverted a Srinagar-bound consignment of Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) allotted five boxes, carrying 5,000 test kits, to Jammu.

Official sources said the alarm was raised by top health officials in Srinagar besides officials in-charge of the COVID-19 crisis in the Divisional Commissioner's office when a cargo plane arrived in Srinagar on Tuesday morning and failed to deliver the 5,000 testing kits.

It was only following the intervention of Chief Secretary B.V.R. Subrahmanyam that 4,000 test kits were airlifted from Jammu to Srinagar around 4 p.m. on Tuesday. Sources said Jitendra Mehta of the National Health Mission, who advises Divisional Commissioner Pandurang K. Pole on procurements, diverted the testing kits to Jammu. "It's being looked into if it was a goof-up or a deliberate attempt," an official said. Sources said the bungling in the supply of kits forced the DHS, Kashmir, to stop taking swabs from suspected COVID-19 cases in the Valley. There is a backlog of some 1,300 samples which are waiting to be tested.

Civil Defence volunteers join containment efforts

They have been deployed in all States and most UTs



Civil Defence volunteers packing essential supplies for distribution. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

DEVESH K. PANDEY
NEW DELHI

More than 50,000 Civil Defence volunteers are working at the grassroots level in various roles and capacities to assist the local administration in implementing the measures to contain the spread of COVID-19.

"The Central government has made budgetary provisions under the State Disaster Relief Fund and asked the State governments to procure as many personal protective equipment as they want for use by the deployed workers," said a senior Civil Defence official.

Civil Defence personnel have been deployed in all the States and most Union Territories, barring Ladakh, Daman & Diu, and Puducherry. Rajasthan, Karnataka, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh,

Delhi, Uttarakhand and Assam have taken the lead in using their services, the official said.

The volunteers have been deployed under the command of District Magistrates to assist the local administration in implementing the COVID-19 guidelines and policies effectively.

"As they are from within the community, they are extending the policies, facilities and services of the government up to the block level," said the official.

The Civil Defence personnel are supplementing the local administration in conducting surveillance of suspected and confirmed COVID-19 cases. They have been working as rapid response teams.

"The volunteers are also manning hunger helplines and assisting elderly citizens. They are helping in the maintenance of essential supplies, like packing and home distribution of ration and medicines," the official said.

The volunteers are supplementing health workers and also carrying out community awareness drives on social distancing and hygiene practices. Besides, they are being roped in for distribution of PPEs, masks and sanitizers and setting up community kitchens and shelters for migrant workers and other stranded persons.

Civil Defence operates under the Civil Defence Act and associated rules and regulations. The Act was amended in 2009 and a notification was issued in 2010 to include disaster management as an additional role.

'Disinfectant tunnels can cause harm'

High concentrations of sodium hypochlorite constitute a health risk: PGIMER

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

The use of a "disinfectant tunnel", in which sodium hypochlorite is sprayed to prevent the spread of COVID-19, may give a false sense of security and cause harmful side effects, the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), Chandigarh, has said.

J.S. Thakur, Chairman, COVID-19 Prevention and IEC Committee at PGIMER, said that the tunnels are being set up at crowded places like malls, markets and offices and it was initially believed that the tunnel would work as a mass disinfectant.

"The use of these tunnels may give a false sense of se-



Tunnel vision: People passing through a sanitisation tunnel at Azadpur Mandi in New Delhi. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHAKAR

curity and may have adverse health effects as sodium hypochlorite has a lot of harmful effects on the human body. Although a 0.5% solution of hypochlorite (5%) exposure may cause nasal and ocular irritation, sore throat and coughing," said Dr. Thakur in a

statement here. "Exposure to stronger concentration (10-15%) of hypochlorite can cause serious damage to multiple organs, including burning pain, redness, swelling and blisters, damage to the respiratory tract as well as the oesophagus, serious eye damage, stomach ache, a burning sensation, diarrhoea and vomiting," he added.

Dr. Thakur said that, according to World Health Organisation (WHO), too, disinfectants will work on surfaces, but not on the human body, and can also harm people.

He said the use of disinfection tunnels is not recommended as a prevention measure.

NHRC asks Centre to protect rights

Panel seeks advisory to States and Union Territories for the lockdown

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on Wednesday asked the Centre to issue an advisory to all States and Union Territories to implement the lockdown without violating rights.

The NHRC said it had written to the Union Home Ministry to issue an advisory or standard operating procedure for all public officials, including police personnel, to "behave in a sensible manner with the people, particularly those belonging

to vulnerable sections, respecting human rights relating to their life, liberty and dignity".

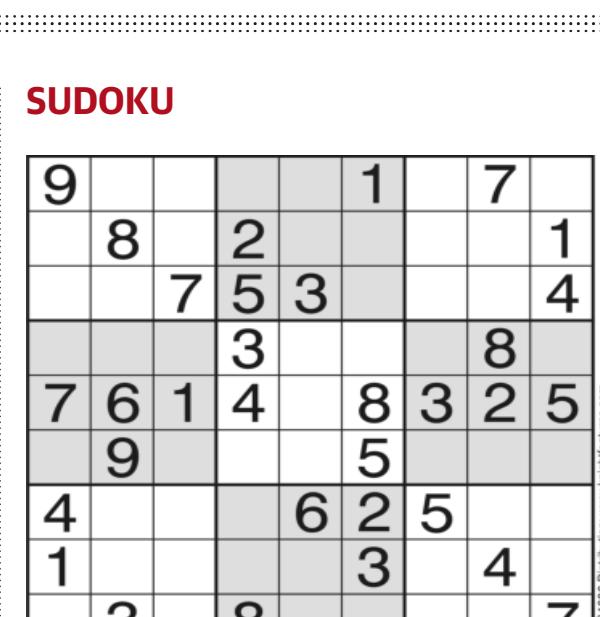
The commission did not specify a time frame for reply, but said it expected a response "at the earliest". The direction came after one of its special monitors and human rights activist, Maja Daruwala, raised the issue of public servants, including the police, undermining the rights of people, particularly labourers, while implementing the lockdown.

Ms. Daruwala noted that the police were doing many "good things" and the recent incident of a policeman's hand being chopped off while enforcing the lock-

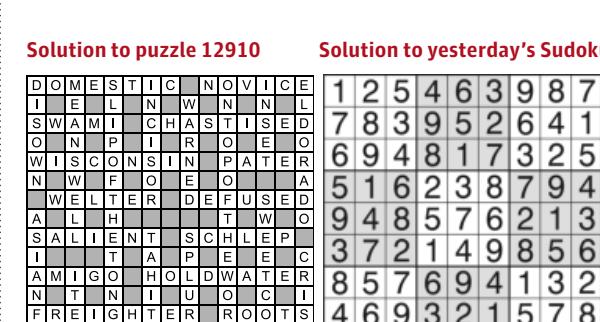
down in Punjab was "unforgivable", the panel said. At the same time, those police officials who were "using this time to be cruel and harsh must be stopped," it added.

"Allegedly, those who are illiterate and less informed, mainly the poor labourers and daily wages workers, etc., are facing extreme difficulties due to shortage of food and other facilities for themselves and their families. They can be asked to stay off the streets ... without being cruel and abusive."

SUDOKU



Solution to puzzle 12910 **Solution to yesterday's Sudoku**



FAITH

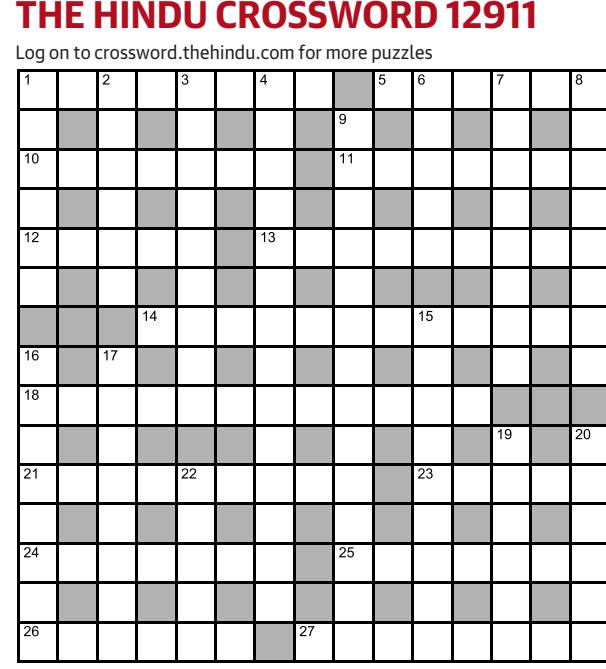
Lessons on good conduct

The basic dharma pertaining to human life is found in the Vedas and the Vedas are the very life breath of the Supreme Brahman. The Vedas merely state, 'Speak the Truth. Don't speak untruth. Don't harm anyone in thought, word or deed. Honour mother, father and teacher as equal to God. Don't do anything that goes against the sastras. Uphold dharma and don't swerve from this path.' Apart from these commands on good conduct specified in the Vedas, there are no precise indications about how dharma is to be upheld in definite situations or individual actions. Nor is there any exact definition of adharma, pointed out Sri B. Sundarkumar in a discourse.

But a detailed exposition on the nuances of right conduct and behaviour and on adharma is to be found in the texts on dharma sastras known as Smritis. These have been written by those who are well versed in the Vedas and have thought about the deep insights from various angles to explain their essence. Moreover, there are many practical illustrations of the ethical code in the context of the narratives in the Puranas and the Itihasas. It is shown that abiding by the rules of right conduct and avoiding the wrong path which results in sin and punishment is mandatory for all. The law is clear that each individual is answerable to his deeds good or bad. The sinful life led by Ajamil brings the messengers of Yama to his deathbed. In the case of Ravana, when he threatens Sita in Asoka Vana, Sita refers to his adharma of coveting another's wife is enough to eclipse all his meticulous observance of samskaras and sastras. Ravana is known for his austere penance and his devotion to Siva. Following outward samskaras cannot absolve anyone of the sins that one commits. The emphasis is on good conduct and purity of mind.

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12911

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ACROSS

- 1 Total loss immediately detected by auditors (5-3)
- 5 Sentimental drivel by female in an excited state leads to blunder (4-2)
- 10 Ladylike to hold a little scented flower (7)
- 11 Small container at hand lacks a wrench (7)
- 12 Dinar hit all-time low (5)
- 13 Ruffians, largely violent, rioting in gaols (9)
- 14 Visible apprehension about plot to trap leader of insurgents (2,5,5)
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- 25 Small ring found in a tunnel (7)
- 26 Maiden languorously embraces trainee in a gentle manner (6)
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To play an interactive version of this crossword online, scan the QR code



CM YK

In these house-bound times, five authors help propel us around the globe to the places that captured their hearts

Oh, the places you'll go

DEEPA ALEXANDER

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the whole point of travel writing is to make us journey from our sofas. This is usually the time of the year when schools slow down to a stop and plans are made for the annual great Indian family exodus. Entire continents are seen in a week; the odyssey is a patchwork of people, places and packed lunches. For some, slow travel is the way to go.

This summer, it is different although the sun shines brightly outside and the birds are chirping in the trees. The COVID-19 pandemic has killed the romance of leaving on a jet plane. Web series have been watched, board games played and marshmallows made – you'd rather be somewhere else. And yet, in the tradition of travel glossies, here is your chance to experience Dehradun or Dushanbe without leaving Delhi.

Five well-known authors write on places that have fallen off the map and are nowhere on the tourist radar. So walk through rhododendron-carpeted hill trails, lounge in the thermal waters of northern Italy, rediscover exquisite Pahari paintings, take a boat out to an island North of Jaffna and picnic in the orchards of Afghanistan.

When the world rights itself, you can slip these experiences into your backpack, step out and sing the song of the open road.

Notes on a small island

Delft, Sri Lanka

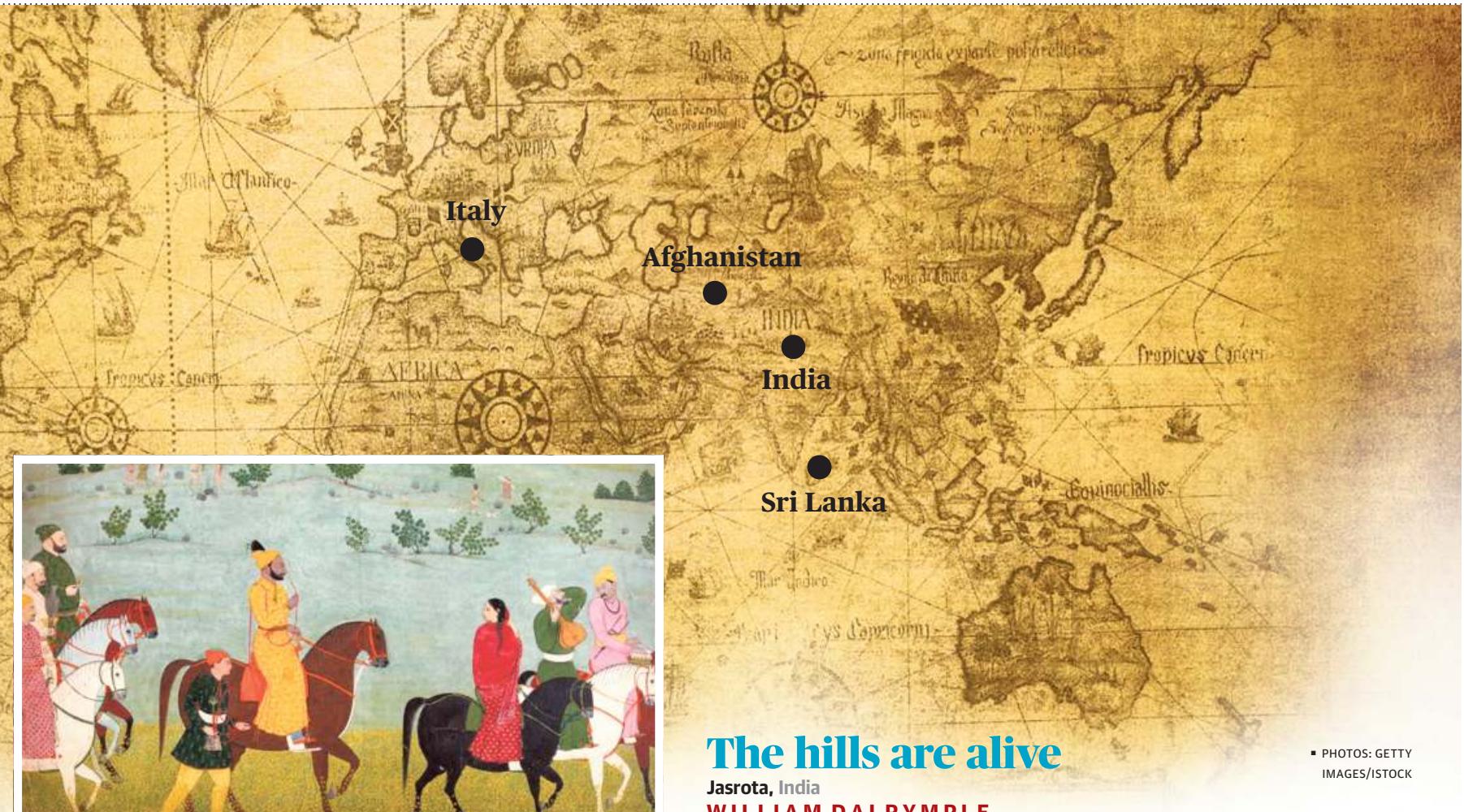
SAMANTH SUBRAMANIAN

Off the northern coast of Sri Lanka, near Jaffna, is a spray of small islands – mere bars of sand, so flat that the land and the water seem one. I visited them when I was researching my book, *This Divided Island*, and fell in love. In the afternoons, the light is so bright it shatters you, but at other times of the day, it has a mystical quality, as if some great Marquez tale were just about to unfold. Some of these islands are linked to each other by thin causeways, repaved and maintained by the armed forces after the civil war ended in 2009. Between others run ferry services – not always

pleasant ones, I'll admit, because I was once stowed with a hundred other people below the deck of a small, smoky boat. On the islands, the roads

snake through tiny villages and small palmyrah plantations, or next to the shores of white, alkaline sand. The island I never managed to visit – my constant regret – was Delft, the last but one island in the chain before the Palk Strait runs on to India. When I visited the islands, in 2012, you needed to find a boat to take you to Delft, so I gave it a miss. Not long afterwards, though, a friend told me about the wild ponies on Delft – descendants of horses that had been abandoned by Dutch colonists late in the 18th Century. More magic realism, I thought with a pang. I've dreamed about Delft ever since: of the land and the water so close to each other that they recall the other Delft, the one that Vermeer painted in Holland; and of those ponies running free on the island.

The Cambridge-based journalist is the author of three books: Following Fish: Travels Around the Indian Coast, This Divided Island: Stories from the Sri Lankan War, and his latest, A Dominant Character: The Radical Science and Restless Politics of J. B. S. Haldane



The hills are alive

Jasrota, India

WILLIAM DALRYMPLE

As the heat begins to rise, I am already dreaming of the hills, especially of the small hill town of Jasrota. It was here that the great Pahari artist Nainsukh spent his glory years in the court of his principal patron, Mian Zorawar Singh and his son, Rajah Balwant Singh, and here that Nainsukh produced his greatest masterpieces. These include *A Leisurely Ride*, my favourite of all his works. It shows a courtly company riding out on a winter's evening. In this painting you can almost hear the male singer Saddu with his lute, can admire the vulnerability of the lovely dancing girl Amal as she rides swathed in her winter shawl, turning back to catch the eye of Mian Mukund Dev, another of Nainsukh's patrons, and you can sense the growing intimacy between the two. This is Indian courtly life at its most elegant and perfect: music, the faint bubble of the water pipe, the chill of a winter sunset, a mist of yellow winter mustard, hunting dogs out on the hills looking for partridges and a blossoming love affair, with its consummation soon to come.

Today, the palaces of the Jasrota rajahs lie on the edge of a cliff at the top of the jungle-clad hill, in the middle of a leopard sanctuary. Two magnificent palaces, surrounded by tanks, stable and barrack blocks crown the summit of the hill. Sadly, both are roofless and all that remains of any frescoes Nainsukh might have painted are some fragmentary pieces of decoration under arches and over window frames. From Jasrota, the road heads along the foothills to Pathankot and then rises rapidly through orchards of mangoes, until it reaches the wooded switchbacks of the Jot Pass. It is the landscape you see again and again in Pahari paintings: a panorama of terracing and white-spired temples, of looping rivers and hilltop forts. As you snake upwards, the air is fresher, the temperature cooler. Large hawks circle the thermals above the white boulders washed by headwaters of the Ravi.

Partly because of its very remoteness, many of the villages in the Chamba valley have managed to preserve their ancient artworks from periods of history when these valleys were not backwaters but a major cultural crossroads, mediating the art of Afghanistan and Kashmir with that of the eastern Himalayas. One of the side valleys leads to the ancient shrine of Brahmaur, where 7th-Century sculptures of heavenly *apsaras* still show the influence of Bactrian Greeks from beyond the Hindu Kush. Another village,

Read: *The Wild Places* by Robert Macfarlane
In Patagonia by Bruce Chatwin

brings you back into deodar forests, and it is through this tree cover that you first sight the village below. The stone houses tumble down a steep mountainside, the high-pitched slate roofs alternating with roof terraces where the women were drying apricots and stacking kindling for the winter. Looking down from above, you can almost smell the warm peach-brandy aroma of the drying fruit through the resin-scent of the deodars.

This remote village is home to one of the finest sets of 18th-Century frescoes in North India, and certainly the greatest cycle of Pahari painting still in situ. The

Chhatradi, contains an amazing cycle of 17th-Century Pahari wall paintings showing the life and loves of Krishna. But my way lay first to the North, towards Devi Kothi. It is wild country up here: the only traffic I met were groups of nomads on their summer migrations, driving their flocks to the new grass of the high pastures. As the road crosses the treeline, the landscape becomes bleaker: you find yourself in an ambiguous landscape of mist and rolling cloud banks, mosses and lichens.

The final unmetalled descent to Devi Kothi

brings you back into deodar forests, and it is through this tree cover that you first

sight the village below. The stone houses

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cycle of Pahari painting still in situ. The

• PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

frescoes decorate a tiny Himalayan shrine to the great goddess, and are the work of two brothers who completed their decoration of the temple in 1754. Here in the middle of these remote hills, straddled on her tiger, the goddess swoops mercilessly down on an army of horned devils, cutting heads from necks with a sweep of her divine blade. In one hand she holds a shield, in others tridents, bells, chakras, and an assortment of spears and javelins.

They are astonishingly strong and confident compositions.

Nothing is known about Gurdev and Jhanda, the two men who painted these images. But these were local boys, and closely in touch with the other masters working in the hills, especially the family atelier of Nainsukh. Today, most of Nainsukh's work resides in the great museums of London, New York and Delhi, but it is here on the mountaintop at Devi Kothi, surrounded by this most remote of masterpieces, that you feel most strongly the remarkable world he belonged to, with great works of art still intact, virtually unknown and almost completely unvisited in this most beautiful and distant of locations.

*The Scotland-born, Delhi-based historian-writer-art historian is the author of several acclaimed books. His latest is *The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company**



Mountain lines

Valdagno, Italy

CARLO PIZZATI

More important than where and what you should visit is why you should visit it. Go only where you need to. Where is a place I've needed to go to? Occasionally, I feel I must go home, to the town where I grew up, Valdagno, about an hour's drive North of Venice. It is five minutes from my mother's hometown of Recoaro Terme and

near my favourite mountains, the Little Dolomites. Valdagno has some of the most interesting residential architecture of the 1930s, in the Social City built by the industrial family Marzotto, and enchanting hikes in the hills that surround it. Also, quite a vibrant *aperitivo* life at sunset. You must try the famous *biancorosso* of the Carlotta distillery or its milder *rosolio*. Recoaro Terme is a famous thermal waters town, where even Friedrich Nietzsche went to seek inspiration.

Read: *The Travel Diary of a Philosopher* by Hermann Keyserling
A Search in Secret India by Paul Brunton



Read: *Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino
Empires of the Indus by Alice Albinia

A vale full of summer

Panjshir, Afghanistan

TARAN N KHAN

Picnics are a Kabul institution. Every Friday – the Afghan weekend – the roads leading out of the city would be packed with cars, which in turn would be packed with *deghs* (pots) of food, children, *toshaks* (mattresses) to spread out on, and melons rattling in the boot. Over the years, I made several trips with friends to scenic spots near the capital. Among my favourites were excursions to the Panjshir valley, around 100 kilometres North of Kabul.

The road passed small stalls selling

dogh (buttermilk) and juices. It crossed a narrow defile where the Panjshir river gushed, unnervingly close, filled with snowmelt. The route opened into the valley, and across the water I saw green fields, rows of adobe mud homes, and the mountains. It was a landscape that seemed untouched by the passage of time, but in fact has weathered many transformations – like those witnessed by the ruins of Soviet-era tanks that lie by the roadside. We settled by the running water; melons left to cool in the chilly shallows. On the riverbed, children

played football. I remember perching on a rock with my friend's family, and looking up at the bare mountains, and the azure blue sky. On another trip, a group of young men had driven up by the river where we sat. They were shooting a music video, and had left us a basket of sweet mulberries – or *toot* – as a gift. For a more substantial repast, we had stopped at a *chaikhana* and had fried fish with crisp *naans*, washed down with green tea.

The way back always seemed shorter. Once our vehicle got stuck on a flooded section of road, and a group of men pushed us clear of the swirling current, waving us off with cries of *manda na bashi* (may you never be tired). These picnics were moments of pause; time spent by Kabulis with beauty and Nature, with family and music, poetry and laughter.

We returned to traffic jams at dusk, the city appearing behind a dip in the road, its lights twinkling in the dusty air. In my pocket, as keepsakes, I carried pebbles, shaped and made smooth by the flow of an Afghan river.

The Mumbai-based journalist lived and worked in Kabul for nearly eight years. Shadow City: A Woman Walks Kabul is her first book

In lake district

Deoratal, India

RACHNA BISHTRAWAT

A black puppy with shining eyes and white dots for eyebrows watches. It's a village stray. "She needs a name," says Rajni Murlidhara, our host in Sari village, where we are lodged for the night at Café Buransh, all set for an early morning trek. "How about Bhulli?" I ask. "It means little sister in Garhwali."

A seven-hour car ride from Kotdwara (or Rishikesh)

takes travellers to this tiny village in Rudraprayag district, Uttarakhand, the starting point for the trek to the mountain lake Deoratal. A long winding path

uncorks amidst lush buransh (rhododendron) trees with arms spread out above our heads, dropping scarlet blossoms at our feet, laying out a soft red carpet for us to step on. Soon the village falls behind,

reduced to a cluster of toy houses down in the valley.

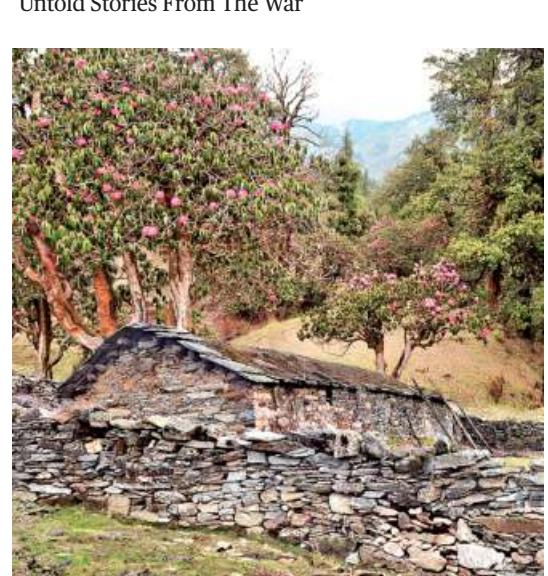
After an hour-plus walk intercepted with orange-devouring breaks – popping juicy fruit into our mouths, spitting pips out with the hope that they sprout young trees – the

path climbs up and then down and suddenly opens up dazzling us with a sparkling pool of blue, flanked by the towering Himalayas.

Crisp mountain air zips down to our lungs, calf muscles ache from the climb, but the mind is free to roam amidst folk tales and poetry and thoughts of those that you have loved and lost; or found and loved. If you haven't tried it already, I suggest you try it once. Trekking in the mountains is therapy.

One day soon, after we have overcome the virus that has brought our world to a standstill, I plan to return. And I hope to find a furry white-eyebrowed Bhota dog named Bhulli roaming the hillside. I plan to pat her head, look into her eyes; and tell her who gave her that beautiful name.

*The writer is an avid trekker and author of four books on the Indian Army. Her latest is *Kargil: Untold Stories From The War**



IN OUR BACKYARD

The curry leaf or *kadi patta* bush or tree plays host to the Common Mormon butterfly

Every mother's favourite

ABHISHEK GULSHAN

During the lockdown, we're all beginning to pay more attention to the flora and fauna around – suddenly the trees seem grander, the butterflies prettier, the flowers more vibrant. And the creepy crawlies are back, devouring leaves like there's no tomorrow.

Staying home didn't seem like a happy proposition for a naturalist like me at first, but I am now overwhelmed by the richness of my own concrete backyard with potted plants. One of my mother's favourites is the curry leaf (*Bergera koenigii* aka *Murraya koenigii*), small deciduous tree or bush with strongly scented leaves, a much loved ingredient in several Indian cuisines.



The plant, also called *meetha Neem* belongs to the family Rutaceae, which also includes citrus.

The bark is brown, thin and delicate. The older barks may show shallow fissures. The leaves take a compound arrangement with about 9-25 small pointy leaflets. White fragrant flowers appear on the plant with about five petals and pink berry like fruits arrive at first and slowly turn purple and then shiny black towards the end, Pradip Krishn's book *Trees of Delhi* tells us.

In Delhi, the bush is mostly grown in pots and is not often found growing wild as a tree. Very few exist in tree form, found mostly in Sunder Nursery. In Jawaharlal Nehru University campus they are found as hedgerows.

The *kadi patta* plays host plant to the caterpillars of the Common Mormon (*Papilio polytes*) butterfly that belongs to the elegant Swallowtail family. During the long hours at home I discovered caterpillars devouring the leaves – delightful for me; an annoyance for my mother, though she is learning to take it in her stride.

Common Mormon butterflies keep coming to my backyard to lay more and more eggs in singles under the leaf. This behaviour of laying their eggs under the leaf is a defence mechanism to avoid losing eggs to predators.

Although caterpillars in their lifetime have the luxury of only eating and pooping, their life is not a bed of roses. The several stages between a butterfly ovipositing (laying an egg) to the new butterfly emerging from the pupa are very delicate and prone to several dangers. From the egg being damaged, to the caterpillar being eaten by birds and lizards to wasp parasitism, they have to brave it all, but most fall prey. In the process, my curry leaf plant has lost at least two caterpillars, one in pupa form to a macaque and the other under mysterious circumstances!

But all is not lost. I have found more eggs and can't wait to chronicle their life cycle. So if you have a curry leaf plant at home, try looking for the caterpillars.

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



Close bond
(Above) The Common Mormon butterfly buzzing past the curry leaf bush
■ SOHAIL MADAN



Old is gold (Above) Guy Robertson, the book cover
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

quite challenging circumstances. I knew instinctively which one I wanted to join! My experience illustrated the old saying: 'It's not what happens to you in life but how you respond to it which determines your happiness.'

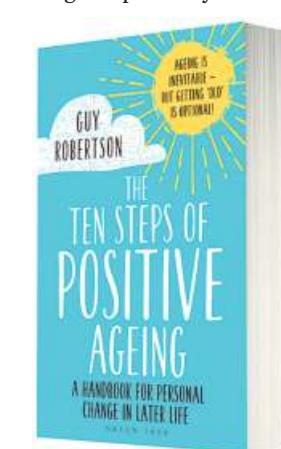
The key factor here is "how you respond to it". In the book, Robertson addresses socio-cultural attitudes to ageing and even to death. Focusing on death and mortality, he says, "can actually enliven and bring more joy and satisfaction to our lives."

He moves on to protecting ourselves from toxic ageism and harnessing the power of relationships and mindfulness to positive ageing.

Answering a query on the response of healthcare professionals, Robertson agrees that they "need to examine their own attitudes and make sure that they are not being ageist. By that I mean that they treat each older person as an individual person rather than just a 'type', by virtue of age... Second I think they need to highlight that not every illness means tragedy." Despite being on dialysis, he says he managed to "lead a full and active life with lots of joy and achievements."

From personal experience

Another revelation came from Robertson himself undergoing sudden kidney failure. He had to be admitted for emergency dialysis. "One of the things I observed was that there were two kinds of kidney patients: those who had given in to their illness; they had become dominated by it and ended up very negative about their lives. Another group, equally ill, chose to focus on the positive aspects of life and made the most of what abilities they had and what aspects of life that they could still engage with. This group maintained a sense of well-being and positivity in the face of



What is ageing?

"My personal definition of ageing is that it is important to recognise that it is a process... which, like all other stages in life, has great satisfaction and joy, as well as challenges and disappointments," he says in an email interview.

Robertson's new book explores the physiological and psychological aspects of ageing and offers exercises and questionnaires by which readers can question their own point of view. The focus is not on the external – diet or exercise – but on what's going on in our heads.

Our attitude to growing old can affect our physical and mental well-being, he says, citing Becca Levy's research "that found that people who have more positive attitudes about ageing live on average 7.5 years longer than those who feel more negative

"There is a lot of evidence to show that health and care staff can 'disable' and make matters worse for older people by attitudes which see every older person as frail and in need of having everything done for them. The starting point needs to be to approach the older person as an individual and to find out what their hopes, fears and worries are and what they do and don't need help with."

The key take-away from this book is that one needs to prepare to age. "Just as we had to learn to grow up, so we have to learn to grow old," he says.

POOCH CAFE



PEANUTS



HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



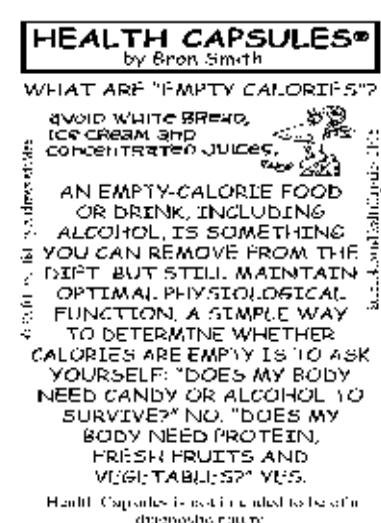
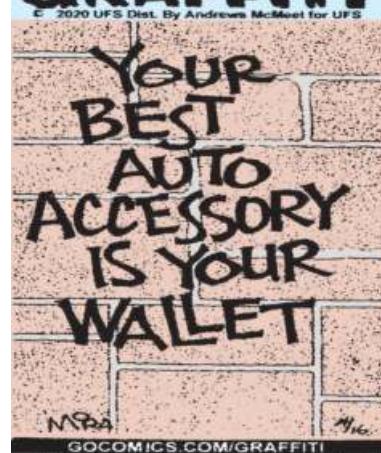
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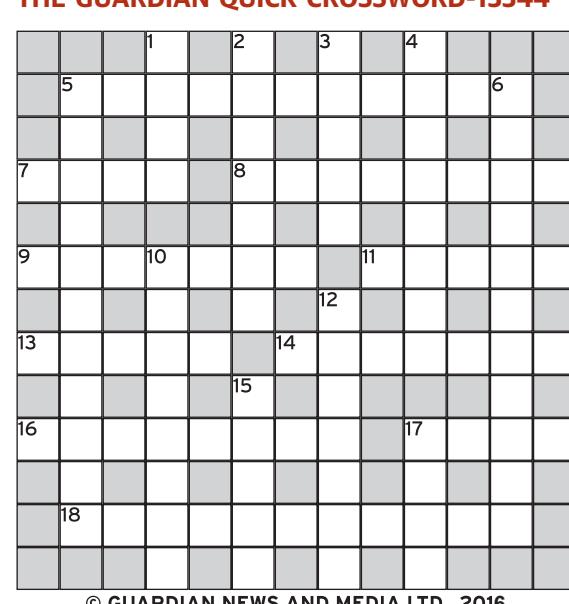
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THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13344



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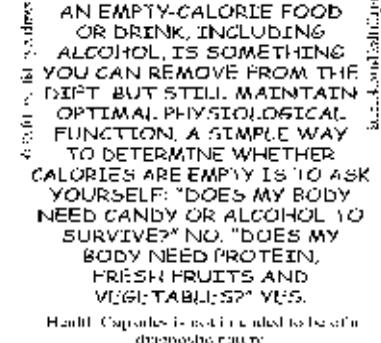
- 4 Rank one above baron (8)
5 Retaliation (11)
6 First person to do something entirely new (11)
10 Belongings (8)
12 Make happy (7)
15 Journal (5)
17 Speed (4)

The solution will appear on April 18, 2020.

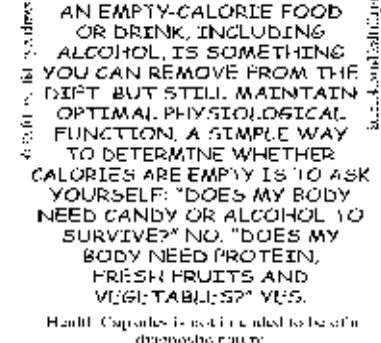
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WUMO



PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



Trump under fire for attacking WHO

From UN to EU and the African Union, leaders slam U.S. President's decision to halt funding to agency

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
GENEVA

Global efforts to join forces against the COVID-19 pandemic faltered on Wednesday after U.S. President Donald Trump froze funding for the World Health Organization, igniting a chorus of criticism from world leaders who urged solidarity in the face of a crippling economic crisis.

Mr. Trump's shock move came as a patchwork of countries experiment with loosening lockdown measures, ushering the planet into a new and uncertain phase of a pandemic that has killed more than 1,25,000 people worldwide and infected at least two million.

In Europe, Denmark became the first country on the badly-hit continent to start reopening schools, while Finland lifted a travel blockade on the Helsinki region.

Italy and Spain have also allowed some businesses to restart after signs both are finally flattening the curve.

COVID-19

But as governments launch into delicate debates of how to jump-start economies without triggering new waves of infection, Mr. Trump rattled efforts at global solidarity by ramping up his blame-game with the WHO and halting funds to the agency.

Fired back

Leaders around the globe fired back at the U.S. President, who initially downplayed the dangers of a virus that has now killed more people in the U.S. than any other country.

"There is no time to waste," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said



Another victory: Second World War veteran Ermindo Piveta, 99, after his discharge from a hospital in Brasilia, where he was treated for COVID-19, on Wednesday. • AFP

Google launches journalism relief fund'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

Google said on Wednesday it will launch an emergency fund to help local news outlets struggling to maintain operations in the face of the pandemic.

The internet giant gave no specific figure for its fund, but said it would offer grants ranging from the "low thousands of dollars" for the smallest operations to "low tens of thousands" for larger newsrooms."

The move comes with the media sector facing deep cutbacks resulting from lockdowns, an intense economic slump and a retrenchment in advertising revenues that many news outlets depend on.

The New York Times has estimated that news outlets have cut 28,000 jobs as a result of the health crisis and subsequent economic impact.

Facebook on March 30 said it was donating \$100 million to support news organizations globally hurting from the coronavirus pandemic.

Mr. Trump also earned a rebuke from UN chief Antonio Guterres and billionaire Bill Gates, who tweeted that cutting funding was "as dangerous as it sounds".

Beijing, who has been the focus of Mr. Trump's finger-pointing for weeks, warned

99-year-old war veteran beats virus

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BRASILIA

A 99-year-old Second World War veteran in Brazil was released from hospital with military honours on Tuesday after recovering from the coronavirus. Second Lieutenant Ermindo Piveta, who served in the Brazilian artillery in Africa during the Second World War, was brought out of Brasilia's Armed Forces Hospital to trumpet music and applause.

the move would "undermine the international cooperation" at "critical moment" in the pandemic.

The European Union's foreign policy leader Josep Borrell was similarly disapproving of a move he said

lacked any justification, while African Union chief Moussa Faki Mahamat condemned Mr. Trump's decision as "deeply regrettable".

The controversy erupted as the world is trying to soften the blow of a looming economic catastrophe, which the International Monetary Fund has said could see \$9 trillion wiped from the global economy in the worst downturn since the 1930s Great Depression.

Underlining the point, Europe's powerhouse Germany has been in recession since March, the government said Wednesday.

Economy contracts

The virus-hit Chinese economy probably contracted for the first time in around three decades in the first quarter, according to an AFP poll of economists.

With tentative hope the pandemic could be past its peak in some European hot-spots, countries are gradually lifting restrictions - to mixed reception.

Children started returning to nurseries, kindergartens and primary schools in parts of Denmark, where other measures, such as the closing of borders, bars, restaurants remained in place.

Finland's PM Sanna Marin also lifted a travel ban in the Helsinki region even as she urged residents to continue avoiding movement, saying "now is not the right time to go to the summer cottage".

Italy is allowing bookshops, laundrettes, stationers and children's clothing retailers to reopen.

And Spain, which saw another dip in its daily death toll, has permitted work to start some factories and construction sites, though most people remain under strict stay-at-home measures.

Roping in Army to fight virus

Sri Lanka's military is helping health workers beat COVID-19

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO



Sri Lankan police personnel distributing food in Colombo. • AFP

Tisarane Gunasekara wrote in Groundviews.org, a Colombo-based civic media portal. But, some Sri Lankan leaders and their supporters have repeatedly likened the pandemic to a "war", sparking discomfort among sections – especially the Tamil minority that bore the brunt of the actual civil war.

Further, local media reports have highlighted the police and Army's efforts to track down those reportedly in hiding, and evading quarantine. The Sunday Times newspaper reported that the State Intelligence Service is leading the contact-tracing effort that involves perusal of immigration records and data analysis.

Meanwhile, the Acting Inspector General of Police directed the Criminal Investigation Department to take stern action against those who spread false information or launch "malicious attacks on public servants" involved in essential services, raising concern over the space for free expression.

It is not as if medical professionals don't have a say. They play a key role in decision making and charting out the action plan, senior doctors in the public health sector and outside the system said.

The military was officially roped into Sri Lanka's COVID-19 response mid-March, a week after the first local tested positive. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa set up a 'National Operation Center for Prevention of COVID-19 Outbreak' led by Army Commander Shavendra Silva.

"Placing an army General at the helm of the campaign against the epidemic is as insane as asking a medical doctor with zero-military training to lead a war," columnist

S. Koreans vote in national polls

President Moon Jae-in's ruling party is projected to win

REUTERS
SEOUL

South Korean President Moon Jae-in's ruling party is projected to win a general election on Wednesday, exit polls showed, as mask-wearing voters cast their ballots under strict precautions against SARS-CoV-2.

The election was closely watched around the world as one of the first nationwide votes since the epidemic began. The disease has caused delays in many other political calendars.

A ruling party majority in Parliament would help Mr. Moon to push through his agenda in his final two years in office, with a looser fiscal policy aimed at creating jobs, a higher minimum



A woman casting her vote for the elections at a booth in Seoul. • AP

wage and engagement with North Korea his priorities.

Voters at some 14,000 disinfected polling stations across the country had to wear masks, have their temperatures checked, use hand sanitizer and plastic gloves and maintain a safe distance from others.

Voter Choi Sun-hwa told Reuters she was initially ap-

prehensive about coming out to vote because of the virus.

"But having come here and seen for myself, I felt it's good we voted as planned, and people are taking greater precaution about distancing," said Choi, 56, outside a Seoul polling station.

Mr. Moon's progressive camp is on track to secure up to 177 seats in the 300-member, single-chamber Parliament. The main conservative party is expected to win as many as 131 seats, according to exit polls conducted by TV networks.

South Korea's largely successful campaign against the coronavirus has provided an unlikely boon for Mr. Moon and his party.

President Xi Jinping

China sat on pandemic news for 6 days

Xi made it public on seventh day; by then, more than 3,000 had been infected

ASSOCIATED PRESS

In the six days after top Chinese officials secretly determined they likely were facing a pandemic from a new coronavirus, the city of Wuhan, which was the epicentre of the disease, hosted a mass banquet for tens of thousands of people; millions began travelling through for Lunar New Year celebrations.

President Xi Jinping warned the public on the seventh day, January 20. But by that time, more than 3,000 people had been infected during almost a week of public silence, according to internal documents obtained by AP and expert estimates.



Xi Jinping

But the delay by the first

country to face the new coronavirus came at a critical time – the beginning of the outbreak. China's attempt to avoid panic set the stage for a pandemic that has infected almost 2 million people and taken more than 1,25,000 lives.

"If they took action six days earlier, there would have been much fewer patients and medical facilities would have been sufficient. We might have avoided the collapse of Wuhan's medical system," said Zuo-Feng Zhang, an epidemiologist at the University of California.

Other experts noted that the Chinese government may have waited on warning the public to stave off hysteria, and that it did act quickly in private during that time.

But the six-day delay by China's leaders in Beijing came on top of almost two weeks during which the National Center for Disease Control did not register any cases from local officials, internal bulletins obtained by

the AP confirm. Yet during that time, from January 5 to January 17, hundreds of patients were appearing in hospitals not just in Wuhan but across the country.

It's uncertain whether it was local officials who failed to report cases or national officials who failed to record them. Under Mr. Xi, China's most authoritarian leader in decades, increasing political repression has made officials hesitant to report cases without a clear green light from the top.

"It really increased the stakes for officials, which made them reluctant to step out of line," said Daniel Mattingly, a scholar of Chinese politics at Yale. "It made it harder for local officials to report bad information."

Google, FB may be facing an ad slump

DAISUKE WAKABAYASHI
TIFANY HSU
OAKLAND

Google's and Facebook's advertising businesses, which have roughly tripled in combined size over the past five years, may be headed for a rare stumble as the pandemic pushes the global economy into a tailspin.

Once-abundant travel and entertainment ads have all but disappeared from Google search. The prices for Facebook advertisements are at record lows. And Wall Street analysts are estimating that annual revenues will decline for the first time in the history of the two companies.

The prices of Facebook ads have declined 35% to 50% on average in recent weeks, said Alex Palmer, an analyst for Gupta Media, a digital marketing agency.

"Our business is being adversely affected like so many others," Alex Schultz and Jay Parikh, Facebook vice-presidents, wrote in a company blog post in March.

Sensitive events
Google said it had started a "sensitive events" policy last month, which restricts ads on coronavirus content. On March 9, it also placed a temporary ban on ads selling masks, citing a supply shortage for medical professionals.

But mask ads served by Google continue to appear on publisher websites. There are also ads served by Google for hand sanitiser and disinfectant wipes from e-commerce sites offering a wide selection of masks and other items in short supply at significant markups.

Facebook banned the placement of predatory ads for masks, sanitisers and other personal protective gear, and it eliminated nearly all mask ads across the social network. NY TIMES

How pandemics have changed the world

They have triggered the collapse of empires, weakened pre-eminent institutions, created social upheavals and ended wars

STANLY JOHNY

Pandemics have had great influence in shaping human society and politics throughout history. From the Justinian Plague of sixth century to the Spanish flu of last century, pandemics have triggered the collapse of empires, weakened pre-eminent institutions, created social upheavals and brought down wars. Here's a look at some of the deadliest pandemics and how they influenced the course of human history.

NEWS ANALYSIS

The plague would come back in different waves, finally disappearing in AD 750, after weakening the empire substantially. As the Byzantine Army failed to recruit new soldiers and ensure military supplies to battlefields in the wake of the spread of the illness, their provinces came under attack. By the time plague disappeared, the Empire had lost territories in Europe to the Germanic-speaking Franks and Egypt and Syria to the Arabs.

Black Death

The Black Death, or pestilence, that hit Europe and Asia in the 14th century was

when the Byzantine Empire was at the pinnacle of its power under Justinian's reign. The Empire had conquered much of the historically Roman Mediterranean coast, including Italy, Rome and North Africa.

the deadliest pandemic recorded in human history. It killed some 75 to 200 million people. The plague arrived in Europe in 1347, where up to 50% of the population died of the disease. In the words of Stanford historian Walter Scheidel, pandemics are one of the "four horsemen" that have flattened inequality. The other three are wars, revolutions and state failures. In his book, *The Great Leveller*, Mr. Scheidel writes how the Black Death led to improved wages for serfs and agricultural labourers. "Land became more abundant relative to labour [after the death of millions of working people]. Landowners stood to lose, and workers could hope to gain," he writes. In parts of Europe, wages tripled as labour demand rose.

The most significant impact of the Black Death was perhaps the weakening of the Catholic Church. The Church was as helpless as any other institution as the plague spread like wildfire.



Past pandemics: Clerks at work at an office in New York during the Spanish Flu of 1918. • NYT

across the continent, which shook the people's faith in Church and the clergy. While Church would continue to remain as a powerful institution, it would never regain the power and influence it had enjoyed before the outbreak of the plague. The Protestant Reformation in the 16th century would further weaken the Church.

Spanish Flu

Spanish Flu, which broke out during the last phase of First World War, was the deadliest pandemic of the last century that killed up to 50 million people.

One of the major impacts of the outbreak was on the result of the war. Though the flu hit both sides, the Germans and Austrians were affected so badly that the outbreak derailed their offensives. German General Erich Ludendorff in his memoir, *My War Memories, 1914-18*, wrote that the flu was one of the reasons for Germany's defeat. Germany

launched its Spring Offensive

on the western front in March 1918. By June and July, the disease had weakened the German units. The Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918 that ended the War. But the flu continues to ravage parts of the world for many more months.

COVID-19

It's too early to say how COVID-19 would change the world. But the outbreak has seen countries, both democratic and dictatorial, imposing drastic restrictions on people's movements. The western world lies exposed to the attack of the virus. Unemployment rate in the U.S. has shot up to the levels not seen since the end of Second World War. Governments across the world, including the U.S. administration, are beefing up spending to stimulate an economy that shows signs of depression. Radical changes, good or bad, are already unfolding.

ELSEWHERE



Warren endorses Biden for President

WASHINGTON

Former White House hopeful Elizabeth Warren on Wednesday endorsed her one-time rival Joe Biden, becoming the final major Democratic candidate to publicly support his presidential bid. The formal backing from Ms. Warren comes a day after former President Barack Obama endorsed Mr. Biden. AFP

Germany arrests 5 Tajiks for links to IS terror cell

BERLIN

German police have arrested five Tajik nationals on suspicion that they belonged to an Islamic State terror cell planning attacks on U.S. forces stationed in Germany, prosecutors said on Wednesday. Four of the suspects were arrested after raids at several apartments in North Rhine-Westphalia. Another suspect was held earlier. AFP

CMYK

MARKET WATCH

	PRICE	CHANGE
Sensex	30,380	-1.01
US Dollar	76.44	-0.22
Brent oil	27.51	-8.48

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	268.90	6.05
Asian Paints	1718.20	37.35
Axis Bank	417.30	-1.65
Bajaj Auto	2335.15	-62.40
Bajaj Finserv	4599.10	107.70
Bajaj Finance	2182.45	-104.85
Bharti Airtel	510.50	-1.70
BPLC	353.85	3.75
Britannia Ind	2837.35	131.20
Cipla	592.35	-0.50
Coal India	146.85	0.95
Dr Reddy's Lab	3807.60	61.00
Eicher Motors	13319.40	-85.65
GAIL (India)	86.60	0.55
Grasim Ind	535.40	-9.10
HCL Tech	478.75	20.50
HDFC	1596.30	-58.90
HDFC Bank	863.80	-32.05
Hero MotoCorp	1824.10	-94.95
Hindalco	115.10	1.30
Hind Unilever	2487.55	141.10
ICICI Bank	327.35	-3.30
IndusInd Bank	424.10	13.70
Bharti Infralet	173.80	-3.70
Infosys	639.05	1.65
Indian Oil Corp	83.20	0.05
ITC	189.35	7.75
JSW Steel	171.40	3.75
Kotak Bank	1173.75	-77.15
L&T	880.15	14.70
M&M	353.15	-9.70
Maruti Suzuki	5094.30	-188.85
Nestle India Ltd.	17325.90	725.95
NTPC	89.90	1.25
ONGC	74.35	-0.70
PowerGrid Corp	159.55	-0.40
Reliance Ind	1149.85	-39.30
State Bank	182.35	-1.15
Shree Cement	18138.55	837.45
Sun Pharma	449.20	-13.15
Tata Motors	72.90	-1.35
Tata Steel	285.15	2.60
TCS	1735.15	-24.10
Tech Mahindra	538.65	11.80
Titan	952.05	-14.80
UltraTech Cement	3600.15	134.05
UPL	350.55	25.60
Vedanta	78.60	0.30
Wipro	186.55	-2.65
Zee Entertainment	133.75	-3.35

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	76.24	76.56
Euro	82.90	83.25
British Pound	95.00	95.43
Japanese Yen (100)	70.77	71.07
Chinese Yuan	10.79	10.83
Swiss Franc	78.70	79.03
Singapore Dollar	53.44	53.67
Canadian Dollar	54.07	54.30
Malaysian Ringgit	17.56	17.65
Australian Dollar	48.04	48.24

Source: Indian Bank

Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on April 15

Wipro skips Q1 guidance, net drops 6%

'Seeing pricing pressures, cut in budgets, delayed decision cycles; most key customer geographies hit'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BENGALURU

Software services major Wipro on Wednesday refrained from giving any guidance for the first quarter of fiscal 2020-21, for the first time since it became a listed entity, following the uncertainty surrounding the spread of COVID-19 pandemic.

The company said it did not have the visibility as to the extent to which COVID-19 would disrupt operations, and thus decided not to provide revenue guidance for the June 2020 quarter.

The company said it would resume providing revenue guidance once market visibility was restored in terms of both demand and supply-side factors.

As per Wipro's estimates, its IT services revenue for the quarter ended March 31, 2020 was negatively impacted

IT's just unfolding

BENGALURU

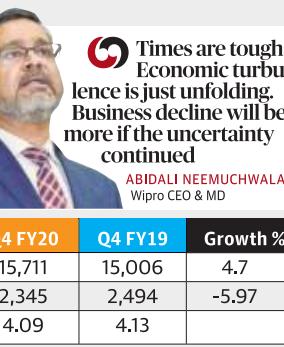
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The company said it would resume providing revenue guidance once market visibility was restored in terms of both demand and supply-side factors.

Revenue for the company rose 4.7% year-on-year (YoY) to ₹15,711 crore from the year-ago period.

The operating margin for



Times are tough. Economic turbulence is just unfolding. Business decline will be more if the uncertainty continued

—

Abidali Neemuchwala,

Wipro CEO & MD

JATIN DALAL

CFO, Wipro

The quarters ahead

will require tremendous response on costs; working capital may increase

we don't even know how

long the uncertainty will

continue. This is going to be

much bigger than the global

financial crisis we have seen."

Wipro currently has

cash and cash equivalents of

\$3.5 billion, as per Jatin Dalal, chief financial officer.

"The quarters ahead seem

challenging and require a

tremendous response on

costs.

We also expect our working

capital to increase, but

our strong balance sheet

provides us with the confi-

dence that we will emerge

stronger and better. Due to

the volatility in the external

environment, we have decid-

ed not to provide a quarterly

guidance on revenue," said

Mr. Dalal. Usually, the

quarterly earnings are given first

either by Infosys or TCS. This

is time, however, Wipro breast-

ed the tape.

muchwala said: "Times are

tough. Economic turbu-

lence is just unfolding. Busi-

ness decline will be

more if the uncertainty

continued.

We are already seeing pricing

pressures, cut in budgets

and delayed decision cycles.

"Sectors such as energy,

retail, manufacturing, auto-

mobile, banking and media

will witness pressure."

Fluid situation'

He further said, "We are wit-

nessing a very fluid situa-

tion, we really don't know where

it is going as of now. Recov-

ery is a matter of time, but

the quarter came in at 17.6%,

down 0.8% quarter-on-quar-

ter (QoQ). However, it re-

ported an almost 6% YoY fall

in profit to ₹2,345 crore for

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Addressing the media via

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IN BRIEF



Buttler is in awe of Rohit's effortless batting

NEW DELHI
England's Jos Buttler was effusive in his praise for Rohit Sharma during an Instagram live session on Rajasthan Royals page. "Rohit Sharma I think is an awesome player. I just like the way he bats and the effortless nature in which he takes people down. I think a few years ago people used to attack Indian players with the short ball but Rohit smashes them. Then you go fuller and he smashes them right down the ground." PTI

PM Modi lauds chess players

NEW DELHI
Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday lavished praise on Indian chess players, including Vishwanathan Anand, for coming up with an "innovative" way to raise funds for the country's fight against COVID-19 pandemic. Vedit Gujrathi, P. Harikrishna, B. Adhiban, K. Humpy and D. Harika, alongside Anand, had participated in an online chess exhibition and helped raise ₹4.5 lakh for the PM-CARES Fund. PTI



I was an Arsenal fan because of Henry: Pogba

PARIS
Manchester United star midfielder Paul Pogba has said he was an Arsenal fan as a child, mainly due to his favourite player and fellow Frenchman Thierry Henry. "Me and my brother were but my other brother was a Manchester United fan. I couldn't say anything so I used to love Henry and, because of him, I was an Arsenal fan. Then I changed and went on to choose with my other brother. No Arsenal, I went with the other one, the United fan!" IANS

Sports Ministry to have video conference with 11 federations

NEW DELHI
The Sports Ministry will reach out to 11 national federations on Thursday via video conference for a possible discussion on the future course of action in view of the COVID-19. NSFs invited in the first batch are handball, basketball, volleyball, wushu, tennis, squash, Special Olympic Bharat, yachting, kayaking and canoeing, kabaddi, All India University. PTI

W.V. Raman live!

Catch former India Opener and current Indian women's team coach, W.V. Raman in a live chat on Sportstar's Instagram handle (@Sportstarweb) on April 16, 2020 at 8.15 p.m. IST.

BCCI postpones IPL indefinitely

Board decides that the mega event cannot be held now; franchises informed



Good old days! Though the fans will be disappointed about the postponement of the IPL, they will cling on to the hope that it will be held at some stage this year. ■ FILE PHOTO: K.R. DEEPAK

CRICKET

AMOL KARHADKAR
MUMBAI

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has formally informed the eight Indian Premier League (IPL) franchises that the 13th edition of the T20 league has been "indefinitely postponed" due to COVID-19.

A day after the Government of India extended the lockdown across the country till May 3, IPL chief operating officer Hemang Amin called each of the franchise owners and told them that the tournament could not be scheduled in the conventional window (April-May).

"All of us were expecting it anyway, but today it was formalised. Hopefully, the fans

■ The BCCI top brass, after consulting Brijesh Patel and Hemang Amin, felt that there was no way the tournament could be held before the situation improved

■ This will be the first time the IPL will not be played during India's summer

can watch their favourite IPL teams in action at some point later this year," a franchise executive told *The Hindu* on Wednesday.

Conference call

It was reported in these columns on Monday that the BCCI was set to indefinitely defer IPL-2020 after a conference call between the office-bearers. That con-call was eventually held on Tues-

day, hours after the Prime Minister's decision to continue the lockdown.

BCCI president Sourav Ganguly, secretary Jay Shah, treasurer Arun Dhumal, IPL governing council chairman Brijesh Patel and Amin decided that there was no way the IPL could be held before the situation eases.

According to the BCCI executives, an official announcement was "expected soon" from the secretary. The statement hadn't been issued at the time of writing.

This will be the first time since its inception in 2008 that the T20 extravaganza will not be played during India's summer. All the 12 editions have been played between March and May. This year's tournament was originally slated to be held from

March 29 to May 24.

With COVID-19 cases on the rise, the BCCI, on March 13, had suspended the IPL till April 15. Once the India went into lockdown and many other countries shut down their airspace, it was clear that even a truncated IPL in May would not be possible.

Though the BCCI hopes that it can squeeze in the IPL later this year – either a shortened or a full tournament in case the T20 World Cup, scheduled for October-November in Australia, gets postponed – it is premature to discuss the feasibility.

"Like all things in the world, the cricket calendar will also be revised when things become normal. All we can do is to wait and keep our fingers crossed," said another franchise executive.

All eight teams in the 2017-2020 edition of the ICC Women's Championship were to play each other in a three-match series.

Format

"Australia (37 points), England (29), South Africa (25) and now India (23) have qualified by virtue of being the top four. Pakistan (19), New Zealand (17), West Indies (13) and Sri Lanka (5) complete the table," the statement added.

The development means that India, which finished runner-up in the 2017 edition, has secured its berth for the event in New Zealand.

Popularity counts

In a virtual contest, it is the number of votes and the popularity of the player that tilts the balance in a match-up.

Former Davis Cup captain Mahesh Bhupathi weighed the singles performances of the players in the Davis Cup

Virtual tennis, the Indian way!

The 64-member draw features some of the country's best, past and present



Ramanathan Krishnan.

■ FILE PHOTO: RAJEEV BHATT

while preparing the seedings' list, paving the way for a 64-player draw.

Krishnan is the top seed, Vijay Amritraj the second seed and Leander Paes third. Ramesh Krishnan, Jaidip Mukherjee, Somdev Devvarman, Bhupathi and Naresh Kumar form the rest of the top-8.

Rohan Bopanna, who assisted Nitten and Sandeep Kirtane in developing the idea, has been seeded 11th behind S.P. Misra and Premjit Lall.

Zeeshan Ali, Sashi Menon, Akhtar Ali, Anand Amritraj and Ramkumar are the other seeds.

It will be interesting to view the voting pattern on social media from Thursday. The draw has been kept long enough, perhaps to last till the end of the lockdown on May 31. Remarkably, the draw, made with the support of qualified supervisor Tejal Kulkarni, binds the players of different eras in a single sheet.

Ramanathan Krishnan will not lose in the first round since he has a bye, but there will be no such guarantee when he meets the winner of the Vishal Uppal-Enrico Pierno match. That is the reality of the virtual world!

HI tweaks format of Nationals

Separate tournaments for States, institutions and academies across age-groups

HOCKEY

UTHRA GANESAN
NEW DELHI

A day after indefinitely postponing all remaining National championships for 2020, Hockey India on Wednesday announced a re-structured format for conducting the same from 2021, removing the existing two-tier system and creating separate competitions for States, institutions and academies across age-groups.

The new format, approved by the Hockey India Executive Board, provides for separate Nationals for registered States/Union Territories, Public Sector Units/departments/institutions and registered academies.

While the PSUs would compete in the junior and senior categories, the academies would battle for honours at the junior and sub-junior levels. The National championships for State units, however, would be held

■ Competitions will continue to be played on a league-cum-knockout format

■ This is not the first time HI has changed the format of the Nationals

across all age groups – sub-junior, junior and senior.

One team, one category

HI has also decided to allow a player to represent only one team and one age-category "to ensure more athletes are given the opportunity to participate". It has also been mandatory for States to conduct their respective championships in each category to be eligible to field a team at the National championships.

The previous system of A and B Divisions would no longer prevail. By this restructuring, we want to encourage more States and Union Territories to develop players in their regions, and institutions to pursue hock-

ey," Hockey India president Mohd. Mushtaq Ahmad said.

The competitions would continue to be played on a league-cum-knockout format depending on the final number of participants. The classifications and eligibility would be done on the basis of the final results of the last National championships before December 31, 2020.

However, given the fact that the various age-group competitions for the year are uncertain, it is likely the 2019 edition might be used for classifications.

This is not the first time HI has changed the format for its National championships. The A and B Division structure was introduced in 2014 to address the issue of largely mismatched games between stronger and weaker teams, especially in the initial rounds. Prior to that, the senior tournaments were held at one go while the age-group events had zonal competitions before a National finals.

Tour de France to now start on Aug. 29

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS

The Tour de France will be raced from August 29 to Sept. 20, organisers of the event announced on Wednesday, postponing cycling's flagship event originally slated to start on June 27 due to the coronavirus lockdown.

The new dates will be the latest ever for the Tour since its inception in 1903.

The race would follow the



Delayed: The new dates will be the latest ever for the Tour since its inception in 1903. ■ GETTY IMAGES

same route as the original itinerary with a start in Nice.

While the news comes as a relief to professional cycling teams and fans, it also moves the three-week race out of its traditional slot in the summer holidays where crowds of around 12 million would have been expected to gather in festive spirit.

With the Olympics and Euro 2020 both postponed, the Tour is the last major event remaining on the summer sports calendar.

Aid of technology in the time of lockdown

Wrestlers are using different apps to get inputs from coaches and mentors

Y.B. SARANGI
KOLKATA

Lockdown has spread the use of technology in the wrestling fraternity.

"Technology is helping today's wrestlers, especially in the time of lockdown. All of them are using video-calling apps and WhatsApp to get inputs from their coaches and mentors," said Mahavir.

Positive impact

Well-known coach Vinod Kumar, a Dhyan Chand award winner, noted how technology made a positive impact on wrestlers.

"The mobile phone is an asset which keeps one connected with the coach and helps in getting inputs," Krupa Shankar Patel, who taught wrestling to the actors of Dangal, told *The Hindu*.

"Even as I take care of my ailing father and do my training for the World veterans' championships, I get several calls from wrestlers who seek help."

"I help them through video chats and other apps."

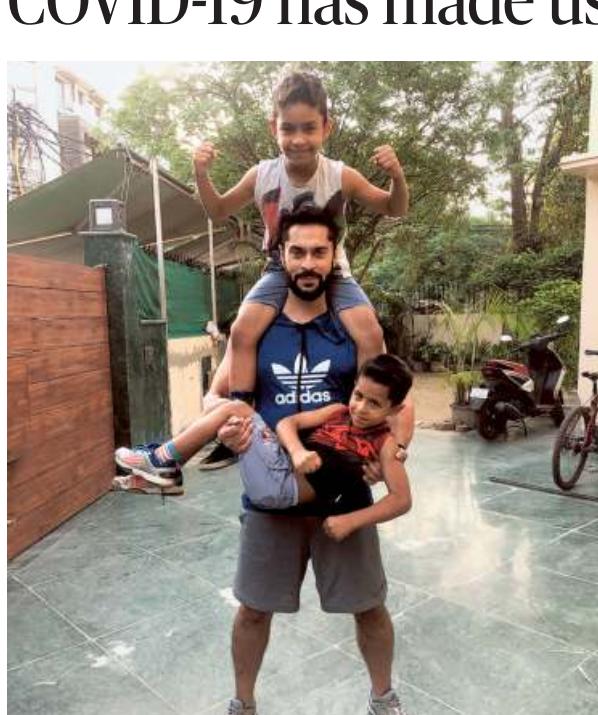
"Lockdown has definitely spread the use of technology among wrestlers," said Patel, an Arjuna award-winning wrestler turned referee.

Mahavir Prasad, a Dronacharya award-winning coach, concurred. "When we were active wrestlers, it



Tech savvy: Wrestling coach Kripa Shankar Patel teaches through video conference. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

COVID-19 has made us realise how fragile life is, says Gill



Family bonding: Gaurav Gill, who is doing innovative workouts to keep fit, wants to ensure that his sons Aryan and Veer don't become 'couch potatoes'.

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The ace driver believes that the earth is healing itself

MOTORSPORTS

RAYAN ROZARIO
COIMBATORE

India's celebrated driver Gaurav Gill has seen the best and worst during his two-decade career in racing and rallying, but COVID-19 is something that has shaken him to the roots.

"This is something shocking. We used to see such things only in movies but now we are experiencing this in real life. The pandemic has made us all realise how fragile our lives are," Gill told *The Hindu* from New Delhi.

The three-time APRC champion believes that the earth is healing itself. "We burn so much of fuel and rubber and it's time we un-

derstand that, and learn to respect nature and everything around us," he said.

The Arjuna awardee revealed that he was focusing on the World championship races in Mexico and Argentina and the upcoming INRC season when things took a sudden turn. "I wanted to get some testing done at Coimbatore but couldn't do it because of the lockdown. I feel sad to see mankind suffering," said Gill.

He spends a lot of time doing innovative workouts with the limited equipment he possesses. "That's not all. I teach my young ones (Aryan and Veer) as the online schooling has started for them on Thursday (April 16)."

Gill said he also plays rally games and soccer with his boys. "I believe in physical

activity and don't want them to become couch potatoes," he said.

Is it only family time now? "Not really. I am taking my rally school online. I am also starting an online consultation programme later this week. People who engage with me will be given expert advice on how to drive, be safe in the car and much more."

The challenge
Gill has a tricky assignment ahead of him. His wife, a doctor, has challenged him to make a cheese cake for their eldest son's (Aryan) birthday on Thursday (April 16).

"I can cook and bake a bit, but I will get some quick tips from my mother as she is a baking expert. I hope to win this one," he signed off.

AAI's 'Train the Trainer' from today

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

The Archery Association of India (AAI) expects a good response for its first-ever online 'Train the Trainer' programme, to be conducted in association with the Sports Authority of India, from Thursday.

The programme can be accessed through the Zoom app at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/288782815> from April 16 to May 2.

Besides, coaches can also benefit from lectures related to sports science by logging in to <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83599988550> between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. from April 16 to May 12.



Tech savvy: Wrestling coach Kripa Shankar Patel teaches through video conference. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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