



Congress criticises govt.
move to go ahead with
Central Vista project
page 8



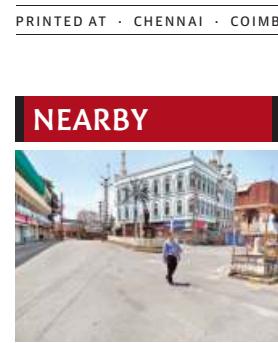
IAF to conduct fly past
tomorrow to salute
COVID-19 warriors
page 9



Four more States
join 'One Nation One
Ration Card' scheme
page 9



Gotabaya Rajapaksa
rules out reconvening
Parliament in Sri Lanka
page 14



Bhilwara residents yearn
for return to normalcy
With the Bhilwara residents
expecting their lives to limp
back to normal sooner rather
than later from the lockdown
enforced to contain
COVID-19, stories of grit,
determination, compassion
and philanthropic gestures
have emerged in the city.
NORTH & EAST ▶ PAGE 4

AAP MLA infected; Delhi
reports two deaths

NEW DELHI
AAP MLA from Karol Bagh
Vishesh Ravi was among the
223 people who tested
positive for COVID-19 on
Friday. Two deaths were also
reported in the city, taking the
toll to 62. The total
number of cases now stands
at 3,738.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

First chargesheet filed
in Delhi riots case

NEW DELHI
The police on Friday filed the
first chargesheet in
connection with the riots that
broke out in north-east Delhi in
February this year. A senior
police officer said the
chargesheet was submitted in
Karkardooma Court on an
FIR lodged under IPC sections
of rioting, attempt to murder
and Arms Act at the Jafrabad
police station.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

Lockdown extended till May 17; curbs stay on public transport

Private cars, cabs to be allowed with fewer riders; buses with 50% commuters

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Friday issued new guidelines allowing considerable relaxations across red, orange and green zones, based on the evidence of COVID-19 infection, even though it extended the countrywide lockdown till May 17.

The lockdown, imposed first on March 24 in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, was to end on May 3.

The MHA asked local authorities to ensure 100% coverage of the Aarogya Setu app among the residents in the containment zones. The National Directive for COVID-19 management said use of the Aarogya Setu applica-

COVID-19

tion is to be mandatory for all employees, both private and public and "it should be the responsibility of the head of organisation to ensure 100% coverage of this App among the employees".

In green zones, buses can operate with up to 50% seating capacity and bus depots can operate with up to 50% capacity, the MHA said.

In orange zones, taxis and cab aggregators will be permitted to ply with only one passenger. Inter-district



Long wait ends: Migrant workers waiting on the IIT-Hyderabad campus to board a special train early on Friday to return to their home State of Jharkhand. ▶ MOHD ARIF

movement of vehicles will be allowed in orange zones for permitted activities and cars could have maximum two passengers besides the driver, and pillion riding will be allowed on two-wheelers.

In red zones, other than the containment zones, private cars will be allowed only for permitted activities with a maximum of two persons other than the driver but no pillion riders in two-wheelers. Irrespective of zones, however, all forms of other public transport – air, rail, metro and inter-State movement by road – will remain suspended except those allowed in select cases.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

MORE REPORTS ON ▶ PAGES 2, 3,
4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 14

Railways run 'Shramik Specials' to ferry stranded

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Railways on Friday began operating 'Shramik Special' trains to transport migrant workers, tourists, pilgrims, students and others stranded by the nationwide lockdown back to their home States.

The decision follows revised guidelines issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) allowing the movement of such people. Routine passenger trains have remained suspended for almost 40 days in the wake of the lockdown imposed in

March to contain the COVID-19 outbreak.

Done on State's request

Interestingly, the first such special train to ferry about 1,200 migrants from Lingampally (in Telangana) to Hatia (in Jharkhand) started its journey around 5 a.m. on Friday, even before the MHA guidelines were issued. Terming it a "one-off special train", a railways official said this was done on the request of the Telangana government.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Sealed border chokes travel to Gurugram

Hospitals, labs demand easier passage for staff to ensure proper patient care

ASHOK KUMAR
GURUGRAM

Commuters taking the Delhi-Gurugram Expressway to Millennium City, included among orange zones by the Union Health Ministry on Friday, had a harrowing time crossing the border with the intensified checking leading to long snarls and increased waiting time.

Scores of people were sent back by the police, which only allowed ambulances, those carrying passes authorised by the Centre and Haryana government, and those providing essential services to cross over.

The stricter curbs on inter-city movement severely affected the functioning of hospitals and pathology labs in both Delhi and Gurugram on Friday, prompting several sta-

Direct taxes revenues defy lockdown, jump 36.6% in April

Mumbai records 500% jump, followed by Bengaluru at 160%

MANOJIT SAHA
MUMBAI

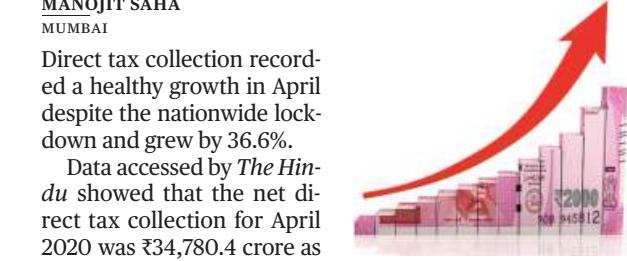
Direct tax collection recorded a healthy growth in April despite the nationwide lockdown and grew by 36.6%.

Data accessed by *The Hindu* showed that the net direct tax collection for April 2020 was ₹34,780.4 crore as compared to ₹25,466 crore recorded in April 2019, a jump of 36.6%.

Income tax collection in April was ₹19,762.1 crore while corporate tax collection was ₹4,608.1 crore.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) had convened a video-conference on Friday with tax commissioners to review the collection position during the lockdown period. The collection figures of different zones were discussed during the meeting.

CMYK



patients undergoing chemotherapy, dialysis and with other medical emergencies. A number of our health workers are settled outside Gurugram... it is difficult for them to move here," said Dr. Garg in a statement.

Arjun Dang, the CEO of Dr. Dangi Lab, said the sealing came on the back of restrictions in Faridabad for the past two days. He said that two of his senior consultants could not come from Gurugram. "Earlier four molecular biologists, all residents of Faridabad, were also not allowed.

We are authorised for COVID-19 tests and with four of the eight microbiologists not turning up for work, it becomes difficult to run operations. Eventually we made arrangements for their stay in Delhi," said Dr. Dang.

"I request to exclude doctors from this border sealing thing and allow them to travel with valid ID card so as the patients don't suffer," said Dr. Ashish Mahajan, in response to a Facebook post from *The Hindu* on the 'Gurgaon Helpline' page. A few, however, supported the sealing saying it would help curb the spread of the virus.

Gurugram MP and Union Minister Rao Inderjit said the decision could be reviewed in a couple of days.

Apart from strengthened

police presence on the Gurugram border, strict restrictions on other border points of the national capital adjoining Faridabad and Sonipat were also imposed by Haryana police personnel.

SEAL INTER-STATE BORDERS,
ORDERS CHIEF SECY. ▶ PAGE 2

keholders to demand easier passage.

Patients affected

Ritu Garg, zonal director, Fortis Memorial Research Institute, said a system to allow medical staff through with adequate screening would help ensure sustained medical care for patients. "We need to ensure assistance to

Make full auto value chain functional: plea

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Automakers reported negligible or nil sales in April, with the country under lockdown due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

The country's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki India and Hyundai Motor India on Friday said they had made zero dispatches to domestic dealers.

Separately, associations for auto component makers, manufacturers and dealers on Friday requested the Centre to allow resumption of operations by the entire value chain, including service workshops.

In a submission to Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla, they reasoned that a vehicle manufacturer could not begin operations if any supplier was unable to undertake production.

The department noted the effort of the officers in ensuring healthy growth of tax collection in these testing times. Among the zones, Mumbai reported a massive 500% growth in net tax collections, followed by Bengaluru that reported 160% growth. Delhi, at number three, reported a 34% growth in April.

Revised targets
The government is expected to miss the direct tax collect-

NIL SALES ▶ PAGE 15

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9829 247 247
9829 249 249
9829 256 256
7222 888 666



Jainee

NDE

Timings**DELHI**

SATURDAY, MAY. 02
RISE 05:40 SET 18:57
RISE 13:26 SET 02:13
SUNDAY, MAY. 03
RISE 05:39 SET 18:58
RISE 14:31 SET 02:55
MONDAY, MAY. 04
RISE 05:39 SET 18:59
RISE 15:38 SET 03:35

Delhi Weather

max min

Delhi City 39 25

Safdarjung 39 25

Palam 40 24

Delhi Pali Today

39°C A very warm weather

with partly cloudy sky to

prevail. Chances of light spell of

duststorm & thundershower.

Delhi Pali Tomorrow

39°C Mostly dry and very

warm day with partly cloudy sky.

Chances of thunderstorm with

gusty winds.

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THE HINDU

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Air quality of Delhi-NCR			
Delhi 146	Gurugram 165		
Ghaziabad 148	Faridabad 126		
Noida 138	Greater Noida 134		
Good 51-100	Satisfactory 101-200	Moderate 201-300	Poor >401
Very poor 301-400	Severe 401-500		
AIR QUALITY INDEX AT 4 P.M. YESTERDAY (AVERAGE OF PAST 24 HOURS) [SOURCE: CPCB]			

IN BRIEF**Civic bodies extend date for trade licence renewal**

NEW DELHI

Municipal corporations here on Friday extended the last date for renewal of various trade licenses up till June 30 in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, said officials. The North Delhi Municipal Corporation, as well as the East civic body, informed that the last date for health trade licenses, general trade licenses, veterinary and factory licenses could be renewed without payment of late fee or penalty. The North body also cancelled bookings at its community halls until the end of the lockdown.

HIMACHAL PRADESH PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT REQUEST FOR EMPANELMENT (RFE) OF CONSULTANTS

The Chief Engineer (H2)HP.PWD, Hamirpur on behalf of Governor of H.P invites the proposals , in electronic/offline tendering system from the eligible consultants for empanelment as detailed in the table.

Sr.No.1:-
Scope of Proposal:-
Empanelment of consultants for

1. Preparation of Detailed Project Report of Roads & Bridges and other related reports.

2. Design Consultancy for :
i) Design of Buildings and
ii) Design of Bridges.

Cost of tender form/ Application : 500/-

Starting Date for downloading Bid : 06.05.2020,

EMD (Rs.) : 25,000/-

Deadline for Submission of Bid : 26.05.2020 11.00 AM

The bidders are advised to note other details of proposal from the department website www.hptenders.gov.in.

Chief Engineer (H2),
HPPWD, Hamirpur,
Pin Code 177001Telephone No. 01972-22925
e-mail: ce-ham-hp@nic.in
On behalf of Governor of
Himachal Pradesh

HP / 0237/20-21

HIMACHAL PRADESH PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)

The Executive Engineer, Bhawana Division, HPPWD Bhawana on behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh, invites the item rate bids, in electronic tendering system from the eligible class of contractors registered with HP.PWD for the works as detailed in the table:-

Sr. No.	Name of work	Estimated cost	Starting Date for downloading Bid	Earnest Money	Deadline for submission of Bid
1.	C/o Thakurdwara Ram Nagar Rajehar Tea Estate Godown Shiv Nagar Colony Radha Krishan Mandir Himalaya via Tea Factory Salboni Km. 0/0 to 9/40 (SH: Formation cutting, Passing Places, R/walls, Cross Drainage, Providing & laying GSB, P/L WBM-II, WBM-III, C.C. pavement, Tarring work, Side drain, Parapets and road Furniture). (Under NABARD-RIDF-XXV).	Rs. 2,91,72,590/-	08/05/2020	Rs. 3,24,300/-	22/05/2020
2.	C/o link road Saprol to Hanizan Basti Sanoh via Govt. Senior Sec. School Sanoh Km 0/0 to 1/665. (SH: Formation cutting, Passing Places, R/walls, Cross Drainage, Providing & laying GSB, P/L WBM-II, WBM-III, C.C. pavement, Tarring work, Side drain, Parapets and road Furniture). (Under NABARD-RIDF-XXV).	Rs. 14,386/-	08/05/2020	Rs. 75,200/-	22/05/2020
3.	Chiran to Thirk via Village Devi Tilla Km. 0/00 to 10/150 i/c Bridge over Bathu Khad at RD 1/665. (SH: Construction of 30 mtrs. Box Girder Bridge, Formation cutting, Passing Places, C/o Protection work, Cross Drainage, Providing & laying GSB, P/L WBM-II, WBM-III, Interlocking Pavement Block, Tarring work, Side drain, Parapets and road Furniture). (Under NABARD-RIDF-XXV).	Rs. 5,00,41,877/-	08/05/2020	Rs. 5,00,000/-	22/05/2020

The bidders are advised to note other details of tender from the department website www.hptenders.gov.in.

Executive Engineer HPPWD Division Bhawana Pin-176083, Tel:01894-227777 e-mail: ce-hpm-bhaw@nic.in on behalf of Governor of H.P

HP / 0197/20-21

HIM SUCHANA AVAN JAN SAMPARK

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Seal inter-State borders, orders Chief Secy.

Police told to prevent 'tensions and conflicts', impound vehicles illegally transporting migrant workers

JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI

Labourers carry onion sacks on International Workers' Day in a west Delhi market on Friday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Chief Secretary Vijay Dev on Friday ordered the sealing of all inter-State borders of the Capital and directed the police to be vigilant to prevent "tensions and conflict" that anti-social elements may attempt to trigger among those stranded in the Capital, especially migrant workers.

The order comes after the national lockdown was extended to contain the community spread of the COVID-19. Intelligence inputs had been received that Ministry of Home Affairs directions to allow the movement of stranded individuals such as migrant workers, students and pilgrims among others to return to their respective hometowns may be cited to "incite and provoke" such individuals to "affect devastating consequences" to an-

ti-COVID measures currently in place, he said.

"Certain anti-social elements may try to incite and provoke the stranded persons, particularly migrant workers in the undesirable

hope of creating some tensions and conflict besides attempting to violate the lockdown measures...make all out efforts...to prevent

any such unlawful assembly and movement of persons..." the order addressed to the Delhi Police Commissioner and officials in charge of government districts read.

After the first lockdown A mass exodus of migrant workers had taken place across the country after the imposition of the first lockdown with scenes from east Delhi's Anand Vihar ISBT

The inter-State borders must be completely sealed and a strict vigil should be maintained on inter-State goods carriers too...no movement of such stranded persons should also be allowed

presenting what Delhi government officials admit was among the most grave of visuals in this respect.

Similar instances, in addition to clashes between workers and police in some cases, were reported from Gujarat; workers had also taken to the streets of Mumbai earlier this month. In addition to setting up pickets in areas populated significantly by migrant workers, the order directed that

the police also needed to ensure that goods carriers were not engaging in their illegal transportation. "The inter-State borders must be completely sealed and a strict vigil should be maintained on inter-State goods carriers too...no movement of such stranded persons should be allowed at the inter-State borders without following protocol prescribed by the MHA..." the order stated.

Mr. Dev also directed that the police act on intelligence inputs regarding movement of migrant labourers and impound vehicles illegally transporting them.

In a related development, the Chief Secretary appointed each of the 10 District Magistrates as nodal officers in charge of reaching out to the Resident Commissioners of various States regarding the movement of their residents back home.

First chargesheet filed in Delhi riots case

Shahrukh Pathan named as accused

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

The police on Friday filed the first chargesheet in connection with the riots that broke out in north-east Delhi in February this year.

A senior police officer said the chargesheet was submitted in Karkardooma Court on an FIR lodged under IPC Sections of rioting, attempt to murder, obstructing public servant in discharge of public functions and Arms Act at the Jafraabadi police station.

Shahrukh Pathan had allegedly opened fire at a head constable during the riots on February 24.

"Shahrukh was arrested on March 3. He was the first person to be arrested in the riot cases," said the officer.

During investigation, Kaleem Ahmad, a resident of



Shahrukh Pathan had allegedly opened fire at a head constable during the riots on February 24.

Kaleem in U.P. who had given shelter to Shahrukh, was also arrested.

The chargesheet has been filed against Shahrukh, Kaleem, and Ishtiyak Mallik, a resident of Ghonda. "We had recovered the weapon of offence, a 7.65 mm pistol and two live rounds, from Shahrukh," the officer said, adding that other cases are in the last phase of investigation and more chargesheets will be filed soon.

Leverage technology to overcome academic losses, CM tells V-Cs

Admission process, conducting pending exams discussed

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in a meeting with Vice-Chancellors of the universities under the government on Friday asked them to proactively use technology to revive the academic losses due to lockdown.

In the meeting, also attended by Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, it was discussed how the universities are planning the admission process of the upcoming academic session, the action plan of the universities to conduct the pending examinations and about the start of the next academic session. It was decided that

arrangements would be made to conduct online examinations so that students do not lose academic time, the government said.

Mr. Kejriwal said: "The government will provide all possible help to the universities in this extraordinary time. In this situation, universities should use the technology more proactively to recover the academic losses due to the pandemic.

Social distancing is the key to fight this pandemic, therefore, every university should plan the academic sessions and running of the universities keeping in mind the social distancing norms."

The V-Cs were told to ensure that those students who have got a placement but still have examinations pending be issued a provisional degree certificate so that they do not face any problem in joining their companies once the lockdown is lifted.

Mr. Sisodia sought suggestions from the business faculty and department at the universities on what steps should be taken to revive Delhi's economy in the post-COVID-19 lockdown phase. The meeting was attended by the V-Cs of GGSIPU, DTU, NSIT, Ambardar University, IGDTUW, NLU, NIPSRU and Director of IIT-Delhi.

JNU lacking in taking decisions'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union (JNUSU) on Friday said while the university administration was conducting an online seminar on the topic – Leadership Lessons from Ramayana – it felt that the administration's leadership was lacking when taking decisions regarding JNU.

It said the administration

was taking decisions without involving all stakeholders of the university. "The JNU administration and the Vice-Chancellor are deriving their 'leadership prowess' from it, helps them to focus on the issues faced by the students and workers employed in JNU. Because up till now there has been a failure of leadership on issues of a serious nature," it added.

most affected," the union said.

"We definitely hope that wherever the JNU administration and the Vice-Chancellor are deriving their 'leadership prowess' from it, helps them to focus on the issues faced by the students and workers employed in JNU. Because up till now there has been a failure of leadership on issues of a serious nature," it added.

It added that the group appealed that shops selling non-essential goods be allowed to operate irrespective of their locations.

The effort is aimed at providing immediate relief to over seven million people employed in the food and beverage sector who have been impacted due to the lockdown. Customers can avail the scheme on <https://r4r.nrai.org/>.For term and condition Nit on the Portal <http://hptenders.gov.in> may be referred.

Stay vigilant

Guidelines for COVID-19 patients with mild symptoms

STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4
Visit a doctor (public/private) if you have fever with cough, running nose and breathing difficulty	Refer to COVID testing centre or any government hospital	Screening and sample collection at COVID testing centre or any government hospital	If COVID 19 positive, following measures apply based on severity of symptoms:
Mild or very mild	Home isolation/ visit to COVID care centre	Moderate	

IN BRIEF



Family courts to reopen to hear new divorce cases

NEW DELHI
The Delhi High Court has decided to reopen the family courts, which had stopped functioning during the lockdown, to hear fresh divorce matters and the cases where arguments have been heard and judgment or order reserved. The cases in which arguments have already been heard and the order or judgment has been reserved, shall be given priority.

Over 2,600 held for defying lockdown norms

NEW DELHI
Ninety cases were registered and 2,654 people detained in the Capital on Friday for violating government orders pertaining to the lockdown imposed to control COVID-19 spread, the police said. According to the data shared by the police, 90 cases have been registered under IPC Section 188 (for disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) till 5 pm. PTI

17 new cases in Gautam Buddha Nagar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GHAZIABAD
Seventeen new cases of COVID-19 were reported from Gautam Buddha Nagar on Friday, an official release said.

With this, the total number of cases in the district has touched 155. Of this, 90 infected persons have recovered. "Out of 33 sample reports received on Friday, 17 have been found positive," said Sunil Dohre, District Surveillance Officer, Gautam Buddha Nagar.

The maximum number of positive cases have been reported from Noida Sector 8 where 10 new cases were reported, which included two 10-year-old children.

Dr. Dohre said that so far 3,618 samples had been tested and 697 persons were in institutional quarantine.

Labour pain



Workers seen outside closed shops in Kashmere Gate in the Capital on Friday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

Baijal reviews status of COVID-19 management in city

L-G has advised field officials to delineate containment zones properly to ensure effective management



Anil Baijal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI
Lieutenant-Governor Anil Baijal on Friday reviewed the status of COVID-19 management in Delhi through video conference with Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and senior Delhi government and Delhi Police officers.

Secretary (Health) made a detailed presentation on the status of COVID-19 management in the city, presented detailed analysis of spatial distribution of COVID-19 cases, containment zones and

CM YK

and Delhi has conducted almost six times more tests than the national average per million population. The L-G directed all stakeholders for scaling up their efforts to rein in the COVID-19 pandemic," Raj Niwas said in a statement.

"L-G advised field officials to delineate containment zones properly to ensure their effective management, instructed field officials to adopt strict perimeter control measures, carry out active house-to-house surveil-

lance and trace contacts extensively as per guidelines... He also advised narrowing down of containment zones into micro containment zones for effective management," the statement said.

The Raj Niwas said that the L-G instructed the Health Department to develop an action plan to convert red zones into orange to green zones and hot-spots

COVID-19

lance and trace contacts extensively as per guidelines... He also advised narrowing down of containment zones into micro containment zones for effective management," the statement said.

The Raj Niwas said that the L-G instructed the Health Department to develop an action plan to convert red zones into orange to green zones and hot-spots

field machinery in maintaining the green zones. He also instructed that the steps required to augment testing capacity should be taken immediately. He also instructed for extensive testing as per guidelines and ensure faster results of tests in a time-bound manner. Mr. Baijal directed to provide protective gear to all frontline workers who are performing their duties at vulnerable places, especially the containment zones and hot-spots

Delhi govt. to double amount of free ration per person: Kejriwal

Forty buses have been arranged to bring back stranded students from Kota'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government has decided to double the amount of free ration being provided to each person – that is 10 kg against 5 kg ration per month – Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Friday. Ration kits will also be handed out.

On students stranded in Rajasthan, Mr. Kejriwal said: "Many students from Delhi had been studying in Kota and they had been waiting to come back to their city. But, we could not take any action without approval from the Centre. The Centre has allowed the movement now, and around 40 private buses will be leaving for Kota."

The Delhi government is also in talks with other States on the status of migrant workers. "I have been getting calls and messages and being asked as to how people from Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Bihar would travel back to their houses. We are regularly communicating with these

HELPLINE NUMBERS	
COMMON HELPLINE	+91-11-23978046
DELHI	011-22307145
GAZIABAD	0120 4186453
NOIDA	8076623612/6396776304
GURUGRAM	108 / 0124-2322412 / 9911519296 / 7015523417 / 9654231756

State governments and the final plan will be shared soon. Please be patient till then and stay at home for your own safety and the safety of your family members," he said.

Increase in testing

Delhi had 3,515 cases till Thursday night which rose to 3,738 on Friday.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said that out of the 3,515 COVID-19 cases in Delhi, 1,100 had recovered and had been discharged from hospitals, adding that the testing rate had increased here.

He added that of the 3,515 cases, 59 people had lost their lives and there were 2,362 active cases.

The common percep-

tion, he said, would be that there was a sudden and steady rise in the number of cases, but there was also an increase in testing of samples to monitor those who have been infected and treat them thereafter.

"In Delhi, we are conducting 2,300 tests per million people, as compared to the country's average, which is 500 tests per 1 million people. Hence, it seems like the cases are rising in Delhi. The positive aspect of this, however, is that infected people are recovering. A total of 1,100 people have recovered and were discharged so far. The rate of recovery is increasing," he said, adding that at 59, the death ratio was much less in the Capital

compared to other States and countries.

Plasma therapy

"We had gotten the plasma therapy trial permitted by the Centre in Lok Nayak Hospital. The patient who was given the first trial and was admitted to an ICU in a critical condition has recovered and has been discharged from the hospital... A few statements on behalf of the Union government led the people to believe that plasma therapy will be halted in Delhi. The Union government said that only the States which have received the permission should conduct the plasma therapy trials. Initial results are satisfactory and we hope that this technique can be treated as a sustainable solution for the future," Mr. Kejriwal said.

The Delhi government, he also said, was contacting the 1,100 people who had recovered. He claimed that almost every one of them was ready to donate their plasma.



City reports two deaths, 223 new cases; AAP MLA infected

Govt. says 73 more people have recovered from infection

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLA from Karol Bagh Vishesh Ravi was among the 223 people who tested positive for COVID-19 on Friday. Two deaths were also reported in the city, taking the toll to 61. The total number of cases now stands at 3,738.

As per the Delhi government health bulletin, 73 people made a recovery on Friday, taking the total number of recoveries to 1,167.

Mr. Ravi said that he had tested positive along with his brother Ankit Ravi and was currently self isolating as he was asymptomatic.

Mr. Ravi is a three-time AAP MLA and was advised to get tested by his doctor on April 29 as he was running a fever. His results came back positive on Friday.

Meanwhile, the Delhi Dis-

aster Management Authority said that from now on, COVID-19 sampling and testing data will be collected at the level of the chief district medical officer under the supervision of the concerned district magistrate.

The move is aimed at reducing "difficulty in reconciling data of samples collected, number of tests carried out and the pendency in various labs and institutions, which is hampering effective management of the pandemic," Delhi Chief Secretary Vijay Dev, who is also the DDMA chairman, said in an order.

(With inputs from PTI)

'It is tough to procure food to break fast during Ramzan'

Many people from riot-affected areas in the Capital who have run out of money complain about erratic food supply



A constable managing people as they queue up to collect food in Dwarka. ■ FILE PHOTO: V.V. KRISHNAN

has also changed and it is so hot that we cannot even save the food for later. So we are managing somehow by borrowing some ration from the locals so that we can at least break our fast. At times, the

police personnel deployed in the area also come forward to give us some food from their share," said 30-year-old Sonia Khatoon.

Despite government directives, several ration shops

were still not distributing ration to those without ration cards, many complained.

"While we do not have ration cards. We do have Aadhaar cards which we showed to those who were distributing ration. But they asked us to go away and refused to give us any ration. We are not being able to store the cooked meal for later and neither can we make something for ourselves. What do the poor like us do in such a situation?" said Ms. Khatoon, who along with 20 others, have been surviving without a roof above their head.

Complaining about erratic food supply, several others from the riot-affected areas said that they had been un-

able to obtain the free ration promised by the government which was forcing them to buy raw material from local shops, despite being cash-strapped.

Imran Ansari (21), a resident of Shiv Vihar, one of the most affected areas in the riots which took place here in February, said that this year's Ramzan was unlike other times as the family's struggle continued.

"We have not received any ration from the government. We had visited a couple of times but every time had to return empty-handed. We have been facing such struggle since the riots. I lost my father three days back and now our source of livelihood is also

gone. I have been buying stuff from local shops on credit so that we can have at least a basic iftar," said Mr. Ansari.

Shoaib, a resident of Ashok Nagar, where a mosque was vandalised during the riots, said: "Till now, we have only received the initial compensation from the government. Our shop and house were both looted and burnt. By the time we could think of standing on our feet again, the lockdown started. So we shifted to a relative's place. Here we are sharing resources and observing roza. With limited cooked meals being provided, it's difficult to support large families. So we can only depend on each other somehow for Ramzan this year."

The DRAA also urged the government to devise off-line modes for those without ration cards, apart from the e-coupon system which is already in place, to ensure a larger coverage.

"To enable and facilitate inclusion, the system must also be provided in an off-line mode..." read the letter to the Chief Minister

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THE HINDU
India's National Newspaper

Two more policemen test positive

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Two more policemen posted with the Delhi Police Crime Branch who allegedly visited a Nizamuddin centre here have tested positive for COVID-19, the police said on Friday. The policemen had visited the building for investigation purpose, they said.

The police said around 15 Crime Branch staff who came in contact with one of the policemen have been advised home quarantine after he was tested positive for the virus.

A case has been registered against Maulana Saad of the Nizamuddin headquarters of the centre under relevant sections of the Epidemic Diseases Act and IPC for allegedly violating government orders as regards the management of the centre.

"I realise that my tweet was ill-timed and insensitive in view of our country facing a medical emergency and fighting an unseen enemy. I apologise to all whose sentiments were hurt. Further, the limitation of a tweet, which has to be very short by its very nature, was also responsible that the whole narrative was not made out in plain language," he said in a statement.

Minorities panel chief apologises for tweet

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Delhi Minorities Commission Chairman Zafrul Islam Khan has sought to clarify that the tweet issued by him on April 28 thanking Kuwait for taking note of the persecution of Indian Muslims, in the context of the violence in north-east Delhi, had "pained some people", which never was his intention.

The police said around 15 Crime Branch staff who came in contact with one of the policemen have been advised home quarantine after he was tested positive for the virus.

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SEARCH COMMITTEE NOTIFICATION APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHANCELLOR

The Government of Tamil Nadu vide G.O.D. No. 84, Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries (FS-2), department dated 26th February 2020 have constituted a Search Committee to recommend a panel of three persons to the Hon'ble Governor-Chancellor for appointment of Vice-Chancellor, Tamil Nadu Dr. J. Jayalalithaa Fisheries University, Nagapattinam.

The Search Committee invites applications for the post of Vice-Chancellor, Tamil Nadu Dr. J. Jayalalithaa Fisheries University, from distinguished academicians with high level of competence, integrity, moral and institutional commitment and possessing the educational qualifications and work experience as notified by the Government of Tamil Nadu in their Tamil Nadu Act and ordinances Act No.21 of 2012 published in Tamil Nadu Government Gazette (Extraordinary) No.145 dated 1st June 2012 copy of which is available in Tamil Nadu Dr. J. Jayalalithaa Fisheries University website: www.tnrfu.ac.in

The Vice-Chancellor shall hold the office for a period of three years (provided that the person appointed as Vice-Chancellor shall retire from office if, during the term of office, he/she attains the age of 70 years).

Interested candidates possessing the qualifications and experience shall download the prescribed application from the website of Tamil Nadu Dr. J. Jayalalithaa Fisheries University. The filled in applications shall be sent (only in the prescribed format) either by e-mail or by post duly superscribing the Envelope "Application for the post of Vice-Chancellor, Tamil Nadu Dr. J. Jayalalithaa Fisheries University" so as to reach the following address, on or before 5.00 p.m. of 01st June 2020.

Dr. Ka. Ilango, Ph.D.,

Nodal Officer

Search Committee for selection of Vice-Chancellor

Tamil Nadu Dr. J. Jayalalithaa Fisheries University

No. 19, Rukmani Lakshmi Path Road,

Annamalai University Study Centre

Egmore, Chennai – 600 008 India.

e-mail: tnrfuvcsearchcommittee@gmail.com

Application received by the Nodal Officer after publication of this Notification in the Website / Newspaper alone will be considered. Applications received after the closing date will not be entertained on any account. Application should not be sent to the Search Committee Members directly.

Date : 02.05.2020

DIPR/ 496 /DISPLAY/2020

REGISTRAR

Baijal reviews status of COVID-19 management in city

L-G has advised field officials to delineate containment zones properly to ensure effective management



Bhilwara residents yearn for restoration of normalcy

The lockdown has brought upheavals never anticipated in the textile town

MOHAMMED IQBAL
BHILWARA

Married to a textile trader, Alka Ladha, 40, who shifted from Chittorgarh to her matrimonial home in 2002, has spent the last 18 years taking care of her joint family as a homemaker. The lockdown enforced to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by an "all-down curfew" in Bhilwara, has brought upheavals to her life that she had never anticipated.

Neither has Ms. Ladha stepped out of her home for more than six weeks, nor have her two teenaged children asked for their favourite fast food or gadgets from the market. The sense of anxiety on being confined to home is visible on the faces of her daughter, Ridhima, 18, who

returned from her coaching institute in Kota just in time, and Riyansh, 14, who now attends online lessons from his school.

During the aggressive curfew imposed in the textile city, which had initially emerged as the worst-affected hotspot in Rajasthan, the Ladha family, residing in Sanjay Colony, had faced the difficulties of financial losses, paucity of essential items and disruption of education with equanimity. "This is a health emergency... It is our duty to assist the authorities in their attempt to break the chain of virus transmission," Ms. Ladha told *The Hindu*.

Supply of essentials

The city with a 4-lakh population is served by the vans of Sahakari Upbhokta Bhandar, which make the rounds of the residential localities to supply milk, vegetables, groceries and other essentials. Working on the two fronts of identification of pa-



The main market opposite the railway station in Bhilwara city during the 'all-down curfew'. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

tients and containing the spread of novel coronavirus, the administration has extended the 11-day-long 'all-down curfew' till the time that the nationwide lockdown's restrictions are eased.

With the residents expecting their lives to limp back to normal sooner rather than later, stories of grit, determination, compassion, philan-

thropic gestures and even help to the animals have emerged in the city, which has so far succeeded in preventing community transmission of the disease. Institutions and community groups have come forward to assist migrant workers and poor families with food rations and essentials.

Yashdeep Bhatia, Station House Officer of the Kotwali

police station, said while numerous social groups were regularly handing over food packets and dry ration kits to the police for distribution among the needy, he himself was going every evening to the nearby Smriti Van to feed the garden's ducks and fish. "Birds and animals are hungry these days. I thought I should play a part in their conservation," he remarked.

Fabric hub

Known as India's largest manufacturer of fabric, Bhilwara's textile industry - worth about ₹35,000 crore, including exports - has come to a standstill. Chartered Accountant Gautam Gagrani said the industry has faced tremendous losses and the balance sheets of most of the units had not been cleared, while the GST returns were yet to be filed. "It is still not clear how will they survive and restart their production. There is no demand even in

the global market."

Govt. support must

Giriraj Ajmera, owner of Jai Shiv Syncotex, said since the business and export channels were not going to open soon, the normalcy in production could not be restored without the government's support in the form of interest subsidy and labour wages through the Employees' State Insurance funds.

Mr. Ajmera said his firm's clients were mostly in Afghanistan, from where no orders had been received during the lockdown despite the Id-ul-Fitr festivities approaching fast.

The Mewar Chamber of Commerce & Industry has demanded that Bhilwara district be reclassified as green zone from red zone, as only 35 COVID-19 positive cases had been detected here so far, and permission granted to restart over 400 micro, small and medium enterpris-

es. The chamber's secretary-general R.K. Jain said the continued closure of units would risk MSME loans worth ₹12,000 crore becoming non-performing assets for the banks.

As the administration gears up to face the challenge of more than 10,000 migrant labourers returning home from other States, the rapid response teams of the health department have mobilised resources for screening the returnees and sending them to quarantine facilities if infection is suspected.

Ruthless containment

Having so far controlled the pandemic through massive contact tracing and screening of the district's entire population of 24 lakh inhabitants, making it a model of "ruthless containment" of the virus, the health authorities here are determined to not let their guard down.

Most of west U.P. in red or orange zone

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GHAZIABAD

Almost the whole of western Uttar Pradesh is in either red or orange zone in the list released by the Union Health Ministry on Friday.

Only Hathras has made it to the green zone. Both Aligarh and Mathura, its neighbouring districts, have been put in the red zone.

The other districts in the red zone from the region include Agra, Firozabad, Bulandshahr, Meerut, Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar, Bijnor, Amroha, Rampur and Moradabad. Out of these, Agra has the most cases.

While Gautam Buddh Nagar with 155 positive cases continues to be in the red zone, Ghaziabad, with 71 positive cases, has now been put in the orange zone.

SGPC chief questions Nanded numbers

Large number of Sikh pilgrims had tested positive on their return to Punjab

ASHOK KUMAR
GURUGRAM

Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee president Gobind Singh Longowal on Friday demanded a probe into the large number of Nanded Sikh pilgrims testing positive for COVID-19 on their return to Punjab, expressing the apprehension that they probably contracted the virus during the travel back home in State buses.

He claimed that all pilgrims were tested thrice during their month-long stay in Nanded and never showed any signs of illness.

'Tests clear in Nanded'

Referring to a video of Sant Baba Balwinder Singh Ji Gurudwara Langar Sahib Nanded on Facebook, Mr. Longowal, speaking to *The Hindu* over phone, said the priest had claimed that the Sikh pilgrims during their stay in



SGPC chief Gobind Singh Longowal. ■ FILE PHOTO

the gurdwara were tested thrice, but were found healthy. Raising questions over the "discrepancy" in the testing results, the SGPC chief said it was a matter of investigation.

"It seems that the pilgrims seemingly contracted the virus during their stay at Indore and other places during the journey. This also needs to be investigated," Mr. Longowal said, adding that bringing back the devotees by air could have pre-

vented the infection. As many as 3,525 pilgrims from Nanded (Maharashtra) and 153 students from Rajasthan's Kota have returned to Punjab over the past four days.

Besides, 3,085 labourers were also received at the Faizabad-Rajasthan border. Of those who have returned from Nanded, test reports were received for 577 persons till April 30 and 20% tested positive. Of the 105 fresh cases reported in the State on Thursday, 98 involved those from outside.

Chief Minister Amarinder Singh has attributed the infections in the State to three sources - Non-Resident Indians, religious congregation at Nizamuddin and Nanded returnees.

The large-scale infection of Nanded returnees has also led to fears of their vilification on the lines of those who participated in a reli-

gious congregation at Delhi's Nizamuddin. Making an appeal to the masses to show restraint, Mr. Longowal has called upon them to treat the pilgrims as their "own people".

'Don't listen to rumours' Baba Balwinder has also appealed to the people not to pay heed to rumours on social media.

In his Facebook message, Baba Balwinder asked how the sevadars and the priests were healthy when the Sikh pilgrims were infected in such large numbers.

He said thermal screening of the pilgrims was carried out everyday during their stay in Nanded.

Mr. Longowal has also offered to arrange for the stay of the Sikh pilgrims in gurdwaras, saying he was getting calls from them complaining about the arrangements in the Deras.

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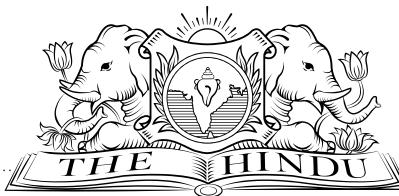
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Recovering early

An improved recovery rate is positive news, but reducing new infections is crucial

Data for COVID-19 is still a long way from giving a complete picture, but it is encouraging that the basic metric of the number of those recovering as a share of confirmed infections is showing improvement in India. The Health Ministry has said that the percentage of recoveries currently stands at just over 25, almost double of what it was two weeks ago. National data on other parameters appear similar to disease trends witnessed globally, with the worst outcomes encountered among elderly patients – translating into a case fatality rate of 51.2% for Indians older than 60. What is important to note, however, is that whether it is recovery or death, not all cases are recorded for a variety of reasons. There may be untested people who have recovered. Also, in the long term, most recover from the infection. It is therefore imperative to find positive cases early and assess the pace of recovery accurately. Among the countries moving to a mass-testing strategy after a measured lockdown and successful control over viral transmission is New Zealand. In terms of deaths, there could be unknown fatalities caused by COVID-19 outside hospitals. Doctors in the United States have made a contrasting determination: of people who had the virus, but died of unrelated causes. These findings and trends underscore the importance of research on the progression of the pandemic in India.

The comparatively low death rate from COVID-19 in India, officially estimated at 3.2%, remains a topic for systematic study. Even accounting for inability to identify all virus-caused deaths and misclassified fatalities, the absence of a large number of severely distressed patients in hospitals stands in contrast to the experience abroad, notably in the U.S., as well as many countries in Europe. The Johns Hopkins database gives the fatalities per 100 confirmed cases as 15.7% for the U.K. and Belgium, for example. There are many hypotheses for the less dismal outcome in India based on the impact of climate, benefits of immunisation, and other possible factors, but they remain untested. While India's fatalities may be low, and an improved recovery rate will help revive the economy, there is genuine worry that patients with non-COVID-19 conditions are at greater risk for poor health outcomes due to lack of access to care during the pandemic. The public health strategy for COVID-19 has to sharply focus on helping people determine their infection status through widely available testing. This will enable selective quarantining, planning of welfare measures and participation of people who have recovered in trials for potential therapies such as convalescent plasma transfusion. With a relaxation of the lockdown, India's strategy will need precise and intensive measures to drive down the reproduction number for the virus.

Ominous contraction

Steepest fall in core sector output in at least 8 years portends protracted economic pain

The latest data on core sector output is signalling that considerable economic pain lies ahead in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the nationwide lockdown that commenced on March 25. The provisional figures released by the Commerce Ministry show that production at all but one of the eight industries comprising the core sector shrank in March from a year earlier, resulting in the sharpest contraction in the index since the new series began in April 2012. That output contracted by as much as 6.5% in a month when most economic activities ground to a halt only in the last seven days, is a worrying augury. While output at petroleum refineries slid only by a marginal 0.5% as a bulk of the transportation sector was idled only in the last week of March, the 7.2% and 13% contractions in electricity and steel production, respectively, reflect the underlying stress in the economy, most crucially on the demand side. With all non-essential industries and commercial establishments ordered shut as part of the lockdown, demand for electricity declined by more than 9% in March, according to data from the National Load Despatch Centre. While the power sector has been exempt from the lockdown because of its essential nature, the slump in demand from commercial customers is bound to have a significant sector-wide cascading impact as a result of heightened cash flow problems at the already stressed distribution companies that deliver electricity over the last mile to consumers.

Coal, the only sector to post a positive figure in March as output expanded 4%, also presents a far from reassuring picture as growth slowed sharply from February's 11.2% and was less than half the 9.1% pace seen in March 2019. And with demand for coal from user sectors spanning thermal generators and the key process industries of steel and cement unlikely to revive any time soon, production of the crucial commodity is very likely to shrink in April. With the construction sector hit hard by the lockdown and likely to face serious labour supply issues even after the economy gradually reopens, cement may see production shrink in the first month of the new fiscal year by an even greater extent than the 25% drop seen in March. The mayhem in the oil market with global crude prices tumbling is also certain to undermine the industries in the energy sector. Undoubtedly, April's overall core output appears headed for an even sharper contraction. And with the eight major industries having a weight of 40.3% in the broader Index of Industrial Production, it is certain to drag industrial output as a whole into negative territory. The Centre may be left with little option but to massively lift public spending on infrastructure once the lockdown eases in order to revive the reeling economy.

It's about food, nutrition and livelihood security

Farmers' cooperation, technological upgrading and favourable public policies can help India deal with the pandemic



M.S. SWAMINATHAN & NITYA RAO

The current national lockdown to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the problems of food, nutrition and livelihood security confronting a large number of rural people, in particular, migrants to cities. While some measures have been announced, such as provision of additional rice or wheat, some pulses and oil free of cost, as well as ₹1,000 cash for the purchase of other essential commodities through the Public Distribution System (PDS), we need to understand the different dimensions of food security in a holistic manner in order to address this problem in its totality.

The first is the availability of food in the market, and this is seen as a function of production. Fortunately, thanks to the Green Revolution, today we have enough food in the market and in government godowns. This is a great accomplishment by Indian farmers who converted a "ship to mouth" situation to a "right to food" commitment. Yet we cannot take farmers' contributions in terms of sustaining production for granted. While some special exemptions have been given to the agricultural sector, farmers are confronted at the moment with labour shortages, many of the inputs, including seeds, are expensive or unavailable,

marketing arrangements including supply chains are not fully functional, pricing is not remunerative, and public procurement is also not adequate. There is no room for complacency, as in the absence of demand, the lack of storage or value addition facilities, especially for perishable commodities, we do not yet know exactly what the impact of the current pandemic will be on the kharif sowing and food availability in the future.

Widen the food basket

The second dimension is the access to food, which is a function of purchasing power, as unless you are a farmer and grow your own food, others have to buy it. Fortunately, the government, through the National Food Security Act (NFS) and the PDS, has assured some additional food to every individual during this crisis. This should be further strengthened and the food basket widened by including millets, pulses and oil. Steps should also be taken to avoid hidden hunger caused by the deficiency of micronutrients in the diet. In light of the closure of schools and anganwadi centres, and the consequent disruptions in the provision of midday meals or other nutritional inputs, it is important to pay attention to the life cycle approach advocated in the NFS, particularly the first thousand days in a child's life, when the cognitive abilities of the child are shaped. We may otherwise see negative effects on nutritional security in the medium to longer term.

Food security and access to nu-



tritious, good quality food is also contingent on job security. Today, a lot of people employed both on farms and in the non-farm sector are without jobs. If job security is threatened, then so is food and nutrition security. We have to ensure people do not lose their jobs, and one way of doing this will be to ensure value addition to primary products. One example of such value addition is the Rice Biopark in Myanmar, wherein the straw, bran, and the entire biomass are utilised. This would of course mean some attention to and investment in new technologies that can contribute to biomass utilisation. The Arun model provides a good example from the dairy sector of improved incomes to milk producers through value addition. Similar attention needs to be given to the horticulture sector on a priority basis. Women farmers are at the forefront of horticulture and special attention needs to be given to both their technological and economic empowerment during this crisis.

Work under MGNREGA

A second pathway to livelihood security for small and marginal farmers and landless households, and women within them, is strengthening the Mahatma Gandhi Na-

tional Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The definition of a worker in MGNREGA has so far been applied only to unskilled, manual work, and not to skilled jobs in agriculture and allied activities. Given the lack of jobs and incomes during the COVID-19 crisis, it is imperative to expand the definition of work in MGNREGA to cover skilled work related to farmers and their farming activities. This is particularly important for women farmers and workers, who should not just be given tasks of carrying stones or digging mud. Apart from farming, they engage in a range of essential care tasks, including caring for children, the elderly and sick people. These tasks, often invisible, need to be recognised as work and supported with appropriate education, including on nutrition.

Focus on non-food factors

The third dimension of food security is absorption of food in the body or its utilisation, which is dependent importantly on sanitation, drinking water and other non-food factors, including public health services. Ensuring that these services are functional depends on the capacities of the local panchayats and their coordination with other local bodies. The lack of adequate clean water in particular has come to the fore in both rural areas and urban slums in the context of COVID-19, where one of the key measures for stopping transmission relates to frequent hand-washing.

If we can ensure food availability, food access and food absorption, then we have a fairly robust

system of food and nutrition security. All the above dimensions are, however, now threatened by the novel coronavirus, as discussed earlier. It is very critical to highlight the linkages between agriculture, nutrition and health. While the PDS may be able to meet calorie needs, the inability to harvest, transport and market perishable fruits and vegetables at remunerative prices during the current crisis, has not just deprived farmers of incomes and livelihoods, but consumers too are deprived of micronutrients in their diets. Farmers making losses, and agriculture moving from being job-led to jobless, raise questions about the sustainability of the production cycle. At the same time, this can have long-term consequences on nutrition and health security.

India avoided what could have been a big famine in the 1960s through the help of technology and public policy, which actively worked with and supported farmers to achieve significant increases in yield. Today's problems are not as daunting. Through a combination of farmers' cooperation, technological upgrading and favourable public policies in procurement, pricing and distribution, we can deal with the fallouts of the pandemic. We hope that this pandemic will help recognise the contribution of our farmers.

M.S. Swaminathan, eminent agricultural scientist, is Founder of the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai. Nitya Rao is Professor, Gender and Development at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, U.K.

Taiwan's coronavirus protocol shows how it is done

If WHO's mission is to ensure the highest level of health for all, then no country should be excluded from this goal



CHEN SHIH-CHUNG

The threat of emerging infectious diseases to global health and the economy, trade, and tourism has never abated. Pandemics can spread rapidly around the world because of the ease of international transportation. Among the most salient examples are the Spanish flu of 1918, the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak of 2003, and the H1N1 influenza of 2009. Intermittently, serious regional epidemics, such as the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in 2012, Ebola in West Africa in 2014, and the Zika virus in Central and South America in 2015-16, have also reared their heads.

Today, a novel form of pneumonia that first emerged in Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019 and has since been classified as coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has caused a global pandemic. As of April 8, 2020, World Health Organization (WHO) data shows that 1.35 million people had been confirmed as having the disease, with 79,235 deaths in 211 countries/territories. Taiwan too has not been spared.

Taiwan's strategy

In the 17 years since it was hit hard by the SARS outbreak, Taiwan has been in a state of constant readiness to the threat of emerging infectious disease. As a result, when information concerning a novel pneumonia outbreak was first confirmed on December 31, 2019, Taiwan began implementing onboard quarantine of direct flights from

Wuhan that same day. On January 2, 2020, Taiwan established a response team for the disease and activated the Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC) on January 20 as a level 3 government entity, upgrading it to level 2 and level 1 on January 23 and February 27, respectively. The CECC is able to effectively integrate resources from various ministries and invest itself fully in the containment of the epidemic. As of April 9, Taiwan had tested a total of 42,315 persons showing 380 confirmed cases, of which 54 have been indigenous, 326 imported and five deaths; 80 people had been released from hospital after testing negative. Despite its proximity to China, Taiwan ranked 123 among 183 countries in terms of confirmed cases per million people. This has shown that Taiwan's aggressive efforts to control the epidemic are working.

Harnessing technology

Disease knows no borders. In response to the threat of the COVID-19 epidemic, Taiwan has implemented dynamic plans concerning border quarantine measures, including onboard quarantine, fever screening, health declarations, and a 14-day home quarantine for passengers arriving from nations it has listed under the Level 3 Warning. Moreover, Taiwan has established an electronic system for entry quarantine, which allows passengers with a local mobile phone number to fill in health information using a mobile phone. A health declaration pass will then be sent to them as a text message. This is connected to the community care support management system, which allows government agencies to provide care services and medical assistance. The travel history of individuals is now stored on the



National Health Insurance (NHI) card to alert physicians to possible cases and prevent community transmission. For those undergoing home quarantine or isolation, the government is working with telecom operators to allow GPS tracking of their locations. Quarantine offenders are subject to fines or mandatory placement according to relevant laws and regulations, so as to prevent transmission.

Taiwan has also increased its laboratory testing capacity, expanded the scope of its surveillance and inspections based on trends of the COVID-19 epidemic, and retested people with higher risk who had already tested negative, including patients with symptoms of severe influenza, community cases with upper respiratory tract infections who were already being monitored, and cluster cases of upper respiratory tract infections, to identify suspected cases and perform treatment in isolation wards.

Meanwhile, it has designated 50 regional hospitals and medical centres and 167 community hospitals and clinics to create a tiered system for testing. These hospitals and clinics are required to set up special wards or areas; in principle, COVID-19 patients are isolated and treated individually in these wards and areas to prevent nosocomial infections. Moreover, Tai-

wan has banned the export of surgical masks since January 24, requisitioned masks, and expanded domestic mask production to more effectively allocate masks.

On February 6, Taiwan launched a name-based rationing system for mask purchases at NHI-contracted pharmacies and local public health agencies. It added an ordering system for masks on March 12. This allows people to order online and pick up masks at convenience stores. These measures have helped us achieve effective allocation of limited resources and meet health-care, epidemic prevention, household, and industrial trial needs.

Global linking and beyond

A crisis anywhere readily becomes a problem everywhere. Global health security requires the efforts of every person to ensure an optimal response to public health threats and challenges. Taiwan, though not a member of WHO, cannot stand alone and must be included in the fight against such threats and challenges.

Taiwan has fulfilled its responsibilities as a global citizen and abided by the International Health Regulations 2005 (IHR 2005) in notifying WHO of confirmed COVID-19 cases. Moreover, Taiwan has communicated with other countries such as Japan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, the United States, Canada, Italy, France, Switzerland, Germany, the United Kingdom, Belgium, and the Netherlands, as well as the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, to share information on confirmed cases, travel and contact histories of patients, and border control measures.

Taiwan has uploaded the genetic sequence of COVID-19 to the GISAID Initiative, or the Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID). Taiwan has worked with global partners to respond to the threat of COVID-19 to ensure that global health is not imperiled by a lack of communication and transparency.

If it is indeed WHO's mission to ensure the highest attainable standard of health for every person, then WHO needs Taiwan just as Taiwan needs WHO. Yet, Taiwan has long been excluded from WHO due to political considerations. This has been regrettable given all that Taiwan could share with the world thanks to its renowned public health experience, health system, the NHI, and ability to perform rapid testing as well as research and manufacture vaccines and drugs against COVID-19.

We can also share our methods for analysing the virus. We hope that after this pandemic abates, WHO will truly understand that infectious diseases know no borders, and that no country should be excluded, lest it become a major gap in global health security. WHO should not neglect the contribution to global health security of any nation.

We urge WHO and related parties to acknowledge Taiwan's long-standing contributions to the international community in the areas of public health, disease prevention, and the human right to health, and to include Taiwan in WHO and its meetings, mechanisms, and activities. Taiwan will continue to work with the rest of the world to ensure that all enjoy the fundamental human right to health, as stipulated in the WHO Constitution. Echoing the mantra of the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, no one should be left behind.

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Dr. Chen Shih-chung is Minister of Health and Welfare, Taiwan

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

India as one

The spirit of the ruling dispensation's advocacy to people to display their unity by clapping and lighting candles should be ubiquitous in all areas of political management especially when it comes to promoting brotherhood among people of different religions ("Editorial, 'Religion and freedom'. May 1). The government is still in no mood to review its much protested pieces of legislation such as the National Register of Citizens and the Citizenship (Amendment) Act that have the potential to deepen the divisions within the country. It is imperative for the ruling establishment in

the post-novel corona scenario to keep all Indians united in every way possible in order to effectively and expeditiously recover from the devastating effects of the pandemic – probably in a changed global environment too. Even during the pandemic fight, it is distressing to see politicians in power not doing enough to contain the communal virus set free by fanatics to promote hatred against a particular religion. The politicians at the helm should go beyond symbolism in establishing a united India by shedding a religion-selective approach lest the adverse remarks of the U.S. Commission on

International Religious Freedom against India gain more credence (Inside pages, April 29, 2020). N. RAVEENDRA BABU, Hyderabad

Getting home

The plight of migrant labourers across India during the extended lockdown is distressing with several of them now walking several hundred kilometres back home, and for days on end (Inside pages, Picture combo – "Homeward bound", May 1). The respective States where such migrant labourers are working to earn their daily bread should unhesitatingly arrange for their quick and

safe return home. The situation is only getting from bad to worse. The desperation on the faces of the workers is evident. MURUGATHERRY R. JAYANTHY, Mumbai

GI tag for candy

The report, "Kovilpatti kadai mittai gets GI tag" (Tamil Nadu, May 1), is a source of happiness. The rich ingredients in this all-natural gift are the sweet water of the great Thamirabarani, groundnuts and traditional, organic and special jaggery prepared in an oven (*veragu aduppu*). The legal protection for this sweet, the Palani Panchamirtham and Tirupati laddu will

ensure healthy and tasty treats in the days to come. A.J. RANGARAJAN, Chennai

Sporting legend

Chuni Goswami, 82, was one of India's all-time great footballers who, along with the P.K. Banerjee and Tulsidas Balram formed a trio that could weave circles around the opposition and score goals with ease ("Sport" page, "Football legend Chuni Goswami

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

In a Business page story titled "HUL sales hit a rough patch, profit slips" (May 1, 2020), in the sentence that read: "Among the segment-wise businesses of HUL, beauty and personal care, the largest segment, fell 24% while...", the figure should be corrected to 14%.

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The mystery of the low COVID-19 numbers

The West Bengal government is locked in a confrontation with the Centre, even as it battles charges that it withheld information on the number of infected and dead, and is testing too few people. **Shiv Sahay Singh** reports on a State that made initial efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19, but has come under fire since

On March 17, West Bengal recorded its first case of COVID-19 when an 18-year-old student, who had returned from London, tested positive for the virus. The student had been admitted to the Infectious Diseases and Beliaghata General Hospital, located about a kilometre away from the Eastern Metropolitan bypass in Kolkata. Despite being thrust into the limelight, the primary referral hospital for COVID-19 cases remained quiet. People continued to walk in; the guards did not stop anyone. They did not even object to a television crew that headed to the building later that night.

The next morning, however, there was frenetic activity at Nabanna, which houses the State Secretariat, when it became public knowledge that the student was the son of a senior official in the State Home Department. The student had been in contact with his parents and his driver after his return to India on March 15. His mother had attended office till March 17 and met senior officials, including the Home Secretary of West Bengal. To make matters worse, reports said that the student had delayed his visit to a testing centre and had visited a shopping mall in the city, despite government instructions that those returning from abroad must remain in quarantine for 14 days. Several officials were furious about this serious and dangerous lapse of judgment.

Changing bulletins

Nearly a week later, on March 23, West Bengal recorded its first COVID-19-related death when a 57-year-old succumbed to the virus. The case was a matter of concern as it was unclear where the man, a resident of Dum Dum and an employee of the Eastern Railways, had contracted the virus. His family denied Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's statement that he had travelled abroad. The confusion over his travel history also reflected in the Health Department's official bulletin: it simply did not say anything about his travel history. In fact, from that day onwards, the Health Department, in its bulletins on COVID-19, stopped carrying any details about the travel histories of the infected and dead. The daily bulletin, which was first released as early as February, was initially an important tool for keeping the people informed. However, as cases grew in the State, the bulletins were constantly altered – sometimes to omit certain details and at other times to add details. This not only caused confusion and panic, but also raised eyebrows about the government's handling of the crisis.

This was surprising given how Banerjee appeared to be making all the right moves in the beginning of the outbreak. Between the time of the first reported COVID-19 case and the first COVID-19-related death in West Bengal, the government issued dozens of notifications and orders. The most significant one was issued on March 22. Titled 'Complete Safety Restriction', it announced a complete lockdown in West Bengal from 5 p.m. on March 23, a day before Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a nationwide lockdown. A meeting of major political parties was called to discuss ways of fighting the deadly virus. The Chief Minister demanded special packages from the Centre and visited markets and hospitals. An image circulating on social media at the time showed her drawing circles on the road in front of a shop to demonstrate to people how to practise physical distancing. Regular meetings with senior health and district officials were broadcast live on local television news channels. The State government announced a ₹200 crore fund and urged people to donate to the State Emergency Relief Fund that had been set up to contain the crisis. Quarantine centres were set up in every district. A separate COVID-19 hospital was identified and made functional. The police was busy enforcing the lockdown strictly by arresting hundreds of violators in Kolkata alone.

Setting up a task force

But in the last few days of March, it became clear that the virus had spread to different parts of the State: a resident of Kalimpong in North Bengal died, several in Howrah succumbed to the infection, and Purba Medinipur and Nadia districts also registered cases. Between March 31 and April 2, the death toll jumped from two to seven. Those who had died had no confirmed travel history outside the country.

On April 2, a committee of doctors engaged by the State government as a Special Task Force against COVID-19 met at the State Secretariat and announced that the death toll had increased to seven. However, within an hour, the government revised the number. Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha said that the death toll was not seven but three, as four people who had died were admitted with "co-morbidities". On April 3, the West Bengal government issued a notification announcing that an expert committee would be set up for "conducting audit of the suspected



A municipal worker delivers fruits and vegetables from a vendor for residents in a containment area in Kolkata on April 21. (Below): Health workers interact with residents in a slum during a health survey in Belgachia, Kolkata, after it became a COVID-19 hotspot. • AFP | PTI



deaths due to COVID-19". The committee's task was to audit all those people who had died after testing positive for the virus and examine "whether they died of the viral infection or co-morbidities". The two terms, 'audit committee' and 'co-morbidities', came to dominate the discourse on the pandemic in West Bengal over the next few weeks.

More and more reports of COVID-19-positive patients dying were published in the media, but the official death count remained low. This was because the audit committee was busy examining each and every case. The figures were updated only with its approval. Journalists, doctors and Central teams began raising questions about the committee's method in arriving at the findings.

The bulletins caused more suspicion about the accuracy of the numbers. On April 2 and 3, the government did not release the official bulletin. The April 4 bulletin had no column on COVID-19-related deaths. This continued for a couple of days until April 7, when the government finally re-introduced the column specifying how many had died in West Bengal of SARS-CoV-2.

From bad to worse

Unlike most places in the country, the West Bengal government relaxed lockdown-related restrictions. It allowed sweet shops and flower markets to remain open, apparently to give people some relief. It issued exemptions in labour-intensive sectors such as tea and jute. These were not isolated instances but part of the government's stated policy of having a "lockdown with a human face". Towards the end of April, Banerjee announced that tea stalls and local paan shops would be kept open in safer areas of the State. Even buses were allowed to ply in the eight districts of the State which had not recorded COVID-19 cases yet.

Despite her advocating physical distancing, the scenes from the markets of Kolkata and Howrah presented a worrying picture. Banerjee announced that markets and shops selling essential commodities would remain open. Peo-

ple thronged the markets daily to stock up on groceries and other essential goods. The government struggled to implement its stated policy, while also implementing the lockdown. The police was accused of engaging in excesses in their attempts to keep people from congregating. On March 27, when Banerjee chided the police, the results were swift. In the next 24 hours, the number of people prosecuted for violating the lockdown in Kolkata fell to 182 from 453.

The nightmare of trying to enforce physical distancing got worse on March 25 when thousands of people stranded due to the nationwide lockdown packed into Howrah Station. Banerjee claimed that the government had arranged to feed about 2 lakh migrants from other States, in 711 camps. She also wrote to 18 Chief Ministers urging them to provide essentials to the migrants from West Bengal stuck in their respective States.

Even as the situation went from bad to worse, attempts continued to stonewall questions from the media on the location of hotspots in the State. Sinha said on April 4, "Everyone does not need to know everything. We are putting information which people need to know". Instead of announcing the total number of infections, for instance, the government simply published the number of active cases. This number excluded the number of recoveries and deaths. As on April 30, the active cases in the State stood at 572, while 139 COVID-19 patients have been discharged after treatment.

Testing problems

While COVID-19 cases emerged in many districts in south Bengal, and in a few districts in north Bengal, Howrah and Kolkata especially posed a challenge. According to the 2011 Census, about 31% of the total population in Kolkata resides in urban slums. The administration struggled to deal with the large crowds in front of ration shops in urban slums. It was in the slums that the first rapid antibody tests were conducted on April 21. Of the 14 samples collected, two people tested positive.

Official records show that testing started as early as March 3, almost two weeks before the first case was detected.



ed. The National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Diseases (NICED), a facility of the Indian Council of Medical Research, was the only testing facility in the first few days of the outbreak. NICED provided training to other testing centres of the State, particularly the medical colleges and hospitals. But until April 15, one and a half months after testing started, the fourth most populous State in the country was struggling to conduct 400 tests on a daily basis.

Initially the State government said it did not have enough testing kits and urged the Centre to provide more kits. Officials of the NICED denied any shortage of kits, however, and said that the samples reaching them had reduced significantly. Their statement indicated that the State preferred its own medical colleges to the Central government institution.

The State Health Department also alleged that tests conducted using the RT-PCR testing kits provided by ICMR-NICED were proving to be non-conclusive. Every sample had to be tested twice or thrice, it said, which was causing delays. "We received instructions from the ICMR not to distribute the faulty kits. The kits have lost their activity due to problems in storage level at the medical college level or during transportation," NICED director Shanta Dutta said. This development triggered a major controversy with the Trinamool Congress accusing the Centre of not providing even the most basic resources to fight the pandemic. By the end of April, the State began testing at 14 facilities. It tested 2,000 samples a day. Yet, with over 16,500 samples tested by the end of April, West Bengal still ranked the lowest among the bigger States in terms of testing. It was testing 183 per million of the population, whereas the national average was 613.

Centre-State differences

The NICED issue was not the only one that revealed the differences between the State and Centre. The Centre's decision to send two inter-ministerial central teams (IMCTs) triggered a public spat between the West Bengal government and the Centre. Banerjee made it very clear that she was unhappy about the IMCTs' visit and sent a strong

ly worded letter to Modi saying "such unilateral action on the part of the Central Government is not desirable at all". The Chief Secretary said that the Central teams had arrived in the State without any consultation with the State government and would therefore not be allowed to tour West Bengal. However, the State government softened its stand after receiving a letter from the Union Home Secretary, which said that the Central teams "have been specifically restrained from making any visits" which amount to "obstructing the implementation of the orders issued by the Central government under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, and equally binding directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court".

For the next few days the IMCTs raised questions on almost all aspects of COVID-19 management in the State, from the number of ventilators in hospitals, quarantine facilities, delays in test reports, and the use of personal protective equipment for medical staff. Letters addressed to the Chief Secretary by the IMCTs stationed in the city and north Bengal were made public, and dominated the headlines for several days.

Meanwhile, while the Central teams were visiting the State, the Chief Minister took to the streets once again. This time, she did not distribute masks or speak to the people directly; instead, she addressed them via a microphone while being seated inside a police vehicle. She appealed to the people to remain inside their homes during the lockdown. For several days, Banerjee went around different areas appealing to people to respect the lockdown.

On April 24, the IMCTs sought to know details of the procedure which the audit committee was following to announce COVID-19 deaths. On the same day, the State government shared for the first time the total number of deaths related to COVID-19 in the State. It said that the audit committee had examined 57 deaths and found that 18 were related to the virus; the rest were due to severe co-morbidities. On April 30, the State government announced that since the outbreak of the pandemic, 105 persons who had tested positive for COVID-19 in West Bengal had died. Of these, 33 deaths had died of COVID-19 and 72 had died of co-morbidities. Interestingly, this revelation came a day after Banerjee said that it was the Health Department's decision to set up the audit committee and that she had nothing to do with it. Banerjee holds the health portfolio in the government.

Virus infects healthcare workers

While the State and Centre were busy writing letters to each other, healthcare providers at State-run hospitals were getting infected at a rapid pace. By the end of April, more than 20 healthcare staff, including at the Medical College, Kolkata, one of the oldest medical colleges in the country, had tested positive. A doctor at the hospital said N95 masks and personal protective equipment available were not enough; that they were available only for those who had

the highest risk of getting infected. This endangered the lives of medical professionals, he said. The situation was similar in other medical college and hospitals of the State.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, the doctor cited an instance that occurred on April 8 to illustrate how the government was not taking the situation seriously. A pregnant woman with COVID-19 symptoms was brought to the gynaecology department. She was not shifted to the COVID-19 facility and came in contact with doctors and health workers of three consecutive shifts. The doctor, who was working at the emergency department, later showed symptoms of the disease and was placed under quarantine. Like many of his colleagues, he stood in queue, gave his samples and waited for the reports.

On April 26, a senior health official of the West Bengal government died. The news sent shockwaves across the health sector. The Calcutta High Court, which is also hearing a matter on the spread of COVID-19, wanted to know whether enough pieces of personal protective equipment were available for frontline health workers. Highlighting the fact that more and more healthcare workers are testing positive for the virus in the State, the West Bengal Doctors Forum has emphasised the need for intensive testing for healthcare professionals.

At the Medical College, Kolkata, a doctor heaved a sigh of relief after testing negative for the virus. "My test results are negative, but my colleagues and friends are testing positive. Even today a postgraduate trainee at the hospital has tested positive. I don't know what the future holds for us," he said.

'Clerical mistakes', data updates

The West Bengal government has not only been criticised for allegedly hiding data and for its low testing rate. In the last week of April, a 70-year-old man died after being readmitted to a State-run health facility in Kolkata. The hospital had initially released him saying he had tested negative for the virus. A day after he was released, it asked him to get readmitted. The hospital said he was COVID-19 positive and that he had been released by mistake. While the government did not comment on this case, the Chief Minister said "minor clerical mistakes" should not be highlighted.

It was only in the last week of April that the State government started sharing more information about the spread of the outbreak. It released the list of containment zones in the State (444 on April 30). Almost 60% of these contain-

ment zones (264) are in Kolkata, followed by 72 in Howrah and 70 in the adjoining district of North 24 Parganas.

West Bengal has contested the Centre's May list that shows 10 districts of the State being in the 'red zone'. It insists that only four districts should be included in the category. Communication from the State to the Centre revealed that on April 30, West Bengal had 931 COVID-19 infections. With 489 cases, Kolkata alone accounted for over 52% off all infections in the State.

FROM PAGE ONE

Lockdown till May 17; curbs stay on transport

The National Directive for COVID-19 management said shops selling liquor, gutkha, and tobacco will be allowed to open in orange, green zones and rural areas by maintaining six-feet distance and ensuring no more than five persons are present at a time.

Schools, colleges, hotels and restaurants, cinema halls, malls, gyms, and all kinds of social, political, cultural, religious gatherings remain prohibited.

The MHA said movement of individuals, for all non-essential activities, shall remain strictly prohibited between 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. in all zones.

Green zones are districts with either zero confirmed cases till date; or, no confirmed case in the last 21 days. Red zones are defined as per total number of active cases, doubling rate of confirmed cases, extent of testing and surveillance feedback from the districts. The districts, which are neither defined as red nor green, shall be classified as orange zones.

Railways run 'Shramik Specials' to ferry stranded

The five 'Shramik Special' trains planned are: Nasik (Maharashtra) to Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh), Aluva (Kerala) to Bhubaneswar (Odisha), Nasik (Maharashtra) to Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh), Jaipur (Rajasthan) to Patna (Bihar) and Kota (Rajasthan) to Hatia (Jharkhand). A Railways official stressed that these were special trains planned for people identified and registered by the State governments, and that the Railways would not issue any tickets to any individual or group. "We will allow only those passengers to board whom State government officials will bring to Railway Stations," said the official, speaking on the condition of anonymity.

"These special trains will be run from point to point on the request of both the concerned State governments as per the standard protocols for sending and receiving such stranded persons," the Indian Railways said in an official statement.

The passengers would

According to the Union Health Ministry, there are 130 red zone districts, 284 orange zone districts and 319 green zone districts.

"However, States/UTs, based on their assessment of the situation, and with the primary objective of keeping the spread of COVID-19 in check, may allow only select activities from out of the permitted activities, with such restrictions as felt necessary," MHA said.

"In all zones, persons above 65 years of age, persons with co-morbidities, pregnant women, and children below the age of 10 years, shall stay at home, except for meeting essential requirements and for health purposes," MHA said.

All private offices in red zone can operate with up to 33% strength as per requirement.

All Government offices shall function with senior officers of the level of Deputy Secretary and above at full strength, and the remaining staff attending up to 33% as per requirement, MHA said.

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI

The Centre's proposal to construct a new Parliament building next to the existing heritage structure was approved by the Environment Ministry's expert appraisal committee (EAC) last week.

The EAC, however, said the approval was subject to the outcome of a legal challenge to the change of land-use of the plot, according to the minutes of the meeting.

The Central Public Works Department's (CPWD) proposal for "expansion and renovation of the existing Parliament building at Parliament Street" was among the projects considered by the EAC at its meetings on April 22-24.

The proposal was earlier considered by the EAC at its meetings on February 25-26, where it asked the CPWD for additional information.

While reconsidering the project during last week's meeting, the EAC noted that the project cost, as submitted by the CPWD, had gone up from ₹776 crore to ₹922 crore due to "changes in project specifications".

While the March notification of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) changing the land-use of the plot from "recreational (district park)" to "Parliament" in the Master Plan of Delhi has been challenged in the Supreme Court, the CPWD clarified that there was no stay order.

The CPWD submitted that there would be "no significant impacts on public space" and with the entire area being in "high security zone", the plot could have never been used for recreational purposes. Of the 333 trees on the plot, 223 will be transplanted and 100 retained. In addition, 290 new trees would be planted.

Responding to a representation to the EAC about the timing of the project in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CPWD submitted: "The existing Parliament building was constructed 93 years ago. Over the years many planned/unplanned changes have been made, often undocumented. It is in dire need of retrofitting as soon as possible. This can

only be done once the building is in vacant position and that will happen once the new building is made available. Therefore, development of the proposed Parliament building is of utmost importance."

The CPWD stated that the project was the "expansion of an existing building on the neighbouring plot" so the environmental impacts would be "if at all, minor and incremental". The project would not lead to any increase in air and noise pollution and the water consumption would decrease due to reuse of treated wa-

ter, the EAC minutes stated.

Kanchi Kohli, an independent environment law researcher, said the assessment done was inadequate. "The CPWD's EIA consultant has called the impacts of the modernisation and expansion of Parliament, which includes an entirely new building 'minor and incremental'. This is without carrying out a full environmental assessment of the stand-alone Parliament project, leave alone the full Central Vista redevelopment, of which it is a part."

(With inputs from Jacob Koshy)

Buildings built in 1970s-1980s to be demolished (5,200 sqm)

New Parliament construction
Estimated cost: ₹922 crore
Maximum height of building: 42 metres (basement + ground + 2 floors)
Trees: Of the 333 on site, 223 to be transplanted, 100 retained

SOURCE: MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF EXPERT COMMITTEE OF THE MOEF ON APRIL 22-24 | PLAN BY HCP DESIGN

CAT J&K Bench will hear service matters: Centre

No one needs to go to Chandigarh'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

The Centre on Friday clarified that all service matters of the employees of the Central government and the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir courts, to the CAT, Chandigarh.

In an order issued by the DoPT on April 29, the CAT, Chandigarh, was granted jurisdiction of the Benches in Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab and in the Union Territories of Chandigarh, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

The registration of cases can also be done either online or at the CAT's secretariat office to be set up locally.

"Disposal of cases through the CAT in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir will ensure fair and objective delivery of justice," the statement said.

The clarification came a

SC comes to the aid of Bhushan

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday granted noted civil rights lawyer Prashant Bhushan protection from arrest in an FIR registered against him in Gujarat in connection with his tweet on the re-telecast of epics Ramayana and Mahabharata amid the COVID-19 lockdown.

A Bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan and Sanjiv Khanna, in the proceedings conducted through video conferencing, issued notice to the Gujarat Police and listed the case after two weeks.

The FIR was lodged by former Army personnel Jai Dev Rajnikant Joshi at Rajkot in Gujarat. In his complaint, Joshi had accused Bhushan of using word 'opium' for Ramayana and Mahabharata in a tweet on March 28 which hurt the sentiments of many Hindu people.

Maharashtra Legislative Council elections to be held on May 21

State says it is committed to offering safe, sanitised facilities

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Friday decided to hold elections to nine vacant Maharashtra Legislative Council seats on May 21, after receiving letters from the State Governor and the Chief Secretary on the feasibility of conducting the polls during the pandemic.

The nomination process will be from May 4 to 11, the last date for withdrawal of candidature is May 14 and polling and counting on May 21. The ECI's decision comes just in time for Uddhav Thackeray, who was sworn in as Chief Minister on November 28 last, giving him six months to become a member of the Assembly or the Council in order to continue in the post.

The ECI's schedule for the polls says the election process will be completed by

May 26, a day ahead of the May 27 deadline for Mr. Thackeray.

In a statement, the ECI said it reviewed the feasibility of conducting biennial elections to the nine seats that fell vacant on April 24.

Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora joined the meeting with Election Commissioners Ashok Lavasa and Sushil Chandra through videoconferencing from the United States, where he is since travel restrictions were imposed to control CO-

VID-19 in March. The ECI decided on April 3 to defer the elections to the nine seats each in Maharashtra and Bihar councils due to the lockdown that followed the pandemic. The Commission said it received a letter on Thursday from the Chief Secretary highlighting the steps taken to control the pandemic and reiterating that the State government thought the polls could be conducted safely.

The State government had assured the Commission that it was fully committed to ensuring that the elections are held in total hygienic conditions with social distancing measures and other conditions imposed by the competent authorities, the ECI said. Other elections that were deferred, including to the Rajya Sabha and the Bihar Legislative Council, would be reviewed next week.

Project shows govt's warped view: Congress

Funds must be used to fight COVID-19'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Congress criticised the government for moving ahead with its plan to construct a new Parliament building at a time when the country is battling the COVID-19 pandemic. It showed the government's "absurd priorities" at a time when the country was facing a health crisis and hunger looming large due to the extended lockdown, the party said.

The Central Vista Committee, at a meeting on April 23, approved the construction of a new Parliament building. *The Hindu* reported on Friday. The construction is a part of the larger revamp of the entire 3-km Central Vista from Rashtrapati Bhavan till India Gate, proposed by the Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry and its construction agency, the CPWD.

"It shows the warped, distorted and completely absurd priorities of this government. Bang in the middle of COVID-19, they are fast-tracking, hot-footing the project," Congress national spokesperson and Rajya Sabha member Abhishek Manu Singhvi said.

'Hobby horse'

Mr. Singhvi called it a "hobby horse" of the government. "It is the intention to leave in a personal manner your own stamp, by littering the green verdant landscape of Rajpath with new buildings in the name of modernisation. A more horrible attack on the heart and psyche of Delhi cannot be imagined," he said.

Nearly 14 lakh ventilators could be purchased with



Abhishek Manu Singhvi

this money and even the migrant workers stranded across various cities, staring at hunger, could be, if needed, flown back in planes using this money. "We would earnestly with folded hands urge the Supreme Court to pay attention to this," he added.

Jairam Ramesh's plea

Rajya Sabha member Jairam Ramesh, wrote to House Chairman Venkaiah Naidu, urging him to oppose the project. The MP Local Area Development fund had been frozen for two years. The dearness allowance of government employees had been deferred till mid-2021 and there were reports that the defence expenditure too shall be substantially cut. At such a time, Mr. Ramesh wrote, "the Central Vista Redevelopment Project, of which you have been a strong votary, continues unmindful of the financial crisis staring the government in its face and unmindful of all objections that have been raised against it."

Mr. Ramesh urged Mr. Naidu to speak out and support a freeze on the Central Vista Redevelopment Project. In a tweet earlier, Mr. Ramesh said that "the many 'Modi Mahals' can and must wait!"

'Sarpanch held for terror links is not with BJP'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A BJP spokesman on Friday said that a former sarpanch, arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in a terror case on Wednesday, had unsuccessfully contested Assembly elections in J&K in 2014 on a party ticket but was suspended for anti-party activities four years later.

The suspect, Tariq Ahmad Mir, 36, was arrested by Delhi police's Crime Branch on January 28 from Jehanabad in Bihar for allegedly making inflammatory speeches in Jamia Millia Islamia and Aligarh, during protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. He has been booked under the draconian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

Mr. Imam was arrested by Delhi police's Crime Branch on January 28 from Jehanabad in Bihar for allegedly making inflammatory speeches in Jamia Millia Islamia and Aligarh, during protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. The PhD student at the JNU's Centre for Historical Studies has been booked on sedition and other charges after videos of his speeches were circulated on social media.



court had urgently heard the case of journalist Arnab Goswami even as it stayed at multiple FIRs against him except for the one in Nagpur, which was shifted to Mumbai. Mr. Dave asked why his client, whose personal liberty was also at stake, should not get a similar relief.

'Only one key LeT operative in Pak. jail'

Enforcement officials express concern

DEVESH K. PANDEY
NEW DELHI

Only one of the key terrorists of the banned Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and its front, Jamat-ud-Dawah (JuD), who were earlier arrested in Pakistan ahead of the crucial Financial Action Task Force (FATF) review meetings, is currently lodged in jail, according to Indian enforcement agencies.

"Arrests of several top LeT/JuD operatives were shown by Pakistan before the meetings in October 2019 and February this year. However, according to our information, now only one of them – Qari Yaqoob Sheikh – is lodged in Adyalia Jail [Central Jail-Rawalpindi]," said an official.

LeT chief Hafiz Saeed and co-founder Amir Hamza are currently said to be operating from their homes in Lahore.

The agencies are of the view that Pakistani authori-

ties are exploring various ways to conceal the ground realities and instead, come up with presentable figures before the FATF on the action taken against terror funding, before the review of its performance in June. In February, the international watchdog decided to keep it on its grey list.

Following pressure from the global community to crack down on the terrorists, Pakistan had admitted that hundreds of them were operating from its soil and that strong action was being taken against them.

Pakistan's National Counter Terrorism Authority (NCTA) maintains a list of such elements. However, according to the recent media reports, about 1,800 names have been removed from the list since March. In the past 18 months, as many as 3,800 of the 7,600 names have been struck off," the official said.



VID-19 in March. The ECI decided on April 3 to defer the elections to the nine seats each in Maharashtra and Bihar councils due to the lockdown that followed the pandemic. The Commission said it received a letter on Thursday from the Chief Secretary highlighting the steps taken to control the pandemic and reiterating that the State government thought the polls could be conducted safely.

The State government had assured the Commission that it was fully committed to ensuring that the elections are held in total hygienic conditions with social distancing measures and other conditions imposed by the competent authorities, the ECI said. Other elections that were deferred, including to the Rajya Sabha and the Bihar Legislative Council, would be reviewed next week.

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Over 9,000 test reports unaccounted for in M.P.

State claims 23% jump in number of tests conducted on April 30

SIDHARTH YADAV
BHOPAL

A wide variance between the cumulative COVID-19 test reports received and the sum of samples that tested positive and negative until April 30 in Madhya Pradesh, has raised questions about accuracy of data maintained by the State government. The difference between the two metrics has left at least 9,271 test results unaccounted.

Incidentally, this figure is close to startlingly high number of 7,875 tests which the State government claims to have conducted on the same day (April 30).

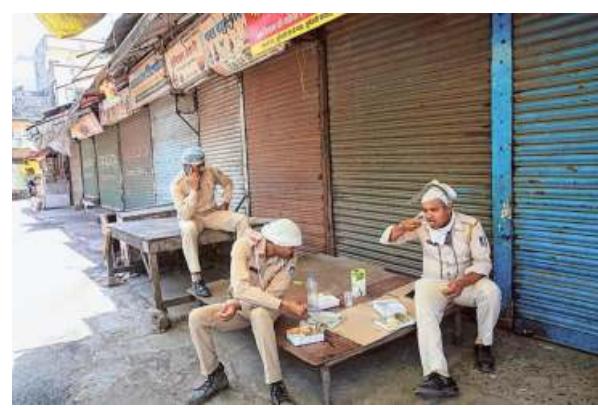
This stated number of tests is more than twice the highest number of tests reported earlier. It also marks an unusual 23.27% jump in testing over the previous day, much beyond the State's infrastructure. On April 16, a similar inexplicable jump of

41% was recorded.

The spike in testing numbers helps buttress the claims of the embattled State government, under whose watch 5.2% of COVID-19 patients have died. Ujjain, with a fatality rate of 17% has overtaken every other city in country. However, even as the figures showed a wide discrepancy, Chief Minister Shivraj Chouhan said the infection rate had reduced in the State, and the situation was improving.

Slump in positive cases

On April 30, Madhya Pradesh had conducted 500.3 tests per million, up by around 100 counts over the previous day. In line with Mr. Chouhan's claim, the number of positive samples among the tested ones continued a downward trend, settling at 6.3% on the day, according to the media



On the go: Policemen having meals while on duty in a market in Bhopal on Friday. ■ PTI

bulletin. "We are recompiling these figures. The Indian Council of Medical Research is not sharing the data with us real time. Their database is not available with us. And the data given in the bulletin is collected from laboratories. The laboratories are reporting more," said a senior official of the State Health Department, requesting anonymity.

The over-reporting in test-

ing comes four days after 8,439 samples were shown in the daily bulletin as pending results. Thereafter, the government scrapped the 'pending samples' column altogether. Amulya Nidhi, of the Jan Swasthya Abhiyan, believes this was done to avoid the media questions over the high numbers of pending test results.

"The government is manipulating data in varying

ways since March 26," Mr. Nidhi alleged. "First, it stopped releasing the tally of rejected samples, and instead combined it with negative samples. Then a month later, it stopped revealing the number of samples collected and the pendency."

The number of total sample test reports received is a sum of positive and negative samples tested. Since April 26, the tally of negative samples has not been taken into account the rejected samples, said an official at the department. And since then, the difference between reports received and the sum has been growing. Starting with 1,344 on April 27, it has touched 9,271.

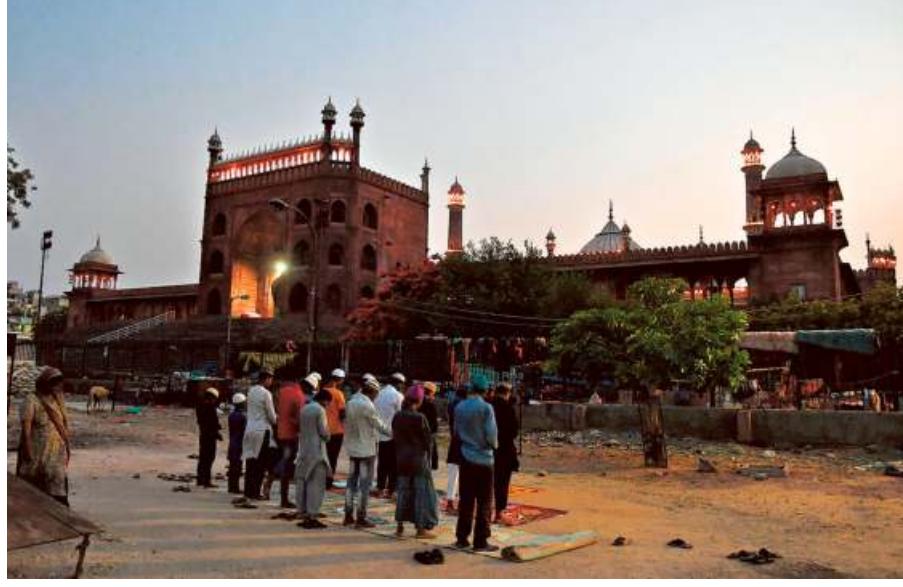
In two other recent instances, the government had similarly slashed its cumulative tally of samples which had tested negative. On April 27, the total samples tested until then dropped to 25,665, as 4,679 was subtracted from the tally of negative samples

on the previous day. Similarly, 416 was removed on April 18 from the tally until the previous day, thereby dropping the testing count.

The bulletin, released every evening, does not take into account figures from Indore, the hardest-hit city where most cases and deaths have been reported. The city releases its figures late night, which are adjusted in the State tally the next day.

"As the situation in Indore turned worse, they stopped even revealing who died of COVID-19 and with what comorbidities, in the city's bulletin. From a comprehensive bulletin, Indore district administration has made it into a short single-page one," said Anand Rai, part of the Indore COVID-19 combat team. "The media and the public have a right to access data, and analyse it. It must be transparently released so that others can study trends and help to contain the virus," said Dr. Rai.

Subdued prayers



Fasting period: Muslims maintaining physical distancing as they offer Ramzan prayers outside the Jama Masjid in New Delhi on Friday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

MoD for contributing 1-day salary every month to PM-CARES Fund

However, this will be implemented on a voluntary basis

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

After the contribution of one-day salary of all the employees of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to the PM CARES Fund to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, a proposal has been moved to contribute one-day salary every month of this financial year to the Fund, defence sources said.

The proposal is to deduct one day's salary every month this financial year and deposit it in the PM CARES Fund. The circular on this will be issued in a day or two. This will be purely

on a voluntary basis," a defence source said on Friday.

End of March, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh approved a proposal for the contribution of the MoD employees' one-day salary, which the Ministry had stated "around ₹500 crore will be collectively" from the three Services, Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) and others, to the PM-CARES Fund. The contribution is voluntary and those desirous of opting out will be exempted, the MoD had noted.

In addition, the DPSUs and the Ordnance Factory

Board have made a contribution from the Corporate Social Responsibility funds.

Earlier, the Finance Ministry issued a circular dated April 17 on contribution of a day's salary every month of all its employees to the fund till March 2021. It stated that "any officer or staff having objection to it may intimate drawing and disbursing officer, Department of Revenue, in writing..." However, this was modified in an order on April 29 that said anyone willing to contribute a day's salary every month has to write to the drawing and disbursing officer.

State caps hospital costs

STAFF REPORTER
MUMBAI

In a first, the Maharashtra government has capped the cost of treatment in private

hospitals for people who are not covered under insurance. For those who have insurance, the capped price will come into force after they have exhausted the cover. The decision comes after several patients suffering from COVID-19 and other ailments highlighted the exorbitant cost at private hospitals.

reported a relatively low figure of 42 positive cases, now has a high death toll figure of 12.

High risk

"58% of the deaths reported had high-risk co-morbidities such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma and heart disease," informed Dr. Awate.

Till date, 1,43,798 samples have been tested in Maharashtra, of which 1,34,244 (nearly 90%) have returned negative, while 10,498 have tested positive.

+ 25 fresh COVID-19 cases reported in J&K

31 persons recover in a single day

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

Jammu and Kashmir has reported 25 fresh COVID-19 cases on Friday, taking the tally to 639.

Government spokesman Rohit Kansal said the Union Territory also recorded 31 cases of recovery. "It is the first time the number of recoveries overtook the number of those who tested positive in a day."

The total number of patients who have recovered now stands at 247, including 51 from the Jammu division and 196 from the Kashmir division.

The official said that of the 25 fresh cases, 12 were reported from Anantnag, six from Kupwara, two each from Srinagar and Shopian and one each from Budgam, Bandipora and Baramulla.

In Hirpora, a hotspot in Shopian district, two fresh cases pushed the total number to 49.

Hirpora saw an exponential increase in the num-



Health officials carrying out random sampling in Srinagar on Friday. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

ber of cases since the first was recorded on April 8. A total of 74 cases has been reported from the entire Shopian district," officials said.

Bandipora district topped, with 128 positive cases. In Jammu division, all 26 patients have recovered in Jammu district, officials said.

In Pulwama, five more villages were declared red zones and surrounding villages buffer zones on Friday. This comes with seven fresh cases reported after no case emerged for a month. In all, 17 villages have been declared red zones.

U.P. man cycles 100 km all alone for his wedding

Rides double with bride on way back

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
HAMIRUR

Undeterred by the coronavirus lockdown, a 23-year-old man in Uttar Pradesh kept his marriage date even if he had to pedal some 100 km to reach his bride's home, all alone – no family members in tow.

Kalku Prajapati of Pauthiya village in Hamirpur district was waiting till the last minute for permission from the administration for his marriage on April 25.

But on finding that it was not coming, he decided to go all alone on his bicycle to his bride Rinki's place at Puniya village in neighbouring Mahoba district, 230 km south of Lucknow.

"We were not getting permission from the local police for the marriage. I was left with no option but to go on cycle, all alone, to reach there," Mr. Prajapati, who studied till Class X and who is a farmer by profession, said.

In Pulwama, five more villages were declared red zones and surrounding villages buffer zones on Friday. This comes with seven fresh cases reported after no case emerged for a month. In all, 17 villages have been declared red zones.

"Those people [in-laws]

had also got wedding cards printed and were ready for the wedding on the decided date," Mr. Prajapati told PTI on the phone.

"Though I have a motorcycle, I have no driving licence. Cycle was most handy," Mr. Prajapati said. "With a handkerchief around my mouth to save myself from any infection, I set off in the morning in jeans and a T-shirt."

Interestingly, the wedding was performed in a village temple with the bride and the groom posing before the camera in their normal attire, with mouths covered.

The return journey after the marriage was even more arduous for Mr. Prajapati as he had to carry his newly wed wife on pillion.

"I pedalled all the way back with the double load. Even in my dream, I had not thought that my legs will have such pain. I could not sleep and had to take pills to ease it," he recalled.

Spirited legislator backs tipplers' joke

Open liquor shops and virus may die in throats, says Rajasthan Congress MLA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOTA

If alcohol-based sanitisers can kill the coronavirus on hands, there is no reason why alcoholic drinks may not kill the virus in tipplers' throats, Congress MLA from Sangod Assembly constituency in Kota district Bharat Singh Kundanpur has proposed, seeking the reopening of liquor shops in Rajasthan.

Mr. Kundanpur wrote in all seriousness to Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Thursday. The move would not only save alcoholics from dying of



The move would earn much-needed revenue for the State, the MLA said.

spurious liquor consumption, but also earn much-needed revenue for the State in a lockdown-hit economy, he stated. Liquor

is a much-maligned commodity, Mr. Kundanpur said in a matter-of-fact manner. When alcohol can wash coronavirus off hands, it will dislodge the virus from booze guzzlers' throats as well, he reasoned.

Mr. Kundanpur is not alone in urging Mr. Gehlot to open liquor shops in the State.

Similar appeal
His Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) colleague Balwan Singh Punia, MLA from the Bhadra Assembly segment, had made a similar plea to the

CM in early April. He, too, had pointed out that the closure of alcohol shops had led to spurious liquor businesses flourishing, affecting people's health.

Appealing fervently, Mr. Kundanpur referred to an incident in Halena village in Bharatpur district, where two persons lost their eyesight and after consuming country-made liquor. He also pointed out that Rajasthan's target of generating ₹12,500 crore revenue from liquor sale in 2020-21 appeared to have become a distant dream now.

Virus claims 26 more lives in Maharashtra

Tally hits 11,506 with 1,008 fresh cases



New facility: A test being conducted in a newly inaugurated COVID-19 bus in Worli, Mumbai, on Friday. ■ AADESH CHOURHADI

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PUNE

Maharashtra reported a record single-day surge of a staggering 1,008 COVID-19 positive cases as the State's cumulative tally crossed the 11,000 mark to touch 11,506 cases, while 26 deaths took the State's death toll to 485.

As per figures from the Health Department, Pune district reported 11 deaths, while Mumbai city reported six, including that of a resident from Uttar Pradesh.

Three deaths were reported from Jalgaon district, while one death each was reported from Thane, Bhiwandi and Sindhudurg in the Konkan, and from the Nanded, Parbhani and Aurangabad districts in the Marathwada region.

Mumbai city reported its highest single-day surge in new positive cases, recording a significant 751 cases, as the city's cumulative tally soared to 7,812 cases with 295 fatalities thus far.

"A total of 106 persons were discharged today, taking the cumulative discharged till date to 1,879," said State Surveillance Officer Pradeep Awate.

Pune district's death toll stands at 99, while Jalgaon district, which has thus far

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Gujarat sees 22 deaths, 326 fresh cases

State records more than 300 cases for the third consecutive day

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
AHMEDABAD

The COVID-19 outbreak is spiking sharply in Gujarat with 326 cases and 22 deaths reported on Friday, taking the total to 4,721 cases and 236 deaths. The State has now recorded increases of 300 or more cases for three consecutive days.

Friday's 22 deaths was the highest single-day toll due to COVID-19 in the State so far.

In the midst of rising cases and deaths, emerged a new trend of higher recoveries as the State recorded 123 discharges on Friday, its highest single-day recovery count, while the total number of discharged patients was 736.

There are 3,713 patients undergoing treatment at various places in the State and their condition is reported to be stable, while 36 others are

critically ill and have been put on ventilator support for breathing. As per the health department's figures, so far 68,774 samples have been tested in the State.

Ahmedabad continues to remain grim. The city saw its steepest spike of 267 new infections and 16 deaths on Friday.

The death toll in the city has now jumped to 165 while number of cases have reached 3,293 and recovery is at 399.

For the last three days, the city has been adding 200 plus cases, making it one of the worst affected cities in the country and the city with the second highest number of cases and deaths after Mumbai.

Ahmedabad accounts for almost 70% of the total casualties and cases of CO-



In the hotspot: The situation in Ahmedabad continues to remain grim, with the steepest spike of 267 new cases of infections and 16 deaths on Friday. ■ PTI

VID-19 in Gujarat. After Ahmedabad is Surat with 644 cases and 26 deaths while Vadodara's numbers stand at 308 cases and 21 deaths.

Entire Gujarat's death ratio is almost 5%, which is even higher than Maharashtra's ratio. Maharashtra is the

worst affected State with more than 10,000 cases.

Cases in other districts
Besides Ahmedabad, Surat and Vadodara, deaths have been reported from other places like Bhavnagar 5, Anand 4, Panchmahal 3 and

Bharuch and Gandhinagar 2 each.

According to medical experts, Ahmedabad will likely see an exponential rise in cases and fatalities in the coming days as the infection has penetrated in highly congested and slum pockets.

'Add Chakmas and Hajongs to relief plan'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

The Ministry of Development of the North Eastern Region (DoNER) has directed the Arunachal Pradesh government to include the Chakma and Hajong communities in the COVID-19 relief programme.

In a letter to the State's Chief Secretary, Naresh Kumar, on April 29, DoNER Joint Secretary Rambir Singh cited the complaint by a rights group to Prime Minister's office for treating the issue as a "matter of priority" in these difficult times of pandemic.

A majority of the Chakmas and Hajongs living in the State for the last 56 years have been facing massive food shortage because of their exclusion from the relief programme, the Rights and Risks Analysis Group said.

Odisha veterinarians train to man testing labs

State anticipates a rise in infections

SATYASUNDAR BARIK
BHUBANESWAR

As Odisha's graph of people testing positive for COVID-19 is sharply rising, the State government has been ramping up trained manpower to tackle the pandemic – the latest addition is the engagement of a large group of veterinarians.



Functionaries see no harm in letting veterinarians perform critical clinical functions. ■ FILE PHOTO

an ICMR institute.

Stating that the capacity building is a continuous process, Dr. Panda said, "We have already trained 1.5 lakh people including doctors, medical students, nurses and pathologists and made them ready to tackle COVID-19 pandemic in the State."

Besides, members of NGOs, students, Scout and Guide cadets, sanitation workers and other support staff have been trained as to how to conduct themselves during the emerging crisis and save themselves from infections.

"We are preparing for a scenario when more than 50,000 people will be infected and we would require proportionate number of manpower to serve them," he said.

According to Director of Medical Education and Training, C.B.K. Mohanty, the State government has also been proactively preparing technical manpower to face the crisis.

"We have a sizeable number of government doctors. Besides, private health institutions have been requested to keep their doctors on alert so that they can join the workforce at short notice. The government had also put out an advertisement inviting private and retired health professionals to enroll for COVID-19 response," said Mr. Mohanty.

Parents miss son's last rites over pass delay

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

Kamala Das and husband Subhash Chandra Das on Friday received the Meghalaya government's approval to travel from State capital Shillong to their home town Hojai in central Assam. But the curfew pass came too late – after their son was cremated.

The couple were on a visit to their ailing daughter in Shillong more than a month ago but were stranded after the nationwide COVID-19 lockdown began from March 25.

While in Shillong, the health of their 34-year-old son Deepak deteriorated.

The couple applied for a curfew pass on April 29 but it did not arrive.

They wrote another online application on April 30, this time informing the authorities about their son's death along with a copy of his death certificate.

"A daughter of a film star [Rishi Kapoor] quickly got permission to travel but an ordinary couple had to wait until their son died," Shillong-based social activist Arvind Yadav said.

He added that the pass was finally issued after the intervention of Meghalaya Health Minister. Officials claimed some applications take time because of several cases of travel permits obtained for medical emergencies being misused.

"How can they suspect medical certificates? Will parents lie about the failing health or death of their son or daughter? I hope no parent on earth has to undergo such an ordeal, not even those who were responsible for ours," Ms. Das said.

COVID-19 cases resurface in 'corona-free' districts of U.P.

However, figures are down from 11 on April 22 to 6 on May 1

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

COVID-19 cases are resurfacing in districts declared "corona-free" by the Uttar Pradesh government.

On April 22, the Health Department declared that with the inclusion of Pratapgarh district, the total number of districts that had recovered from COVID-19, those that have not reported any new cases over a certain period of time, had increased to 11.

These "corona-mukt" districts, as the government called them, were Lakhimpur Kheri, Pilibhit, Bareilly, Hardoi, Pratapgarh, Shahjahanpur, Hathras, Barabanki, Kaushambi and Prayagraj.

However, the figure has dropped since then as some of these districts, including Prayagraj and Pratapgarh,



The number of affected districts with no active cases further fell to six. ■ AFP

reported fresh cases. On April 30, the number of districts that now have zero active cases stood at seven. These were Kheri, Hardoi, Shahjahanpur, Hathras, Barabanki, Kaushambi and Bhadohi. But on May 1, Friday, the number further fell to six. These were Lakhimpur Kheri, Hardoi, Shahjahanpur, Barabanki, Kaushambi and Kasganj.

Hathras and Bhadohi, which had been declared free of COVID-19 returned on Thursday to the infected list, as they reported one fresh case each, as per the health department data.

WHO raises concern over use of BCG vaccine

'Vital to understand its safety, efficacy before being given to health workers'

R. PRASAD
CHENNAI

In a letter published in *The Lancet* on April 30, World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros A Ghebreyesus and others highlight a few critical issues over the use of BCG vaccine for COVID-19. They underscore the importance of randomised controlled trials of the vaccine to understand its safety and efficacy before using it on healthcare workers.

Randomised controlled trials are under way in the Netherlands and Australia to find out whether the vaccine can reduce the incidence and severity of COVID-19 among healthcare workers.

The authors do state that

the BCG vaccine, which "enhances the innate immune response to subsequent infections, might reduce viral load after SARS-CoV2 exposure, with a consequent less severe COVID-19 and more rapid recovery".

A study, posted on March 28 in a preprint server medRxiv, found an association between countries that have a universal BCG vaccination programme and reduced coronavirus cases – and even deaths. Preprints are yet to be peer-reviewed and published in scientific journals.

The authors cite five reasons countries should wait for the results of the BCG vaccine randomised controlled trials. According to



Deeper insight: The WHO has underscored the importance of randomised controlled trials before usage. ■ GETTY IMAGES

them, the association of fewer COVID-19 cases in countries that have a universal BCG vaccination programme is based on population rather than individual data.

Second, the beneficial effects of the BCG vaccine given at birth are "unlikely" to reduce the severity of COVID-19 decades later. "One reason for this is that the beneficial off-target effects of the BCG vaccine might be al-

tered by subsequent administration of a different vaccine," they write.

Third, there is a possibility, even if remote, that the BCG vaccine ramps up the immune system leading to exacerbation of COVID-19 in a small population of patients with a severe disease. It is already known that the virus induces cytokine storm in some patients, leading to further complications – and

even death. Fourth, if not effective against the novel coronavirus, BCG vaccination is likely to give a false sense of security to people, especially during the pandemic.

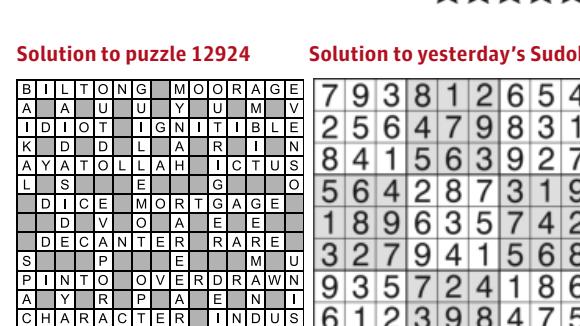
And finally, using the vaccine without evidence of its benefits could further jeopardise vaccine supply, which is already short, to protect children against disseminated TB in high-risk countries.

"BCG given early in life does improve the immune system. The vaccine can prevent intracellular infections. So the protective effect of BCG against COVID-19 is a biologically plausible hypothesis," Prof. Gagandeep Kang, executive director of the Translational Health Science and Technology Institute (THSTI), Faridabad, had earlier told *The Hindu*.

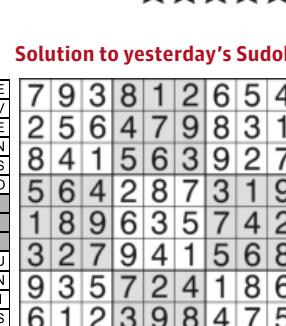
SUDOKU



Solution to puzzle 12924



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku



FAITH

Contentment & happiness

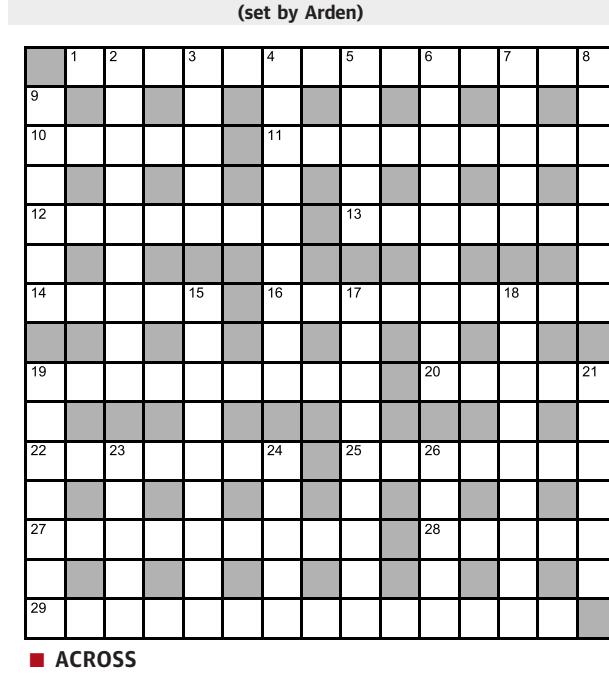
All beings seek happiness, but many are misled to believe that the external world with its glitter and attractions is the source of it. This is in spite of the fact that the world is a place full of sorrow and uncertainties. Krishna tells Arjuna that the mind of an unsteady person where innumerable desires keep arising can never find happiness, whereas the approach of the steady minded Stitaprajna finds peace within himself, pointed out Sri B. Sundarkumar in a discourse.

There are many examples of such strong minded people who have transcended the contradictory pulls of the world and have shown that it is possible to find happiness even in this ephemeral world by distancing oneself from it. It is said that the great music genius and composer Saint Thyagaraja was once invited by the king of Thanjavur to attend the royal court. But he rejected the invitation without hesitation. He knew only too well that the promise of the life of comfort in the palace meant subservience to the king at the expense of the personal freedom and joy he experienced in the worship of Lord Rama. He was not prepared for this. It is said the famous song 'Nidhi Chala Sukama' was sung in this context and reflects his spirit of vairagya and bhakti.

Sastras assign the greatest importance to righteous living. But in several trying contexts, even the righteous minded find it difficult to distinguish dharma from adharma. The spirit of dharma is buried well within each being and it is important that it is discovered. It is generally accepted that when assailed by doubts about following the right path, the wise fall back on the promptings of the inner self and mind, which is accepted as the final authority. In the pure mind, truth, which confers peace and joy, is reflected clearly without distortion.

TH CROSSWORD + 12925

(set by Arden)



- ACROSS
- 1 Restraining – did perhaps break the law by doing it (7,7)
- 10 Rob's returned to seat (5)
- 11 Harp on shifting time – there are many wards here (9)
- 12 Aversion for amount of work partner accepts (7)
- 13 Follow girl with flower (3,4)
- 14 Pushed the horse, wading in up river (5)

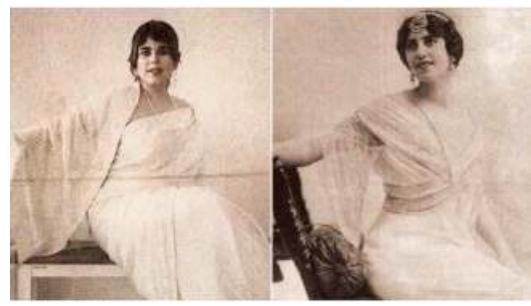
CM YK

SCANN TO PLAY
Try solving a puzzle today!
@ <https://crossword.thehindu.com>

QR CODE

- 16 Doctor must inject drug, there is some change in swelling (9)
- 19 Metal can't upset a cowboy (9)
- 20 Trainer's had a change of heart, gets a comfortable seat (5)
- 22 Crossover the sides and repeat... (7)
- 25 ... work is heavy at the religious academy (7)
- 27 Crafty ideas to acquire money – area where the British set up shop (4,5)
- 28 Term's somewhat lost in translation (5)
- 29 All ten swirling around – no holds barred here (3-2,9)
- DOWN
- 2 In the dark, may be lone source of illumination (4,5)
- 3 Loafer may go around dreamily (5)
- 4 Sweetheart, stop getting snug with the surroundings (9)
- 5 Maybe tide over initial problems, not too hot to handle (5)
- 6 Current carrying electronic signal turns out to be a pain reliever (9)
- 7 I had taken up old state (5)
- 8 Great! one's gone for sure – was the oldest (7)
- 9 Property dispute ended on land... (6)
- 15 ...and a Tamil version could be a pet possession (9)
- 17 He's loaded one in my luggage (9)
- 18 Somehow tried to get top university – no one came up with scholarship (9)
- 19 Fish caught by him over time (7)
- 21 Home under hard ground (6)
- 23 Tea-seller's got a stand (5)
- 24 Wood dock workers use essentially (5)
- 26 Sails woven with fibre (5)

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Instapick

Costume parties: First, we had to wear pillows but make it fashionable. Then, people were recreating iconic Met Gala looks: including Katy Perry's 2019 chandelier dress. Closer home, stylist Spardha Malik (@spardhamalik) is inviting everyone to a #CostumePartyWithS. Every Saturday, she picks a theme (Disco, Birds of Paradise, and Maharajas and Maharanis of India have been featured so far). All you have to do is dress up and show up on Instagram!



Talking point

We Are One: A Global Film Festival: The excitement is mounting for this 10-day virtual festival. It will bring this year's film festival submissions – from Berlin, Cannes, Sundance, Toronto and Tribeca, among others – straight to your home. While the line-up is yet to be revealed, features, shorts, documentaries, comedies and conversations will be included. From May 29 to June 7 on YouTube.

Pick of the week

Concerts, stand-up and other online events you just can't miss.
The event preview and calendar will resume in a few weeks.



Click for rewards

For photographers looking for inspiration, **Life Framer** has two themes open for entry: Colours and Youthhood. Interpret them as literally or as playfully as you want, from portraits and travel adventures to landscapes and still life. On life-framer.com. The debut **Eyewin Awards**, curated by photographer Manoj Aryan, is now open for submissions. Prizes worth ₹3 lakh and above per category are to be won. Last date for entries is May 19. Details and registration on eyewinawards.com



A family matter

Earlier this week, playwright Richard Nelson brought back the Apple family in the context of the current Covid-19 situation in a new play, **What Do We Need to Talk About?: Conversations on Zoom**. The virtual stage reunited the original cast to play the four siblings who discuss relevant topics around the dinner table. Only this time, they were videoconferencing. While the live stream took place on April 29, an edited version is available for streaming on YouTube and publictheater.org till May 3.



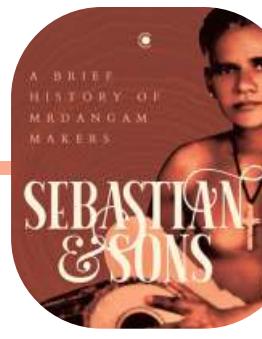
Music from quarantine

Mumbai-based singer-songwriter Maalavika Manoj aka Mali, has released a haunting music video for her new single, **Age of Limbo**. Crowdsourced footage of empty streets from 12 countries and 15 cities can be seen in the lyric video, which is now available on YouTube. Other tunes from the lockdown include UK rapper Lady Leshurr's **'Quarantine Speech'**. In the video, she puts on a hazmat suit and wanders around her apartment venting all of her social distancing frustrations – filmed and edited on an iPhone.



Shop for a cause

Labels Kresha Bajaj and Papa Don't Preach have started a joint initiative called **Care for Karigars**, to support their craftspeople. While Bajaj has created a limited-edition cape, PDP's is an embroidered belt bag – each priced at ₹5,000. All proceeds will be donated to the karigars. Chennai-based brand, **Hastha**, has designed a T-shirt with the Sanskrit slogan **Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu** – 'May all beings be happy and free' – available for pre-order at ₹500. Proceeds will go towards India Fellow's Covid Relief. #9940020264



Let's talk literature

Jaipur Literature Festival's online edition (@jliflitfest) features multiple sessions this weekend. Today, playwright Peter Morgan talks to filmmaker Ritesh Batra about Netflix's *The Crown* at 7.30 pm, followed by Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw in conversation with Samanth Subramanian on healthcare and life sciences at 9 pm. Tomorrow, Roger Highfield will talk about the different dimensions of the pandemic at 7.30 pm. At 9 pm, TM Krishna will discuss his latest book, *Sebastian & Sons*, with Maya Mirchandani.



Staying Zen in a pandemic

Susan Hopkinson teaches **Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction** in an eight-week online course. Classes will be held every Sunday, starting with an introductory session on May 3. At ₹8,000. WhatsApp 9717085369 to register. On a budget? Canadian author and meditation teacher, Jeff Warren, invites people to join in a free live session where you can meditate or simply stare into space. Aptly called the **Do Nothing Project**, it is available on YouTube at 5.30 am on Sundays and 9.30 pm on Wednesdays.



Today at 6 pm, actor **Taapsee Pannu** shares her favourite women characters in pop culture. On @the_hindu. And @thehinduweekend, tune in to talk luxury retail 101 with **Tina Tahiliani Parikh**, of multi-brand boutique, Ensemble. Today at 4 pm. On Sunday, author **Daniel Handler** aka Lemony Snicket, of *A Series of Unfortunate Events* fame, and his illustrator wife, Lisa Brown, will join in from California to read *Goldfish Ghost* and share a lesson on drawing their goldfish, (@the_hindu) at 7.30 pm. For children above nine and adults.

Get smart about cinema

The ultimate guide to online courses that teach everything from animation to screenwriting

ADITYA MANI JHA

Through most of the lockdown, we have been spending a lot of time watching and re-watching our favourite movies and TV shows. One would hope this has led to increased respect for the people who make the magic happen – filmmakers. Here are some online resources for filmmaking students, and others, who want to learn more about the industry and how it works.

40 Days to Learn Film

Mark Cousins

Cousins is one of the most followed historians of cinema – his 15-hour documentary series, *The Story of Film* (2011), is currently streaming on Hulu. He is also the author of several books on the subject, most notably *The Story of Looking* (2017), hailed by critics as one of the great visual studies texts of the modern era. Recently, he made the extraordinary gesture of putting together a nearly 140-minute lecture for filmmaking students and scholars, called '40 Days to Learn Film', making it freely available on Vimeo. His encyclopedic knowledge of cinema is matched only by the clearly child-like pleasure (the lecture even begins with an image of him as a film-crazy four-year-old) he derives from this endeavour.

Pixar in a Box

Pixar Studios/Khan Academy

The world's most famous animation studio offers a peek behind the curtain



(Below) Mark Cousins • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

a free online course via Khan Academy.

The Film Experience

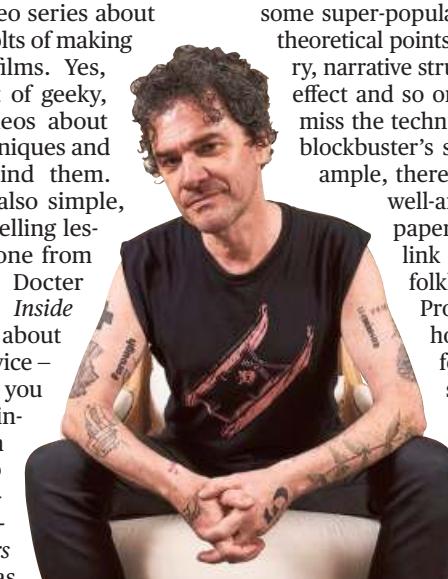
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)

Over the years, MIT has made many of its courses freely available on their OpenCourseWare site, and this 23-lecture series by Professor David Thorburn of the Film and Media Studies programme is one of them. All supplemental materials, including short clips from the films discussed, are available – bundled into a playlist on YouTube. Thorburn is very effective at drawing meaningful connections between different strands of world cinema. For example, during a lecture on Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon*, he segues into the movie's linkages with European cinema, which then becomes its own sub-topic.

An Introduction to Screenwriting

University of East Anglia (UEA)

This three-week online course, offered free of cost, is taught by Michael Lensfield, who teaches at the university's Literature, Drama and Creative Writing programme as well as the School of Art, Media and American Studies. It is hosted on FutureLearn, and the course uses some super-popular films to illustrate theoretical points about plot trajectory, narrative structure, the dramatic effect and so on. It is very easy to miss the technical aspects of a big blockbuster's storytelling. For example, there are any number of well-argued academic papers that highlight the link between Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp's theories and how they apply perfectly to the narrative structure of the *Harry Potter* books/films. This course will help you spot these patterns and apply them to your own work.



CMK



Where the heart is

A home wedding
• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

gatherings will be allowed past 20 or 40 people. Therefore, all the industries associated with weddings are in deep trouble," says couturier Tarun Tahiliani.

Eye on value

With existing orders cancelled or tweaked to be appropriate for more intimate weddings, bridal wear is set for a complete makeover. Ritu Kumar, the doyenne of Indian fashion, says, "The ornate and the theatrical must take a back seat now and so things are going to get much simpler and more personal."

Naturally, this will result in less profit for designers, especially couturiers. "Couture in India is only made for weddings, unlike the West where they have galas or big black-tie fundraisers. Designers will now have to look at making more ready-to-wear separates," says Tahiliani. The post-COVID bride could, in fact, be far more stylish than her pre-CO-

VID counterpart. "We will go back to greater delicacy and elegance," he observes.

Most designers have stopped receiving enquires during lockdown.

Manish Malhotra, one of India's top designers, says that among the few brides-to-be who reached out, he's seen a change in mindset. "They want value – be it the money or the outfit. They want something that is made responsibly and is repeat worthy," he says, adding, "The aesthetics of my design won't change, but it might just adapt."

The nostalgia card

A simpler aesthetic, however, could benefit designers who work with handloom. "Anything handmade will become more relevant in times like this. People want to go back to their roots and old-world values," says K. Radharaman, founder-CEO at Bengaluru's The House of Angadi. Stressing that because they use pure zari and silk yarn, there is no difference between a new sari and one made a 100 years ago, he adds that customers are looking at sustaina-

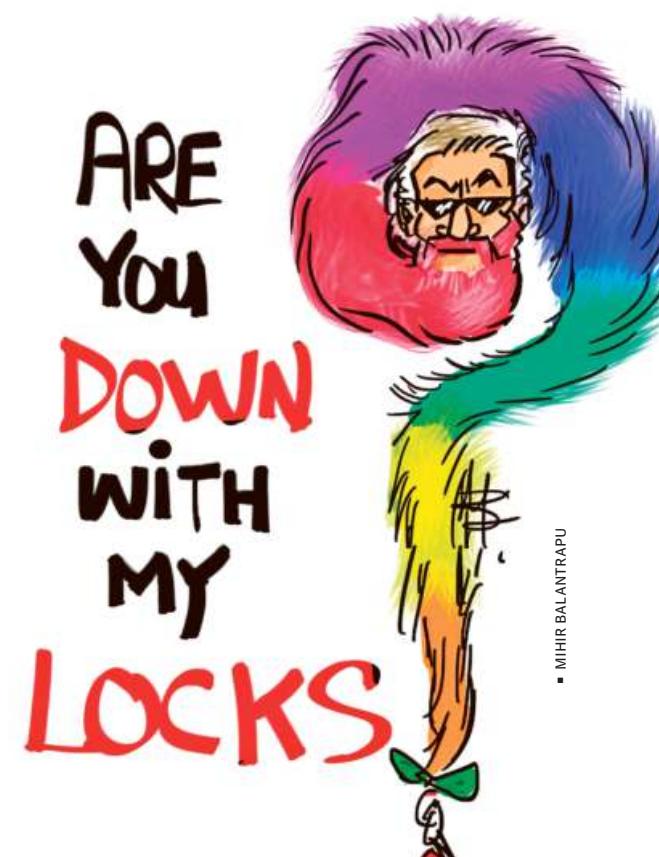
bility in a practical way. "As a design house working with handloom, we provide designs that will become cherished heirlooms."

Designers are also more open to working with pre-loved and heirloom textiles. "Couture is likely to see a revival of pre-owned classics, such as the Banarasi sari," says Kumar. Repurposing – something Kareena Kapoor kicked off in 2012, when she had her mother-in-law's ghara restored for her wedding – could become a bigger trend too. Kumar says she will be "happy to work on a mother's lehenga that she'd bought from us". In fact, Malhotra recently convinced a bride to go with an heirloom piece for her wedding rather than a new outfit.

Social distance shopping

Post lockdown, shopping remains a scary proposition. Wedding shows and exhibitions – a key revenue generator for small and mid-size fashion labels – aren't scheduled, and standalone flagships are considered safer than malls or markets. "Those with large stores can work with brides-to-be, by practising physical distancing and using temperature control and disinfectants. Even during sales, we will allocate slots; no more than seven clients in an 8,000 sq ft store," says Tahiliani. Virtual consultancy is also picking up, as is concierge-driven shopping.

The silver lining? "When we have a vaccine, this whole conversation will become irrelevant," says Tahiliani. Meanwhile, Malhotra expects things to go back to a "new normal" after two seasons. Perhaps our love of weddings could become the reason that the fashion industry recovers faster than expected.



Beard with me

Which stage of the facial hair cycle are you at?

MAGANDEEP SINGH

During the Great Black Plague of London in the 1700s, Isaac Newton, all of 23, quarantined himself in his farmhouse and advanced the principles of Calculus and analysed the light colour spectrum. Today we are proud of banana bread or some idiotic coffee. To be fair, Newton wasn't plagued by a million inane live videos, support group webinars and mundane web

calls to dampen his focus.

Nothing scares us more than feeling useless and so usefulness is being sought out in the kindest of manners. Some bake, others brew, but all of us, no matter the gender, beard.

Having been through the cycle, here are the stages of bearding that one will go through.

1. **Lazy:** In the beginning, it starts as a harmless two days of shaving/trimming, skipped.

2. **Curiosity:** Seeing more than a 5 p.m. shade on our faces, one wonders where it could lead to; not women, they panic. In my case, I was curious to see if I could push out hair on my face having clearly failed on my head for decades.

3. **Vanity:** Now we start imagining ourselves hipsters – aka "the stubble suits me" stage – as we remain confined within our homes, but more so by our illusions of grandeur.

4. **Messy:** Facial hair, left to grow for the first time unrestrained, explores all directions in defiance of gravity. This is how we got the term 'scrappy'.

5. **Feasibility:** By this point, devoid of any other challenges, we peg our will to live to the length of this black wiry fungus.

6. **Sagacity:** By now, the beard has acquired a certain silhouette, even if not flow or form. It makes us feel that we look wiser. The only wisdom I can shortcut and impart to you here is that it doesn't.

7. **Itchy:** The stage name says it all; resting your face on a cushion feels like you just lay down on a pillow made of thorns. It rustles you awake when you turn sides.

8. **Acceptability:** By now the beard is parasitic; it is feeding off your food. Aka the Soup Strainer, Debris Collector, and if one doesn't snap out of it and nip it, it spirals downhill fast from here.

9. **Incompatibility:** Now the beard occupies more of the face than expressions. Your speech sounds muffled and every time you scratch your beard, an ASMR addict somewhere gets excited.

Once here, the cycle repeats. The world, unwillingly, gets informed through an Insta update, or if you are feeling excessively useless, a ridiculous TikTok video.

Outside of Captain Haddock and that bearded lady from PT Barnum's motley crew, nobody has ever managed to own a beard as if they were born with it. So tell me how much of a beard you have right now and I will tell you what state of quarantine you are at.

TRIBUTES

ZIYA US SALAM

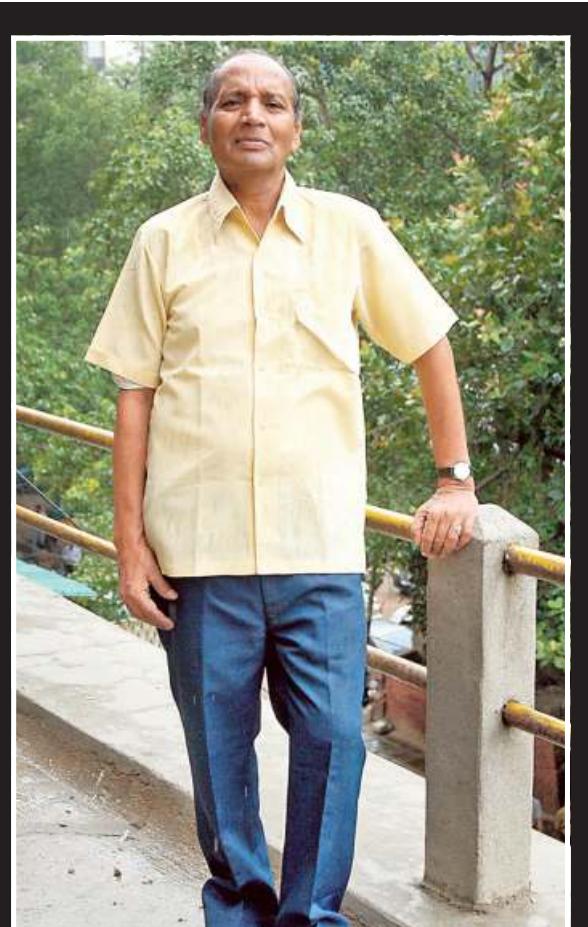
He was among the last chips off the old block. In many ways, he was a bit of an odd ball too; a man who never took to the steering wheel or the laptop, content as he was with being chauffeur driven in a good old Ambassador, or even travelling by a cycle-rickshaw. A man who loved his pan and his *kababs*, he was blessed with a rare command over English, the Queen's language, as he would often say. It was this ease with the language that led to his rise in the world of letters – he had a long innings with *The Statesman* as a news editor, and a longer one as a columnist with *The Hindu*, and was a widely published author.

Hailing from Agra, for years Ronald Vivian Smith lived in a hotel near the Jama Masjid. Long years in the hotel begot familiarity, and a family. Two of his sons were born in the hotel, much of his writing as a columnist derived inspiration from the lanes, the *mohallas*, the *havelis*, the *kuchas*, the *sarais* of Old Delhi.

In an area where a god found abode under every Peepul tree, and a muezzin called out for prayer from a *masjid* every few metres, Smith was a practising Christian, a proud one too.

A noted editor, for many years, his job was to bring out *The Statesman* to his readers on time every morning. Among the most punctilious and diligent of editors, Ronald Vivian Smith had a long innings with the paper, from where he retired back in January 1997.

His innings as an editor ended more than 23 years ago, but his innings as a columnist and an author took wing. Even as the paper faded away after his retirement, Smith's star burned bright, courtesy a weekly column, Quaint Corner, which he started with *The Statesman* a little under 40 years ago. Then a little over 20 years ago, he added a weekly trip Down Memory Lane with *The Hindu Metro Plus*.



January 6, 1938 - April 30, 2020

Here and near

A tribute to R. V. Smith, who breathed his last on April 30

In his columns, the past never died. It merely hid in untapped zones of Old Delhi, the time when *begums* chewed *paan*, the Nawabs watched either a *mushaira*, or went down to regale themselves with the charms of naughti girls. It was a time too when a Muslim woman of 'ill repute' married an Englishman and left her past behind. She went on to build a mosque too, now called the Mubarak Begum Masjid near Hauz Qazi. It was a time when the Pandits of Charkhewalan walked across lanes of Dariba and on to Gauri Shankar Mandir to offer their prayers – the *mandir* stood in front of the majestic Lal Quila as a symbol of a shared past. The Sikh women of Lajpat Nagar undertook a longer tour to Sisganj Gurdwara in Chandni Chowk. The *gurudwara* itself stood adjacent to Sunehri Masjid, the mosque which was subjected to the worst horrors by

A subeditor who made the slightest error was a recipient of a huge circle marked around the error on the news clipping, which was then put up on the notice board for everyone to see. For Smith, the work had to be flawless.

After work, he was a different man: one who loved his life, who helped the needy, who wore success with ease, and kept relationships going despite distances.

Veteran chronicler of Delhi

R.V. Smith ■ R.V. MOORTHY

Nadir Shah's men on Eid in 1739.

Then there were girls who sang carols and disappeared into the shadows. All these moments of a past long gone made their appearance with unfailing regularity in Smith's columns which continued till he breathed his last on April 30, 2020.

There was an easy familiarity to his writing, an inscrutable charm when he went down memory lane. The stories he came back with reached his readers via a typewriter he used until recently. For years, this correspondent received his typed columns with hand-written corrections. He would use every inch of space, every leaflet was put to use. Just as every anecdote of the years gone by was fished out for his reader.

The way Smith wrote, it seemed he was a fly on the wall when the British ruled with an iron hand, or when the Mughals reigned over a declining empire. The present was so incidental in his columns that a wag once said, "Without history, Smith would not have a future, or present."

The half-in-jest statement summed up Smith's writing. His books, *Delhi: Unknown Tales of a City, Lingering Charm of Delhi, The Taj: The Myth and Reality*, too derived from the world of emperors and queens, nobles and naughti girls. For him, there was no full stop to history.

As a journalist, he was known to be fierce and steadfast, one who would push his subordinates really hard to get the edition out on time, and with minimum mistakes. A subeditor who made the slightest error was a recipient of a huge circle marked around the error on the news clipping, which was then put up on the notice board for everyone to see. For Smith, the work had to be flawless.

After work, he was a different man: one who loved his life, who helped the needy, who wore success with ease, and kept relationships going despite distances.

"Oh, He's gone? Without saying goodbye, How could he? He might have waited". Waiting for Godot

Irfan=thankfulness, knowledge, wisdom.

Irfan (as he insisted on spelling it), went away in the same unobtrusive and dignified manner as he had lived. Much before *Maqbool* was a germ of an idea in Vishal Bhardwaj's head, one day on returning home I saw Ratna sitting in my drawing room with a very slight, very mild looking person who was rehearsing with her for a TV film they were to act in together. If not for those eyes I might have taken no notice of the man, never having seen him perform but something in his quiet assurance as he rose to greet me that day stayed with me – mildly respectful, not at all ingratiating, with a handshake that had a gentle firmness, all stemming from an unshakeable confidence in himself and a deep interest in others, the quality that was to define him for me always.

It would be a while before Irrfan with his sharply etched, thoughtful, deeply felt performances would break like a gentle wave, sweeping everything before it onto the entire country's consciousness and upon the world as a startlingly sensitive performer. His early stint which saw him making do with walk-on parts in movies or more prominent ones in forgotten TV serials – a path that didn't seem to be leading anywhere – was for him, I believe, an apprenticeship to hone the craft on display in the work he was to subsequently astonish us all with. It was as if Nature recognised what he was capable of and was

A eulogy for Irrfan Khan

Naseeruddin Shah recalls the actor's quiet, unforgettable magnetism, hunger for acting and the magic in his performances

preparing him to do justice to it. But Nature is also strangely perverse; it makes you step on the teeth of a rake, then has the handle pop up and hit you on the head.

Unfolding talent

Until the film *Haasil* he was hardly noticed, but undeterred and with rock solid determination instead of the usual wounded ego he persevered with whatever came his way, learning as he went along what worked for him and what didn't. This lean period paid off in spades later, and thanks to the acute perception he was blessed with, he was merrily on the way to becoming a living illustration of the adage, 'opportunity comes to those who persevere'. Aware that readiness is all, Irrfan knew that the big question was not whether his chance would come, but whether he would be ready for it when it came. Consciously, I think, he prepared himself to grab it and wring it dry when it came, let-

ting neither the rejections and disappointments of the extended struggle he endured nor his elation at finally getting what he deserved, come in the way of his desire to get his performances across in the subtlest yet most emphatic and empathetic way.

I never detected an iota of self doubt in the man, either as an actor or as a person. His willingness to repose trust in people, not to mention the intelligence that shone through in everything he did, coupled with an almost feral magnetism, gave his persona a tenderness, a quiet menace, and a unique enigma that was the envy of many less hard-working actors who attribute success to God's benevolence or inborn talent or good luck, none of which in my opinion made Irrfan what he was.

The laid-back comfort in front of the camera for which he is acclaimed certainly didn't come easily. Not only were there years of thought and practice behind it, but

also an uncanny understanding of what communicates in performance, and how and to what degree. I feel absolutely no embarrassment in confessing that I greatly envied his ac-

ting chops. And after witnessing something he had done, I often wished I could turn back the clock, and go over some of my old performances with the benefit of the hindsight and the understanding of acting that was his gift to all us lesser actors. Watching him, I could not hold back an untrammelled admiration, that at his age he seemed to have fully grasped the technique of acting, yet stayed hungry to learn more. This admiration of course, would turn to wonder at the way he kept his work process so totally invisible, that it was impossible to understand exactly how he did, what he did.

Extraordinary life
For those of us approaching our own sunsets, another life lesson awaited us in the manner he handled his illness. Almost revelling in the thought that he was actually able to observe the grim reaper's approach ("How many of us get this chance?" he'd say) surveying the onset of the inevitable with the same incisive observation he channelled into his work, I don't think he ever once wondered "WHY?" Despite being determined to fight it out and win, his body clock had other plans.

It was exhilarating just to ponder what magic he'd come up with next but we who'd anticipated the dizzying levels he could hit in a decade's time were due for heartbreak. We'll just have to content ourselves with the thought that for a while we breathed the same air as he did.

"Jaate huwe kehte ho
ki qayamat pe milenge
Kya khoob, Qayamat
ka hai goya koi din aur".
Ghalib

In praise of an icon Naseeruddin Shah with Irrfan Khan ■ SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY



RAHUL VERMA

I always thought the two words – Chandni Chowk – spelled magic, even though the marketplace never really looked like what the name suggested: a silvery, moonlit centre. But I wonder what the once incredibly busy neighbourhood looks like now. The shops are mostly shut, and the roads will be empty. But in the little lanes, some of the eateries delivering food should be open, even though the crowds that gather there every morning for breakfast will be missing.

The thought of having breakfast at Chandni Chowk had been haunting me for a while. When I

FOOD SPOT Once in a blue moon

The tricks and treats of Chandni Chowk at home

am stopped from doing something, it troubles me no end. I don't recall when I last went to Old Delhi for my morning fare, but I had been dreaming of it ever since the lockdown. As someone wise once said though, if you can't go to the market, let the market come to you. It wasn't exactly the market, but one of my favourite shops – Kanwarji's – that came visiting one morning.

Kanwarji is at the mouth of Parathewali Galli in Chandni

Chowk. The shop, which was set up in 1850, is famous for its *dal beeji* – a delicious mix of *bhujia*, cantaloupe seeds, musk melon seeds and brown *masoor dal*. The shop split into two quite a while ago. And then, some years ago, it opened a branch in East Delhi (G-1, Sagar Chamber, Saini Enclave, 011-22374913). I found out that the *dal beeji* (250g for ₹160) was on the menu of the East Delhi branch, and what gladdened my heart further was the information

that it sold *bedmi aloo* on Sundays – which would be delivered by Swiggy.

So, I was up with the lark on Sunday morning, and before anyone could say COVID-19, I had placed my order for four plates of *bedmi aloo* (₹60 for each plate), and two plates of *nagori halwa* (₹60 for a plate of five small flat *puris*). Each plate of *bedmi* came with two stuffed *puris*, a good helping of a spicy potato *sabzi*, and a finger-licking mixed pickle.



Nagori halwa, for those who came in late, is a traditional breakfast dish of little discs (like flattened *golgappa*) served with *halwa*. You make a hole in the disc, fill it with *halwa*, and pop it into your mouth. It marked the end of what was a delicious meal. The *bedmis* were thick with *pitthee* (the lentil paste that the dough is stuffed with) and I loved the *alo* – which, while hot, wasn't as hot as I remember it used to be. The pickle complemented the curry, and I finished the meal with some

Put your best face on

Two celebrity make-up artists who consult online on what brides can expect

Ambika Pillai

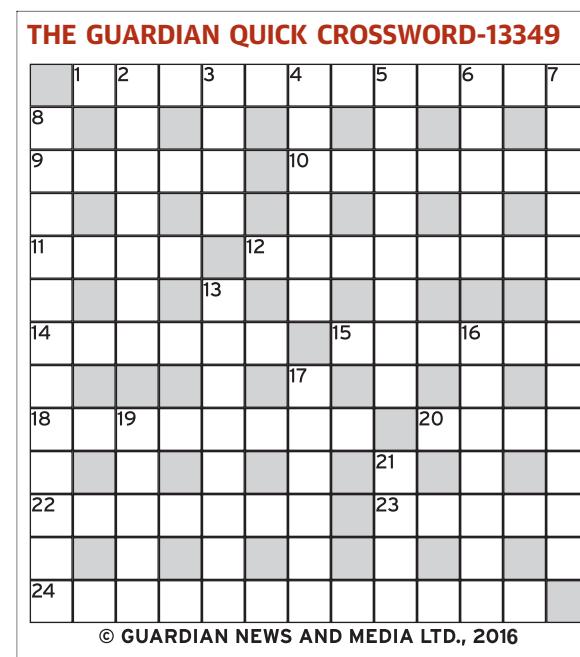
"The last thing on anyone's mind now is any kind of event. I consult via WhatsApp video calls on a daily basis, but [so far] no one has brought up a bridal consultation. This is a frightening phase for me, not knowing what the future holds. My line of work is one where social distancing of any sort will be compromised, as we are always in close proximity with our clients. Also, it is not a profession where working from home is an option. We had taken bookings before the pandemic [monsoon brides, and going into autumn and winter brides] and though everyone is in touch via e-mail, no one has finalised any occasion. In the near future, one can work on a bride with masks on and attention paid to sanitation, but will it be safe for the artist herself?"



Prakruthi Ananth

"I opted for virtual consultations for two brides in Chennai. I couldn't travel to the venues during lockdown, but they managed with the online help. Going forward, I think weddings will be conducted on a much smaller scale, especially with restrictions on international travel. As long as we can travel to their destination locally, brides needn't compromise on their dream look. Having said that, hairstyles and make-up trends will not see any changes. I have received enquiries and bookings post lockdown (until September), but with a request to be flexible. Starting May, I will be conducting one-on-one online tutorials for basic make-up. Details: 9884843210
As told to Nidhi Adlakha

THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13349



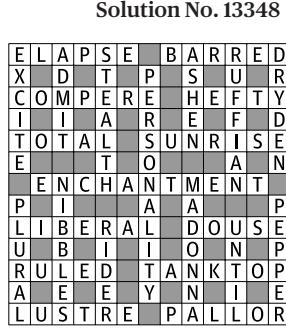
- Across**
1 Not nice (12)
9 Up – siren (anag) (5)
10 Showing great courage (7)
11 Consider (4)
12 Set of bells for playing tunes (8)
14 Falling star (6)
15 Lounge (6)
18 Storyteller (8)
20 Forbidding (4)
- Down**
2 English county (7)
3 Constellation – mythical hunter (5)
4 Giving increased knowledge (12)
5 Muse of epic poetry (8)

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

- 6 With everything counted (2,3)
7 Compromising relationship (12)
8 Superiority (12)
13 Very cheaply (3,1,4)
16 Put on trial (7)
17 Take unlawfully (6)
19 Pastoral (5)
21 Dress for a formal occasion (4)

The solution will appear on May 7, 2020.

Solution No. 13348



Trump points finger at China laboratory

He does not provide any evidence though; lockdowns continue to ease in Europe and some U.S. States

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump has said he has seen evidence the new coronavirus originated in a Chinese lab, an assertion that threatened on Friday to turn a health emergency into a diplomatic crisis. The statement was immediately undermined by intelligence officials and top diplomat Mike Pompeo, who said: "We don't know precisely where it began."

But the claim – already denied by Beijing – could stir tensions even as the World Health Organization (WHO) asks to be allowed to take part in a Chinese investigation into the "animal origins" of the pandemic.

COVID-19

The lockdowns that have frozen the global economy for weeks continued to ease, with South Africa and Austria allowing some businesses to reopen from Friday, joining other parts of Europe and some U.S. States that have begun to emerge in the last few days.

Death rates slow down

While death rates slowed in most of Europe, the global toll from the pandemic has now topped 2,30,000.

Scientists believe the killer virus jumped from animals to humans, emerging in China late last year, possibly from a market in Wuhan selling exotic animals for meat.

But speculation has swirled about a top-secret lab, and seems to have been taken up by the U.S. President. Asked if he had seen anything to make him think the Wuhan Institute of Virology was the source of the outbreak, Mr. Trump replied:



Another day at work: Workers at a United States Postal Service plant in Los Angeles, California. The employees continue to work and deliver mail to customers. • AFP

Russian PM tests positive

REUTERS
MOSCOW

Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin told President Vladimir Putin on Thursday that he had been diagnosed with the new coronavirus and was temporarily stepping down to recover. Mr. Mishustin, 54, suggested that First Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Belousov serve as acting Prime Minister in his absence. Mr. Putin, who was listening on a televised video conference, sighed when he heard the news, wished Mr. Mishustin a speedy recovery and said he agreed with the proposed replacement.

Mr. Mishustin, who has been one of the main coordinators of Russia's response to the new coronavirus, is the first high-ranking Russian official to publicly say they have the virus. He broke the news



Mikhail Mishustin. • AP

hours after the number of confirmed cases of the virus in Russia surged past the 1,00,000 mark.

"I have found out that the coronavirus tests I had done returned with a positive result," said Mr. Mishustin, who was appointed by Mr. Putin in January. "I need to self-isolate, and follow doctors' instructions. This is necessary for the safety of my colleagues."

The broadcast of the meeting, which showed the men on split screens, lasted just under four minutes.

Gotabaya rules out reconvening dissolved Sri Lankan Parliament

'Opposition parties engage in a narrow political agenda'

ELSEWHERE



Australia to consider ending restrictions

SYDNEY
Australia will consider early easing of coronavirus restrictions next week, officials announced on Friday, as the number of local cases dwindled. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the national Cabinet would meet on May 8 – a week earlier than expected – to weigh loosening social distancing measures. • AFP

Spain confirms slowdown in spread

MADRID
Spain registered 281 deaths from coronavirus in the past 24 hours, bringing the total toll to 24,824, confirming the slowdown in the pandemic, according to figures released on Friday. On Thursday, the death toll reached its lowest since March 20 with 268 deaths. Spain has registered a total of 2,15,216 confirmed cases. • AFP

INTERVIEW | ABDULLA SHAHID

'There should be a common regional strategy in the fight against COVID-19'

Maldives has been a firm believer in regional cooperation: Foreign Minister

MEERA SRINIVASAN

In an interview with *The Hindu*, Maldivian Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid spoke of a range of issues from the country's fight against COVID-19 to regional collaboration. Edited excerpts:

How is the Maldives dealing with COVID-19?

■ As of 3 p.m. on May 1, we have 468 confirmed positive cases. This includes 145 Maldivians and 323 foreigners. They are from Bangladesh, India, Italy, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and the U.K. Unfortunately, there has been one death, of an 83-year-old woman.

man. We saw the highest number of confirmed cases recorded – 107 – in a single day on April 30. The government is isolating all positive cases in dedicated isolation facilities and taking their direct contacts into quarantine. Elderly persons are being kept in the dedicated hospital facilities in Malé. Contact tracing is done extensively.

You have a National Task Force on COVID-19 chaired by the President. What is its strategy?

■ All our key stakeholders have worked together since the beginning of the first re-



Abdulla Shahid in December 2019. • V.V. KRISHNAN

ports [of COVID-19] from late January. The challenge has always been that in the event of a major breakout, our health services would be stretched immensely. The shortage of healthcare professionals is felt more acutely in such a crisis. We made very difficult decisions early on. We temporarily suspended direct travel from China on February 4, 2020. As you know, China is our biggest source market for tourism, and this was in the middle of the peak season.

The virus was first reported in one of the atolls, and has now reached Malé. How are you arresting the spread?

■ We had managed to prevent community spread for over a month, until we found

large population of migrant workers as well.

The Maldives's primary revenue-earning tourism sector is affected very badly. What are the options you are looking at to revive your economy?

■ Our economy is heavily dependent on tourism. And the disruption in global travel and connectivity has resulted in the closure of the entire industry. And falling demand, and resulting decline in price for fish globally, has impacted the fisheries sector, which is our second largest economic sector. The Maldives imports nearly everything, from basic staple food, to luxury goods, to everything consumed in the tourist resorts. We pay for these

Biden denies sexual assault allegation by former aide

His campaign has already said the accusation is not true

REUTERS
WASHINGTON
ISLAMABAD

The Speaker of Pakistan's National Assembly said late on Thursday that he had tested positive for COVID-19, after hosting an iftar dinner to celebrate Ramzan, and meeting Prime Minister Imran Khan and other high officials earlier in the week. "I have quarantined myself at home," Asad Qaiser, who is also a close aide to Mr. Khan, said on Twitter. Mr. Qaiser met with the Prime Minister on Monday, and has met several other leading figures during the past few days.



Joe Biden. • AFP

"No, it is not true. I'm saying unequivocally it never, never happened," Mr. Biden said in an interview on MSNBC when asked about the accusation, which his campaign had already denied.

Pressure to respond
A California woman named Tara Reade, who worked as a staff assistant in Mr. Biden's Senate office from December 1992 to August 1993, has accused Mr. Biden in media interviews of pinning her against a wall in 1993, reaching under her skirt and pushing his fingers inside

her. Mr. Biden, 77, who will be the Democratic nominee to face Republican President Donald Trump, 73, in the November 3 U.S. election, has faced growing pressure from within and outside his party to directly address the accusation.

In a statement before the interview, Mr. Biden called on the U.S. Senate to ask the National Archives to release any personnel records that could indicate whether the aide filed a complaint against Mr. Biden at the

time. He said that personal papers from his Senate years, which were donated to the University of Delaware and have yet to be made available to the public, do not contain any personnel files. "There is nothing for me to hide," Mr. Biden said.

Mr. Biden said he was not aware of any complaint against him by Ms. Reade and he had not asked anyone to sign a non-disclosure agreement. He said he would not question Ms. Reade's motive and did not know why she had made the complaint. Reuters has not been able to independently confirm Ms. Reade's accusation and also was unable to reach Ms. Reade for comment.

"I think he should respond," Mr. Trump said of Mr. Biden at a media briefing on Thursday ahead of the Biden interview. "It could be false accusations. I know all about false accusations."

Ghani, Abdullah reach 'tentative deal'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KABUL

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said Friday the government would plan for an approximately month-long extension of a state of emergency declared over the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Abe put in place an initial month-long state of emergency for seven regions on April 7, later expanding it to cover the entire country. But with the measures due to expire on May 6, Mr. Abe said he had instructed his minister for the virus outbreak Yasutoshi Nishimura to plan for an extension.

Japan has seen nearly 14,300 infections and 432 deaths so far.

the coronavirus crisis worsened daily and the Taliban stepping up attacks despite a deal they signed with the U.S. in February.

"We hope to finalize the political agreement at the earliest so that we can pay undivided attention to tackling COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring a just, dignified & lasting peace, & confronting the security & economic challenges in a spirit of national unity & solidarity," Mr. Abdullah tweeted. Mr. Ghani's office did not immediately comment.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, an Afghan offi-

cial said Mr. Abdullah has made a multi-pronged proposal to Mr. Ghani. The offer would see Mr. Abdullah appointed to lead eventual peace talks with the Taliban while also getting a 50% share of the government including several high-ranking positions for his allies. Mr. Abdullah would also gain the title of "executive Prime Minister", the official said, stressing that Mr. Ghani has not accepted the proposal.

On Thursday, Mr. Ghani's second Vice-President, Sarwar Danish, confirmed that Mr. Abdullah would be leading the peace council.

Wages, rights, justice



Soldiering on: Members of the Greek Labour Union (PAME) at a Labour Day demonstration in Thessaloniki on Friday. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, workers were forced to scale back May Day rallies around the world, though some pushed on. • AFP

INTERVIEW | ABDULLA SHAHID

'There should be a common regional strategy in the fight against COVID-19'

Maldives has been a firm believer in regional cooperation: Foreign Minister

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imports from hard currency earned from tourism and fish exports. Last year, we projected a rise of 8% in tourist revenues. Revenue generated by the tourism industry accounts for over 70% of the country's GDP. Now, tourist arrivals are expected to decline by 50%. The sharp reduction in tourist arrivals this year and shutting down of the tourism industry have brought a cash flow crisis to the government. The government has taken a number of measures, including reducing expenditure and introducing a financial stimulus package with \$161.9 million to prevent the closing down of local businesses.

The Maldives has been working on restructuring its external debt. How does COVID-19 impact your engagement with donors?

■ The Maldives is, and has always been a firm believer of strong regional cooperation, especially in the face of adversity, such as the one we are facing now. A common regional strategy must create space for closer cooperation among the health emergency agencies to ensure that the countries in SAARC have unhindered exchange of information. Secondly, because the economic impact of this pandemic on our region will be immense, to formulate an economic relief package. Third, to start discussing a long-term recovery plan for the region.

The Maldives has been making the necessary adjustments as required.

For the full interview, log on to www.thehindu.com

IDFC First Bank to raise ₹2,000 crore

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Private sector lender IDFC First Bank has decided to raise equity capital of ₹2,000 crore by way of a preferential issue to five investors – ICICI Prudential Life Insurance Company, HDFC Life Insurance Company, Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance, Dayside Investment of the Warburg Pincus group, and to its promoter, IDFC Ltd., the lender said on Friday.

The board of the bank which met on Friday has approved the proposal.

The bank will allot 86.24 crore equity shares with a face value of ₹10 to these five investors at ₹23.19 a share, compared with Thursday's closing price of ₹21.90. Stock markets were closed on Friday.

IDFC First Bank said that Dayside Investments Ltd., along with Cloverleaf Investment Ltd., both Warburg Pincus LLC Group entities, holds 9.92% of the pre-issue shareholding and will hold 9.93% of the post-issue shareholding of the bank.

The post issue shareholding of ICICI Prudential will be 4.56% in the bank, while HDFC Life will have 1.52%, and Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance will have 1.76%. Parent IDFC's shareholding will remain at 40%. "The networth of the bank post the issue and as added to the networth as of December 31, 2019 will be ₹7,240 crore," IDFC First Bank said.

The bank's common equity tier-I (CET1), which was 13.28% on December 31, 2019, will improve to 15.3% post the capital raising. The lender said it would use this capital to power growth, to continue to invest in liabilities and asset franchise, technology and infrastructure platforms to expand reach, among other things.

Automakers remain stationary in April

Most companies report nil or negligible sales on account of the COVID-19 triggered lockdown

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Automakers reported negligible or nil sales in the domestic market last month with the country under lockdown for all of April due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

The country's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki India on Friday said it made zero dispatches to dealers in the domestic market in April 2020. "This was because, in compliance with government orders, all production facilities were closed," it said in a statement.

However, the company added that following resumption of port operations, the first export shipment of 632 units was undertaken from the Mundra port, ensuring that all guidelines for safety were followed. Likewise, Hyundai Motor India



Exports gave some solace to the sector, with Maruti exporting 632 units and Hyundai, 1,341 units. ■REUTERS

exported 1,341 units last month. "Domestic sales stood at zero amid the nationwide lockdown due to pandemic COVID-19," Hyundai said in a statement.

Naveen Soni, senior V-P, Sales & Services at Toyota Kirloskar Motor noted that

the COVID crisis exacerbated the already prevalent pressures on the automobile industry, but that the challenges this time were multi-dimensional. While Mr. Soni said the lockdown was absolutely necessary, the unavoidable side effect

had been the adverse impact on economic activity.

Homegrown auto major Mahindra & Mahindra said it exported 733 units last month. Veejay Nakra, CEO, Automotive Division, Mahindra & Mahindra said, "We are hopeful that our dealerships will open soon and have stocks to cover the first few weeks of sale."

Meanwhile, Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd.'s Farm Equipment Sector said its tractor sales stood at 4,716 units in the domestic market, while exports were 56 units.

Its president Hemant Sikka said "The extension of the national lockdown impacted the business, with dealers partially open for just a few days. Going forward, several positive factors, including a good rabi output, opening of procurement centres by the

government, indication of good crop prices, reservoir levels etc., augur well for tractor demand."

"However, the rate of improvement will depend on how quickly the on-ground sales operations, including the start of NBFCs, are normalised, following the relaxation of the lockdown."

MG Motor India also saw zero sales as showrooms remained closed. The company, which has begun operations and manufacturing on a small scale at its facility in Halol, expressed hope that the production will ramp up in the month of May.

VE Commercial Vehicles said due to the halt in operations, it sold a total of 85 units in the domestic and export markets for April 2020, while Royal Enfield posted sales of 91 units.

take production.

Further, production for a vehicle manufacturer will only amount to adding to inventory, thus blocking working capital in case dealers are unable to sell vehicles.

"You would appreciate that the automotive value chain is highly complex, integrated and interdependent... It is therefore pertinent to note that, if any element in any segment does not commence operations, the value chain will not be able to restart," the letter dated May 1, which is also marked to Heavy Industries Secretary Arun Goel, stated.

The industry associations also noted that the sector was losing ₹2,300 crore in revenue per day due to the halt in operations.

Airlines owe ₹3,700 cr. refunds'

Domestic travel may fall by 60%, international by 75%: CAPA

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Indian carriers owe ₹3,700 crore in refunds to passengers and repaying such a large amount – if the Supreme Court takes a decision favouring air travellers – will be among the first major acid tests for airlines, according to aviation consultancy CAPA.

CAPA estimates that airlines owe nearly \$500 million, which translates into ₹3,787 crore as per the current exchange rate, in refunds. This includes \$300 million (₹2,200 crore) for domestic bookings and over \$200 (₹1,500 crore) for international travel.

But there will be many more challenges facing the industry. As and when the ban on air travel is lifted, resumption of operations will prove to be extremely complex so much so that "some



carriers may choose to remain grounded, whilst others may not survive," the Centre for Asia Pacific Aviation (CAPA) warned in its fourth report on the impact of COVID-19 on the sector.

It noted that the safety protocols laid down by the aviation security watchdog, Bureau of Civil Aviation Security, which require airlines to leave the middle seats and the last three rows empty, will push up the fares at which airlines can break

even, forcing an exit from the market by some carriers.

Moreover, aircraft utilisation may drop as they may need to spend more time on ground in between a landing and a takeoff for sanitising requirements, further mounting pressure on airlines to increase airfares.

But, with all this unfolding between June and September, when demand for travel is at its lowest in any given year, a move to hike fares may completely 'choke off demand', explains CAPA.

It has also further revised its estimates for the impact on passenger demand. From its forecast in April that domestic passenger demand will fall 40%, it now expects passenger trips to fall 50-60% to 5.5-7 crore trips. Similarly, international trips are likely to fall 70-75%, instead of 50%, to 2-2.7 crore trips.

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Australia tops Test, T20 rankings

India slips to third place in the longest format; England keeps No. 1 spot in ODIs

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

NEW DELHI

Australia has deposed India in the world Test rankings and Pakistan in the Twenty20 standings, the International Cricket Council said on Friday.

Just two points separate Australia (116), New Zealand (115) and India (114) in the Test standings, with cricket suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Leads WTC table

India, which had held the No. 1 spot since October 2016, stays on top of the World Test Championship table.

In 2019, India claimed its first-ever Test series win in Australia, but Australia drew the Ashes 2-2 before blanking Pakistan and New Zealand at home to cap off a successful season cut short by the coronavirus outbreak.

The annual update of the



The best: A magnificent rally after a Test series loss to India in 2019 has taken Australia to the top of the charts. ■ FILE PHOTO: PTI

rankings eliminates results from the 2016-17 season when India won 12 and lost just one Test.

The system also gives more weight to matches played since May 2019 than those of the previous two years.

South Africa suffered the

biggest fall of eight points, which sees it drop below Sri Lanka to sixth place. England is fourth.

In the ODI rankings, World champion England consolidated its No. 1 position, followed by India and New Zealand.

In the T20 chart, Australia

ended Pakistan's 27-month stay at the top to reach the summit for the first time since rankings in the shortest format were introduced in 2011.

Pakistan is now fourth while England jumped to second and India to the third spot.

■ FILE PHOTO: PTI

Does badminton need a scoring revamp?

BWF president Hoyer continues to push for a change in format

RAYAN ROZARIO

COIMBATORE

The Badminton World Federation (BWF), a couple of years ago, had expressed interest in replacing the current scoring system – 21 points, best of three games (21x3) – with an 11-point, best-of-five format (11x5). However, this was rejected by the member associations.

The pandemic lockdown appears to have allowed BWF president Poul-Erik Hoyer the time to mull over the idea and restate his case. In a recent interview, Hoyer said that he still wants to change the scoring format because it's long and not as exciting for spectators as a shorter, sharper game.

His intention is to make badminton keep pace with other international sports.



P. Gopi Chand.
■ FILE PHOTO: VIVEK BENDRE



U. Vimal Kumar.
■ FILE PHOTO: G.P. SAMPATH KUMAR

India's chief badminton coach P. Gopi Chand was surprised to hear this and was willing to discuss the subject.

"Is that really going to make a change? I don't think so. It does not actually shorten the game by a big standard. In fact, you could end

up playing for longer durations," Gopi told *The Hindu* on Wednesday.

"If there is speculation about a change in the scoring system to 11x5, then I would prefer the 15x3 rally format as it cuts down 18 points. Anyway, we can all have our preferences, but if a

change happens it happens. "As players and coaches, we have to adapt to it. There's no point in brooding or thinking about it," Gopi added. But he preferred not to speculate about the possibility of a change.

Not taken off
Former national coach U. Vimal Kumar said the BWF had tried to push the idea through, but it hadn't taken off.

"The sport is doing well and nothing needs to be done now. I also feel that it (format change) has not been discussed properly.

"They must take the views of the players, but I am not for the change," he said and quickly added that it can suit one brand of badminton – the attacking kind.

Shooters Sanjeev Rajput, Abhishek Verma, Deepak Kumar, Kajal Saini, Varsha

■ FILE PHOTO: PTI

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