

on Sunday

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## NEARBY



Shivraj Chouhan tipped to return as M.P. CM

NEW DELHI  
The BJP is likely to hold a meeting of its legislature party in Madhya Pradesh on Monday, with Shivraj Singh Chouhan tipped to return as CM. Sources said the delay in decision was because of the "janata curfew" announced by the PM.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 10

Vasundhara, Dushyant test result negative

LUCKNOW  
Uttar Pradesh Health Minister Jai Pratap Singh, former Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje and her son Dushyant Singh have tested negative for COVID-19 after attending a party with singer Kanika Kapoor, who has tested positive.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 11

Jamia panel suspends anti-CAA demonstration

NEW DELHI  
The Jamia Coordination Committee on Saturday announced that the anti-CAA protest outside Jamia Millia Islamia would be temporarily suspended in view of the COVID-19 outbreak. It said the fight against CAA-NPR-NRC "remains uncompromising".

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## No community transmission of coronavirus, says Centre

271 cases confirmed nationwide, with 12 new ones in Kerala and Maharashtra

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

As India braced for a nationwide 14-hour lockdown on Sunday to break the spread of the novel coronavirus, and several State governments announced new, stringent measures to enforce social distancing, the Centre said there was no evidence of community transmission yet in the country.

The total number of people testing positive for the virus stood at 271 with 65 new cases on Saturday, the Union Health Ministry said.

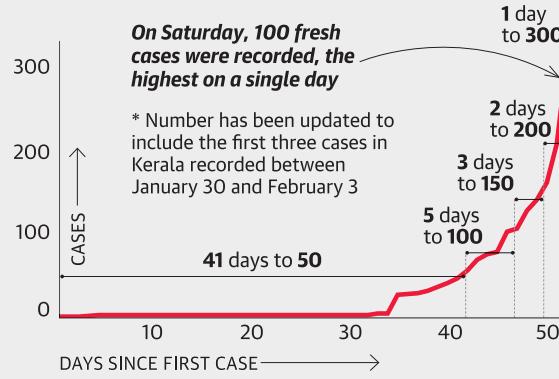
Authorities are tracing 7,000 people who have come in contact with the affected persons, Joint Secretary in the Health Ministry Lav Agarwal said. All cases confirmed so far could be linked to imported cases, the official insisted, adding: "So far there's no confirmation of any community transmission."

Mr. Agarwal was responding to questions on reports of suspected COVID-19 infected persons in Tamil Nadu, Pune and Nagpur, who had no travel history or known history of contact with people from abroad.

Reports from the States put the number of cases at 323.

### Massive spike

A total of 100 COVID-19 cases were detected on Saturday, with the overall numbers crossing 300. While it took 41 days\* for the first 50 cases, the last 100 took just one day



Maharashtra and Kerala reported 12 new cases, Gujarat seven and Karnataka five. The government held a

### COVID-19

conference call with Chief Secretaries of the States. Critical care training was imparted to 1,000 hospitals across the country and State health centres are scheduled to take part in a "mock drill" on Sunday on preparing for ventilator use and advanced care to patients, Mr. Agarwal added.

Reports from the States put the number of cases at 323.

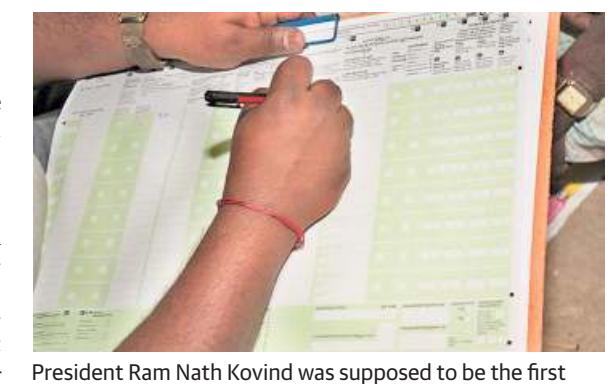
Prime Minister Narendra

## Aid for U.P. labourers

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath announced that 35 lakh labourers in the State will get ₹1,000 each as financial aid, while free ration for a month will be provided to 1.65 crore construction workers and labourers amid the COVID-19 outbreak. The money will be directly sent to them through direct bank transfer. ▶ PAGE 11

## ICMR revises testing norms

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) revised its testing strategy, saying all hospitalised patients with Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (fever and cough and/or shortness of breath) will be tested for COVID-19. Asymptomatic direct and high-risk contacts of a confirmed case should be tested once between day 5 and day 14 of coming in his/her contact. ▶ PAGE 9



President Ram Nath Kovind was supposed to be the first Indian to be enumerated in the Census and NPR exercise.

coronavirus. In a letter to Census Commissioner of India Vivek Joshi, the Delhi government, on March 18, pointed out that a "high state" of alert had been declared in the capital territory and the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, invoked.

The letter to Mr. Joshi al-

### SUNDAY SPECIAL

so pointed out that since enumerators will have to go house to house to collect details, the "spread of COVID-19 may be exacerbated".

Earlier in the week, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi that mobilisation for the Cen-

sus-NPR would pose a great risk for field functionaries and a decision to postpone the two exercises be taken immediately.

Multiple efforts to contact Mr. Joshi on his response to the letters of the Odisha and Delhi governments were to no avail. He did not respond to either text or telephone calls on the issue.

In December 2019, the Union Cabinet, chaired by Mr. Modi, approved over ₹3,941.35 crore for updating the NPR across the country, barring Assam, and ₹8,754.23 crore for conducting the Census of India, 2021.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10

## Special aircraft to bring 100 Indians home

KLM flight was turned back from Delhi

SUHASINI HAIDAR  
JAGRITI CHANDRA  
NEW DELHI

After a harrowing 10 hours aboard a flight from Amsterdam, more than 100 Indian passengers, who were not allowed to land in Delhi early on Saturday due to worries over the COVID-19 pandemic, are expected to be brought to the national capital on Sunday by a special flight.

The decision was taken by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, which had earlier disallowed the KLM flight, forcing it to return to Amsterdam's Schiphol airport.

Among the passengers kept waiting at the Amsterdam airport for three days was a pregnant woman, who developed complications as a result of the tense situation on board, and had to be hospitalised on returning to Amsterdam. Another passenger gave up waiting to return to India and



The stranded passengers of the KLM flight.

caught a flight to Canada, taking the final number of passengers to 102.

"[There were] some gaps in interpreting the advisory, which led to this problem," a senior Ministry of External Affairs official told *The Hindu*, indicating that the interpretation by the DGCA of an advisory dated March 16 that prohibited "travel of passengers from" Europe was wrong, as these were passengers transiting from North America.

A senior official of the West Bengal Correctional Services Department said on Friday that allowing fa-

## Curbs at Kolkata prison trigger violent clash

Visits put on hold after virus outbreak

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA

Widespread violence erupted at the Dum Dum Central Correctional Home in the northern fringes of Kolkata on Saturday after prison authorities announced that family members of inmates cannot meet them till March 31 in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As clashes erupted between inmates and police personnel, some buildings inside the complex were set on fire and prisoners indulged in stone-throwing. The violence that started in the afternoon continued for several hours, leaving many inmates and police personnel injured. Gun shots were heard and the police fired teargas shells to control the situation. At least three fire tenders were called in to tackle the fires.

A senior official of the West Bengal Correctional Services Department said on Friday that allowing fa-



Prisoners indulging in violence. ■ SUBHAM DUTTA

milies to wait outside the prison was against the concept of social distancing, essential to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

"Keeping this in mind, a decision was taken not to allow the meetings till March 31," he said.

"The inmates were upset at being denied meetings with family members. Some people have sustained injuries," Prison's Minister Ujjwal Biswas told *The Hindu*.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10



Workers engaged in a drainage project in Guwahati.

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

only ₹20 from one passenger against an average ₹300 by noon on normal days," said the rickshaw-puller.

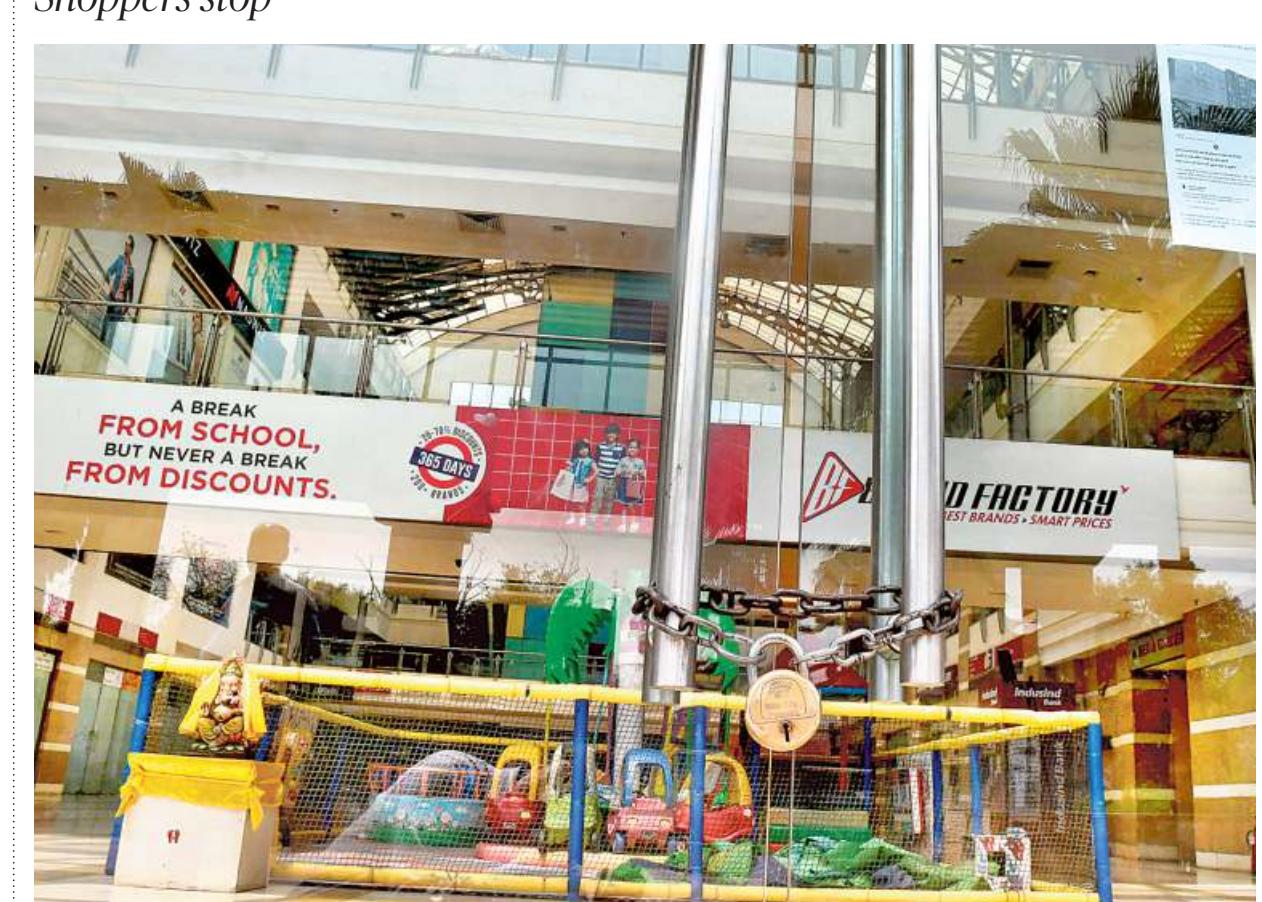
rich people who went abroad brought the virus with them. They should be made to pay for our loss of business," Mr. Nag said.

For Santosh Kumar from Bihar's Madhubani, things were never so bad in the last 10 years, not even during the three days of shutdown due to violent protests against the CAA in December 2019. "First came the battery-operated three-wheelers, then the agitation and now this dangerous disease. I earned

Labu Pator of Bonda near Guwahati has switched over from selling chicken to fish. "Chicken prices halved because of the fear that meat increases the possibility of catching the virus," he said.

Assam's weavers and silk traders have been worst-hit by the COVID-19. "We received the first blow when raw yarn from China stopped coming after the Wuhan outbreak. Now the buyers have vanished. We can take a year to recover,"

## Shoppers stop



A closed City Square Mall at Rajouri Garden in west Delhi on Saturday amid the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

## 'We're suffering because rich people brought virus with them'

Daily wagers, weavers, traders worst-hit as pandemic keeps customers away, want govt. to provide relief

RAHUL KARMAKAR  
GUWAHATI

The clientele at Montu Nag's stationery and tea shop in Guwahati's Ulubari area began thinning when social distancing became the buzzword a week ago.

He sold three cups of tea by noon on Saturday. The total sale on Friday was ₹134 while people, driven by panic to stock up essentials, crowded the shop of the adjoining grocer.

"We are suffering because



Workers engaged in a drainage project in Guwahati.

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

only ₹20 from one passenger against an average ₹300 by noon on normal days," said the rickshaw-puller.

## Free ration, double pension in Delhi

Govt. caps gatherings at 5, may consider lockdown if needed

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday announced several measures, including doubling pension under various categories, in a bid to alleviate the financial stress on economically backward citizens of the Capital amid a surge in COVID-19 cases.

Some like Mehboob Hussain, a construction worker engaged in a drainage project, prefer the quietness around. "We cannot afford to miss a day's work and with the streets almost empty, we can work in peace and with less fear of contamination."

shelters across the city.

Speaking at his first "digital-only" press conference, Mr. Kejriwal said, had not imposed a lockdown in Delhi for now but would have to do so if the need arose in the future. He announced that the number of people allowed at social, religious and cultural gatherings have been brought down to five from 20.

The Delhi government is taking all possible measures to tackle coronavirus in close coordination with the Cen-

tral government and the people of Delhi," he said. "We have decided to provide 7.5 kg free ration to 72 lakh beneficiaries of our ration scheme for one month," he said.

The Delhi government, he said, has also decided to double the pension under the widow pension scheme for 2.5 lakh beneficiaries, old age pension scheme for 5 lakh beneficiaries, and disability pension scheme for 1 lakh beneficiaries.

MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 2, 3 & 4

**Timings****DELHI**

SUNDAY, MAR. 22
RISE 06:23 SET 18:34
RISE 05:29 SET 16:52
MONDAY, MAR. 23
RISE 06:22 SET 18:34
RISE 06:01 SET 17:45
TUESDAY, MAR. 24
RISE 06:20 SET 18:35
RISE 06:32 SET 18:36

**Delhi Weather**

max min

Delhi City 30 18

Safdarjung 30 18

Palam 31 18

**Delhi Palam Today**

32°C A dry and warm day lies ahead. A partly cloudy sky is likely to prevail. Night will be pleasant and hazy.

**Delhi Palam Tomorrow**

28°C A cloudy and comfortable day lies ahead. There are chances of rain and thunder-shower activities.

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**THE HINDU**

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**Air Quality of Delhi-NCR**

Delhi 186	Gurugram 126
Ghaziabad 207	Faridabad 174
Noida 161	Greater Noida 198
■ 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 past 24 hours) [Source: CPCB]

**Airline staff found dead at airport****STAFF REPORTER**

NEW DELHI

A 44-year-old employee of IndiGo airlines was found dead at Indira Gandhi International Airport here on Saturday morning, the police said.

The Delhi police, in a statement, said that the person has been identified as Murlihara Guddy, a resident of Hyderabad. "The cause of death given by the doctor primarily is pulmonary cardiac arrest," they said.

They said that at 10.30 a.m., an information was received regarding the death after which inquest proceedings were initiated. "The man along with other employees was on official work in Jakarta, Indonesia and were called up by the company in view of the outbreak of COVID-19. He arrived on a flight and had undergone all mandatory screening for COVID-19," they said, adding that the person, while waiting for immigration clearance, suddenly fell down from the chair.

The police said that immediate medical assistance was provided to him by the doctors at the airport. "He did not respond and was declared dead at 10.22 a.m. by the doctors," they said.

**Delhi Cong. appeals to govt. to allocate ₹6K crore in form of packages, relief**

Give 3 months' pension, salaries in advance: DPCC chief to CM

**STAFF REPORTER**

NEW DELHI

The Delhi Congress on Saturday wrote to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal urging the Delhi government to allocate ₹6,000 crore in the form of health packages, free food grains, financial packages, tax reliefs and loan assistance, among other measures.

Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (DPCC) President Anil Kumar, while stating that the party "extends full cooperation" to the State government in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, appealed to Mr. Kejriwal to also provide a minimum of three months' pension and salaries in advance.

# Delhi, Noida metros to be shut from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. tomorrow

Services will be regulated, only certain commuters will be allowed to enter: DMRC

**STAFF REPORTER**

NEW DELHI

In view of the outbreak of COVID-19 and to promote social distancing, both the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) and the Noida Metro Rail Corporation (NMRC) on Saturday announced that metro services will be regulated on Monday and no trains will be available between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Officials said that the last trains, on both the Delhi Metro network and the Aqua line, will depart at 8 p.m. from the originating stations.

DMRC officials said that between 6 a.m. and 8 a.m. only commuters involved in essential services will be allowed to enter the metro premises.

"During this period, only people involved in essential services like hospitals, fire, electricity, police and so on will be allowed to enter metro stations on the produc-



Between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m., metro trains will run normally and general public will be able to avail services. ■ BIBEK CHETTRI

tion of their identification cards to security personnel," said DMRC spokesperson Anuj Dayal.

**COVID-19**

However, between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m., metro trains will run on the normal frequency and general public will also be able to avail the services during this period,

Mr. Dayal said.

"There will be no metro service between 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. However, all the trains which started at 10 a.m. from originating stations of all lines will continue to run till they reach their destinations. Metro services will again resume at 4 p.m. till 8 p.m. for general public on a normal frequency, after which it will not be available," added Mr. Dayal.

All parking spaces at metro stations will also be closed on Monday.

"The objective of this staggered metro services plan on Monday is aimed at facilitating all stakeholders with effectiveness and to promote social distancing which is very much required to contain the spread of COVID-19," the DMRC said.

Meanwhile, the NMRC added that Aqua Line metro and bus services will ply at a frequency of 20 minutes between 6 a.m. and 8 a.m. after which normal frequency of 7.5 minutes will be followed till 10 a.m.

**Bus services**

Bus services will also not be available between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., officials said.

On Friday, both the DMRC and the NMRC had announced that metro services will not be available on Sunday in view of the "Janata Curfew."

# Delhi budget session curtailed to one day due to COVID-19 outbreak

The budget will be tabled and passed by the House tomorrow

**JATIN ANAND**

NEW DELHI

The upcoming five-day Budget session of the Delhi Legislative Assembly, has been truncated to one day in the wake of a the outbreak of COVID-19.

The Hindu had on Saturday morning, first reported the possibility of the truncation of the Session, scheduled to begin, and now also to conclude, on Monday.

A decision to this effect, Delhi Legislative Assembly Speaker Ram Niwas Goel had told The Hindu, rested on the Delhi government.

**Is the Parliament not functioning despite the COVID-19 epidemic?**

First the non-provision of a Question Hour in the five-day session and now just a one-day session? This is just wrongful on multiple levels

RAMVIR SINGH BIDHURI  
Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Legislative Assembly

number, that is 24 MLAs, for a sitting," a source had said.

**Staff at half strength**

"The duration of the session may be brought down to one or two days from five... half of the total staff is currently at work, given the government's directions to practise social distancing to contain the possible spread of COVID-19," another source had said.

When asked for comment, the Speaker had said, "The Assembly has made provisions for the five-day session as per schedule. Any change regarding this is the prerogative of the Delhi government."

Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Legislative Assembly Ramvirsingh Bidhuri, however, termed the move "wrongful" and against the established legislative norms.

"Is the Parliament not functioning despite the COVID-19 epidemic? First the non-provision of a Question Hour in the five-day session and now just a one-day session? This is just wrongful on multiple levels," Mr. Bidhuri alleged.

**Economic Survey**

According to the List of Business issued by the Delhi Assembly on Saturday evening, the Budget will now be tabled by Finance Minister Manish Sisodia, and passed, by the Delhi Assembly on Monday. Mr. Sisodia is scheduled to table the Economic Survey and the Outcome Budget before the Annual Budget.

Scheduled from March 23 to 28, according to sources privy to developments in this regard, it was gradually decided to shorten the session to a "maximum of two

and a minimum of one day (s)" instead of five, as initially planned.

In addition to prohibiting social, religious and political gatherings of more than 20 individuals, the Delhi government has also directed employees engaged in "non-essential" services to work from home or go on leave. This number was reduced to five at a press conference on Saturday evening.

"Gatherings of more than 20 people have been prohibited by the Delhi government. The Delhi Assembly has 70 members and needs at least one-third of that

# Gurugram reports two more COVID-19 cases, tally now six

Total number of cases rises to 10 in the State

**ASHOK KUMAR**

GURUGRAM

A woman with a travel history to the United Kingdom and a teenager have tested positive for COVID-19 in Gurugram taking the total number of confirmed cases in the district to six. In Haryana, the total number of cases rose to 10 on Saturday.

People coming from abroad have to undergo two different medical checks at the airport.

The first test is done by the airport authorities for visible symptoms, where after an initial thermal screening, symptomatic passengers are isolated and moved to designated hospitals. Others move to the second screening point where they are either advised home quarantine or sent to a government-run quarantine facility.

"International flights are banned from tomorrow [Sunday] and therefore we saw a large number of people at the airport today [Saturday]," an airport official said while commenting on the delay.

Besides, a woman resident of upscale group housing society at Sushant Lok Phase-I in Sector 28 has also tested positive. She had returned from the U.K. along

In Gurugram, 131 samples have been taken so far. While six were tested positive and 31 negative, the results for the rest are awaited.

Two labs from Haryana – PGIMs, Rohtak and BPS

Khanpur Kalan – have been designated for testing COVID-19 cases. Self-declaration forms for the passengers with travel history from affected countries are available at Haryana Health Department website.

Meanwhile, Deputy Commissioner Amit Khatri directed complete shutdown of all private, corporate establishments and factories till March 31 with the exception of those providing essential services such as banking, Internet, media and hospital, to name a few. Also, dine-in operations have been suspended at all restaurants and eateries.

**232 samples sent for test**

According to a health department bulletin on Saturday, a total of 232 samples have been sent for examination from across the State till date and results for 133 were

confirmed to be infected with the virus.

Besides, a woman resident of upscale group housing society at Sushant Lok Phase-I in Sector 28 has also tested positive. She had returned from the U.K. along

with her husband a week earlier.

Three women and a man had earlier tested positive for COVID-19 in Gurugram.

One person each from Panchkula and Sonipat also tested positive in Haryana on Saturday, taking the total

number to 10. So far, there are six cases from Gurugram and one each from Faridabad, Panipat, Sonipat and Panchkula in Haryana.

Gurugram Chief Medical Officer J.S. Punia confirmed to The Hindu that the teenage brother of a 22-year-old woman, a resident of Palam Vihar, who studies in the U.K. had tested positive on her return to India earlier this month, has now been confirmed to be infected with the virus.

Besides, a woman resident of upscale group housing society at Sushant Lok Phase-I in Sector 28 has also tested positive. She had returned from the U.K. along

with her husband a week earlier.

She claimed to have managed to free herself and reach the road where she met a woman and took her help.

Her medical examination was subsequently conducted though she alleged that the officers forced her against filing a complaint.

The police, however, said that around 11.30 p.m., two officers patrolling in the area saw a few foreign nationals, including the woman, standing outside the convenience store and asked them not to gather. The woman, they alleged, started arguing and said she was waiting for her friend. While she was waiting outside the convenience store, she started talking to a few foreign nationals standing there. She alleged that two police officers arrived on a bike and started abusing her after which they pushed her inside a police car on the pretext of taking her to the police station.

The woman alleged that the officers then asked her to sit in another car which was not a police vehicle and that she was driven by one officer while the two followed. She alleged that she was taken to a secluded place near Green Park cremation ground where the officers tried to undress her.

The police said that a woman constable was called at the spot as the woman undressed herself.

"She was asked to sit in the PCR van and later taken for medical examination," the officer said.

# COVID-19: DU teachers call off protest outside V-C's office

**STAFF REPORTER**

NEW DELHI

The Delhi University Teachers' Association (DUTA) on Saturday called off the sit-in outside the Vice-Chancellor's office, in view of the outbreak of COVID-19.

DUТА president Rajib

Ray said that the decision was taken following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to the nation where he also appealed for a "Janata Curfew" to be observed on March 22.

"The responsibility of sustaining such action programmes cannot entirely

fall on a few and today, as a collective, we cannot risk the lives and health of our members and their families. I wish to assure all teachers, that we will collectively rebuild our agitation on our key issues," Mr. Ray said.

The letter, addressed to

the teachers of the university, said an inspection of the protest site carried out by doctors had shown that the necessary safety standards were not in place.

"It is my duty to share the information that during the inspection by a team of doctors and other

officers from the MCD, at the university on March 20, the doctors raised alarm at the conditions of the tents. The doctors inspecting the site concluded that the safety and hygiene standards were not adequate, given the present situation," said Mr. Ray.

**Minister orders officials to check overpricing of masks, sanitisers**

Masks, sanitizers declared essential commodities under 1955 Act

**STAFF REPORTER**

NEW DELHI

Food and Supplies Minister Imran Hussain on Saturday directed officials to regularly visit shops selling face masks and hand sanitizers and ensure that good quality masks and sanitizers are available and people are not being overcharged.

**Overcharging**

"Under the provisions of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, masks [2 ply and 3 ply surgical masks, N-95 masks] and hand sanitizers have been declared as essential commodities. The teams of Food and Civil

Supplies Department and Weights and Measures Department should regularly visit General/Provisional Stores, Chemists, Pharmacies, Drug Manufacturers etc. dealing in the face masks and hand sanitizers to ensure that good quality masks and sanitizers

# Long queues outside grocery stores ahead of 'janata curfew'

Fearing further lockdowns due to COVID-19 outbreak, people stock up essentials

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'janata curfew', people across the city said they were stocking up on essentials due to uncertainty over further lockdowns in the Capital amid the COVID-19 outbreak.

Soon after the PM's announcement on Thursday, people lined up outside supermarkets and local grocery stores to ensure they have enough "basic essentials" at home "before the stocks run out of stock".

Geetika Sengupta, a south Delhi resident, working in the private sector, said: "The Kendriya Bhandar was like a fish market. People were buying five-six bags of wheat, and groceries to last for at least three months. Looking at the huge stream



People line up outside a grocery store in a mall in the Capital. • SANDEEP SAXENA

of people and the high demand, even I stocked up on essentials that will last for around a week."

## Tempers running high

Bhavya D.N., a resident of Vasundhara Enclave who works in the public health sector, said: "Tempers are running high in markets with residents scrambling to

stock up on non-perishable goods... grocers are working overtime to meet the demand. The other day, one shopkeeper snapped at a customer asked him to patient."

For Green Park resident Surveen Chopra, the need to "hoard" was slightly different. "I have three dogs and I regularly give them rotis as

## COVID-19

part of their diet. Now, with people panicking, I too had to hoard on flour, not as much for me but for my pets. We, as humans, can still vary our diet but what about our pets?" said Ms. Chopra.

Even as authorities maintain and continue to assure people that ration and essential items are available in the market, some people said that rumours of "stocks running out" were making the public go into a panic.

Sushila Kumari, a resident of Madanpur Khadar, said: "People are saying that markets will soon shutdown and we will not be able to buy basic items like rice and wheat. We are a huge family, we have stocked up enough food to last us 10 days."

## Jamia panel suspends anti-CAA demonstration

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

The Jamia Coordination Committee (JCC) on Saturday announced that the anti-CAA protest outside Gate No. 7 of Jamia Millia Islamia would be temporarily suspended in view of the COVID-19 outbreak.

"With a heavy heart, we temporarily suspend the ongoing 24-hour sit-in and appeal to all protesters to take the situation seriously and save themselves and others from this fatal illness," read a statement issued by the JCC.

Stating that the fight against the CAA, NPR and NRC "remains uncompromising", the statement reiterated JCC's demand that the government revoke the amended citizenship law.

## Policy measures

"We also demand adequate monetary and policy measures to be taken to combat COVID-19. Doctors need proper medical infrastructure such as safety gear and testing kits, more than appreciation and heroism," the statement read.

It added that instead of 'janata curfew', people should be encouraged to "quarantine for humanity". "The focus must remain on voluntary self-initiated precautions. No situation must be utilised to normalise curfews," it read.

## Khan no longer Waqf Board chief, says govt.

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

AAP MLA Amanatullah Khan is no longer the Delhi Waqf Board chairman, the Revenue Department of the Delhi government has said in a letter to Mr. Khan.

The letter said that Mr. Khan ceased to be the chairman on February 11, when the Assembly was dissolved.

## 'A technicality'

Meanwhile, Mr. Khan said in a tweet: "From September 2018 to March 2020 the journey of Delhi Waqf Board was good. I am happy that I could help the poor and the needy and extend to them their right."



Amanatullah Khan

## BSES lineman electrocuted

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

A 32-year-old line man was electrocuted on Friday in North-East Delhi's Harsh Vihar. A senior police officer said that the victim has been identified as Ramalal, a resident of Kabin Nagar who worked as a lineman with the BSES.

The victim's colleague Devendra Kumar told the police that on Friday, they had gone to Saboli Extension to fix a light connection. When Ramalal climbed up the pole, he allegedly asked the helper if the current had been switched off to which he said yes. But, while fixing, the victim touched a wire which still had current in it.

Based on the complaint, the police have registered a case on charges of negligence.

## Man arrested for firing at constable, businessman

Incident happened over betting stake

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

A 32-year-old bookie was arrested for allegedly firing at a businessman and a police officer in Central Delhi's Patel Nagar, the police said on Saturday.

DCP (Central) Sanjay Bhatia said that the accused has been identified as Gaurav Kakkar, a resident of Uttam Nagar.

The police said that on Thursday evening, they received a PCR call over firing by two persons. When the police reached the spot, they were informed that Kunal Mongia (31), a resident of Patel Nagar, had promised a betting stake of ₹20 lakh in a South African Domestic Cricket League match

through bookies Gaurav Sachdeva and Gaurav Kakkar and had lost the bet after which the two were demanding the amount.

The police said that Kunal paid ₹6 lakh and couldn't pay the rest due to which Kakkar hired Vikas Shokeen to threaten him to pay or eliminate him if he refuses.

The police said, Shokeen and Kakkar came to Patel Nagar and demanded money from Kunal and his father Ravi after which an altercation took place. The accused then fired shots in the direction of the father-son duo which hit Mr. Ravi's foot. While escaping, the accused fired at the constable who was reaching the spot after the distress call.

## Rickshaw puller beaten to death

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Two persons have been arrested for allegedly beating a rickshaw puller to death in South-East Delhi's Jaitpur after his rickshaw was hit by the accused's vehicle followed by a quarrel, the police said on Saturday.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (South East) R.P. Meena said that the accused have been identified as Sourav Bhati alias Billi (23) and Ravi (30) who allegedly killed Khem Chand, a rickshaw puller (47).

The victim's daughter [14] stated that at 10 a.m. on the same day, a scuffle took place between one Vishnu Bhati and his nephew Sourav. The two had beaten the victim following a quarrel after Vishnu's car hit the victim's rickshaw, said Mr. Meena.

## Constable gets out-of-turn promotion for bravery

He caught assailants despite injuries

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

A Delhi Police constable has been given out-of-turn promotion for his courage and work while trying to apprehend armed assailants in Dwarka.

The promotion has been given to constable Rajiv posted in Dwarka Sector 2 police station. "He retaliated and fired at the criminals despite sustaining serious bullet injury on his face. He was admitted and operated upon in the hospital and is still in the ICU," said a Delhi police spokesperson.

On March 15 night, Rajiv who joined the force in 2010, was on patrol duty with Home Guard Ajay Kumar when they received an information about firing at a construction site. When they reached the spot, the assailants had fled. Subse-

quently, the duo reached a plot where the accused were hiding and asked them to surrender but they tried to flee.

**Retaliatory firing**  
The two officers overpowered one of the four accused but three of them tried to save their accomplice and fired at Mr. Rajiv who sustained an injury on his face. Despite the injury, he fired in retaliation. The four were later arrested, the police said.

In another development, five officers have been given 'Asadharan Karya Puraskar' by Commissioner of Police S.N. Srivastava for their work. The officers have been identified as Assistant Sub-Inspector Ravindra, Head Constables Joginder Singh, Vijay, Sanej and Krishan.

## Will protest NPR from balconies: rights group

Centre should focus on fighting virus

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

Civil society group United Against Hate on Saturday urged people to protest against the National Register of Citizens, the National Population Register and the amended citizenship law during the 'janata curfew' on Sunday, from their balconies, windows and gates.

Mr. Khan said the government's priority should be countering the virus threat and "we are all in this together".

He said, "While the PM has urged people to remain inside their homes from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Sunday, we urge him to rehabilitate people who have lost their homes in the riots in North-East Delhi and are putting up in relief camps".

Parvez Alam, a social worker, said the entire world is battling a health emergency and the government should focus on it first. "I welcome the PM's initiative and will follow the 'Janata Curfew'. But we will also protest against NPR and CAA by beating utensils," he said.

Police vehicles to blow sirens at 5 p.m. today

STAFF REPORTER

During the 'janata curfew' on Sunday, Delhi Police will blow siren at 5 p.m.

All the senior officers have been directed to ensure that vehicles of Station House Officers, PCR vans and traffic vehicles will blow siren at 5 p.m. for one minute. Prime Minister Narendra Modi wanted the nation to applaud the selfless work of essential services personnel at 5 p.m. on Sunday.

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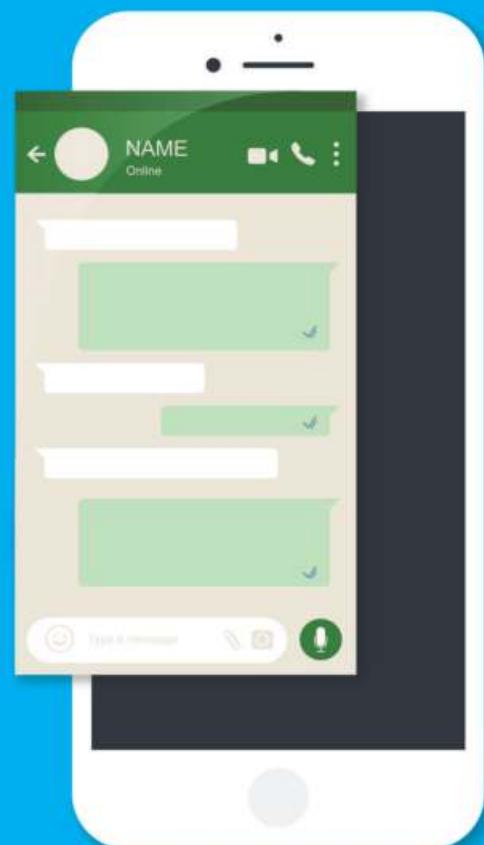
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# COVID-19: 10 new cases in Punjab

Six family members of a 70-year-old man test positive; total count now 13

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHANDIGARH

With 10 fresh positive cases of COVID-19 reported in Punjab in a day, the total number of cases in the State on Saturday climbed to 13, said an official statement.

The Health Department in a statement confirmed that as many as 13 positive cases have been reported in Punjab. Till yesterday, the figure was three.

Six family members of the 70-year-old man of Pathlawa village in Shahid Bhagat Singh Nagar district have been tested positive, the statement said. The septuagenarian had recently died and was tested positive for the virus. The family members who have tested positive include his three sons, daughter, daughter-in-law, and granddaughter. One other person, a 60-year-old male from Garshankar in Hoshiarpur district has also been found positive. He had come in contact with the deceased.

In Mohali town, three fresh cases were either contacts of previously con-



Passengers wearing face masks arriving at the international airport near Amritsar on Saturday. ■ AFP

One of the patients so far has died.

#### Strict action

Meanwhile, Punjab and Haryana governments have warned of strict action against those indulging in spreading rumours or fake news surrounding the virus.

Punjab Director General of Police Dinkar Gupta in an advisory warned people against spreading baseless rumours and falsehood about COVID-19. Urging people not to create panic or unrest through malicious

forwards and social media posts, also issued a series of dos and don'ts against using mobile phones and social media platforms to spread mischievous and unsubstantiated information.

Haryana Health Minister Anil Vij said the government was keeping a strict vigil on spreading of rumours on the social media. "Anyone found involving in such activities will not be spared," he said. He also said that people who have been home quarantined should not venture out. "Legal action will be taken against all those who don't follow directions," he added.

The State government has also decided to restrict public dealing in government offices. An official statement said public access to important government officers such as the District and State Secretaries shall be restricted by all department and offices. "While, in exceptional circumstances, controlled and regulated access shall be permitted," it said.

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# CLASSIFIEDS

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## MATRIMONIAL

### BRIDEROOMS WANTED

#### INDEX OF MATRIMONIAL

##### BRIDEROOMS WANTED

##### BRIDES WANTED

##### BRIDES & GROOMS WANTED

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Assamese

Awadhi

Bengali

Bhojpuri

Bihari

Chhattisgarhi

English

Gujarati

Haryanvi

Hindi

Kannada

Kashmiri

Konkani

Malayalam

Manipuri

Marathi

Marwari

Nepali

Oriya

Parsi

Punjabi

Saurashtra

Sindhi

Tamil

Telugu

Tulu

Urdu

Advocate

Business

Defence

Doctor

Engineer

Finance/ Banking

Government/ Quasi-Govt.

IAS/ Allied Services

Information Technology

MBA/ CA/ ICWA

NRI

Cosmopolitan

Divorcee

Physically Challenged

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Seeks alliance from same status pro  
fessionals - Sub Caste No Bar. Mob -  
965755318

INTERCASTE TAMIL Girl, MBA, 34/  
175 Divorced with no issues seeks  
profly, well qld groom/BF with good  
family background. CNB 96630 63289

##### DIVORCEE

VISWAKARMA, 27 yrs Meenam, Uthi  
rattni, MBA, seeks suitable  
groom. Ct: 9863005630

DIVORCEE Hindu Nadar, Rohini Ag/  
40 M.Sc., B.Ed., M.Sc., (Yoga) See  
king Nadar caste grom only profes  
sionally educated / employed / Busi  
nessmen with good family background ag  
between 40 to 42 Ct : 944354226

##### DOCTOR

DOCTOR, 29, M.S. (Gen Surg),  
Christian, Seeks Doctor Grooms with  
MD, MS, M.Ch, DM Ct: 94431-62620  
Email: joystunguna@gmail.com

Vanniyakula Kehatriya ketai-2,age-25  
MBBS,Medical Officer,State Govt,good  
looking seeks DoctorGroom below 30/  
30729503/ sekar2017@gmail.com

BEAUTIFUL FAIR Doctor girl, doing  
MD Anesthesiology 2nd yr Chenal  
30/165, high family, Father-  
Kerala Nair Surgeon, Chennai, Mother  
Tamil CSI, broad-minded family  
seeks Doctor grom from good,  
broadminded families, MD, MS, M.Ch,  
DM from Kerala/ Tamilnadu.  
Ct:944050381/ 9840958383

HINDU MUJLIAR Girl 25/168 doing MD  
at MMC seeks MS/ MD/ MBBS/IAS  
groom below 30 yrs. Ct: 9840671187

TAMIL / PILLAI/ Non-veg Uthiram, 24  
yrs 160 cm good looking girl, MBBS  
(MD) seeks Doctor grom below 30/  
952648863, mvijivelu1966@gmail.com

GROOMS WANTED

SC-Devendrakulam, 27,  
MBBS, Doctor, Medical  
Officer (Govt), Coimbatore.  
Father: AEE/TWAD,  
Mother: AEE/TNEB,  
seeks Doctor /Govt Services  
(Group - I or Class I officers)  
groom.

99655 39717 / 99655 44003

PQM4 Naidu MBBS1994 PVT Chen  
nai Homely Gir/Bf- Ct: 9443082290

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# PRECAUTIONARY STEPS TO DEFEAT CORONA



**IF YOU HAVE BEEN ADVISED TO QUARANTINE OR SELF-ISOLATE YOURSELF, THEN PLEASE MAKE SURE YOU DO SO**

Quarantine or self-isolation means distancing oneself from all forms of physical contact with other people.

If you are advised home quarantine then, limit your activities within the house. It would be ideal if you stay in a separate room.

## If you have flu-like symptoms such as fever, dry cough, cold, then:

- Call:** If you develop cold, fever or any other Coronavirus or Covid-19 like symptoms, then immediately call the nearest health centre. If you are in Delhi NCR then call to ask for help, explain your condition instead of reaching any health centre or hospital by yourself.
- Isolate yourself:** If you live with your family, then try restricting yourself to a ventilated room in the house. Keep the door of the room closed. Use a separate toilet. If there is no separate toilet in the house, then use the toilet only after everyone has used it. Do not share things like soap, towels under any circumstances.
- Maintain hygiene:** Regularly wash your hands with soap, wear a mask at all times, use hand sanitizer. Separate your things from the rest of the members in the house. Change the mask every 6 to 8 hours. Do not reuse the mask.
- Take special care of waste or garbage disposal:** Double pack your waste or garbage as it will be disposed off separately if your virus test turns out to be positive.
- If you live alone:** If you live alone then shop online for basic needs. You can seek help from your friends and colleagues. Make sure that everything that you order is dropped off at the door which you can pick later. Do not make contact with the person delivering your order.
- How to care for the sick:** There should be only one person in the house to look after the quarantined person who is tested positive. While cleaning the room, changing the sheet etc, the caregiver should wear mask and gloves. They should wash their hands thoroughly after removing the gloves. Take special care of cleanliness in the house.
- Why is this important?** 4 out of 5 people are infected with a mild form of coronavirus. By isolating yourself, you will prevent the virus from transmitting to others. Older people, or children and pregnant women are more vulnerable to the virus. So isolate yourself and stop the spread of this virus.

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South	011-29531277	North-East	011-22115289
East	011-22050908, 22051234	New Delhi	011-23385743
West	011-25195529	Central	011-23270151
North-West	011-25951182	Shahdara	011-22111077

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# More positive cases reported in Kerala

Six confirmed cases from Kasaragod and three each from Ernakulam and Kannur districts

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Yet another dozen cases of COVID-19 surfaced in Kerala on Saturday, all of which could be traced to Gulf nations, taking the total number of positive cases reported in Kerala in the second wave to 49. This is the second consecutive day when cases in double digits were being reported in the State.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, briefing media on Saturday, said three patients were natives of Ernakulam, six from Kasaragod and three from Kannur. They have been isolated in Government Medical College Hospital, Ernakulam; General Hospital, Kasaragod; and General Hospital, Thalassery; and General Hospital, Kannur, respectively.

The number of persons under surveillance in the

## COVID-19

State has swelled to 53,013, with 8,623 persons additionally being put in the surveillance network on Saturday. The number of persons in isolation wards in hospitals is 228 and the rest are all in home quarantine.

The number of persons being put on surveillance has seen a tremendous jump ever since universal screening was introduced in airports recently and anyone from abroad, regardless of where they were coming from, had to mandatorily undergo 14-day self-quarantine.

Mr. Vijayan expressed happiness that the government's directives to religious denominations to avoid mass gatherings were being observed in letter and spirit. Restraints are being introduced at Guruvayur Sreekrishna Temple, Sri Padmanabhaswamy Temple and Sabarimala Ayyappa Temple.



KOCHI



VIJAYAWADA



KHAMMAM



BENGALURU

**Chaos reigns:** Despite the announcements that there was no shortage, markets were crowded on Friday ahead of the Janata Curfew. From those queueing up to buy liquor in Kerala (clockwise from top left) and vegetables in Andhra Pradesh, people thronged markets in Karnataka and Telangana too. ■ THULASI KAKKAT, V. RAJU, K. MURALI KUMAR & G.N.RAO

## KCR calls for 24-hour curfew in Telangana

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD

said at a press conference here.

"There will be 100% closure of buses by the State government. It was already decided at the national level that all metro rail services will be withdrawn", he said.

He appealed for closure of shops, malls and all commercial establishments voluntarily. However, essential services like milk, vegetables, drinking water, power, petrol bunks and ambulances would be spared from the curfew, Mr. Rao said.

"Though the curfew is scheduled from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. at the national level, Telangana will be one step ahead in implementing the same from 6 a.m. on Sunday to 6 a.m. on Monday", he

## Five more positive cases in Karnataka

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
BENGALURU

Five more persons in Karnataka tested positive for COVID-19 on Saturday, taking the total number of confirmed cases to 20.

Among the new cases is the domestic help of a 67-year-old woman who had returned from Dubai via Goa to Bengaluru on March 8 and tested positive.

Till date, 1,25,840 passengers have been screened in Karnataka of which 149 have been isolated in various hos-

pitals cumulatively.

These include 32 admissions and 22 people who have been discharged on Saturday.

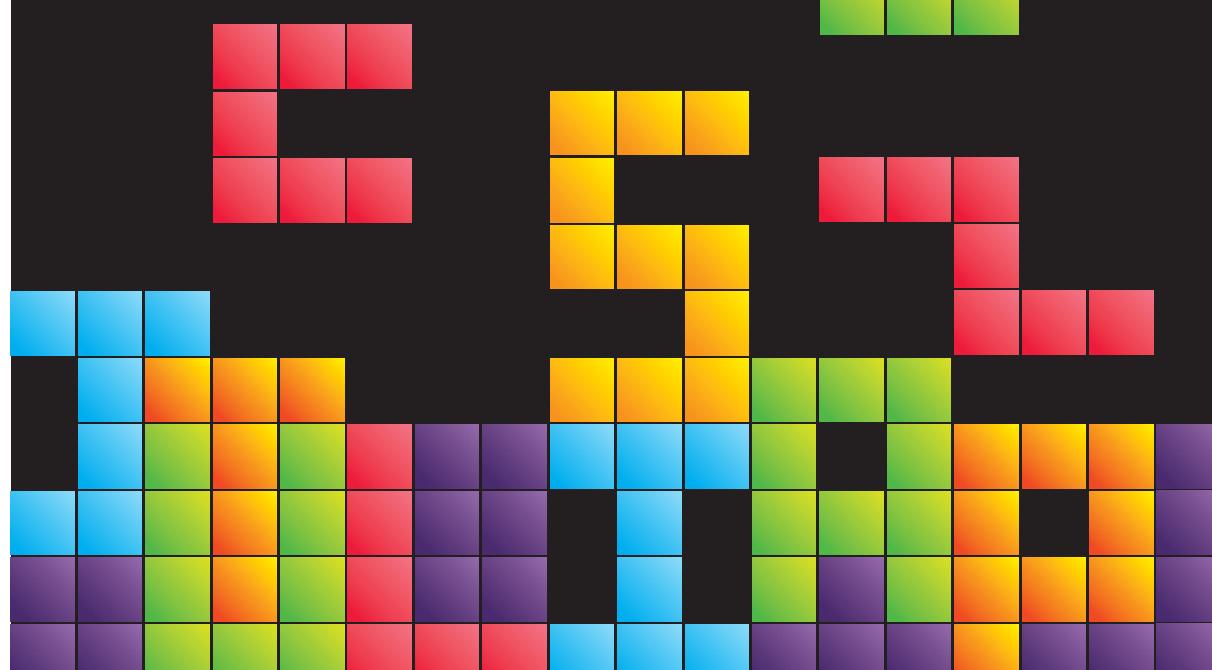
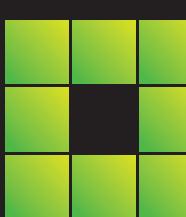
"As most passengers will now be arriving through domestic flights after they land elsewhere in the country, we will start collecting details of domestic passengers too before allowing them to go home," Jawaid Akhtar, Additional Chief Secretary (Health and Family Welfare and Medical Education) said on Saturday.

"This laid the foundation of Ramana Maharshi's teachings that primarily stressed Vichara or Self-enquiry such as 'Who am I', expressed in Tamil as 'Naan Yaar' which was an appealing route in that it transcended all de-

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# The Hindu Group launches book on Sri Ramana

It includes the life story of the Maharishi in five parts

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUVANNAMALAI

A book on Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharishi, published by The Hindu Group of Publications, was launched at Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, on Friday, March 20. It has been titled, *'Who Am I, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharishi, 1879-1950'*.

The priest placed the book in the sanctum at the behest of V. Subramanian, administrator of Sri Ramanasramam.

V.S. Ramanan, president, Sri Ramanasramam, Susila Ramanan and Mr. Subramanian were presented with the copies of the book. Copies were also given to Sivadas Krishnan, accounts and administration in-charge, K.S. Kannan, ashram office manager, and Dev Gogoi, independent editor and photographer. Sridhar Arnala, vice-president (sales and distribution), The Hindu Group, was present.

Malini Parthasarathy, Co-Chair, The Hindu Group & Director, Editorial Strategy, *The Hindu*, in her foreword to the book, said: "...Reflecting a truly mystical approach to spirituality, Sri Ramana's own 'awakening' transformational experience happened when he was only 16. A sudden fear of death which he dramatised intentionally by imitating a corpse in rigor mortis 'to give greater reality to the enquiry' led him to discover that while 'this body dies...the Spirit that transcends it cannot be touched by death'."

"This laid the foundation of Ramana Maharshi's teachings that primarily stressed Vichara or Self-enquiry such as 'Who am I', expressed in Tamil as 'Naan Yaar' which was an appealing route in that it transcended all de-



The book was presented to (from left to right) Dev Gogoi, independent editor; K.S. Kannan, manager, Ramanasramam; Sivadas Krishnan, administration-in-charge; V. Subramanian, administrator; V.S. Ramanan, president; and his wife Susila Ramanan. ■ S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

nominations of religion, caste, gender or region, allowing the individual to access his or her true freedom of Self. Sri Ramana, by universalising his teachings and opening the doors of his ashram to all, represented the true inclusivitessence of Hinduism which does not discriminate amongst those longing for spiritual transformation or does not privilege specific religious or caste traditions to exclude people from its ambit."

### Interviews with relatives

The 168-page book includes the life story of Sri Ramana Maharishi in five parts, milestones in his life, reproduction of his teaching "Who am I" in the form of his answers to 28 questions, his Forty Verses on Reality, the activities of the ashram, interviews with the grand-nephews of the Maharishi who had known him, the incoming president of the ashram and with composer Ilaiyaraaja, who is also a devotee.

The book has articles on the multi-faceted Maharishi, his deep affection for the Arunachala hill, his love for the animals, Girivalam, and Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi Swamigal of the Kanchipuram Math directing journalist Paul Brunton to meet the Maharishi, and on the famed Arunachaleswara temple complex at Tiruvannamalai, its inscriptions, murals.

The Hindu has reported on the Maharishi and published scores of commentaries in its columns during and after his lifetime.

Included in this volume are *The Hindu*'s tributes to the great sage of Arunachala and its editorial of April 17, 1950, three days after his passing.

There is a bonanza of pictures of Ramana Maharishi, and places and people that were close to him.

The cover price of the book is ₹399. Readers can avail themselves of a special launch offer of a 20% discount for a limited period by booking the copies online at <https://publications.thehindugroup.com/bookstore/>

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FROM PAGE ONE

## No community transmission: Centre

In Odisha, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik announced a "near total" shutdown in five districts and eight other prominent towns for a week from Sunday morning.

The Goa government imposed Section 144 across the State to prohibit large gatherings. The Kerala government has warned of strict action if people did not follow quarantine guidelines.

As of Saturday evening, 1.4 million passengers were screened at airports and 22 cases were cured or discharged. Four people have died.

Late on Friday, The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) expanded its testing to include all hospitalised patients with Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (fever AND cough and/or shortness of breath) and asymptomatic direct and high-risk contacts of a confirmed case should be tested once between Day 5 and Day 14 of coming into contact with them. Testing was also being offered to all

symptomatic contacts of laboratory confirmed cases and all symptomatic health care workers.

The government is set to specify specific guidelines for private sector diagnostic companies to offer testing services, Mr. Agarwal added but till late evening, prominent diagnostic labs in Delhi contacted by *The Hindu*, said they had not received any guidelines.

Mr. Modi also held a video conference with representatives of pharmaceutical companies and asked them to boost production.

The companies reportedly assured the Prime Minister that India had enough supplies for all essential pharma commodities and there was no reason to worry.

To further research on the coronavirus, the government decreed that biology-research institutes be allowed to culture the virus. This is in line with WHO recommendations.

(With inputs from PTI)

## Centre likely to postpone Census and NPR exercise

Lakhs of people had taken to the streets across the country protesting against the Centre's decision to update the NPR, which is considered the basis for the preparation of a National Register of Citizens (NRC) that could potentially exclude millions of people born in India. These protests continue in many cities despite the COVID-19 threat.

As *The Hindu* reported recently, at least 13 States, and Delhi, covering nearly 60% of the total population of India, are opposed to the

updating of the NPR in the format being prepared by the Centre.

Many State Assemblies have passed resolutions against the NPR and the NRC.

However, the Centre has been unfazed by the views expressed by States.

As late as March 17, the Ministry of Home Affairs filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court saying that the NRC was a "necessary exercise for any sovereign country for mere identification of citizens from non-citizens".

## Special flight to bring 100 Indians home

An official of the Ministry of Civil Aviation, too, explained that the aircraft was forced to return because of "inter-ministry confusion".

KLM-871 was one hour from landing in Delhi around 1 a.m. on Saturday but was "redirected" to Amsterdam on instructions of the Civil Aviation Ministry. It was carrying transit passengers from the U.S., Canada and Mexico. Also, it was being operated to Delhi to evacuate Dutch nationals before a complete ban on commercial flights kicks in on Sunday.

authorities] being told that the flight was bringing transit passengers from North America," an MEA official said, adding that the DGCA was also informed that elderly people and children were on board.

**15 hours in air**  
The husband and sister-in-law of the pregnant woman from Mumbai tweeted a number of appeals to the government as the flight spent more than 15 harrowing hours in the air. "My wife is six months pregnant and requires special assistance," wrote Tejas Deepak Vispute. He also thanked Indian Embassy staff who assisted the woman with medical aid after she developed complications and had to be hospitalised at Amsterdam's University Hospital.

Officials said a flight from Amsterdam would be allowed to land on Sunday. Although the government had put into place a ban on commercial planes, KLM would be allowed to fly a special flight, bringing the stranded Indian passengers and taking back Dutch nationals.

"The flight was forced to return despite [civil aviation

## Curbs at Kolkata prison trigger violent clash

However, he denied reports of fatalities in the clashes.

Ambulances carrying the injured were seen making several trips from the Correctional Home.

According to sources, inmates were also upset over the suspension of bail hearings for undertrial prisoners.

Sources also said the prisoners tried to overpower the police and come outside the prison.

Two other senior Ministers – Fire Minister Sujit Bose and Minister for Food

and Supplies Jyoti Priyo Mukherjee – also rushed to the correctional facility to control the situation.

"At 12.20 p.m. we got the information that there was a fire at the correctional homes. There was a huge stone pelting. We tried to calm them but nobody is listening. I was also hit by a stone," Mr. Bose said.

Following the incident, the State government appointed Peeyush Pandey as ADG Correctional Services with immediate effect.

(With PTI inputs)

CM YK

## Decision on M.P. CM tomorrow

Shivraj Singh Chouhan tipped for post; 22 Congress MLAs join BJP

NISTULA HEBBAR  
NEW DELHI

The BJP is likely to hold a meeting of its legislature party in Madhya Pradesh on Monday, with Shivraj Singh Chouhan tipped to return as Chief Minister.

Senior party sources told *The Hindu* that the delay after Congress leader Kamal Nath's resignation as Chief Minister on Friday was because of the "Janata Curfew" announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi for Sunday.

"The Janata Curfew is an important part of trying to get the country to take the threat of the novel coronavirus seriously, and we want no public meetings, etc. Also, the 22 MLAs arrived in Delhi from Bengaluru today [Saturday] and met BJP president J.P. Nadda along with former Congress leader Jyotiraditya Scindia. They need to be reassured with regard to their future," said a senior central leader of the BJP.

Later, BJP national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya said the 22 rebel Congress MLAs had joined the BJP.



**Forging ties:** BJP State president Shivraj Singh Chouhan meeting Madhya Pradesh Assembly Speaker N.P. Prajapati in Bhopal. ■ PTI

Mr. Chouhan, after much speculation, is considered the front runner for the post of Chief Minister.

"There are 25 bypolls to be fought going ahead, as there were already two seats vacant in the Assembly and the resignation of BJP MLA Sharad Kol along with the 22 Congress rebel MLAs. Shiv-

raj [Singh Chouhan] is the man most capable of steering us through that challenge," the source said.

### Second candidate

While this is more or less decided, party leaders said Union Minister Narendra Singh Tomar's name is also doing the rounds.

"Most of the important meetings with regard to the developments in Madhya Pradesh were held in Mr. Tomar's house in New Delhi," said the source.

With COVID-19 and Madhya Pradesh registering its first case on Friday, an experienced hand at the helm is required, the source added.

## More defections likely in M.P.

Observers say there is always a tendency to side with the new government

SIDHARTH YADAV  
BHOPAL

The fall of a seemingly stable Kamal Nath government due to the defection of at least 22 Jyotiraditya Scindia loyalists and factional feuds has dealt a body blow to the Congress in the State.

"There is no sympathy left for Mr. Nath," said Yatindra Singh Sisodia, director, Madhya Pradesh Institute of Social Science Research. "The prevailing sentiment is he couldn't even run a smooth government and stave off an offensive."

Even ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha election, the Congress's popularity was on the wane within just three or four months of coming to power.



Kamal Nath

"Voters cited failure to keep the promise of loan waiver within 10 days and frequent power cuts as the major reasons," said Mr. Sisodia, part of the CSDS-Lokniti survey team then.

Yet, the party nurses hope of retaining at least more

than half its 23 seats to which by-election will be held soon.

"Mr. Scindia, along with his flock, will lend the BJP weight in the Gwalior-Chambal region where the Congress is bound to confront a political vacuum there post defection," Mr. Sisodia said.

### Mass exodus

Going by the law of averages, said Rasheed Kidwai, visiting fellow, Observer Research Foundation, the best the Congress could hope for was to retain half of the seats.

Mr. Kidwai hinted at a mass exodus from the Congress, however, after the BJP government was sworn in. "When a new government comes in, there will be a natural attraction towards it.

"With the BJP in power, it would have an edge in the by-election as well."

## Maharashtra to get paid by Centre for cotton MSP

State to be reimbursed ₹1,061 crore

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Centre will spend ₹1,061 crore to reimburse the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) and its sub-agent in Maharashtra for procuring cotton at the minimum support price in that State since 2014.

The decision to give *post facto* approval to the MSP operations was taken by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs at a meeting on Saturday, an official statement said.

### Farmer interests

The approval will help in price support operations to stabilise cotton prices, and is primarily aimed at safeguarding the interests of

farmers and controlling any distress sale, the statement said.

### Reimbursing CCI

Maharashtra is the country's second largest producer of cotton.

The MSP operations were carried out by the CCI's sub-agent, Maharashtra State Cooperative Cotton Growers Marketing Federation Ltd.

The Centre will spend ₹312.93 crore to reimburse the losses to the CCI and the federation on sale of cotton procured during the cotton years (October-September) 2017-18 and 2018-19, and incur an additional expenditure of ₹748.08 crore for 2014-15 and 2015-16.

## Customs official booked for smuggling

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation has booked a Superintendent of Customs, then posted at the IGI Airport, a Delhi-based company and others for alleged smuggling of gold from Dubai to India in the garb of reimport of jewellery exported for exhibition purpose.

The case is based on a probe by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence.

The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence had seized jewellery weighing over 51 kg at the airport in the early hours of April 25, 2019.

The DRI probe revealed the alleged role of Customs Superintendent Vikram Bhasin, who was arrested on May 31, 2019.

Quantum of punishment will be pronounced on March 31

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Anosh Ekka, a former Jharkhand Minister, was on Saturday convicted by a special court in Ranchi in connection with a money-laundering case.

Ekka was the Minister of Rural Development in the Cabinet of the then Chief Minister Madhu Koda from March 2005 to December 2008.

### ED probe

"The special court convicted him for his involvement in the laundering of about ₹20.32 crore. The quantum of punishment will be pronounced on March 31," said an ED official.

## Govt. approval for bulk drug parks

Grants for States on the cards

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet has approved a scheme for promotion of bulk drug parks with a financial assistance of ₹3,000 crore for the next five years.

It has also approved a Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for promotion of domestic manufacturing of critical drug intermediates and active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) with a financial assistance of ₹6,940 crore for the next eight years, a release issued by the Central government on Saturday said.



The scheme is expected to reduce the manufacturing cost of bulk drugs.

lease. The bulk drugs parks scheme is expected to reduce the manufacturing cost of bulk drugs in the country. It will also bring down the dependency on other countries for such drugs.

"The Production Linked Incentive Scheme will lead to expected incremental sales of ₹46,400 crore and significant additional employment generation over eight years," noted the release.

## Ayush Wellness Centre to come under NAM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet has approved the inclusion of the AYUSH Health and Wellness Centre (AYUSH HWC) component of Ayushman Bharat in the National AYUSH Mission (NAM).

motive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative healthcare by integration with the existing public health care system.

The National Health Policy 2017 has advocated mainstreaming the potential of AYUSH systems (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa-rigpa and Homoeopathy) within a pluralistic system of Integrative healthcare.

**Self-care**  
"The vision of the proposal is to establish a holistic wellness model based on AYUSH principles and practices, to empower masses for 'self care' to reduce the disease burden and out of pocket expenditure and to provide informed choice of the needy public," noted the release.

The move is aimed at establishing a holistic wellness model based on AYUSH principles and practices focusing on preventive, pro-

## Former Jharkhand Minister convicted for money-laundering

Quantum of punishment will be pronounced on March 31

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Anosh Ekka, a former Jharkhand Minister, was on Saturday convicted by a special court in Ranchi in connection with a money-laundering case.

Ekka was involved in the laundering of about ₹20.32 crore.

In November 2008, the State's vigilance bureau had registered the corruption case against Ekka and others. About a year later, it filed a chargesheet against him. Based on the case, the

ED initiated a probe under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act.

**Rai's involvement**  
On the Jharkhand High Court's direction, the CBI later took over the corruption case and filed another chargesheet in January 2012, alleging disproportionate assets worth ₹18.82 crore.

The ED identified immovable and movable assets amounting to about ₹20.32 crore and filed a chargesheet against Ekka and another former State Minister Hari Narayan Rai in December 2009.

Hari Narayan Rai was sentenced to seven years' jail in January 2017.

## India, France conduct joint patrols from Reunion Island

The Navy had so far carried out coordinated patrols only with maritime neighbours, and had rejected similar U.S. offer

DINAKAR PERI  
NEW DELHI

India and France have conducted joint patrols from the Reunion Island for the first time, signalling New Delhi's intent to engage with friendly foreign partners in expanding its footprint on the Indian Ocean, focusing on the stretch between the East African coastline and the Malacca straits.

India has so far carried out coordinated patrols only with maritime neighbours and had rejected a similar offer by the U.S.

The Indian Navy conducted a joint patrol with the French Navy from the



## Faroq to skip Parliament session

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
SRINAGAR

National Conference president Farooq Abdullah is unlikely to attend the ongoing session of Parliament because of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Opposition parties said on Saturday.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi, in a statement, said COVID-19, which followed demonetisation and the slowing down of the economy, had been a huge setback.

### COVID-19

to millions of daily wage earners, MGNREGA workers, *ad hoc* and temporary workers, labourers, farmers and those in the unorganised sector.

"The government has to put in place broad-based so-

## Press conferences to go virtual amid COVID fears

Govt. to live stream media interactions

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

As part of the ongoing social distancing measures undertaken to deal with the COVID-19 outbreak, the Centre has announced that press conferences will be held through live streaming and reporters can pose questions on social media.

"The reporters who could not come today can watch the press conference through live streaming and they can pose questions through WhatsApp. These are two new things we have introduced for social distancing," Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar said at the beginning of a Cabinet briefing addressed by him along with Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad and Minister of State for Highways and Road Transport Mansukh Mandaviya.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal too announced that all Delhi government press conferences would be conducted digitally.

"It's very important that all journalists, who are at the forefront of our battle against corona [COVID-19], also protect themselves as



they are in a high-exposure environment," he tweeted.

### Guidelines for channels

On Friday, the News Broadcasters Association had issued guidelines for television channels to ensure social distancing. Channels have been asked to keep only skeleton staff and allow employees to opt for work from home. Reporters and camera persons who are out on the field were advised not to come to office. While interviewing a subject, the crew have been told to keep a distance of at least four feet from one another and not to crowd around.

The NBA requested the Delhi government to allot a parking lot for their broadcast vans so that these vehicles may not be required to return to office. Mr. Kejriwal has agreed to this demand.

The House saw disruption only on Wednesday, when the Congress protested



**The virus is a strong assault on our already fragile economy. Small, medium business men and daily wage workers are the worst affected. Clapping won't help them.**

RAHUL GANDHI, CONGRESS MP

## Six more cases detected in Rajasthan

Five cases, reported from Bhilwara, were of paramedical staff of a private hospital

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
JAIPUR

Six more positive cases of COVID-19 infection were detected in Rajasthan on Saturday, taking the total number of people diagnosed with the disease to 23. Five of the new cases, reported from Bhilwara, were those of paramedical staff of a private hospital where the three doctors who tested COVID-19 positive on Friday work.

Of the 23 positive cases, three have been cured after their treatment in isolation, though one of them – a 69-year-old Italian tourist – died of heart failure on Friday. The five persons in Bhilwara confirmed with the infection were already admitted to isolation ward in Mahatma Gandhi Government Hospital.

The curfew clamped in the municipal areas of Bhilwara remained in force on Saturday and the private hospital, where the medics and



Johari Bazaar in the Walled City of Jaipur wearing a forlorn look on Saturday. • ROHIT JAIN PARAS

staff tested positive, was sealed. The patients admitted there were shifted to other health facilities.

Additional Chief Secretary (Medical & Health) Rohit Kumar Singh said the large number of patients who came in contact with the COVID-19 positive doctors in Bhilwara would be traced and screened. A team of

for creating isolation wards for COVID-19 patients as well as suspects. The hospitals were also asked to ensure availability of 25% of beds in their intensive care units for the purpose.

The Jails Department has shifted over 2,200 prisoners from the central and district jails and sub-jails in other nearby prisons to reduce congestion. All meetings of prisoners with their relatives on the jail premises have been stopped to contain the spread of virus.

Civil rights groups here have demanded a relief package for daily wage labourers in the State to help them mitigate the financial burden arising out of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The activists placed the demand before Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot in the wake of similar monetary aid for workers announced by the Kerala and Uttar Pradesh governments.

## Don't sack contract staff: Maharashtra

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra Labour Commissioner directed all establishments not to terminate or deduct wages of contract or temporary workers.

A circular issued on Saturday by Dr. Mahendra Kalyankar said termination of employees from the job or reduc-

tion in wages in the current scenario would further deepen the crisis. It will not only weaken the financial condition of the employee but also lower their morale in the present situation.

The circular further clarifies that if any place of employment is non-operational due to COVID-19, the staff will be deemed to be on duty.

CM YK

This move follows Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's appeal on Friday to owners of private establishments to continue paying salaries to their staff "in the name of humanity". All shops and private offices, except those providing essential services, in Mumbai, Mumbai Metropolitan Region, Pune, Pimpri-Chinchwad and

Nagpur have been ordered shut till March 31.

**Exam rescheduled**

In another development, Education Minister Varsha Gaikwad on Saturday announced the postponement of the last Class X exam scheduled for Monday. "The decision on rescheduling the exam date will be taken after March 31."

equally important factor," Ms. Gandhi said.

Former party president Rahul Gandhi said the virus was a strong assault on our already fragile economy. "Small, medium business men and daily wage workers are the worst affected. Clapping won't help them!" he tweeted.

NCP president Sharad Pawar too has demanded that the government push back deadlines to file both GST and income-tax returns from the last week of March.

The Opposition had expressed disappointment with Mr. Modi's address to the nation on Thursday.

The CPI(M) had sought ₹5,000 to every Jan Dhan account holder and BPL beneficiary to tide over the crisis.

## Congress seeks cash transfers

Sonia calls for broad-based social protection measures to tide over crisis

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The government needs to outline measures to help people whose livelihoods have been affected by the COVID-19 outbreak, the Opposition parties said on Saturday.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi, in a statement, said COVID-19, which followed demonetisation and the slowing down of the economy, had been a huge setback.

### COVID-19

to millions of daily wage earners, MGNREGA workers, *ad hoc* and temporary workers, labourers, farmers and those in the unorganised sector.

"The government has to put in place broad-based so-

cial protection measures, including direct cash financial help to these sections," she said. Calling for a comprehensive sector-wise relief package, Ms. Gandhi said: "The Congress is demanding necessary tax breaks, interest subvention and deferment of liabilities. For the salaried class, the government and the RBI must consider deferment of EMIs."

"As the entire nation stands united in our joint

fight, I would urge the Prime Minister and the government to take action on some key issues. There is uncertainty and lack of information about the number of beds, isolation chambers, ventilators, medical supplies and dedicated medical teams. This information, including location of each hospital and their emergency phone line numbers, should be publicly shared. Special budgetary allocation is an

House sat longer than usual, with only one disruption

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Amid the repeated demands from the Opposition to defer the Parliament session owing to the coronavirus outbreak, the Rajya Sabha reported 106 per cent productivity with a sitting of more than 30 hours in the last five days.

Both Houses of Parliament will start only at 2 p.m. on Monday as flight services will be disrupted on Sunday because of the 'Janata Curfew' from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m.

According to the Rajya Sabha Secretariat, while the majority of the institutions had allowed work from home, the House, with 44% of its members aged 65 or above, has actually sat for longer than usual.

"The House sat for 30 hours and 28 minutes in its five sittings held over the week. Normally, the House is scheduled to sit for 28 hours and 30 minutes in a week," a senior Rajya Sabha official said.

The House saw disruption only on Wednesday, when the Congress protested



No holidays: Workers sanitising Parliament House on Saturday as a precautionary measure against COVID-19. • PTI

against party leader Digvijaya Singh's police detention.

### Session on till April 3

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his address to the nation on the outbreak, had counted *jan pratinidhi* or people's representatives among essential services, effectively ruling out ending the Parliament session ahead of schedule. The second part of the Parliament session, which began on March 2, will end on April 3. So far four Rajya Sabha

members have gone into self-quarantine after coming directly or indirectly in touch with COVID-19 patients.

"Public figures in self-isolation is not the story. What about those living pay check to pay check and can't self-isolate; daily wage earners, domestic workers, drivers, security guards and lakhs in the unorganised sector," Trinamool Rajya Sabha Parliamentary party leader Derek O'Brien said in a tweet. He is one of the four MPs to be in self-quarantine.

The number of COVID-19 cases in the State surged to 13 on Saturday.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHANDIGARH

With COVID-19 cases rising, political parties in Punjab have put on hold or postponed their programmes to avoid large gatherings.

The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) has deferred its rallies, scheduled till April 13, against the ruling Congress's failure to keep its election promises. SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal said the party would announce a new schedule.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has put on hold its membership drive and door-to-door contact programme, besides media interactions, AAP State president Bhagwant Mann said.

The number of COVID-19 cases in the State surged to 13 on Saturday.

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1 99.07 198100 5600 THREE

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No.: IADB/ENGC/ETND-EP-48/17844/2019-20 Date : 21-03-2020

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Short Term Tender Notice No.09 PBC / 2019-20 / Dt. 20.03.2020

For and on behalf of the Governor of Tamil Nadu, the Superintending Engineer, WRD, Palar Basin Circle, Chennai-5 invites tender from eligible tenderers for the works of

(1) "Construction of Check Dam across the Palar River near Ullavur (Palayaseevaram) Village in Walajabad Taluk of Kancheepuram District" (2) "Formation of a Reservoir by upgrading the capacity of the twin tanks of Kattur and Thattamari in Minjur Block of Ponneri Taluk of Thiruvallur District" (3) "Construction of Inlet at L.S.5600 m of bung in Kannumudi Taluk of Thiruvallur District near Theroykandigai Village in Gunnipoodandi Taluk of Thiruvallur District" at his office upto 03.00 P.M. on 08.04.2020 in sealed covers. The tender will be opened at 03.30 P.M. at his office on the same day.

Other informations such as name of work, details of Work, Value, EMD, Cost of tender schedule, etc., will be available in the Government website "www.tenders.tn.gov.in". Any Corrections or Modifications will be published on web site only.

Superintending Engineer, WRD., Palar Basin Circle, Chennai - 5.

DIPR/1502/Tender/2020

GOVERNMENT OF TAMILNADU / WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

PALAR BASIN CIRCLE, CHEPAUK, CHENNAI - 5.

Form of Contract :Lumpsum - Item Rate Contract

Short Term Tender Notice (Two Cover System)

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# Nearly 1 bn people confined to homes

COVID-19 death toll crosses 11,000 worldwide; More U.S. States order residents to stay home

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
NEW YORK

Close to one billion people worldwide were confined to their homes on Saturday as the global COVID-19 death toll shot past 11,000 and U.S. States rolled out lockdown measures already imposed across swathes of Europe.

The pandemic has completely upended lives across the planet, restricting movement, shutting schools and forcing millions to work from home. While President Donald Trump insisted the U.S. was "winning" the war against the virus, individual States dramatically ramped up restrictions, with New York and Illinois joining California in ordering residents to stay home.

The virus death toll

## COVID-19

surged past 11,000 worldwide, with 4,000 alone in worst-hit Italy where the daily number of fatalities has shot up relentlessly over the past week. An estimated 900 million people are now confined to their homes in 35 countries around the world – including 600 million hemmed in by obligatory government lockdown orders – according to an AFP tally.

### Message for the youth

While the elderly and those with pre-existing medical conditions are the hardest hit by the virus, the World Health Organization warned that young people were also vulnerable. "Today, I have a message for young people: you are not invincible. This virus could put you in hospital for weeks – or even kill you," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said. "Even if you don't get sick, the choices you make about

where you go could be the difference between life and death for someone else."

Italy reported its worst single day death toll on Friday, adding another 627 fatalities and taking its reported total to 4,032 despite efforts to stem the spread.

The nation of 60 million now accounts for 36% of the world's COVID-19 deaths and its death rate of 8.6% among confirmed infections is significantly higher than that in most other countries.

France, Italy, Spain and other European countries have ordered people to stay at home, threatening fines in some cases, while Bavaria became the first region in Germany to order a lockdown. Britain also announced restrictions, telling pubs, restaurants and theatres to close.

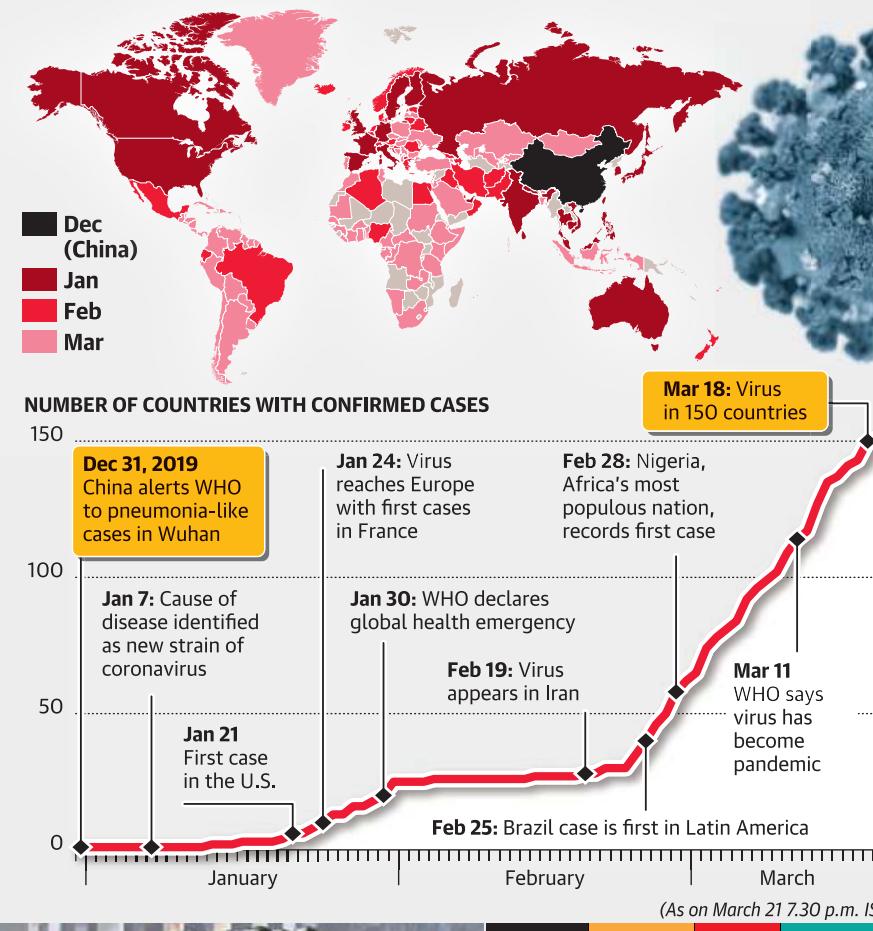
With the virus fears gripping the U.S., its largest State California – with over 1,000 cases and 19 deaths – told its 40 million residents to stay at home. New York State, which has reported over 7,000 cases and 39 deaths, followed suit on Friday, ordering its nearly 20 million residents to do the same from Sunday evening.

Mr. Trump applauded the New York and California decisions, but said he did not think a nationwide lockdown was needed. "Those are really two hotbeds," he said. "I don't think we'll ever find a (U.S.-wide lockdown) necessary." Shortly after the President spoke, the Governor of Illinois ordered residents of the State to stay at home and the Connecticut Governor did the same. The restrictions so far imposed in seven States cover around 100 million people, with the U.S.'s three most populous cities – New York, Los Angeles and Chicago – under lockdown.

## Proliferation across continents

From being confined to China late last year, the COVID-19 has rapidly snowballed into a pandemic, whose impact is now being felt in more than 150 countries

### FIRST CONFIRMED CASES OF COVID-19 IN THE COUNTRY



SOURCE: GRAPHIC NEWS, JOHN HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

## N. Korea fires two ballistic missiles into sea

'Extremely inappropriate,' says S. Korea

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
SEOUL

North Korea fired what appeared to be two short-range ballistic missiles off its east coast on Saturday, the latest in a series of such launches by Pyongyang as the world struggles with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The South Korean military condemned the launches as "extremely inappropriate given the difficult situation the world is experiencing due to COVID-19... We urge them to stop immediately." North Korea has not reported any cases of the COVID-19.

Japan's Defence Ministry also confirmed the North Korean launches.

For decades, North Korea's leadership has faced international criticism for



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. ■ AP

prioritising spending on its military and nuclear weapons programme instead of providing for the population – even during times of famine.

Shortly before the launch, North Korea's official news agency KCNA reported that the rubber-stamp Parliament, the Supreme People's Assembly, would convene on April 10.

## ELSEWHERE



### U.S. Senate negotiating a \$2 trillion package

WASHINGTON  
The COVID-19 stimulus package being negotiated by the U.S. Senate would be worth more than \$2 trillion, White House economic adviser Larry Kudlow said on Saturday. "The package is coming in at about 10 percent of GDP," Mr. Kudlow told reporters. Asked if that amounted to more than \$2 trillion, Mr. Kudlow said: "That's correct." ■ REUTERS

### Greece gets 5,00,000 masks from China

ATHENS  
A plane from China carrying 5,00,000 masks landed at Athens Airport on Saturday. Health Minister Vassilis Kikilias was among those at the airport to receive the load which was donated by the Chinese public electricity company State Grid and Greek electricity supplier Admie, in which the Chinese firm holds a 25% stake.

## Music legend Kenny Rogers dies at 81

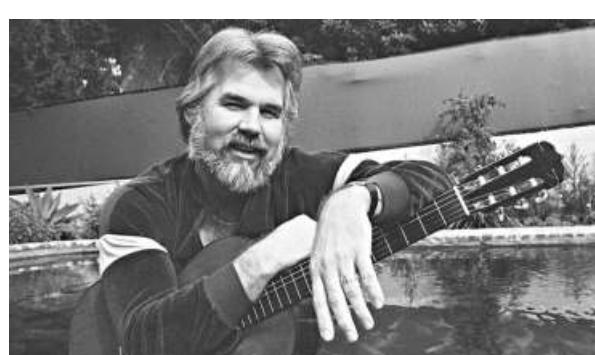
He played a key role in popularising country music in the 1970s and 1980s

BILL FRISKICS-WARREN

Kenny Rogers, a prolific singer who played a major role in expanding the audience for country music in the 1970s and 1980s, died on Friday at his home in Sandy Springs, Georgia. He was 81. Mr. Rogers had been in hospice care and died of natural causes, said his publicist, Keith Hagan.

### Husky voice

Singing in a husky voice that exuded sincerity and warmth, Mr. Rogers sold well over 100 million records in a career that spanned seven decades. He had 21 No. 1 country hits, including two – "Lady," written and produced by Lionel Richie, and "Islands in the Stream," composed by the Bee Gees and performed with Dolly Parton. By the time he retired from performing for health reasons in 2018, Mr. Rogers had placed more than 50 singles in the coun-



Kenny Rogers at his home in California, in February 1978. ■ AP

try Top 40, of which 20 also appeared in the pop Top 40. Long before the ascendancy of Garth Brooks and Shania Twain in the 1990s, he was among the first country artists to sell out arenas.

### Two categories

Mr. Rogers's popularity stemmed partly from his genial persona and rugged good looks but also from his ability to inhabit his material, which, he often said, was of two main types: love songs like "You Decorated My Life" and narrative ballads like "The Gambler". All the songs I record fall into one of two categories, as a rule," he said in a 2012 interview with NPR. "One is ballads that say what every man would like to say and every woman would like to hear. The other is story songs that have social significance.

"Reuben James" was about a black man who raised a white child, he continued, referring to a 1969 pop success as well. ■ NY TIMES

song that was a Top 40 hit for his group Kenny Rogers and the First Edition.

"Ruby, Don't Take Your Love to Town" was about a guy who came home from a war. "Ruby" in particular revealed Mr. Rogers's command as an interpreter of narrative ballads. Written by Mel Tillis, the song is about a veteran, left impotent and bound to a wheelchair by the Vietnam War, who must endure the agony of watching his wife leave the house every night to meet other men. "And if I could move, I'd get my gun and put her in the ground," Mr. Rogers broods as the record ends.

Duo recordings were a prominent part of Mr. Rogers's repertoire, accounting for more than a dozen country hits, including eight No. 1 records. Several of them, including "Don't Fall in Love With a Dreamer," and "We've Got Tonight," were pop successes as well. ■ NY TIMES

## An Italian tragedy in the making

Why is the Mediterranean country the worst-hit by COVID-19

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
ROME

Loads of people have been wondering why the beautiful Mediterranean country of Italy has become the new epicentre of the COVID-19 pandemic. Experts list a range of reasons – from Italy's relatively high age to its strained healthcare system to some old fashioned bad luck – that add up to a disaster not seen in generations.

None of the answers alone explain why the nation of 60 million accounts for over a third of the nearly 11,500 deaths officially reported across the 7.7-billion strong world.



A man being checked in Ostia, Italy. ■ REUTERS

VID-19 averaging out at 78.5. Almost 99% of them were also suffering from at least one pre-existing condition or ailment.

Italy's mortality rate among those infected with the virus is thus a relatively high 8.6%. Yet, Japan's median age of 47.3 makes it an even older nation than Italy – and it has just 35 officially registered deaths. So age is clearly not the only factor.

Some scientists think that it could really have been almost any other country after China. "I think the question of 'Why Italy?' is the most important question and it has a simple answer: No reason at all," Yascha Mounk of Johns Hopkins University told Canada's CBC television.

The only thing that makes Italy different is that the median age of the overall population was 45.4 last year – greater than anywhere else in Europe. It is also seven years higher than the median age in China and slightly above that of South Korea. Figures released on Friday showed the age of Italians dying of CO

VID-19 the first couple of (locally-transmitted) cases arrived in Italy about 10 days before they arrived in Germany, the United States or Canada."

The grim reality learned across Italy's devastated north is that diseases start spreading much faster once the healthcare system reaches its saturation point.

Old and frail patients who are turned away are extremely contagious.

### More testing needed

The world has suddenly realised that it does not have enough test kits to screen for COVID-19. Nations such as Italy dealt with this problem by only testing those who already exhibited symptoms such as a fever and a dry cough. South Korea had the kits and the means to conduct more than 10,000 tests a day. Germany followed a similar model and its death rate began to drop once even the mild COVID-19 infections began being counted. This partially explains both why Italy's mortality rate is so high and why COVID-19 was contained faster in some other countries.

## China's imported cases soar

REUTERS  
BEIJING

China reported a record rise in imported COVID-19 cases on Friday as students and expatriates returned home from the United States and Europe, sparking fears of a second wave of infections just as the country recovers from the initial outbreak.

All 41 of the new confirmed cases in China were imported from overseas, the country's National Health Commission said on Saturday, bringing the total number of such cases to 269.

Also returning in a flight to safety were China-based expats, as businesses begin to reopen. While there is no reported transmission of the virus from people arriving

from abroad to local communities, authorities across China are tightening public health measures.

Of the 14 new imported cases in Beijing on Friday, five were Chinese students returning from abroad. They have come back after many campuses in the United States and Europe shut down to stem rapidly rising infection rates there.

Also returning in a flight to safety were China-based expats, as businesses begin to reopen. While there is no reported transmission of the virus from people arriving

## Member of V-P Pence's office tests positive

Contact tracing being conducted

REUTERS  
WASHINGTON

A member of U.S. Vice-President Mike Pence's office has tested positive for the virus but neither President Donald Trump nor Mr. Pence have had close contact with the individual, Mr. Pence's Press Secretary Katie Miller said in a statement on Friday. Ms. Miller said Mr. Pence's office was notified on Friday evening about the positive test. The statement did not name the individual.

The Iranian judiciary's news agency Mizan Online reported that Mr. Rohollahnejad had been freed by France on Friday. Iranian state television showed images of him hugging members of his family during an emotional reunion in Tehran.

Mr. Pence is leading the White House task force formed to combat the outbreak.

The detentions have coincided with a protracted stand-off with Western powers prompted by a U.S. decision to withdraw from an international agreement to curb Iranian nuclear activities.

The Iranian judiciary's news agency Mizan Online reported that Mr. Rohollahnejad had been freed by France on Friday. Iranian state television showed images of him hugging members of his family during an emotional reunion in Tehran.

In May, a French court approved the extradition of Mr. Rohollahnejad to the United States to face charges of attempting to illegally import U.S. technology for military purposes on behalf of an Iranian company which U.S. officials said was linked to the elite Revolutionary Guards. The detentions have complicated ties between

The Iranian judiciary's news agency Mizan Online reported that Mr. Rohollahnejad had been freed by France on Friday. Iranian state television showed images of him hugging members of his family during an emotional reunion in Tehran.

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## Restrictions on PMC Bank extended

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has extended the restrictions imposed on Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative Bank by another three months, till June 22.

The bank was put under restrictions for six months on September 23, 2019. Deposit withdrawal was initially capped at ₹1,000 and later raised to ₹50,000 in phases. The RBI said it has been closely monitoring the situation and has held meetings with the Administrator and the bank's Advisory Committee. It added that it has also been discussing with "various authorities on expeditious sale of securities and recoveries of loans. Due to various factors, tangible outcomes are taking... time."

## ICICI Lombard rolls out cover for COVID-19

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

General insurer ICICI Lombard has rolled out a focussed 'COVID-19 Protection Cover' under the group insurance mode.

This policy will pay 100% of the sum insured to a policyholder diagnosed as COVID-19 positive, irrespective of the hospitalisation expenses.

"If a policyholder tests positive for COVID-19 at any of the government-authorised centres, the company will pay out the entire sum insured, in a lump sum in the event of the first diagnosis of COVID-19 during the policy period, subject to an initial waiting period of 14 days," the insurer said.

# Cabinet okays ₹48,000-cr. plan for electronics manufacturing

Three schemes for manufacturing, supply chain, infra to help create over 20 lakh jobs

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

In a bid to boost large-scale electronics manufacturing in India, the Union Cabinet approved three schemes, including a production-linked incentive scheme, with a total outlay of almost ₹48,000 crore.

"The three schemes together will enable large-scale electronics manufacturing, a domestic supply chain ecosystem of components and a state-of-the-art infrastructure and common facilities for large anchor units and their supply chain partners," Minister of Electronics and IT Ravi Shankar Prasad said on Saturday.

The schemes are expected to attract new investments worth at least ₹50,000 crore in the sector,



Union Ministers Ravi Shankar Prasad and Prakash Javadekar addressing the media in New Delhi on Saturday. • R.V. MOORTHY

while generating more than five lakh direct and 15 lakh indirect jobs.

The production-linked incentive scheme aims to attract large investments in mobile phone manufacturing and specified electronic components, including assembly, testing, marking and packaging (ATMP) units, at a

budgetary outlay of ₹40,995 crore for five years.

The scheme will offer an incentive of 4-6% on incremental sales of goods manufactured in India and is expected to create a total of 8 lakh jobs.

"Domestic value addition for mobile phones is expected to rise to 35-40% by 2025

from the current 20-25% due to the impetus provided by the scheme," an official statement said.

For the 'Scheme for Promotion of Manufacturing of Electronics Components and Semiconductors' the outlay has been kept at ₹3,285 crore over eight years and is expected to create about 6 lakh jobs.

The third scheme, Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC) 2.0, aims at creating quality infrastructure with a minimum area of 200 acres along with industry-specific facilities such as common facility centres, ready-built factory sheds/plug-and-play facilities at an outlay of ₹3,762.25 crore over eight years.

The scheme is expected to create about 10 lakh jobs.

## CIL's one-day output peaks at 3.17 MT

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA

Coal India Limited (CIL) output peaked at a new high of 3.17 million tonnes (MT) on March 20, overtaking the 3.14 MT production recorded on March 25, 2019, according to an official statement.

"3.17 MT is the highest ever single-day production so far. In the remaining days of the month, we aim to better this figure and increase it further," said an official of the CIL.

The two highest producing subsidiaries of CIL—Mahanadi Coalfields Ltd. and South Eastern Coalfields Ltd. – contributed 0.93 MT and 0.81 MT, respectively. "CIL's production started on a path of healthy recovery from October 2019 after a prolonged monsoon impeded its production tempo," said the statement.



HDFC Bank has temporarily halted foreign currency deposits at retail branches across the country. • AFP

## Virus hits NRI foreign currency deposits

Fear of contamination drives bank trend

NARAYAN LAKSHMAN  
CHENNAI

With the introduction of an increasing number of protocols at the branch level, including ensuring that all customers and officials use hand sanitiser vigorously before entering the branch – this is enforced by a security personnel at the entrance – and also the use of masks by all cashiers and others in customer-facing roles.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, an HDFC Bank official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said that after an audit call on Friday, there has been an internal advisory to temporarily halt foreign currency deposits at retail branches across the country, because "people have realised that it is very difficult to track where currencies have been."

One customer told *The Hindu* that he had to retain the currency he had hoped to deposit, instead, issuing a cheque and seeking his relationship manager's help to get the same deposited at a city branch. So far, it appears that no measures have been taken to prevent NRI customers themselves from using banking services, despite questions about the risk of the virus passing from the notes to the bearer of the currencies.

Nevertheless, private sector banks across States have, since last week, instituted hygiene and sanitation protocols at the branch level, including ensuring that all customers and officials use hand sanitiser vigorously before entering the branch – this is enforced by a security personnel at the entrance – and also the use of masks by all cashiers and others in customer-facing roles.

Both at HDFC Bank and ICICI Bank, rotation of staff in shifts to minimise social contact in the work environment has been put in place and been in force for several days now.

An ICICI Bank official added that while most customers were being encouraged to use online facilities and avoid entering branches, it was ironically the senior citizens, without easy access to net banking, who were found to be using branch services. The virus has, so far, proven to be far deadlier in terms of fatality rate, for old demographic cohorts.

While some private sector banks have categorised cities such as New Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Kolkata and Hyderabad as 'red-alert' areas from the point of view of infection risk, Chennai does not yet appear to have been labelled as such.

## City Union Bank to open 200 branches in 4 years

Eyes ₹40-cr. investment for expansion

N. ANAND  
CHENNAI

Private sector lender City Union Bank Ltd. (CUB) is proposing to open 200 more branches over the next three to four years, with an investment of ₹40 crore, said a top official.

"For the last few years, we have been opening 50 branches during the last quarter of a given fiscal," said N. Kamakodi, MD and CEO, CUB. "This month itself, we have opened 40 out of 50 branches [as also] the 700th branch at Chinna Kanchipuram on Friday."

CUB will end the current fiscal with a total of 700 branches. It had invested about ₹10 crore in opening 50 branches this fiscal. Over the next three to four years, the bank plans to invest ₹40 crore for the proposed expansion activities, taking the total to 900 branches. About 25% of new branches would be in un-banked rural areas.

"At the given run-rate, we might be opening 200 branches over the next three to four years. The investment per branch works out to ₹15-20 lakh in fixed cost. Each branch would hire about six people, including one manager and one officer," he said.

## CII bats for ₹2 lakh-cr. stimulus

Reserve Bank must consider relaxing NPA norms: Kirloskar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

Vikram Kirloskar, president, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi amid the spread of COVID-19, requesting him to provide a fiscal stimulus of ₹2 lakh crore to needy citizens through Aadhaar-based direct benefit transfer (DBT).

He also suggested the RBI consider relaxing the NPA recognition norms from 90 days to 180 days till September 30, 2020 to provide relief to the industry facing payment issues as well as banks which were under pressure on classifying loans as NPAs.

"The government may

consider a strong fiscal stimulus to the extent of ₹2 lakh crore, to be given to the needy citizens through Aadhaar-based direct benefit transfer. An amount of ₹5,000 for each individual, especially the rural and urban poor and ₹10,000 for the most vulnerable section—the elderly, may be given," he said.

### COVID-19

These measures will help industry and economy manage the economic impact of COVID-19 and also help the banking sector tide over the stress of NPAs due to delayed debt servicing arising out of disruptions in business operations, the CII said.

To help ease the cost of capital, the CII said the government could consider removing long-term capital gains tax of 10% and fixing the total dividend distribution tax at 25%.

### GST payments

The CII requested that GST payments should be based on collection of bills rather than on raising of invoices, to avoid liquidity getting locked, in case there are delays in payments.

On monetary measures, the CII suggested a 50 basis-point-cut each in cash reserve ratio and the repo rate, to ensure that banks had enough liquidity to lend to industry.

## DGFT relaxes pharma export curbs

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD

The Centre has relaxed the export restrictions it had introduced earlier this month on 13 active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) and an equal number of formulations made from them.

In a notification, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) said all the formulations in the March 3 notification will be permitted for export under the advance licences issued on or before the date of notification. However, no enhancement of quantity will be permitted for import and export items in these Advance Licences.

Another notification said as per SEZ Rules, the restrictions on exports do not apply to SEZs.

## BPM industry focussing on staff safety

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
BENGALURU

The business process management (BPM) sector is facing a unique predicament: how does a BPM player ensure business continuity when the entire globe is simultaneously hit by COVID-19.

"It is unprecedented. [The virus is] clearly getting governments across the globe to think differently," said Keshav Murugesh, chairman, Nasscom.

However, he said, the industry has been working to ensure safety of staff. "In WNS, we have rationalised work-from-home across locations," said Mr. Murugesh, who is also group CEO at WNS. To ensure data security, employees are being given 'remodelled, cybersafe, secure' desktops to work at home.

It's

this

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stop

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spreading.

PRACTISE SAFE SOCIAL DISTANCING.

Issued in public interest by

THE HINDU



## INTERVIEW | VENKATRAM MAMILLAPALLE

### We see huge potential in rural areas

Industry hopes on BS-IV pre-buying belied: Renault India MD

N. ANAND

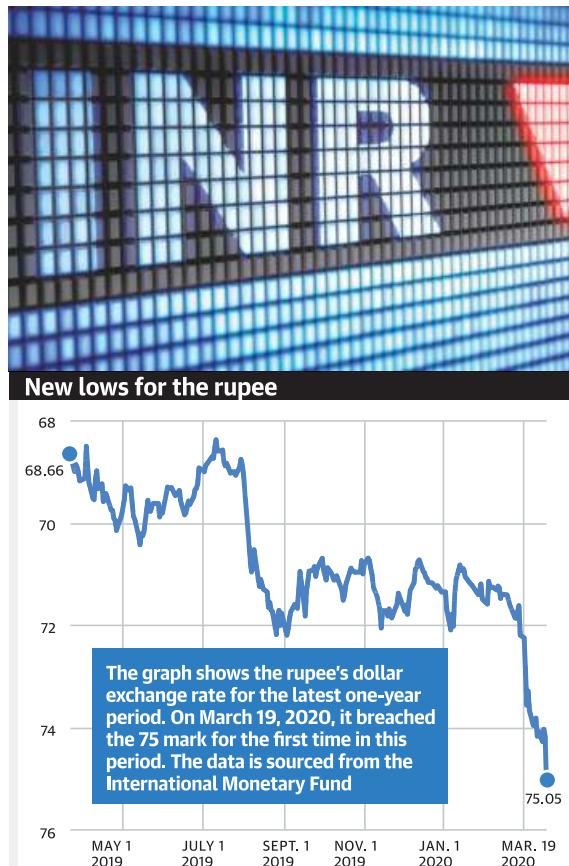
**What about your sales network?**

■ With a developing product portfolio, we have grown the Renault family to more than six lakh customers and we aim to keep increasing that number. We already have expanded our network reach to more than 370 sales and 450 service touchpoints. Our investments in new products that will be launched in 2020 and beyond, will create new segments. We are working towards doubling our sales volume in India in the mid-term.

How was the year 2019 for you in the backdrop of an economic slowdown? ■ Despite the challenging macro-economic environment, Renault was the only brand to grow in 2019 and in fourth quarter of 2019, we moved to the fifth spot of the automotive pie. With the launch of Triber [an SUV] in 2019, Renault forayed into the largest and the fastest-growing segment of the Indian auto market. In 2019, Renault India sales rose 7.9% in a market that contracted 12.3%. This growth can be attributed to our product strategy, new launches, localisation and focus on quality.

What is your product line up for 2020? ■ With Triber, we successfully launched a spacious, flexible and affordable alternative in the market and sold more than 33,000 units since launch. We will create a new segment again with the new products that we will launch this year. We will soon launch the Triber AMT that was recently unveiled at the Auto Expo. AMT technology is becoming increasingly popular in India and we see good potential for Triber AMT. We have action planned for H2 of 2020 and details will be shared closer to the launch date.

CM YK



## The rupee's plunge

Why has the Indian currency fallen against the dollar? What lies ahead?

SURESH SESHADRI

**The story so far:** The rupee slumped on Friday to a record closing low of 75.20 against the U.S. dollar as deepening concerns about the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic sent global investors scurrying to dump most assets, especially emerging market holdings, and opt for cash and the relative safety of the greenback. The rupee has now depreciated by more than 5.3% in 2020, with the bulk of its losses, a 4.1% slide, having occurred in March.

### Why is the Indian currency weakening?

Just as it happened in 2008 during the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), the widespread economic uncertainty triggered by the latest COVID-19 outbreak has forced most investors and businesses across the world to seek to conserve that most crucial asset during times of crisis: cash and more specifically the U.S. dollar. In 2008, the dollar strengthened about 22% against the Euro as enterprises, especially in the world's largest economy, hoarded the U.S. currency.

Since the start of the month, overseas investors have dumped Indian equities and debt on a scale not seen since the taper tantrum of 2013, when news that the U.S. was going to gradually wind down its GFC-triggered quantitative easing spurred an exodus out of emerging market assets.

Given that the possibility of the global economy heading into a recession has been a key driver of the dollar's appreciation against other currencies, including the rupee, there is more pain ahead for the Indian currency

**What else is contributing to the fall?** The rupee's decline in March has been part of a broad trend as most currencies across the globe have weakened against their U.S. counterpart. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, has gained almost 4% so far this month. The risk aversion as a result of the pandemic triggered by the global outbreak of COVID-19 has been so intense that it has not spared most perceived safe havens including U.S. Treasuries (government bonds) and significantly even gold. The yellow metal too has been sold by investors looking to hold the most liquid and fungible of all assets – the U.S. dollar.

**Where does the rupee go from here?** Given that the increasing possibility of the global economy heading into a recession has been a key driver of the dollar's appreciation against other currencies, including the rupee, there is clearly more pain ahead for the Indian currency. Add to it the fact that India's own domestic economy has been struggling to reverse an extended slowdown – with both private consumption and investment by businesses substantially becalmed – and it is hard to see sentiment on the rupee improving appreciably in the short-term.

However, a few offsetting factors offer just a little comfort. For one, India's foreign exchange reserves are still at a fairly robust level and as on March 13 amounted to a total of almost \$482 billion. Armed with this war chest, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has stepped in every now and then, both to smooth volatility in the foreign exchange market and to ensure that a sudden shortage of dollar supply does not exacerbate the weakening trend in the rupee. The central bank, in fact, last week provided \$2-billion of dollar liquidity through a forex swap on Monday, and is set to provide a similar line on March 23 as well.

Also, the price of oil, which is one of the largest contributors to India's import bill, has dramatically declined this month with Brent crude oil futures having slumped more than 46% to \$26.98 as on March 20. With neither Saudi Arabia nor Russia appearing to be in any hurry to de-escalate their price war, and energy demand likely to remain depressed in the foreseeable future on account of the global economic downturn, oil may remain one source of respite for the rupee.

And were the U.S. economy itself to go beyond a recession and possibly head for a massive unemployment featuring depression – if more States join California in enforcing severe movement curbs such as the large coastal State's statewide "stay-in-place" order to contain the spread of the viral pandemic – the dollar too could become a risky holding.

Still, to complicate matters on the outlook, the RBI is most likely to cut interest rates in the very near future to support the sagging economy at this juncture, a move that could potentially add to the downward pressure on the rupee.

# When will a COVID-19 vaccine be ready?

What are scientists working on to tackle the pandemic? How long will it take after clinical trials?

SHAHID JAMEEL

**The story so far:** A Phase-I clinical trial on 45 healthy volunteers between the ages of 18 and 55 years has begun in Seattle, U.S., about 100 days after the whole genome sequence of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) was shared by Chinese researchers. Different vaccine approaches are being undertaken against the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) even as 11,402 people have succumbed to the pandemic worldwide so far (March 21, 3.40 p.m.). The vaccine that is being tested in the U.S. is called mRNA (or messenger ribonucleic acid)-1273 and developed in partnership with the Vaccine Research Center at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and their collaborators at the biotechnology company Moderna, Inc. based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, U.S.

### What are vaccines? How are these made?

Vaccines are one of the most effective tools to prevent diseases. A vaccine is a substance that resembles the disease-causing agent (also called pathogen) but does not cause the disease. It trains the body's immune system to recognise and kill the pathogen, and creates a memory for the future. Vaccines are available to protect us against many life-threatening diseases such as polio, influenza, meningitis, typhoid, tetanus, diphtheria, and certain types of cancers. Vaccines have also been responsible for eradication (or near eradication) of deadly diseases such as smallpox and polio.

There are multiple ways to make vaccines. For a killed vaccine, the pathogen can be grown outside the body, purified and inactivated with chemicals. An example of this is the injectable polio vaccine. Alternatively, the pathogen can be weakened by repeated culture or by genetic means. An example of this would be the oral polio vaccine – the kind used in the 'Pulse Polio Programme'. One of the proteins on the pathogen surface can also be produced artificially and used to raise immunity. An example of this would be the Hepatitis B vaccine.

### What vaccines are being developed against COVID-19?

According to the World Health Organization, over 40 different candidate vaccines for COVID-19 are in development. These include an inactivated vaccine being developed in China (Sinovac) using purified COVID-19 virus killed with formaldehyde (a chemical). A live attenuated vaccine being developed by Codagenix, a U.S.-based company in partnership with the Serum Institute of India (Pune), uses a genetically engineered COVID-19 virus that replicates very poorly. There are multiple other vaccine candidates under development that use DNA, RNA, viral vector and subunit protein platforms.

### One vaccine against COVID-19 is already in trials. What is it about?

An experimental COVID-19 vaccine called mRNA-1273 was developed by Moderna, a biotechnology company based in Cambridge, Massachusetts in the U.S. in partnership with the Vaccine Research Center at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), U.S. A Phase I study to evaluate its safety and immunogenicity (i.e. ability to raise immune responses) in humans is being conducted by the NIH.

**How is testing for COVID-19 done?** To rapidly determine whether someone with symptoms of cough, fever and breathlessness is infected, hospital authorities are doing an RT-PCR (real time reverse transcriptase-polymerase chain reaction) test. This process involves collecting a nasal or throat swab from a patient suspected of having the disease. These are two sites (the nose and back of the throat) where the virus can be collected, and the swab picks up the cells where the virus might be. Replication happens in the upper respiratory tract. These are frozen and sent to one of the designated government centres for a result.

A sample is also sent to the National Institute of Virology (NIV) to recheck the diagnosis. To check for the SARS CoV-2 virus, the sample is passed through a machine, which is part of the diagnostic kit. The RNA, or ribonucleic acid, which is the genetic material of a virus, is isolated from the sample and it is on this that further tests are done.

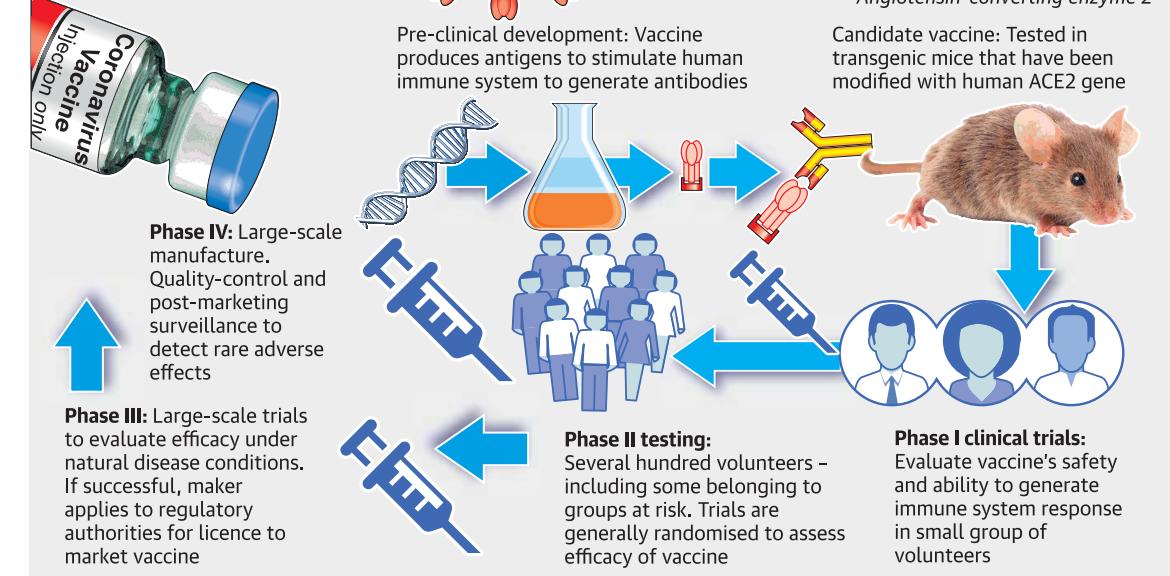
Based on what is known about the structure of coronaviruses in general and what emerging research about SARS CoV-2 suggests, research organisations around the world have marked out locations on the SARS CoV-2 genome that differentiate it from other coronaviruses, particularly SARS-CoV that was identified in China in 2003. On the basis of this, protocols or steps are prescribed for testing agencies to follow to determine the presence of SARS CoV-2. Enter primers and probes. Primers are small pieces of DNA and research laboratories, both private and public, have designed customised primers that bind only to a specific combination of DNA bases. It is the uniqueness of a sequence of DNA bases that differentiates species as well as strains within it.

With an enzyme, the virus's RNA is converted into DNA and the appropriate primer – like a key that can only open the right lock – zooms into the virus's genome and amplifies it.

This amplification is necessary as there is an extremely limited amount of the viral genome and detecting it requires that a sufficient amount of the material is

### Stages of vaccine development

The race to find a vaccine for the coronavirus outbreak is underway but vaccines go through multiple stages of development – from discovery to animal trials, human trials, regulatory approval and manufacturing



Sources: European Vaccine Initiative, MNT

The novel coronavirus causing pneumonia in Wuhan, China was identified on January 7; China shared its genetic sequence on January 12. On February 24, the mRNA-1273 vaccine was sent to NIH for human testing and on March 16, it was given to the first set of human volunteers. Never before has a candidate vaccine been developed so quickly – from sequence to product in 42 days and start of testing in 63 days.

### What is the mRNA vaccine?

The genetic blueprint (or code) in living organisms is stored in a double-stranded molecule called DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid), which makes proteins that are responsible for nearly every function in the human body. The conversion of DNA code into proteins requires a single-stranded molecule called the mRNA (messenger ribonucleic acid). In an analogy with computers, one may think of the DNA as the hardware, the mRNA as the software and proteins as the applications.

The mRNA-1273 is a piece of RNA that carries the code to make the COVID-19 virus Spike protein when introduced into cells. This protein present on the virus surface is critical for its entry into cells. Immunity (antibodies) to the Spike protein can block virus entry and its multiplication, and thus ameliorate the disease.

While simple to engineer, mRNA can degrade easily. Therefore, it has to be protected with a coating that can also target it to the cells of choice when injected into the body.

### How long does it take to develop a vaccine?

It can take years to develop vaccines – first in laboratories to show proof-of-concept, then developing a manufacturing process to make stable and a highly pure product to be tested in animals and humans, and finally

for the market.

The COVID-19 vaccine has been fast-tracked into humans without prior testing in animals. Clinical trials may take one to two years

mRNA-1273 (or another) vaccine would work, a rich pipeline of over 40 candidates is important.

**How much does it cost to develop it? Who funds it?** It takes millions of dollars to develop and test a vaccine. Either for-profit companies or philanthropic foundations and countries cover the costs.

The mRNA-1273 vaccine is supported by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), a not-for-profit grouping of foundations and countries. India is a member of CEPI. Besides mRNA-1273, CEPI has funded the development of at least five other COVID-19 vaccines, with an overall commitment of \$23.7 million.

### Is a virus needed to develop a vaccine against it?

With modern molecular tools and technologies, isolating a virus is not required to make a vaccine against it. The genetic sequence can be obtained directly from infected patients and this can be converted into proteins using various platform technologies.

This makes it possible to have vaccines ready for hundreds of pathogens that have not yet infected humans, but have the potential to do so in future.

Shahid Jameel is CEO, Wellcome Trust/DBT India Alliance, Hyderabad and New Delhi

## Why are only a fraction of coronavirus cases tested?

What is the Indian Council of Medical Research doing to expand the search for infected persons?

JACOB KOSHY

**The story so far:** With the number of COVID-19 cases accelerating in India, health authorities are now broadening the pool for testing. On Friday night, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) issued guidelines for a new testing strategy to effectively track COVID-19 cases. The focus remains on finding imported infections and testing their contacts who show symptoms, the new guidelines say all hospitalised patients with severe acute respiratory illness, shortness of breath and having fever and cough will be tested for COVID-19. And asymptomatic direct and high-risk contacts of an infected person should be tested between the fifth day and 14th day of coming into contact with the patient.

### How is testing for COVID-19 done?

To rapidly determine whether someone with symptoms of cough, fever and breathlessness is infected, hospital authorities are doing an RT-PCR (real time reverse transcriptase-polymerase chain reaction) test. This process involves collecting a nasal or throat swab from a patient suspected of having the disease. These are two sites (the nose and back of the throat) where the virus can be collected, and the swab picks up the cells where the virus might be. Replication happens in the upper respiratory tract. These are frozen and sent to one of the designated government centres for a result.

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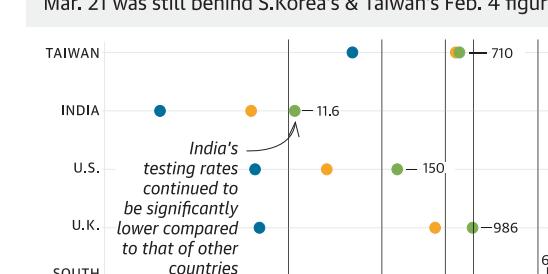
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### Still behind the rest

The graph shows the novel coronavirus tests per million population as of Feb. 4 (●), Mar. 9 (○) and latest date (●) in select nations. India's testing rates were the lowest compared to others on all three dates. India's rate as of Mar. 21 was still behind S. Korea's & Taiwan's Feb. 4 figure



Health Ministry's latest COVID-19 testing strategy	
All asymptomatic individuals who have undertaken international travel in the last 14 days	should be home quarantined for 14 days and should be tested only if they show symptoms
All health-care workers with symptoms should be tested	
All hospitalised patients with fever, cough and/or shortness of breath should be tested	
Asymptomatic contacts of those tested positive should be tested once between five and 14 days of contact	

Source: Health Ministries of respective countries

The Indian Council of Medical Research has

opened a window for private sector health-care laboratories which have a supply chain of primers, probes and reagents to apply for permission to conduct tests

synthesised. A

fluorescent dye, or the probe, is added during the testing process. The probe only lights up when DNA is detected. When many samples are tested simultaneously, only those with the SARS CoV-2 in them will light up, thus confirming its presence. These tests can yield results within hours and are extremely accurate provided they are appropriately conducted by trained, qualified personnel.

### What is the Indian Council of Medical Research's approach to testing?

Currently, testing for SARS-CoV-2 can only be done by 79 laboratories. The ICMR's approach so far was to focus on those who showed symptoms of the disease and had a

synthesised. A

fluorescent dye, or the probe, is added during the testing process. The probe only lights up when DNA is detected. When many samples are tested simultaneously, only those with the SARS CoV-2 in them will light up, thus confirming its presence. These tests can yield results within hours and are extremely accurate provided they are appropriately conducted by trained, qualified personnel.

### Are there enough supplies of kits?

The ICMR has opened a window for private sector health-care laboratories which have a supply chain of primers, probes and reagents to apply for permission to conduct tests. There are 16 Indian companies that have made their own diagnostic kits but await validation by the NIV, the only designated authority. Most of the kits will be imported and involve licensing deals with multinational companies.

The ICMR has requested the private laboratories, if and when they are allowed, to offer "tests for free". As of March 21, 15,701 samples from 14,811 individuals have been tested and 271 have been confirmed positive. Nearly 850 samples that were randomly tested for community transmission have tested negative.

# A step closer to developing a potent drug against novel coronavirus

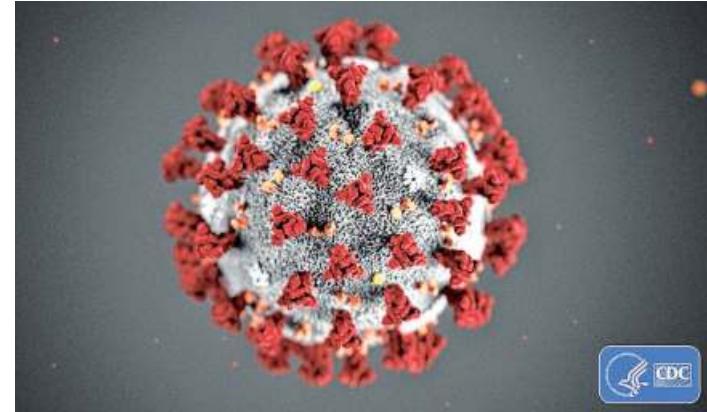
The presence of the inhibitor in the lungs even after 24 hours is significant because the virus affects the lungs

R. PRASAD

Designing better antivirals that would prevent the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) from infecting human cells may now become possible thanks to a team of researchers producing the crystal structure of the main protease of the virus. Main virus protease is an enzyme that processes proteins critical to virus development. An antiviral that blocks this enzyme, as in the case of drugs used against HIV virus, effectively prevents the virus from replicating. Hence, such an inhibitor will be effective against the novel coronavirus. The results of the study were published in the journal *Science*.

#### Deciphering key enzyme

A team led by Rolf Hilgenfeld from the University of Lubeck, Germany developed the crystal structure of main protease of the virus at 1.75 angstrom resolution. And by redesigning an existing inhibitor developed for other coronaviruses, the researchers have been able to develop a potent inhibitor that can effectively block the enzyme



**Home strike:** A team of researchers has deciphered the crystal structure of the main protease of the virus. ■ AP

and neutralise the novel coronavirus. "Based on the structure, we developed the lead compound into a potent inhibitor of the SARS-CoV-2," they write.

Main virus protease is one of the best characterised drug targets among coronaviruses. The inhibitor against the main protease targets a specific region of the enzyme. And any antiviral that targets this region of the enzyme will be specific to the virus and will not

be toxic to human cells.

The researchers had earlier designed broad-spectrum inhibitors of the main proteases of other coronaviruses. One of the inhibitors showed good antiviral activity against other coronaviruses. Now, the team chose that inhibitor and modified it to increase the amount of time the drug is present in the body and to improve its solubility in plasma.

After the modification, the half-

life of the inhibitor (compound 13a) increased three-fold, and the solubility improved by a factor of about 19. And to enhance the antiviral activity, the researchers further modified the inhibitor (compound 13b).

The researchers found that the IC<sub>50</sub> (concentration of the compound to produce 50% inhibition) to inhibit the novel coronavirus is 0.90 microMolar. The inhibitor showed good potency to block the replication of the virus at half maximal effective concentration of 1.75 micromolar. In human cells infected with the novel coronavirus, a higher half maximal effective concentration of the inhibitor was required.

#### Effective inhibitor

The metabolic stability of the 13a inhibitor originally modified was found to be "good" in both mouse and human microsomes (a fragment of endoplasmic reticulum and attached ribosomes). Even at the end of 30 minutes, around 80% of the residual compound in mouse and 60% in human cells remained metabolically stable.

When the inhibitor was administered subcutaneously into mice, the inhibitor was present in the plasma for as long as four hours but was excreted via urine for up to a day.

The half-life of the compound 13b was found to be 1.8 hours. But most importantly, even after 24 hours there was some amount (33 nanogram per gram) of the compound 13b in the lung tissue. The presence of the inhibitor in the lungs even at the end of a day is particularly significant as the virus affects the lungs.

#### No adverse effects

The team tested for any adverse effects when mice inhaled the inhibitor 13b. "Inhalation was tolerated well and mice did not show any adverse effects, suggesting that this way, direct administration of the compound to the lungs would be possible," they write.

Given the "favourable results" the study provides a "useful framework for development" of drugs to combat the novel coronavirus, the authors claim in the paper.

# 'The vaccine was rapidly synthesised as novel coronavirus sequence was available'

R. PRASAD

Just over three months after the genome sequence of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) was shared by Chinese researchers, an messenger-RNA (mRNA) vaccine is being tested at Seattle in a Phase-I clinical trial on 45 healthy volunteers between the ages of 18 to 55 years over a period of approximately six weeks.

The trial began on March 16 at the Kaiser Permanente Washington Health Research Institute (KPWHRI) in Seattle. The study is evaluating different doses of the experimental vaccine for safety and its ability to induce an immune response in participants.

The vaccine (mRNA-1273) was developed by National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIH), U.S., scientists and their collaborators at the biotechnology company Moderna, Inc., based in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) supported the manufacturing of the vaccine candidate for the Phase I clinical trial.

Virologist **Gagandeep Kang**, who is the executive director of the Translational Health Science and Technology Institute (THSTI), Faridabad, in an email to *The Hindu* explains how the mRNA vaccine is developed and how it has become possible to get the vaccine ready for testing so quickly.

What makes the use of

messenger-RNA (mRNA) for the vaccine different from the conventional vaccines and how does it work?

Most of the vaccines we know are based on a whole organism (bacteria or virus, living or dead) or a part of an organism. Usually these organisms cause disease, but to make vaccines, the organisms are manipulated by heat, chemical or other biological approaches to ensure that their pathogenicity has been removed. These vaccines, when given to a person, act like an infection, but without producing disease. The parts of the organism which are recognised by the immune response are called antigens, and when they are recognised, an immune response is made, as either antibodies or activated immune cells that protect from disease when the same infection is seen again.

Unlike a usual vaccine, RNA vaccines work by the introduction of an mRNA sequence into the host's cells. This mRNA codes for a disease-specific antigen. Once inside a cell, the mRNA instructs the cell to produce the antigen, which is recognised by the immune system which makes an antibody or cellular response.

Currently, two forms of mRNA vaccines are being widely developed against multiple pathogens: conventional mRNA vaccines and self-amplifying mRNA vaccines, which are derived from positive strand RNA viruses.

No, the virus is not required, but the genome sequence [of the virus] is needed. The messenger



Gagandeep Kang ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

How has it become possible to develop an mRNA vaccine in just about three months? Is it necessary to have the virus to develop the vaccine?

In part, researchers were able to quickly develop mRNA-1273 because of prior studies of related coronaviruses that cause SARS and MERS.

We have incredible genome sequencing capacity now, and got the SARS-CoV-2 sequence in early January 2020. Since all you need for the mRNA vaccine is the sequence of the pathogen, a vaccine could be rapidly synthesised in the laboratory.

The mRNA can be made synthetically by *in vitro* transcription or reading of a plasmid DNA template, with a recombinant RNA polymerase. A cap and tail are attached to a mature mRNA sequence.

No, the virus is not required, but the genome sequence [of the virus] is needed. The messenger

RNA are produced synthetically and this is what makes the technology rapid and reproducible.

Since a particular protein (spike protein) found on the virus is what binds to receptors found on human cells and then infect them, will the vaccine use mRNAs produced for this protein?

The first vaccine to enter human trials is Moderna's mRNA-1273. This is a novel lipid nanoparticle-encapsulated mRNA vaccine that codes for the full-length pre-fusion stabilised spike (S) protein.

How do vaccine developers know which mRNAs of the spike protein are produced? How do they select the correct ones to be included in the vaccine?

The gene sequences of the proteins of coronaviruses are known. Even with a novel virus, it is possible to figure out which sequence codes for which protein. On-

ly one mRNA is included and it is selected based on sequence matching.

Are the mRNAs used in the vaccine packed in some protective material or used bare?

In the case of Moderna, the mRNA is stabilised so that it is protected from enzymes that might break it down.

Has this vaccine already been tested in animals for safety or is it tested on human volunteers bypassing animal trials? How ethical is this?

The US FDA has approved studies to proceed in parallel to human studies are also being done with the same product. The mRNA platform technology by which the vaccine was made has already been used safely in 1,700 volunteers for other mRNA vaccines. So the FDA will have considered that in its decision. There are always worries about ethics when testing in emergencies, because safety should be paramount for vaccines, but there is, so far, no safety signal [adverse effects] from the Moderna mRNA platform.

With regard to the parallel studies in animals also, one unusual aspect of the mRNA-1273 vaccine is that although other formulations of similar vaccines have been tested on animals, this particular vaccine construct has not been evaluated in the appropriate animal mo-

del which is a transgenic mouse expressing the ACE2 receptor. Tal Zaks, Chief Medical Officer of Moderna was quoted in STAT, a news outlet, as saying: "I don't think proving this in an animal model is on the critical path to getting this to a clinical trial."

He also pointed out that National Institute of Health scientists are "working on nonclinical research in parallel."

Has there been any instance before when an mRNA vaccine has been tested on humans?

Many candidate vaccines have been produced using this technology and are in various phases of testing. Currently, there are over 20 candidates for infectious diseases and cancers from multiple groups. This is a new technology and, as yet, there are no licensed products.

Will mRNA vaccine produce better protection against the virus than vaccines developed through the conventional route?

We do not know yet what will work and how well, which is why multiple approaches are being taken for vaccine development.

How long will it take before we have a vaccine for commercial use?

It will take at least a year, if not longer.

# Long-tailed macaques show rich tool-use behaviour

Tool use and object manipulation were observed in six behavioural contexts involving eight different types of objects

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

In recent times, there has been a lot of interest among primatologists in studying object handling and tool-use in non-human primates such as apes and chimpanzees. A study from IISER Mohali has looked into how long-tailed macaques (*Macaca fascicularis umbrosus*) in Greater Nicobar Island handle objects and use tools to simplify their efforts.

The researchers observed interesting behaviour related to object manipulation and tool use in six behavioural contexts involving eight different types of objects. They also saw that males were more frequently involved in tool use than females. The results of the study are published in the *International Journal of*

#### Primateology

There is a crucial difference between tool use and object use. A tool helps the user get better outcomes. Jayashree Mazumder, first author of the paper explains in an email to *The Hindu*: "When we change either the function or structure... of an object, we make it a tool. But when we use an item in the manner it is supposed to be used, we are not making it a tool... it is an object use."

#### Identifying individuals

Observing the long-tailed macaques from a distance of about 10 metres for close to four months, Ms Mazumder, who is working for her PhD at IISER Mohali, has developed a catalogue of the individuals studied. Each individual was identified based on marks on the face

or body. "Identifying adults is easy. They are like humans with distinct features, for example, presence of black or white spots in different locations of the face, scar marks, body size, sex and behaviour. The juveniles and sub-adults were slightly difficult but they too can be identified in a similar fashion," says Ms Mazumder.

Stefano S.K. Kaburu, professor at the University of Wolverhampton, U.K., a co-author of the paper introduced her to the behavioural data collecting software and guided her in designing the study methods.

#### Prevalent in males

As per their observations, 14 individuals used tools, and tool-use was more common among males. "The biased

nature of tool-use could be due to many reasons. It has been hypothesised that the weight of the individual has something to do with the tool-culture. Again, the tool activity itself also defines who uses them more often," says Ms Mazumder.

She gives the example of how among chimpanzees, females excel in fishing, which they learn from their mothers. Males, on the other hand, become adept in hunting, which they pick up from their peers. "Thus there could be social, eco-

logical as well as demographic factors that could decide how tool-culture is divided among the animals. But we need more studies to come to any conclusion," she says.

According to her, the most exciting part was how the macaques decide what tool and technology to use. "Some of the macaques had few trials and errors, but it did not take them long to understand that the technique or tool was not providing the best outcome, and therefore, they were very quick in switching," she says.

Though the long-tailed macaques are further from humans in relatedness than chimpanzees or apes, this study could offer a perspective on evolutionary origins of tool use behaviour.



**Dextrous primate:** A long-tailed macaque in Great Nicobar island uses a scraping tool to process the food before consuming it. ■ JAYASHREE MAZUMDER



**Handed down:** Research suggests prehistoric humans played the 'drum' from whatever material they found suitable, borrowing from our ancestral primate cousins. ■ K. V. SRINIVASAN

# Musical scales are a prehistoric gift to us



#### SPEAKING OF SCIENCE

D. BALASUBRAMANIAN

During the last few months, several groups have come up with interesting publications on how music affects the mind. The first is a report on March 1 from a group from Indiana University in the U.S., stating that music may overcome delirium in critically ill patients (<https://doi.org/10.4037/ajcc2020175>). Such patients experience acute mental disturbance, with speech disorder and hallucinations. The researchers attempted to try music as a drug-free intervention in 117 such patients, and gave half of them music - either their own personally chosen music (PM), or relaxing slow tempo music (STM), and compared them with a control group which was not offered music. The music was offered to the experimental group for 1 hour, twice daily for a week, and their progress noted. Results revealed that such music delivery (PM or STM, either was OK) reduced the incidence of delirium. When audio-books were offered instead of music, it did not help! The STM chosen had relaxing (60-80 beats per minute) classical music, native American flute sounds, or relaxing piano music - all preselected by a board-certified music therapist. They concluded that music is a useful non-pharmacological intervention for critically ill patients.

A little earlier was published a report in *Current Science* (118 (4), 612-620; 2020) from Dr. B. Geethanjali of SSN College, Chennai, and her colleagues, titled "Evaluating the effect of music intervention on hypertension". They did a randomised controlled assessment of 200 high-blood-pressure patients, measuring their heart rate, respiratory rate (RR) and mean arterial pressure (MAP), and found that these parameters declined after music intervention for one month. The researchers chose to offer music intervention, along with the regular treatment, and chose the raga Hindola (or Malkauns) - a pentatonic, 'low arousal', and pleasant one. (As we all know and experience, fast music and rhythms are 'high arousal', and excite us).

About this time also, the well-known music therapist, Rajan Shankar of Hyderabad came out with a scholarly and well-researched monograph: "the healing power of music", with details on the kind of ragas that can be used in therapy, and a detailed description of as many as 35 known Carnatic music ragas (many common to Hindustani music too), and some case studies.

#### A 'universality' to music appreciation

Note that while America's Indiana University researchers used music that was familiar to the patients of the 'Western' cultural background, and the Chennai authors used the music familiar in the South, the question is can music penetrate cultural differences with its ability to evoke emotions? This is the question that was studied by the brain researcher Nandini Chatterji Singh of the National Brain Research Centre at Manesar, Haryana, and the results of her studies have appeared six months ago in the journal *PLOS ONE* (<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0222380>). Here, she and her group played excerpts from twelve ragas from Hindustani music, online to 144 people from many parts of India, and 112 participants from non-Indian cultural backgrounds (from the U.S., the U.K., parts of Europe, Japan, Korea). They played the *alap* part (a slow-paced introduction of the swaras of the raga, which define the sequence of the notes of the octave, with no rhythm) followed by the *gat* (the same melodic sequence of the swaras but in a faster pace, and with the accompaniment of a percussion instrument (usually a tabla) with an explicit rhythmic cycle). These were played on a sarod. When ragas such as Hansdhwani were played, both the 'encultured' listeners from India and the 'non-encultured' group from abroad felt 'happy' or 'romantic', and when the raga Marwa was played, they described a feeling of 'sadness'. The non-encultured group responded to the rhythmic part, the *gat*, more readily. This, the researchers point out, is in agreement with other reports wherein American members in the audience reacted more readily when they witnessed traditional Indian classical dance. There thus appears to be an 'universality' in emotions in the auditory domain. They further note that a similar kind of reaction when foreigners were invited to listen to music of the Javanese people.

#### Ancestral gift!

This raises the question of how this universality has come about, and how music across the world uses the basic tonal alphabets and rhythms. Is this an evolutionary gift to us, much as DNA sequences are? What are the origins of music in us humans? A whole field termed 'biomusicology' has come about since the 1990s, which studies the origins of music, what areas of the brain are involved in music processing and the functions, uses and costs of music making, and what universal features can be detected across various cultures. Some researchers have suggested that prehistoric humans played the 'drum' from whatever material they found suitable, and that it is an evolutionary borrowing from our ancestral cousins, the primates. And some archaeologists have looked at the kind of music from prehistoric, Paleolithic ages of humans (Neanderthals) about 4000-5000 years ago. The first such prehistoric musical instrument was a 'flute', made of the bone of a young bear, in Slovenia; this find has at least three holes in the hollowed-out bone, perhaps there were more, which were broken away when found.

Another set of flutes, found in the Jiahu region of China, was dated even earlier (7000-8000 years ago, using isotope dating methods), and when the researchers played them (vertically like a shehnai), they found the music reminded them of the traditional do, re, fa, so, la, ti (or sa, re, ga, ma pa..) scale! (More on this in my earlier column in *The Hindu*, of October 14, 1999). Recall what Saint Thyagaraja wrote: Sobhillu Saptaswara (worship the goddess presiding over the seven swaras from the navel to the head to the throat, tongue and the nostrils)!

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## Brazil bangs pots and pans to protest

A survey showed that 64% of Brazilians rejected the way Bolsonaro handled COVID-19 crisis

### SAO PAULO



At 8.30 p.m. on Wednesday, the city erupted in protest: cars honked on

avenues, women banged pots and pans on their balconies, boys beat drums, and thousands shouted "Fora Bolsonaro!" (Bolsonaro out) from the windows. With people blinking the lights of their homes, the banging of utensils – a South American way of protesting against the government – rippled through posh condominiums and middle-class towers for 30 minutes.

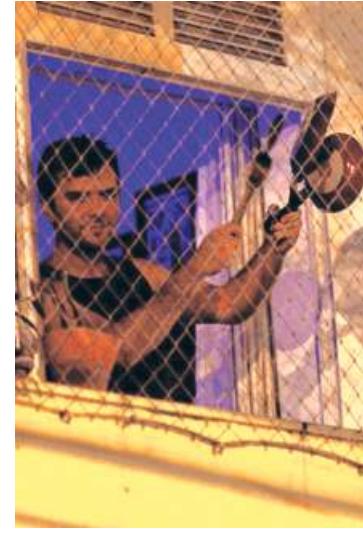
Jair Bolsonaro, the President who has behaved erratically since the outbreak of COVID-19, has angered many Brazilians. Even after 23 government officials, who travelled with him to Florida recently, tested posi-

tive, Mr. Bolsonaro said on Friday he was not worried about a "little cold". Earlier, he had said he would do another test to see if he was infected (he has already been tested thrice). Then, he launched a tirade against State Governors for "creating a hysteria" about the virus.

With more than 900 confirmed cases, 11 deaths and many suspected fatalities, Brazil is shivering with fear but Mr. Bolsonaro continues to send out confusing signals, upsetting the vast majority of middle class, which voted for him in 2018. A survey released on Thursday showed that 64% of Brazilians rejected the way Mr. Bolsonaro has handled the COVID-19 crisis, and 45% of people want him impeached. "People are feeling abandoned by the President. He has been talking about his birthday plans and calling out his supporters to the streets. There is no leadership," says

a top-level official in the Ministry of Health, speaking on condition of anonymity. "We are not prepared to handle this pandemic." Brazilian healthcare workers are in panic: top private hospitals have run out of beds, doctors do not have enough tests kits, and public hospitals are reporting a shortage of sanitizers, masks and gloves. According to the Unified Healthcare System (SUS) data, the country has 61,219 respirators, but most of the equipment is concentrated in the southern States.

As horror stories of deaths because of the lack of ventilators in Italy come in, the people dependent on SUS, which is free and spread across the country, are worried sick. Outside a metro station just off Clínicas, a cluster of massive hospitals, Rodrigo Filho, 27, eagerly waits for his mother, who has gone inside to get a test. "We live far away and spent two hours in crowded trains and buses to get here. I am not sure if my mother will get tested. She is in a bad shape," says Mr. Filho, who works as a car-



penter. "As there are no testing centres near our house, I have to skip work to bring my mother here. If I lose my job, we are sunk."

With many offices shut, many middle-class Brazilians are in self-isolation. But as pubs, restaurants,

malls and factories are still open, the working class have to choose between working or sitting at home. For 40% of the people who are in the informal sector, falling sick is not an option. As the virus is now transmitting locally in all 29 States, SUS is under a great stress.

### Awaiting disaster

In a shocking statement on Friday, federal Health Minister Luiz Mandetta spelled out the disaster that awaits the country. "The virus here is following the growth graph in European countries. The COVID-19 cases will peak here in mid-April and our healthcare system will collapse," said Mr. Mandetta. "The graph will start falling quickly only in September."

Till a few years ago, Brazil had one of the best healthcare systems in the developing world. During the Workers Party government between 2003 and 2016, the country spent 8% of GDP on health, created a network of emergency units and invited thou-

sands of Cuban doctors to work in remote areas. "The last time there was a global pandemic, AIDS, Brazil contained the transmission much effectively than the U.S. and many European countries," said Brian Mier, the co-editor of Brasil Wire news portal.

The system suffered a setback in 2017 when the Michel Temer government put a spending cap on healthcare for 20 years and cut the minimum health budget guaranteed by the Constitution by \$210 million. In 2019, Mr. Bolsonaro asked the Cuban doctors to leave Brazil, and cut the health budget by \$250 million.

But in this difficult time, ordinary Brazilians have not lost faith in their doctors and nurses. On Friday evening, people across the country – from the slums of Rio de Janeiro to shiny buildings in São Paulo's leafy neighbourhoods – stood on their balconies to applaud the healthcare professionals fighting the virus. After several rounds of clapping, many began to beat their pans and pots amid loud shouts of "Bolsonaro out!"

## The call for collective action

A gathering in Colombo of feminists from S. Asia called for solidarity among rights activists

### COLOMBO



It was in the early 1980s that one of Sri Lanka's foremost feminist scholars Kumari Jayawardena (in picture) wrote *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, considered a classic in the academic and activist worlds.

About 30 years later, the London-based Verso books republished it, proving the book's enduring relevance. Writing in *The Guardian* about it in 2017, noted British socialist feminist Sheila Rowbotham said: "More than three decades after it first came out, the book remains the best introduction to the history of women's movements in Turkey, Egypt, Iran, India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, the Philippines, China, Viet-

nam, Korea and Japan."

"There was a gap about our part of the world," Ms. Jayawardena told *The Hindu* in an interview that year, on her motivations for writing it. "To discuss the knowledge and status of women today, it is important to know what they have gained and how," she said. It was in that spirit that a group of feminists from the region decided to meet in Colombo in early March. They may have got their timing just right, convening barely days before COVID-19 brought South Asia, like much of the rest of the world, to a halt.

The reason that the feminist scholars and activists gathered at a seminar, supported by UN Women, was to brainstorm and come up with a declaration. Their inputs will feed into deliberations at a forum in Mexico scheduled later this summer, to mark 25 years since the Fourth



World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), which called for global action for 'Equality, Development and Peace'. The participants at the Colombo seminar were from Sri Lanka, India,

Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. They represented different generations of women's movements in the Global South and at times, very different perspectives too. That diversity was precisely what the organisers had hoped for. It wasn't that one generation did not appreciate the work of the other, but they all felt there were serious gaps that demanded more collective thinking and action.

### Human rights approach

They decided to avoid familiar 'UN speak' of Sustainable Development Goals, or the often-cited law and order approach, and instead focused on a human rights approach to women's rights. The declaration is a feminist take on global concerns, ranging from climate change, violence against women, disappearance and extra-judicial killings, majoritarianism and authoritarianism to extremism. Apart from the document, the meeting also offered a chance for some introspection.

Speaking of a shift in women's ac-

tivism along the years, Radhika Coomaraswamy, a senior activist and former UN Under-Secretary-General who was involved in organising the seminar, noted that the subsequent generation of feminists were more focused on issues and at times, did not frame them holistically.

"Also, South Asian feminist solidarity has weakened since the 1990s. There is perhaps solidarity nationally and even globally, but not regionally," she told *The Hindu*. But the more worrying political reality facing women's movements, she said, is the manner in which right-wing groups are "hijacking" feminist movements.

Subha Wijesiriwardena, a women's rights activist in her 30s, agreed that regional solidarity could certainly be strengthened, but also pointed to other broader shifts in women's rights activism that had now become more "NGOised" and "donor-driven". "At a micro level, each of our countries have become more insular with this idea of a

nation being imposed by those governing us. Moreover, our generation grew up during the civil war in Sri Lanka, so that too has shaped our activism significantly," she said.

The feminists also found out that the differences in perspective and positions were not merely generational. Some of the arguments in the discussions in Colombo were very political. For instance, on whether and how to include questions of identity based on sexuality, and rights tied to technology in the ambit of women's rights.

While the discussions showed the differences even among "like-minded" feminists, for younger participants like Ms. Wijesiriwardena, it "re-ignited" the faith in the value of a gathering like this that allowed for such conversations. It was only fitting that participants invited Ms. Jayawardena and honoured her. The breadth and depth of her work, they know, will remain crucial to their struggles and the future of feminist history across the world.

## Bangladesh readies itself for the COVID-19 battle

Authorities have shut down an area, set up isolation units and kept a graveyard ready

### DHAKA



Bangladeshis have begun to shut themselves down. A sub-district, about 125 km from Dhaka, has become the first potential hotspot for COVID-19 cases to come under partial lockdown. The local administration has shut public transport and shops, except grocery and drug stores, as at least 613 people have returned home to the area from European nations, mostly from Italy and Spain. The area, known as Shibchar in central Bangladesh, has sent about 10,000 people to Europe as migrant workers. "They are now coming back, turning the area into a risk zone," said Shamsuddin Khan, chairman of the sub-district. "May God save us," he said.

Mr. Khan is part of a team assigned to warn the residents against the growing risks of infections and order the migrant workers to stay indoors or in self-isolation.

Shibchar, home to 4,27,913 people, is just the first leg of the government's unfolding war against the virus. It also sheds light on how COVID-19 has confined people to their homes in a remote corner of the world. The area is now a hotbed of frustration over how lives are being upended by the disease that was first detected in China's Wuhan.

On the afternoon of March 18, Bangladesh announced the first death from COVID-19 – the 70-year-old patient was also suffering from a combination of diabetes, hypertension, and kidney and lung ailments. As the news broke, people started to leave Dhaka streets and hurry home. Many crowded shops to hoard basic

household items to tide through days or weeks, in signs of panic buying. Santona, a sales clerk at an outlet of chain supermarket Agora in Segunbagicha neighbourhood, said she went home late after work due to a sudden rush of customers.

### People going inward

In times of crisis, fear gives way to a profound sense of solidarity. The virus is having an opposite effect, sending people inward and unmooring families from communities.

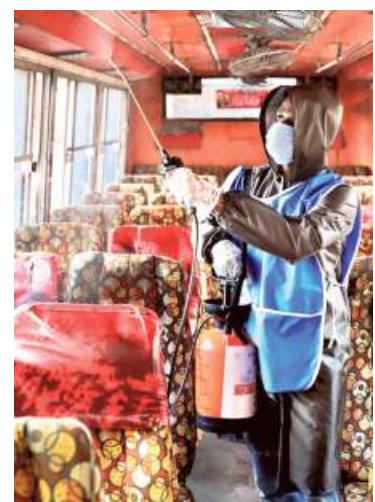
Like many Dhaka residents, Muhammad Hasan untethered himself from routines and activities: no weekend outings, no dining out with his children and wife. His employer, Bangladesh's largest telecom company Grameenphone, has allowed him and many others to work from home.

Not just Grameenphone, but also other telecom companies, including Robi, are letting their employees work remotely as the country is beginning to retreat from public life.

While he is busy at home working, Mr. Hasan has a different challenge of how to beat the boredom for his children. He renewed his Netflix subscription to binge-watch TV series.

The most obvious impact is on garment exports that account for 84% of Bangladesh's total overseas sales. European and American retailers are cancelling clothing orders almost every day, costing the local manufacturers more than \$100 million in lost business, as consumer spirits in the Western world are depressed, according to Rubana Huq, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association. "We are facing a grave situation with the coronavirus," Ms. Huq said, adding that the business drought would lead to financial disruption at the manufacturing companies.

There was initial confusion over how to respond to the outbreak. With infections on the rise and two septuagenarians dead, it appears that the administration's efforts to limit the spread of the virus have ac-



celerated. The celebrations of independence leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's birth centenary have been scaled down. Amid mounting criticism, the government eventually shut schools across the country. The Army has been assigned to operate

two quarantine camps, not far from the Dhaka airport. In addition, several hospitals have been designated for suspected virus cases. The Department of Archaeology closed sites and museums to visitors. Dhaka University asked its students to vacate dormitories, days after it suspended classes. In a sad reminder of growing vulnerability to the virus, city corporation authorities in Dhaka have designated a graveyard for the dead. Local administrations in districts have ratcheted up surveillance. In the port city of Chittagong, another high-risk zone, the police banned social events in restaurants and community centres.

An uneasy quiet seems to have settled across the country, but some people like Ms. Santona and her co-workers choose to carry on, more concerned about their livelihoods. For them, social distancing is far from an option. The weekend means busy hours for them as more customers line up to stock up for a period of quarantine.

## Chronicle of an arrest foretold

The arrest of an editor has triggered an outcry against Pakistan's handling of media freedom

### LAHORE



On March 12, Pakistan's anti-corruption agency, the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), arrested Mir Shakil-ur-Rehman (in picture), the editor-in-chief of Jang Group, the largest media group in the country. The group owns the largest Urdu newspaper *Jang* and English daily *The News*, besides Geo News and other television channels.

Mr. Rehman was arrested on charges pertaining to a 34-year-old property transaction. Many in the media and Opposition parties see the arrest as the government's way of muzzling the media. The Human Rights Watch, the Committee to Protect Journalists and many other national and international human

rights and media groups have condemned the arrest. "We noted with concern the arrest of Mir Shakil-ur-Rehman. Press freedom, due process, and the rule of law are pillars of every democracy," tweeted the official account of the U.S. Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs (SCA), signed by Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Alice Wells.

Firdous Ashiq Awan, Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Information and Broadcasting, held a press conference on the matter, distancing the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government of Imran Khan from the arrest. Ms. Awan said the NAB is an independent institution and the arrest was not an attack on media freedom.

The NAB has been criticised by Opposition politicians for its one-sided functioning in the past. Right after Ms. Awan's press conference, car-

denied this. It has been reported that in meetings with journalists, Prime Minister Khan criticised the Jang Group and *Dawn*. "Prime Minister Imran Khan can't tolerate the voice of dissent. He has recently expressed his displeasure against Jang/Geo and daily *Dawn*. Arrest of Mir Shakeel ur Rehman is the first step. *Dawn* can be the next," tweeted senior journalist Mazhar Abbas.

**Selectivity and arbitrariness**  
Harris Khalique, a poet and secretary-general of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, said the arrest of Mr. Rehman is yet another example of selectivity and arbitrariness in the NAB's conduct. "The regime is blatantly going after individuals it dislikes in the name of curbing corruption. I share the view of the wider journalist community and civil society in Pakistan that it is an attempt towards silencing any critical opinion expressed over the government's weak political and economic policies," he told *The Hindu*.



Imran Aslam, President of Jang Group and Geo TV Network, told *The Hindu* that anybody who has been watching Pakistan's media over the years would know that "this was an arrest foretold". The Jang/Geo group has been facing intimidation, pressure and various kinds of threats for a long time now, he said. "Not just the management but our reporters and staff members have been harassed. There is a long litany that goes on and on."

The arrest is a "body blow to all of us – those who have worked with him and those of us who have known him in a personal capacity as well", Mr. Aslam added. "This is a direct attack on the freedom of the press. This isn't just another case of accountability. This is probably because we were holding the NAB accountable. We have felt our space being encroached upon – for which we have fought for a long period of time. We have seen how these shadows had been lengthening."

Senator Sherry Rehman said the

arrest is open harassment of media. "First it was *Dawn* and other assorted journalists, and now *The News*. This government just wants megaphones that sing its praises and nothing else on air. The message to the media and the Opposition is clear: don't be telling any truth to power, we will dig up old cases and put the NAB on your trail," Ms. Rehman told *The Hindu*.

Opposition parties – including the PML-N and PPP – filed a petition in the Islamabad High Court against Mr. Rehman's arrest, arguing it was part of a crackdown on the media by the government and an attack on freedom of expression.

On Wednesday, the High Court asked PEMRA to restore Geo to its original numbers on TV. Geo has now been restored to its original position but journalists remain concerned. According to a report in *The News*, "After failing to implicate Mir Shakil-ur-Rehman in a 34-year old land case, now efforts are afoot to fabricate new cases."



Mehmood Sarfraz  
is a journalist  
based in Lahore

# Dhoni has to show he deserves India spot: Raju

Difficult task for anyone returning from a long break, feels former selector who backed MS as skipper in 2007

## CRICKET

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM

HYDERABAD  
Doubts linger around the Indian Premier League's prospects of having a truncated version and simultaneously there is talk about how originally it was also seen as a platform to evaluate M.S. Dhoni. Venkatapathy Raju, who was a member of the selection panel that appointed Dhoni as India skipper back in 2007, admitted that the former India captain's national comeback could be a difficult endeavour.

On being specific about Dhoni's chances of wearing the blue shade again, the former India left-arm spinner said that with the current selectors investing in two wicketkeepers, the legend would have to understand his role.

"He has been a match-winner for 15 years and has a huge fan following. But, for any international sportsper-



**A leader is born:** Dhoni repaid the selectors' faith by returning with the 2007 T20 World Cup.

son to come back after such a long break is difficult. And, importantly, Dhoni should be in the scheme of things to be picked based on performances in the IPL, if at all it is held," Raju said.

Still remarkably fit, Dhoni's 38 summers, could still be a factor and Raju said: "Any player has to keep playing and performing to be in

contention. Be it domestic, India-A series or any other competitive cricket. For, you are not out to prove yourself to others, but to prove to yourself that you belong

there. Age also is a big factor. Playing international cricket is never easy. It demands a different level of fitness and skills."

Remembering Dhoni's halcyon days when he emerged as India's captain, Raju said: "Dhoni was the only cricketer performing under pressure at the time, so we unanimously decided to go with him.

"The guiding principle for our panel was simple – only consistent performers and match-winners would be considered. Dhoni's calmness and the way he handled things impressed all of us. It was a unanimous decision.

"The other reason for Dhoni being preferred was that several India players were returning from injuries or long breaks. Hence, we thought he was the best option, and we never had any regrets."

Raju also highlighted that he and his fellow selectors backed Anil Kumble as the



Raju. ■ FILE PHOTO: K.V.S. GIRI

Test captain. "It is important to note that we made Kumble the Test captain for the 2007 Australia tour. That proved to be a wise move given the infamous 'Monkeygate' and the way Kumble and the late Dr. M.V. Sridhar (then administrative manager of the Indian team) handled the issue."

While Raju leaned into nostalgia, in a lighter vein he quipped: "Firstly, I never wanted to be a selector having cursed them for not getting my due as a player!"

Dhoni will silently retire, says Gavaskar

SPORTS BUREAU  
NEW DELHI

Former India captain Sunil Gavaskar feels wicketkeeper-batsman M.S. Dhoni won't be part of India's T20 World Cup squad.

## Team has moved on

The multi-nation event is scheduled to be played in Australia later this year and Gavaskar believes Team India has moved on from Dhoni and his presence in the squad for the showpiece tournament remains highly unlikely.

## Unlikely

"I would definitely like to see Dhoni in India's World Cup squad but it's highly unlikely that it is going to happen," Gavaskar told *Dainik Jagran*.

"The team has moved on. Dhoni is not someone to make big announcements, so I reckon he would silently retire from the game."

**Amul**



## Kohli's record tells a lot: Miandad

'You can't say he is scared of fast bowlers'



**Class act:** Miandad says it is a treat to watch Kohli bat. ■ AFP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
KARACHI

Pakistani cricket legend Javed Miandad is in awe of Virat Kohli's batting and has picked the India captain as his favourite batsman, saying his record "itself tells a lot".

The former Pakistan captain picked the current India skipper as his favourite due to his "classy" batting.

Speaking on his YouTube channel about the talent and depth present in the current Indian squad, Miandad especially praised Kohli for his enviable stats and the way he achieved them.

"I was asked who is the best in the Indian cricket team and I chose Virat Kohli," Miandad said.

## Stats are visible

"I don't have to say much, his performance itself tells a lot. People have to admit this as stats are visible."

"Virat performed really well in South Africa; even on an uneven wicket, he scored

a hundred. You cannot say he is scared of fast bowlers or he cannot play on bouncy pitches or he doesn't play spinners well."

Miandad stated that both Rohit Sharma and Kohli make batting look easy.

One of the toughest competitors of his time, Miandad is known for his outspokenness. On Kohli, he added, "He is a clean hitter. Look at his shots, it feels so good to watch him bat. He has class."

The NBA halted its season on March 11 after Utah's Rudy Gobert tested positive for coronavirus.

## NBA uncertain about salaries after April 1

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
NEW YORK

The NBA plans to pay full salaries to players as scheduled on April 1 but could begin cutting salaries to recover money from cancelled games by April 15, ESPN said on Saturday.

Citing a league memo shared with NBA clubs on Friday, the sport network's website said the league might soon begin recovering salary based on a 'force majeure' clause in its collective bargaining agreement with players.

The NBA halted its season on March 11 after Utah's Rudy Gobert tested positive for coronavirus.

The memo said the league will inform teams about its plans before the April 15 payment date. That's the day the league's regular season was set to end before the schedule was suspended by the COVID-19 outbreak.

Under terms of the NBA-union deal, the league can withhold a percentage of a player's salary for a catastrophic situation that forces games to be cancelled, including a pandemic.

## CA to moot reserve days for men's T20 World Cup

the knockout stages of the women's T20 World Cup in Australia.

As the ICC's current playing conditions stand, the men's T20 World Cup, slated to begin here on October 18, will have no reserve days before the final at the MCG on November 15. But, an ICC spokesperson said, accord-

ing to a report in *cricket.au.com*, that conditions for the men's World Cup would be discussed at a Cricket Committee meeting before they are formally signed by the Chief Executives Committee.

Should any of ICC's member boards wish to suggest changes to playing conditions, they will have the op-

portunity to do so at the CEC gathering, although it's rare for standard playing conditions to be revised at that stage.

CA chief executive Kevin

Roberts, who will be part of that CEC meeting, said a case existed for the inclusion of reserve days in the upcoming men's T20 World Cup.

"There's always cause for reflection at the end of any tournament or any season, in terms of how you approach future tournaments," Roberts said.

He, however, conceded that there was a valid argument to maintain the playing conditions that governed the women's tournament.

Banerjee was a great motivator, says former SBT coach Najeeb

## TRIBUTE

M.R. PRAVEEN CHANDRAN  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Former international striker Xavier Pius is among the few footballers from Kerala who were fortunate to be coached by the late P.K. Banerjee. Pius, who was part of the hugely successful Premier Tyres football team, played a few seasons in Kolkata with Mohun Bagan in the late 70s and came under the tutelage of PK.

**Culture change**  
Pius, who was one of the best strikers in the India during his playing days, recalls PK more as a friend than as a coach. "I was nervous when I landed in Kolkata in the '70s. It was a big culture change for me."

"Those days players from outside Bengal didn't mingle too much with the local players. Shyam Thapa, Ulaganathan and I were the outstation players and we were together most of the time. But before every match PK used to come to our room and would talk a lot to make us comfortable."

"He was like a walking encyclopedia, followed all



**Sweet home:** P.K. Banerjee strikes a pose with family members. ■ THE HINDU ARCHIVES

sports and would tell us incidents from other games to motivate us."

## Didn't change our styles

"One day he would talk to us about boxing and the next day it would be tennis. He was very friendly. As we were all established players he never bothered to change our styles but he was good in

getting the best out of us."

"I had a good rapport with Ulaganathan and our combination was deadly and we scored a lot of goals. The last time I met PK was in 2009 in Kolkata when he was recovering from a mild heart attack. The warmth was still there," said Pius.

Former SBT coach N.M. Najeeb was another player



Xavier Pius. ■ FILE PHOTO

who played under PK when he was with East Bengal during the 1979-80 season.

"The first thing which struck me was his simplicity. When I first addressed him as coach he insisted that I should call him as 'PK da'."

"He was a great motivator and his man-management skills was superb and that was one reason why he was very successful as a coach," said Najeeb. "He took us out for dinner and sometimes used to invite the whole team to his place for food."

"He had great regard for my uncle Olympian Abdul Rahman who was his teammate at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. "He would constantly remind me how good my uncle was and wanted me to be even better than him," said Najeeb.

## Teeing off with caution

### GOLF

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
PHOENIX

Anna Nordqvist drained a birdie putt on the second playoff hole, pumped her fist and gave a slight wave to half a dozen people clapping near the green.

The title in hand, the two-time Major champion turned to playing partner Lisa Pettersson and hesitated.

The customary post-

round hug was out of question, so the Swedish players touched elbows and walked off the green with a laugh.

The major golf tours may have shut down during the coronavirus outbreak, but a handful of mini tours are playing through.

"I'm sure there's a lot of people questioning why we're playing, but everyone is playing golf anyway," said Nordqvist after winning a Cactus Tour event at the Moon Valley Country Club.



**Going ahead:** The major tours have shut down, but a few minor ones are being held in the United States. ■ AP

## COVID-19 IMPACT



**Hamilton says he's self-isolating**

LONDON

Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton says he has been self-isolating for more than a week after meeting people who later tested positive.

Hamilton was at a charity event here on March 4 also attended by actor Idris Elba and the wife of the Canadian Prime Minister, Sophie Gregoire-Trudeau. Both were later found to have the virus. In a message on social media, Hamilton says he's shown zero symptoms but has been isolating himself from other people ever since March 13, when the Australian Grand Prix was called off. "I want to let you know that I am doing well," Hamilton said in a statement. AGENCE

## ECB suspends pro matches till May 28

LONDON

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has suspended all professional cricket till May 28, delaying the start of the season. The ECB took the decision following discussions with counties, MCC and the Professional Cricketers' Association. The ECB said it would review the position when needed. PTI

## Meditation is Karthik's mantra

KOLKATA

With the Indian Premier League getting postponed, Kolkata Knight Riders captain Dinesh Karthik has gone into self-isolation. Karthik has been spending time at home, doing shadow practice and meditation for the last three days. "I really miss the game, but I am doing everything I can to stay connected with the game and trying to do everything that is part of the sport," said Karthik in a video message uploaded on Twitter. The wicketkeeper-batsman, who has been following some

## Thomas and Uber Cup put off to August

NEW DELHI

The Badminton World Federation (BWF) has postponed the Thomas and Uber Cup, the premier global team championships, to be held in Denmark for three months from the scheduled date in May in view of COVID-19. The tournament is now scheduled for August 15-23 in Aarhus, Denmark.

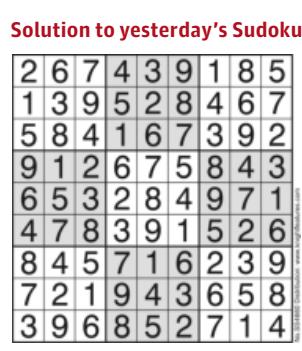


safety practices, urged the fans to do so too. "Stay safe and stay indoors as much as possible. It's not just taking care of ourselves, it's to take care of everyone," he said.

## SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★



CM  
YK

# When will the fate of the Olympics be known?

IOC president Bach has repeatedly said it's too early to announce a final decision

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
TOKYO

The Olympic flame has arrived in Japan from Greece. Next comes the torch relay around the country, which is scheduled to start on Thursday from Fukushima prefecture in northern Japan.

Organisers have asked crowds to be restrained, but have been imprecise about what that means. Greek officials last week stopped a relay there on the second day and did not resume because of crowd size.

In the face of the coronavirus pandemic, Japanese organisers and IOC president Thomas Bach say that the Games will open on July 24 at the \$1.43 billion National Stadium in central Tokyo.

Bach has repeatedly said it's too early to announce a final decision, saying he's taking advice from a task force that includes the World Health Organisation.

But now there's push back, mostly from athletes and former Olympians who are complaining: they can't train, qualifying events have been cancelled, and the chaos is sure to favour some



**Hope springs:** The Olympic flame which arrived in Japan on Friday will be on public display in some areas affected by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. ■ AP

over others. Then there's the question of bringing 11,000 athletes and staff together in the Olympic Village, and 4,400 Paralympians a month later.

Getting the flame to Japan represents a minor victory for both organisers and the IOC. Its symbolic presence could give the IOC space to

postpone the Tokyo Olympics, leaving the symbol behind as a reminder of what's still to come.

#### What is the deadline for making a final decision?

Bach surely knows, but he is not saying. In an interview with the *New York Times* Bach said cancellation is not

on the agenda. That leaves only going ahead, or postponement, as the options. Empty venues seem to have been ruled out.

#### Who will make the final decision?

It will be made jointly with the IOC, the city of Tokyo, and the Japanese Olympic

Committee. They are the three that signed the 81-page Host City Agreement, which spells out in enormous details all Games contingencies.

The IOC has all the leverage, though it will have to honour WHO suggestions and the interests of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The IOC has a reserve fund of about \$2 billion and insurance to cover losses. The contract says termination can occur "... if the IOC has reasonable grounds to believe, in its sole discretion, that the safety of participants in the Games is seriously threatened or jeopardised for any reason, whatsoever."

Tokyo is officially spending \$12.6 billion to organise the Olympics, but a national audit says it's at least twice that much.

**How important is the torch relay to the IOC and local organisers?**

It's important symbolism for the Japanese government and Prime Minister Abe.

He is Japan's longest-serving premier and hopes to use the Olympics to argue that

the Fukushima area has recovered from the disaster nine years ago.

The government has dubbed these The Recovery Olympics. However, many residents are still living in temporary quarters after the earthquake, tsunami and meltdown of three nuclear reactors in 2011.

Getting the relay started from Fukushima also helps major IOC sponsors Coca-Cola and Toyota, who pay millions to give their brands exposure during the relay. Crowds are being asked to be restrained. This will not keep the images of the relay from being transmitted daily around the globe on television. Bach is expected to watch the relay when it reaches Hiroshima on May 18-19.

#### Any bookmaker taking odds?

An Irish bookmaker says 1-7 Games will not open as scheduled on July 24.

A poll by Japanese news agency Kyodo this week showed 69.9% of Japanese questioned do not believe the Games will begin on time.



daCunha/AB/691

## Indian tennis players work on future ventures

Trying to make the most of the COVID-19-forced break

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

resort to host tournaments in future at a scenic location.

Mumbai-based Purav Raja has also busied himself in shaping up his business. "I am starting 'Restrung India', a racket customising business. It's about building your own racket. I am spending some time on this now which was difficult being on road. This is fun, giving Indian players a chance to use best equipment," he said.

Almost all of them are restricted to doing fitness drills at home with courts and gyms out of bound.

Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan is spending time hitting at private courts and handling the marketing of their family resort in Puducherry.

"It obviously is unusual situation. We can hit at a few places where people have private space and obviously the gathering is small. A few players doing that. I am in Puducherry to help with my resort (K resort)," Jeevan told PTI.

The left-hander said he is working on developing a tennis facility at their family

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