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THE HINDU

FRIDAY, APRIL 24, 2020

INDIA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER SINCE 1878

DELHI
CITY EDITION
16 pages • ₹10.00

Bhupesh Baghel seeks payment of MGNREGS wages in foodgrains
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Don't forget that I am an elected CM, Mamata tells Governor
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WHO should have 'weapons inspector' powers: Scott Morrison
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NEARBY

2 deaths, 128 new COVID-19 cases in Delhi

NEW DELHI

Two deaths and 128 new COVID-19 cases were reported in Delhi on Thursday, taking the death toll to 50 and the total cases to 2,376, the Delhi government said. Three more areas were declared "containment zones".

CITY ▸ PAGE 3

Bhopal surpasses Indore in case growth rate

BHOPAL

The rate of growth in the number of COVID-19 cases in Bhopal was seven times that of Indore in three days, as the count of cases in Madhya Pradesh climbed to 1,687 on Thursday. The reason for the upsurge in cases in Bhopal, say district officials, is the backlog of samples.

NEWS ▸ PAGE 9

Haryana sends buses to bring back students

CHANDIGARH

The Haryana government on Thursday sent 31 buses to bring back students who are stuck in Rajasthan's Kota due to the nationwide lockdown. "Thirty-one Haryana Roadways buses have gone to Kota to bring back the students," State Transport Minister Mool Chand Sharma said.

NORTH & EAST ▸ PAGE 4

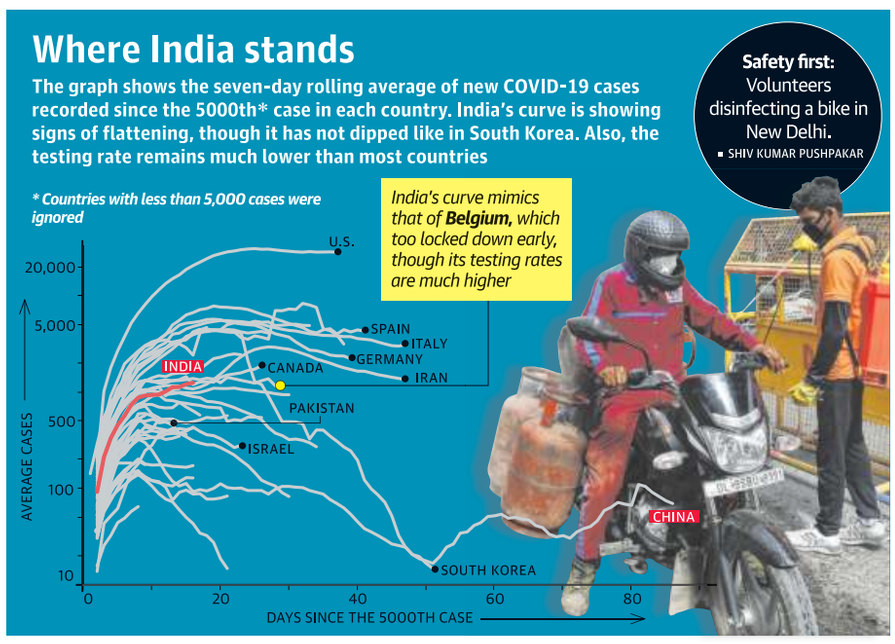
Lockdown ensured growth of cases remained linear, says govt.

12 districts free of new cases for 28 days; total number of cases is now 21, 700

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India has managed to maintain a linear growth of COVID-19 cases over the one month period during its lockdown, the Union Health Ministry said on Thursday even as the country reported over 1,409 new COVID-19 cases, taking the total number of cases to 21,700 with 16,689 active ones.

There have been over 4,324 recoveries, which takes the recovery rate to 19.89 %, the Health Ministry said. A total of 686 deaths have been reported, with 34 in the past 24 hours.



COVID-19

It added that as on Thursday, there are 12 districts that did not have a fresh case in the last 28 days. Since April 21, eight new districts have been added including – Chitradurga (Karnataka), Bilaspur (Chhattisgarh), Imphal West (Manipur), Aizawl West (Mizoram), Bhadradri Kothagudem (Telangana), Pilibhit (Uttar Pradesh), SBS Nagar (Punjab) and South Goa (Goa).

Also, 78 districts from 23 States/Union Territories have not reported any fresh cases during the last 14 days.

State Health Departments have put the nationwide death toll at 718 with 23,034 cases of which 17, 428 are active ones.

Maharashtra has 5,304 active cases, with Mumbai reporting 478 new cases and eight deaths on Thursday taking the death toll to 168 and 4,232 cases.

'Strategies succesful'

"Despite a 24-fold increase in testing, the percentage of positive cases is not rising phenomenally when compared to the percentage of positive cases at the beginning of the lockdown," said chairman of the empowered group-2 C.K. Mishra.

"The growth of cases has been more or less linear, not exponential; this indicates that the strategies we have adopted have succeeded in containing the infection to a particular level," he added.

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MORE REPORTS ON ▸ PAGES 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 12
RAPID FAILURES ▸ EDITORIAL

'More cases likely for three weeks'

A mathematical model projects no respite from the growth in COVID-19 cases and deaths for at least three weeks. Based on the relationship between deaths and cases from several countries, the model says India's healthcare system must prepare to tend to 7,928 ICU patients on May 6, or three days after the lockdown ends. ▸ PAGE 10

Clause allowing FIR against firms for COVID-19 cases goes

Industries can start production fearlessly, says Javadekar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The government withdrew on Thursday the clause allowing filing of an FIR against a company and its management if an employee tests positive for COVID-19, following concerns raised by India Inc.

"There is no mention of sole responsibility fixed of owner/director on detection of COVID-19 positive case/s," stated the reworked guidelines sent to business owners. "The policy has been revised and the FIR clause removed. All the confusions on this matter should end."

Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar, meanwhile, maintained that there was no government directive "for an FIR against a factory".

'No harassment'

On Thursday, Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla wrote to the Chief Secretaries of all States requesting that the guidelines "should not be misused to harass management of any manufacturing/commercial establishment".

He said some apprehension had been raised in the media based on a wrong interpretation of the guidelines. It was believed that the States may take legal action, including imprisonment of the CEO, if a COVID-19 positive employee is found in the factory, and that in such a scenario the factory would be sealed for three months.

"I would like to clarify that there is no such clause in the consolidated revised guidelines...," Mr. Bhalla said. Subject to compliance with standard operating procedure, no fresh licence or statutory approval is needed for resumption of permitted activities, he said.

CONTINUED ON ▸ PAGE 8

Much needed: Workers preparing personal protective equipment in Patna on Thursday. ▪ RANJEET KUMAR

'Industries can't be forced to pay'

In a report on the Industrial Relations Code, 2019, the Parliamentary Committee on Labour recommended that "in case of natural calamities, payment of wages until the re-establishment of the industry may be unjustifiable". Panel Chairman Bhartruhari Mahtab said the lockdown could be counted as such a calamity. ▸ PAGE 8

India follows U.S. trajectory: expert

India's trajectory in COVID-19 cases is following the U.S. and is likely to reach a plateau rather than peak soon, one of China's top infectious disease experts has said. Since there were signs of community transmission in India, it was more likely to follow the U.S. trend rather than limit cases to a low number, Zang Wenhong said. ▸ PAGE 10

Field work

Safeguarding livelihoods: Women undertaking desilting as part of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme at Nidigattu village in Visakhapatnam district on Thursday, even as the lockdown continues. With over 93 lakh registered workers, Andhra Pradesh is one of the leading States in the implementation of the MGNREGA. ▪ K.R. DEEPAK

Former bureaucrats flag 'minority harassment' in letter to CMs, L-Gs

They seek directions to prevent 'social boycott' of Muslims

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A group of 101 former civil servants has written to Chief Ministers and Lieutenant-Governors of all States and Union Territories, expressing anguish over reports of alleged harassment of Muslims in some parts of the country, particularly after the meeting of the Tablighi Jamaat in Delhi's Nizamuddin in March.

Through the letter, copied to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, they have sought directions to all public functionaries to remain vigilant in preventing "social boycott" of any community and to ensure that all entitlements, including medical and hospital care, rations and financial assistance, are available equally to all those in need.

The group said it did not subscribe to any particular political ideology and rather focused on issues having a bearing on the Constitution.

Among the signatories are former National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon, former Chief Election Commissioner S.Y. Quraishi, former Chief Economic Adviser Nitin Desai, former High Commissioner to the United Kingdom Nareshwar Dayal, former Foreign Secretary and National Security Advisory Board Chairman Shyam Saran, former OSD on Kashmir in the PMO A.S. Dulat and former Health Secretaries K. Sujatha Rao and Keshav Desiraju. Former Director General of Police Julio Ribeiro, former Chief Information Commissioner Wajahat Habibullah, and former Chief Secretary (J&K) Hindal Tyabji have also endorsed the letter.

"The Jamaat was criticised for ignoring the principles of social distancing when cases of COVID-19 had started emerging in the country. Although this was hardly the only incident of such gatherings, both political and religious, sections of the media hastened to give a communal colour to COVID-19, including attributing motives to the Tablighi Jamaat in spreading the virus to different parts of the country," the group said.

'Irresponsible' media

The group criticised Tablighi Jamaat's action of ignoring the Delhi government's advisories on organising such an event. "However, the action of the media in communalising it and extending it to the Muslim community as a whole is utterly irresponsible and reprehensible," the letter added.

DA for Central staff frozen till July 2021

SPCIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Finance Ministry on Thursday issued an order freezing the Dearness Allowance (DA) to the Central employees and Dearness Relief (DR) to pensioners at current rates till July 2021.

"In view of the crisis arising out of COVID-19, it has been decided that the additional instalment of Dearness Allowance... and Dearness Relief..., due from January 1, 2020, shall not be paid," said the order.

"The additional instalments of Dearness Allowance and Dearness Relief due from July 1, 2020, and January 1, 2021, shall also not be paid. However, Dearness Allowance and Dearness Relief at current rates will continue to be paid," it said.

CONTINUED ON ▸ PAGE 8

In Rae Bareli, doctors have untold stories of quarantine

Medical team releases videos of cramped space, dirty toilets, cold food, is then moved to guest house

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

A group of government doctors and medical staff in Rae Bareli, Uttar Pradesh, have released videos highlighting the poor and unpleasant living facilities provided to them at a government-run school, where they were lodged under "active quarantine".

After the "expose", the chief medical officer of the district shifted the 25 doctors and paramedical staff to a guest house, providing them en suite single rooms.

Till Wednesday evening, Rae Bareli had reported 43 COVID-19 cases, all of them active.

In a series of short videos, the doctors and paramedical staff of the L1 facility (community health centre), showed the poor conditions they were made to live in.

In a video, a man, identifying himself as a medical officer, described the team's sleeping space, with four beds in a room thus: "It is 3 a.m. The electricity is gone. Fans are not working. This is awesome five-star class facility." He then walks towards the shared toilet area, which has a dirty and stained floor, and shows the toilets, some of which are blocked and dirty.

Pushed to a corner: A video grab shows a medical team member in a cramped quarantine facility. ▪ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

'Food not packed'

In another video, a voice describes the food available. Oily puris and sabzi are sealed together in a cloth bag without proper packing. "This is the food for active quarantine for doctors and all staff who are treating coronavirus patients," it said. In the third video, a person in full PPE kit explained how the members lived in conditions that went against active quarantine norms. Not only did they have to share bathrooms and toilets, they were boarded in big classrooms with four beds in each. "Totally wrong for active quarantine," he said.

There was no light on the premises a day earlier; even the food came late. They were also made to share a single water can of 20 litres, he added.

A mobile toilet was installed outside when they complained but they had no bathrooms.

S.K Sharma, Chief Medical Officer, said, "We have shifted everyone to a guest house nearby. We are also arranging for a live kitchen there, so the doctors can get hot cooked food. The facilities [at the L1 centre] were arranged by the local administration. I was myself not satisfied with it," he said.

Plan ahead for train services for migrant workers: Maharashtra

Desperation might spark Bandra-like clashes: Ajit Pawar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

With just about 10 days to go for the lockdown to end on May 3, Maharashtra urged the Union government to plan and resume railway services for several lakh migrant labourers who want to return home.

In a letter to Minister for Railways Piyush Goyal on Thursday, Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar warned of a possible repeat of the violent incidents at the Bandra railway station on April 14, when thousands of migrant labourers who had gathered hoping to return home had to be turned back.

He appealed for advance planning for resuming train services to facilitate the return of nearly 6.5 lakh labourers. The special trains could originate from Mumbai and Pune to all major destinations in the country, he said, "to accommodate all such restless labourers".

Warning of potential law and order problems, Mr. Pawar said Maharashtra has the highest number of migrant workers from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and other northern States.

CONTINUED ON ▸ PAGE 8

Desperate measure: Migrant workers gathered in Bandra earlier this month, defying the lockdown. ▪ ZOYA THOMAS

Timings
DELHI

FRIDAY, APR. 24		
RISE	05:47	SET 18:53
RISE	06:37	SET 20:02
SATURDAY, APR. 25		
RISE	05:46	SET 18:53
RISE	07:12	SET 20:57
SUNDAY, APR. 26		
RISE	05:45	SET 18:54
RISE	07:51	SET 21:54

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	35	23
Safdarjang	35	23
Palam	36	24

Delhi Palam Today
36°C The weather will be dry and warm during the day.Night will be pleasant. Thunderstorm is likely.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
37°C Weather will be warm with partly cloudy sky. Short spell of duststorm and thundershower is likely

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IN BRIEF

North body Mayor writes to CM, demands funds

NEW DELHI

North Delhi Mayor Avtar Singh wrote to the Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday demanding the release of funds — due to the civic body — in order to disburse salaries to employees. The civic body staffhave not been paid for the last two months and sanitation workers have not received salaries for March, Mr. Singh said.

8 caught for travelling on fake curfew pass

NEW DELHI

Eight persons were caught on Thursday for allegedly trying to go to Bihar from here on fake curfew pass, the police said. The officers intercepted a car on Thursday at 12 a.m. on Rani Jhansi Road. There were five men, one woman and two children inside the vehicle, they said.

Over 30 calls in 3 days on domestic violence: DCW

NEW DELHI

The DCW on Thursday said they have received over 30 calls in three days on a WhatsApp helpline number launched by it to address complaints pertaining to domestic violence during the ongoing lockdown. It said the number of calls received on its 181 helpline number had reduced since the lockdown.

Delhi pollution halved during first phase of lockdown: CPCB

Air quality index remained 'good' and 'satisfactory' during the period

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The first phase of the lockdown, from March 25 to April 15, reduced particulate matter pollution by nearly half in Delhi, according to a report by the Central Pollution Control Board.

"Overall, 46% reduction in PM2.5 and 50% reduction in PM10 was observed during the lockdown period," the body noted.

This led to nearly a week-long run of the air quality index remaining in the 'good' and 'satisfactory' categories, as opposed to the unhealthy and hazardous categories the city is more accustomed to. The stint was broken by a dust storm and subsequent change in temperature and dry weather heralding summer.

The improvement in air was due to a reduction in combustion and industrial sources which are common to both the categories of particulate matter. As 81% of Delhi's nitrous oxide emissions came from the transport sector, restrictions on vehicular activity led to a 56% reduction in NO2 levels and over 37% reduction in carbon monoxide levels during the lockdown period, compared to pre-lockdown times.

Clear skies at an empty Rajpath on Thursday. ▪ V.V. KRISHNAN

There was also a 47% reduction in benzene levels while sulphur dioxide levels reduced only by 20%. This was because 70% of Delhi's SO2 originates from power plants located around Delhi and power plants continue to operate. Other sources of SO2 were restaurants and some industries, which were operational during the lockdown period along with biomass/refuse burning in some areas in and around Delhi.

Less than average

Moreover, 24-hourly average PM2.5 and PM10 were within National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for 20 and 15 days respectively, while NO2 levels were 75% less than their 24-hourly standard. Also, 24 hourly average levels of PM10, PM2.5 , NO2 and SO2 dropped as low as 24 g/m3, 39g/m3, 15 g/m3 and 10 g/m3 respectively, the report noted.

While significant reduction in NO2 levels was observed in Noida (68%), Ghaziabad (60%) and Gurugram (40%), the same was not observed in Faridabad (17%), where NO2 emissions were found higher during a few days during lockdown. This was likely due to the gas-based power plants in and around Faridabad. Significant reduction in SO2 levels was only seen in Faridabad (47%) and Ghaziabad (22%), while Gurugram (14%) and Noida (10%) recorded relatively limited reductions during the lockdown phase.

As much as 78% of cities in the country that are monitored by the CPCB had their AQI in the good and satisfactory categories, increasing from the average of 44% seen in the pre-lockdown phase.

Maruti not to resume production despite government's go-ahead

'Production not possible unless vendors, retail outlets open'

ASHOK KUMAR
GURUGRAM

Exactly a month after the Maruti Suzuki India Limited shut down its production and office operations across Haryana on March 22, the company's Manesar plant was on Wednesday granted the permission to resume operations in a single shift with restricted number of staff and vehicles. The company's chairman R.C. Bhargava, however, ruled out actual production unless the vendors and the retail outlets were open.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Bhargava said it was good that the government granted permission and that it would help them prepare for the future, but there "is no way we can start production". He said that it was not known as to how long it might take for the production to start as the situation changed every day.

"Cars cannot be produced until all components are produced on a steady and regular basis. And this means thousands of vendors have to start production. It is not likely to happen today because many of them are in red zones or containment zones. We cannot get the complete set of components. The retail outlets have not been opened yet. There is no permission. So you cannot produce unless you can sell," said Mr. Bhargava.

He said the permission from the government was only one part of the problem, and the company could not start producing cars only because it had the permission to do so.

Earlier, the Haryana government issued a permission certificate to the company saying the "authorised strength" of the company during the lockdown period would be 4,696 people and 50 vehicles. However, the certificate also said the application was recommended for permission to operate for 600 employees.

Additional Chief Secretary V.S. Kundu said the company could resume operations after they put in place all measures for social distancing and safe management of the workers.

However, Maruti Suzuki's decision to not to start production would be a big blow to the plans of several micro, small and medium enterprises, mostly vendors of the company, to resume operations.

Manesar Industries Welfare Association vice-president Manmohan Gaind said in case the Maruti Suzuki and the Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India Limited did not start production, the other factories down the chain would have no reason to resume production because they are dedicated suppliers to them.

He said it would defeat the whole idea of starting things in a small way that the Union government wanted.

Defer all charges except tuition fees: Haryana govt. to pvt. schools

Parents want tuition fees reduced by half

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GURUGRAM

The Haryana government on Thursday directed the private schools to defer all charges like building and maintenance funds except tuition fees and also told not to include any hidden charges in the monthly fee. The parents' associations, however, demanded that the tuition fee be reduced by half in view of the grim economic situation due to lockdown.

The Directorate of Secondary Education, in its directions, said certain guidelines had been issued to the private schools on April 12 regarding fees but it had been brought to their notice that the management was seeking charges other than the tuition fees from the parents. Issuing seven-point directions, the government categorically said the schools should only charge the monthly fees and not enhance it. The order said the charges such as building and maintenance funds and entry and computer fees be deferred in view of the unprecedented situation emerging out of COVID-19. Reiterating its earlier order to not charge the transport fee during the lockdown period, the government directed the schools to ensure that no hidden charges were added to the monthly fee. The government directed the schools not to change the uniform, textbooks, notebooks etc.

Tabligh chief's farmhouse 'raided'

Policemen in PPE kits create a flutter in sleepy U.P. town

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI/GHAZIABAD

The Delhi Police Crime Branch 'raided' the farmhouse of Tablighi Jamaat chief Maulana Saad Kandhalvi, who was booked for holding a religious congregation in the national capital during the lockdown, at Shamli district in Uttar Pradesh, officials said on Thursday.

The presence of more than half-a-dozen policemen in PPE kits created a flutter in the sleepy town, but Delhi Police had no other choice, revealed sources.

"We were informed about the action beforehand and the Uttar Pradesh police provided the local support," a source said. But those who witnessed the incident remarked that the police wanted to create a *mahaul* [atmosphere] for the media, as they came in uniform. However, Superintendent of Police Vineet Jaiswal clarified that it was the lockdown-enforced protocol.

As Mr. Kandhalvi was not in Shamli, where 17 people have been tested positive for COVID 19 cases, the police might have raided the farmhouse to scour some documents. "We know he is not in Shamli. They might have gone to check some documents. Since the Nizamuddin incident, we have visited the farmhouse thrice. Apart from his three-member staff, there are some relatives who live in the vicinity. Out of them, some had a travel history to Nizamuddin, not necessarily the markaz. They have been tested and their reports have come out to be negative," he explained.

Appeal to followers

On Monday, Kandhalvi had urged the followers of the organisation to pray at home in the month of Ramzan. "I request all, both in India and abroad, to strictly follow the guidelines and instructions of the local or national governments and till the time restrictions are in place, please observe prayers at home. And even in this, we should not invite people from outside," he said. In an audio message released earlier this month, Kandhalvi had said he was exercising self-quarantine.

Activists condemn arrest of two Jamia students

Duo held in communal violence case

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

After the police booked two students from Jamia Millia Islamia under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, several activists on Thursday issued a statement condemning the arrests and also the charges leveled against former Jawaharlal Nehru University student Umar Khalid.

The police had arrested the two students – Meeran Haider and Safoora Zargar – in a case related to communal violence in Delhi over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, said a lawyer. The activists, under the banner of "Hum Bharat Ke Log-We the People of India", also sought removal of the charges, saying those involved in inciting violence should be held accountable.

"It is shocking to see that while the entire nation has come together to deal with the health emergency caused by COVID-19 and the consequent nationwide lockdown, the government, instead of focusing on saving lives and livelihoods of citizens, is conspiring to crush people's movements by incarcerating activists," the statement read.

Mr. Haider's advocate Akram Khan had said Mr. Khalid too was booked under the UAPA.

Government of Jammu and Kashmir
Officer of the Chief Engineer, Mechanical Engineering Department Jammu
e-mail: cemedjammu@gmail.com website: www.mechjmu.co.in Ph. 0191-2430098
CORRIGENDUM-4
Due to prevailing circumstances of lockdown resulting from the pandemic of Coronavirus, the e-Tender/Auction No: CE/MEDJ/Tech/2019-20/08 Dated: 24-02-2020 Due on 12-03-2020 extended upto 19-03-2020, 27-03-2020 & 20-04-2020 for the Disposal of Condemned vehicles/machinery lying in various Divisions of Mechanical Engineering Department, Jammu is hereby again extended upto 20-05-2020 and shall be opened on 22-05-2020. The revised critical dates can be seen / downloaded from the J&K Govt. website www.jktenders.gov.in and departmental website www.mechjmu.co.in , rest all other terms and conditions of e-NIT shall remain the same.
Sd-
(Er. Gagan Jyoti)
Chief Engineer
Mechanical Engineering Department, Jammu
DIP/J-243/20

APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION

General public is here by informed that an unidentified person (depicted in the photo) name: **Unknown**, residence and family: **Unknown** about **35-40 years** of age was found unconscious condition in the area of P.S. Bawan, Delhi. He was admitted in BSA Hospital, Rohini, Delhi. During the treatment he was died. In this regard a DD No. **8-A** dated **05.04.2020** has been registered at **Police Station Bawana, Delhi.** The dead body is preserve at BSA Hospital Mortuary, Delhi.
His physical description is as under:-
Sex: Male, **Age:** 35-40 years, **Height:** 5'6", **Face:** Long, **Complexion:** Wheatish, **Buit:** Medium, **Wearing:** Only Brown colour pant.
Note: He told that his **Name:** Manoj, **S/o** Mishri Lal **R/o** JJ Colony, Bawana, Delhi. After many efforts his address/legal heirs has not found in JJ Colony, Bawana, Delhi.
Any person having any information or clue about the deceased may kindly inform to the undersigned on the following address or Telephone Numbers.
SHO
P.S. Bawana, Delhi
Ph. No.-011-27752534
Mob. No- 7065036321
DP/217/ON/2020

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED (See Section 82 Cr.PC.)
Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person Mohd. Jagir @ Neeraj Mohd. Jagen @ Neeraj, S/o Mohd. Naseem Khan, R/o A-354, Pappu Colony, Prahlad Vihar, Phase-II, Delhi has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in Complaint Case No. 175/3/13 U/S 156(3) Cr.PC PS Shahbad Dairy, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said accused Mohd. Jagir @ Neeraj Mohd. Jagen @ Neeraj can not be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused Mohd. Jagir @ Neeraj Mohd. Jagen @ Neeraj has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).
Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused person Mohd. Jagir @ Neeraj Mohd. Jagen @ Neeraj of Complaint Case No. 175/3/13 U/S 156(3) Cr.PC PS Shahbad Dairy, Delhi is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on 30.07.20.
By Order
Shri Vaibhav Mehta
Metropolitan Magistrate-05
Room No. 114, First Floor, Rohini Court, Delhi
DP/208/ON/20

THE HINDU
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EASTERN RAILWAY
e-Bids are invited by Dy Chief Signal & Telecom Engineer, Railway Electrification, 11, Convent Lane, Beliaghata, Kolkata-700015 at website **http://www.ireps.gov.in** for the under mentioned works from the tenderers fulfilling the requisite eligibility criteria : **Sl. No. 1. e-Tender Notice No. : RE-KKK-SIG-BGP-DUMK-OT-49, dated 14.04.2020. Name of the Work :** Trenching & laying of underground signaling cables, power cables, casting of foundations, supply of certain equipment/materials, erection of apparatus cases & fixing of equipment, wiring, testing & commissioning in connection with modification of PI/EI/RRI at stations in Bhagalpur-Dumka section and Barahat-Banka section of Malda Division of Eastern Railway under Deputy Chief Signal & Telecom Engineer, Railway Electrification, Kolkata to suit 25 kV AC Traction. **Advertised Value :** Rs. 4,22,52,446.44. **EMD :** Rs. 3,61,300/-. **Date and Time of opening :** 18.05.2020 at 14.00 hrs. **Tender Closing Date & Time :** 18.05.2020 upto 14.00 hrs. **Sl. No. 2. e-Tender Notice No. : RE_KKK_ROP-BGY_SIG_OT-51, dated 21.04.2020. Name of the Work :** Trenching & laying of underground signaling cables/power cables/telecom cables, casting of foundations, supply of certain equipment/materials, erection of apparatus cases & fixing of equipment, wiring, testing & commissioning in connection with modification of PI/EI/RRI at stations and modification of MACLS at LC gates in Rupsa (ROP)-Bangriposi (BGY) section of Kharagpur Division of South Eastern Railway under Deputy Chief Signal & Telecom Engineer, Railway Electrification, Kolkata to suit 25 kV AC Traction. **Advertised Value :** Rs. 84,65,130.69. **EMD :** Rs. 1,69,300/-. **Date and Time of Opening :** 20.05.2020 at 14.00 hrs. **Tender Closing Date & Time :** 20.05.2020 upto 14.00 hrs. Complete information including e-tender document of the above e-tender is available in website **http://www.ireps.gov.in Note** : The prospective tenderers are advised to revisit the website fourteen days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes/corrigenda issued for these tenders. Website : **http://www.ireps.gov.in**
MISC-08/2020-21
Tender Notice is also available at websites : www.er.indianrailways.gov.in / www.ireps.gov.in

NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY
Corrigendum no. 1 Regarding E-tender notice No. **M/C&W/43/ 2019-20 dt. 30.03.2020** published by **Mech./C&W/BSB, Published Information:** Date of opening of e-tender Dt. **08.05.2020, Corrected Information:** Date of opening of e-tender Dt. **21.05.2020. Note:** All other terms and conditions shall remain same as per uploaded tender document. The above corrigendum letter can be seen on the IREPS Website **www.ireps.gov.in**.
Sr. Divl. Mech. Engineer (C&W)
CPRO/Mech.-9 Varanasi
About any passenger amenity complain SMS on Mobile No. 09794845955
"DO NOT TRAVEL WITH INFLAMMABLE ARTICLE IN TRAIN"

NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY
Corrigendum No. 1 Regarding E-tender notice no. M/C&W/40/ 2019-20 dt. 20-03-2020 published by Mech./C&W/BSB
Published Information : Date of opening of e-tender **: 15.05.2020.**
Corrected information : Date of opening of e-tender **: Dt. 29.05.2020.**
All other terms and conditions shall remain same as per uploaded tender document. The above corringdum letter can be seen on the IREPS website **www.ireps.gov.in.**
Sr. Divl. Mech. Engineer
CPRO/Mech-07 (C&W), Varanasi
About any passenger amenity complain SMS on Mobile No. 09794845955
"Never travel on roof and foot boards"

JAMMU & KASHMIR POWER DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, GENERATION DIVISION LJHP BARAMULLA
(Email id: xeneljhp@gmail.com)
E-NIT No: GD/LJHP/01 of 2020-21,
Dated: - 21-04- 2020
(Tender ID: 2020_SPDC_95958_1)
For and on behalf of the Managing Director, J&K Power Development Corporation, sealed bids affixed with revenue stamps worth Rs. 6 valid for 180 days, accompanied with earnest money in the shape of DD/ CDR/FDR/BG from any International / Nationalized/Scheduled Bank @ 2% of the estimated cost pledged to the Chief Engineer Generation Wing Kashmir, Bemina Srinagar, are invited from OEMS (original equipment manufacturers)/Registered firms/ Authorized firms / Electro- Mechanical / Mechanical Contractors of International / National Repute having sufficient experience of the relevant job for

S. No	Description	Estimated cost (Lacs)	Amount of EMD	Cost of Tender Specification (Non-Refundable)	Time of Completion
1	Survey, Design, Engineering, Fabrication, Supply, Installation, Testing & Commissioning of HDPE Pipe Debris Barrier Boom with pathway at Headworks Barrage LJHP Gantamulla and maintenance of Barrier for 3 years from the date of commissioning.	Rs 176.90 lacs	2 % of the estimated cost i.e. (Rs. 3.60 lacs)	Rs.5000.00	180 Days

1.	Date of Issue of tender notice	21-04-2020
2.	Period of downloading of bidding documents.	23-04-2020 TO 15-05-2020
3.	Bid submission start date	23-04-2020
4.	Bid submission end date	15-05-2020
5.	Deadline for receiving the hard copies (CDR & EMD).	18-05-2020
6.	Date & time of opening of Technical Bid (Online).	20-05-2020

1. The complete bidding process will be online. However, hard copy shall be submitted in the office of Chief Engineer Generation Wing Kashmir alongwith cost of Tender Document and EMD.
2. Bid documents can be download from the website www.jktenders.gov.in and official website of JKPSC www.jkspdc.nin.in. The bid documents contain Qualifying criteria for the bidders, specifications, Bill of Quantities, terms & conditions and other details.

No GD /LJHP/34-53
Dated: 21 - 04 -2020
Sd/-
Executive Engineer
Generation Division LJHP
Gantamulla Baramulla
DIPK-NB-99/20

Man injured in Farooqia Masjid attack held for 'rioting'

Family claims police called him to identify accused

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

A 22-year-old man was arrested on April 19 in connection with the riots in north-east Delhi in February. His family claimed that he had lodged a complaint with the police about being attacked inside a mosque in Brijpuri on February 25 and was called to the police station on the pretext of identifying the accused in the case.

Javed, a resident of Mustafabad who is pursuing BA from open school, was arrested at Dayalpur police station, his father Shokeen Ahmed, 45, said.

A senior police officer from North-East district said, "He [Javed] has been carefully examined. He was found involved in rioting. Hence, has been arrested."

Mr. Shokeen, who runs a milk business, said Javed had gone to Brijpuri on February 25 to collect money from a relative. From there he went to Farooqia Masjid to offer prayers. "While they were praying, some men in uniform entered [the mosque] wearing helmets and handkerchiefs and attacked everyone with sticks. Javed's head and foot were injured in the attack. Whether they were real policemen or not, we don't know," he said.

MLC prepared

When Javed reached home in an injured condition, he was rushed to Al Hind Hospital where many injured were being treated at that time, said the family. Javed received 10 stitches in his head and was sent home. On suggestions of lawyers, who were active in the area providing legal aid to victims, his medico-legal certificate (MLC) was prepared from Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital on March 5. A copy of the MLC was seen by *The Hindu*.

About 20 days ago, the family members said they were approached by police officers who first asked them about the MLC and then about how Javed got injured. "They asked whether we want legal action and we said yes. They tried to dissuade us from pursuing but we still insisted. They then agreed and took a written statement," Mr. Shokeen said.

> **They have not shown us any video footage. They haven't spoken to the imam of the Masjid. The arrest has been made only because we got the MLC done**
>
> SHOKEEN AHMED
> Javed's father

On April 19, Javed allegedly received a call from the police station and was asked to come to identify the accused. "We went and they asked Javed what he does. He told them he studies. They asked him to bring his education-related documents. The officer who initially questioned us let us go but then we were taken to a senior officer who asked Javed if he was involved. Javed said he was in Brijpuri to collect payment. The officer took details of the relative and called him," Mr. Shokeen said. The relative allegedly got scared and fumbled while answering a few questions and Javed was arrested, said the family. He was sent to Mandoli jail the next day.

Police sources in a unit tasked to probe the riots said they have started examining MLCs and are speaking to those who were injured. "There's a possibility that those who got injured were rioting," a source said.

Javed's lawyer Deeksha Dwivedi said that he has been arrested in an unnamed FIR on charges of rioting, vandalism and theft. She also said that "it's an arbitrary arrest" after he went to file an FIR for the injuries he received during the riots for which an MLC was done. "The family wasn't informed of the charges. We will file a plea for interim bail," she said.

The father said, "They have not shown us any video footage. They haven't spoken to the imam of the Masjid. The arrest has been made only because we got the MLC done and they got to know about Javed."

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IN BRIEF

Plea in HC over violation by CWG residents

The Delhi High Court has agreed to hear a petition alleging violation of lockdown and social distancing norms by the residents of Commonwealth Games (CWG) Village near Akshardham Temple here. The application, filed by a CWG Village resident, alleged that there was repeated violation of lockdown directives by residents who are regularly going out for walk in the adjacent DDA park and that they are neither adhering to social distancing norms nor wearing masks.

Cong. leader wants FIR against news anchor

NEW DELHI

Delhi Congress president Chaudhury Anil Kumar on Thursday lodged a police complaint seeking registration of an FIR against news anchor Arnab Goswami for his alleged derogatory remarks against Congress president Sonia Gandhi. Mr. Kumar in his complaint demanded registration of an FIR against Mr. Goswami for "propagating hatred," the Delhi Congress said.

Air Quality of Delhi-NCR

Delhi	122	Gurugram	106
Ghaziabad	143	Faridabad	130
Noida	128	Greater Noida	142

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

BJP leader seeks L-G help over fund release

NEW DELHI

Leader of the Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri on Thursday called on Lieutenant Governor Anil Baijal at Raj Niwas seeking intervention in impressing upon the Delhi government the need to immediately release pending funds to the municipal corporations. He stressed that the funds were required by civic bodies in their fight against the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic as well as to pay salaries to their staff. The L-G assured that he will ensure necessary action at the earliest, he said.

L-G reviews COVID-19 measures in city

NEW DELHI

Lieutenant Governor Anil Baijal on Thursday reviewed preparedness for the enforcement of the lockdown and other measures to contain COVID-19 with the Chief Secretary, Police Commissioner and other senior officers. Mr. Baijal directed the Delhi Police to ensure safety and security of frontline health workers while taking all precautions in addition to issuing instruction related to the effective enforcement of the lockdown.

Lok Nayak doctor 'attacked' by CATS ambulance workers

Hospital releases statement saying the matter has been amicably resolved

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A woman doctor of Lok Nayak Hospital was allegedly attacked by a worker of CATS ambulance service while she was on duty on Wednesday. The Resident Doctors' Association has written a complaint to the hospital medical director over the incident.

Meanwhile the hospital, in a statement on Thursday, said that the matter has been resolved.

"The matter of misunderstanding and consequently ensuing altercation between the CATS ambulance attendants and accident and emergency staff of Lok Nayak Hospital was amicably resolved by the intervention of senior officers of both the organisations, CATS and LNH, after the staff members concerned of both the organisations involved in the incident felt that any and all differences need to be kept aside in view of the ongoing pandemic," the statement said.

"Most of the resident doctors are from different places and they do not want to file an FIR because then they will get summons when they are somewhere else after a year or two. No FIR was filed," a doctor at the hospital, privy to the development, told *The Hindu*.

"This is to bring to your notice an incident of physical and verbal assault on healthcare workers posted at Lok Nayak Hospital by certain CATS ambulance personnel and vandalism by the same. The incident took place at around 3.45 p.m. when personnel of CATS ambulance started misbehaving with a resident doctor on duty on being asked to wear mask and maintain social distancing. They started abusing the woman doctor on duty, the casualty medical officer and throttled the female guard posted there," the letter written by the association to the medical director read.

Medical staff and patients at Lok Nayak Hospital in New Delhi on Thursday. ▪ R.V. MOORTHY

> Most of the resident doctors are from different places. They don't want to file an FIR because then they will get summons when they are somewhere else after a year or two. No FIR was filed.
>
> DOCTOR AT LOK NAYAK HOSPITAL

2 deaths, 128 new COVID-19 cases reported in Capital

Number of containment zones in Delhi rises to 92

NIKHIL M BABU
NEW DELHI

Two deaths and 128 new COVID-19 cases were reported in Delhi on Thursday, taking the total number of death to 50 and total number of cases to 2,376, the Delhi government said. The government on Thursday declared three more areas as "containment zones", taking the total number of such zones in the city to 92.

Of the 2,376 cases, 808 people have recovered and there are 1,518 active cases.

Virus spread

Total number of COVID-19 cases	2,376
Total deaths	50
New cases in the past 24 hours	128
New deaths in the past 24 hours	2

SOURCE: DELHI GOVERNMENT HEALTH BULLETIN

Dietician tests positive

A woman dietician working at Delhi government-run Lok Nayak Hospital tested positive for COVID-19, hospital officials said on Thursday.

A kitchen at the hospital has been shut and around 35 people who came into contact with her have been quarantined, an official said. "We used to prepare food for the patients at this canteen. The dietician was asymptomatic and it doesn't look like she came in contact with the two nurses who had earlier tested positive. We are still looking into the matter," the official told *The Hindu*.

To "improve interaction with patients" and "reduce anxiety" of them and their relatives, medical director of the hospital, J.C. Passey, issued a set of direction on Thursday, including doctors taking three rounds in COVID-19 wards.

2 more test positive

A guard and an administrative employee of Delhi government-run Babu Jagjivan Ram Memorial Hospital in Jahangirpuri tested COVID-19 positive, taking the total number of infected hospital staff to 16, authorities said.

Infant infected

Meanwhile, 12 people staying in Jama Masjid area, including a two-month-old infant, were tested positive, officials informed.

"They belong to two families and one of them had travelled from Uzbekistan to India. We got to know about it last evening [Wednesday] and shifted all of them to Lok Nayak Hospital. We are doing contact tracing of the families," a Delhi government source said.

Meanwhile, a vegetable hawker in Ward No. 3 Mehrauli was found to be positive, officials said.

Grievance cell

The grievance cell has also been activated and patients and their attendants can register their grievances and issues through WhatsApp or text messages on COVID-19 services.

Also, the Delhi government on Thursday formed a State Level Media Cell (SLMC) to deal with COVID-19 related issues, misinformation, complaints, according to an official order.

Police officer tests positive, number of infected personnel rises to 29

More than 200 policemen are under home quarantine

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

An Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) posted in Delhi Police Crime Branch tested positive for COVID-19 on Thursday, taking the total number of Delhi police personnel afflicted by the dreaded virus to 29, said a senior police officer.

Sample of a family residing in Mansarovar Park area was tested for COVID-19 and six members of the family tested positive. The ASI was their neighbour.

A senior police officer said that the 29 policemen and four others, who are among their family members, tested positive, while one policeman has recovered and was discharged from the hospital.

"More than 200 policemen are under home quarantine after they came in contact with infected police personnel," said the officer.

Of 29 police personnel, 14 are from Central district and were deployed in Chandni Mahal, Nabi Karim and Jama Masjid police station.

On Wednesday, a Head Constable of the Special Cell of the Delhi Police tested positive for COVID-19 and 71 personnel of the cell were sent to home quarantine as a preventive measures.

A police team patrols the streets amid COVID-19 nationwide lockdown in the Capital. ▪ R. V. MOORTHY

HELPLINE NUMBERS

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

18 new containment zones declared in Gurugram after fresh virus cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GURUGRAM

In view of growing number of COVID-19 cases in Gurugram, the local administration on Thursday declared 18 more containment zones in the district taking the total number to 24.

It includes 10 in Gurugram block.

COVID-19

In late evening orders, Deputy Commissioner Amit Khatri announced containment of 18 more places across the district after new cases were reported in these areas.

As per the orders, there are 10 containment zones in Gurugram block, 11 in Sohna and three in Pataudi.

A total of 47 people have tested positive in Gurugram district so far, and 35 of them have recovered. Only twelve cases are active.

As many as 3,953 samples have been taken so far. The results for 116 are awaited.

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Mr. N SELVA KUMAR
PH: 9820350726
selvakumar.n@thehindu.co.in
Mr. MANOJ KUMAR KUSHWAHA
PH: 9999490055
manoj.kushwaha@thehindu.co.in
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India's National Newspaper

Plea claims violations in Food Act implementation

Food rights activists appeal in HC

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A petition has been filed before the Delhi High Court alleging widespread violations in the implementation of the National Food Security Act (NFSA), including ration shops being shut during working hours, and denial of access to foodgrains to needy during lockdown.

Food insecurity

The plea by Delhi Rozi Roti Adhikar Abhiyan claimed that the lockdown has led to large-scale and sudden loss of livelihood of workers in the informal sector, daily wagers, self-employed persons working as plumbers, carpenters, rickshaw pullers, street hawkers, and has plunged lakhs of people into food insecurity and hunger.

"The various food programmes under the NFSA are the only lifeline for a large number of persons and families in Delhi and therefore, it is crucial that these work properly to ensure that every person is able to access the fundamental right to food," it said. It has sought for proper implementation of necessary grievance redressal and accountability mechanisms under the NFSA.

The NGO said information such as list of all ration shops in Delhi, with their phone number, address and GPS location be provided proactively in the public domain on the website of the food department to ensure transparency.

Mandoli jail to take in more inmates

250 prisoners to be shifted from Tihar, Rohini prisons to enable 'social distancing'

SOIBAM ROCKY SINGH
NEW DELHI

To implement social distancing inside prisons in the Capital, a high-powered committee (HPC) has decided to transfer 200 prisoners from Rohini jail and 50 prisoners from Tihar to Mandoli jail here.

The HPC, constituted under the Supreme Court's direction, and headed by Justice Hima Kohli said the decision would enable the prison administration to implement "social distancing" amongst the inmates of all the three jail complexes.

The committee, which took stock of the ongoing process of decongesting prisons here, was informed by D.G. (Prisons) that a total of 2,962 undertrial prisoners (UTPs) and convicts, were released on either interim bail, parole or remission of sentence during the lockdown period till April 18.

Relaxation of criteria

Members of the committee have taken into consideration that on the basis of the criteria adopted earlier, till April 18 about 2,700 inmates/ convicts/UTPs have been released on parole/interim bail.

The panel also took note of the observations made by the Supreme Court in its subsequent orders, as well as the advisory issued by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) to the effect that persons suffering from acute illness have lesser immunity and are more prone to getting infected by COVID-19.

It relaxed the criteria for release during lockdown with respect to those prisoners/UTPs who are suffering from HIV, cancer, chronic kidney dysfunction (UTPs requiring dialysis), Hepatitis B or C, asthma, and TB.

Easing jail population

D.G (Prisons) said that on the basis of this new criterion, approximately 50 UTPs suffering from various illness (es) would be the beneficiaries and their release would further ease out the jail population.

However, those inmates who are undergoing trial for intermediary or large quantity recovery under narcotics drugs, or are facing trial for sexual offences, including those made against children, and acid attack will not be given the benefit of the additional relaxation. Also UTPs who are foreign nationals are excluded from this relaxation.

Those convicts who have completed their sentence and could not be released for want of deposit of fine have been given the option to deposit it within "15 days of lifting of lockdown".

DG (Prisons) also assured the committee that before releasing any prisoner, he or she will be medically screened and their transportation will be carried out in full compliance of the norms of social distancing.

Decongesting Delhi prisons

	Tihar Jail Complex (9 jails)	Rohini Jail Complex	Mandoli Jail Complex (6 jails)	Overall Delhi Prisons (16 jails)
Holding capacity	5,200	1,050	3,776	10,026
Actual occupancy on March 25	11,981	1,824	3,747	17,552
Actual occupancy on April 18	10,115	1,540	3,144	14,799

Prisoners released during lockdown

Undertrial prisoners released on interim bail till April 18	1,984
Convicts released on emergency parole till April 18	953
Convicts released on remission of sentence	25
Total released till April 18	2,962

SOURCE: MINUTES OF HIGH-POWERED COMMITTEE DATED APRIL 18, 2020

11 minors flee from observation home

They attacked guard and policemen

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Eleven juveniles fled from an observation home in central Delhi's Delhi Gate area after injuring a security guard and three policemen, the police said on Thursday. One minor has been found and brought back, they said.

The police said that the incident took place on Wednesday evening when eleven juveniles in conflict with law (JCL) – under the age group of 16 to 18 – escaped from the home. While fleeing, they attacked the security in-charge and three policemen who were deployed at the centre. They were rushed to a nearby hospital where they were treated and discharged.

The police said that parents of the minors were informed about the incident and it was found that one of them had fled to his residence in Kailash Nagar from where he was brought back.

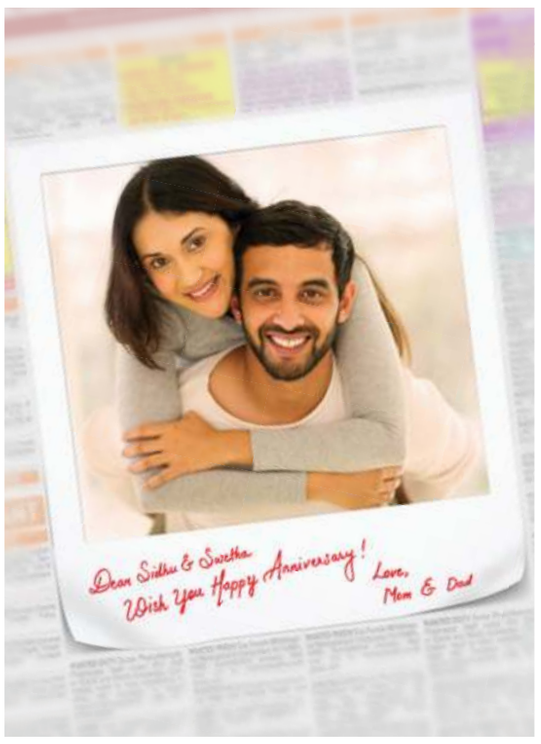
Also, over the last few days, 32 people have fled from a government school in north West Delhi's Mukherjee Nagar that has been turned into a shelter for the needy during lockdown.

The police said that a complaint was received from the school staff on April 21 stating that 32 people had fled from the shelter on different dates and that they could pose a threat to the society.

Based on the complaint, the police have registered a first information report under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code and further probe is under way.

THE HINDU GROUP

A GREETING TO REMEMBER



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Haryana sends buses to bring back students

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHANDIGARH

The Haryana government on Thursday sent 31 State transport buses to bring back students of the State who are stuck in Rajasthan's Kota due to the nationwide lockdown imposed to control the spread of COVID-19.

The students from Haryana, who were preparing for various competitive examinations, have been stuck at the coaching hub of Kota due to the lockdown.

"Thirty-one Haryana Roadways buses have gone to Kota to bring back the students," Haryana's Transport Minister Mool Chand Sharma said.

He said the buses were sent from the Rewari and Narnaul depots of Haryana Roadways.

Nearly 850 students are expected to travel back to their homes.

Rajasthan govt. steps in to give regular wages to poor villagers

Focus on labour-intensive opportunities for employment under MGNREGA

MOHAMMED IQBAL
JAIPUR

After a massive slump in the number of labourers engaged at the sites of the rural employment guarantee works during the COVID-19 lockdown, the Rajasthan government has initiated steps to generate labour-intensive opportunities in order to give regular wages to the poor villagers. The flagship scheme's wages have been revised from ₹199 a day to ₹220 a day.

Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot, who holds the rural development portfolio, said here on Thursday that 6.08 lakh labourers were engaged under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) across the State during the last four days. Earlier, only 62,000 workers were employed in the scheme till April 17.

Deputy CM Sachin Pilot interacting with labourers at an MGNREGA site in Chaksu on Thursday. ▪ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Mr. Pilot, who visited the MGNREGA sites in Jaipur district's Chaksu panchayat samiti, said the creation of rural jobs would ensure money in the hands of the poor and help the rural households. "This is our focus area as part of the economic measures being taken during the pandemic. All guidelines of social distancing, washing hands and use of masks will be strictly followed," he said.

The labourers resumed work at Kumhariyawas and Titariya in Chaksu for construction of model ponds. Mr. Pilot said the works such as construction of houses under the Prime Minister's Awas Yojana, cattle shed construction, vermicompost units and fencing and levelling of agricultural fields would be taken up with priority under the MGNREGA, so that permanent assets could be created for villagers.

Wage increase

Apart from the hike in wages for unskilled labourers to ₹220 a day, the wages of skilled and semi-skilled workers and recordkeepers at the MGNREGA sites have been enhanced from ₹213 a day to ₹235 a day.

The labourers who interacted with Mr. Pilot said the employment guarantee scheme was the main source of their livelihood during the present crisis.

Six Muslim families convert in Haryana's Jind district

They embrace Hinduism in view of the 'changed environment'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GURUGRAM

Around 35 people belonging to six Muslim families have converted to Hinduism in Haryana's Jind district this past week. The families claimed they were contemplating about converting for the past several months since their names, customs and rituals were akin to Hindus, but their resolve was strengthened by the recent Nizamuddin congregation of the Tablighi Jamaat which led to targeting of their community.

One of those who converted, Ramesh Kumar, a resident of Danoda Kalan village and belonging to the Doom caste, told *The Hindu* over phone that they had been staying in the village surrounded by Hindus for more than four generations and their names and rituals were akin to them. "My father is Ved Prakash. My brothers are Vikas and Sunil. We always had Hindu names. We have same customs as Hindus and celebrate Holi, Diwali and other Hindu festivals. I bought a home in January this year and held *havan*. Even three of the six houses of our families have temples. I had also offered myself as volunteer for the vigil during the lockdown," said Mr. Kumar, who works as block resource co-ordinator with the Public Health Engineering Department in Sonipat.

He said that they regretted the attacks on doctors and healthcare officials reported in the media recently and felt that the misdeeds of a few members of a community had brought a bad name to all. "We thought it was against humanity. The environment had also changed. We, therefore, met the sarpanch and conveyed to him our decision to convert," said the 35-year-old.

When their uncle, Nek Chand, 70, died due to heart attack on April 18, the families decided to cremate him instead of burying. "We also decided to wear the *janeu* on the occasion and formally convert," said Mr. Kumar. He said he had been getting lot of calls from the intelligence agencies since and hoped that it would soon end.

Village sarpanch Purshottam Sharma said the families approached him in the first week of April expressing their desire to convert and told him that they were not acting under any pressure.

Junior doctor tests positive in Aligarh

20 persons who came in contact with her have been sent to home quarantine

ANUJ KUMAR
GHAZIABAD

A junior resident of Aligarh Muslim University's Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College and Hospital tested positive for COVID-19 on Wednesday night, district officials said.

"The doctor is a paediatric surgeon and performed surgery on April 20. After she felt feverish, her sample was taken and it was found positive on Wednesday," said Shafey Kidwai, spokesperson of AMU.

He clarified that the doctor was a non-resident and didn't come in contact of the COVID-19 infected person who passed away in the hospital on April 21.

"She was not posted in the isolation ward or fever clinic. The doctor has been admitted to the COVID-19 ward. The five patients of the paediatric ward have been shifted to the isolation ward and their samples have been sent for testing. Twenty persons who have come in her contact, including fellow doctors and paramedical and nursing staff, have been sent to home quarantine and are being screened," he said.

Medical workers escort a suspected COVID-19 patient in Aligarh. ▪ FILE PHOTO

Meanwhile, the Resident Doctors' Association of JNMC has demanded that the hospital be converted into a dedicated COVID-19 hospital. "The doctor who has tested positive had extensive contacts with healthcare professionals throughout JNMC. So, all the patients should be discharged and no further non-COVID treatment should be entertained," said Mohd. Hamza Malik, president of RDA in a press statement. He said healthcare workers will work only with designated personal protective equipment (PPE).

"If proper actions are not taken, residents will not be able to perform their duties," he said.

Sources in the university administration said changing the nature of hospital would affect the common man adversely as it is a level 3 hospital and one of the few referral hospitals in western Uttar Pradesh. "It is not time to politicise the issue. We should show unity in fighting the virus. Only one COVID -19 infected person is admitted to the hospital. PPEs are in short supply everywhere. We are doing our best. Masks are being distributed to healthcare professionals," said a source, requesting anonymity.

Six active cases

Late on Thursday evening, one more person, related to the deceased COVID-19 infected person, tested positive, taking the tally of active cases in Aligarh to six. The suspended doctor and his wife, in whose hospital the deceased person was allegedly treated before being shifted to the JNMC, have tested negative.

In a related development, District Magistrate Chandra Bhushan Singh has directed the district information officer to initiate action against a prominent private satellite channel for misreporting the number of infected doctors in AMU's JNMC.

Ramzan treat

A worker makes vermicelli at a factory ahead of Ramzan, in Prayagraj on Thursday. ▪ PTI

BJP leader, kin booked for lockdown violation

She had tested positive for COVID-19

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GHAZIABAD

An FIR was registered against a local Bharatiya Janata Party worker, who fought a municipal election, and her three family members in Bulandshahr on Wednesday for violating the rules of lockdown by celebrating her wedding anniversary at the Shikarpur quarantine centre, police said.

She, along with her three family members were quarantined after she tested positive for COVID-19.

According to an official press note, she had possibly come in contact with an Ayurvedic doctor of Shikarpur who had tested positive in Delhi, and later passed away because of the virus.

A former vice-president of the BJP's Mahila Morcha in the district, she has been shifted to a quarantine centre in the neighbouring Khurja town after the incident.

Quarantine centre bash

The incident came to light when the photos of her cutting and feeding cake to family members on her 36th wedding anniversary went viral on social media. Her two-year-old granddaughter could also be seen in the photo.

She also boasted on her social media account that time and place don't matter, every moment is a celebration when the family is together.

After the incident, the report of her spouse also came positive.

Himachal floriculturists stare at heavy losses

They seek financial support in the absence of buyers, transportation and events

VIKAS VASUDEVA
CHANDIGARH

Flower growers in Himachal Pradesh are staring at heavy losses on account of no buyers and lack of transportation amid the lockdown.

Baldev Dhiman, a grower at Kalhali, a village near Shimla, who cultivates flowers in around 3,500 square metres, desperately wants the lockdown to end as the peak season is getting over.

"The season is at its peak now but there are no buyers. Traders are not placing any orders as they say there's no demand in the market. Besides, due to the lockdown, the transportation has come to a halt and there's no way I can transport flowers," he told *The Hindu* over phone.

"Hotels, offices, marriage places... everything is closed and so the demand has dropped significantly. I cultivate carnation flowers but now I am left with no choice but to feed them to cattle. Even cattle hardly eat them," said Mr. Dhiman. He said the last consignment he had sent was on March 22, two days before the announcement of the lockdown.

A villager plucking flowers in Sirmaur district. ▪ FILE PHOTO

"On March 24, when the lockdown was announced, I had prepared a consignment of 10,000 flower bunches [20 flowers in one bunch] to be sent to the wholesale Ghazipur flower market, but I had to destroy them all and since then, there have been no orders," he said. "Last year during this season [March-April] I had a business of around ₹5 lakh."

Mr. Dhiman said around 25 families are actively into flower cultivation in many villages. They are associated with the 'The Maloothi Fruits Flowers and Vegetable Growers Mkt Co-op Society Ltd". "Every farmer here is running in loss."

Mr. Dhiman said he is not hopeful of the business reviving anytime soon and hence he has appealed to the State government to financially compensate the flower growers.

Kuldeep Thakur in Mahog village of Solan district said the business has taken a severe blow and flowers such as carnations and lilies are rotting in the farms.

Harish Chauhan, president of the Himachal Pradesh Fruit, Vegetables and Flowers Growers Association (HPFVFGA), said flower cultivation is primarily being done in Solan, Shimla, Bilaspur and Hamirpur districts and the situation of floriculturists is similar in all the places.

'No buyer'

"Floriculturists are at a complete loss in the current situation. There's no buyer, no transportation. Flowers are perishable. The annual business of flower-related activities is around ₹500 crore in the State and in the current scenario, I am afraid, floriculturists could incur a loss of ₹200 crore," said Mr. Chauhan.

Curbs brighten hope for ostracised family

'Community ban' likely to be lifted

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

The lockdown has brightened the hopes of community acceptance for a Meghalaya rural family that was ostracised more than five months ago for questioning the allegedly unfair practices of a local fair price shop dealer.

The Dorbar Shnong of Laitniangtlong village had in November 2019 excommunicated the family of Phutborsing Rangslang after they protested against the fair price shop dealer for giving them 32 kg of rice instead of 40 kg according to his wife Aihundalin Mawlong's ration card.

Dorbar Shnong is the Khasi traditional local council and the village in East Khasi Hills district is about 35 km from State capital Shillong.

The couple had also objected to overpricing – the dealer was allegedly charging double the rate applicable per item allotted under the public distribution system.

'Leaders summoned'

"Though there was no official complaint, we took note of an information provided by an NGO and summoned the leaders of the Dorbar Shnong and advised them to not earn a bad name at a time when we are undergoing the COVID-19 crisis," an officer of the local Mawngap police station said.

He added that the villagers assured him of lifting the "community ban" on the aggrieved family.

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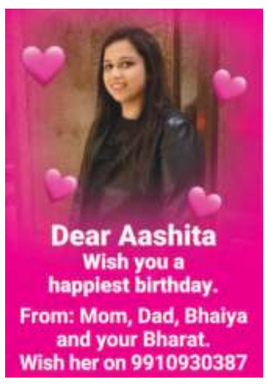

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PERSONAL MESSAGES

DEAR PUJA Happy Birthday to the sweetest and loveliest person I know. Don't ever change! Stay as amazing as you are, my friend!

Tribals in Malkangiri left out of food security and pro-poor schemes

CPI(M) urges Odisha CM to take action to prevent starvation

SIB KUMAR DAS
BERHAMPUR

A ground-level investigation by members of the Odisha unit of CPI(M) has hinted that hundreds of tribal families in remote Swabhiman Anchal of Odisha's Malkangiri district are left out from the food security and other pro-poor government schemes.

These poor tribal families are the worst sufferers during the continuing lockdown for COVID-19. CPI(M) members living in villages of Swabhiman Anchal adhered to the norms of social distancing to conduct this investigation in eight villages in Gajalmamudi, Badapada and Deoguda panchayats.

Ground-level inquiry

Their ground-level enquiry located 136 extremly poor tribal families, who are left out from the food security and pro-poor schemes of the government. "This small investigation in eight villages is an indicator of hundreds of similar tribal families left out of pro-poor schemes in Swabhiman Anchal", said State secretary of CPI(M) Ali Kishor Patnaik.

Mr. Patnaik has written to Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik about the plight of the poor tribals with an request for immediate measures to save them. "We will also provide the list of poor tribal families who are left out for necessary action," the CPI(M) leader added.

The administration has also neglected Swabhiman Anchal because of Maoist threat. ▪ FILE PHOTO: BISWARANJAN ROUT

Swabhiman Anchal was a cut-off area in Balimela reservoir with over 150 villages that got road connection to mainland Odisha in 2018 with the opening of the Gurupriya bridge. Even now several interior villages of Swabhiman Anchal are not connected by roads. Swabhiman Anchal is the most deprived area in Maoist-infested Malkangiri district.

No panchayat polls

The hilly terrain of Swabhiman Anchal reduces the scope of cultivation. Due to the Maoist threat, panchayat elections could not be held in the area.

Lack of elected panchayat bodies became a stumbling the block in identification and inclusion of tribal families of the region in the list of beneficiaries of government schemes, including food security. The administration has also neglected this region because of Maoist threat and lack of proper communication network.

The Swabhiman Anchal tribals are also victims of collateral damage due to continuing fight between Maoists and security forces. Most inhabitants of the area are menial labourers and collectors of forest produce. But they do not get minimum daily wage prescribed by the State government and proper price for their forest produce, said Mr. Patnaik.

The CPI(M) has urged the State government to immediately reach out to each and every tribal family in Swabhiman Anchal, so that they are saved from starvation.

Three die in A.P., 2 in T.N. and one in Telangana

Kurnool and Guntur, worst-hit districts in A.P., experience spike; Karnataka records 18 new cases while Kerala has 10 more

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA/CHENNAI/THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/BENGALURU/HYDERABAD

Andhra Pradesh once again saw a spike in COVID-19 positive cases detected in a single day. On Thursday, the State reported 80 new cases and three deaths, taking the

COVID-19

tally to 893 and the toll to 27.

One more person with the virus died in Telangana. Two 'green' districts in Kerala with few or no cases turned restricted zones with new ones reported.

Kurnool district in Andhra Pradesh had 31 of the 80 fresh cases, taking the total to 234. It also reported two more deaths and Krishna district reported one more.

Guntur district followed Kurnool with 18 new cases and 195 in all. Chittoor, an emerging hotspot, reported 14 new cases while Anantapur and East Godavari reported six new cases each, and Krishna and Prakasam two new cases each. Visakhapatnam had one new case.

Meanwhile, 21 patients – nine in Krishna, seven in Chittoor and five in Kadapa districts – recovered and were discharged.

The Kerala government has concluded that there is no third stage, or community transmission, of COVID-19 in the State.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, briefing the media, said that there was no community transmission, even though the threat of this happening was very real.

There were 10 new COVID-19 cases reported in Kerala on Thursday. New cases in two districts, Kottayam and Idukki, earlier designated as green zones because there were few or no cases, have got the alarm bells ringing.

In Karnataka, 18 new cases were reported on Thursday, nine from a labour unit in Hongasandra, Bengaluru. All were primary contacts of a 54-year-old migrant labourer who tested positive on Wednesday. Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike sealed the area.

970 in Telangana

Besides the fatality, cases in Telangana touched 970 as 27 new ones were detected on Thursday. Also, 58 people were discharged. Of 27 new cases, 13 were from Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation, 10 from Jogulambagadwal district, said Telangana Health Minister Eatala Rajender. One case each was reported in Kumaram Bheem, Medchal, Jangaon and Rangareddy districts.

Two deaths in T.N.

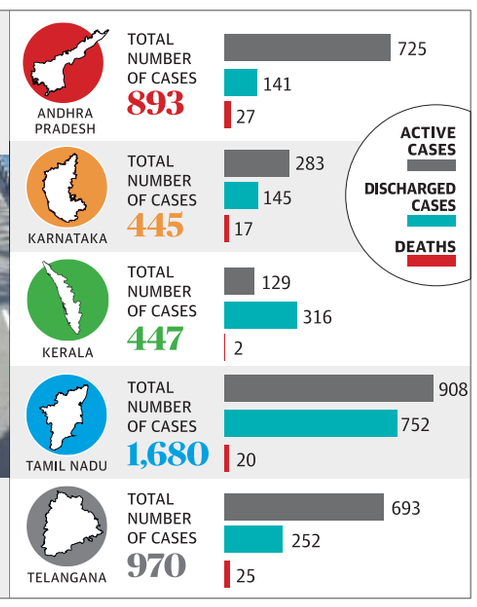
Tamil Nadu reported two more deaths due to COVID-19 on Thursday. Another 54 persons tested positive, with Chennai accounting for half of these cases. This took the State's tally to 1,683 (inclusive of two patients who died in other States and one patient whose samples tested negative after his death).

An elderly man died of COVID-19 at the Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital, while a 56-year-old woman, who was admitted to Apollo Hospitals, also died. She had tested positive for COVID-19 on April 4. With this, the State has reported a total of 20 deaths.

Mobile message

The Tamil Nadu government is trying new initiatives to create awareness of COVID-19 among the public

On the move: The Chennai Corporation is driving home the message about the effects of the pandemic through a coronavirus-themed auto on Thursday. ▪ B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM



A.P. now top State in ratio of tests: officials

STAFF REPORTER
VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh stood first in the country in the COVID-19 tests per million ratio by conducting 961 tests on Thursday, officials told Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy at a review meeting.

Of the 48,034 tests conducted so far, 14,423 were rapid tests. Of them, 11,543 were conducted in the red zones. On Wednesday, 6,520 RT-PCR tests were conducted. Of the total rapid tests, 30 turned out to be positive. For further confirmation, PCR tests would be done, the officials said.

ICMR approval

Stating that the kits procured from South Korea had the ICMR's approval and were working satisfactorily, the officials said the tests were being conducted as per protocol.

Mr. Reddy, while patting the officials for the achievement, asked them not to be complacent.

Jagan Mohan Reddy

"Take necessary steps and conduct another round of door-to-door survey in July. Focus attention on thalassemia, cancer and dialysis patients. See that these patients do not face any hardship. Respond immediately to all the calls received on the helpline number 104. Ensure that emergency and delivery cases are not hit," the Chief Minister said.

Privacy protected in Sprinklr deal, Kerala tells High Court

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOCHI

The terms and conditions of the master service and non-disclosure agreements signed by the U.S.-based Sprinklr with the State government ensure that the data of COVID-19 patients and those under surveillance are secure and their right to privacy is protected, according to a statement filed by the State government in the High Court on Thursday.

The statement said the privacy policy of the company and international data protection norms, including the General Data Protection Regulations, ensured a high level of confidence. The platform made available by the company could handle large volumes of multichannel data and these would facilitate effective monitoring of those in home quarantine. None of the government institutions in the State was capable of doing big data analysis in the shortest possible time.

The statement said the choice of jurisdiction of New York courts was a standard form of contract of the company. The data resided in India and there would therefore be no issues of jurisdiction. Even if any breach occurred outside India, prosecution could be initiated within India under Section 75 of the IT Act, provided such breach impacted a computer or computer resource within the country.

CPI(M) supports State govt.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Communist Part of India (Marxist) on Thursday said the party-led LDF government in Kerala has not violated the party's stance by engaging a U.S. company to analyse COVID-19 data. "The CPI(M) does not think that the government has gone overboard... Adequate safeguards have been made to prevent data leak or trading. Moreover, it could be examined once the crisis blows over," State Secretary Kodiyeri Balakrishnan told reporters.

Provide relief to migrant workers: HC

STAFF REPORTER
VIJAYAWADA

A Division Bench of the High Court comprising Justices C. Praveen Kumar and D. Ramesh directed the Andhra Pradesh government to provide shelter, food and medicine to migrant workers within 24 hours of identifying them.

The court gave the direction to the State government while hearing a petition filed by the Communist Party of India's State secretary K. Ramakrishna seeking orders to the Central and the State governments to allow migrant workers staying back in Vijayawada, Guntur and other places to return to their hometowns and villages within the State and other parts of the country.

IN BRIEF

KCR happy with work on Kaleshwaram project

HYDERABAD

Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao has expressed satisfaction over the arrangements being made by the Energy department to lift Kaleshwaram project water from Ranganayaksagar to Kondapochamma reservoir. Telangana Transco Managing Director Prabhakar Rao said all the lifts would be readied in four to five days to transfer Kaleshwaram project water to Kondapochamma reservoir.

TTD uploads 781 publications on website

TIRUPATI

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) has uploaded a whopping 781 publications in seven languages, including the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, in the e-publications section on its website www.tirumala.org. The 781 publications include 492 in Telugu, 75 in Sanskrit, 122 in English, 74 in Hindi, 14 in Tamil and two each in Kannada and Banjara languages.

Six held on poaching charge in Wayanad

KALPETTA

Six persons were arrested on Thursday on the charge of poaching in the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary in Kerala. Wildlife warden P.K. Asif said the accused had hunted Malabar giant squirrel, flying squirrel, porcupine and mouse deer from the Masalakunnu forest on the Kerala-Karnataka border of the sanctuary on April 21. They also vandalised a surveillance camera installed in the Nagarhole tiger reserve in Karnataka adjacent to the sanctuary.

'Occupancy in Karnataka prisons down to 95%'

State takes steps to prevent virus spread

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

The average percentage of occupancy in prisons across Karnataka has been brought down to 95% from 110% by releasing 1,198 prisoners on temporary bail and parole, and shifting 575 prisoners from overcrowded prisons to less crowded ones for preventing spread of COVID-19, the State government told the High Court of Karnataka.

As many as 790 undertrial prisoners were released on temporary bail based on veracity of the charges against them on recommendation of a High Powered Committee (HPC), constituted as per the apex court's guidelines to decongest prisons as a precaution. And 408 convict prisoners were released on parole, the government said in its statement.

It also said that 575 had been transferred from 12 of the overcrowded prisons to the six prisons having lesser number of prisoners, and an additional temporary living space to house 1,471 prisoners has been created since March 23.

Meanwhile, a special Division Bench comprising Chief Justice Abhay Shreeniwas Oka and Justice B.V. Nagarathna, taking note of measures taken to prevent COVID-19 in prisons, pointed out that the undertrial prisoners can still file pleas to exercise their right to seek bail from the jurisdictional court even if the HPC had not considered them for release on temporary bail.

Kerala blames illegal travellers for new cases in green zones

Chief Minister flags smuggling of people in cargo vehicles

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The State government on Thursday said the illegal movement of people across interstate borders might have triggered the emergence of new COVID-19 positive cases in Green zone districts such as Idukki.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan flagged the smuggling of people across borders in cargo vehicles and lockdown-defying illegal travel across districts as the foremost threat to the State's epidemic containment strategy, which he said had entered its third phase.

Mr. Vijayan asked law enforcers to commit their resources, including drones, to halt the to and fro movement of people between Kerala and Karnataka and also Tamil Nadu through forest trails, illegal crossing points, and rural roads.

The tightening of lockdown curbs had spawned a mafia that transported people to other States and districts in return for cash. The curfew-breakers contracted a network of ambulance and container lorry drivers to conceal passengers in the holds of their vehicles. Some persons living on properties abutting inter-State borders aided the racket.

Probe ordered

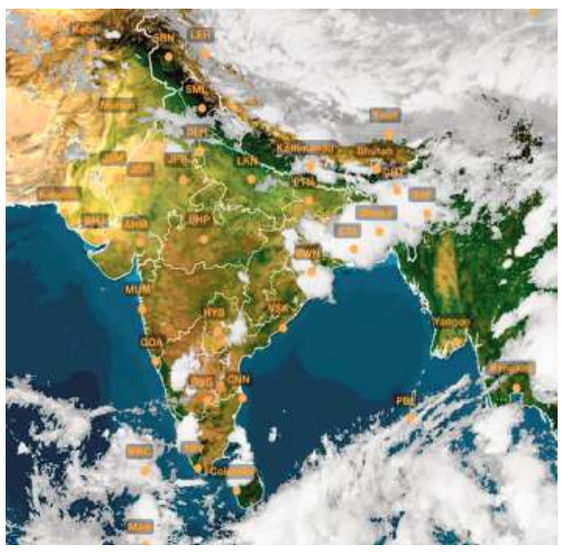
Mr. Vijayan ordered an investigation into how a schoolteacher from Thiruvananthapuram could enlist the help of the police, and later the Excise Department to travel to Thamarassery in Kozhikode from where she crossed over to Karnataka in an excise vehicle for onward passage to New Delhi.

The Wayanad police said the woman had journeyed to Muthanga unchallenged on the strength of a vehicle pass issued by the DySP, Narcotic Cell, Thiruvananthapuram Rural. She then crossed over to Karnataka allegedly with the help of an inspector attached to the Excise Circle Office, Kalpetta.

District Police Chief, Wayanad, R. Ilanko, said the police booked the woman and the excise official for violating lockdown and jeopardising pandemic control.

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 Friday: Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning, hail and squall very likely at isolated places over Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura; with lightning, hail and squall at isolated places over sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Sikkim, Jharkhand, Odisha, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	7.8	33.5	22.7
Ahmedabad	–	41.3	27.5
Aizawl	–	26.8	15.1
Allahabad	–	38.0	22.6
Bengaluru	–	35.4	23.4
Bhopal	–	38.0	24.6
Bhubaneswar	–	34.2	25.0
Chandigarh	–	33.0	20.1
Chennai	–	34.9	28.6
Coimbatore	–	37.3	25.0
Dehradun	–	31.7	17.0
Gangtok	12.0	15.2	9.6
Goa	–	34.6	26.5
Guwahati	6.0	28.2	18.8
Hubballi	–	37.0	22.0
Hyderabad	–	39.1	26.5
Imphal	15.6	28.0	15.2
Jaipur	1.0	35.1	21.3
Kochi	66.0	33.6	24.0
Kohima	–	–	19.8
Kolkata	–	31.7	25.6
Kozhikode	–	36.4	27.8
Kurnool	–	42.7	29.2
Lucknow	–	33.2	21.8
Madurai	–	39.0	27.2
Mangaluru	–	37.1	27.1
Mumbai	–	36.3	26.5
Mysuru	–	35.9	24.2
New Delhi	–	36.4	23.6
Patna	–	34.8	24.2
Port Blair	–	32.9	26.4
Puducherry	–	35.4	27.4
Pune	–	39.6	24.0
Raipur	–	37.0	35.8
Ranchi	–	34.0	20.0
Shillong	21.2	20.0	–
Shimla	–	25.0	14.4
Srinagar	–	5.6	–
Thiruvananthapuram	–	34.8	26.6
Tiruchi	–	40.5	27.0
Vijayawada	–	–	–
Visakhapatnam	–	33.8	28.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing — **Yesterday**

CITIES	SO_2	NO_2	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	38	.22	.19	55	79	
Bengaluru	05	.08	.63	119	–	
Chennai	08	.02	.39	14	–	
Delhi	25	.28	110	283	.142	
Hyderabad	04	.55	.28	57	–	
Kolkata	09	.11	.20	18	31	
Lucknow	06	.40	.59	178	–	
Mumbai	09	.12	.07	40	78	
Pune	31	.11	.51	39	37	
Visakhapatnam	08	.32	.06	13	35	

In observation made at 6.00 p.m., Panipat, Haryana recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 203 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Panchkula, Haryana recorded a healthy AQI score of 25.

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

SO_2: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO_2: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

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

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

Karnataka gives Devanahalli chakota new wings

Bengaluru airport is helping to grow the citrus variety, which enjoys a Geographical Indication tag

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

Endowed with a unique taste and flavour, and a Geographical Indication (GI) tag, the Devanahalli Pomelo, the citrus fruit popularly known as chakota, is getting a fresh cultivation push.

The Karnataka Horticulture Department is set to provide the plant to interested farmers in Devanahalli and Doddaballapur regions. As urbanisation grows and the landscape changes, the number of farmers growing the fruit has dropped over the years. The fruit is localised to around 13 villages in Devanahalli taluk, eight villages of Sidlaghatta taluk and seven villages of Doddaballapura taluk.

A Joint Director in the Horticulture Department, Krishnamurthy, said, "Farmers in these areas grow chakota on the borders of their fields or near their houses. After the fruit received the GI tag, they are coming forward to grow the plant more widely. The department is using its farms in Chikkaballapur and Bengaluru Rural district to provide plants and promote it."

Massive nursery

At Soppahalli farm in Chikkaballapur, the department is growing 5,000 plants, to provide them to interested farmers.

Fruit punch: A file photo of chakota on sale in Devanahalli.

Guru Kumar, a farmer said, "Devanahalli is known for chakota. During the summer season, farmers sell it on the Devanahalli main road, on the National Highway and other areas. Each fruit is sold at around ₹ 80. But there are no buyers during the lockdown."

Bangalore International Airport Limited (BIAL), which operates the Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) too is cultivating the fruit. BIAL said in a statement that under its CSR programme 'Namma Ooru', it will have 500 chakota plants.

With departmental support, 50 plants have been planted in the campus that once was a hub for pomelos before the airport came up.

BIAL aims to promote cultivation of the fruit and form a viable market in collaboration with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and other institutions.

It would work with farmers in and around Devanahalli to promote cultivation through self-help groups.

Rapid failures

Significant error rates for COVID-19 antibody testing kits underscore the need for caution

Rapid testing kits that State governments have been using to detect antibodies to the novel coronavirus have proved unreliable, making the shift to normal life after the lockdown ends on May 3 more difficult. Governments around the world have been looking for an accurate blood test that can tell people if they have immunity through past COVID-19 infection, and can therefore return to their duties to kickstart the economy. While the diagnostic RT-PCR test to confirm the presence of the virus using a nasal swab in a laboratory setting is considered reliable, attempts to design a rapid test that uses a blood sample to find antibodies after past infection have thrown up errors in as much as a third of cases: a study in the U.K. showed that they were high on specificity – accurate in cases that they found to be antibody positive. But they still missed about 30% of positive cases, showing low sensitivity. This is the phenomenon worrying India, which has imported several hundred thousand rapid testing kits, and its experience is shared by the U.S., U.K., Spain and other countries. Rajasthan had laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 positive cases not being detected by rapid testing kits. Several States have independently ordered thousands of kits, mainly from China, and are in a quandary.

The ICMR has advised States, to whom it distributed kits, that they could be used for surveillance testing, rather than to make medically important decisions. Narrowing down the test to reliable methods is the challenge, and the WHO along with its collaborating centres is working to identify them. The results will be crucial and all countries, including the U.S. White House Coronavirus Task Force, are looking at serosurveillance, the process that will determine the status of the population on COVID-19. An exit from lockdown and other public health measures depend on such testing. India should remain focused on identifying tests that work well. This requires close integration with efforts launched by diagnostics regulators in the U.S., Europe and China who have used emergency provisions to allow early use of kits; the kits themselves are under evaluation. There are reports indicating that some vendors of rapid testing devices in China have run afoul of regulators in that country since they have no prior expertise in the field. Making purchase decisions, therefore, calls for rigorous review. In the immediate context, the message should go out to States that rapid tests cannot substitute for RT-PCR to diagnose infection. It is by no means clear that antibodies developed in response to COVID-19 provide long-term protection against reinfection. Yet, a good test to certify a large section of the population as having developed immunity seems to be a promising tool to reopen the economy with some confidence.

Protection for protectors

Healthcare workers should be allowed to work in an environment free of violence and abuse

Since the first case of novel coronavirus infection in India was reported in end-January, many healthcare workers have been subjected to abuse and violence in the line of duty. Most of the attacks have been on healthcare personnel sent to localities to collect samples from people who are suspected to have been infected or have come in contact with those who have tested positive for the virus. Some doctors returning home from duty have been prevented from entering their homes and, in some cases, even asked to vacate their premises. While such acts have been widely condemned, nothing much changed on the ground. The dastardly act of a few people in Chennai who not only attacked healthcare workers but also prevented a decent burial of a neurosurgeon who died of COVID-19 complications on April 19 shook the nation's conscience. Though belated, the Union Cabinet's decision to promulgate an ordinance to amend the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 to make acts of violence against medical personnel a cognisable and non-bailable offence and also provide compensation in case of injury or damage or loss to property is thus commendable.

Very often, the abuse and violence against healthcare workers after the outbreak of COVID-19 in the country has been due to fear and ignorance. The communal colour given to the COVID-19 epidemic after the large religious congregation was held in mid-March by the Tablighi Jamaat in Nizamuddin, Delhi initially led many in the community to avoid coming forward to get tested. In many cases, the fear of stigma and isolation resulted in attacks on healthcare workers who had gone to collect samples from those who were part of this congregation. In other instances, the wrong messaging that getting infected by the virus meant certain death, in order to achieve maximum compliance with the shutdown, unwittingly led to a fear psychosis. Negative messaging, especially of the kind that induces fear and stigma, has always been counterproductive, as seen in the early days of the HIV/AIDS awareness campaign in the country. Awareness-building exercises became easier and more effective when negative messaging and stereotyping about HIV/AIDS was shunned. Doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers who are forced to work long hours treating patients infected with the highly infectious virus, and even when protective gear in the form of gloves, face mask and personal protective equipment are scarce, need more empathy, compassion, unmitigated support and cooperation from the society. Symbolic gestures such as clapping hands and lighting candles in recognition of their selfless service during these trying times do not bolster their morale as much as understanding and support does.

The COVID-19 paradox in South Asia

It is surprising that the region has far fewer infections and deaths compared with North America and Western Europe

DEEPAK NAYYAR

The oldest and largest democracies in the world are often compared. This time is different. The first person tested positive for COVID-19 on January 21 in the United States and on January 30 in India. Roughly three months later, on April 20, the total number of infections was 7,23,605 in the U.S. and 17,265 in India, accounting for 31.2% and 0.75% of the world total, while the number of COVID-19 deaths was 34,203 in the U.S. and 543 in India, making up 21.7% and 0.33% of the world total. The share of the two countries in world population, by contrast, is about 4% and 18%, respectively.

A puzzling situation

It is even more surprising that a comparison with South Asia – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – yields similar results. In Nepal too, it was in late January that the first person tested positive for COVID-19, though it was end-February or early-March in the other countries. On April 20, South Asia, with a share of 23.4% in world population, accounted for 1.25% of infections and 0.5% of COVID-19 deaths in the world.

Before the pandemic, it would have been impossible to predict, let alone imagine, such a reality. Income per capita in South Asia is just 16% that of the world, and a mere 4% of that in industrialised countries. One-third of the world's poor live in South Asia, so absolute poverty is high and nutrition levels are low. Population density in the subcontinent is among the highest in the world. The poor, who live cheek by jowl in urban slums and in cramped spaces in rural areas, are most susceptible to a virus that is contagious. Public health systems and facilities are perhaps the worst in the world.

The outcome, then, is puzzling, if not paradoxical. Compared with North America, Western Europe and East Asia, or their own population size, the number of infections and deaths in South Asia is far lower. Of course, it is plausible to argue that, unlike those parts of the world, South Asian countries are in the early stages where community transmission has not gathered momentum. An explosive growth in infection numbers could yet surface later, or in a second round. But it is simply not possible to assess probabilities or make predictions. However, evidence available so far does suggest some flattening of the curve in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Infection numbers in Maldives and Nepal are in double-digits and Bhutan's infection numbers are in single digits.

Two possible explanations

How can we explain this situation in which, so far, South Asia has fared better than many other parts of the world? Past experience of the Spanish influenza in 1918, when India accounted for 18-20 million of the estimated 50 million deaths in the world, or conventional thinking even now, would have led to the opposite conclusion. There are two possible explanations.

First, the reality might be much worse than the statistics suggest because the total number of infections is almost certainly underestimated, as testing has been nowhere near enough, given the scarcity of testing kits and the massive size of populations. Improved statistics might change the numbers but cannot transform the asymmetry emerging from the above comparisons.

REUTERS

Second, the lockdowns imposed by governments in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal, which started in the last week of March and continue until April 27 or longer, have clearly made a difference. The lockdown in India, straddling its vast geography, is perhaps among the most stringent in the world. The common purpose was to break the chain of transmission through physical distancing, which has two dimensions. For one, it confined people to their homes. But this created physical distancing only for the privileged living in homes that have spaces and doors. It was impossible for people in urban slums in mega-cities, where migrant workers lived in cramped spaces, often as many as 10 to a room. For another, it meant that people could not move within cities or across States. Migrant workers could not return to their villages, and citizens or foreigners who might carry the virus could not come from abroad. It did strangle potential chains of community transmission, reducing the geographical spread of the virus through contagion, and flattening the curve compared with what it would have been without a lockdown.

This obvious explanation is necessary but not sufficient because other countries which have imposed lockdowns, say in Western Europe, with public health systems that are far superior, have not managed to slow down the phenomenal spread in the number of infections as much. The impact of diseases can and does differ across countries, possibly attributable to differences in cultures, immunities, or even climates. I am not an epidemiologist or a virologist. But as a social scientist, it is possible to observe an association of attributes.

A possible hypothesis

It has been suggested that countries which have mandatory BCG vaccinations against tuberculosis are less susceptible to COVID-19 morbidity and mortality. Compare, for example, the Iberian Peninsula countries, Spain and Portugal. On April 20, the former had around 1,96,000 infections and 20,500 deaths, whereas the latter 20,200 infections and 700 deaths. Is it only a coincidence that BCG vaccinations are mandatory in Portugal but not in Spain, or that the U.S. and Italy, both ravaged by COVID-19, never had universal BCG vaccination programmes? Obviously, it is only scientific investigation that can establish cause and effect.

But the BCG vaccine seems to have a stimulating effect on the immune system that goes well beyond tuberculosis. For that reason, perhaps, some countries are running trials of BCG against COVID-19, or thinking of it as a means of protecting health workers. Similarly, countries are buying hydroxychloroquine in large quantities from India, as a prophylactic for health workers and for treatment of COVID-19 patients. In South Asian countries, universal BCG vaccination is mandatory, while immune systems of people have a lifelong exposure to malaria. These could provide possible explanations for the relatively limited spread of COVID-19 in South Asia so far.

Lives and livelihoods

Obviously, lockdowns have also mitigated the spread. In doing so, they have saved lives, but at the same time, they have also taken away livelihoods. In South Asian countries, almost 90% of the workforce is made up of the self-employed, casual labour on daily wages, and informal workers without any social protection. The lockdowns have meant that hundreds of millions of people who have lost their jobs, hence incomes, have been deprived of their livelihoods, imposing a disproportionate burden on the poor and those who survive just above the poverty line. For them, the trade-off between getting sick and going hungry is no choice. Livelihoods are an imperative for preserving lives.

The problem will not vanish after lockdowns are lifted. Economies that have been shut down for six weeks or longer will be close to collapse. In the short-run, it will be a matter of survival for households and firms and stabilisation for the economy. Economic growth will be zero or negative this year. In the medium-term, it will be about recovery. That will take time. Rapid economic growth in the past 25 years had enabled South Asian countries to bring about a significant reduction in absolute poverty, even though it was associated with rising inequality. Alas, absolute poverty will increase once again, while economic inequality will rise further.

Deepak Nayyar is Emeritus Professor of Economics at JNU and former Vice Chancellor of the University of Delhi

Fishing in troubled waters during a pandemic

As China seeks to restore its credibility, creating tensions in the South China Sea should be the least of its priorities

HARSH V. PANT
& PREMESHA SAHA

Even as several countries struggle to cope with the challenges posed by COVID-19, Beijing's military moves in the contested South China Sea continue to take place unabated. In recent days, China has conducted military drills and deployed large-scale military assets to the maritime area, while officially celebrating strides made in exploiting disputed energy resources in the sea.

Strategy for expansion

The Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported early this month that a Chinese Coast Guard vessel "rammed and sunk" a Vietnamese fishing boat carrying eight Vietnamese fishermen in the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea. It maintained that this violates "Vietnam's sovereignty over the Paracel Islands, causes property losses and endangers the lives, safety and legitimate interests of the Vietnamese fishermen". It underlined that Chinese actions "also run counter to agreements reached by Hanoi and Beijing's leaders and the proposed Code of Conduct that would govern all interested parties in the South China Sea dispute." The Vietnamese government lodged a diplomatic protest with China's embassy in Hanoi, requesting the Chinese side to investigate the incident, strictly discipline the officers aboard the Chinese vessel aforementioned, prevent the recurrence of similar actions, and make adequate compensation for the losses of the Vietnamese fishermen.

There have been incidents involving Chinese fishing vessels and the Chinese Coast Guard with Indonesian fishing vessels in waters around the Natuna Sea as well. In February, Chinese fishing boats flanked by Chinese Coast Guard vessels dropped their trawl nets yet again. China's illegal fishing near the Natuna Sea carries global consequences, reminding regional governments of Beijing's expanding claims to the South China Sea through which one-third of the world's maritime trade flows.

Besides these incidents, there were satellite images showing a Chinese military plane landing on Kagitingan Reef in the West Philippine Sea in late March. There are also reports that China recently opened a research station on Kagitingan and Zamora Reef, also in the West Philippine Sea, to gather data on the ecology, geology, and environment in the Spratlys.

It seems as though the COVID-19 outbreak in China did little to diminish the country's strategy of regional expansion. Routine operations of transport aircraft in the South China Sea indicate that the Chinese military is hardly affected by the country's health crisis.

NYT

Other claimant countries such as the Philippines have condemned the sinking of the Vietnamese fishing vessel. The Foreign Ministry of the Philippines issued a statement that said, "Such incidents undermine relations between Southeast Asian nations and Beijing." Meanwhile, the U.S. State Department also published a statement, "We call on the PRC to remain focused on supporting international efforts to combat the global pandemic, and to stop exploiting the distraction or vulnerability of other states to expand its unlawful claims in the South China Sea." These encroachments and advances by China in the South China Sea not only dampen China's image globally, and affect its relations with its Southeast Asian neighbours, but also raise questions on why it continues its assertiveness in the disputed waters when most of the claimant states are having to contend with the challenges posed by COVID-19.

Window of opportunity

While a military policy of expansion in the neighbourhood can be one way of shoring up the credibility of the Chinese Communist Party, which has been bruised by its handling of the COVID-19 outbreak, it is also a response to what many in the party would view as a rare window of opportunity as the U.S. is grappling with the pandemic. American ties with Vietnam have been on an upward trajectory in recent times. Vietnam has been an ardent supporter of the U.S.'s freedom of navigation operations (FONOPS) carried out in the South China Sea. China has always taken a strong stand against these FONOPS of the U.S. It has flexed its muscles to match up to these operations. In that direction, China also recently conducted anti-submarine drills in the disputed areas soon after the Pentagon deployed the U.S.-guided missile destroyer USS McCampbell in a FONOP in the South China Sea before the pandemic hit the U.S. mainland with full force.

At present, Vietnam is the chair of the ASEAN and will be presiding over the discussions on the Code of Conduct which has been a work in progress for long. Vietnam has always been in favour of non-claimant countries or external players having an active voice and calling out China for its growing assertiveness in these contested waters. Among all the claimant countries, Vietnam has always taken a strong stand against Chinese actions in the South China Sea. Unlike the Philippines, which has changed its stance quite often with respect to Chinese activities in the South China Sea, and Indonesia, which recognised the Chinese threat in the Natuna Sea rather late, Vietnam has held a firm stand against the China. Even with regard to its COVID-19 response, Vietnam was the first country in the ASEAN to suspend all flights to and from China as early as February. Hence, China has always kept a watch on Vietnamese manoeuvres in the South China Sea dispute.

As China seeks to restore its global credibility, creating tensions in the South China Sea should be the least of its priorities. A more generous China during a global pandemic might go a long way in ensuring its global ascent. But that's a hope that has been belied many a times in the past and it's unlikely that the Chinese Communist Party would let go of its regional security agenda of expansion.

Harsh V. Pant is Director, Studies, at Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, and Professor of International Relations, King's College London; Premesha Saha is an Associate Fellow with the ORF's Strategic Studies Programme

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Open in phases

We should be cautious about opening up several sectors at one go in the first week of May ("Most sectors will be open by May 3, says Sanjeev Sanyal", April 23). Every day we have about 1,000 new positive COVID-19 cases in the country. Mumbai, the beehive of economic activity, is a big hotspot, as are some other cities. We should be guarded in opening up the remaining sectors of the economy and do this over phases. Every industry, big or small, should be allowed to function only at a third of its capacity, probably in shifts. Wearing masks and practising physical distancing should be made mandatory.

KOSARAJU CHANDRAMOULI,
Hyderabad

Important, albeit late

The Prime Minister's call for unity is important, but it has come rather late ("Script of unity", April 23). A particular community has received a lot of hatred online for "spreading" the virus. Some TV channels continue to portray members of that community as more dangerous than the virus itself. The ruling party's IT wing and cadres are relentless in their attacks on them. This hatred towards members of one community will affect Indians working abroad, especially in countries like the UAE. As the editorial points out, the call for unity should translate into action.

G.B. SIVANADAM,
Coimbatore

The new normal

It looks like the situation won't be safe for a long time ("There may be no going back", April 23). It is important to understand that we were not asked to practise physical distancing or stay at home to cure society of COVID-19; these measures were taken to only slow the spread of the virus so that our healthcare system wouldn't be overwhelmed. For the most part, India has done that. But when we emerge slowly from the lockdown, the virus could spread faster. We need to make our healthcare system more robust to handle the load, not mislead ourselves over the outcome of this lockdown period.

NAGARAJAMANI M.V.,
Hyderabad

While we have to accept that things will take a long time to return to some semblance of normalcy, there is a silver lining. The air quality in many places has improved. With fewer people going to work over the next few weeks or months, traffic will greatly reduce. Other infectious diseases might also reduce due to greater awareness about personal hygiene. This pandemic will teach us to be kinder, more resilient and patient. We should take this opportunity to think about how we can redesign our lifestyle to have a more peaceful co-existence with nature.

P. VENKAT,
Chennai

Offers post-retirement

Not only must justice be done; it must also be seen to be done ("Pre-retirement judgments and post-retirement jobs", April 23). Hence, irrespective of the judgments made, it should be made a practice for the serving judges not to accept any government assignments post-retirement. Also, judges should not accept any assignments with any political party whose case they handled at any point. However, I do not subscribe to the view that judges must get as pension their last drawn salary. Judges need not be pampered post-retirement and can save for the future. Being legal professionals, they can earn additional money, if needed. I also think that other constitutional functionaries like Governors, Speakers, Election Commissioners and CAGs should also not accept political and government posts after retirement.

B.C. UNNIKRISHNAN NAIR,
Kuthiathode

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How will India emerge out of the lockdown?

PARLEY

An opening up has to be accompanied by an increase in relief budget for the most vulnerable

After a 39-day lockdown, what will be the shape of things to come? How should one strike a balance between ensuring livelihoods, minimising strife, and maintaining social distancing? In a discussion moderated by **G. Ananthakrishnan**, *Reetika Khera, and Giridhar R. Babu examine the options. Edited excerpts:*

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

With less than a fortnight left for the lockdown to be lifted, there are seemingly conflicting requirements of having to prevent group activity, and restarting economic activity...

Reetika Khera (RK): We need to keep our socioeconomic conditions firmly in focus while deciding on a health strategy to deal with the epidemic. Only 17% of the employed have salaried jobs; one-third are casual labourers. According to the World Bank, 76% are in 'vulnerable employment' in India. There is no provision for unemployment doles. Overall, what we should try to minimise is hardship and deaths from the pandemic. In the past few weeks, we have seen reports of hunger, homelessness, vagrancy – even deaths – from the lockdown, coupled with government apathy to these issues. We, therefore, need to ensure that the poor are not forgotten or abandoned as we protect ourselves, roughly the top 30%, from the viral infection. For the poor, an extended lockdown poses a health risk because they live in cramped spaces and may not have running water to wash their hands; it is also economically disastrous, because they do not have savings or an assured monthly income to keep themselves going. Greater sensitivity and better planning are urgently required.

Reetika Khera *is an associate professor at the Indian Institute of Management-Ahmedabad*

Giridhar R. Babu *is the head of Lifecourse Epidemiology at the Public Health Foundation of India*

Giridhar R. Babu (GB): I do not see any conflict in continuing physical distancing and measures to prevent large congregations in the near future. In most circumstances, such as in the IT sector, work from home options should be made mandatory for the next few months. Similarly, annual fair, marathon events, and all such events which require large gatherings for non-essential purposes should be postponed until we have a drug or a vaccine. When it comes to essential activities such as public transport, ensuring physical distancing, face mask use, and enforcing respiratory hygiene such as cough etiquette is essential.

There is a view that the lockdown cannot be lifted completely. What happens to the self-employed and migrant labourers?

RK: The lockdown will probably be partially lifted allowing some activities and [then] gradually phased out, red zones remaining locked. But it must be accompanied by a massive increase in the relief budget, currently at about 0.5% of GDP, for the most vulnerable. Existing programmes of social support, such as the Public Distribution System (PDS), the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), and pensions need more financial allocations.

The PDS today only covers about 60% of the population, even though the legally mandated coverage under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) is two-thirds of the population. This is because the government is using population figures from the 2011 census to determine coverage. Due to the lockdown, a significant portion of those who would not have been covered anyway – the one-third outside the NFSA – now need support; workers in the gig economy, taxi drivers, delivery boys, etc., for instance. This under-coverage is especially criminal today because at the moment, the government is hoarding grains on an unprecedented scale: three-and-a-half times the buffer stock norms, before wheat procurement has even started. The first step should be to universalise the PDS, for up to a year, by allowing anyone from the 40% without ration card the opportunity to apply for a temporary card. The Centre needs to make grain available to the States and they can do the rest.

As far as the NREGA is concerned, there are two issues. One, whether such works can be opened without increasing the risk of community transmission at worksites. Two, how to make payments in a convenient manner? Density of bank branches is very low in rural areas and, even in normal circumstances, they are very crowded and far from people. Banking correspondents, who could have eased these pressures, are unsafe at the moment because they use biometric authentication at the time of disbursal of wages. For this reason, the government needs to allow greater flexibility to States in deciding how to disburse cash. Several States have successfully disbursed cash in hand in the past, and have done so without much corruption. Odisha pays pensions through panchayat secretaries; Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu used to pay NREGA wages at the worksite before 2009.

For migrants, the government must provide transport, assisting them to return home, just as it flew back Indians stuck abroad and helped the students stuck in Kota. Those who are willing to stay, must be provided dignified shelter in schools, community halls, along with cooked food.

GB: While their healthcare needs are to be addressed by the public health system, the government has to ensure their subsistence by providing necessary ration and medicines. The situation has exacerbated distress in the informal sector, which constitutes around 303 million people. The nutritional issues around food quality are significant. If these are addressed, a scientific decision tree can be developed by the Indian Council of Medical Research and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to guide the deployment and lifting of lockdowns in the future.

> **Public health is the art and science of preventing diseases and promoting health through the organised social efforts**
> GIRIDHAR R. BABU, Epidemiologist

Taking the NREGA as a workfare programme rather than welfare, can it be used to scale up health infrastructure, such as by building primary health centres?

RK: I believe that as far as health is concerned, the really big crunch is the availability of medical personnel. As far as physical infrastructure is concerned, we need hospital beds, personal protective equipment (PPE), ventilators, etc. But more than physical infrastructure, we need to ensure more frontline workers in the health system – ASHA workers, anganwadi workers, auxiliary nurses and midwives – and to employ them on fair terms. For instance, ASHA workers get honorarium and 'incentives', rather than a salary. They earn less than ₹2,000 per month generally. Similarly, anganwadi workers are still underpaid in many States.

GB: More often than not, most health system-strengthening efforts are used for activities such as constructing buildings. As a result, there are buildings which are vacant and equipment kept unused. For any meaningful change, significant investments will have to be made in strengthening human resources. Investments should primarily address the public health challenges such as [those linked to] nutrition, ensuring behavioural modifications to prevent non-communicable diseases, screening, early diagnosis, and timely treatment.

The feeder pipe of illness is filled with people of several risk factors for infectious as well as non-communicable diseases. Instead of addressing this, most money is spent on curing only part of the resulting conditions. Inaccessible healthcare, in combination with an unhealthy lifestyle, is a deadly cocktail; no amount of healthcare through reimbursing costs can alleviate the disease burden. Nearly 80% of all healthcare expenditure should be on preventive services.

Like Aadhaar, there is emphasis on getting people to accept the Aarogya Setu app. There are fears of lost privacy, stigma and discrimination...

RK: Many people have already warned about over-reliance on technology. One, the app needs smartphones. Less than one-fifth of Indians own smartphones. Two, the reliability of the technology [using bluetooth to detect contacts] has been questioned by computer scientists in India. Three, it entails an unnecessary and unjustified privacy invasion, which nevertheless is projected as necessary. Authoritarian governments across the world are using the pandemic as an opportunity to normalise unprecedented levels of mass surveillance. Finally, Kerala shows us that contact tracing can be done, and possibly better, by utilising human resources. We must guard against techno-solutionism as well as privacy invasions.

GB: Any effort to track the cases or their contacts should involve strengthening the human resources, including [through] capacity building. Technology should complement health system strengthening and not [be used] as a shortcut.

How can we prepare for a future pandemic?

RK: I feel that we must understand that we have been cheated for more than 70 years by the political class, that used every possible excuse to underspend on health. Today, public spending on health in India is barely 1% of GDP, compared with more than 10% in countries like France and Germany. There needs to be a serious discussion on resetting our priorities – not focusing on overall GDP growth only, but also on where GDP growth is coming from. Expenditure on health (nurses, doctors, hospital beds etc.) adds to GDP as much as roads and fighter jets do.

There also needs to be a serious rethink about the health system. At the very least, we should be regulating the (for-profit) private health sector, in a similar manner as Germany and Japan. These countries do not have socialised healthcare like the National Health Service of the U.K. But Germany has not-for-profit social insurance funds; in Japan, the government regulates what private practitioners can charge patients. In India, the private health providers seem to dictate terms to the government, as happened recently with respect to pricing for the COVID-19 test. This must change right now.

GB: It is time that we start investing in strengthening the public health system. There is disproportionate spending on curative services and heavy reliance on insurance. Pandemic preparedness is a small component of health system strengthening. Public health is the art and science of preventing diseases and promoting health through the organised social efforts. Any aspirations for an increase in GDP allocation should, therefore, be prioritised for the public health system, towards preventing diseases and promoting health. Preventing the disease includes addressing behavioural changes, adequate nutrition, improved living conditions, screening, early diagnosis, and treatment. A significant portion of this should be towards prevention, including strengthening disease surveillance. Public health should be managed by a specialist cadre – epidemiologists, social scientists, economists, bio-statisticians, behavioural scientists. Our response has been mostly reactive – in terms of measures such as scaling up purchase of equipment during a crisis.

The full version can be accessed on www.thehindu.com

Making doctors wash hands

Placing the sanitiser at prominent locations in hospitals and installing bright signage will help

ANAND DAMANI

Ignaz Philipp Semmelweis, a Hungarian-born doctor came to Vienna in 1846 to work at the city's General Hospital. Semmelweis noticed that women delivered by doctors had three times higher mortality rate than women delivered by midwives. He spotted a link between the lack of hygiene of the doctors and the mortality rate of the mothers. After he initiated a mandatory hand-washing policy, the mortality rate for women delivered by doctors fell from 18% to about 1%.

Despite such a brilliant outcome, the idea of hand washing was rejected by the medical community. Doctors were offended by the suggestion that they could be causing infections. Semmelweis's practice earned widespread acceptance only two decades after his death, when Louis Pasteur, of pasteurisation fame, raised awareness of pathogens.

From the 1850s to 2020, hand washing has been advocated as a simple way of reducing the risk of infection. But, studies find that doctors still do not wash their hands often. A systematic review of studies on compliance with hand hygiene in hospitals, done by researchers Vicki Erasmus et al, found that only 32% of doctors and 48% of nurses wash their hands between seeing patients. Another study by researcher Didier Pittet, an infection control expert with the University of Geneva Hospitals, Switzerland found that compliance rates for hand washing amongst doctors and nurses was only 57%, and years of awareness programmes had little effect. A study amongst Indian doctors by researchers S. K. Ansari et al, found that only 49% of doctors and 56% of nurses washed their hands with soap between patients.

Modifying behaviour

If India needs to contain the spread of COVID-19, everybody ought to be washing our hands, especially doctors and nurses. But how can we change their hand-washing behaviour?

The traditional approach of changing behaviour is to educate doctors and nurses on the importance of hand washing. It seems like the rational and logical thing to do, but even though doctors and nurses know that they should be washing their hands, they forget to do so. That's why we need to apply behavioural design. Behavioural design is about creating subconscious nudges right at the moment where the desired action is to be performed.

A simple intervention

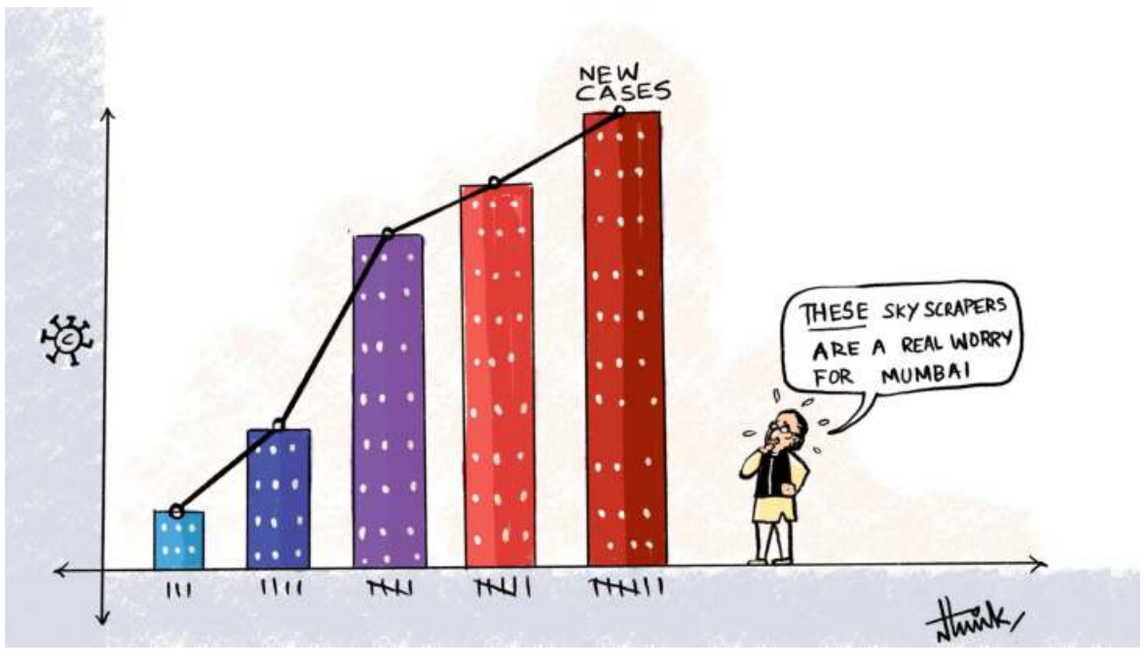
Behavioural scientists piloted a low-cost experiment in rural schools in Bangladesh where nudges were used to guide hand washing with soap after toilet use. Hand-washing stations were built in visible and easy to reach locations, brightly coloured paths were painted from toilets to the hand-washing station, and footprints and handprints were painted on the path and at the hand-washing station.

Hand washing with soap after using the toilet went up from 4% before these behavioural design nudges were created, to 74% six weeks after they were introduced. No other hygiene education was communicated.

Similarly, in hospitals where wash basins and hand sanitisers are placed, stickers of brightly coloured footsteps should be placed so that doctors and nurses get attracted by them, which subconsciously directs them to the wash basin or the hand sanitiser. Such behavioural design nudges influence doctors and nurses to wash their hands with soap or sanitiser without making a conscious decision to do so.

Hand washing is often done as a relatively subconscious habitual action, and can be easily triggered by contextual cues, so hand washing lends itself well to such behavioural design nudging. An experiment done at the Gentofte Hospital in Denmark has found that sanitiser usage increased from 3% to 67% when the hand sanitiser was placed at a prominent location with bright signage that caught people's attention. Not bad for such a simple and low-cost intervention.

Anand Damani is behavioural scientist



NOTEBOOK

Locked out of cities, homes and livelihoods

Hakim, an auto driver who had to leave Delhi, is hopeful of returning soon

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ

The defining images of the migrant worker exodus that followed the lockdown may comprise of the long lines of men, women and children trudging down the highways under the scorching sun, leaving Delhi with their belongings on their backs.

But I didn't have to head out of the city to report on the plight of migrant workers; I just had to step out of my front door. The unorganised colony of Jal Vihar lies barely five minutes from my home, crammed between Lajpat Nagar and the railway line that divides it from Jangpura. About a week after the lockdown began, a colleague and I headed to the Jal Vihar bus terminal to meet a migrant worker. The streets of Lajpat Nagar, usually bustling with shoppers and traffic jams, were empty.

We were met by Mohammed Hakim, who led us to a small gate behind the bus terminal and through a maze of small alleys into the heart of Jal Vihar. With hundreds of families crowded into tiny homes and narrow streets, social distancing was impossible.

Kavitha*, who works at my home, lives here in Jal Vihar with her family. She is a migrant herself, having come from a village south of Chennai to marry a Tamil man who grew up here in Jal Vihar, who in turn is son of migrants brought to the capital in the 1980s to build infrastructure for the Asian Games. In fact, most of the cleaners and cooks working in my upper-middle class neighbourhood live here in Jal Vihar. So do the young men who clean my neighbours' cars every morning, or tend the civic gardens scattered through the area.

Mohammed Hakim and about 180 other men from Bihar's Katihar district ply the autos and cycle-rickshaws. The migrants at Jal Vihar had been entwined into the daily rhythms of life in Lajpat Nagar, until the lockdown brought that to a crashing halt.

Hungry and stranded

Mr. Hakim introduced us to about 40 other men from his village. They had not eaten for more than a day, having been deprived of their ability to work and earn a living due to the lockdown. Their ration cards were with their families in Bihar. They still had to pay rent for the windowless shanties they shared, and many had to pay leases or mortgages on their vehicles as well.

Most of the men did not think of themselves as poor. They felt that in normal times, they earned enough for a decent life here in Delhi and send back money to their families as well. But now, reduced to begging from philanthropists for food, their self-esteem had taken a hit. For them, hunger was a bigger spectre than the virus.

The streets of Lajpat Nagar that they ruled as auto rickshaw drivers, were now forbidden and dangerous spaces, with police lathi-charging them if they dared to step out of the colony.

A few weeks later, after the Prime Minister announced an extension to the lockdown, I called Mr. Hakim again. He and his friends had already left Delhi, joining the exodus on the highways. At home in Katihar, fellow villagers were scared that he had brought the virus with him, and forced him into a quarantine outside the village. Still, he has food and a roof over his head, and for now, that's enough. But once the lockdown ends, he knows that the city and its wages will lure him back. "I will take you in my autorickshaw again," he vowed. (*name changed)

The Hindu.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 24, 1970

Why Computerise?

(From an editorial)

A study team on automation headed by Mr. N. M. Tidke, Labour Minister of Maharashtra, has reiterated, in its report submitted recently to the State Assembly that, without selective introduction of automated techniques of production, the ground will not have been prepared for creating job opportunities in the dimension warranted by the country's long-term needs of employment. The team is aware that a suggestion of this sort will not be welcomed by those who are crying hoarse for a deliberate bias towards labour-intensive techniques. It has, therefore, emphasised the point that "it is, on advanced technology that we depend for the realization of the fruits of civilisation and it is for us to convert the same into an instrument of economic growth and social progress." Much of the opposition to computers, for instance, has arisen from a misconception of their role. The benefit from these instruments does not consist in large-scale displacement of clerical and other labour, force but in their superior computational ability in terms of both quality and quantity, which helps to expand investment and therefore employment opportunities.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 24, 1920

The Agony of The Punjab: Rebellion.

(From an editorial)

A good deal has been made in the Anglo-Indian press of the necessity for awaiting the publication of the Hunter Report before forming a final judgment on the Punjab episode. There will certainly be no tendency on the part of any section of public opinion to ignore that Report, just as no reasonable man will consent to accept it as the last word on the subject. The conclusions the public has already been able to form, for example, on the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, the crawling order, the floggings and all that ingenious variety of "frightfulness" which would have done honour to a Torquemada, are not likely to be modified by the view taken of them by a cautious Scotch lawyer, a seasoned Anglo-Indian Judge or a capitalist or by a colleague of General Dyer. What the public awaits is not the Hunger Committee's opinion on the nature of the measures taken under Martial Law, for these have so far transcended the code of humanity and civilisation that no two opinions can be possible, but any fresh light that may be thrown on the theory of "rebellion," or in other words the necessity for Martial Law.

FROM PAGE ONE

India ensured linear growth of cases: govt.

"One crucial weapon we employed during the 30-day lockdown period is RT-PCR testing which has been scaled up. While on March 23 we had did 14,915 tests by April 23 we have now done more than 5 lakh tests," said Mr. Mishra, who is coordinating availability of hospitals, isolation/quarantine facilities, disease surveillance/testing.

Mr. Mishra added that during the 30 days of lockdown, India has been able to cut transmission, minimise spread and increase the doubling time of COVID-19.

"We have been consistently ramping up our testing and utilising our time to prepare for the future," he said.

India currently has 19,4026 isolation beds for severe and critical cases, 24,644 ICU beds in 3773 facilities and 1,66,960 isolation beds in care centre with 12,371 ventilators, according to the Health Ministry.

Urged to report

Encouraging people to report any early symptoms of COVID-19 All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) director Dr. Randeep Guleria said, "Due to the stigma we have attached to COVID-19, patients are not coming forward or they are coming very late when they have severe breathlessness issues, thereby increasing morbidity and mortality."

He added that as per the patient profile, the critical thing is oxygen and hospital preparation is focused on ensuring oxygen support to those who need it.

Clause allowing FIR for COVID-19 cases goes

Replying to a query, Principal Economic Adviser Sanjeev Sanyal told members of the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry via a video-conference call on Wednesday that this was a classic example of a junior officer somewhere in the system issuing something without thinking and it becomes law. "This is a very good example of where an industry association comes back [and says] this is a problem and this makes no sense..." he had said, adding, this was what happened when the system was overloaded. "...All these things will happen, but we in the government are open to feedback. We will resolve it. It obviously makes no sense... you are businessmen and not doctors...you can't track every single worker... it makes no sense at all for having this kind of draconian note going out."

Another industry body CII had reached out to the government stating that it would not be correct to hold employers culpable, as the infection could spread even through asymptomatic carriers. It, however, suggested randomised inspections.

Meanwhile, the Home Ministry took to Twitter to clarify the guidelines issued by it. A Ministry spokesperson said that penalties under Disaster Management Act, 2005, would be applicable if the offence occurred with the consent and cognisance or due to the negligence of the employer.

However, Mr. Javadekar tweeted: "Govt. has not issued any directive that if any Coronavirus case is detected in the factory, there will be FIR against the factory. This is a rumor and absolutely false."

DA for Central staff frozen till July 2021

As and when the decision to release the future instalment of DA and DR due from July 1, 2021, is taken by the government, the rates of DA and DR, as effective from January 1, 2020, July 1, 2020 and January 1, 2021, will be restored prospectively.

They will be subsumed in the cumulative revised rate effective from July 1, 2021. However, no arrears for the period from January 1, 2020, till June 30, 2021, will be paid, according to the Department of Expenditure's order.

The combined savings on account of freezing of three instalments of DA and DR would be ₹37,530 crore in 2020-21 and 2021-22, an official said.

Rising expenditure

The decision had been taken considering that there was a major increase in the expenditure on health as well as on welfare measures for various affected sections of society, including the poor and vulnerable.

The State usually follow the Central orders on DA and DR. The Centre estimates that the saving on freezing of three instalments of State government employees and pensioners will be ₹82,566 crore.

'Plan ahead for train services for migrants'

While the State was providing them food and health services, the labourers were without jobs and eagerly waiting to go home.

"All these informal labourers are now jobless and eagerly waiting to go to their respective States. The incidents at Bandra Railway station gathering happened in Mumbai and is an example of restlessness of such labourers. In near future or maybe on May 3, 2020, or any other later date as decided by the Government of India, the lockdown would be withdrawn and public transport including railway would be starting and there will be a huge rush of all these migrated labourers at all railway stations," Mr Pawar warned.

Thousands of migrant labourers had gathered outside the Bandra station on April 14 – which marked the end of the first phase of lockdown – hoping to return home. With the extension of the lockdown and absence of trains, the police had to resort to a lathi charge to disperse the desperate people, resulting in several injures and arrests. It was alleged the crowd had gathered following rumours long-distance trains had started functioning even as politicians in the State criticised Centre's lack of planning.

Several Cabinet ministers from the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government had blamed the Centre for the incident.

"The current situation at Bandra Station, now dispersed or even the rioting in Surat is a result of the Union Government not being able to take a call on arranging a way back home for migrant labour. They do not want food or shelter; they want to go back home," Maharashtra Tourism Minister Aaditya Thackeray had tweeted.

Industries cannot be forced to pay wages: panel

MPs' committee sees COVID-19 lockdown as natural calamity, says units not responsible for lay-off must not be affected

SOBHANA K. NAIR
NEW DELHI

The Parliamentary Committee on Labour, in its report on the Industrial Relations Code, 2019, submitted on Thursday, has recommended that "in case of natural calamities, payment of wages to the workers until the re-establishment of the industry may be unjustifiable".

Committee Chairman and senior BJD leader Bhartruhari Mahtab said that the ongoing lockdown to check the spread of COVID-19 can be counted as one such calamity.

The Industrial Code makes it incumbent upon the employer to pay 50% wages to the workers/employees who are laid off due to a shortage of power, coal, raw material and such instances for 45 days.

The committee has, however, expressed reservation on payment of the prescribed percentage of wages to the workers in the event of closure of an establishment due to "natural calamity" .

"In case of natural calamities like earthquake, flood, super cyclone etc. which often result in closure of establishments for a considerably longer period without the employer's fault, payment of wages to the workers until the re-establishment of the industry may be unjustifiable," the report says.

The committee has suggested that "clarity" be brought in so that employers "not responsible for closure or lay off, are not disadvantaged in case of such natural calamity of high intent".

Asked if COVID-19 and the ongoing 40-day lockdown under which almost all industries have been shut, would also count as a natural calamity, Mr. Mahtab told *The Hindu*, that "it should".

'A helping hand'

"The basic idea about our recommendations is that the industry should also not be forced when the situation is beyond their control. The law has to be reasonable. It is for the government to step in and extend a helping hand for the industries," he added. These recommendations were strongly opposed by three members – CPI(M) Rajya Sabha member Elamaram Kaim, CPI Lok Sabha member K. Subbarayan and DMK's M. Shanmugam.

Dissent note

In his dissent note against the report, Mr. Karim said the recommendations are unfortunate especially in the present context.

"Given the present situation where the entire nation is fighting against monstrous attack of novel coronavirus and when every ordinary citizen has been shouldering the risk beyond his/her capacity, I am not able to understand the rationale behind these recommendations," Mr. Karim wrote.

The Industrial Relations Code, 2019 is an amalgamation of three laws – the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, the Trade Unions Act, 1926, and the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946.

The law was introduced in the Lok Sabha in November last year and referred to the Standing Committee on Labour in December.

With the ongoing lockdown, the draft report was circulated to the members on April 15 via e-mail and they were given eight days to respond. And the final adopted report was accepted by the Speaker Om Birla on Thursday.

Plea against govt. circular on meat eating

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A petition was filed in the Supreme Court on Thursday challenging the government's March 2020 circular, allaying fears about the consumption of non-vegetarian food amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The petition, filed by Vishwa Jain Sangathan, said the circular "promoting the eating of meat" was issued by the Animal Husbandry Ministry under pressure from the "butchers' lobby". It said the Ministry did not wait to hear from researchers on whether COVID-19 was transmitted from animals to humans.

"The circular advising people to eat meat in the midst of the spread of this deadly virus is premature. It was issued when biologists all over world were still searching for the source and its interface with animals," the petition said. It said the eating habits of "some people" had jeopardised humanity.

'BJP spreading communal virus'

Cong. asks govt. to use remaining lockdown period to make a 'detailed exit plan'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Thursday accused the BJP of spreading 'the virus of communal prejudice and hatred' even in the midst of the COVID- 19 pandemic. Ms. Gandhi made the charge at a Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting held through video conferencing.

The CWC asked the government to utilise the remaining lockdown period to prepare a 'detailed exit strategy and a future road map' that would substantially increase the health infrastructure capacity, revive the economy and protect current levels of employment and wages/income.

While former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said Centre-State cooperation was key to successfully fighting the pandemic, former party chief Rahul Gandhi urged the Centre to resume economic activities in green zone, seal the hotspots and and address the issue of return of migrants workers on priority.

Chief Minister V . Narayanasamy watches Sonia Gandhi's address on a screen in Puducherry on Thursday. • PTI

Chief Ministers of the Congress-ruled States - Ashok Gehlot of Rajasthan, Amarinder Singh of Punjab, Bhupesh Baghel of Chhattisgarh and V. Narayansamy of Puducherry complained of lack of financial assistance from the Centre. They also complained about the shortage as well as poor quality of the China-made rapid testing kits.

"The fight against COVID-19 is being fought at the State, district, city and village levels. States, therefore, must be empowered to devise solutions tailored to their unique situations and challenges," party leaders K.C. Venugopal and Randeep Surjewala said while reading out parts of a CWC resolution.

In her opening remarks, Ms Gandhi told the CWC, "Let me also share with you something that should worry each and every one us Indians. When we should be tackling the coronavirus unitedly, the BJP continues to spread the virus of communal prejudice and hatred. Grave damage is being done to our social harmony. Our party, we will have to work hard to repair that damage."

Lynching incident

Ms. Gandhi's remarks come just days after the BJP targeted the Maharashtra government, in which the Congress is a part, for the lynching in Palghar on April 16.

She pointed out that the speed and the spread of the pandemic had increased disturbingly in the past three weeks. "We have repeatedly urged the Prime Minister that there is no alternative to testing, tracing and quarantine programme. Unfortunately, testing still remains low and testing kits are still in short supply and of poor quality. The PPE [personal protection equipment] kits are being provided to our doctors and healthcare workers but the number and quality are poor," she said.

Ms. Gandhi noted that the lockdown had meant acute distress to those who are earn their livelihood from the informal sector.

Allow MGNREGS payments in foodgrains, says Baghel

Chhattisgarh CM writes to Rural Development Minister

SOBHANA K. NAIR
NEW DELHI

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel in a letter to Union Rural Development Minister Narendra Singh Tomar has asked the Centre to allow payment of MGNREGS wages in the form of foodgrains.

Mr. Baghel said the State was employing five lakh workers every day under the scheme.

He said the livelihood of over 62.5 lakh persons was dependent on the scheme which made it essential that the work continued in this hour of crisis.

The Chief Minister proposed that handing the workers foodgrains directly was better due to the lockdown and the continuing scare of the COVID-19. "Once we credit the MGNREGS wages, the worker will have to go to the banks to withdraw the money. This would not only be a bother but also could jeopardise social distancing norms."

Bhupesh Baghel

He said Chhattisgarh did not have many bank branches and faced the problem of Internet connectivity in Naxal-affected areas.

"Due to this, there are often problems like link failure and workers have to contact the branch many times to withdraw the amount," he wrote in his letter.

Social Activist Nikhil Dey from the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sanghatan said payment should continue as required by the law. "If accessibility to banks is a problem, then the government must make timely cash payments in a public place," Mr. Dey said.

Workers were paid in cash for the first five years after the scheme was launched in 2006. It was only in 2011 that the government had started bank transfers.

Mr. Dey said a "food-for-work" programme should run parallel to the MGNREGS in this time of crisis. "Food-for-work is well worth thinking about, with additional days of work provided, through possibly a disaster employment guarantee scheme," he said.

Two Palghar accused are from BJP: Congress

'No efforts to bring law against lynching'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra Congress on Thursday alleged that two of the accused in Palghar lynching – in which two sadhus and their driver were killed – are BJP office-bearers and the party wants to turn it into a communal issue using the media houses which serve its interests.

"The list of booth office-bearers in Gadchinchale village was announced on the official Facebook profile of BJP Dahanu Mandal. The first two office-bearers, Ishwar Nikole and Bhau Sathe, are the 61st and 65th accused in the list of criminals accused of leading and participating in Palghar mob lynching," said Maharashtra Congress Committee spokesperson Sachin Sawant at a press conference.

He alleged that apart from that, the names of many other BJP members are in the list of those accused for killing the sadhus. "The government will take stern action against all these office-bearers for the heinous murder of sadhus, but wonder why the BJP has not taken action against them yet," Mr. Sawant said.

"After the Palghar incident, Union Home Minister Amit Shah called Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray but the BJP has not done anything to pass a law against mob lynching in the last two years despite a number of incidents in different States. In one of the lynching cases, the accused in some of the cases were later felicitated by the BJP ministers," said Mr. Sawant.

"In July 2018, the Supreme Court condemned mob lynching and directed the Central government to enact legislation against this heinous act. In addition, 11 guidelines were issued but the Centre did not take any action on them," he said.

Violence not the answer: Press Council

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Press Council has said it is distressed by the 'attack' on Republic TV anchor Arnab Goswami, and stressed that violence was not the answer to even bad journalism. The Council, in a brief statement, said every citizen including a journalist had the right to express their opinion which may not be palatable to many but this does not give anybody the authority to strangulate such voice.

Two held for 'attack' on television anchor

Arnab Goswami alleges that accused are from Congress, but party denies hand

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI/NEW DELHI

Two persons were arrested by the N.M. Joshi Marg police in Mumbai on Thursday after *Republic TV* co-founder and anchor Arnab Goswami complained that he was attacked by them while he was on his home in the early hours of the day.

The police said they were informed about the incident at 1 a.m, by the police personnel deployed for the protection of Mr. Goswami. A team was sent to the Raheja Atlantis building in Worli, where Mr. Goswami stays with his wife, Samyabrata. The team took the two men into custody.

Shortly thereafter, Mr. Goswami reached the police station with an application signed by him, his wife and his police guards.

Based on the complaint, an FIR was registered.

A police officer said the accused in their 30s had been identified as Pratik Mishra and Raju Borade, residents of Pratiskha Nagar in Vikhroli. They were produced in court in the afternoon and remanded in police custody till April 25.

Mr. Goswami said the duo confessed to being from the Congress. He moved the Supreme Court against registration of FIRs against him in various States for his comments against Sonia Gandhi, seeking an immediate stay on prosecution. A Bench of Justices DY Chandrachud and M.R. Shah is scheduled to hear the plea on Friday.

The party denied that its workers were involved in the alleged attack. "We are very sure Congressmen have nothing to do with this. This is not our tradition, not our culture. We will not get physical against anybody even those who criticise the Congress," party general secretary K.C. Venugopal said in an online press conference.

The Maharashtra unit of the BJP called the alleged attack a cowardly act. Senior leaders of the party on Thursday urged the State government to take strict action. "The Congress goons have attacked a respectable journalist," Kirit Somaiya said.

IN BRIEF

Former Minister gets 7 years in laundering case

NEW DELHI

Anosh Ekka, a former Jharkhand Minister, was on Thursday sentenced to seven years of rigorous imprisonment by a special court in Ranchi in a money laundering case. The court of Special Judge Anil Kumar Mishra, which pronounced the sentencing via video conferencing, also imposed a fine of ₹2 crore on him.
In March, the court had convicted him for his role in the laundering of about ₹20.32 crore.

Akhil Gogoi sent to judicial custody again

GUWAHATI

Assam peasant leader Akhil Gogoi was sent to judicial custody after being produced at the National Investigation Agency's special court in Guwahati on Thursday. Mr. Gogoi, who has been shifted from one jail to another in a series of cases including sedition, was brought from the jail in eastern Assam's Dibrugarh on Wednesday. He was produced at the NIA court in a case registered at the Chabua police station in Dibrugarh district during the violent protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in December 2019.

Three held for transporting people

GURUGRAM

Three persons have been arrested for allegedly transporting 76 people, including women and children, to Uttar Pradesh. Acting on a tip-off, a Farrukhnagar police team flagged down a truck coming from Ludhiana at Gurugram-Jhajjar border on Wednesday. The truck driver and his two helpers got down from the vehicle and fled the spot. However, they were later arrested. The police found 76 people sitting inside the truck.

Ensure only one-third staff, offices told

NEW DELHI

All Central government departments were on Thursday asked to ensure that not more than one-third of employees, below the level of deputy secretary, were called to offices to avoid crowding and ensuring social distancing, according to a Personnel Ministry communiqué. The move comes after it was noticed that more than one-third of staff below deputy secretary level were being called to offices in some Ministries. • PTI

New CJs for Bombay, Orissa, Meghalaya HCs

NEW DELHI

The Law Ministry has appointed the next Chief Justices of the Bombay, Orissa and Meghalaya High Courts (HC). As Chief Justice B.P. Dharmadhikari of the Bombay HC is to retire on April 28, Justice Dipankar Datta will succeed him. Meghalaya HC Chief Justice Mohammed Rafiq is the next Chief Justice of the Orissa HC. Justice Biswanath Somadder, who is a judge in the Allahabad HC, is the new CJ of the Meghalaya HC.

Six-month-old dies of virus in Punjab

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

A six-month-old girl from Kapurthala, who was admitted to the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER) for corrective heart surgery and tested positive for COVID-19, died on Thursday taking the toll to 17 in Punjab, according to an official statement.

The State also reported 26 fresh cases – 18 from Patiala, six from Jalandhar and two from Amritsar – taking the count to 283. The Health Department said 66 patients had so far recovered.

Chief Minister Amarinder Singh told Congress party president Sonia Gandhi during a videoconference that he had ordered a detailed audit of every virus-related death by experts to understand and check the high mortality rate in the State. He informed the party leadership that the State was being guided by a group of experts. "The mortality numbers are high largely due to co-morbidity and lack of health-seeking behaviour," he said.

Central teams check hotspots in Bengal

IMCT inspects COVID-19 hospitals, quarantine centres; says State is extending cooperation now

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Three days after landing in West Bengal on instructions from the Union Home Ministry, two groups of the Inter-Ministerial Central Team (IMCT) on Thursday checked COVID-19 hotspots, hospitals and quarantine centres.

A group visited a quarantine centre in the Rajarhat New town area of Kolkata. This was followed by a visit to M.R. Bangur Hospital, which is serving as a primary COVID-19 hospital in the State.

The group, led by Apurva Chandra, Additional Secretary, Defence Ministry, spoke to the hospital authorities about the treatment provided and its preparedness to accommodate more patients.

Keeping a check: BSF personnel escorting members of the Central team at the M.R. Bangur Hospital on Thursday. ▪PTI

Detailed presentation

On Wednesday, Mr. Chandra wrote to Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha seeking a detailed presentation from the Health Department on the COVID-19 situation. He also said the IMCT would like to visit some hospitals, quarantine centres, hotspots and market places.

Another group of the ICMT visited an apartment complex near the North Bengal Medical College and Hospital, where several residents had tested positive.

The team, led by Vineet Joshi, Additional Secretary, Human Resource and Development Ministry, visited a quarantine centre at Siliguri.

"We are getting the cooperation of the State government from today. We have asked a detailed report from it and learning about the situation on ground," Mr. Joshi told presspersons.

In Kolkata and north Bengal, State officials accompanied the ICMT groups.

'Providing support'

Mr. Sinha told presspersons that cooperation was being provided to the IMCT groups. The State was not telling the two Central teams that they could not visit different areas in the State.

"Today, they have informed us that they want to visit certain areas. We are looking into where they want to go," he said.

The IMCT that landed on April 20 initially got little cooperation from the State. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, describing the Central team's visit as "unilateral".

Meanwhile, after Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla's letter on April 21 claimed that the State was not cooperating with the IMCT, the Chief Secretary sent a letter to the Ministry promising all cooperation and saying that they had shared up-to-date reports with the Centre

Mamata, Dhankhar lock horns over virus fight

'Governor is violating the Constitution'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

At a time when West Bengal is battling the spread of COVID-19, relations between Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar reached a new nadir on Thursday, with Ms. Banerjee writing to him stating that the "Governor seems to have forgotten that he is a nominated representative and she an elected Chief Minister".

Mamata Banerjee

"You appear to have forgotten that I am an elected Chief Minister of a proud Indian State. You also seem to have forgotten that you are a nominated Governor," Ms. Banerjee wrote in the five-page letter. Minutes after receiving the letter, Mr. Dhankhar took to Twitter to call it "outrageous, factually wrong and constitutionally infirm".

The public spat comes after differences between the two increased over issues pertaining to the pandemic. The Chief Minister quoted B.R. Ambedkar's remarks in the Constituent Assembly and the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission. In view of these comments, she said, "Your repeated and consistent interference in the administration... makes it clear who has fragrantly transgressed constitutional dharma." She also blamed him for holding press conferences against the State.

The Chief Minister, while making the letter public, said: "The people of this State and of this nation judge themselves who has done what and who is in breach of elementary norms of constitutional behaviour." On Thursday, the Governor urged the Chief Minister to "ensure a seamless way forward for the Central teams".

Bhopal surpasses Indore in case growth rate

Surge attributed to results from pending samples

STAFF REPORTER
BHOPAL

The rate of growth in the number of COVID-19 cases in Bhopal was seven times that of Indore in three days, as the count of cases in Madhya Pradesh climbed to 1,687 on Thursday.

The reason for the continuing upsurge in cases in Bhopal, say district officials, is the backlog of samples, whose test reports are coming in now.

From April 20 to 22, if Indore, the State's worst-hit city, recorded an average 16 cases a day, Bhopal saw 30. The rate of growth in the count for Indore was 1.75%, while for Bhopal it was 12.3%.

The upward trend would continue for five or six days, and the city's tally will hit a peak in around three days, District Collector, Bhopal, Tarun Kumar Pithode said.

"We had collected 10,000 samples, of which results of half the samples are still pending," Mr. Pithode said.

Signs of hope: Patients being garlanded after their discharge from the Chirayu Medical College and Hospital in Bhopal. ▪PTI

Samples collected

Samples were extensively collected during a recent survey for influenza-like illnesses and severe acute respiratory illness. Besides, health workers had collected samples of high-risk persons, who either reside in hotspots or are primary contacts of patients.

The virus was not transmitted to newer areas, with most recent cases being detected in Jahangirabad and T.T. Nagar, the city's hotspots, where containment areas had been drawn up. Cases in the city touched 323 on Thursday.

Around 10 days ago, when Indore's case fatality rate was close to 10%, the highest in the country, the situation there was worse as 20% more cases were reported every day, whereas in Bhopal the rate was 12.9%.

Akash Tripathi, Indore Divisional Commissioner, said in the coming days the surge was expected to plateau in Indore, which has the third-most number of cases after New Delhi and Mumbai, as newer cases were mostly from primary contacts of patients already in quarantine.

Unrelenting uptick

Yet, the unrelenting uptick in the number of deaths in the neighbouring districts of Indore, Dewas, Khargone and Ujjain, which in a combined form make up 85% of the 85 deaths in the State, is confounding health experts. Indore authorities are sending swab samples to the National Institute of Virology, to ascertain if a more virulent form of the virus strain was proving more fatal.

As of April 23, as many as 28 districts of Madhya Pradesh were prey to the virus, with Indore, having 945 cases, bearing the maximum load.

So far, 203 patients have recovered from the illness. In order to stop the virus' spread further, the State government has identified 461 containment areas.

34 policemen test positive

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BHOPAL

So far, 34 police personnel, including some officers, have tested positive for COVID-19 in Bhopal, a top official said on Thursday.

The official claimed that as per the findings, the initial infections in the city's police force were caused when the personnel went out in search of those who had returned to the State capital after attending the Tablighi Jamaat congregation at Delhi's Nizamuddin held last month. "With a policeman in our cybercell testing positive on Thursday, 34 of our personnel, including officers, have been infected so far," Bhopal Additional Director General of Police (ADGP), Upendra Jain, said.

Around 30 of their family members had also contracted the infection, he added.

Gujarat records 217 new cases and nine deaths

Ahmedabad continues to account for the bulk of cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
AHMEDABAD

With 217 new infections and nine deaths recorded on Thursday, Gujarat's COVID-19 curve continues to rise in number of cases and fatalities. So far, 112 people had died and 2,624 cases detected in the State.

Amid the rising number of cases and casualties, Thursday also saw the largest number of patients, 79, getting discharged, increasing the number of recoveries to 258.

Now, 28 infected patients are critically ill and supported by ventilator while 2,226 are stable under treatment. The State has so far tested 42,384 samples.

Ahmedabad continues to account for the bulk of cases and casualties. On Thursday, out of 217 cases, 151 came from the city alone. Seven of the nine deaths occurred in Ahmedabad. As on Thursday, Ahmedabad's tally of total cases has jumped to 1,652 and 69 deaths, while 113 people have been discharged after they recovered.

Tracking infections: A medical team conducting a door-to-door survey in Ahmedabad on Thursday. ▪PTI

Of the 79 discharged on Thursday, 45 came from Vadodara, which has seen 53 recover out of a total of 218 cases including 11 deaths.

With rise in recovery and slow transmission of new infections, the city has managed to flatten its curve.

"A total of 45 persons who were COVID -19 positive and under isolation in Ebrahim Bavani ITI, Ajwa Road, have recovered. They have tested negative twice in last two days, and have been discharged," said Vinod Rao, senior IAS officer, who has been deputed by the State government to manage the pandemic in the city.

He said the administration along with the help of Baroda Muslim Doctors Association had counselled all 45 persons to be plasma donors whenever the need arises in the coming days, and all of them have agreed.

Odisha reports 6 new cases, tally rises to 89

Complete lockdown in three districts

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BHUBANESWAR

Odisha on Thursday reported six new COVID-19 cases, four in Jajpur district and two in Balasore, taking the total to 89.

The four persons from Jajpur who had tested positive were family members of those who had returned from West Bengal and tested positive earlier, while the two cases reported from Balasore were contacts of a COVID-19 case detected earlier, the State government said.

While contact tracing of the six patients was initiated immediately, the State government deputed three of its senior officials to oversee the containment measures in Balasore, Bhadrak and Jajpur. These three districts have reported as many as 33 cases till Thursday and a majority of them include those who had recently returned from the neighbouring State, their family members and close contacts.

Legal action

The State government ordered a 60-hour-long complete lockdown in the three districts, starting from 10 p.m. on Thursday, to contain the spread of the virus. Legal action would be taken against those violating the shutdown, the government said.

The capital city of Bhubaneswar, which comes under Khordha district, has recorded the highest number of cases in the State so far (46). As on Thursday, 10 of the State's 30 districts had recorded COVID-19 cases.

Of the total 89 cases, as many as 33 had been discharged from hospitals after treatment by Thursday. While one patient had died earlier, 55 persons are under treatment at different exclusive COVID-19 hospitals.

More testing

Meanwhile, the State government's high level inter-ministerial committee on the pandemic decided to increase testing to 3,000 samples per day by the end of this month.

A total of 15,984 samples had been tested in the State till midnight on Wednesday. The meeting, held via video-conferencing, also discussed the implementation of a special plan that had been drawn up to deal with the emerging situation in the districts of Balasore, Bhadrak and Jajpur.

Maharashtra records single-day high

A total of 778 fresh cases reported; State's tally crosses 6,000 mark

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PUNE

In a record single-day surge, Maharashtra reported a staggering 778 fresh COVID-19 cases on Thursday as the State's cumulative tally exceeded the 6,000-case mark to 6,427, while 14 new deaths took the death toll to 283.

According to State Health officials, six of these deaths were from Mumbai city, while five more were reported from Pune, and one each from Navi Mumbai, Nandurbar and Dhule, with the latter two districts reporting their first deaths.

Mumbai's death toll now stands at 167, while that of Pune district has risen to 62 with as many as 59 deaths being reported from Pune city.

"More than 55% of the deaths reported had high-risk co-morbidities such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma and heart disease," said State Surveillance Officer Dr. Pradeep Awate.

Mumbai and Pune

Alarming spikes in the number of cases were reported from both Mumbai and Pune cities, with the Maximum City reporting an all-time high jump of 522 fresh cases to surge past the 4,000 mark to touch 4,205 cases.

Eye of the storm: Boats anchored off the Worli jetty after the area was sealed due to a surge in cases. ▪AADESH CHOUDHARI

Pune city reported 100 cases in less than 24 hours, to take its tally of cases to 853, while Pimpri-Chinchwad reported six new cases to take its total to 57.

The cumulative district total for Pune now stands at 910, with nearly 170 cases being reported over just two days.

"In the past few days, the cases in Pune district, especially in Pune city, have soared. However, this is primarily due to the fact that we have intensified testing as well as our screening efforts. An average 700-800 tests are being carried out daily in the highly infected areas in the city. We have expanded our testing capacity to as many as 1,035 samples," said Pune District Collector Naval Kishore Ram.

He further said that it was especially worrying that there were more women patients and female fatalities in the city's Bhavani Peth area – a highly infected cluster accounting for more than 200 of the 800-odd cases in Pune city.

'Suppressing details'

"People have been suppressing details of their ailments. I appeal to them – if they have fever or are showing virus-like symptoms, they must have themselves checked at any of the 75-odd flu clinics across the city," Mr. Ram said. He said stringent lockdown measures would be implemented in Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad.

Alongside the surge in cases, a total of 51 persons were discharged today, taking the figure of persons recovered till date in the State to 840.

Dharavi cases cross 200

STAFF REPORTER
MUMBAI

COVID-19 positive cases in Mumbai's Dharavi crossed the 200 mark after it reported 25 new cases on Thursday, bringing the total to 214. It also reported its 13th death, a 69 year-old man from Shastri Nagar.

Of the 25 new cases, most are from areas already part of containment zones, including Mukund Nagar, Kalyanwadi, labour camp and Rajiv Gandhi Nagar.

Besides, cases were reported from newer parts of Dharavi, including Sant Kakaiya Marg, Chamda Bazar and Netaji Society.

On Wednesday, a Central team had advised the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation to increase the number of quarantine beds at least up to 5,000 considering a peak in cases.

Three Army personnel test positive in Gujarat

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Three Army personnel tested positive for the novel coronavirus in Gujarat's Vadodara, Army sources said on Thursday.

As per the initial investigation, an ATM looks to be the source of the infection as they all had withdrawn money from it on the same day, the sources said. The necessary medical protocols were initiated and close contacts have been quarantined, the sources added.

So far, there have been nine positive COVID-19 cases in the Army.

KSCSTE-Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (KSCSTE-JNTBGRI)
An Institution Under Kerala State Council for Science, Technology and Environment
Govt. of Kerala, National Centre of Excellence, Govt. of India,
Karimancode P.O., Pacha, Palode, Thiruvananthapuram 695562, Kerala, India
Website:www.jntbgri.res.in, email:tbgri.purchase@gmail.com

No. 967/PS/2020/JNTBGRI **E-TENDER NOTICE** 24.04.2020

E-tenders are invited for the supply of various laboratory equipments for Institute of Advanced Virology (IAV). For E-tender ID, visit our institute website **www.jntbgri.res.in** and submit bids through e-tender site **www.etenders.kerala.gov.in**. Last date of receipt of tenders is 22.05.2020 up to 5.00 PM.

(RO/00764/D3/2020/I&PRD) DIRECTOR

GOVERNMENT OF PUDUCHERRY
PONDICHERRY URBAN DEVELOPMENT AGENCY
PUDUCHERRY

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (2nd Call)

Tender is invited from eligible consulting firms/agencies for setting of Construction and Demolition Waste Processing Plant at Puducherry. Tender RFP document available at http:pudutenders.gov.in can be downloaded from 25.04.2020. Last date for tender submission is 15.05.2020 by 15.00hrs. Further clarification can be obtained from PUDA in the email id: dirlad.pon@nic.in and puda.pon@nic.in.

(GIDDI BALARAM)
OFFICER ON SPECIAL DUTY
PUDA

NO:005/DIP/AD(PRESS)/2020-2021

Australia pitches for trilateral ties

DINAKAR PERI
SUHASINI HAIDER
NEW DELHI

India and Australia would face common challenges in the Indo-Pacific as COVID-19 was stretching much of the world's governmental capacity, Barry O'Farrell, Australian High Commissioner-designate, said in an address to the National Defence College (NDC) through videoconference. He called for greater cooperation, especially among India, Australia and Indonesia.

Cooperation between India and Australia in southeast Asia was a natural fit. "As a starting point, we should build on last year's successful trilateral maritime security workshop with Indonesia to identify new ways that our three countries can collaborate to be the best possible custodians of the Indian Ocean," he said.

In a separate development, the Australian High Commission, in coordination with the MEA, gave a ride to India's Ambassador to Indonesia Pradeep Rawat and his family in one of the repatriation flights to Australia that had a stopover at Denpasar in Indonesia, official sources said.

Diplomatic sources said: "Australia was very happy and keen to help two of our strongest Indo-Pacific partners, India and Indonesia, in this matter. The trilateral cooperation had been growing and would continue to be important as we considered the implications of COVID-19 for Indo-Pacific regional order."

Mr. O'Farrell said COVID-19 would not necessarily change the nature of threats but would hasten the pace at which they were developing.

Model shows deaths, cases rising over next three weeks

'Healthcare system must prepare to tend to 7,928 ICU patients on May 6'

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

There is likely to be no respite from increases in the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in the country for at least three weeks, predicts a mathematical model that projects the future burden on India's healthcare system.

Based on the relationship between COVID-19 deaths and cases from several countries, the model posits that the country's healthcare system must prepare to tend to 7,928 ICU patients on May 6. Authorities have currently extended the nationwide lockdown up to May 3. As of today, India has 24,644 ICU beds, and bed-demands and deaths, according to the model's authors, assume a "worst-case" scenario.

The projections are available on a freely accessible website, covid19medinventory.in, and the model has been developed by scientists from multiple institutions who were brought together by the office of the government's Principal Scientific Adviser K. VijayRaghavan.

Bleak forecast

A projection based on research work facilitated by the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser estimates that the death toll due to COVID-19 could rise to 14,000 a week by May 13.
Estimates made by the team:

28,049 ICU patients by May 13

19,635 ventilators projected to be in use by May 13

An APMC worker seen disinfecting a shop in a wholesale market in New Delhi. ▪ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

The story in numbers	May 6	May 14	Unit
COVID-19 related deaths	3,964	14,025	per week
ICU patients	7,928	28,049	on this day
10-bed dedicated COVID hospitals	793	2,805	on this day
Doctors	6,344	22,440	on duty this day
Nurses and paramedics	12,688	44,880	on duty this day
Ventilators	5,551	19,635	on this day
Infusion pumps	31,720	112,200	on this day
Full PPEs (for frontline staff)	47,580	168,300	per day
PPEs (for supporting staff)	7,930	28,050	per day

Global experience

The "academic initiative" as it describes itself bases its numbers on the number of COVID-19 deaths reported by hospitals. Though there are no projections on the number of cases, it derives numbers based on the global experience and relationships between testing and the true number of infections and, correlations such as: that 5% of total cases are critical, and 50% of those admitted to an ICU survive.

The website shows an India map with the expected number of positive cases in every district. The model itself, however, is yet to be peer-reviewed but is available as a preprint for perusal.

"Our model assumes a constant ratio between total infected (detected or not) and the number of deaths," Aloke Kumar of the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, wrote in an e-mail reply to *The Hindu*. "So, any increase in deaths is reflected proportionately in confirmed cases. Since the entire model focuses on the healthcare system, we decided against giving out our projections for true infected in the dashboard," he added. "Having said that, the death rate is approximately 1% of the estimate of true infection (considering South Korea as a benchmark where testing was quite methodical and extensive) and around 2-3% of reported infection."

From April 23 to 29, the model projects 1,164 deaths, and from April 29 to May 6 predicts the number of fatalities to rise to 3,964 – again the authors emphasise – based on a worst case scenario. As of Thursday, India had reported 21,700 cases and 686 deaths. "It is certainly a large jump, as shown by the model," P. Sunthar, of the Chemical Engineering Department at the Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai, wrote in an e-mail. "But we do hope the health administrations will take measures to contain the outbreak in badly affected areas (in which case we won't see such large numbers in a week). But going by the global trend, this is what the model shows," he added.

While these numbers take into account the impact of the lockdown, the authors say the model's projections for the third week and beyond aren't yet reliable. Because it bases itself on deaths, the model would falter if the number of COVID-19 deaths aren't truthfully recorded and could be a problem in rural areas or regions with limited hospitalisation facilities. However, being an adaptive model, the numbers as well as healthcare demand can change daily. Scientists who participated in developing the model include those from the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research, Bengaluru, and personnel of the Armed Forces Medical Services.

India following U.S. trajectory, says Chinese disease expert

Zhang Wenhong points to signs of community transmission

ANANTH KRISHNAN
CHENNAI

India's trajectory in COVID-19 cases is following the United States and likely to similarly reach a plateau rather than peak soon, one of China's top infectious disease experts has said.

Since there were already signs of some community transmission in India, it was more likely to follow the trend of the U.S. and Europe rather than limit cases to a low number, said Zhang Wenhong, a leading figure in China's COVID-19 strategy, who is also director of Huashan Hospital's Department of Infectious Disease in Shanghai.

"I think the overall situation in India may be similar to that of the U.S," he said. "The measures of each state in the U.S. are different. Some states are strict and some have resumed work. India has to consider how the economy functions and how the epidemic can be controlled, so it does not pay a high price for epidemic prevention."

Fight is on: Staff guiding people outside the COVID-19 ward at the LNJP Hospital in New Delhi on Thursday. ▪ R.V. MOORTHY

Long-term strategy

He said in this view, India's approach to adopt a long-term strategy made sense, including its approach to testing. While India's approach in tackling COVID-19 has been different from China's sweeping lockdowns and mass quarantines, India's strategy was understandable for its national conditions. "Every country should find a way that suits them according to their situation," he said.

He suggested China's "100%" lockdown, or Australia's approach of locking down until very low numbers of new cases were reached, was unlikely to be replicated in other countries, and added that he did not necessarily advocate a one-size-fits-all approach.

"I personally feel that India does not need to adopt such a strategy," he said. "I think their government would probably follow the U.S. strategy."

India may not be able to keep cases to as low a level as did many places in China – which managed to limit the spread outside of the Hubei province epicentre with mass lockdowns, quarantines and testing – but at the same time, the rise in cases did not mean the spread was uncontrollable.

Work goes on

"Do not look only at the number of cases," he said. "There have been hundreds of thousands of cases in the U.S. and Europe, more than in India. The lives of Europeans still has not stopped, and they are preparing to resume work, school and business."

Dr. Zhang made the comments on Wednesday while interacting with Chinese nationals in India in an online exchange arranged by the Chinese Embassy, and fielding questions on India's strategy, testing and the future trajectory of cases.

Globally under control

He believed the global pandemic was broadly under control, and as the number of diagnosed cases increased, the mortality rate would further reduce.

This outbreak, he said, was very different from SARS in 2003, which had a far higher mortality among both young and old. This also explained why some countries were choosing to reopen their economies and schools.

On the question of whether Indians had a higher immunity than the rest of the world – a matter that has been widely debated in China – Dr. Zhang said the incidence rate in India suggested this was not the case.

He said he was, however, moved to see how "calm" people were in handling the pandemic, which suggested what they did have was a high "spiritual immunity".

Foreigners paid dearly to fly out

U.S. nationals had to cough up nearly three times the normal one-way fare

S. VIJAY KUMAR
CHENNAI

Hundreds of foreign nationals stranded in India during the COVID-19 lockdown flew home in chartered flights organised by their home countries in coordination with airlines and the Government of India in recent weeks. However, the evacuation trips did not come for free and they were not affordable either.

While the U.S. nationals had to pay anywhere between $2,000 and $2,500 per person from New Delhi to San Francisco or Mumbai to Atlanta, British nationals had to spend between £500 and £600 despite the U.K. government allocating £75 million for chartered flights from countries where commercial flight operations were not available.

Loan option

However, the U.S. gave a loan option to its nationals and even took a promissory note allowing them to fly and pay later. The U.K. government offered conditional loans that many could not avail while flying out of India. U.S. nationals were informed that if they failed to repay the loan, they would not be eligible for issue of new passport. Only U.S. citizens with confirmation with U.S. Mission to India were allowed to board the flights.

Foreign nationals at the Kolkata airport to board a special flight recently. ▪ AFP

"Please understand this flight is not free. All passengers will need to reimburse the U.S. government for the cost of the flight. Previous flights have cost between $2,000 and 2,500 per person. A legal document, called a promissory note, for the full cost of the flight must be signed by each adult passenger. However, payment is not required at the time of the flight," the U.S. Embassy in India said in a travel advisory to its nationals.

Responding to an announcement put out on Twitter by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that U.K. travellers should return home and £75 million had been allocated to support special chartered flights where commercial options were no longer available, an aspiring flyer replied wondering why people were being charged £600 from India if so much money was earmarked. Another traveller said the tickets were "quite expensive" for one way and sought to know how he could take the loan. However, he was informed that he should attempt to use his own financial means to arrange return to the U.K..

No relief

"I had to pay £1,088 for travel from Delhi to London for myself and my three-year-old daughter. This is more than double the normal fare... we usually pay £862 for return ticket on the same sector. We are British nationals and the U.K. government should have considered some subsidy if not free repatriation," said Neha Chauhan, a banking professional in London who took a British Airways flight from Delhi on April 21, 2020.

Early this month, the U.K. government said that over 3,000 British travellers, including tourists, short-term travellers and their direct dependents, currently stranded in India could get home on an additional 12 chartered flights for which bookings opened on April 10, 2020. Travellers who could not afford the cost and had exhausted all other options for getting funds were told to contact a commercial partner for seeking loan. "You may be eligible to apply for an emergency loan to cover the cost of the ticket. This is a last resort option and you would need to repay the loan when you are back in the U.K.," the advisory said.

Srikanth, an IT director in a reputed firm in Washington DC and a native of Visakhapatnam, said the fare was almost thrice compared to the normal one-way trip from Delhi to San Francisco or Mumbai to Atlanta, the sectors in which the rescue flights were operated. "Travellers were told to report to the nearest U.S. Consulate for a health check-up. This fare is much more than what is sold during peak holiday season. Many stayed back hoping that flights will resume soon after the lockdown in India," he said.

Many other countries including Australia, Japan and others operated special flights to move their nationals stranded in India. Their pricing details were not available for comparison though airport sources said that most of the rescue planes charged double since they would fly back empty.

Sarpanches want phased return of migrants

SATYASUNDAR BARIK
BHUBANESWAR

With Odisha bracing for an influx of about 7.5 lakh migrant workers, sarpanches, who will be at the vanguard of government efforts to keep the State safe from possible COVID-19 spread, are dreading the scenario of thousands returning at the same time.

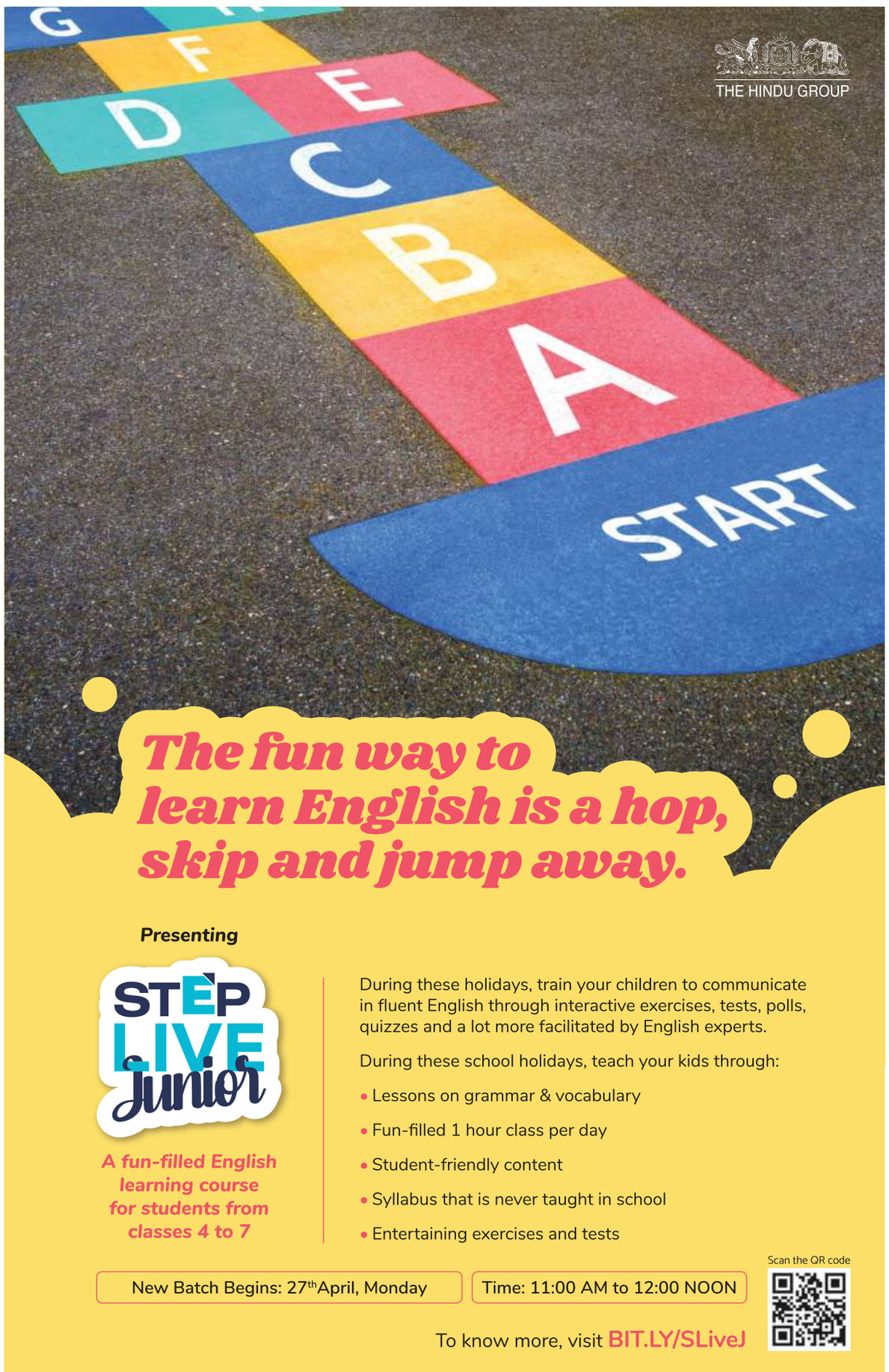
The registration for return of migrants will begin from April 24.

Sample this: Kansara panchayat in coastal Kendrapara district has readied 70 isolation beds while more than 300 migrant workers from the panchayat have already informed their family members about their return.

In Bhatigaon panchayat under Bargarh district, an isolation centre with 20 beds is ready. However, 60 people from the area who are stranded outside are desperate to return. Similarly, the Gorakhunta gram panchayat in Malkangiri district has 50 beds whereas 160 people from the area are slated to return. In all likelihood, returnees will outnumber COVID-19 isolation beds at the panchayat level. At present, 2 lakh beds have been kept ready in 6,798 panchayats of the State. The government plans to increase the capacity to 5 lakh.

"Around 7.5 lakh Odia migrants are stranded in other States. They are desperate to return home. The government concerned about their well-being," said D.K. Singh, Odisha's Panchayati Raj Department Secretary. "The government had announced to provide ₹5 lakh to each panchayat for tackling COVID-19. We have not received a penny," claimed Pradyumna Kumar Jena, Kansara sarpanch.

Although the government has appointed gram panchayat nodal officers who will be responsible for fixing the timing of return of migrants, sarpanches said full-fledged control rooms are required to keep tabs on the movement of people. The sarpanches have demanded that the government devise some mechanism so that migrants' return could be phased out.



First batch of seafarers disembark in Mumbai

145 crew members of *Marella Discovery* sent to quarantine after undergoing four-stage clearance at the port

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

A total of 145 crew members disembarked from U.S. cruise ship *Marella Discovery* on Thursday, making them the first batch of Indian seafarers to be allowed by the government to return.

The seafarers spent over 40 days in Indian waters as the government put together a standard operating procedure (SOP) for them in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

After *Marella Discovery* called in at the Mumbai Port Trust (MbPT) around 10.30 a.m., the Indian crew were put through a four-stage disembarkation process before being sent to a government-authorised quarantine facility. It was an emotional moment as the remaining crew of *Marella Discovery*, led by its captain Chris Dodds, bid their Indian colleagues goodbye, with promises that they would all sail through the pandemic and regroup for another voyage in the near future.

Safe passage: The crew returned to land after a 40-day wait at sea. ▪SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

MbPT officials said that the SOP for sign-on and sign-off for seafarers to embark and disembark was prepared by the Director-General of Shipping.

While a check by the Port Health Officer and immigration clearance are regular activities, the SOP included a COVID-19 test and quarantine till the results are negative. An electronic pass will be created for all those who test negative.

They will then have to apply to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) for a transit pass so that they can travel to their respective homes in various States by road. Each transit pass will be valid for one seafarer and a driver only. While the crew are from all over India, 99 hail from Goa, and the State government is making arrangements for them to return home.

The disembarkation of the *Marella Discovery* crew was carried out by shipping agent J.M. Baxi. "All the 145 crew disembarked on Thursday. After the clarifications on SOP came in late at night, there was limited time in hand. The transition was smooth," said a senior official of J.M. Baxi and Company.

The Ministry of Shipping brought out an order on Tuesday night that paved the way for Indian seafarers to return home. The process devised by the Ministry is going to be a three-phased one.

Three phases

In the first phase, the government will allow seamen on ships docked at Indian ports to disembark and sign off. In the second phase, those on ships in deep sea will be allowed to return. And in the final stage, all those who have disembarked from ships and signed off in a foreign country will be allowed to return.

Seafarers in foreign countries would be allowed to return to India only when the government lifts its ban on flights and allows other Indians stranded abroad to return.

"It's very heartening to see the extraordinary effort made by the ship owners for crew disembarkation. Patience paid off. The send off was given to the Indian crew by remaining staff, a tradition at sea was followed to the core by Captain of the ship," Sanjay Parashar, member of the National Shipping Board and Chairman, International Maritime Federation, said.

Mr. Parashar said that the return of the seafarers had made their families smile, and given other stranded seafarers the hope that they too would be back soon.

Jaishankar thanks Saudi, Omani Ministers

'India will remain a reliable partner'

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

India on Thursday thanked Saudi Arabia for looking after the expat Indian community as the world continued to struggle with the COVID-19 pandemic. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar spoke with his Saudi Arabia and Oman counterparts as the Gulf region began observing the holy month of Ramadan.

"Appreciated the very warm conversation with His Highness Prince Faisal, Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia. Thanked him for taking care of the Indian community there. Discussed our shared interests in ensuring health and food security. India will remain a reliable partner," he said in a social media message after the conversation. It is understood that Delhi has also assured Riyadh that the pandemic will not affect India's supply of high quality Basmati rice to the monarchy.

The conversation shows that officials continued to stay in touch even as people-to-people ties were strained after notable Arab commentators took to social media over the past few days to highlight incidents of Islamophobia in India. In this context, a source pointed to a tweet sent from a fake Omani account and described it as an "attempt to distort the special relation that India shares with the regional countries".

Dr. Jaishankar also thanked Foreign Minister Yusuf Alawi of Oman for "taking care" of the Indian community.

Saudi Arabia has witnessed a surge in the COVID-19 cases in recent weeks with reports suggesting that a bulk of the affected patients could be Indian blue collar workers. According to available information, the majority of Indians abroad affected by the virus are located in the Gulf region with Saudi Arabia accounting for 186 and Oman for 238.

Discussed our shared interests in ensuring health and food security

S. JAISHANKAR
External Affairs Minister

Seeking repatriation

Additionally, a large number of Indians in Saudi Arabia have been urging New Delhi to evacuate them.

On Thursday, around 100 of them wrote a joint letter to Dr. Jaishankar seeking evacuation. *The Hindu* was told that the Indian missions are in contact with expat Indians in the region.

One source indicated that they are aware of cases where Indians employed with local Gulf companies are eager to return as the employers have shut down because of the economic downturn.

The expats have been in contact with the authorities through the COVID-19 cell of the Ministry of External Affairs which has been the coordinating body of the international operations. Sources said the cell has received 3,000 phone calls and 25,000 emails till Thursday from expat Indians and their relatives.

Kamakhya temple festival called off

First time in recorded history

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

With the lockdown, the annual festival at the Kamakhya temple here has been cancelled for the first time in its recorded history.

Legends say the temple atop the Nilachal Hills, whose northern face slopes down to the Brahmaputra river, was built by the demon king Narakasura. Records are available only from 1565 when Koch King Naranarayana had the temple rebuilt.

Kamakhya is one of the 51 shaktipeeths, or holy sites, for the followers of the Shakti cult, each representing a body part of Sati, Lord Shiva's companion. The temple's *sanctum sanctorum* houses the *yoni* – female genitals – symbolised by a rock. The festival marks the menstruation of the goddess

"Tough times call for tough decisions. With a heavy heart, we have decided not to organise the annual Ambubachi Mela in view of the possibility of the spread of COVID-19 infection," Kabindra Sarma, a senior temple priest said on Thursday.

DRDO develops mobile virology lab

It will carry out COVID-19 diagnosis and virus-culturing for various therapies

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday inaugurated through videoconference a mobile virology research and diagnostics laboratory (MVRDL). It has been developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), together with ESIC Hospital, Hyderabad, and the private industry.

"The mobile lab will be helpful in carrying out diagnosis of COVID-19 and in virus-culturing for drug screening, convalescent plasma-derived therapy, comprehensive immune profiling of patients towards vaccine development and early clinical trials specific to Indian population," the Defence Ministry said in a statement.

On the go: The mobile lab developed by the DRDO and ESIC Hospital, Hyderabad. ▪SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The MVRDL is the combination of a bio-safety level (BSL)-3 lab and a BSL-2 lab and was set up in a record time of 15 days. It can process 1,000-2,000 samples a day, the statement said.

The laboratories comply with the biosafety standards of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) so as to meet international guidelines.

The first such MVRDL was developed by the Research Centre Imarat (RCI), Hyderabad, in consultation with ESIC Hospital. It can be positioned anywhere in the country, the statement said.

Air ticket refunds from travel sites delayed

Most airlines do not reimburse cash to booking portals but have set up a digital wallet for future use

JAGRITI CHANDRA
NEW DELHI

If you have booked an air ticket during the lockdown through a travel portal, you are unlikely to get a refund immediately despite a government order. Most airlines have not reimbursed money to online travel agents (OTAs) due to a severe cash crunch.

Low-cost carriers IndiGo, SpiceJet, GoAir, AirAsia and TrueJet say booking portals deposit money in advance in the bank accounts of the airlines to be able to buy air tickets. In return for this cash deposit, airlines create a wallet online against which a portal can purchase tickets. These wallets merely give entities an indication of the balance amount they can utilise, unlike other digital wallets that allow one to carry out monetary transactions.

Airlines are facing a severe cash crunch.

Since the government directive, airlines have not reimbursed cash to portals such as MakeMyTrip, Yatra.com, EasyMyTrip and ixigo, but merely restored the balance in the online wallet.

"When airlines reimburse an amount to this online wallet, without actually refunding cash into our bank accounts, we don't have money with us to give refunds. Only when fresh bookings start will we be able to utilise that wallet to book tickets for our customers, and with new cash flowing in, we will be able to refund our previous clients who have sought refunds," says Nishant Pitti, CEO & Co-Founder, EaseMyTrip.com.

Mr. Pitti says their website is the only one to refund cash to their clients by digging into its earnings. He says the website has made refunds for tickets worth ₹50 crore. Citing industry estimates, Mr. Pitti says that tickets worth ₹180 crore were bought by various travel portals from different Indian airlines during the lockdown period.

Full-service carriers such as Vistara and Air India have asked OTAs to share air tickets and a refund application from passengers, which is then verified and processed.

As far as direct bookings with airlines during the lockdown are concerned, the likes of IndiGo and SpiceJet have conveyed to their passengers that the money has been reimbursed and it will take three weeks for the amount to reflect in their bank accounts. In response to a query, Dhruv Shringi, co-founder and CEO Yatra.com said: "We are closely working with our airline partners to work out more benign policies for the customers and trying our best to streamline the cancellation and refund process. We are processing refunds as per the policies defined by the airlines." MakeMyTrip says on its website, "If you have a credit shell issued by IndiGo or SpiceJet for an impacted booking, you can use it to book your ticket for a future travel date." Ixigo's website says, "We are working with our airline partners to get their updated advisories. In the meantime, the current policies remain valid."

CSIR lab defends sanitisation tunnel after Ministry's advisory

'Correct use of sodium hypochlorite does not harm skin'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PUNE

In the wake of several advisories advocating against the use of sanitisation tunnels as part of efforts to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus, the Pune-based CSIR-National Chemical Laboratory (CSIR-NCL) and the Mumbai-based Institute of Chemical Technology (ICT) issued a joint statement on Thursday asserting that the advisories "did not have any scientific basis".

"Efficacy of sodium hypochlorite, also known as hypo or bleach, ranging from 0.02% to 0.05% weight concentration was studied on personnel walking through mist tunnel unit besides antibacterial activity against standard microorganisms before and after exposure in the walk-through," the CSIR-NCL and ICT said in a release.

"Results indicated that [sodium hypochlorite used in this weight concentration range] did not show any adverse effects on the skin. Thus, we recommend using 0.02% to 0.05 wt. % sodium hypochlorite solution (200 to 500 ppm) for external body surface sanitisation of personnel walking through the mist tunnel by following standard safety precautions," the two scientific establishments added.

The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) had in a recent advisory cautioned against the spraying of disinfectant on people as part of measures to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic and had explicitly said that "disinfectants are recommended for the cleaning and disinfection only of frequently touched areas or surfaces by those suspected or confirmed to have been infected" by the virus.

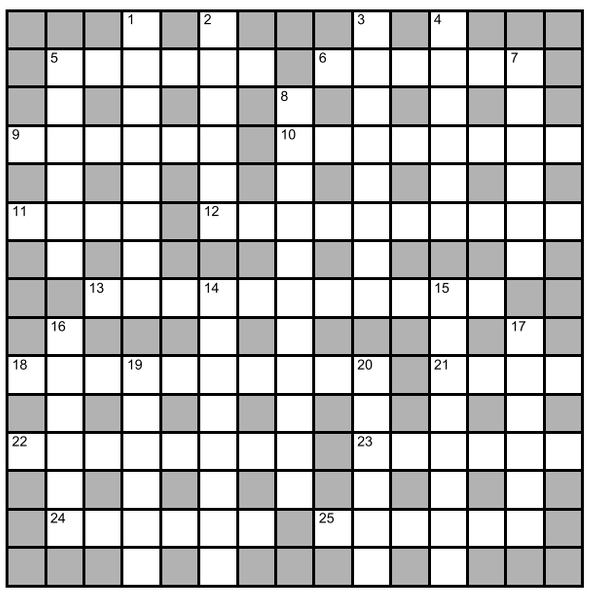
The statement said that the scientific reports would be submitted to government.

TH CROSSWORD + 12918

(set by Karaoke)

Feeling down in lockdown? Get across to our Crossword site. @ https://crossword.thehindu.com

SCAN TO PLAY



ACROSS

5 Promotes pads around Ohio (6)
6 Old and new duck perhaps (6)
9 An involuntary agitation, more unusual in Turkey (6)
10 Invite trouble with no credit in risk factor perhaps (3,3,2)
11 German woman is a charlatan mostly (4)
12 Outline of house title redrawn (10)
13 Sex prevented by setter's big siren (5,6)
18 He drives an old vehicle with joy controlling a disorder (10)
21 Curls created by balanced dyes to some extent (4)
22 Chopped tree in the trunk for vegetable (8)
23 Plant family growing endlessly in Siberia (6)
24 Impassive airmen returned yielding power to department (6)
25 Cricket batting order (6)

DOWN

1 Small accommodation by river-rat (8)
2 Human development centre? (6)
3 What one does with the crossword here? (5,3)
4 Terribly annoyed without nitrogen in the very beginning (3,3)
5 Short comedy line – It's a disappointing disparity! (3,3)
7 Delightful time spent around home town (6)
8 Flathead owl? Perhaps a fairground attraction (4,2,5)
14 Motion sickness controls Y-chromosome in adult during muscular contraction (8)
15 Retainers have right to acquire treasure trove at last (8)
16 Animals moved quickly with no time in the vessel (6)
17 Commercial break at sea (6)
19 Traitor gets decapitated lion's share (6)
20 Serving clandestinely but not against rules (6)

SUDOKU

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

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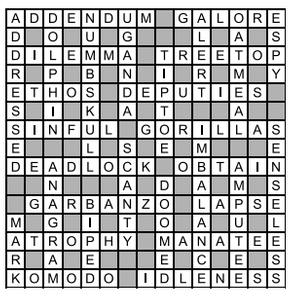
DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Solution to puzzle 12917



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

An obedient son

When Rama is exiled to the forest, Kausalya is inconsolable. She tries to dissuade Rama from leaving, but her pleas and tears are of no avail. Rama is determined to obey His father. But having left for the forest, Rama is anxious about His mother's welfare, and says even the parrot she has reared is better than her son Rama. "The parrot gives warning cries, and is ready to bite anyone who it sees as an enemy. Of what use is this son of hers, who cannot comfort her or wipe away her tears?" laments Rama. Rama, therefore, had this feeling that He had not been a consolation to His mother.

In order to compensate for this, when He took the Krishna avatara, He was an obedient son to Devaki, said V.S. Karunakarachariar in a discourse. When He was born to Devaki, Krishna reminded her that He had been her son in her two previous births. This was in accordance with a boon He had granted her. She had asked the Lord that she should have a son like Him. There cannot be another like Him. He is alone, unique. Ekameva adviteeyam, says the Upanishad, indicating that there is none His equal or superior. Since the prayer was for a son like the Lord, there was no option for Him but to be born as the desired child. So, in two births, He had already fulfilled His promise.

Now in the third birth, He had appeared as Krishna. Devaki, however, dreaded Kamsa. When she saw Krishna with four hands, she begged Him to conceal two of them. From then, until the slaying of Kamsa, the Lord showed only two of his hands. Only after the killing of Kamsa did He show His other two hands also. Thus, while Rama could not obey His mother Kausalya, Krishna did what His mother wanted, right from His birth. Thus, the regret He had as Rama was wiped off when He came as Krishna.

DELHI THE HINDU
FRIDAY, APRIL 24, 2020

Home sweet home Food bloggers are helping families to cook easy and nutritious food with minimal ingredients in lesser time ▪ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Easy hacks for unwilling chefs

The lockdown has the young, old and clueless flocking to their kitchens. Hence, food bloggers are curating free, downloadable cookbooks, with recipes that need minimal effort and fewer groceries

CHITRADEEPA ANANTHARAM

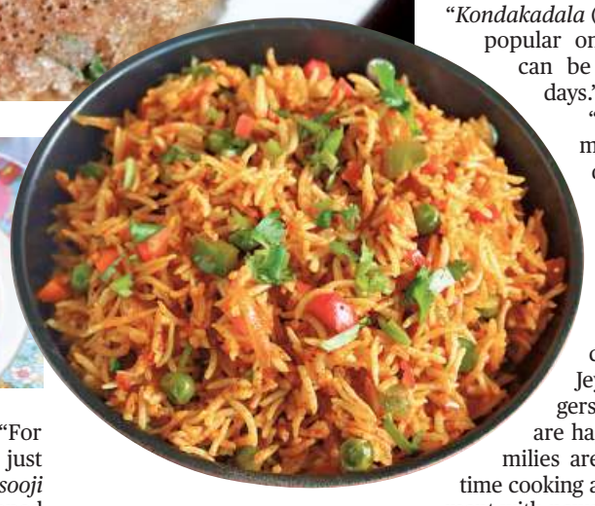
The world is under lockdown. While in some cities across the globe groceries, fruits and vegetables are available, they are scarce in others. "I think it is important to make the food tasty and there must be some variety to lift the lockdown gloom," says veteran culinary expert Chandri Bhat. The octogenarian, who lives in Malaysia, says that a balanced meal is important to boost immunity, but the challenge is making the most of whatever ingredients are available.

Guide at hand

Hong Kong-based food blogger Jeyashri Suresh (www.jeyashriskitchen.com) echoes this, recounting how her followers in the U.S. were seeking help, as there was a shortage of Indian groceries. Jeyashri has compiled a downloadable PDF 'cookbook' with the easier of her recipes. She especially focusses on Indians living overseas with limited access to traditional ingredients. "I realised that couples working from home had to manage work and their children, and were looking for recipes that could be prepared with whatever ingredients were available. From my website, I compiled about 90 recipes, including breakfast, lunch and dinner ones, that would also be useful for students and bachelors: beginners who might be living alone," says Jeyashri.

Nagercoil-based food blogger Aarthi Satheesh (www.yummytummyaarthi.com) says that there have been a number of requests from people in the U.S., Singapore, the Middle East and all over India for simple and quick-to-prepare recipes. "People may have the time, but there is no possibility of cooking elaborately or making something exotic, as special ingredients are hard to find right now. I compiled a list of 83 dosas which I had already published on my website," says Aarthi. "As everyone is stressed out, I have chosen dosa recipes which can be made instantly with minimal grinding or fermentation, but are at the same time nutritious," she says.

Spaghetti *cheela*, bread dosa, wheat *adai* are some of her recipes which can be made easily. "For spaghetti *cheela*, we need to just boil the spaghetti, add in some *sooji* (semolina) and rice flour, chopped vegetables and green chilli. Mix with water and the batter is ready. Bread dosa can also be prepared using the same technique, but the bread and *sooji* have to be blended together with water in a mixer grinder," explains Aarthi, adding another example: "If there is ground and fermented dosa batter available, some chopped vegetables can be added to it. This can be spiced up with green chilli, ginger and coriander leaves, and poured into a waffle-maker for a crispy dosa waffle.



Spaghetti *cheela*, bread dosa, wheat *adai* and dosa waffles are some of the quick-fix recipes

Says Chandri, "South Indian dosa varieties are comfort food and help us feel good that at least some things are still normal. *Adai* and *pesarattu* provide the much-needed protein and fibre; easy to prepare, minimum wash-up." Chandri also says that curd/yoghurt is a must-have during this time, as it is simple to make, tasty, healthy and nutritious.

Similarly, she says that chickpeas can be used to make hummus, which can be used as a bread spread or as chutney for idli/dosa; it can be frozen and used for *channa masala* or just made into *sundal* as a snack. "Peanut rice using the store-bought roasted peanuts, dry red chilli, desiccated coconut and rice is a delicious and nutritious dish for the family, and it takes no more than 20 minutes and requires less ingredients. Whatever the preparation, the ingredients used would be no more than three or four," says Jeyashri.

"I observe that many families are going back to their grandma's recipes during lockdown," says Bengaluru-based blogger Chitra Sendhil (www.chitrasfoodbook.com), who has put together an Indian vegetarian lockdown cookbook on her website. "As people of different age groups are now actively cooking, I have focused on vegetarian one-pot meals for lunch and dinner. Sambar rice or pressure-cooker vegetable biryani can be made in less than 30 minutes. My recipes are appreciated by young exhausted mothers who have infants and are working from home, and also by bachelors and beginners," says Chitra. Rice, dal, tomato, onion, a mix of vegetables and ready-made sambar powder can be cooked in a pressure cooker for a delicious meal, she says, "*Kondakadala* (*channa*) *kurma* is a popular one-pot dish, which can be stored for a few days."

"The lockdown has made youngsters understand the effort that goes in even to make the simplest dish, and I notice that they have gradually started showing interest in cooking," says Jeyashri. Food bloggers around the globe are happy to note that families are spending a lot of time cooking and trying to experiment with newer recipes. They also help by suggesting recipes that can be made using the limited ingredients their followers have access to during the lockdown. "Cooking is a survival skill and now it is all the more relevant around the globe, and I am glad that bloggers are recognised much more during the COVID-19 crisis," Jeyashri says.

Reaping recipes from the fields

From fried termites to Arabian biryani, Village Cooking Channel makes intriguing food in a rustic setting

NAHLA NAINAR

'*Ellarum vaanga*, always welcomes you!' Fans of Village Cooking Channel (VCC), the Tamil YouTube channel that has more than 3 million subscribers, know that these words, yelled out enthusiastically by its team of five chefs and cameraman, are the start to something worth feasting on, if not physically, at least with one's eyes.

These paddy farmers and cooks have managed to endear their village, Chinna Veeramangalam in Pudukkottai district, to an international audience. Cousins V. Subramanian, V. Murugesan, V. Ayyanar, G. Tamilselvan and T. Muthumanickam are led by their grandfather and former caterer M Periyathambi, and are currently observing social distancing rules by going off air.

"But to keep our fans happy, we have posted a new video that we took before the lockdown, on *vathal kuzhambu* (a tamarind-based gravy with rehydrated dried vegetables). It has clocked 1,405,637 views," says Subramanian, VCC's techie and cameraman.

Before the lockdown, VCC used to post three to four videos per week, of mostly non-vegetarian dishes. The team earns ₹7 lakh per month from the advertising revenue generated by YouTube viewings. "Of this, we spend ₹2-3 lakh on the show. The rest is shared between the members," says Subramanian. "Since we also earn from our fields, we don't solicit sponsorships or donations. We also decline off-camera cooking assignments."

Passion for cooking

Food plays a big role in village life, and men take over kitchen duties when the womenfolk are out in the fields, says Subramanian. "After television, cooking was the biggest form of entertainment for us when growing up. In Chinna Veeramangalam, I would say every man has learned as many recipes from his mother as any woman, from an early age."

This came in handy in 2018, when Subramanian, who has an M Phil in Commerce and previous web design experience, decided to produce online cookery videos. "My cousins were between jobs, and hoping to go abroad. That is when I decided to showcase the food we eat, cooked in our unique style, with *thatha* (grandfather) leading us. VCC's viewership started growing when we stopped imitating other programmes," he says.

Its near-theatrical production style has won it many accolades, the most recent being the Black Sheep Award for Best Food Programme in February.

Subramanian's three cameras focus not just on the cooking, but also the verdant surroundings where firewood stoves are set up from scratch. The team usually shoots in the open, near the fields in 10 neighbouring villages, transporting its equipment (including traditional stone grinders) in a van. Since Periyathambi is not used to cooking for less than 100 people, the team arranges free banquets for charity homes to share the food they prepare.

"We started with recipes that are common in our village, such as winged termites fried with puffed rice, and crabs, snails and fish caught in field bunds," says Subramanian. "These dishes have a nostalgic value for our Tamil viewers, especially for those who have migrated from villages to urban areas."

But it's not all rustic cuisine; Muthumanickam has studied catering in college, and is the brains behind some of the more exotic dishes like Arabian mutton biryani cooked with two full goats, which garnered over 21 million views after it was uploaded last March.

There are some surreal scenes too, such as a giant cloth ball of *chenna* (cheese curds made by splitting milk with lemon juice) hanging out to drain like an outlandish fruit on a tree while the team gets ready to make *rosogollas* in the fields.

Audience feedback plays a huge role in their work, says Subramanian. "Everything from sound quality to the kind of rice (Basmati) that we use for biryani, has been the result of our viewers' comments," he says. After taking three days to research and shoot, Subramanian and the team edit the next day. "Uploading a 10-minute clip can take between two hours and half a day, depending on Internet connection."

Some of the chefs have their own fan following – Ayyanar's skill with the stone grinder (*ammi*) gets many comments, while Muthumanickam's expert onion chopping is also popular. The team avoids using modern conveniences like pressure cookers and electric mixers.

What's on the cards once the lockdown is lifted? "Muthumanickam's wedding, which got delayed," says Subramanian. "*Thatha* and all of us will be cooking his wedding feast."

Tasty journey The Village Cooking Channel team. (From left) V Subramanian, M Periyathambi, V Ayyanar, V Murugesan, T Muthumanickam and G Tamilselvan; a dish being prepared during a video shoot (centre) ▪ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

HORS D'OEUVRES

Eminem's Mom's Spaghetti for frontline workers

Rapper Eminem provided Mom's Spaghetti to employees of the Henry Ford Health System in his hometown of Detroit, Michigan. Fans will be familiar with the phrase from his Oscar-winning track 'Lose Yourself' in the film, *8 Mile*.
The food containers featured a message, 'Thank you frontline caregivers', as well as the Mom's Spaghetti logo.
According to news reports, employees at Detroit Receiving Hospital also received the spaghetti. A total of 400 meals were served. While the donation was made through Eminem's Marshall Mathers Foundation, the spaghetti was cooked by Union Joints in Clarkston.
Eminem's manager, Paul Rosenberg, said that the deliveries will continue over the next few weeks.

Restaurants in U.K. seek rent relief

The heads of several restaurants in the U.K. have sought rent relief for the next nine months.
According to news reports, a letter to the Chancellor, written by Hospitality Union founder Jonathan Downey in this regard, has been co-signed by the bosses of Fuller's, Dishoom, Hawksmoor, Gordon Ramsay Restaurants, Nando's, Burger King, and more.
Under the plan called the #NationalTimeOut, the next nine months' rent would be pushed back so that restaurants pay nothing until the first quarter of 2021.
The rent break period for the industry is due to expire at the end of June, but the letter claims that the short-term relief will not save them.

Follow these cooking failures for some laughs

Cooking sessions on social media are keeping most of us busy. Even those who do not relate to anything to do with the kitchen, are providing some comic relief to recipe hunters, raking in the chuckles using #followmeformorerecipes.
This hashtag is nothing but a meme page on cooking failures, or an honest confession of people being real novices in the kitchen. As many hunt for recipes to make easy desserts, the most popular dessert was the brownie. A certain photo of a 'brownie' has gone viral and people are having a good laugh. The picture in question is that of a pot of burnt rice, shot so cleverly that it makes you pause for a second look. Only to burst out laughing.

A taste of chef David Chang's friendly rants

If you follow international chef and TV host David Chang, then you know that he is not a sucker for shortcut kitchen tools and cannot do without his own chopsticks. But during this lockdown, Chang is stuck away from home and is trying his best with what is available.
This week, he posted a review of a five-blade chopping knife and couldn't stop being amazed at its uselessness. To demonstrate how utterly useless it is, he chopped one sprig of spring onion, and how his eyes rolled as the greens got stuck in between the blades! His comment to the post read: "imagine chopping chives with these at a restaurant kitchen". He also couldn't stop getting annoyed at a new bunch of chopsticks, that just wouldn't hold anything.

SEED to seam

A new report on the unrecognised work of women cotton farmers forms a part of Fashion Revolution Week that encourages people to ask the question #WhatsInMyClothes

SUNALINI MATHEW

As part of the yearly commemoration of Fashion Revolution Week in April, the global organisation that advocates for a fair, safe, clean, transparent industry, launched a report that details the marginalisation of women cotton farmers in India. Titled 'Gender Equity and its Impact on Sustainability in Cotton Farming in India', the report talks of the "role, challenges, and opportunities of gender in bringing sustainability to cotton farming."

Women farmers, who make up 70% of cotton farmers in India, own only 13% of the land – the rest is owned by men, says the report, now available on Fashionrevolution.org. They also earn 25% to 50% less than men and the perception in the community is that they take on 'lighter' or 'softer' work, simply because it does not involve heavy tools or equipment, even though the work is more drudgery-prone and takes a longer time. The work of women cotton farmers is also seldom seen, because men take on the market-facing jobs. Because most women are not acknowledged as farmers, they are not counted in the number of farmer suicides.

At the Zoom launch of the report that took a year to research, Sarah Ditty, the Policy Director of Fashion Revolution said it was time to look at "fundamental systemic change" at three levels: the culture of fashion (which every consumer can participate in), industry (companies and brands and their value chains), Government policy.

A few of the ways people who are not involved in the fashion industry can change the reality of women cotton farmers is simply by demanding honesty and transparency from brands, buying only when needed, and shopping Indian brands that are built on the bedrock of sustainability. Okhai, for instance, works exclusively with women cotton farmers. No Nasties that has a Fairtrade certification, has a non-profit social enterprise called Once Upon a Doug aimed at "giving women cotton farmers a secondary income".

Clothes with a conscience (Clockwise from left) Mamtuben Papybhai Charda, Fairtrade-certified cotton farmer in Rapar, Gujarat; from No Nasties' Goenchi collection; and the face behind the clothes ▪ SEAN T HAWKEY AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Fashion Revolution was founded by Carry Somers and Orsola de Castro, both professionals in the sustainable fashion industry, after the 2013 Rana Plaza factory collapse – in Dhaka, Bangladesh – which killed 1,138 people. The building was the sweat shop for large international brands, some of whom claimed they had no idea that work here was feeding into their supply chains.

This year, even as Fashion Revolution launches the yearly Fashion Transparency Index 2020, the organisation calls for people to ask of brands and or ourselves: #WhatsInMyClothes. They also run a campaign called #WhoMadeMyClothes? These throw up questions like 'Who grew the cotton in my *kurta*?'; 'How much does a person who tills the land make?'; 'What is the impact on a farmer if I shop fast fashion rather than garments made of handwoven cloth?'

We may not get ready answers to all of these questions, but it may help us acknowledge the problem and act. Perhaps we will shift to natural fabrics that are regenerative, rather than factory generated, mass produced clothes that choke the environment. Fashion can then move from a place of privilege to a sector that generates solidarity.

Post a picture of your clothes with the hashtag #WhatsInMyClothes on Twitter and tag us @THMetroPlus

HOMING IN

Staying indoors for a while? We have you covered. For your weekly **Watch List**, actor **Sameera Reddy** shares her choice of films and TV series to watch

K JESHI

The Marvelous Mrs Maisel

This TV series is hilarious and transports you to another era. It has superb acting. The series stars Rachel Brosnahan as Miriam "Midge" Maisel, a housewife in the late 1950s and early 1960s in New York City who discovers her knack for stand-up comedy and pursues a career in it.

The Aeronauts

A must-see for great performances. The film directed by Tom Harper is based on the book *Falling Upwards: How We Took to the Air* and follows the balloon expedition of scientist James Glaisher and Amelia Wren, a flamboyant aeronaut who lost her husband in a balloon accident. It takes audiences back to a time when aeronautical expeditions were just taking flight. The movie above all celebrated the human spirit.

Ozark

The series stars Jason Bateman and Laura Linney as a married couple who are forced to relocate their family to the Ozarks following a money laundering scheme gone wrong. I loved the twists in the plot. It is gripping.

The Laundromat

Meryl Streep along with a bevy of stars brings to life a corruption tale, directed by Steven Soderbergh. I recommend it for the well-written script. It blows open the money laundering scam with shell companies. It shows how loopholes exploited by the rich affected ordinary people like a woman who was unable to collect insurance payments after her husband died in a tour boat accident.

We would love to know how you are keeping busy at home. Tell us what you are watching at metro@thehindu.co.in

All in the FAMILY

Filmmaker John Fortson talks about his short film ***Rated*** and its India connect

NAMRATA JOSHI

Rated, a recent American short film that premiered online this month on Vimeo, pivots on a rather unusual idea – what if humans had to rate each other and wear the aggregate of those star ratings as a crown on their heads? Was it a filmmaker's visual reaction to how their works are rated by critics? I ask actor-writer-filmmaker John Fortson.

"Not quite", he writes back in amusement. "I'm always writing from my personal life," he tells in an email interview. And Rated came to him while discussing ride-hailing companies like Uber and Lyft with his friends and how they allow both the rider as well as the driver to rate each other. Fortson wondered what if a couple woke up one morning with stars floating above their head for all to see. "And boom, these scenes started flying into my head," he says.

The idea was born in December 2014. His actor wife Christie Lynn Smith helped in co-writing and the entire Fortson family of four got to act in the main parts in the film, including their little son Joshua and young star daughter, Abby Ryder Fortson, who we saw in Marvel's *Ant-Man and the Wasp* and recently as the lead in the first episode of the Amazon Prime web series, *Tales from the Loop*. The real family stepping in as reel and making it truly a family film.

It took Fortson four months to write the script, going through drafts, improvising scenes and moments. "I wanted the film to feel lived in, like you're really living with these characters," he says. Fortsons themselves live in Los Angeles and shot it there, in their house, neighbourhood, at Abby's school and at a local cafe. Everything to make it easy and also save money. "The good thing about your home, is that it's full of your life, it's full of personal props, so you bring a level of comfortableness to the film immediately," says Fortson.

Real life John Fortson and his family ▪ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The power of obsession

The focus of the film is the woman, Maggie, played by Christie. It was Christie's idea to have Maggie bear the burden and consequences of getting low ratings. 'A man, he would just feel like it was no big deal. He would joke about it. But a woman, mid-life, having a couple of kids, always short on time, would be overwhelmed, not feeling like she's enough, and then the star rating would be like a nightmare in her life, telling everyone she's not enough', she told him. He agreed instantly: "We don't often get to see the true picture of a woman in this part of her life."

The film is funny yet also offers a commentary on several issues: prejudices, discrimination, being judgemental and also about finding the courage to own up to your behaviour and make a choice to be better.

"Life is like this to me. It's funny and light and heavy and sad rolled into everyday... When we are sad, someone usually tries to make us laugh or we reach inside for positive feelings, sayings, or something funny to break our sad, upset mood. No one wants to live in upset forever... It's important to reflect life in this way," he says.

'When your work is life'

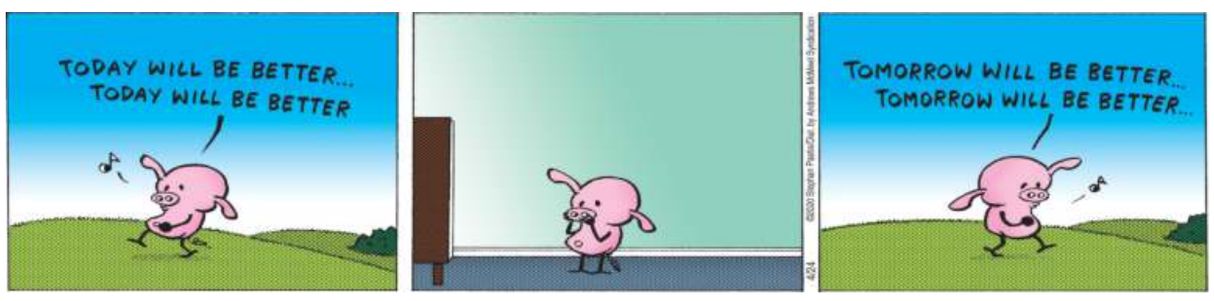
One of the important characters is that of a cafe owner played by Deepti Gupta, a Los Angeles-based actor who also stars in Netflix's *The Politician* and Disney+ *High School Musical: The Musical*. It is she who gives Maggie a chance at redemption. "She is the perfect antagonist, delicately walking the line of what's right for her character and what's right for all," says Fortson.

The VFX in the film was done out of Chennai by Thilak Vasu and his team at Cinibees Studios. It was done in two months, but they had to work on the film right through the heavy rains and major floods in Chennai. "There was no power and we had to take the CPU to Pondicherry to upload the film from there," remembers Thilak. "We went through the film frame by frame to make sure the look of the stars, the colour, how they moved with each character was uniform and perfect. They did a great job. And we were done right in time to premiere at our first festival in April 2016," says Fortson. The film has since travelled to more than 60 international film festivals. Just as with this one film, the personal and professional keeps getting intermingled for the Fortson family. "When your work is your life and it's fun to you and you make it fun with the people you love around you, then it's never work, but just an extension of you, of your family," says Fortson.

So the couple has finished writing the feature version of *Rated* in between working with the children and their online schooling in the lockdown period. In fact, Fortson feels that the *Rated* online premiere has come at a right juncture as it strikes a chord when the whole world is in the throes of COVID-19: "We all need each other, to be understanding and patient with each other now more than ever." *Rated*, he feels, is all about that.

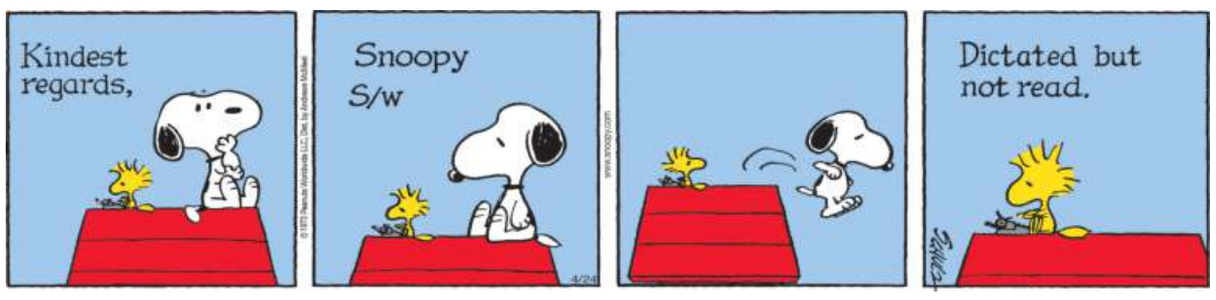
POOCH CAFE

PEARLS BEFORE SWINE

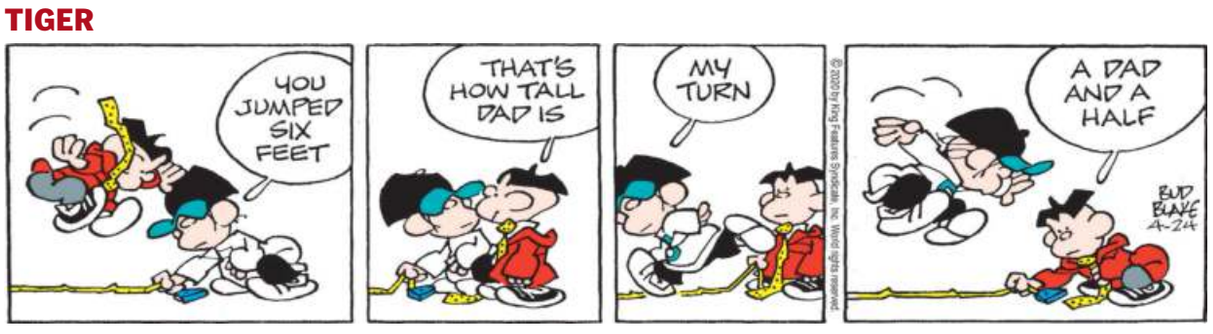


HAGAR THE HORRIBLE

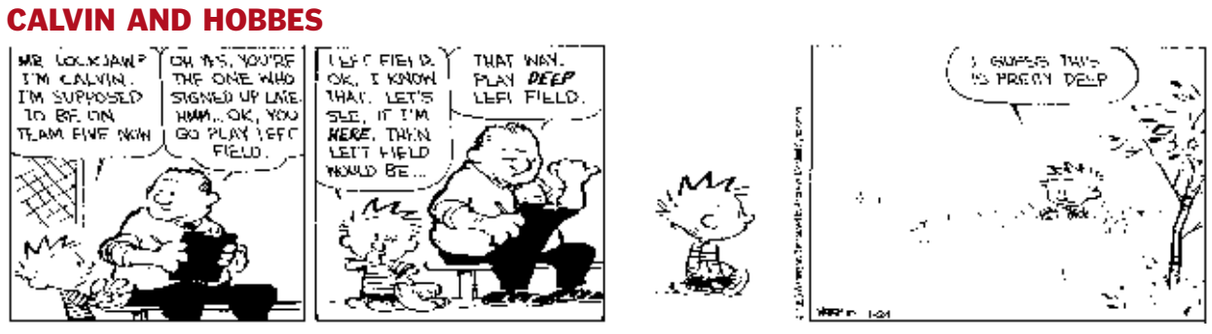
PEANUTS



TIGER



CALVIN AND HOBBES



EU divided over virus recovery plan

Rich members against long-term pooling of debt with Mediterranean nations they accuse of profligacy

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BRUSSELS

Bitterly divided EU leaders will try Thursday to hammer out a huge coronavirus rescue package, as the WHO warned the pandemic is far from over.

While there are signs the COVID-19 outbreak is slowing and some countries have started to ease restrictions affecting billions of people, the world is grappling with how to repair economic damage on a scale not seen for nearly a century.

Other nations are still in the early stages of the fight against a disease that has killed more than 1,80,000 people and infected 2.6 million worldwide, even as it appears to be peaking in Europe and the U.S.

COVID-19

Oil prices and stocks rallied on Thursday after a virus-induced pounding earlier this week but uncertainty remained, with governments fearing a second wave of coronavirus infections if lockdowns are lifted too fast.

In Europe, still the worst-hit continent with 1,10,000 deaths, leaders are set to haggle via videoconference on a giant economic recovery package, but a deep north-south divide threatens to scupper any progress.

'Spirit of solidarity'

The fight has reopened the wounds of the 2009 economic crisis with debt-laden southern states like Spain and Italy, both badly hit by the disease, demanding help to get back on their feet.

"With the pandemic, nobody calls," says Pedro Oran, a 53-year-old Spaniard who usually works by helping a plumber.

But richer northern countries like Germany and the Netherlands, while saying they are ready to help for now, insist they will not take the long-term step of pooling debt with Mediterranean governments they accuse of profligacy.

"In the spirit of solidarity, we should be prepared to make completely different, that is to say significantly higher contributions to the European budget over a set period," German Chancellor Angela Merkel said.

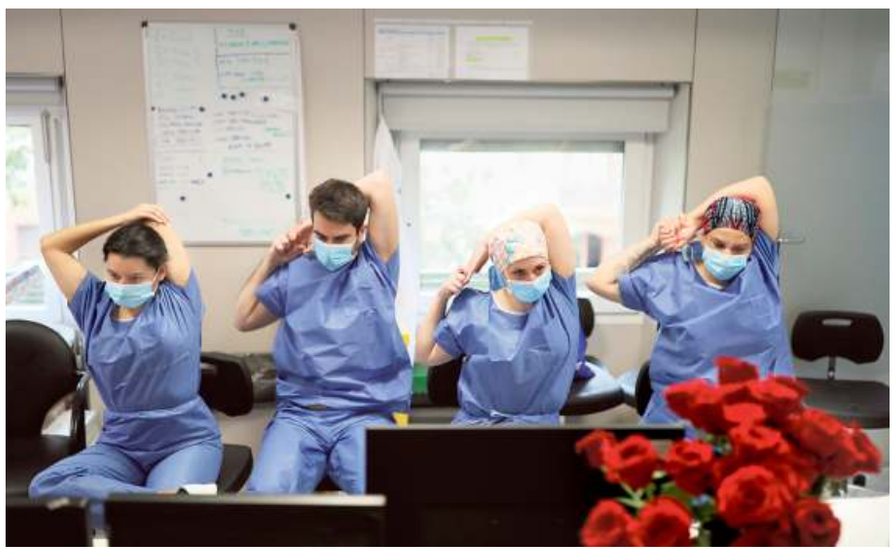
No joint statement

In a sign of how far apart the bloc's 27 countries are, leaders will not even issue their usual joint statement after the videoconference, a diplomat said.

The divisions could not come at a worse time, with the eurozone economy suffering an unprecedented collapse in April due to the pandemic, according to a leading business survey by analysis firm IHS Markit.

The pressure on governments everywhere to ease the economic pain is growing by the day, with tens of millions unemployed and several countries at risk of famine.

Some EU countries have slightly eased restrictions but bans on large gatherings have been extended.



Staying fit: Healthcare workers doing stretches and breathing exercises at a hospital in Barcelona, Spain, on Thursday. ▪REUTERS

$30 mn more for WHO: China

REUTERS
BEIJING

China said on Thursday it would donate another $30 million to the World Health Organization (WHO), which is seeking more than $1 billion to fund its battle against the pandemic. The pledge comes after U.S. President Donald Trump suspended funding to the WHO and accused the organisation of promoting Chinese "disinformation" about the virus, which emerged in Wuhan last year.

Give WHO powers to send in inspectors: Australia PM

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SYDNEY

Australia's Prime Minister called on Thursday for the World Health Organization to be given powers similar to U.N.-backed weapons inspectors, allowing their experts to enter virus-stricken countries to help prevent future pandemics.

WHO member countries should be required to allow independent health inspectors to investigate new virus outbreaks within their borders as a condition of membership, Scott Morrison said.

Enabling these officials to mobilise quickly and carry out assessments like "weapons inspectors" could help save lives, he added. "If you're going to be a member of a club like the World Health Organization, there should be obligations and responsibilities attached to that," he said.

Mr. Morrison reportedly raised the issue with several world leaders this week.

4.4. mn seek U.S. jobless aid

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

More than 4.4 million laid-off workers applied for U.S. unemployment benefits last week as job cuts escalated across an economy that remains all but shut down, the government has said. Roughly 26 million people have now filed for jobless since the pandemic began forcing employers to shut their doors. About one in six American workers have lost their jobs in the past five weeks.

Italy launches antibody tests

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ROME

Italy began conducting antibody tests in the northern region of Lombardy on Thursday, seeking information about coronavirus immunity to help guide authorities as they reopen the locked-down country. Lombardy, which was the worst-hit by the crisis, is betting that the science about "herd immunity" derived from the blood tests will help the region return to work faster and safer.

Trump signs executive order restricting immigration

The move is to protect American workers, says President

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
CHENNAI

U.S. President Donald Trump signed an executive order on Wednesday barring certain categories of immigrants from admission to the U.S. for 60 days, ostensibly to protect Americans' jobs at risk from the COVID-19 pandemic. The order has several exemptions, including for those who are already in the U.S. seeking to switch their visa status to permanent residency.

Mr. Trump had tweeted earlier this week that he would "temporarily suspend immigration".

"In order to protect our great American workers, I've just signed an executive order temporarily suspending immigration into the United States. This will ensure that unemployed Americans of all backgrounds will be first in line for jobs as our economy reopens," he told a press conference in Washington on Wednesday. He also suggested it could be amended or extended at the appropriate time.

The President's proclamation went into effect shortly before the country's weekly job report was released, showing that another 4.4 million Americans had declared themselves unemployed in the week ending April 18, taking the total number to some $26 million since the pandemic began.

The immigration of the following categories of non-U.S. citizens is restricted for 60 days starting Thursday: those outside the U.S., those who do not already have a valid immigrant visa, those that do not have an official travel document other than a visa that is valid on the effective date of the proclamation "or issued on any date thereafter that permits him or her to travel to the United States and seek entry or admission".

Chain migration

The new order, while in effect, will prevent individuals from bringing their parents, adult children, or siblings into the U.S. (Mr. Trump has called this "chain migration").

Entry into the U.S. for individuals who are already legal permanent residents is not suspended. The order also does not apply to spouses of U.S. citizens or those seeking entry on the EB-5 investor visa.

Some immigrant visa holders such as doctors, nurses, healthcare workers and COVID-19 researchers and their spouses and minor dependents are exempt from the suspension order

"Without intervention, the United States faces a potentially protracted economic recovery with persistently high unemployment," the presidential order reads.

" ...Introducing additional permanent residents when our healthcare resources are limited puts strain on the finite limits of our healthcare system at a time when we need to prioritize Americans and the existing immigrant population," it said.

Last year, just over 1 million people got green cards as per Department of Homeland Security (DHS) data. Some 56% switched visa status from within the U.S. and 44% entered the U.S. on immigrant visas. The proportions for the 53,707 Indians who got green cards in FY2019 (year ending October 2019) were similar –with slightly less than half getting immigrant visas from outside.

Mr Trump's policies have progressively tried to restrict both legal and illegal migration to the U.S.

Critics have said his latest policy is to distract from criticisms of his handling of the pandemic.

"President Trump now seeks to distract us from his fumbled COVID-19 response by trying to put the blame on immigrants. The truth is that many immigrants are on our front lines, protecting us as doctors, nurses, health aids, farmworkers, and restaurant workers," Jerrold Nadler, a high ranking Democrat in the House of Representatives said.

Tough decision: President Donald Trump addressing mediapersons in the White House. ▪AP

Bangladesh to turn back Rohingya boats, says Minister

Last week, dozens reportedly starved to death on a boat

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
DHAKA

Bangladesh will not accept two boats carrying hundreds of reportedly starving Rohingya refugees, the country's Foreign Minister said on Thursday as calls grew to rescue the Muslim outcasts.

The new controversy over stranded Rohingya blew up just a week after dozens starved to death on a boat that was left at sea for two months before it could land.

Activists are fearful that large numbers of Rohingya, a persecuted Muslim minority from mostly Buddhist Myanmar, may be trapped on boats and unable to reach other countries.

Rights group Amnesty International has said two fishing trawlers carrying some 500 Rohingya women, men and children are in the Bay of Bengal after being pushed away by Malaysia.

Bangladesh has ordered increased patrols in the Bay of Bengal to stop the boats entering, Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen said.

"Two boats carrying Rohingya are trying to get into our waters," he said, adding that the vessels could have come from Myanmar's Rakhine State following fighting between the military and rebel groups, or "somewhere else".

"Our Navy and coast-guard are on alert ," Mr. Momen said. "No more Rohingya will be allowed in."

About one million Rohingya are in camps on the Bangladesh-Myanmar border having fled decades of persecution in their home region in Rakhine.

The Navy and Coast Guard are on alert, said Minister A.K. Abdul Momen. ▪AFP

Syrian torture trial opens in Germany

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KOBLENZ

Two alleged former Syrian intelligence officers went on trial in Germany on Thursday accused of crimes against humanity in the first court case worldwide over state-sponsored torture by Bashar al-Assad's regime.

Prime suspect Anwar Raslan, 57, an alleged former Colonel, stands accused of carrying out crimes against humanity while in charge of the Al-Khatib detention centre in Damascus.

Fellow defendant Eyad al-Gharib, 43, is accused of being an accomplice to crimes against humanity, having helped to arrest protesters.

'U.S. goals will not change on North Korea'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

The U.S. will keep seeking North Korea's denuclearisation no matter who is in charge in Pyongyang, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Wednesday, amid speculation about leader Kim Jong-un's health.

U.S. officials, including President Donald Trump, have declined to discuss Mr. Kim's condition after a report, downplayed by South Korea, that the reclusive authoritarian was ailing.

But asked in an interview, Mr. Pompeo said he had met Mr. Kim's powerful sister, Kim Yo-jong, whose recent elevation in the hierarchy raised pundits' view that she could be a successor. "I did have a chance to meet her a couple of times, but the challenge remains the same whoever is leading North Korea," Mr. Pompeo said.

Imams overrule Pakistan's lockdown as Ramzan approaches

Nod to mosques to remain open raises questions as to who is in charge during the national crisis: the govt. or the clerics

MARIA ABI-HABIB
ZIA UR-REHMAN

While clerics and governments across the Muslim world will greet Ramzan this week under lockdown, working together to shut mosques and urging worshippers to pray at home, in Pakistan, some of the most prominent imams have rallied their devotees to ignore the anti-pandemic measures.

Ramzan, which begins in Pakistan later this week, is the holy month in which Muslims crowd into mosques and fast all day, holding feasts after sundown with family and friends. Those are ripe conditions for the coronavirus to spread, and imams around the world are asking people to stay home.

But in Pakistan, pandemic or no pandemic, hard-line clerics are calling the shots, overriding the government's nationwide virus lockdown, which began late last month.

Most clerics complied with the shutdown when it was announced. But some of the most influential ones called on worshippers to attend Friday prayers in even greater numbers. Devotees attacked police officers who tried to get in their way.

As Ramzan drew closer, dozens of well-known clerics and leaders of religious parties – including some who had initially obeyed the lockdown orders – signed a letter demanding that the government exempt mosques from the shutdown during the holy month or invite the anger of God and the faithful.

20 rules to be followed

On Saturday, the government gave in, signing an agreement that let mosques stay open for Ramzan as long as they followed 20 rules, including forcing congregants to maintain a 6-foot distance, bring their own prayer mats and do their ablutions at home.

By the time Prime Minister Imran Khan met with the clerics on Monday, deferentially promising to abide by the deal, critics were demanding to know who was in charge during this national crisis: the government or the mosques.

"The state has become totally subservient to these clerics," said Husnul Amin, an Islamabad-based professor and scholar on Islam and politics. "It is very difficult for the state to implement what's best for the public good. The larger public interest is always up against the clerics. It's completely undemocratic."

Pakistan's imams were empowered by the military during the 1980s when mosques across the country churned out jihadists to fight the Soviet military in Afghanistan with the support of the U.S. While other countries tried to curb hard-line clerics' influence after the Afghan war, in Pakistan, the powerful military continued to use them as tools of foreign and domestic policy.

But their defiance of the lockdown is exposing the limits of the military's control.

Beyond Army's control

The military wanted the shutdown, pressuring Mr. Khan to back the measure at a time when he was reluctant and worried about the economic toll. But when the security forces tried to prevent worshippers from gathering at mosques for prayers, they found themselves under attack.

In Karachi, the largest city, scenes emerged of worshippers chasing the police through narrow alleyways, pelting them with rocks and sending several officers to the hospital.

"The military has created a monster they can no longer control," Mr. Amin said. "They are the creation of the military, and only they could handle them. That may no longer be the case."

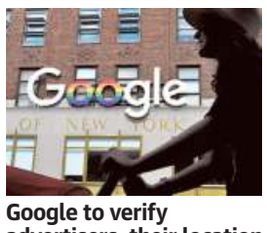
By the time Ramzan approached, police officers were no longer willing to erect cordons around mosques to stop congregants.

While clerics acknowledge that their mosques are perfect vectors for the coronavirus's spread – worshippers gather to perform ablutions together before cramming into the mosques, shoulder to shoulder in supplication – they say they have to protect their bottom line: money and influence.

"We know the pandemic is a global health issue, but religious duties cannot be abandoned," said Maulana Ataullah Hazravi, a Karachi-based cleric, adding that, "mosques depend largely on the donations collected during Ramzan." NY TIMES

Deep devotion: Believers entering the Memon Mosque for afternoon prayers in Karachi, Pakistan, in this file photo. ▪NYT

ELSEWHERE



Google to verify advertisers, their location

WASHINGTON

Google said on Thursday it would expand its programme of verification of advertisers on its platform as part of an effort to weed out fraud and "bad actors." The internet giant said it would start by verifying advertisers in phases in the United States and expand the programme globally. AFP

'Army killed 14 civilians in Mozambique's north'

MAPUTO

Mozambique's main opposition Renamo party on Thursday accused security forces of killing 14 civilians in the northern Cabo Delgado province, which has been repeatedly attacked by jihadists. The former rebel movement-turned-political party named all the 14 alleged victims it said died in three recent incidents. AFP

MARKET WATCH

	23-04-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	31,863	1.54
US Dollar	76.06	0.81
Brent oil	22.67	9.62

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	277.60	5.70
Asian Paints	1821.65	8.65
Axis Bank	430.05	-1.10
Bajaj Auto	2430.65	50.95
Bajaj Finserv	4729.60	-46.15
Bajaj Finance	2172.45	24.20
Bharti Airtel	496.00	-5.40
BPCL	355.15	-1.55
Britannia Ind	2947.40	-5.25
Cipla	586.70	-0.50
Coal India	140.90	0.20
Dr Reddys Lab	4027.10	-29.70
Eicher Motors	14068.35	365.05
GAIL (India)	83.25	-0.95
Grasim Ind	500.45	-9.95
HCL Tech	477.70	15.30
HDFC	1663.45	-0.70
HDFC Bank	954.95	26.35
Hero MotoCorp	1865.00	-22.65
Hindalco	111.25	2.95
Hind Unilever	2317.50	-68.65
ICICI Bank	352.95	17.00
IndusInd Bank	409.95	-5.95
Bharti Infratel	166.10	-1.45
Infosys	679.30	37.45
Indian OilCorp	83.10	0.10
ITC	180.55	-1.70
JSW Steel	159.95	-1.25
Kotak Bank	1249.65	97.50
L&T	840.60	-12.00
M&M	347.50	7.30
Maruti Suzuki	5156.35	-24.50
Nestle India Ltd.	17436.05	-206.00
NTPC	95.20	-2.40
ONGC	67.35	2.00
PowerGrid Corp	158.00	-4.20
Reliance Ind	1370.90	7.30
State Bank	186.70	-2.00
Shree Cement	18707.75	-509.40
Sun Pharma	477.45	3.10
Tata Motors	75.65	-0.25
Tata Steel	270.30	1.95
TCS	1878.25	108.75
Tech Mahindra	523.70	5.40
Titan	912.60	-38.80
UltraTech Cement	3442.20	1.05
UPL	348.90	-4.75
Vedanta	77.60	1.50
Wipro	180.90	2.35
Zee Entertainment	157.55	5.70

EXCHANGE RATES

Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on April 23

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	75.87	76.19
Euro	81.74	82.09
British Pound	93.64	94.06
Japanese Yen (100)	70.60	70.90
Chinese Yuan	10.72	10.76
Swiss Franc	77.77	78.10
Singapore Dollar	53.28	53.52
Canadian Dollar	53.64	53.87
Malaysian Ringitt	17.39	17.47
Australian Dollar	48.24	48.48

Source:Indian Bank

Repo auction gets poor response

May indicate a reluctance on the part of banks to lend to NBFCs

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The first auction of the second tranche of Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) targeted long term repo operations (TLTRO 2.0), which were meant for liquidity support to non-banking financial companies, (NBFCs), received poor response as total value of bids received from banks was almost 50% less than the notified amount.

The RBI received 14 bids worth ₹12,850 crore in the auction that was conducted on Thursday, against a notified amount of ₹25,000 crore, of three-year tenor.

"The total bids that were received amounted to ₹12,850 crore, implying a bid to cover ratio (i.e., the amount of bids received relative to the notified amount) of 0.5," the RBI said.

"Will review the auction results and take a view in the matter," the RBI added.

Out of steam: At least 50% of funds raised was mandated to be deployed by banks in NBFCs. ▪REUTERS

While announcing the auction, the RBI had said that the funds availed from Thursday's auction should be deployed in investment grade bonds, commercial paper (CPs) and non-convertible debentures (NCDs) of NBFCs. At least 50% of the total funds availed of by the banks was mandated to be deployed in small and mid-sized NBFCs.

"Limited participation by banks in the TLTRO 2.0 clearly highlights the banks' reluctance to lend to mid-size and small NBFCs and MFIs in the current situation," said Vydianathan Ramaswamy, director and head, financial sector ratings,Brickwork Ratings.

"Given the lack of risk appetite in banks, a structure with partial credit guarantee by the GoI, similar to the PCG [partial credit guarantee] scheme launched last year for securitisation, may be the only viable option to ease liquidity challenges of NBFCs," he said.

NBFCs, including housing finance companies and MFIs, are facing stretched liquidity conditions as banks turned risk-averse and choked lending. Adding to the woes, banks have not extended the three-month repayment moratorium to the NBFCs. NBFCs, however, extended such a moratorium to their customers. As a result, fund inflow for NBFCs has been severely hit.

A Crisil report estimated that NBFCs rated by it will see debt obligation worth ₹1.75 lakh crore maturing by the end of June.

Listed firms can raise funds 6 months post buyback offer

SEBI move to reduce time gap for quicker access to capital

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

As part of measures to ease fund-raising for companies amid the ongoing volatility due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has allowed listed companies to raise funds after six months of making a buyback offer.

Under normal circumstances, SEBI norms stipulate a minimum gap of 12 months between a buyback offer and any fund raising activity by a listed company.

"To enable relatively quicker access to capital, it has been decided to temporarily relax the period of restriction provided in Regulation 24(i)(f) of the buy-back Regulations. Accordingly, the words 'one year' shall be read as 'six months' in the said regulation," the regulator said in a circular on Thursday.

Effective till Dec. 31

While the relaxation will come into force with immediate effect, it will be applicable until December 31.

The latest move comes following a relaxation in norms for preferential allotment by companies with stressed assets.

The watchdog has also relaxed certain compliance norms for entities that are planning to come with an initial public offer (IPO), while enlarging the definition of entities eligible for making fast track rights issue.

In another circular regarding valuation of money market or debt securities held by mutual funds, the regulator has said that if an issuer defaults on payment obligations due to the lockdown or the moratorium allowed by RBI, then valuation agencies should not term it a default.

The amended norms will be in place till the period of the moratorium of the central bank, it added.

RBI to restart Operation Twist to manage yields

To sell, buy ₹10,000-cr. bonds each

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced simultaneous purchase and sale of government bonds in a bid to soften long-term yields. The central bank will buy ₹10,000 crore of bonds maturing between 2026 and 2030 and sell the same amount of T-bills.

"On a review of current and evolving liquidity and market conditions, the Reserve Bank has decided to conduct simultaneous purchase and sale of government securities under open market operations (OMO) for ₹10,000 crore each on April 27, 2020," the RBI said on Thursday.

Such open market operations are known as 'Operation Twist,' which was used by the RBI in December last year for the first time.

Following the announcement, the yields on the 10-year bonds dropped by 20 basis points (bps).

The move will also aid monetary transmission by prompting banks to pass on interest rate cut benefits to their customers. The RBI had reduced key policy rate or the repo rate by 75 bps to 4.4% in the monetary policy review, announced in the last week of March.

LIC Housing cuts interest rate to 7.5%

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

LIC Housing Finance has reduced the interest rate on home loans by 60 basis points (bps) to 7.5% for new customers with a credit score of 800 from CIBIL.

The rate is applicable for any loan amount. "An additional reduction of 10 bps i.e. 7.4% will be offered if the customer assigns new/existing single premium term assurance policy with the sum assured equal to the loan amount to LIC HFL," it said. For customers with a below-800 score, the rate will start at 7.9% without the policy and 7.8% with the policy.

Gold attracting first-time buyers, of late

Nearly 30% of respondents who had never bought gold open to investing: survey

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

At a time when Indian investors are shying away from assets like equities and real estate, gold is emerging as a preferred choice of investment. A large number of retail investors, who have never bought gold in the past, are now looking at the yellow metal as an investment avenue.

A recent retail survey from the World Gold Council (WGC) revealed that 29% of retail investors surveyed had never bought gold in the past, but are open to the idea of buying gold in the future.

Further, 52% of investors already owned some form of gold, with 48% having invested in the 12 months preceding the survey.

Gold jewellery and gold coins remained two of the top five investments held by Indian investors across the board – a position that has been a permanent fixture for some years, stated a release by the gold body. The survey revealed that there was a clear urban and rural divide with the former having a deeper penetration in terms of gold investment.

In urban areas, 76% of the investors surveyed had invested in gold in the past while 21% were open to buying gold in the future even though they had never previously invested in gold.

On the other hand, 37% of rural investors said they would consider buying gold in future despite never having done so before.

Lack of trust, a key issue

Importantly, lack of trust was found to be the key deterrent for potential investors looking at gold.

"Our global consumer survey revealed that lack of trust was a key challenge for gold across six key markets: 48% of global considerers were deterred from buying gold due to a lack of trust. The data for India shows it to be a far bigger issue here than elsewhere: 61% of Indian considerers identified issues around trust as a barrier to buying gold," the release stated.

The WGC is working with industry to address the trust issue; it recently launched Retail Gold Investment Principles and is collaborating with the industry to operationalise these to build trust in potential investors.

CII says India growth may slip to 1.5% in FY21

Contraction of 0.9% likely if virus stays

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Confederation of Indian Industry on Thursday said it expected India's economy to slow down considerably, with its estimate ranging from a contraction of 0.9% to a growth of 1.5%, in the current financial year due to the COVID-19 outbreak and the subsequent lockdown.

"Given the extent of damage to the economy from disruption to business, GDP growth in FY21 will likely be the lowest in many decades," said Chandrajit Banerjee, director general, CII.

Noting that by the time the second phase of lockdown ends on May 3, it would have extended for 40 days, the industry body said the economic costs of the lockdown are rising with each passing day, with the impact being felt across sectors. "The situation requires immediate, across-the-board intervention from the government," it added.

"Any significant revival in investment activity is unlikely as capacity utilisation levels may remain sub-optimal. Consumption demand is likely to remain lacklustre as people's incomes have been impacted," it said.

Best-case scenario

In a new paper titled 'A plan for economic recovery,' the CII said, in an optimistic scenario, wherein a faster pick-up post the lockdown period is envisaged, the GDP forecast is for growth of 1.5% 'in the best case.' In the 'baseline scenario,' the GDP is expected to grow at 0.6%. In the case of a more prolonged outbreak, the GDP is likely to contract by 0.9%, the CII added.

Bharti Infratel profit rises 7% to ₹650 crore

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Bharti Infratel on Thursday posted a 7% increase in net profit to ₹650 crore for the quarter ended March 31, 2020.

The tower infrastructure provider had clocked a net profit of ₹608 crore in the January-March 2019 quarter, the company said. Consolidated revenue stood at ₹3,624 crore. A year earlier, it was ₹3,600 crore.

The company, however, said that due to the adoption of the new accounting system – IND AS 116 – from April 1, 2019 onwards, the amounts for the quarter and full year ended March 31, 2020 are not comparable.

The board of directors declared a third interim dividend of ₹4.10 per equity share of ₹10 each for financial year 2019-20.

Trump's order no threat to IT sector: Nasscom

Will lobby for critical tech staff, it says

MINI TEJASWI
BENGALURU

U.S. President Donald Trump's order banning immigration under various categories to the U.S. for 60 days need not be seen as a negative sign for the Indian IT sector, said Nasscom.

The sector's apex body also said it would make strong recommendations to the U.S. administration to consider critical technology workers from India under the essential category, complying with the guidelines released by the Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), an arm of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

It's too early to see any impact on the Indian tech sector, but what came out is the first executive order speaking about permanent immigrants, green card holders and also about people who are outside of the country, Shivendra Singh, vice-president and head, immigration, Nasscom, told *The Hindu*.

However, the order will not apply to the more than six lakh Indian H-1B visa holders and their spouses who are currently in the U.S, he said, adding "there's no immediate effect, still we will have to see how these numbers pan out in the future."

Jio-Facebook deal to help deleverage RIL's balance sheet

Indian major eyes zero net-debt with stake sale in other arms

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Jio Platforms Ltd.'s decision to sell 9.99% stake to Facebook Inc. in a $5.7 billion deal is seen as a step towards deleveraging the balance sheet of its parent firm Reliance Industries Limited (RIL).

RIL, with an outstanding debt of ₹3,06,851 crore ($43 billion) is banking on a few more multi-billion-dollar deals in energy, telecom and retail sectors to become a zero-net-debt company by the end of this fiscal.

The proceeds from the Jio-Facebook deal will reduce the net consolidated borrowings of RIL and reinforce the company's commitment to reduce its net borrowings to zero by March 31, 2021, which is seen as credit positive by analysts.

Moody's Investor Services expects the Jio-Facebook transaction to reduce RIL's consolidated net debt/EBITDA by 0.4x to well below 3.0x – the tolerance level for its Baa2 rating. "The investment by Facebook establishes a valuation for RIL's digital services business and can be used as a base for further divestment by the company. This also increases RIL's financial flexibility," Moody's said. In July 2019, RIL announced the sale of its telecom tower business to Brookfield Asset Management Inc. for ₹25,200 crore.

The company also signed a non-binding letter of intent to sell 20% stake in its oil-to-chemical business to Saudi Aramco for an enterprise value of $15 billion. The company has also entered into a deal with BP Plc to sell 49% stake in its fuel marketing business in India for $1 billion. Together, the proceeds from these transactions will result in a $16 billion reduction in RIL's net debt and the company's leverage.

As on December 31, 2019, the company had cash and cash equivalents were at ₹153,719 crore ($21.5 billion).

19,000 containers to be 'evacuated'

N. ANAND
CHENNAI

The two major ports in Chennai have successfully evacuated most of the imported containers from their terminals via road and rakes post the COVID-19 lockdown.

"Currently, Chennai Port Trust (ChPT) has 11,000 containers for transhipment and they are being evacuated on a regular basis," said P. Raveendran, chairman, ChPT. "As inventories are at manageable levels, we don't foresee traffic or container congestion in our port," he said.

Meanwhile, Kamarajar Port Ltd. (KPL) has close to 8,000 containers for evacuation. "The containers will be moved by road and some by rakes," said Sunil Paliwal, CMD, KPL.

Govt. to suspend IBC rules for up to one year

Move to help banks to rejig loans

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

In a major relief for corporate borrowers hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has decided to amend the insolvency law to suspend up to one year provisions that trigger insolvency proceedings against defaulters, according to sources.

Further, the sources said amendments to the IBC (Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code) would pave the way for banks to restructure loans. The sources said an ordinance would be promulgated to suspend three sections of the IBC for up to one year and a decision in this regard was taken by the Union Cabinet on Wednesday.

Sections 7, 9 and 10 of the IBC would be suspended for six months and the suspension time can be extended by up to one year. An enabling provision with respect to extending the time would be part of the ordinance, they added.

Suspension of these provisions could be extended up to one year based on the economic situation going forward. The effective date of the amendments coming into force would be the date of promulgation of the ordinance, the sources said.

Section 7 and 9 pertain to initiation of corporate insolvency proceedings by a financial creditor and an operational creditor, respectively. Section 10 relates to filing of an application for insolvency resolution by a corporate.

Most commodity prices will drop substantially in 2020: World Bank

Energy prices may average at 40% lower than in 2019

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON

COVID-19 is projected to bring most commodity prices down substantially in 2020, the World Bank said in its 'April Commodity Markets Outlook', released on Thursday.

Prices of energy and metals have been worst hit. While there has been only a moderate impact on the agricultural commodities outlook, supply chain disruptions and export restrictions and stockpiling by governments have raised food security concerns, it said.

The outlooks are "exceptionally uncertain" and depend on the severity and duration of the pandemic and when mitigation measures are unwound. Energy prices, which fell 18.4% quarter-on-quarter in 2020 Q1, are expected to average at 40% lower in 2020 than in 2019.

With crude benchmarks trading at below zero earlier this week, the bank projects oil prices to average at $35 per barrel in 2020.

This reflects a historically large expected drop in oil demand of 10%. Non-energy prices are expected to fall 5% in 2020 and stabilise next year. Metal prices are expected to fall 13% and rebound modestly next year.

Agricultural prices are likely to stay broadly stable in 2020 because of relatively stable demand and all-time high levels of staple production and stock.

However, supply chain disruptions and trade policy announcements and stockpiling could create food shortages, the report said.

"Policymakers must resist the urge to impose trade restrictions and actions that put food security at risk, as the poor would be hit the hardest," World Bank economist, Ceyla Pazarbasioglu, said.

Life insurers' first-year premium grows 20.6%

However, March plays spoilsport

N.RAVI KUMAR
HYDERABAD

A sharp decline in March notwithstanding, life insurance companies posted a 20.60% increase in the first year premium for 2019-20.

The key indicator of their performance, the first year premium mobilised by life insurers during the fiscal totalled ₹2,58,896.48 crore against ₹2,14,672.86 crore in 2018-19, as per the data released by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI).

Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), the lone public sector entity among the 24 life insurers in the country, clocked a 25.17% growth with first year premium at ₹1,77,977.08 crore (₹1,42,191.69 crore).

Together, the private sector life insurers did ₹80,919.40 crore or an increase of 11.64% from the previous fiscal.

But March came in the way of a better performance. The new business premium of all the life insurers in the month totalled ₹25,409.30 crore or 32.17% lower compared with the year-ago period. For LIC, the decline in March was 31.12% at ₹17,066.57 crore while for the private sector it was a 34.22% drop to ₹8,342.73 crore.

Max Life Insurance deputy managing director V. Viswanand said "due to the COVID-19 triggered lockdown and social distancing, the industry witnessed a significant impact as client meetings were severely hampered."

IN BRIEF

World snooker rescheduled

LONDON

The snooker World championship has been rescheduled to run from July 31 to August 16. The annual tournament was originally scheduled from April 18 to May 4 at the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield. The World Snooker Tour expects that the event can be staged with a full crowd as the Crucible Theatre seats an audience of just under 1,000 spectators. IANS

UEFA postpones women's Euro to 2022

NYON (SWITZERLAND)

The Women's European Championship in 2021 was postponed by one year on Thursday, moving out of a direct clash with the rescheduled Tokyo Olympics. UEFA's executive committee agreed that the 16-nation tournament in England will now be played from July 6 to 31, 2022. UEFA also confirmed that the next men's European Championship will continue to be called Euro 2020 despite being postponed to 2021. AP

COVID-19: Bale donates over €1 million

MADRID

Welsh footballer Gareth Bale has donated upwards of €1 million for the fight against the coronavirus. Bale donated €570,863 to help NHS officials in Wales. The Real Madrid forward will donate a further €500,000 to hospitals in Spain, where he is living with his family currently. IANS

Shakib auctions bat, raises almost $24,000

DHAKA

Former Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan raised almost $24,000 for the country's Coronavirus campaign by auctioning the bat he used to score 606 runs at last year's World Cup. The winning bidder at the online auction on Wednesday was a New York-based Bangladeshi. AFP

Saudi Arabia and Qatar bid for 2030 Asiad

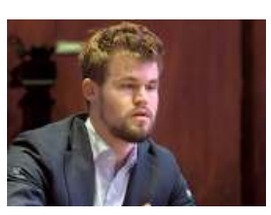
KOCHI

Saudi Arabia and Qatar have submitted official bids to host the 21st Asian Games in 2030, the Olympic Council of Asia announced on Thursday. Riyadh, capital of Saudi Arabia, and Qatar's capital Doha submitted their bids before the OCA's April 22 deadline. The bid document from the National Olympic Committee of each country was accompanied by letters of support from the city and respective governments.

Premier League may return on free-to-air TV

LONDON

The Premier League is considering screening some behind-closed-doors matches on free-to-air television in Britain when the season restarts, Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden has said. AFP



Carlsen nails Caruana

NEW DELHI

Magnus Carlsen stamped his superiority over strong title-contender Fabiano Caruana 3-1 to retain his position at the top of the table in the $250,000 Magnus Carlsen Invitational online chess tournament on Wednesday.

The results (third round): Magnus Carlsen (Nor) bt Fabiano Caruana (USA) 3-1; Hikaru Nakamura (USA) bt Alireza Firouzja (FIDE) 3.5-0.5.

No spectators, no energy: Tendulkar

'Given the circumstances, I don't think it's a right time to celebrate anything'

MAESTROSPEAK

AMOL KARHADKAR
MUMBAI

With the world in a sombre mood due to the COVID-19 outbreak, Sachin Tendulkar is in no mood to celebrate his 47th birthday on Friday. The Bharat Ratna opened up to *The Hindu* about the biggest challenge for the sporting fraternity in the post-pandemic world. *Excerpts:*

Fan is king! Sachin Tendulkar says that the impact of crucial moments will be lost if there are no spectators to enjoy the action. ▪ FILE PHOTO: VIVEK BENDRE

Is this going to be the most unusual birthday for you?

I won't be celebrating my birthday this year. Given the circumstances, I don't think it's a right time to celebrate anything.

How do you see sport in general, cricket in particular, in the post-pandemic scenario?

Whenever it opens up, it's going to be a fresh start. It's not physical but mental adjustment for all the sportspersons. The players are training at home and trying to keep themselves in good shape. As and when we overcome this challenge, sport will be back to being competitive. I believe once a sportsman, always a sportsman, so you would want to go out and compete hard. For that, you'll require physical as well as mental preparation, which will happen.

The question I am hearing a lot about is whether the matches would be the same with empty stands. And empty stands will surely lack energy in the stadium because players are used to crowd's response. When it's a packed stadium and a batsman hits a cracking shot or a bowler picks up a wicket, you are kicked with the roar of the crowd celebrating that boundary or a six or the crucial wicket. That element of energy will be missing without any doubt.

How challenging will it be, especially for an Indian cricketer, to make the mental adjustment of going back to the days of domestic cricket while playing without spectators?

It's easier said than done because you are used to playing cricket in a certain style, with certain response. That response is also important. Imagine if India is playing some nation and we have done well and you want to celebrate that victory, that occasion. For that, you need a full house. If there are no people to celebrate, that moment's importance won't be as much. Can you imagine a match between Federer and Nadal on an empty Centre Court at Wimbledon? It's going to be a very very different experience which no one is used to.

With no live sport on TV, fans have been forced to watch replays of some of your epic innings. Do you watch reruns of those games?

I sometimes watch. Those are some great memories and I enjoy it. Right since my starting days, me and my brother (Ajit) would sit down and watch those video tapes to analyse. Be it a hundred or an early dismissal, we always wanted to find some areas to improve on. Nowadays, since the brother is not here, sometimes I just sit back and cherish those memories.

Which is your most favourite innings to revisit?

I would say the 2003 World Cup match versus Pakistan. It was a high-voltage game, with the kind of build-up it had had. It's a wonderful match to revisit and I enjoy playing it back sometimes.

ICC panel explores rescheduling of FTP

Possible deferment of WTC discussed

AMOL KARHADKAR
MUMBAI

The Chief Executives' Committee (CEC) of the International Cricket Council (ICC), on Thursday, discussed possibilities of rescheduling the Future Tours Programme (FTP) till 2023.

According to a statement released by the ICC, the CEC was briefed about "the continuing contingency planning for all ICC global events, including the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2020 and the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup 2021."

The CEC also discussed possible deferment of the World Test Championship (WTC) and the ODI Super League, both affected by the pandemic.

Collective review

"There was agreement that the disrupted FTP programme would need to be collectively reviewed through to 2023 with a view to rescheduling as much of the cricket that has been postponed due to the COVID-19 as possible," the statement read.

"Discussions and decisions on this and the future of both the World Test Championship and the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Super League will be held at a later date when there is a greater understanding of the impact of the cricket that has been lost on the competitions."

In a month's time

The Hindu understands that, with the dynamic nature of the pandemic and almost six months remaining for the start of the T20 World Cup, the CEC decided to discuss the situation in around a month.

The CEC will then forward its recommendations to the ICC which is scheduled to meet in June.

While Manu Sawhney, the ICC CEO, stated "the health and safety of everyone involved (in ICC events) will be carefully considered before any decisions are arrived at in the best interests of the game," Cricket Australia chief executive Kevin Roberts said the members are " jointly exploring all other options in relation to staging the event."

Following a routine important: Amit

The circadian cycle must be maintained, says the mental conditioning coach

UTHRA GANESAN
NEW DELHI

He is best known as the mentor to Abhinav Bindra but Amit Bhattacharjee has helped many more overcome limitations of the mind on the field. The renowned mental conditioning coach believes individual sportspersons would find it easier to recover from the ongoing lockdown provided they continue to follow a routine through this period.

Training the mind: Amit Bhattacharjee working with the Minerva FC players. ▪ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

"Lockdown has a different conditioning of the mind in individual and team games. Besides the 4-5 hours of daily practice in their respective sports, people in individual events generally stay indoors, spending almost 5-6 hours while working on their mind. Their training is very separate from those in teams, they are already used to staying inside for long periods and are mentally very strong. So it will be easier for them to come out of the lockdown," Bhatttacharjee told *The Hindu*.

Besides Bindra, Bhattacharjee has worked with cricketers Siddarth Kaul and Manan Vohra, golfers Ajitesh Sandhu and Abhijit Chadha, shooter Ayushi Poddar, East Bengal and Minerva Punjab FC. "When we do meditation we tell the players that 'fame is a bubble, honour is a shadow' and that you have to rise above it. You have to understand your inner power and we do it through breathing patterns, visualisation and most importantly, learning to balance the left and right brains.

Different with teams

Teams, he said, worked differently. "There is psyche (body) and soma (mind) and they work in bundles, controlled by our subconscious mind. To ensure co-ordination, we work on linear mind mapping with the players using meditation techniques including sound vibrations, breathing pattern, energy management and visualisations related to nature. All players visualise the same game situation and proceed at the same rhythm," he said.

Asked about the post-lockdown challenges he said, "An empty mind will lead to sleeping disorders, depression and negativity. The circadian (sleep-wake) cycle must be maintained. Those not practising these techniques may end up struggling to get mind-body coordination and suffer injury if practice at high intensity immediately.

"Also, there will a lot of pent up aggression which will have to be channelled in the right direction," he suggested.

Staying motivated, the Rutuja way

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI

Rutuja Bhosale, who played a significant role in helping India qualify for the Fed Cup World Group play-offs before the world went into lockdown, is watching a lot of tennis on the internet to stay motivated.

"It is easy to be motivated for me! I am watching a lot of Grand Slam matches on the net, all my favourite players. It will hopefully help me," said the 24-year-old Rutuja, the former Asian junior champion and national women's champion.

Rutuja has also read a few books in the last few weeks, apart from doing her regular fitness routine home.

Staying calm

"I stay calm, doing yoga and meditation. I love colouring," she said, adding that her mom, Neeta – a certified yoga teacher – has been making her do household work too.

While Rutuja is proud of her Fed Cup performance, she takes greater pride in her police inspector father Sampatrao, who has been working through this tough time. "He has to go out and do his work. He loves his job. At home we maintain a distance. He is doing so much for people. Am amazed and super proud of him," Rutuja said.

Going live on Facebook, Rutuja answered a lot of questions and helped young players and their parents get a perspective about education and sports.

"It was easy for me to choose tennis, as I was good at it. My parents let me go to the US on scholarship and study," said Rutuja, about combining sports and education for a bright career. "It is not important to get 90% in education, but the effort matters."

She was also all praise for her coaches Sandeep Kirtane and Hemant Bendrey, who have helped her make rapid strides after a relatively late start.

Rutuja's mantra is simple – "keep your head high, and keep working hard."

Rutuja Bhosale. ▪ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Dhoni named IPL's GOAT captain

M.S. Dhoni... astute skipper. ▪ FILE PHOTO: VIVEK BENDRE

SPORTS REPORTER
CHENNAI

With three Indian Premier League titles with Chennai Super Kings, M.S. Dhoni was named IPL's Greatest of All Time (GOAT) captain by a *Star Sports* jury on the 13th anniversary of the league. 'Captain Cool', who has a staggering win percentage of 60.11, pipped Rohit Sharma, who has led Mumbai Indians to a record four titles.

Dhoni has led CSK to eight finals, the most by any captain in the IPL.

Besides Rohit, Dhoni also faced stiff competition from Gautam Gambhir who helped KKR bag two titles. Shane Warne, Adam Gilchrist and David Warner were also a part of the elite nominee list.

Dingko to undergo chemo-radiation

Dingko. ▪ FILE PHOTO: VIVEK BENDRE

Y.B. SARANGI
KOLKATA

Dingko Singh, who won a boxing gold at the 1998 Asian Games, will go undergo chemo-radiation therapy for recurrence of cancer at a Delhi hospital from Saturday.

According to information received from the Boxing Federation of India (BFI) secretary Jay Kowli on Thursday, BFI president Ajay Singh, who is also the chairman and managing director of Spicejet airlines, has provided air ambulance facility to airlift Dingko from Manipur to Delhi.

Union Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju and the BFI staff in Delhi have arranged for the 41-year-old's hospitalisation.

Dingko was diagnosed with bile duct cancer and had a surgery in January 2017.

He recovered well to take up the role of a boxing coach and guided the Manipur team in the Nationals last year.

However, he was admitted to the hospital with 'suspected recurrence' of the disease in February and underwent treatment for inflammation of the bile duct system. He was now required to undergo chemo-radiation therapy.

ISRO invites technology proposals for human space flight missions

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

The Directorate of Human Space Programme of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has invited proposals to develop indigenous technologies for its future human space flight missions.

The concepts can range from food and medicine eaten by astronauts during low-earth space trips; to anti-radiation and thermal protection technologies for the spacecraft, life support systems for astronauts, and inflatable habitats to robotic interfaces during more complex missions.

The announcement of opportunity (AO) issued this week suggests 17 potential areas of work for national research and academic agencies.

The directorate of HSP has sought the proposals by July 15. A selection committee will be formed to scrutinise the proposals. The AO said there was a need to develop affordable local technologies that could support human survival in low-earth orbits initially, and in bigger explorations later.

"This opportunity will enable national research/academic institutions to harness their expertise and capabilities towards development of technologies for space exploration," the announcement said.

In the long term, the country's emerging human space programme will need to establish research facilities and develop human resources.

In August 2018, ISRO announced its first human space trip slated for around 2022, the ₹10,000-crore Gaganyaan. It plans to send three astronauts to a distance of 400 km in space in a special spacecraft. They will circle earth over three to seven days.

In August 2018, ISRO announced its first human space trip slated for around 2022. ▪ FILE PHOTO

Four pilots of the Indian Air Force are currently training in Moscow to be the first set of potential candidates for Gaganyaan.

MAMI's year-round programme comes home

A nominal fee per film has to be paid directly to the filmmaker to access web link

NAMRATA JOSHI
MUMBAI

It continues to rain goodies for binge watchers during the lockdown. With the launch of the "home theatre" on Friday, April 24, one of India's front-ranking film festivals, Jio Mami Mumbai Film Festival with Star, is making one of its arms – the popular year-round film programme – go digital while tiding over COVID-19.

An extension – and not a replacement – of the year-round programme, the online avtaar will be open to viewers from across India.

While registration will be free, a nominal fee per film will have to be paid directly to the filmmaker, after which the web link will be made available to the member for a limited period of time.

"The idea is to have filmmakers become theatre owners and bring their films to premiere in your homes," said Smriti Kiran, Artistic Director, Mumbai Film Festival, adding, "It empowers filmmakers and we help them find an audience not just in the city but across the country." The festival's role, as a not-for-profit entity, is of championing the films and the filmmakers and help in outreach and promotion.

Wide reach

The idea is to make it a functional, easy and effective viewing experience online. Unlike the limited seats in the theatre, there won't be any capacity issues here, ensuring a wide reach. "Thousands can watch it. It also empowers the audience," said Ms. Smriti.

The titles will include those not available on streaming platforms. "There are a considerable number of incredible films sitting with producers and filmmakers that are not available on any platform," said Ms. Smriti. In fact, the idea to begin MAMI home theatre came to her while making a list of titles from the festival's past editions for someone who had asked for it.

A goldmine

She realised that they were sitting on a literal goldmine that hadn't found a way to reach the people.

The online programme kicks off with Tanuja Chandra's delightful documentary *Aunty Sudha*, *Aunty Radha*, about her two aunts, aged 86 and 93, spending the sunset years of their lives together in Lahra village, near Hathras in Uttar Pradesh. The charge per viewing will be ₹55 and the producer, in this case, has decided to put the proceeds towards COVID-19 charity.

What next? For now it's one step at a time. "We have already started working on a portal. We are also in conversation with a few platforms for a potential tie-up with this initiative. But till we can hone the pipeline, we request everyone for their patience and support with regard to the tech involved. We will get to a place that is systemically smooth soon," said Ms. Smriti.

While stressing that "home theatre" will not be a replacement for the year-round programme, she also underlined that going forward, it would be "an arm that would need to be built stronger". They may be trying something new for now but are committed to it for the long term.

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