

Amit Shah dismisses rumours about his health, says he is fine
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Chidambaram welcomes Centre's plan to borrow additional ₹4.2 lakh cr.
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CBSE to soon start evaluation of Class 10, 12 answer sheets
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Not sure if we even have a choice on reopening states, says Trump
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NEARBY



Delhi reports 224 new COVID-19 cases, no death

NEW DELHI
The Capital on Saturday reported 224 new COVID-19 cases, taking the total number to 6,542, stated a Delhi government health bulletin. No new death was reported in the city and the toll of dead remained at 68. In all, 2,020 patients have recovered so far and 4,454 are under treatment.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

AAP legislator arrested for doctor's death

NEW DELHI
Two persons, including AAP MLA Prakash Jarwal, were arrested on Saturday in connection with the death of a BAMS doctor in south Delhi's Neb Sarai, the police said. The 52-year-old doctor was found dead at his house on April 18. The police said he had blamed Mr. Jarwal and another person in his note.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

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ICMR to test for community transmission in 75 districts

Health Ministry to send central teams to 10 States; spike of 3,320 new cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

With India registering 3,320 new COVID-19 cases in the past 24 hours, taking the overall tally as reported by State Health Departments to 62,584, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) on Saturday said it will initiate a study in the worst-affected 75 hotspot districts to check for community transmission.

In a separate development, the Health Ministry announced that it will deploy central teams to 10 States witnessing high case load and spurt in cases.

COVID-19

"The teams are being sent to Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. This is besides the 20 central teams of public health experts earlier sent to the high case load districts. A high level team had recently been deputed to Mumbai to support the State's efforts," the Ministry said.

"The teams will support State health departments in containment measures," it added.

Double trouble

India is now among just 14 countries with more than 60,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases. The table lists the days taken for cases to double in these countries as of April 28 and May 8. Among countries with low doubling times (shaded red), the rate of increase in cases has gone up only in India

Country	Total cases	Doubling time (in days)	
		April 28	May 8
U.S.	12,83,929	20.97	30.34
Spain	2,22,857	134.86	131.8
Italy	2,17,185	51.11	99.28
U.K.	2,12,629	21.04	26.24
Russia	1,87,859	7.99	9.61
France	1,76,202	71.4	107.49
Germany	1,70,588	62.1	123.81
Brazil	1,46,894	9.5	10.61
Turkey	1,35,569	22.74	45.23
Iran	1,04,691	52.98	56.38
China	82,887	4,485.74	24,683.73
Canada	67,674	17.51	25.05
Peru	61,847	8.67	10.67
India	62,519	10.45	10.37



Testing times: A health worker collecting a sample for testing from a woman in Srinagar on Saturday. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

added.
An ICMR official said the study on community transmission was scheduled for the first week of April but had "subsequently got derailed".

"We had drawn up places based on hot-spots, which being dynamic have changed; a final list will be announced soon," he said.

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MORE REPORTS ON ▶ PAGES 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11 & 12

'Only severe cases need to test negative for discharge'

The Union Health Ministry has revised its discharge guidelines for COVID-19 patients, saying only those with severe illness need to test negative (through a swab test) before discharge.

Other categories of patients — very mild, mild, pre-symptomatic and

moderate cases — need not be tested before discharge.

The two-page revised guideline replaces the rule that patients could be discharged only after testing negative on the 14th and 21st day after confirmation of the infection. ▶ PAGE 7

Weary workers lug crashed hopes en route their homes

Most entering M.P. from Maharashtra are headed to U.P.

SIDHARTH YADAV
BARWANI



Sad plight: People moving to Uttar Pradesh, their home State, on Saturday. ■ A.M. FARUQUI

to undertake the more than 1,300 km journey back home on mopeds.

With the third extension of the lockdown dashing all

SPECIAL

hope that work would resume soon, about 50,000 migrant workers have been crossing over from Maharashtra into Madhya Pradesh's Barwani district daily since May 3 — huddled inside trucks, precariously perched atop goods lorries, on bicycles, or simply on foot, in a desperate attempt to return home.

"Woh bole number aayega, number aayega. Arey kab aayega!" (They said your number will come, it will come. But when will it come), said a miffed Devaki Saroj, 42, his wife. The family, after registering to return home with a panchayat in Maharashtra's Pune district, had waited in vain for 10 days. Both patience and food eventually ran out. And they resolved

As many as 10 lakh workers crossed the border since March 22, said Sendhwa Sub Divisional Police Officer Tarunendra Singh

Baghel. While a majority were returning to U.P., many were headed towards Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Odisha.

A kulf vendor in Pune district, Mr. Saroj made ₹15,000 a month. Barely 10 days into the yearly trip, when the summer was just picking up, his business prospects were crushed by the lockdown. And the rest of the days were spent spending the meagre savings to buy grains. "We had to work as labourers on fields to make ends meet," he said.

Once back home, they plan to await the monsoon, when agricultural labour will be required.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

+ Bihar, Delhi govts. spar over migrants' train fare

Both claim they are footing the bill

AMARNATH TEWARY
PATNA

The Nitish Kumar-led Bihar government on Saturday engaged in a virtual face-off with the Delhi dispensation over reimbursement of train fare of returning migrants.

The controversy erupted on Friday when Delhi Labour Minister Gopal Rai tweeted, "Train with workers departed from Delhi to Muzaffarpur, Bihar. Fare of all 1,200 on board will be paid by Arvind Kejriwal government."

Citing the tweet, Bihar Water Resources Minister Sanjay Jha accused the Delhi government of resorting to "cheap populism" over the train fare. He posted a letter from Mr. Rai asking the Bihar government to reimburse the train fare spent by the Delhi government to the tune of ₹6.5 lakh.

"The problem with lies is that you forget what you

have said. See, your Minister Gopal Rai is lying on Twitter that your government will pay the fare, and then sends a letter asking for money from us," Mr. Jha tweeted.

"The Bihar government has already paid ₹76 lakh as advance to the railways for trains destined to Bihar," said Mr. Jha. Later, Union Minister Giriraj Singh, too, took on the AAP government for "trying to claim credit when the Bihar government was paying the rail fare".

Replies to Mr. Jha's claims, Mr. Rai tweeted, "It is true that the Delhi government wrote a letter to the Bihar government...But it is also true that there was no response from them."

Bihar Opposition leader Tejaswi Yadav and poll strategist Prashant Kishor too tweeted to take on the Bihar government over the row.

SEE ALSO ▶ PAGE 3

Police get a guide to detect fake news

Manual asks officers to fact-check with reliable sites, including thehindu.com

VIJAYA SINGH
NEW DELHI

The Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD) has published a step-by-step guide for law enforcement agencies to identify "fake news" and videos intended to spread panic through hatred and communal violence in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The think-tank under the Union Home Ministry, in the detailed guide, has said "digital news has brought back and increased the usage of fake news or yellow journalism" usually "published with the intent to damage an agency, entity or a person and gain financially or politically often using sensationalist, dishonest or outright



fabricated headlines to increase readership."

'Look for trusted source' "Photos, audio recordings, and videos can be edited to mislead the recipient. Look at trusted news sources to verify whether the story is being reported elsewhere. When a story is reported in multiple places, it is more likely to be true," the manual

said, asking the officers to read beyond "outrageous" headlines designed to attract clicks. It asked them to read the whole story and also do a "quick search on the author" if he or she is "reliable and real."

The manual gives an indicative list of websites that could be accessed for fact-checking including thehindu.com, pib.gov.in and reporterlabs.org among others.

Communal angle

To explain the communal aspect, the guidelines include a screenshot of fake video which accused Muslims of licking cleaned plates and spoons to transfer the virus to people at large.

It also attached a clip where miscreants used fake URLs to mislead people who wanted to donate to PM-CARES fund.

The guidelines ask police and other investigating agencies to use open domain tools to authenticate content such as Google Reverse Image search for collecting more information on fake videos.

The research body, however, cautioned that the "Investigating officer may consider the case sensitivity because these websites are hosted on foreign servers/cloud systems, that may influence or mislead the investigation due to data leakage."

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6



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M.B.A. (Rs 600 / 650)	Test & Interview. AIMAT / XAT / CAT / GMAT / CMAT candidates will be given preference		Rolling Admissions based on +2 Marks / UG Scores or Exam Scores

Timings**DELHI**

SUNDAY, MAY. 10
RISE 05:34 SET 19:02
RISE 22:20 SET 07:56
MONDAY, MAY. 11
RISE 05:33 SET 19:03
RISE 23:18 SET 08:51
TUESDAY, MAY. 12
RISE 05:33 SET 19:04
RISE 00:00 SET 09:49

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	41	26
Safdarjung	41	26
Palam	42	24

Delhi Pali Today
39°C A cloudy and hot weather with spell of duststorm and thundershower along with strong winds is likely.

Delhi Pali Tomorrow
39°C A cloudy and warm weather with spell of duststorm and thundershower along with strong winds will occur.

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Air Quality of Delhi-NCR		
Delhi 144	Gurugram 249	
Ghaziabad 160	Faridabad 178	
Noida 125	Greater Noida 140	
Good	Satisfactory	Moderate
0-50	51-100	101-200
Poor	Very Poor	Severe
201-300	301-400	>400

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

IN BRIEF**NGO seeks urgent virus tests for homeless**

NEW DELHI
After five people from two shelter homes tested positive for COVID-19, the Centre for Holistic Development has written to the Delhi government seeking urgent medical tests of the homeless population in the city. "It is important for authorities to conduct tests of the homeless who cannot afford proper medical care," it said.

Our families are the real heroes: doctors

Medical staff and their kin talk about sacrifices they are willingly making for each other and the nation

SIDHARTH RAVI
NEW DELHI

The lives of healthcare workers and their families have undergone a sea change in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While many hospital employees have opted to stay in hostels or hotel rooms far away from their families, others who still go back to their home after duty undertake extraordinary sanitisation measures and make sure they never come in physical contact with their loved ones.

Worry is writ large on their faces but the families of doctors that *The Hindu* spoke to said they are ready to take on any novel challenge and are proud to support their frontline CO-VID-19 warriors.

The new normal

Kulsaurabh Kaushik, who works in a critical care ward of a private hospital in Delhi, said he constantly worries about going back home to Gurugram and interacting with his parents. "We do what we have to do in any case, but our families, they are the real heroes," he said, adding: "My parents worry about me and whether I have eaten food."

"Everything is normal," said Ishan Tayal (2), who



Medical staff of LNJP Hospital and their family members wait to get tested for COVID-19 on the hospital premises on Saturday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

has had to shift from the room he shared with his sister Prerna Tayal since the start of the pandemic. Prerna is a doctor at the 'CO-VID-19 suspect' OBGYN ward at Lady Hardinge Hospital.

"When she comes home, she leaves her bag and other things outside, puts her clothes in an antiseptic bucket, sanitises her phone, and takes a bath. She mostly keeps to her room and takes her meals there as well. Everyone wears a mask," said Ishan.

"I am very attached to my

parents which is why I have not opted for a hostel room... even though we are in the same house we have to speak and play games over the phone," said Dr. Prerna, coming home after a 24-hour shift on Saturday.

"We are worried about Prerna's safety of course, but she has to serve the nation," said her father.

A family of doctors
Ravi Mittal's sons and daughter-in-law are doctors. While one works at the orthopaedics centre at RML

hospital, the other works as a microbiologist.

"We are always worried... after all there is no sign of COVID-19," he said, referring to the often asymptomatic nature of the virus.

"We tell them to take precautions, bathe and change clothes before touching their [two-year-old] child or interacting with the other family members," he added.

Challenging times ahead
In the coming week, Sonali Melhotra will start her duty at the COVID ward in Lady

Hardinge Hospital for the first time. She was earlier working in the emergency ward and had to isolate herself from the rest of her family whenever she got home.

COVID-19

Her duty at the COVID-19 ward will last for a week during which time she will be staying at a hostel. After Dr. Melhotra's shift ends, she will have to go into quarantine before returning home.

"My parents are scared. The situation is stressful and a cause for concern but I have no choice... I am just trying to keep calm and not worry," said Dr. Melhotra.

Her father Sanjeev Melhotra compared his daughter's work to that of a soldier in the Army – like a form of duty. "You can be called up any time and you cannot say no."

Like her colleagues, Dr. Melhotra keeps her room while at home and takes her meals there too.

"We talk to her over the phone or just shout through the door," said Mr. Melhotra.

Before she left for her week-long duty, Mr. Melhotra had some words of encouragement for his daughter: "Have faith in god. Have faith things will be okay."

AAP MLA arrested for doctor's death

Note left behind blamed the leader

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Two persons, including AAP MLA Prakash Jarwal were arrested on Saturday in connection with the death of a BAMS doctor in South Delhi's Neb Sarai in April, the police said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (South) Atul Thakur said that Mr. Jarwal and Kapil Nagar were detained for questioning on Saturday.



so threatened by the accused persons, his family alleged.

Based on the complaint by deceased's son, the police had registered a case, on charges of extortion, compelling for suicide and threat for life, at Neb Sarai police station.

Suicide prevention helpline: Sanjivini, Society for Mental Health, 011-4076 9002, Monday-Saturday (10 a.m.-7.30 p.m.)

JNU asks students to return by end of June

Exams by July 31; next semester from August 1

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) on Saturday announced that students are expected to return to the campus between June 25-30 to complete their courses and that examinations will be conducted by July 31.

In a statement, JNU Vice-Chancellor M. Jagadesh Kumar said, "The next semester for continuing students will start from August 1. Even if the examination results are not ready by July 31, students will have the

opportunity to provisionally register and move on to the next semester."

The administration said that the registration process for the monsoon semester will be online.

The entire monsoon semester registration process will be completely online, making it easy for the students to register even from their homes. We have made sure that research scholars who have to submit their dissertations or theses, do not face any difficulty as the deadline for submission is shifted to December 31," the statement read.

The varsity added that the academic calendar announced was tentative.

Inebriated man held for creating ruckus, damaging police vehicle

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A man was arrested for allegedly creating ruckus and damaging a police vehicle in an inebriated state in east Delhi's Kalyanpuri, the police said on Saturday.

The police said that the incident took place around 4.30 p.m. on Friday and the

accused has been identified as Harkesh, a resident of east Delhi's Trilokpuri.

Video goes viral
A video of the incident was recorded and shared widely on social media.

In the video, the man can be seen hitting on the windows of the police vehicle

and then standing in front of the vehicle. In the incident, the vehicle's windscreen was damaged while people can be seen asking him to leave.

The police have registered a case under Section 186, Section 332 and Section 353 for damaging public property at Kalyanpuri police station.

(Clockwise from far left) Sweety Shalini Guria, Anupriya Kapur, Sundreysh Sarup and family, Namrata Joshipura ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



orange-chocolate cake and the boys read the recipe and measured the ingredients out," he says, as he instructs his sons on homework, while on the phone. "The teachers are doing a wonderful job." For instance, they're recreating stories with background music and animal sounds.

Starting something

A few people are alone though, with work only in the interludes. Namrata Joshipura, a fashion designer with her own label, says she does have team meetings online, and they try and develop artworks and layouts, but "our stores and factory are shut. The lockdown started on a very disappointing note with multiple cancellations internationally."

To add another layer of what is already a stressful situation, Ms. Joshipura's husband Vivek, and her daughter, Ananya, are stuck in Vancouver, Canada, where the latter goes to school. "I haven't seen her since January," says Ms. Joshipura, who chats with her twice a day.

With a great deal of time on her hands, she has taken up baking, and she'll often do a tea party for one. She's tried variations of chocolate-chip

cookies, tea cake with buttered cinnamon glaze infused with Grand Marnier, and more, with suggestions from her daughter. "I have never baked in my life, because I didn't have the time, and I thought it needed some special skill, though I did cook a lot." She's enjoyed learning to make a moist cake and tweaking recipes. "It's about small, meaningful successes," she says, adding that she delivers the goodies to neighbours often, and to hear people fighting over a last cookie is what gives her joy.

Staying engaged

For Ms. Joshipura and Mr. Sarup, fitness, in the form they were used to, has taken a hit. Both are endurance athletes, used to running long distances. Determined not to let the lockdown push them onto the couch Ms. Joshipura, who doesn't own a television, decided to practise doing a headstand. Mr. Sarup, as the co-founder of the Delhi Runners Group, is part of a WhatsApp team of about 186 members who decide on a distance to run within the

home. "It's more fun than a run; we don't want people to get injured inside the house," he says. She does live sessions with experts, or organises small groups of women over Zoom. "We recently had a group from Purulia, Bengal, who were using the medium for the first time," she says. With brand work almost coming to a standstill - she has in the past worked with Airbnb, Amazon, Jeep, and several others - she is now on TikTok, experimenting with the potential of making fun content. With the lockdown, "I have let my inhibitions go in every way," she says.

From rescripting their day to including an afternoon nap, to learning a new skill, Delhiites are finding ways to make the most of a trying time

LIFE IN THE LOCKDOWN

day begins at 3 p.m. with cleaning the house and then some college work. A student at JNU, in the department of international relations, she couldn't make it home to Ranchi, and misses her family. "We have three dogs, and one has just given birth to four pups; I wish I could be there," says the 23-year-old, who shares an apartment in Katwaria Sarai with two friends.

To pass time, "We take videos of random things, and a lot of black and white photographs. We have four guitars and my friend tries to show me how to compose music." The boys and she are in the process of setting

their lockdown videos about everyday life at home, to music. It's the little things that seem to make sense she says, echoing Mr. Sarup, though their lives couldn't be more different. "One day it was raining and I walked to Mother Dairy early in the morning. I saw a man riding his scooter with a dog on the footboard. It made me happy."

Rediscovering connections
Many in Delhi run their own businesses, and Viraj Mahajan is one of them - he manufactures furniture and has an interior design firm. A single father of two sons, 7 and 6, his day has be-

come all about the kids: their morning Zoom classes ("I'm running between two rooms") with The Shri Ram School, an afternoon ritual of drawing the curtains and putting on a movie, and an evening of badminton.

At their home off MG Road, they cook together daily, a life skill Mr. Mahajan feels is a necessity but wasn't possible in the earlier go-go time. "We'll make pesto from the basil in the garden, or pizzas from scratch; we bake bread every other day," though they haven't yet got into the sourdough territory that's all the rage on social media.

"Yesterday we made an

orange-chocolate cake and the boys read the recipe and measured the ingredients out," he says, as he instructs his sons on homework, while on the phone. "The teachers are doing a wonderful job." For instance, they're recreating stories with background music and animal sounds.

Starting something

A few people are alone though, with work only in the interludes. Namrata Joshipura, a fashion designer with her own label, says she does have team meetings online, and they try and develop artworks and layouts, but "our stores and factory are shut. The lockdown started on a very disappointing note with multiple cancellations internationally."

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With a great deal of time on her hands, she has taken up baking, and she'll often do a tea party for one. She's tried variations of chocolate-chip

Missing woman found dead inside AIIMS

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 23-year-old woman who was reported missing on Wednesday was found dead inside All India Institute of Medical Sciences on Saturday morning, the police said. No note left behind by her has been recovered, they said.

DCP (South) Atul Kumar Thakur said that the woman's mother had died of cancer and she had been upset since. "The body of was found inside the hospital premises. Her mother was a cancer patient. She was being treated at the hospital and died during treatment on Wednesday," he confirmed.

The police said that she was reported missing since Wednesday.

Inquest proceedings have been initiated.

Suicide prevention helpline: Sanjivini, Society for Mental Health: 011-4076 9002, Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-7.30 p.m.

Second COVID-19 death in Gautam Buddha Nagar

District now has 216 cases, 93 active

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GHAZIABAD

Gautam Buddha Nagar reported the second death due to COVID-19 in 24 hours on Friday night, an official release has said.

Official sources said that the deceased, a resident of Sector 66, was lodged at Galgotia University hostel, a quarantine facility.

He was brought dead at around 10.45 p.m., said Rakesh Gupta, Director, Government Institute of Medical Sciences (GIMS).

The 62-year-old's sample was taken on Thursday and his report came out on Friday evening. He was found unconscious in his room in the evening and was rushed to GIMS. "The cause of the death is cardio-respiratory attack," said Sunil Dohre, District Surveillance Officer.

On Thursday night, a 60-year-old resident of Sector 22 died due to respiratory issues after contracting CO-

'We don't need trains, just let us walk home'

Stranded workers say they don't want to wait in shelters till they get a train or be quarantined once they get home

JATIN ANAND
GREATER NOIDA

It may have abated for a while but the exodus of migrant workers from across the National Capital Region on Day 69 of the national lockdown is not only still going on but is seemingly underlined by more desperation than before.

A week after the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) allowed the movement of stranded individuals, especially migrant workers, to their home States on inter-State buses or special trains, visuals and news of others like them had renewed their hope before they realised there is more than one catch.

For groups of on-foot migrant workers, the possibly endless wait for more passengers headed their way on one hand and the certainty of two weeks' quarantine on the other side of their journey in lieu merely of "free travel" arrangements by governments, they complain, is too steep a price to pay.



Migrant workers from U.P. and Bihar wait at the Yamuna E-way Zero Point in Greater Noida on Saturday. ■ JATIN ANAND

Even facing and contending with police batons on the way did not matter, they said, as long as they were able to inch as close to home as possible. "It is better if they just put us in jail and be done with it," complained Om Prakash, a resident of Faizabad who undertook a nine-hour journey, mostly on foot, from Ballabhgarh in Haryana before landing up below the Yamuna Expressway.

"The police have told us that they will take us to a shelter camp where we will be required to stay till the administration is able to find more people headed along our route. Some of our relatives who have recently been able to make it home have told me that we will need to stay in quarantine for 14 days in a school outside the village. Are we supposed to spend our lives waiting?" he demanded.

One from a group of nine former factory workers from Ballabhgarh and Faridabad headed to their hometowns

in Lucknow, Agra and Faizabad among others, Mr. Prakash said he and the others began their journey from Haryana at 3 a.m. on Saturday.

COVID-19

Prem Kumar, who was employed as a security guard at a wardrobe manufacturing unit, said the first installment of the national lockdown was announced on the eve of his first day at work. "The supervisor took care of us for as long as possible; for over two months. Then we thought we would try and make our way home. We tried to register ourselves on the U.P. government's online portal but couldn't. So we decided to start walking and get as close as we could on our own," he said.

Seeing the group of nine from Uttar Pradesh waiting below the elevated highway encouraged close to two dozen people from Bihar, mainly construction workers, to

position themselves on the other side of the street from them.

After a four-hour-long wait for food and arrangements for travel which they had hoped for, however, the gradually swelling number of migrant workers could only procure disappointment before setting out on foot for their destinations hundreds, and in the cases of some over a thousand, kilometres away.

"Did you hear about what happened in Nanded? The workers who were run over by the train? Why were they not on that train instead of below it? I am even ready for that kind of death if it happens near home. At least people will remember and talk about me. That will not happen if I stay here," said Prabhas Kumar, a construction worker who wanted to travel to Saharsa in Bihar.

"We don't need special trains; even tractors will do. If not tractors, just let us walk. We just want to go home," he said.

Migrants' train fare: BJP, Congress slam AAP govt.

It follows letter seeking reimbursement

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

overnment, but in this too, the Kejriwal government is engaging in propaganda," Delhi BJP chief Manoj Tiwari alleged. "On one hand, the Delhi government writes to the Bihar government, demanding money spent on the train fare of labourers and on the other, it is saying that it's paying the fare," he said.

Delhi Congress chief Ch. Anil Kumar said that it was "shocking" that the Delhi government, which "takes false credit" for paying the train fare of migrant labourers, had demanded reimbursement from the receiving States of the migrant labour.

"There was no need to indulge in such a charade by the Delhi government had written to Kejriwal and the Chief Secretary, expressing its readiness to pay for the train fares of the migrants," he said.

Foreign nationals held for robbing gas supplier

Three foreign nationals have been arrested for allegedly robbing a gas cylinder supplier in South Delhi's Hauz Khas on Friday, the police said. DCP (South) Atul Thakur said that the accused have been identified and are from Iran living in the Capital. A cylinder supplier was on his way near Chirag Delhi metro station when they flooded him and fled with the cylinder.

'Release Tablighis who served quarantine period'

567 foreigners to be handed over to police

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The office of the Divisional Commissioner on Saturday ordered government officials concerned to release and make arrangements for the inter-State movement of individuals related to the Tablighi Jamaat centre in Nizamuddin here who had served the requisite quarantine period.

A little over 2,300 such individuals had been rescued from a congregation in south-east Delhi's Nizamuddin till April 1.

Out of a total of 4,000 people related to the centre, over 1,800 were placed under quarantine and over 500 were admitted to hospitals.

All of them have com-

pleted the mandatory quarantine period.

The order

"I am directed to convey that out of total 2,446 COVID-19 suspects related to the centre and others... belonging to various States staying in quarantine facilities, those who have turned negative and can be released... be returned to their respective States... as per prescribe guidelines," the order stated.

While the District Magistrates concerned were directed to explore the possibility of sending these individuals to their home States in buses, 567 individuals foreign nationals would be handed over to the Delhi Police.

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THE HINDU

India's National Newspaper

City reports 224 new cases, no death

Three more healthcare workers test positive for COVID-19

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Capital has reported 224 new COVID-19 no, taking the total number of cases to 6,542, according to a health bulletin by the Delhi government.

Of the 6,542 cases, 2,020 people have recovered and there are 4,454 active cases.

Though a total of 68 deaths have been reported in the city so far, no new death was reported. The fresh cases were reported between 4 p.m. on Friday and 12 a.m. on Saturday, according to the bulletin. The Delhi government said that they have decided to change the period for which they are releasing the data.

Three more healthcare workers, including a nurse, working at Delhi government-run Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Hospital tested positive on Saturday, taking the total number of workers infected by the virus to 106, according to hospital

officials.

"We have changed the cycle of health bulletin from 12 midnight to 12 midnight as per ICMR time cycle. Earlier we were following 4 p.m. to 4 p.m. From tomorrow, we will be releasing health bulletin in the morning," the government said in a statement.

The Delhi government has so far conducted 84,226 COVID-19 tests, the statement said. Also, a total of 937 COVID-19-positive patients have been placed under home isolation.

Three more hospitals

The Delhi government on Saturday declared three more hospitals - Fortis Hospital, Shalimar Bagh, Saroj Medical Institute, Rohini, and Khushi Hospital, Dwarka - as designated hospitals for COVID-19 treatment. A total of 150 beds, 50 in each hospital, will be kept for isolation. While only a part of Fortis Hospital will be turned into a COVID-19 treatment facility, the whole of the other two hospitals will be converted into such facilities.

In a separate order, the Delhi government also ordered District Magistrate (East Delhi) to make arrangements for 50-100 rooms in one of the three hotels, it had selected, for the accommodation of doctors on COVID-19 duty at Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital.

Saroj Medical Institute, Rohini, and Khushi Hospital, Dwarka - as designated hospitals for COVID-19 treatment. A total of 150 beds, 50 in each hospital, will be kept for isolation. While only a part of Fortis Hospital will be turned into a COVID-19 treatment facility, the whole of the other two hospitals will be converted into such facilities.

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All of them have com-

Bidhuri alleged. "After this sad incident, the state of treatment of common people at the hospitals of Delhi can be easily guessed. The Delhi government has failed to protect the people of Delhi from the virus. Instead of doing press conferences, the Chief Minister should work to strengthen the health system. This is the time to deal with the crisis and not to shine through TV channels and advertisements," he said.

Since yesterday we are seeking answers from the Chief Minister... we want him to make public the real death toll but so far we have not received any reply. There has been the burial of 86 bodies at a cemetery exclusively for those dying due to COVID-19, near ITO, but it [government] still says that the death toll is

66. The Delhi government is putting the lives of people of Delhi at risk," Mr. Tiwari alleged.

Mr. Bidhuri alleged that testing of samples was not being done on time at city hospitals nor were the patients getting proper treatment leading to loss of life of both the common man as well as the "COVID-19 warriors". Due to lack of facilities, many hospitals refused to give treatment to Delhi Police constable Amit Rana, which led to his death, Mr.

Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital till Friday, but the hospital medical superintendent Minakshi Bhardwaj said 52 such deaths had occurred.

"We have raised the issue multiple times. Even the total number of positive cases reported by them of our hospital is less. Every day, we are sending fresh data and I have no idea why they are reporting less [number of] cases," she said.

Similarly, five deaths occurred in Lok Nayak Hospital till Friday, according to the government administration. However, the hospital reported 55 COVID-19 positive deaths.

Director of Lady Hardinge Medical College, N.N. Mathur, said that there were three COVID-19 deaths in the hospital,

BJP MLAs to meet CM to submit memorandum

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

BJP MLAs will meet CM Arvind Kejriwal on Monday and submit a memorandum to draw his attention to increasing cases of COVID-19, the alleged poor condition of Delhi government hospitals, a heavy increase in petrol and diesel prices and "faulty" distribution of free ration to 72 lakh people in Delhi. "Despite Delhi being identified as a 'Red Zone', the AAP government decided to open liquor shops. It is known to all how social distancing norms were violated after that," said Lohia in the Delhi Assembly, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri.

Bidhuri alleged. "After this sad incident, the state of treatment of common people at the hospitals of Delhi can be easily guessed. The Delhi government has failed to protect the people of Delhi from the virus. Instead of doing press conferences, the Chief Minister should work to strengthen the health system. This is the time to deal with the crisis and not to shine through TV channels and advertisements," he said.

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Director of Lady Hardinge Medical College, N.N. Mathur, said that there were three COVID-19 deaths in the hospital,

committee and only then it is reflected in the health bulletin [official statement]," a government spokesperson said.

According to the Delhi government, 26 COVID-19-related deaths have taken place at Dr.

but the Delhi government data shows "zero" virus-related deaths at the hospital.

When reached out, AIIMS, Max Hospital, Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital (RGSSH) and Safdarjung Hospital did not provide data of COVID-19 deaths. "We can only share [the data] with the government," a Max Hospital official said.

"We are not authorised to share data on the number of deaths," a RGSSH spokesperson said. The "death audit committee" was formed by the Delhi government only on April 20.

The spokesperson did not clarify how the data on the number of deaths were released by the government before April 20.

Similar to the COVID-19 ward at Lok Nayak Hospital in the Capital.

Outside the COVID-19 ward at Lok Nayak Hospital in the Capital.
■ FILE PHOTO: R.V. MOORTHY

and ensures that every death is reported. There is no interference of any kind in the work of this committee," it said.

"Each and every death reported by hospitals has to be certified by a death [audit]

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■ FILE PHOTO: R.V. MOORTHY

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PURABI DAIRY
The West Assam Milk Producers' Cooperative Union Ltd.
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World

A tailor's long journey from Jaipur to Farrukhabad to be with family

The sudden lockdown announcement, an uncertain future, concern for family pushed him to walk to his hometown in Uttar Pradesh hundreds of kilometres away

ROHINI SOMANATHAN
BHAVISHYA MEHTA

The following narrative is based on an interview conducted on April 15 with a tailor who walked most of the way from Jaipur to his home in Farrukhabad district of Uttar Pradesh after the announcement of the nationwide lockdown. In 2018, he moved to east Delhi with his wife and three children. Initially they were quite happy in Delhi and found the schools relatively good. When communal tensions rose in 2019, the family moved back to the safety of their home. He started work again in his father's shop but there was not enough work to meet school and household expenses. His sister invited him to come to Jaipur where there was more work. The lockdown was announced af-

ter he had been in Jaipur for three months. His story illustrates that there are no stereotypical migrants – they come from many different walks of life. Their shared experience is their loss of livelihood and the traumatic separation from their family during a life-threatening crisis.

Setting out

I saw the news of the lockdown on my mobile phone on the night of March 24. I had been staying with my sister in the Idgah neighbourhood of Jaipur for over three months and working in a tailoring shop in the area. Four of my relatives also worked in the same shop. My wife and three boys were at our home in Farrukhabad.

I spent the first day of the lockdown indoors. The fol-

lowing evening, a van came to the road crossing near us with packets of food from a local NGO. A group stood with large sticks and took control over the food packets. Some claimed they were policemen, but no one was in uniform. The next morning, we saw some of those packets (empty or half-eaten) strewn by the rubbish dump and in the drains.

I was well-provided for at my sister's house but my co-workers were hungry. I carried food for them and we decided we should somehow leave for home. While there was no dearth of necessities at my sister's house for now, there was no telling what would happen if the lockdown continued and my nephews lost their tailoring jobs. I could not bear to burden my sister's family or beg

Stuck far away, one does not think of food or belongings, just a desperate longing to reach their family and a place they belong

from others. My employer owed me ₹3,000 but he said he could not pay me until the situation improved.

We set out after nightfall on April 27. My sister handed me a packet of food and ₹1,000, adding to the ₹500 of my own. We started walking, three or four metres apart, afraid to be recognised as a single group. We saw others coming in from all directions, and by the time we reached the police barricade, about 3 km away, we were a large number, too many to control or hold back. There were all

sorts of people in the crowd. They let us pass.

We must have walked 50 km towards Agra before we lay down by the side of the road, and slept fitfully for a couple of hours. We got to our feet as the sun rose. The eldest among us turned back saying, "It is a long road, I will not manage it." The rest of us continued. We felt death at our heels and had to somehow get home.

There were villages along the way. At the first village, there was a religious reading going on in a tent. They let us in to rest, brought us butter-milk. We kept receiving bits of food. In the small towns, there were sometimes food packets, chips and bottles of water. Neither the travellers nor the villagers cared about class or religion. They wished us well, took video clips of us

on their phones and gave us faith in humanity and confidence that we would reach our destination. We finally reached Bharatpur and found a tractor that gave us a ride for about 30 km. Then we walked again until we reached the Agra bus station later that night. At a police outpost, 25 km from Agra, we were told we would be quarantined in schools if we went ahead, but we kept moving. In Agra, I called a relative who said we were welcome if we could make our way there. They had relatives waiting for us and we stayed the night.

The curfew-like conditions in Agra were much worse than Jaipur. We left at 8 the next morning when people were allowed out of their houses for essentials. We walked to Tundla, where an

autorickshaw driver took us 50 km for ₹1,500. From there we walked to Etah. Luckily, we found a matador van carrying vegetables and scrambled in the back until its destination in Aliganj and another tractor carrying wheat harvest to Karimganj. I then called my sister who sent an e-rickshaw to take us the remaining 10 km. We reached home on April 29 night, a little over two days after leaving Jaipur.

Waiting to exhale

It has been over two weeks but still feels as if I have just entered my house and sat down with my family. When I see news of crowds of workers at bus stations, I feel their pain – our story is one. Stuck far away, one does not think of food or belongings, just a desperate longing to reach

their family and a place they belong. I am not quite sure what the future holds. The police are taking bribes from labourers wanting to work and from grocery shops, which are supposed to be open. My father's tailoring shop is closed for now. My wife usually works from home on embroidery and stitching accessories on fashion garments for city shops. There is no work these days because the sequins and other accessories are mostly from China and there are also no customers. We will manage something provided the lockdown ends soon.

(Rohini Somanathan is professor of economics at the Delhi School of Economics and Bhavishya Mehta is a student in his final semester of the M.A. Economics programme.)

Punjab to give ₹50 lakh ex gratia to govt. staff

State records 31 new COVID-19 cases

VIKAS VASUDEVA
CHANDIGARH



Amarinder Singh. ■ FILE PHOTO

The Punjab government has announced an ex gratia of ₹50 lakh to the dependants of government employees who die while on duty fighting the novel coronavirus.

The Finance Department in an order on May 8 said "... the government of Punjab, after careful consideration, has decided to put in place special provisions with regard to ex gratia admissible to dependant/legal heirs of employees who die in harness while on government duty during the fight against Coronavirus pandemic".

The order shall be applicable to all categories of regular government employees including those recruited on or after January 1, 2004, and covered under the new pension scheme.

Punjab recorded 31 fresh COVID-19 cases on Saturday and reported two more deaths, taking the tally to 31, according to an official statement.

The number of positive cases has reached 1,762 on May 9. The patients who died were from Ludhiana

and Hoshiarpur districts. The Health Department said majority cases, 17 and five, were reported from Jalandhar and Fatehgarh districts respectively. The active cases are 1,574 and 157 patients have so far recovered, it added.

Contact tracing
Health Minister Balbir Singh Sidhu said that across the State, 11,078 persons were identified who came in contact with COVID-19 patients; of these cases, 11,056 have already been traced by the department – 99.9% contact tracing.

In Chandigarh, 23 new cases surfaced, taking the tally to 169.

Odisha govt. defends move to bring back migrants

SATYASUNDAR BARIK
BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government on Saturday sought to dismiss criticism on its decision to bring back migrant workers as the State's tally of COVID-19 cases doubled since their return.

The State reported 24 new COVID-19 positive cases, taking the to 294. Highest 89 cases were reported from Ganjam district. Since April 29, when the first bus-load of migrants arrived in Ganjam from Surat, the State's total number of positive cases doubled from 143 to 294.

"The pandemic in Odisha should be seen in four phases. First, infected persons from abroad arrived before lockdown. Their number was 7. Subsequently, 41 people linked with the Delhi event tested positive. Then, more than 100 people who returned from West Bengal were found to be infected. In the fourth phase, people from other States are returning in large number," said Subroto Bagchi, Chief Spokesperson on COVID-19.

"Many question if the decision was correct. Every citizen has a legal right to return to their home for which the Union Ministry of Home Affairs allowed inter-State movement from May 1," he added.

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PERSONAL

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MATRIMONIAL

BRIDEGROOMS WANTED

INDEX OF MATRIMONIAL

BRIDEGROOMS WANTED

BRIDES WANTED

BRIDES & GROOMS WANTED

Classification common for Brides, Bridegrooms, Brides & Grooms

Assamese

Awadhi

Bengali

Bhojpuri

Bihari

Chhattisgarhi

English

Gujarati

Haryanvi

Hindi

Kannada

Kashmiri

Konkani

Malayalam

Manipuri

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Leak from storage tank led to accident: LG

Company promises support to all affected families

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

VISAKHAPATNAM

Three days after a gas leak at its plant in Visakhapatnam claimed 12 lives and left over 300 in hospital, LG Polymers India on Saturday said its preliminary investigation suggested that leakage of gas from the styrene monomer (SM) tank caused the accident. The company expressed sincere condolences and apologies to all who had been affected by the accident.

"We would like to assure everyone that the company is committed to working closely with the authorities concerned in India to investigate the cause of the incident, prevent recurrence in the future, and secure the foundation for care and treatment," a statement issued by company said.

"We are happy to confirm that the situation at the plant was brought under control on Saturday morning," it claimed.

"While focusing on stabilising the plant, we assure you that we are doing our best to extend all possible support to ensure people and their families who have been affected are taken care of. Our teams are working with the government to assess the impact of the damage and create concrete measures to deliver an effective care package that can be implemented immediately," the release stated.

Special task force

LG has set up a special task force to help the victims and their families and provide assistance to bereaved families. The company said it would contact all the affected families soon.

The team was tasked with providing every support to the next of kin of the deceased, and medical sup-



Acting tough: Police dispersing gas leak victims who gathered near the LG Polymers plant in Visakhapatnam. ■ K.R. DEEPAK

Villagers stage protest with bodies of victims

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

VISAKHAPATNAM

Tension prevailed in front of the main gate of LG Polymers in Andhra Pradesh on Saturday as the villagers brought the bodies of four victims of the gas leak tragedy and staged a dharna demanding that the company be shifted from the area. Over 100 villagers participated in the protest.

The dharna was staged when DGP D. Goutam Sawang was visiting the accident site.

The police had to resort to mild lathi-charge to mitigate the situation. The protesting villagers relented only after Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar Meena intervened and assured to look into their grievances.

In the early hours of Thursday, styrene vapours leaked from one of the two storage tanks. The vapours spread over R.R. Venkatapuram and four other villages in a radius of 1.5 to 3 km.

After inhaling the poisonous gas, 12 persons died and over 300 were hospitalised. Over 2,000 families were evacuated to safer zones.

"We are happy with the ₹1 crore package announced by the Chief Minister. But we are not satisfied with the attitude of the company. So far, it has not cared to enquire about our well-being. This is a chemical plant and it cannot be located in the midst of a densely populated habitation. We demand its immediate shifting," said K. Appanna, a resident of R.R. Venkatapuram, who lost his uncle in the incident.

plies, household goods, and emotional management to all injured and victims.

The Andhra Pradesh government has said it would pay a compensation of ₹1 crore to the family members of each deceased person, in addition to the ex gratia to those injured and all the affected persons living in the vicinity of the factory.

The company said it would also actively develop and promote mid to long-term support programmes that could help the local communities, and thanked all the authorities, the police and government officials who worked hard to rescue and recover the victims.

Major disaster averted, say experts

SUMIT BHATTACHARJEE
VISAKHAPATNAM

The tragedy that struck R.R. Venkatapuram here on Thursday had a silver lining to it. A storage tank at the plant behaved like a pressure cooker of sorts due to a variance in temperature. Had the safety valves not functioned at the right time allowing the gas to leak, the tank would have eventually exploded due to the high pressure killing many more people, it is learnt.

Experts said that the plant was closed for over 40 days due to the lockdown, causing a variation in temperature between the bottom and upper parts of the storage tank. This variation in temperature led to self-polymerisation inside the tank, due to which vapours were formed.

The 2,400 MT tank contained 1,800 MT of styrene monomer, indicating that some portion of the tank was empty which gave enough room for the formation of vapour. As the quantity of vapour began to increase, the tank started to behave like a pressure cooker. When the pressure rose beyond control, the safety valves opened, allowing the vapour to find its way into the atmosphere, said an expert, who is leading a team in the containment operation.

Now, things are under control and the solidifying process is on by adding para-tertiary butyl catechol (PTBC), which was flown into the city on a special cargo flight from Gujarat. The formation of vapour has been contained, said NDRF 10th Battalion Commandant Zahid Khan.

Fatalities dog Andhra Pradesh, Telangana battle against virus

Two expatriates test positive in Kerala; Karnataka focuses on Bengaluru cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh has reported three more COVID-19 deaths and 43 fresh cases after 8,388 new samples were tested. Telangana reported 31 fresh cases and one death. In Kerala, two expatriates who returned by the first evacuation flights on May 7 tested positive.

The tally in Andhra Pradesh touched 1,930 while the toll mounted to 44. At the same time, 45 patients had recovered, leaving 999 active patients under treatment. So far 887 had recovered and been discharged.

The recovery rate among patients was going up. While about 52% were under treatment, about 46% had recovered and were discharged. About 2% succumbed to the virus.

Meanwhile, officials said more samples were being

Responsible citizens

People involved in delivery of essential services have started following government guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19



Not taking chances: Staff members of a petrol bunk in Vijayawada wearing personal protective equipment on Saturday. ■ V. RAJU



TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES
1,930

| 44
ACTIVE CASES
DISCHARGED CASES
DEATHS



TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES
794

| 31
ACTIVE CASES
DISCHARGED CASES
DEATHS



TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES
505

| 3
ACTIVE CASES
DISCHARGED CASES
DEATHS



TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES
6,532

| 44
ACTIVE CASES
DISCHARGED CASES
DEATHS



TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES
1,163

| 30
ACTIVE CASES
DISCHARGED CASES
DEATHS

flight. They were being treated at Kozhikode and Kochi.

Mr. Vijayan said that the confirmation of COVID-19 in expatriates showed that the State had to renew its vigil and strengthen containment measures.

The two travellers on special flights had taken a rapid antibody test. The State had tested passengers using RT-PCR to find active infection.

Kerala now had a total of 505 cases, of which 17 were under treatment.

The Kerala government imposed a total lockdown on Sunday. Hospitals, laboratories, medical stores, milk distribution, hotels offering takeaway or home delivery, garbage collectors, and other essential services were exempted.

Citizens would require a pass from the police or District Collector for travelling.

Total cases in Karnataka rose to 794 with 41 new ones added on Saturday, and the State had tested 1,03,098 samples. The State now had 32 ICMR-approved testing labs, including 11 private

labs. Medical Education Minister K. Sudhakar tweeted,

"We are boosting our testing capacity to have 60 labs by end of this month and will be able to conduct 10,000 tests per day."

Saturday's 41 new cases included 12 from Bengaluru Urban, eight from Bhakti in Uttara Kannada, six from Davangere, four from Tumakuru, three each from Bantwal in Dakshina Kannada, Chitravadi and Bidar, and one each from Chickballapur and Vijayapura.

While most were contacts of previous positive patients, six had travelled to Ahmedabad. In Bengaluru Urban, five were from Hongasandra and the remaining from Padmanabhanagar.

Four women died of CO

VID-19 in Chennai and Sivagangai. This took the total deaths due to COVID-19 to 44.

On Friday, 219 persons were discharged from hospitals across the State.

(With inputs from Thiruvananthapuram, Chennai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru Bureaus)

while 23 were discharged after treatment on Saturday.

Warangal (Rural), Yadadri and Wanaparthy had not reported any cases. Also, 23 districts, including Karimnagar, Sirsilla, Kamareddy and Mahabubnagar had no new case in the past 14 days.

526 more cases in T.N.

Tamil Nadu added another 526 cases of COVID-19 to its tally of positive cases on Saturday. The fresh cases were reported in 20 districts, with Chennai leading the table with 279 cases. As the State's tally of positive cases rose to 6,535, it was pointed out that 1,867 cases were linked to the Koyambedu market cluster.

Telangana's 31 fresh cases took the total to 1,163 and the death toll to 30. Of the new cases, which included a migrant, 30 were from Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation limits.

The health bulletin said

751 persons were so far treated and discharged, and there were 382 active cases,

Karnataka mulls relaxing some key labour laws

Consultations with stakeholders on

SHARATH S. SRIVATS

BENGALURU

The Karnataka government is considering relaxing some key labour laws meant to protect the interest of workers in the State, including those which govern termination, retrenchment and closure, even as it is consulting stakeholders.

Multiple sources confirmed that the government, like its counterparts elsewhere in the country, could take the Ordinance route to bring about changes, a move which is being opposed by unions.

Changes are being sought in the implementation of Factories Act, Industrial Disputes Act, Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, and Minimum Wages Act. Sources aware of the developments said that many of the changes to these laws were in line with those brought in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Guja-

rat. It is learnt that though the Labour Department is holding its ground and opposing the amendments, the Industries and Commerce Department is pushing some of these amendments.

A source in the Labour Department said, "We are discussing with both industry bodies and trade unions on the proposed changes."

On Saturday, the department sought inputs from industry leaders while a scheduled meeting with labour unions was deferred. The CII in a release said, "The government is looking at extending working hours to a daily 12-hour shift and a 72-hour shift per week."

The FKCCI, in its letter to Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa and Industries Minister Jagadish Shettar, on Friday sought deferment of labour laws for three years to attract new investments to the State.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



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

Forecast for Sunday: Thunderstorm accompanied by lightning likely over Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, Telangana, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala.

CITY RAIN MAX MIN **CITY** RAIN MAX MIN

Agartala -37.0...24.0 Kozhikode -36.0...27.0

Ahmedabad 43.0...28.0 Kurnool 0.1...41.0...31.0

Aizawl 30.0...18.0 Lucknow 37.0...24.0

Allahabad 42.0...25.0 Madurai 38.0...26.0

Bengaluru -32.0...21.0 Mangalore 35.0...27.0

Bhopal 0.6...43.0...26.0 Mumbai 36.0...26.0

Bhubaneswar 38.0...25.0 Mysuru 35.0...24.0

Chandigarh 36.0...20.0 New Delhi 41.0...26.0

Chennai -37.0...28.0 Patna 34.0...23.0

Coimbatore 38.0...25.0 Port Blair 4.4...30.0...27.0

Dehradun -34.0...19.0 Puducherry 36.0...29.0

Gangtok -27.0...14.0 Pune 41.0...22.0

Goa -35.0...27.0 Raipur 36.0...21.0

Guwahati -35.0...23.0 Ranchi 35.0...22.0

Hubballi -37.0...23.0 Shillong 25.0...14.0

Hyderabad -38.0...26.0 Shimla 28.0...17.0

Imphal -32.0...19.0 Srinagar 0.1...24.0...14.0

Jaipur -41.0...27.0 Thiruvananthapuram 15.1...33.0...25.0

Kochi -18.4...33.0...25.0 Tiruchi -40.0...28.0

Kohima 4.2...26.0...16.0 Vijayawada -41.0...27.0

Kolkata -37.0...26.0 Visakhapatnam -34.0...29.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing Yesterday

CITIES	SO₂	NO₂	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE

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FROM PAGE ONE

ICMR to test for community spread

"But we will go into 75 districts to find the spread, if any, and extent of community spread," said a senior ICMR official. Community transmission is said to have taken place where tracing the source of infection is not possible, he said.

The ICMR, which was supposed to use the rapid antibody test kits for the survey, will now use the enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) test – used in HIV detection – for the survey.

Fatality rate now 3.3%
On Saturday, the country registered 95 more deaths, taking the total COVID-19 fatalities to 1,981, the Health Ministry said. 17,847 persons have been cured so far with 1,307 cured in the last

24 hours. India now has a fatality rate of 3.3% and recovery rate is 29.9%, a Ministry release said.

Data from State Health Departments put the nationwide death toll at 1992, with 40,382 active cases. A total of 280 new cases were reported from Ahmedabad along with 20 more deaths on Saturday, taking the total case count to 5,540 in the district and fatalities to 363, a Gujarat Health department official said. Maharashtra reported 1,165 new case, taking its tally to 20,228. The State also reported 48 deaths, taking the death toll to 779, said a health department official.

Cumulatively, 15,25,631 tests have been done so far for COVID-19, the Ministry added.

ICMR, Bharat Biotech tie up for Indian vaccine

Chairman and Managing Director of Bharat Biotech, Dr. Krishna Ella said in a statement: "We are very proud to participate in this project of national importance with ICMR and NIV. We will do everything to make this program successful in our nation endeavour to combat COVID-19 pandemic."

Saturday's announcement is BBIL's third stated initiative in developing a COVID-19 vaccine. On April 20, the Department of Biotechnology had announced funding support to the company to develop a vaccine candidate utilising the inactivated rabies vector platform. On April 3, the company had said it was working on 'CoroFlu', a one-drop COVID-19 nasal vaccine built

on a flu vaccine "backbone" that had proven to be safe in humans. For developing that vaccine, BBIL was part of an international collaboration of virologists at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and vaccine company FluGen.

Head of Business Development at Bharat Biotech Rakesh Ella had then said: "Bharat Biotech will manufacture the vaccine, conduct clinical trials and prepare to produce almost 300 million doses of vaccine for global distribution. Under the collaboration agreement, FluGen will transfer its existing manufacturing processes to Bharat Biotech to enable the company to scale up production and produce the vaccine for clinical trials".

Weary workers carry crushed hopes home

Crammed inside a truck bearing the 'MH-04' registration code of Thane, Saram Jaiswal holds on to a rope at its rear to keep himself from falling every time the vehicle navigates a curve or a bump or brakes. "Each year, I used to send my family money. Now I had to ask them for it," said Mr. Jaiswal, who was working as a security guard in the city. The truck is bound for Basti district in U.P. and each of the 30 passengers have had to pay ₹4,000 each to book a spot – space to stand for the entire 1,600 km journey.

Long journey
"Only God is giving us strength," said Mr. Rawat. The group of 32, who work at a brick kiln on Dhar Road in Indore, is headed to Lalitpur district in Uttar Pradesh. They said they expected to reach home in about 10 days.

The contractor, who lent us ₹1 lakh for my daughter's wedding, took us to the kiln so that we could work for repaying the amount. We are left with work worth another ₹24,000. We will return after two days. Doesn't it look tasty? Kya bolte? (What do you

Police get a guide to detect fake news

The manual said some points to identify fake news were when headlines, visuals or captions do not support the content or when "genuine contents or sources are impersonated with false or made-up sources" and content is fabricated to deceive and harm. It said there was another category of satire or parody, where the intention is to not cause harm, but it has the potential to fool people.

Telltale signs
The manual suggests that to spot fake news, the investigating officer should stay alert to clues such as language, since such websites

and links usually have spelling mistakes, and adds that officials must look for indicative signs to check if the information is accurate.

The extensive spread of fake news has the potential to gravely impact individuals as well as the society at large. Therefore, fake news detection in cyber space has become an important issue for the law enforcement agencies. The step-by-step procedure will assist LEAs in spotting and investigating fake news in a systematic manner. It will also help in effective prosecution of offenders involved in such mischievous acts," said the guidelines.

Cong. welcomes hike in govt. borrowing

But the amount should be used to restart the economy and provide relief to the poor: Chidambaram

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

It is not enough to borrow more unless the amount is used to provide relief to the poor and restart the economy. We look forward to the revised expenditure budget for 2020-21

P. CHIDAMBARAM, CONGRESS



Senior Congress leader P. Chidambaram on Saturday welcomed the Centre's decision to borrow an additional ₹4.2 lakh crore, but cautioned that the money should be used to provide relief to the poor and restart the economy.

Data from State Health Departments put the nationwide death toll at 1992, with 40,382 active cases. A total of 280 new cases were reported from Ahmedabad along with 20 more deaths on Saturday, taking the total case count to 5,540 in the district and fatalities to 363, a Gujarat Health department official said. Maharashtra reported 1,165 new case, taking its tally to 20,228. The State also reported 48 deaths, taking the death toll to 779, said a health department official.

"After resisting our appeals, especially through statements of the Chief Economic Adviser, the government has finally decided to borrow an additional amount of ₹4.2 lakh crore to

taking the projected fiscal deficit to 5.38%. We welcome the decision," he said in a statement.

The government on Friday revised its gross market borrowing target from the estimated ₹7.8 lakh crore to

₹12 lakh crore in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The estimated gross market borrowing in the financial year 2020-21 will be ₹12 lakh crore in place of ₹7.8 lakh crore as per the Budget 2020-21. The

above revision in borrowings has been necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic," the Finance Ministry said in a statement.

Earlier, in a series of tweets, Mr. Chidambaram said that as the country went into lockdown, the Congress had asked the government to take care of the migrant workers. He said the party was the first to demand that cash and grain be given to the poorest 50% of the families. However, the Narendra Modi government did not pay heed to the demand, he

said. The party had also sought help for the migrants to return home. "Central government dragged its feet for 38 days," he said.

As for the additional borrowing, Mr. Chidambaram said, "It is not enough to borrow more unless the amount is used to provide relief to the poor and restart the economy. We look forward to the revised expenditure budget for 2020-21." He said the budgeted fiscal deficit of 3.5% should not be a constraint in these extraordinary times.

Shah quashes rumours, says he is healthy

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI/AHMEDABAD

Dismissing rumours, Union Home Minister Amit Shah issued a statement on Saturday that he is healthy and not suffering from any ailment. In a signed statement, Mr. Shah said for the past few days rumours have been floating on social media regarding his health and "some people even wished death for me through their tweets".

"In the past two days, lakhs of people from my party and well-wishers expressed concern about my health ... I would like to clarify today that I am totally healthy and not suffering from any ailment. According to Hindu beliefs, such rumours make a person healthier. So I would like to request everyone to mind their work...," he said.

Ahmedabad's Crime Branch arrested four persons for allegedly spreading misinformation about the health of Mr. Shah by circulating a fake tweet, said Special Commissioner (crime) Ajay Tomar.

ED attaches assets in AJL case

DEVESH K. PANDEY
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached assets worth ₹16.58 crore in the Associated Journals Limited (AJL) case. The attachment order was issued on the company and veteran Congress leader Motilal Vora, as its then CMD, said the agency.

The case involves an alleged irregular re-allotment of a Panchkula plot to the AJL in 2005.

The plot was allotted to the company in 1982. The Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) took back the land in 1992 as the AJL did not comply with some conditions of allotment, it is alleged.

"However, Bhupinder Singh Hooda, the then Chief Minister of Haryana and Chairman of HUDA ... allotted the said plot afresh in the guise of re-allotment," said the agency.

The allotment was done at original rates plus interest in alleged violation of HUDA policy, vide a 2005 order.

Odisha govt. extends work shift to 12 hours

Decision taken considering representations of industries

STAFF REPORTER
BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government has temporarily changed the daily eight-hour shift to 12 hours by tweaking the Factories Act, 1948, amid opposition from labour organisations.

The State government modified the existing eight-hour shift considering representations of certain industries and industry associations.

"In exercise of power conferred by Section 5 and 65 of the Factories Act, 1948, the Government of Odisha hereby directs that all the factories registered under the said Act will be exempted from provisions relating to weekly, daily hours and interval of rest of adult work-



The State government has modified the existing eight-hour shift.

ers under Section 51, 54, 55 and 56 for a period of three months and a 12-hour shift is allowed in the period," says a government notification.

"No adult worker will be allowed or required to work in a factory for more than 12 hours in any day and 72 hours in any week," it says.

As per the notification, the periods of work of adult

workers will be so fixed that no period will exceed six hours and that no worker will work for more than six hours before he has had an interval for rest of at least half an hour. The total spread-over will not exceed 13 hours, it adds.

Similarly, no female workers will be allowed or required to work in a factory between 7 p.m. and 6 a.m. unless specifically permitted by the government.

Janardan Pati, president of Centre of Trade Unions (CITU), said, "The change in working hours is against our Constitution. At a time when workers have been impacted the most due to lockdown, making them work for an additional four hours a day defies logic."

States should have the power to decide on the strategy to come out of the lockdown, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel said in a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He has argued against the centralisation of the fight against COVID-19, saying the States should have been empowered to demarcate containment zones and decide on which economic activities that had restarted here will have to be shut down again.

If an area that has been opened up after a long wait

has to be closed down once again, we will only create a situation of unrest and uncertainty," he said.

Practical difficulties
In his May 8 letter, Mr. Baghel highlighted the difficulties in the demarcation of red zones by the Union government. What if fresh cases were detected in a green zone which had already been opened up for basic

economic activities, after the Centre announced the demarcation of zones based on the number of cases, he asked. "If a zone which had been opened up is again declared a red zone, whatever little economic activities that had restarted here will have to be shut down again.

If an area that has been opened up after a long wait has to be closed down once again, we will only create a situation of unrest and uncertainty," he said.

"To end all these uncertainties, it is essential that while observing all necessary precautions we slowly roll out our usual economic activities. And it would only be appropriate that the State governments are given the full rights to operate the economic activities," he said.

Narco-terrorist with links to Pak. groups held

Ranjit Singh was also a prime accused in a terror funding module, says NIA

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

In a joint operation, the Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and Chhattisgarh police killed four Maoists in an encounter in Chhattisgarh's Rajnandgaon district on Saturday. Shyam Kishore Sharma, a sub-inspector (SI), was also killed in the encounter.

The bodies of the Maoists were recovered and they include two women, said an ITBP official.

The NIA said Singh alias

Rana, and another accused Iqbal Singh alias Sheria, were the prime accused in a case registered by the NIA last year in connection with the seizure of 532 kg of heroin hidden in a consignment of rock salt imported from Pakistan. The seizure was made by Customs officials at the Attari border checkpoint on June 29 last.

Investigation revealed that Pakistan-based entities are smuggling narcotics from Pakistan into the Indian territory by hiding

them in sacks of rock salt imported from Pakistan. This is done through an elaborate network of importers, custom house agents and transporters," the statement said.

The NIA said the seized consignment was part of five consignments of drugs, of which four had been smuggled into India. The first chargesheet was submitted in December last year against 15 persons, including Singh, who had been absconding since then.

The NIA said Singh was also the prime accused in the recent unearthling of a Hizbul Mujahideen terror-funding module, with the arrest of suspect Hilal Ahmad Wagay on April 25 with ₹29 lakh, by the Punjab police.

"This money was being transported to the Kashmir Valley to be handed over to Riyaz Naikoo, chief operational commander of the Hizbul Mujahideen," the NIA said. Naikoo was killed in a gunfight with security forces earlier this week.

Revenue deficit, combined with the burden of COVID-19 and industry distress, leaves the State on edge

APPAJI REDDEM
VIJAYAWADA

A precipitous slide in revenues, combined with the burden of the costs associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, has left Andhra Pradesh facing a "grave financial crisis". Add to it the distress in industry, exacerbated by the mass migration of workers, and the State government finds itself with little option but to look at the Centre for liberal financial help, a stimulus package and statutory measures to help the industry.

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had apprised Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the dire situation in the State, during a videoconference in April, and made a pitch for liberal financial aid. The State's revenue had reportedly dipped to a mere ₹2 crore a day.

"We could not pay full salaries for the month of March to our staff due to the grave financial crisis," Mr. Reddy said during his interaction with the PM.

The revenue shortfall in A.P. in the wake of the lockdown was about ₹5,000 crore a month, Finance Minister Buggana Rajendranath Reddy said. The slump in receipts include deep deficits in excise collections, sales tax, motor vehicles tax and revenue from stamp duty

Battling economic headwinds

The pandemic has reduced Andhra Pradesh's revenues by ₹5,000 a day, with growing industrial distress



MARKET BORROWINGS (₹ CR.)

Year	Gross	Repayments
2017-18	22,800	3,878
2018-19	30,200	6,376

GROSS DEVOLUTION FROM CENTRE (₹ CR.)

Year	Actuals	Revised estimates	Budget estimates

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Health Ministry eases discharge guidelines

Only patients with severe illness to be tested before leaving hospital; negative results not required for mild or moderate cases

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN
NEW DELHI

The Union Health Ministry has revised its discharge guidelines for COVID-19 patients, saying only those with severe illness need to test negative (through a swab test) before discharge.

Other categories of patients – very mild, mild, pre-symptomatic and moderate cases – need not be tested before discharge.

The two-page revised guideline replaces the rule that patients could be discharged only after testing negative on the 14th and 21st day after confirmation of the infection.

Three-tier facilities

The guideline states that the revised policy is aligned with the guidelines on the three-tier COVID-19 health facilities and the categorisation of patients based on clinical severity – mild, moderate and severe.

Reacting to the revised guideline, Srinivas Rajkumar, general secretary, All



Final test: Medics checking a COVID-19 patient who has completed the mandatory 14 days of quarantine before his discharge from a hospital in New Delhi on Saturday. ■ PTI

India Institute of Medical Sciences Resident Doctors' Association, said the decision to send back COVID-19 positive patients without testing was a disaster in the making.

"People sent back untested may spread the virus in the community. What was the government doing for 40 days without arranging enough testing facilities? Is

the government ready to sacrifice 2 lakh Indians or more to COVID-19 based on estimates?" he said.

Under the latest guideline, mild, very mild and pre-symptomatic cases admitted to a COVID-19 care facility will undergo regular temperature and pulse monitoring.

"Patient can be discharged after 10 days of symptom onset and if they

have no fever for three days. There will be no need for testing prior to discharge," the revised guideline says.

It adds that at the time of discharge, patients will be advised to follow home isolation for seven more days.

It further clarifies that after discharge from the facility, if patients develop symptoms of fever, cough or breathing difficulty, they

must contact a COVID-19 care centre, State helpline or call 1075. Their health will again be followed up through teleconference on Day 14.

Moderate cases will undergo monitoring of body temperature and oxygen saturation.

If fever resolves within three days and a patient maintains saturation above 95% for the next four days (without oxygen support), he or she will be discharged after 10 days of symptoms in case there is no fever without anti-fever drugs, no breathlessness and no need for oxygen.

"There will again be no need for testing prior to discharge, and home isolation for seven days is suggested, with close monitoring of health," notes the guideline.

Explaining the rationale for discharging mild/moderate cases without testing, a senior ICMR scientist told *The Hindu*: "Studies outside India have shown that positive test result does not mean

the person is still infectious. They may be positive for the virus but can remain non-infectious."

Spread of infection

He further explained that 10 days after the disease set in, people might not be infectious. But once discharged, they should stay at home for five days. The Ministry's revision also takes into account the fact that hospitals are reaching their handling capacities.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention too had revised the guidelines on May 6, saying that no negative test for the virus is needed before a hospitalised person can be discharged.

The CDC says decisions about discharge should be based on "clinical status and the ability of the accepting facility to meet their care needs and adhere to recommended infection prevention and control practices".

(With inputs from R. Prasad in Chennai)

Bengal cleared 10 trains, says Railways

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Railways, which has so far run more than 300 Shramik specials, on Saturday said the West Bengal government had given approval to run 10 such trains to ferry migrants.

In a tweet on Friday evening, the Railways said it had run over 300 specials for States such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh. However, for West Bengal, it had received approval only for two – one from Ajmer Sharif (in Rajasthan) and the other from Ernakulam (in Kerala).

It said after the request by Home Minister Amit Shah, West Bengal had approved two trains each from Punjab and Tamil Nadu, three from Karnataka and one from Telangana "which are being arranged".

Mr. Shah had earlier in the day sent a letter to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee stating that the State government was not allowing the trains and it was "injustice" to the stranded workers.

The Railways Ministry said West Bengal "has not approved any train from Maharashtra, while there is a requirement of 16 trains to West Bengal and presently six requests are pending for which approval is still awaited from West Bengal". A Railways spokesperson said it has so far run about 302 such trains, ferrying about 3.4 lakh passengers.

Valley hospital turns COVID-19 hotspot

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

A super-specialty hospital and an apple cold storage unit have become COVID-19 infection hubs in the Kashmir valley, as 13 more people tested positive for coronavirus on Saturday, pushing the total to 836.

The hospital, associated with the Government Medical College (GMC), witnessed the death of a 34-year-old attendant, who was tending to his ailing father, on May 7. Two days later, 11 people, including one doctor, two nurses, have tested positive.

"Around 20 staff members have been put in administrative quarantine. A majority of staff has been tested and found negative," said Dr. Salim Khan, head of department, Social and Preventive Medicine and nodal officer for COVID-19.

Bengal not cooperating, Shah tells Mamata

Home Minister writes to CM on migrants' travel

VIIJITA SINGH
NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah sent a letter to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday stating that the State government was not allowing special trains and it was an "injustice" to stranded migrant workers.

The letter said that the Central government had facilitated more than two lakh migrants reach home.

"Migrants from West Bengal are also eager to reach home. Central govt. is facilitating but we are not getting expected support from W.B.



A May 7 photo of migrant workers hailing from West Bengal on the road at Gannavaram, Andhra Pradesh. ■ T. VIJAYA KUMAR

State Government, which is not allowing the trains to reach W.B. This is injustice with W.B. migrant labourers. This will create further hardship for them," the letter said.

The Railways has been

running Shramik Special trains on the request of State governments to help the migrant workers stuck in various parts of the country due to the ongoing nationwide lockdown to reach home.

'Centre is targeting State'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress on Saturday released letters written by the West Bengal government to Telangana, Rajasthan, Karnataka and Kerala seeking details of stranded migrants and their destinations.

State Home Secretary Alapan Bandyopadhyay said the return of migrants was based on "bilateral discussions" between the States and there was "a well-planned process for taking back the migrants".

Earlier, the party denied Union Home Minister Amit Shah's charge that the State government was not allow-

ing special trains. Eight trains with 30,000 migrants would arrive in the State in the next few days, it said.

Trinamool national spokesperson Derek O'Brien said Mr. Shah had targeted the State "without facts and with a bunch of lies".

"There is too much evidence in the public domain to suggest that West Bengal is being targeted. It was targeted through bureaucrats, and now the Home Minister has woken up from slumber and targeted the State without any facts," he said.

Trinamool MP Abhishek Banerjee said Mr. Amit Shah should either prove the allegation or apologise.

Key ICMR panel on vaccines dissolved

5 groups set up in National Task Force

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

The Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) has dissolved a key committee, which was part of the National COVID-19 Task Force (NTF) and tasked with developing a research protocol, a team and partners for vaccines and drug development.



The group was to set up to review evidence and develop concept notes.

the CSIR have compiled the existing knowledge base on drugs, diagnostics and potential vaccine development pathways.

According to the ICMR website, members of the group included Gangandeep Kang (Chair), Suman Kanungo (National Institute for Cholera and Enteric Diseases- NICED), Bikash Mishra (Post Graduate Institute for Medical Education and Research), S.S. Das (NICED), Debadish Mitra, (Centre for DNA Fingerprinting and Diagnostics), Sarah Cherian (National Institute of Virology), Sanjay Mehendale (Hinduja hospital) and Niraj Agrawal (ICMR).

Dr. Mitra told *The Hindu* that the group was "likely reconstituted" and that he was unaware of further developments. Dr. Kang didn't respond to requests for clarification on whether the terms of reference of the group were achieved. Dr. Bhargava, in response to queries, referred this correspondent to ICMR's Saturday announcement of the Council's partnership with Bharat Biotech International Ltd/ for developing an indigenous potential COVID-19 vaccine.

The other groups constituted as part of the NTF include a clinical research group headed by Dr. Ranadeep Guleria of AIIMS and on Research on Diagnostics and Biomarkers headed by D.A. Gadkari.

70 migrants jump quarantine in Bihar

They complain of poor facilities and lack of food at the isolation centre

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PATNA

At a time when thousands of workers are returning to Bihar daily, more than 70 migrants on Saturday fled from a quarantine centre in Nawada district of Bihar, citing poor facilities and lack of food and drinking water.

As many as 200 migrants are quarantined at Aadhar Inter School at Sirdala block in the district. On May 8, one of them had tested positive for COVID-19.

Local news channels broadcast images of the migrants, including women and children, fleeing from the centre.

Efforts are on to trace them, said officials.

Similar reports of migrants complaining of food and drinking water not being served came from a quaran-



Back home: Migrant workers leaving the station in Patna after arriving on a special train from Godhra, Gujarat. ■ PTI

tine centre at Amarpur block in Banka district.

Earlier, more than 20 mi-

grants had run away from a quarantine centre in Katihar district of northeast Bihar.

Videos of hapless workers

complaining of shoddy facil-

ties have been pouring in on

social media from different parts of the State. The State government, meanwhile, has banned the entry of media at quarantine centres.

Recently, an order released by the Munger District Magistrate instructing officials to ban media per-

sons from visiting quarantine centres went viral on social media.

Panel to be formed

Sources told *The Hindu* that the government is planning to form a local-level committee under Circle Officers to look after quarantine centres set up at block levels. Panchayat members will be engaged in the committee.

Earlier, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar had announced that he had instructed officials to provide adequate food, drinking water, soap and other required facilities at quarantine centres.

The ground realities are however quite different from what the Chief Minister and the officials have been announcing in Patna," a local journalist from Katihar told *The Hindu* over phone.

Recently, an order released by the Munger District Magistrate instructing officials to ban media per-

sons from visiting quarantine centres went viral on social media.

23 deaths push toll to 472; 2,091 patients recover

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
AHMEDABAD

Gujarat on Saturday reported 394 fresh COVID-19 cases, taking the total to 7,797. It also reported 23 deaths, pushing the toll to 472.

The number of recoveries rose to 2,091, with 219 patients discharged on Saturday.

Ahmedabad recorded the bulk of new cases and fatalities (280 and 20). The city has so far registered 5,540 cases and 363 deaths.

According to the data from the Health Department, there are 5,234 active cases in the State, of which

Gujarat tally jumps to 7,797; Ahmedabad adds 280 cases



Word of advice: AIIMS, Delhi, Director Ranadeep Guleria, centre, meeting health officials in Ahmedabad on Saturday. ■ PTI

the district from Sunday.

In Surat, hundreds of migrant workers took to the streets near the Hazira industrial zone, demanding that they be sent back home. The police lobbed tear-gas shells to break up the crowd.

Maharashtra tops 20,000-mark; toll rises to 779

State registers 48 deaths, the highest in a day

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Maharashtra recorded 1,165 more COVID-19 cases, pushing the tally to 20,228 on Saturday. The State also recorded 48 deaths, the highest in a day, taking the toll to 779. The case fatality rate stands at 3.8%.

Of the 48 deaths, 27 were in Mumbai, 10 in Pune, eight in Malegaon and one each in Akola, Nanded and Amravati. While 21 of them were men, 27 were women. Health officials said 28 patients had such underlying conditions as diabetes, hypertension and heart disease, which made their recovery difficult.

The number of cases has



Taking stock: New municipal commissioner Iqbal Singh Chahal, second from right, inspecting areas in Dharavi. ■ RAVI NARAD

doubled in the State in 10 days, while the number of deaths has doubled in 13 days.

Two districts in green
Only two districts – Wardha and Gadchiroli – remain in the green zone. All the other 33 districts have reported

cases. Mumbai remains the worst affected, with nearly 64% of the cases and 63% of the deaths reported from the city alone.

The Mumbai Metropolitan Region, consisting of Thane, Navi Mumbai and other areas, has the highest number of cases in the State. The

Dharavi adds 25 cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Twenty-five more COVID-19 cases were recorded in Dharavi on Saturday, pushing the tally in the slum pocket to 833. The area also recorded one more death, taking the toll to 27.

New civic commissioner Iqbal Chahal visited Dharavi on Saturday and interacted with many locals.

Pune Municipal Corporation has recorded 1,975 cases and 141 deaths.

Malegaon has emerged as an area of concern, with 472 cases and 20 deaths.

On Saturday, 330 patients were discharged from hospitals across

Green norms must be discussed: Cong.

Environment Impact Assessment notification should not be pushed through, says Jairam Ramesh

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Environment Ministry's announcement to extend the deadline for receiving public comments on the draft Environment Impact Assessment Notification 2020 by 45 days amid the nationwide lockdown is a "crumb that is being thrown", Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said in a letter to Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar.

Mr. Ramesh had been Environment Minister from May 2009 to July 2011. The EIA Notification 2020 is to replace and supersede the 2006 notification and as ma-

C What is the great urgency in ramming such a far-reaching notification through at a time of grave national crisis? I know orders to push through are coming from elsewhere but surely you can fulfil your dharma as Minister responsible for protecting the environment

JAIRAM RAMESH, CONGRESS LEADER



ny critics claim will fundamentally change the environmental regulatory regime.

Mr. Ramesh said life over the next few months was going to be extremely dislocat-

ed and an extension by 45 days was a crumb that is being thrown.

"What is the great urgency in ramming such a far-reaching notification through at a time of grave na-

tional crisis," he asked in his letter. He has suggested that the notification be first discussed in the Parliamentary standing committee and the Minister meet environmental groups rather than just depend on the online comments before finalising it.

Mr. Ramesh told *The Hindu* that there were many alarming clauses in the draft notification including the concept of post facto clearance. He said it was also a matter of concern that the violations could only be reported by the project developer himself and/or government authorities. Not citizens or

the civil society. "New construction projects up to 1,50,000 sq.m do not need detailed scrutiny by an expert committee or EIA. Earlier it was 20,000 sq.m. Basically nearly the entire sector with huge greenhouse gas emissions is exempt," he said.

Taunting Mr. Javadekar, he said, "I know orders to push through the notification are coming from elsewhere but surely you can fulfil your dharma as Minister responsible for protecting the environment which has assumed special significance in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic."

CBSE to start answer sheet evaluation at 3,000 centres

Results will be announced after pending exams are over

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Nearly 3,000 schools affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) have been notified as evaluation centres, and will soon begin work on evaluating Class 10 and 12 board examinations which have been disrupted by the lockdown. Human Resource Development Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank said on Saturday.

In a memo issued on Saturday, the Union Home Ministry said that while all schools remained closed under the lockdown guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19, "special permission has been granted for the operation of 3,000 CBSE-affiliated schools selected as evaluation centres, for the limited purpose of work asso-



Long haul: In this photo dated March 18, 2020, Class 10 students outside an exam centre in Delhi. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

ciated with the evaluation of answer sheets." It said there was no restriction on the transport of answer sheets to the homes of evaluators unless they were located within a containment zone.

CBSE regional offices can also begin work in green and orange zones and function with limited restrictions in red zones, the Ministry memo said.

In total, 1.5 crore answer sheets in 173 subjects will be evaluated, said Mr. Nishank. Results will only be announced after the completion of the pending examinations in 29 subjects, which are to be held from July 1 to 15, he added.

Big risks



Zero distancing: Migrant workers taking the trip back home jam-packed in a lorry from the outskirts of Hyderabad on Saturday. Lorry drivers charge ₹2,000 per head for taking them to Nagpur or places in Uttar Pradesh. ■ NAGARA GOPAL

Rajasthan mandi cess opposed

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

The imposition of a new cess of 2% on sale and purchase of agricultural commodities in mandis for monetary contributions to the Farmers' Welfare Fund has taken a political twist in Rajasthan. The Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party and Rashtriya Loktantrik Party have alleged that the cess will force the farmers to sell their agricultural produce at much lower prices.

The State government had said the cess collected would be deposited in the Farmers' Welfare Fund of the Agricultural Marketing Board to be used only for activities and schemes for the farmers. As a mark of protest, the traders have closed all the 247 Krishi Upaj Mandis as well as the flour, oil and pulses mills in the State for five days from Wednesday.

Row over new link road to Kailash Mansarovar

Nepal says India has breached a 2014 agreement

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

India's plans to shorten the travel time for pilgrims to Kailash Mansarovar ran into a diplomatic trouble as Nepal strongly objected to the new link road from India to China which was inaugurated by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday.

In a strongly worded statement, Nepal's Foreign Ministry said India's decision to build the road through territory at the Lipulekh pass that it claims as its territory is a breach of an agreement reached between the two countries to discuss the matter.

"The Government of Nepal has learnt with regret

about the 'inauguration' yesterday by India of 'Link Road' connecting to Lipulekh, which passes through Nepali territory," said the statement on Saturday.

Boundary issue
"This unilateral act runs against the understanding reached between the two countries, including at the level of Prime Ministers, that a solution to boundary issues would be sought through negotiation," the statement said, referring to the agreement between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and (then) Nepal PM Sushil Koirala in 2014 for Foreign Secretaries to work out the "outstanding boundary issues" on Kalapani (where Lipulekh lies) and Susta.



Strong protest: Students shouting slogans against the Indian government in Kathmandu on Saturday. ■ AP

da), both of whom are co-chairs of the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) issued a separate statement, referring to India's decision to build the road during the coronavirus pandemic as "deplorable".

Student activists from the All Nepal National Free Students Union, affiliated to the ruling Nepal Communist Par-

rakhand's Pithoragarh district "lies completely within the territory of India".

MEA response

"The road follows the pre-existing route used by the pilgrims of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra. Under the present project, the same road has been made pliable for the ease and convenience of pilgrims, locals and traders," the MEA said, adding that the boundary delineation exercise with Nepal is ongoing, and that "India is committed to resolving outstanding boundary issues through diplomatic dialogue and in the spirit of our close and friendly bilateral relations with Nepal".

The road that starts from Dharchula in Uttarakhand and runs 80 km to the Lipulekh pass was built by the Border Roads Organisation.

Cong. wants Centre to roll back value cut in wheat MSP

A black chapter in the exploitation of farmers: Surjewala

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Senior Congress leader Randeep Singh Surjewala on Saturday accused the BJP government at the Centre and in Haryana of ignoring the interests of farmers by allegedly deciding to make a value cut in the minimum support price of wheat for high moisture content and shrivelled or broken grains.

He demanded that the Central government roll back the order, alleging that there was a delay in payment to several farmers by the Haryana government for wheat procurement.

Mr. Surjewala alleged that the Central government de-

cided on a value cut of ₹15 in the minimum support price of wheat because of moisture content and other issues. He called it a "black chapter in the exploitation of farmers by the BJP government".

He criticised the State government for accepting the Centre's order of value cut without even protesting.

"We will not accept this anti-farmer order and the State government must take up the issue with the Centre. If the BJP government at the Centre does not address the pressing problem of farmers, the State government must bear the cost, not farmers," he said.

"There should not be any reduction in the minimum support price in the guise of shrivelled and broken grains because of rain and hail. The farmers of the State should not suffer for the government's failure to provide adequate and timely facilities for wheat procurement," he said.

Mr. Surjewala said the BJP-JP government in the State was ignoring the interests of farmers and leading them towards economic destruction.

The Modi and Khattar governments should know that anything detrimental to the interests of farmers will never be tolerated by the people, he said.

9,000 walking to M.P. sent to shelter homes

Train that accident victims wanted to board reaches Jabalpur with their bodies

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

A day after 16 migrant labourers were run over by a train on Friday, the district authorities in Aurangabad said they had over the past week intercepted 9,000 people walking to Madhya Pradesh and sent them to shelter homes.

On Saturday, a 'Shramik Special' train from Aurangabad to Jabalpur with 1,132 migrant labourers reached its destination at noon carrying the 16 bodies and the two injured.

Jabalpur District Collector Bharat Yadav said two parcel coaches had been attached to the train to carry 11 bodies to Shahdol and five to Umaria from Jabalpur. The deceased had hoped to board the same train back home.

"The two injured were taken to their villages in Mandla by ambulance," said S.S. Jain, Superintendent of Police (Railways), Jabalpur.

All the deceased were



aged between 20 and 30 and hailed from Umaria and Shahdol districts. They were working at a steel firm in the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) zone in neighbouring Jalna district.

On Saturday, the Auranga-

bad district authorities said they had close to 9,000 such migrant labourers housed in various shelter homes where food, water and facilities to play carrom had been provided. Radio or television sets were also available in some homes.

"We have alerted neighbouring Jalna to keep patrolling to dissuade people from coming on tracks. To avoid fatalities on roads, constant patrolling is on," Mokshada Patil, SP (Aurangabad Rural), said.

State government officials said the number of migrant workers on foot is hard to assess because some take paths through jungles and internal roads. Some are on the highway. "As of now, whoever we see, we stop them and plead not to march ahead," the official said.

The official said a majority of the 1,132 people who reached Jabalpur were workers who had been in Pune and had walked over 200 km to Aurangabad before boarding the train.

'HC order hampers reopening of economy'

Online liquor sale needs logistics: T.N.

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Tamil Nadu government, which on Saturday moved the Supreme Court against a Madras High Court order to close liquor shops in the State, also filed a separate memo, requesting that the case be heard even on Sunday.

"The entire country and the State are facing a unique situation, wherein the economy is sought to be reopened in a phased manner, the directions issued are seriously impeding this process. Therefore it is prayed that this case may be listed at the earliest, even on Sunday, so as to mitigate the hardship caused to the citizens," the State said.

It said no other State, except Maharashtra where the COVID-19 cases were three to four times more than Tamil Nadu, sold liquor exclusively through online means. Online sales could at best supplement sales through physical outlets.

Tamil Nadu, represented by advocate Yogesh Kannan and State Additional Advocate-General Balaji Srinivasan, said liquor retail was owned and operated by the Tamil Nadu State Marketing

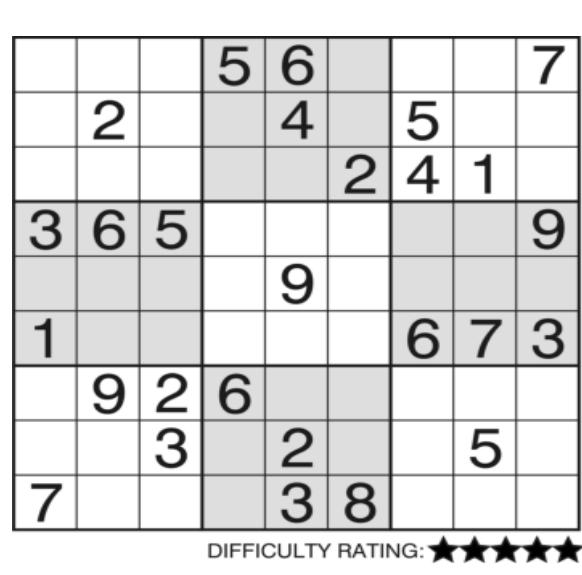
Corporation Limited (TASMAC). The order for an open-ended ban was on the basis of petitions filed by parties interested in keeping the State-run shops closed, he said.

As for online liquor sales and home delivery, Tamil Nadu said the Supreme Court had clarified on May 8 that a decision would be left to the discretion of the States.

It said no other State, except Maharashtra where the COVID-19 cases were three to four times more than Tamil Nadu, sold liquor exclusively through online means. Online sales could at best supplement sales through physical outlets.

E-payment and home delivery call for immense logistical coordination, supply chain management, which needs time and manpower, especially in the present situation," the petition contended.

SUDOKU



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★

CM
YK

Russia virus surge mutes V-Day celebrations

It is now the fifth hardest-hit country with 200,000 infections; Putin hails 'unity' in speech marking Second World War win

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MOSCOW

Rising coronavirus infections forced Russia on Saturday to curtail its celebrations marking the end of Second World War, as deaths from the pandemic surged past 270,000 worldwide and the global economy reeled from the disease and lockdowns. Economic figures point to the most acute downturn in nearly a century – the U.S. being particularly hard hit with 20.5 million jobs lost in the month of April.

COVID-19

The figure was the highest ever reported and represented the biggest percentage increase since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Despite the dire news, President Donald Trump insisted next year would be "phenomenal" for the economy in a country where the virus has killed more than 75,000, telling reporters: "I think it's going to come back blazing". He is determined to reopen the U.S. economy even though the virus has reached the White House's inner circle.

Some European countries are attempting to manage an easing of their lockdowns – German Chancellor Angela Merkel planning an almost complete return to normality within a month, Italy and Denmark both plan to reopen some public buildings soon and Britain is expected to offer a roadmap out of lockdown on Sunday.

'Unity and endurance'
The pandemic, which has already infected almost four million worldwide, continues to wreak havoc on cultural calendars with celebrations to mark the end of



No forgetting the war heroes: Russian President Vladimir Putin watching honour guards marching past during a flower-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Moscow on Saturday. ■ REUTERS

Second World War in Europe being the latest to fall victim.

Across Europe, events marking 75 years since Nazi Germany's surrender were due to be held on Friday, but were cancelled or scaled down. Russia, which usually hosts grand military parades for the event a day later than the rest of Europe, finds itself at the centre of the pandemic crisis. A Red Square parade was postponed and President Vladimir Putin instead gave a speech outside the Kremlin walls on Saturday, making no mention of the coronavirus.

"Our veterans fought for life, against death. And we will always be equal to their unity and endurance," Mr. Putin said, highlighting the sacrifices made by the Soviet Union in what Russians call the Great Patriotic War. "We know and firmly believe that we are invincible when we stand together."

Parades elsewhere

Elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, parades were held only in Turkmenistan and Belarus – where President Alexander Lukashenko said he had "no choice" as "the eyes of those Soviet soldiers who perished for our freedom are watching".

China admits 'shortcomings' in response

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIJING

The COVID-19 outbreak exposed "shortcomings" in China's public healthcare system, a top health official admitted on Saturday, saying that reforms are under way to improve the country's disease prevention and control mechanisms.

China has faced criticism both at home and abroad for downplaying the virus and concealing information about the outbreak when it first emerged in the central city of Wuhan in December.

Beijing has insisted it has always shared information with the World Health Organization (WHO) and other countries in a timely manner.

But on Saturday, Li Bin,

Deputy Director of China's National Health

Commission, made a rare admission when he said the healthcare system had not been adequately prepared, which had left holes in China's response.

"The novel coronavirus outbreak was a big test that revealed China still has shortcomings in its major epidemic prevention and control system, public health systems and other aspects of responding (to an emergency)," Mr. Li told reporters at a press briefing in Beijing.

Better system

China's health authority will build a "centralised, unified and efficient" leadership system that would allow it to respond more quickly

and effectively to any public health crisis in the future, Mr. Li said.

Officials were also discussing how to "modernise" the disease control and prevention system by using big data, artificial intelligence, cloud computing and other technologies that will help to predict outbreaks more accurately and enhance preparedness, Mr. Li said.

The commission was also considering ways to revise public health laws, strengthen international exchanges and "actively participate in global health governance," Mr. Li added.

On Friday, Beijing said it would support a WHO-led review into the global response to the outbreak – once the pandemic is over.

Trump praises Texas Governor for rolling back restrictions

'I am not sure we even have a choice'

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump was continuing his push to get States reopened as he praised another Republican Governor for rolling back State coronavirus restrictions while welcoming that Governor, Greg Abbott of Texas, to the White House. That reopening comes despite Texas failing to meet the administration's recommended benchmarks.



An employee working at a nail salon in Austin, Texas, on Friday. ■ AFP

ed cases before beginning phased reopenings.

Texas has had more than 34,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and more than 940 deaths. And cases have been creeping up. The State has averaged 1,043 new cases a day in the seven days since stay-at-home orders expired May 1, up from an average of 846 new cases daily during the seven days prior. That's a 23% increase.

Mr. Trump has taken a hands-off approach to the reopening process, insisting that decisions be left to the States.

"The Governors have great power as to that given by us," he said. The President has not spelled out what authority he is referring to.

During a visit to deliver protective gear to a nursing home in Alexandria, Virginia, Vice President Mike Pence brushed off States' disregard for the federal guidance, saying he was "very confident that Governors are moving in a responsible way."

"It appears to me that states are taking a phased approach," he told reporters.

Venezuela charges two former U.S. soldiers with terrorism, conspiracy

They allegedly took part in a failed bid to topple Maduro

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
CARACAS

Venezuela has charged two former U.S. soldiers with terrorism and conspiracy for allegedly taking part in a failed bid to topple President Nicolas Maduro, the Attorney General said on Friday.

Luke Alexander Denman, 34, and Airan Berry, 41, were among 17 people captured by the Venezuelan military, which said it had thwarted an attempted invasion by mercenaries in the early hours of Sunday. Attorney General Tarek William Saab said they had been charged with "terrorism, conspiracy, illicit trafficking of weapons of war and (criminal) association," and could face 25-30 years in prison. Eight attackers were reportedly killed in the incident.



Venezuela's Attorney General Tarek William Saab. ■ REUTERS

Mr. Saab said Venezuela had requested arrest warrants – as well as inclusion in the Interpol system – for the capture of former U.S. Army medic Jordan Goudreau, who allegedly organised and trained the mercenary force.

Trump rejects claims
Mr. Maduro has accused President Donald Trump of being

'Saudi Prince Faisal is under detention'

REUTERS
DUBAI

Human Rights Watch (HRW) said on Saturday that Saudi Arabian authorities recently detained and are holding incommunicado Prince Faisal bin Abdullah, who had previously been netted in an anti-corruption drive and released in late 2017. The rights group, citing a source with ties to the royal family, said Prince Faisal bin Abdullah, a son of King Abdullah, was detained by security forces on March 27 while self-isolating due to the pandemic at a family compound

northeast of Riyadh.

Earlier in March, authorities had detained King Salman's brother, Prince Ahmed bin Abdulaziz, and former Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef.

Pence's spokeswoman tests positive

Miller is the second White House staffer with COVID-19

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

The U.S. Vice President's spokeswoman became the second White House staffer this week to test positive for COVID-19 officials said on Friday, even as President Donald Trump continued to go mask-free at a Second World War commemoration with veterans in their 90s.

News that staffer Katie Miller had fallen ill boosted fears that the White House is at risk of becoming a viral hot spot just when Mr. Trump is leading efforts to wind down nationwide quarantine measures that have devastated the world's biggest economy.

Ms. Miller is spokeswoman for Vice President Mike Pence, giving her frequent access to high-level meetings. She is married to top Trump aide Stephen Miller,



Katie Miller, Press Secretary for Vice-President Mike Pence. ■ AP

the speech writer behind the administration's hard-line immigration measures.

President's confirmation

A senior administration official initially said only that a member of Mr. Pence's staff had been tested and found to have the coronavirus. Mr. Trump, speaking later at an

event with Republican lawmakers, identified the person as "Katie," saying she works with Pence as a "press person." This confirmed multiple U.S. media reports that Katie Miller was the person in question.

On Thursday, a Trump spokesman said the President's valet, a member of the military who is in close contact with the President, had tested positive.

Mr. Trump and Mr. Pence were tested and confirmed to be negative. Both are tested daily. White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany said there was no risk of a White House outbreak or threat to Mr. Trump.

Earlier this week, Mr. Trump made his first long-distance trip since the nation's lockdown began, visiting a Honeywell mask-making factory in Arizona.

Sisi grants himself additional powers

Egypt approves amendments to law

ASSOCIATED PRESS
CAIRO

Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi has approved amendments to the country's state of emergency that grant him and security agencies additional powers, which the government says are needed to combat the COVID-19 outbreak.

The new amendments allow the President to take measures such as suspending classes at schools and universities and quarantining those returning from abroad. But they also include expanded powers to ban public and private meetings, protests, celebrations and other forms of assembly.

Prosecution of officials
The amendments, which Mr. Sisi signed off on Friday, also allow military prosecutors to investigate incidents

A shooting that made U.S. blacks fear running

People take to the streets to honour Ahmaud Arbery, who was shot in Feb. while doing exercise

MATTHEW FUTTERMAN
TALYA MINSBERG

The killing in February of an African American man in Georgia and the graphic video of it that emerged this week have brought to the fore a unique anxiety that has long troubled countless runners – running while black.

People across the country took to the streets Friday to honour Ahmaud Arbery, the 25-year-old black man fatally shot February 23, by running or walking 2.23 miles, sharing their journeys by using the social media hashtag #IRunWithMaud.

Racial profiling

For many black runners, the killing and its aftermath have shed light on simmering fears of being attacked or racially profiled while running, an anxiety largely undiscussed in the wider running community but one that is



Black lives matter: A protest in Brunswick, Georgia, on Friday against the killing of Ahmaud Arbery. ■ AFP

now causing runners of colour to think even harder about the decisions they have to make when they go out for a jog.

The killing brought to life what Tianna Bartoletta said she faces during a split second of pause – "Is it worth it?" – when she steps outside to go running. The three-time Olympic gold medalist, a black woman, said the activity that has brought her immense joy and profession-

al success is paired with fear. Arbery was killed far from where he lived in Satilla Shores, Georgia, a quiet mid-class enclave. His family said he was out exercising when two men – who later said they believed he resembled someone wanted for a series of burglaries – followed him in their truck while armed with a shotgun and a handgun, then confronted Arbery and shot him. The killing gathered pu-

blic awareness after cell-phone footage showing the confrontation was released this week.

Arrests over killing

On Thursday, Gregory McMichael, 64, and Travis McMichael, 34, were arrested and charged with murder and aggravated assault, more than two months after the killing. The case has caused runners of colour to be even more vigilant than usual, spending extra time deciding where they run, what they wear, even what they sound like while they are running to try to avoid any confrontations.

As runners laced up their shoes Friday to run – an act they described as one of protest, defiance and mourning – there was another layer of anxiety because of the face mask recommendations brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Da'Rel Patterson, 36, who lives in Atlanta, said he feels safe on the running trails and paths of his city, but if he runs through more residential and predominantly white neighbourhoods, he makes sure to wear brightly coloured clothing and sneakers so people can easily identify him as a runner.

Because he tends to breathe quietly and has a soft step, he intentionally makes additional noise if he sees someone approaching, yelling "hello" or "excuse me" long before it would be necessary. "It's to disarm them," he said. "Those moves are instinctual; it's now a natural part of what I do."

Runners stated the obvious. No, their fear is not new or unfounded. But this latest killing – and the familiarity of the movement that brought Arbery joy in the moments before his death – cracked the sense of security some had developed while running. ■ NY TIMES

Credai alleges cartelisation, flags cement and steel prices

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Confederation of Real Estate Developers' Association of India (Credai) has written to Housing and Urban Affairs minister Hardeep Puri and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, seeking immediate intervention to curb the sudden hike of 40-50% in prices of raw materials such as cement and steel.

As per the apex industry body, the steep hike indicates cartelisation and monopolistic trade practices by cement and steel manufacturers. "We would like to bring your attention to the cartelisation by Cement and Steel manufacturers by imposing a sudden increase in their selling price. Across various States, there has been an increase of ₹100-250 per bag of cement and about ₹2,000-₹2,500 per metric tonne of steel," Credai said in the letter dated May 8.

The letter has also been marked to Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises Minister Prakash Javadekar and Consumer Affairs Minister Ram Vilas Paswan.

The industry body said that given the current crisis faced by the real estate sector because of COVID-19, such an abrupt increase in prices will impact developers and lead to increase in construction costs and overall project costs. "With wafer-thin margins, many developers may be constrained to stop construction work, thereby impacting delivery of projects, leading to penalties under RERA and so on. This will have a cascading effect on homebuyers also," it said.

Enable longer work hours: CII to Centre

Also seeks norms for workers to rejoin duty; 'make those failing to report for work liable for action'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT



Near and dear: Workers residing in shelters or near industrial belts may be assigned to the nearest factories. ■ VIJAY SONEJI

commendations stated. It added that States needed to put the revision of minimum wages on hold for at least one year and that normal working hours of employees across sectors are increased by allowing four hours overtime per day. "For working overtime, workers would be paid in proportion to the normal wages. The workers'

consent has to be taken for the overtime," it said.

Additionally, to address the shortage of workforce, the CII has suggested that migrant workers residing in shelter homes or available locally near the industrial belts be mapped and deployed to the nearest factories.

The industry body has also recommended that the

provisions of layoff under the Industrial Dispute Act be extended to commercial establishments as a job retention measure for workers having no work. "For the period of layoff, such workers shall remain on rolls and will get reduced wages along with statutory benefits such as ESIC and PF."

"... to allow industry to pay wages as per the layoff (50% basic plus DA) provisions for the period no work is carried out for the month of April and May 2020," it said. Further, it sought removal of labour advisories issued under the Disaster Management Act that prohibits employers from any wage reduction, layoff and retrenchment of workers.

On review of labour laws, the industry body said it is critical that these changes are not rushed into without addressing industry concerns. "This is especially re-

levant today when the industry is redefining its business models and working practices in many sectors as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Labour codes should be further reviewed to enable greater ease of doing business and encourage entrepreneurship."

The CII added that the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana ought to be extended to more establishments. Currently, the scheme is eligible for wage earners working in establishments employing up to 100 employees, with 90% of employees earning monthly wages less than ₹15,000/p.m. "[Extend the scheme to organisations having 50-60% workforce earning up to ₹25,000 p.m.," it said.

It added that Employees' State Insurance Corporation and the EPFO should take up massive campaigns to inform workers to rejoin work.

Economy to see output loss of \$190 bn'

FDI by firms moving from China to India will help offset damage: Kotak's Shah

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT



Nilesh Shah

remain shut for a month with 100% drop in activity, output loss could be ₹250 billion. At 50% activity, output loss could be about ₹125 billion; we are likely to be shut for 47 days this year so output loss this year could

be about \$190 billion assuming that we will all open up on May 17," Mr. Shah said.

He added that lower oil prices would benefit our economy by ₹40-45 billion this year. If we replace made-in-China goods with India-made products it can help save about ₹20 billion in the trade deficit.

"Effectively, we are looking at a net ₹130 billion output loss for 47 days of lockdown plus the massive cost of restarting the economy."

According to Mr. Shah, India's biggest opportunity lies in encashing goodwill and getting capital from foreign firms to boost domestic savings so that growth can be accelerated. "PPI in equity

and debt and FDI by bringing companies from China to India will help us cover the losses and minimise the damage caused by the COVID-19 crisis. If the economy does well, eventually, markets will also start doing well," he noted. On fiscal stimulus, he said many businesses needed support in the form of grant aid or subsidies, which is why fiscal stimulus is necessary.

On interest rates, he said, "Policy rates have been cut but it has not yet reflected in borrowers' accounts. Fortunately, with RBI's intervention, the 10-year yield is now below 6% and soon it should reflect in the borrowers' accounts as well."

More time to pay life cover premium

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has extended till May 31 the grace period to pay premium for life insurance policies whose payment date was in March 2020.

The decision came in the backdrop of the COVID-19 triggered lockdown extended, by the Union government, up to May 17.

The insurance regulator had earlier announced an additional grace period of 30 days for the life insurance policies where premium due date fell in March and April.

from non-performing loans were ₹1,883 crore. Slippages to NPA in the quarter included Singapore-based fraud hit oil trader Hin Leong Trading and a healthcare firm in West Asia.

"Both these accounts have been significantly provided for; we do not see any further impact on our books," said Sandeep Batra, president, ICICI Bank.

Net interest income (NII) increased by 17% year-on-year to ₹8,927 crore in Q4. Excluding the interest on income tax refund, NII grew by 24% year-on-year in the quarter. The net interest margin was 3.87% in Q4 compared to 3.77% in the previous quarter and 3.72% in Q4-2019.

Non-interest income, excluding treasury income, increased 16% year-on-year to ₹4,013 crore while treasury income grew 55% year-on-year to ₹242 crore.

The bank has made a provision of ₹3,242 crore in Q4, excluding COVID-19 related provision, which amounted to ₹2,725 crore. "This provision made by the bank is more than the requirement as per the Reserve Bank of India's guideline dated April 17, 2020," ICICI Bank said.

For the quarter, gross additions to non-performing assets were ₹5,306 crore while recoveries and upgrades, excluding write-offs, were ₹2,060 crore as on March 31, 2020 from 2.06% a year ago. "The Net NPA ratio as of March 2020 is the lowest in 19 quarters," Mr. Batra said.

Provision coverage on non-performing loans, excluding technical write-offs, rose to 75.7% as on March 31, 2020 from 70.6% a year ago.

The lender reported 13% growth in domestic advances as on March 31, 2020 with retail loans rising 16% on year. He also said about 30% of the loan book was under the repayment moratorium.

The bank has shifted its registered office from Vadodara, Gujarat to Mumbai, where its corporate office is located.

India set to cover the globe with exports of masks

Demand goes viral in the backdrop of COVID-19 pandemic

M. SOUNDARIYA PREETHA

COIMBATORE
India is expected to emerge as one of the main exporters of masks with the habit of its wearing catching up on people worldwide in the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Francesco Esposito, director of Bioxgreen Technology, a Chennai-based biotech firm, says the demand for masks in Europe is expected to be in the order of millions. It is said that more than 150 million pieces are needed a month in each European country, including different models of masks.

Each buyer decides on the model of mask every month and some of the major suppliers are China, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Brazil and Argentina.

Fantastic alternative
"India can be a fantastic alternative to China," he said. "India, for me, is the world between China and Europe. It has the skills and capability. If it does good quality products, it has huge export potential (for masks)."

In an article, ArtValley, an organisation that co-ordinates with Indian and Italian entrepreneurs to promote cooperation, says, "In Europe, there is a major need for masks manufactured in India for protection against the COVID-19 outbreak since the combined import from China and local production within the European Union is not enough to meet the increasing demand."

China covers only half of the global demand and India can enter the market as the second-largest producer in the world, when the Indian government lifts the ban on export of masks and PPEs.

According to K.S. Sundaram, chairman, Indian Technical Textile Association, Indian manufacturers



Unmasking potential: More than 150 million pieces are needed every month in each European country. ■ PTI

Combined import from China and local production within EU is not enough to meet the increasing demand

make surgical, respirator and cloth masks and masks with high particulate filtration efficiency and breathability.

"There is a lot of innovation going on, making the masks aesthetically good while providing high protection efficiency," he says.

Regarding exports, Mr. Sundaram points out, "There are world-class manufacturing facilities in India. We have the capacity to meet Indian needs and those of exports, too. There is a fantastic opportunity."

Currently, the number of cloth manufacturers are more. When the Union government permits export of masks, overseas buyers will ask for certifications and standards and manufacturers, who are able to meet these requirements, will export. More machinery is imported to make top quality masks. What the country needs is a full-fledged testing facility for masks.

Some companies are coming out with woven cloth masks that have antibacterial and water-repellent coatings. The masks should be able to meet, probably, more parameters for exports.

'Let salons open, 70 lakh livelihoods depend on it'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI Representatives of beauty and wellness segment have urged Union Minister (MSME and Transport) Nitin Gadkari to allow opening of salons, spas, barbershops and clinics under strict health and hygiene norms to ensure livelihood for 70 lakh people.

Segment leaders said they were committed to go through stringent safety and hygiene tests instituted by B&WSSC and the qualifying outlets should be eligible for an accreditation.

No home service

They, however, ruled out providing home services as it would be difficult to assure the same level of safety for customers.

Pushkaraj Shenai, CEO, Lakme Salon said, "We believe that customers will have a safe service experience in the controlled environment of our salon with stringent hygiene measures and detailed checks in place. Since it is difficult to ensure strict safety standards when travelling from home to home, we will not provide home services."

In a video conference with Mr. Gadkari, they highlighted the plight of the industry and sought a lifeline for the 70 lakh professionals, two-thirds of them are women and mostly belonging to lower socio economic and educational backgrounds.

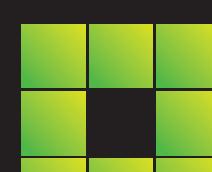
They said with manpower costs being about 40% of revenue and rent being 15-20%, the zero revenue during the lockdown has put a lot of stress on them.

The extended lockdown will lead to large scale unemployment and significant disruption given the high proportion of migrants, they added.

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Both these accounts (Hin Leong and a West Asia healthcare firm) have been significantly provided for; we do not see any further impact on our books

SANDEEP BATRA, President, ICICI Bank

Metrics	Q4 FY20	Q4 FY19	% rise
Total income (₹ cr.)	23,443.66	20,913.82	12.10
Net interest income (₹ cr.)	8,927.00	7,620.00	17.15
Operating profit (₹ cr.)	7,390.09	6,233.39	18.56
Provisions and contingencies (₹ cr.)	5,967.44	5,451.41	9.47
Net profit (₹ cr.)	1,221.36	969.06	26.03

ICICI Bank Q4 net up 26%, provisions rise

'Net NPA at lowest in 19 quarters'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

ICICI Bank reported a 26% growth in its net profit to ₹1,221 crore for the quarter ended March 31, 2020 (Q4), despite higher provisions made by the lender towards COVID-19 related issues.

It added that Employees'

State Insurance Corporation and the EPFO should take up

massive campaigns to inform

workers to rejoin work.

Net interest income (NII) increased by 17% year-on-year to ₹8,927 crore in Q4. Excluding the interest on income tax refund, NII grew by 24% year-on-year in the quarter.

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Now, a mobile app predicts COVID-19 incidence days in advance

The predictive power of the app highlights the potential utility of real-time symptom tracking

R. PRASAD

By repurposing an existing mobile application used for personal nutrition studies, a multinational collaboration – the COoronavirus Pandemic Epidemiology (COPE) – has developed a COVID-19 Symptom Tracker mobile app. The mobile app, which allows for epidemiologic data collection and analysis, was launched in the U.K. on March 24 and in the U.S. on March 29. It already has 2.8 million users as on May 2.

Not only do incidence, disease severity and outcomes vary with age, sex and underlying conditions, even symptoms vary widely. Even as COVID-19 has spread to over 200 countries and infected over 3.5 million people, the full spectrum of clinical presentation is yet to be characterised in the general patient population, leave alone patient subgroups.

The COVID-19 Symptom Tracker enables people to self-report data related to novel coronavirus exposure, symptoms and infections. According to a paper published in *Science*, among the first 1.6 million users (mean age 41 and 75% females) in the U.K. over the first five days of use has confirmed the variability of symptoms in people with suspected infection. The most common symptoms were found to be fatigue and cough, followed by diarrhoea, fever and loss of smell. Shortness of breath was relatively rarely reported. "Only 0.4% (1,176) of individuals reporting possible COVID-19 symptoms reported receiving a RT-PCR test



Easier data collection: The app enables self-reporting of data related to novel coronavirus exposure, symptoms and infections. ■ R. RAGU

for COVID-19," says the paper.

Predicting incidence

The researchers subsequently developed a weighted prediction model based on the symptoms of more than two million individuals who used the app. And they found that the app can predict the dynamics of COVID-19 incidence a few days in advance of traditional measures, such as positive tests, hospitalisations or mortality.

For instance, in Southern Wales, two spikes in COVID-19 cases were reported by the authorities five to seven days after individuals using the app reported symptoms. Conversely, a decline in reports of symptoms preceded a drop in confirmed cases by several days.

Based on the predictive value of the app, the researchers are planning to validate the symptom-based modelling of COVID-19 incidence by carrying out additional studies using representative samples of individuals who will undergo uniform COVID-19 testing.

The predictive power of the app highlights the "potential utility of real-time symptom tracking to help guide allocation of resources for testing and treatment as well as recommendations for lockdown or easement in specific areas" they note.

Definitive symptoms

Among those who got themselves tested, it became possible to know which symptoms commonly lead to testing, and which symptoms

better correlated with a positive test result. For instance, while cough and fatigue did lead people to get themselves tested, the symptoms do not seem to be particularly suggestive of an infection as revealed by the test results. Similarly, nobody who had diarrhoea alone tested positive.

But people who had cough and/or fatigue and at least one additional symptom – including diarrhoea and loss of smell – were more likely to test positive, the researchers found.

They found that loss of smell was a more sensitive symptom than even fever. But a greater number of people with a fever tested positive when fever was accompanied by other symptoms.

Need prioritising

"These findings suggest that individuals with complex or multiple (three or more) symptomatic presentation perhaps should be prioritised for testing. Concerningly, 20% of individuals reported complex symptoms (cough and/or fatigue plus at least one of loss of smell, diarrhoea, or fever) but had not yet received testing, representing a substantial population who appear to be at greater risk for the disease," they write.

The researchers are hoping to "release" the app as fair-use open source software to facilitate translation and development in other regions. They have already begun working with their counterparts in Canada, Australia, and Sweden to implement the app in these countries.

Using NFHS for population surveillance for coronavirus

The infrastructure can be used for random sample-based population surveillance

AWSATHI PACHA

Governments worldwide have been testing for COVID-19 in high-risk individuals, such as those with symptoms, close contacts of those tested positive, health-care professionals and those with travel history to an affected region. But this does not give an accurate number of those affected, making it impossible to understand the true prevalence in a population.

A comment recently published in *Lancet Global Health* proposes the use of the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) framework to ascertain the prevalence of COVID-19.

S.V. Subramanian, Professor of population health and geography at Harvard University, and K.S. James, Director, International Institute of Population Sciences suggest that the scientific and logistical infrastructure of India's National Family Health Survey (NFHS) be leveraged to conduct a random sample-based population surveillance to track coronavirus.

Used earlier

The article gives the example of how India used NFHS for HIV surveillance – India was projected to have 25 million HIV-positive individuals, with a 3-4% prevalence in adults, but when a random-sample-based population surveillance was



Logical distribution: Testing high-risk persons alone does not give an accurate number of those affected. ■ AP

conducted to test for HIV in the general population, the estimates sharply reduced to 2.5 million, with a 0.28% prevalence in adults.

They note that "layering a COVID-19-focused data-collection effort on to the NFHS infrastructure would keep operational costs low, with the major expense being laboratory costs for testing samples."

Prevalence and testing

They estimated that if COVID-19 anticipated prevalence is under 0.5%, it needs a sample of about 3,000 individuals to be tested. "The minimum required sample size increases to just over 15,000 under a rarer scenario of 0.1% prevalence." If a disease is widespread, meaning there is higher prevalence, its detection is easier, needing only a smaller sample. Conversely, if it is rare, it is harder to

find and a larger sample should be tested to detect that. This sampling approach could be implemented at the State or district levels.

"India and about 90 countries with established DHS sampling frames can implement this surveillance system. The idea is that population-based testing is important for any decision making with some repeated cross-sectional testing of the same," notes Dr. Subramanian, in an email to *The Hindu*. "It is my understanding that the Government of India is considering a random-sample-based sero-prevalence survey. I would recommend that the latest NFHS district-sampling frame be used and not invent a new one. Indeed, one needs to be cognizant of the availability of the testing kits and other logistical matters related to the testing itself."

Sal forest tortoise habitat stretches over unprotected areas

Protected areas are designated in a largely mammal-centric way, many equally threatened reptiles and amphibians live outside these

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

The sal forest tortoise is widely distributed over eastern and northern India and Southeast Asia. However, it is not common in any of this terrain. In fact, 23 of the 29 species of freshwater turtle and tortoise species found in India come under the threatened category in the IUCN red list and are under severe existential threat due to human activities. Also known as the elongated tortoise (*Indotestudo elongata*), the sal forest tortoise, recently assessed as critically endangered, is heavily hunted for food and collected both for local use, such as decorative masks, and international wildlife trade. ■ ABHIJIT DAS



Critically endangered: The sal forest tortoise is heavily hunted for food and collected both for local use, such as decorative masks, and international wildlife trade. ■ ABHIJIT DAS

of India, Dehradun, finds that the area designated as a protected area network has only a small overlap with the actual habitat it roams around in. According to the authors of the study published in the journal *Herpetological Conservation and Biology*, over 90% of the potential distribution of the species falls outside current protected area's network. Also, in northeast India, the representation of the species in protected areas is

least, and there is little to no connectivity among most of the protected areas where the species is present.

The study also found that 29% of the predicted distribution of the species falls within high occurrence fire zones or areas where there is management burning. "This includes Uttarakhand State which is the "western-most" distribution limit of the species and where field surveys were conducted with the help of Uttarakhand forest department," says Abhijit Das, an author of the study, from the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, in an email to *The Hindu*. According to him, especially in northeast India, which is a suitable habitat for the species, they experience jhum fire. Such an intervention

may not only directly kill the animals but also open up habitats, which, in turn, increases the chance of people finding the tortoise easily.

Forest fires also perturb soil moisture which may impact forest floor thus changing the whole community on which the reptiles depend.

According to the IUCN the population of the species may have fallen by about 80% in the last three generations (90 years).

Monitoring needed

Dr. Das says: "We need to realise that tortoises are no less threatened than tigers. Thus, they should be part of regular monitoring effort. In summer days, these tortoises select moist patches such as dry stream beds. Such areas should be protected

from the spread of forest fire."

The study covers not only parts of India but also Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. Dr. Das observes: "It is not difficult to go to these countries for research or even in having collaborations. However, transboundary research has not picked up in our countries. For tigers, yes, there are some efforts in this line, but not for many other species which are equally threatened globally."

There is little information on the population sizes of the sal forest tortoise, or any such species, mainly because they are so rare, live in remote areas of the forest and funding opportunities to study them are few. Species having large distribution may suffer myriad problems. "Protected areas are designated in a largely mammal-centric way. Many reptiles and amphibians which are equally threatened live outside protected areas where exploitation risk is more," says Dr. Das.

New antibody test highly accurate

REUTERS

A new antibody test which can determine whether people have been infected with the novel coronavirus is highly accurate, according to a study published in *The Journal of Clinical Microbiology*.

The researchers found the test, manufactured by Abbott Laboratories, had a specificity rate of 99.9% and a sensitivity rate of 100%, suggesting little chance of incorrectly diagnosing a healthy person as having been infected, and virtually no chance of a false negative readout. Abbott's test has received emergency use authorisation from the FDA.

The company has already shipped more than 10 million of the tests to various hospitals and labs.

'COVID-19 death is a wake-up call to improve surveillance in the area'

R. PRASAD

Even after more than six weeks of national lockdown, there is no sign of any flattening of the curve but instead the number of new novel coronavirus cases reported each day continues to increase. Expanded and increased testing alone cannot be the reason. **Gridhara R. Babu**, Professor, Head-Life course Epidemiology, at the Public Health Foundation of India, Bengaluru, and Intermediate Fellow, Wellcome Trust DBT India Alliance says in an email that States should look for active cases through house-to-house search using the syndrome approach and isolate every person who has two COVID-19 symptoms.

What is the reason why we see thousands of cases each day despite India being under a lockdown since March 24?

In absolute numbers, India's case burden has increased by 1.8 times (180%) in the last two weeks alone. However, considering the infection period of 14 days, the R_0 [the number of people one person can infect] has indeed resulted in a spike in cases, as earlier, the testing criterion was centred mostly around people with symptoms. However, if lockdown was successful and containment measures were also successful, we could have picked up these cases earlier

on. When you increase testing, you will not get many positives if there is no extensive spread of infection. When you expand testing, you get more new cases only when more people are infected around you, only when the infection has spread either in clusters or beyond. I am concerned about the increase in Bihar and West Bengal, which have a relatively poor healthcare system to cater to the surge in cases. Let me repeat for clarity – it is only improved surveillance measures that will get us to minimise casualties.

Countries that had gone under lockdown, including Italy, saw a flattening of the curve in about three weeks. Why is India not seeing any flattening even after six weeks of lockdown?

I agree partly; India's expanded testing (including random testing in red zones and surrounding areas) has indeed resulted in a spike in cases, as earlier, the testing criterion was centred mostly around people with symptoms. However, if lockdown was successful and containment measures were also successful, we could have picked up these cases earlier

intuitive. States/Union territories that have higher ILI/SARI reporting and a higher number of contacts traced per confirmed case should guide future reviewers. Better quarantine measures coupled with identification and isolation of all cases is the only vaccine we have for now.

Should India restrict itself to testing contacts and SARI AND ILI cases alone?

No, it is also imperative to treat every person with a particular symptom complex in a syndromic approach. In my view, anyone who has two of these symptoms should be isolated as COVID-19 unless otherwise proved – fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty

breathing, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, new loss of taste or loss of smell. Since a vast majority of the infections are mild or asymptomatic, we should develop plans for home isolation of cases, wherever possible. It is essential to review regularly the performance of districts and States based on the syndrome-based surveillance.

What different strategy should India adopt to make testing more targeted?

A good surveillance system is like a great surfer, one which goes in search of the tide to take control over it. The reality is that in the absence of strong district-level planning, we will get caught, and [it will] make us a sitting duck. We need to decide whether to tame the tide or be a sitting duck.

We should find active cases through the house-to-house search using the syndrome approach and isolate every person who has two COVID-19 symptoms. Governments should use the tests judiciously to test people who have symptoms and their contacts. After the contacts are quarantined, test between five-seven days from the day of onset of the symptoms in people who

they were in contact with. Besides, it is essential to offer testing to health workers.

Like pulse polio programme, door-to-door surveillance to check the health status of the public is needed. This requires a lot of workforce, which the government should pay heed to. Without health workforce and active testing we cannot say the curve will flatten anytime soon. District-level task forces should be formed to plan and improve surveillance and testing, and step up preparedness.

We still see many States, including Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka, reporting fewer cases each day. Is it because there truly is less virus spread?

Test positivity in Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka is 5.58% and 0.79% respectively. It varies from zero to 8.29% across the States in India. Decreasing test positivity rate can indicate many things. First, there is less virus spread in the State, which is an implausible scenario. Second, it suggests that we are not testing the right kind of people and randomly testing. In many districts, the number of SARI and ILI cases tested are very few. Through improved surveillance, all the high-risk persons need to be tested. For now, we can think at our

peril that the epidemic is over, given that there is a huge cohort of susceptible persons throughout the country.

What is the reason we see a high case fatality rate in Maharashtra and Gujarat?

The possible reasons for the high fatality in these two States might be due to different reasons. The disease can worsen fast, sometimes within a few hours to one day. People might reach health facility late by which time their condition already could be serious. Further, a higher proportion of co-morbidities like diabetes and hypertension might lead to fatalities. Reporting late to health system can also indicate stigma. Improving communication to reach people and addressing their fear and stigma can resolve some of these challenges.

On the other hand, if surveillance is poor, we might miss cases in the initial phases and only deaths occurring later will draw the system's attention. By then, the infection would have spread wider, resulting in more deaths. Death is an unfortunate wake-up call to improve surveillance in that area.



Giridhara Babu ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Funds and the PM

How different is the PM CARES Fund from the PM's National Relief Fund?

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ

The story so far: On March 28, the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund, or the PM CARES Fund, was set up to tackle distress situations such as that posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. In one-and-a-half months, the fund has raked in thousands of crores worth of donations including unlimited tax-free contributions from major corporates.

Who may contribute to the fund?

The fund receives voluntary contributions from individuals and organisations and does not get any budgetary support. Donations have been made tax-exempt, and can be counted against a company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) obligations. It is also exempt from the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010, and accepts foreign contributions, although the Centre has previously refused foreign aid to deal with disasters such as the Kerala floods. The Prime Minister chairs the fund in his official capacity, and can nominate three eminent persons in relevant fields to the Board of Trustees. The Ministers of Defence, Home Affairs and Finance are ex-officio Trustees of the Fund.

Does not India already have a fund with similar objectives?

Yes. The Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF) was set up in January 1948, originally to accept public contributions for the assistance of Partition refugees. It is now used to provide immediate relief to the families of those killed in natural calamities and the victims of major accidents and riots and support medical expenses for acid attack victims and others.

The PMNRF was initially managed by a committee which included the Prime Minister and his deputy, the Finance Minister, the Congress President, a representative of the Tata Trustees and an industry representative. However, in 1985, the committee entrusted the entire management of the fund to the Prime Minister, who currently has sole discretion for fund disbursal. A joint secretary in the PMO administers the fund on an honorary basis.

As of December 2019, the PMNRF had an unspent balance of ₹3,800 crore in its corpus.

Opposition leaders have questioned the need for a new PM CARES Fund, given that the PMNRF has similar objectives. States also have similar Chief Minister's Relief Funds, and State governments have appealed for donations noting that they bear the major burden of implementing COVID-19 relief operations.

Are donations pouring in?

In its 45-day existence, PM CARES has attracted a large amount of donations. Within the first half hour after the PM's tweet on March 28, donors as varied as the IAS Association and Bollywood actor Akshay Kumar had pledged to contribute ₹21 lakh and ₹25 crore, respectively, to the fund. In the first week, news reports suggested that publicly declared donations added up to at least ₹6,500 crore.

In the month since then, lakhs of public and private sector employees have donated a day's salary to the fund, with some claiming it was done without their permission or knowledge. Among major donations include ₹500 crore from employees of the Defence Ministry, Army, Navy, Air Force and defence public sector units, as well as ₹500 crore each from the Tata Group and Reliance Industries. Protests have been raised against companies such as Reliance which have made major donations to PM CARES even while cutting salaries of their own employees, as well as the Railways, which donated ₹151 crore to PM CARES, but could not provide free transport for destitute migrant workers.

The Centre has not responded to queries on how much money is in the PM CARES Fund. A senior official said an announcement will be made "once a respectable amount' has been collected



FILE PHOTO/K. PICHUMANI

A market and Tamil Nadu's biggest cluster

Why has Koyambedu, the popular wholesale complex, been so badly affected during the COVID-19 pandemic?

K. LAKSHMI & SERENA JOSEPHINE M.

The story so far: Koyambedu, Chennai's popular wholesale market, is now the epicentre of the largest cluster of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Tamil Nadu. Keeping the large, sprawling market open in the midst of an epidemic, with little or no precautionary measures, has proved costly for the State. Cases from the cluster started to emerge during the last week of April. The infection has now reached far and wide, quietly spreading to erstwhile less-affected districts of the State as labourers from the market made their way back to their hometowns. As of Friday, May 8, 2020, 1,589 cases of the State's total COVID-19 count of 6,009 are linked to this market.

What turned the bustling Koyambedu market into a hotspot?

Overcrowding and congestion are nothing new to the Koyambedu wholesale market. The scenario was no different after the first phase of the lockdown. The rush of people to the market only grew whenever the State government announced a lockdown or imposed restrictions on its working hours as a precautionary measure against the spread of COVID-19, much in contrast to the aim of the government authorities. From day one of the lockdown in March, the market received a steady flow of visitors – retailers who relied on the premises for supply, and individual customers. Even though the lockdown was in place, the market witnessed a rush a day ahead of Tamil New Year that falls on April 14 for purchases. From then on, the same situation persisted as people resorted to panic buying. Various government agencies swung into action to control the crowds visiting the market in order to prevent disease transmission. By the end of April, the Koyambedu market – there was scant regard for physical distancing – turned into the largest hotspot for COVID-19, with several districts in the State witnessing a spillover of cases. The market has been closed since May 5 but the cluster continues to trigger a spike in COVID-19 cases.

Why is the Koyambedu wholesale market different from any other urban market in the country?

Conceived to decongest the core parts of the city, the Koyambedu wholesale market complex was established

at what was then a peripheral area to bring the city's wholesale and retail perishable goods trade under one roof; there were facilities for truck terminals. Much of the trade from what was the city's traditional wholesale fruits and vegetables market, in Kothawal Chavadi, was shifted to Koyambedu. An area of 295 acres was earmarked and allotted to set up the market complex. Established in 1996, the Koyambedu market complex is one of Asia's largest hubs for perishable goods. Spread over 65 acres, the wholesale fruits, flowers and vegetables market receives a staggering number of visitors every day – one lakh. During the festive season, this number may go up to two lakh visitors. On an average, the market receives 400 truckloads of vegetables alone every day. Besides individual customers from a radius of 10 km visiting the market for its variety and affordable rates, retail vendors

from a minimum radius of 100 km, including Arakkonam, Gummidiyopodi and Villupuram, use the market to pick up fresh produce. It now houses a wholesale food grains market too. The sheer size of business and the large variety of goods available and bustling market in a confined space make Koyambedu different from other markets.

How did the large-scale spread happen?

The Koyambedu market has nearly 3,750 licensed shops which sell fruits, flowers and vegetables, wholesale and retail. The market begins to receive fresh arrivals from the southern States as well as beyond including Maharashtra, from 10 p.m. and sales continue well into the next day. The nature of the market is such that people and vehicles from various parts of the State and across the country visit the market during different hours of the day. There are about 10,000 labourers in the market. During the lockdown, physical distancing norms were affected as people attempted to purchase produce during the restricted hours. Though measures were taken to

close sections of the market in phases and restrict the crowds during the lockdown period, the damage had already been done and the market became conducive for transmission.

As the retail market closed in April-end, many labourers who did not find enough work, shelter and food left the city for their home towns in the trucks that had arrived at the market. Till then, they had turned the marketplace into their temporary homes, sleeping in vehicles and on platforms within the market. In the last one week, the infection has spread to at least half of Tamil Nadu.

The World Health Organization defines clusters of cases as countries/territories/areas experiencing cases, clustered in time, geographic location and/or common exposures. This holds true for the Koyambedu cluster. As vendors began to test positive in Chennai, market labourers including loadmen were infected in many districts of the State such as Ariyalur, Perambalur, Cuddalore, Villupuram, Chengalpet and Tiruvallur. While the government managed to trace and test all index cases, what marked the beginning of a challenging process was contact tracing. The cluster was different owing to the massive crowds involved. In a normal situation, a person who tests positive for COVID-19 will have 20 to 30 contacts. But, public health officials pointed out, this was not the case with the Koyambedu cluster where some who tested positive had roughly 200 to 250 contacts.

Will the lessons learnt from this pandemic help to shape the future of urban markets?

Urban planning experts note that markets where there are daily activities that are large scale in nature with huge congregations need more attention. According to A. Srivathsan, professor, CEPT University, Ahmedabad, the Koyambedu market, with its confined spaces and shops that are packed closely, was denser than a shopping mall in the city. Instead of one large central unit, there is a need to establish multiple markets in the city that is growing in the periphery.

Experts note that the design of the market should be decided after taking into account various factors that include sanitation. More options for sourcing and the delivery of goods need to be thought of in order to reduce crowding in one place.

How can inter-State workers be protected?

Should a 1979 law on migrant workers be retained or must it be subsumed under a proposed labour code?

K. VENKATARAMAN

The story so far: On Friday, May 8, 16 migrant labourers who were trying to return to Madhya Pradesh, their home State, on foot were killed when a goods train ran over them between Jhalna and Aurangabad districts in Maharashtra. Following the novel coronavirus pandemic, the nationwide lockdown announced on March 24 at short notice has caused immense distress to migrant workers around the country. Hundreds have been seen trying to walk home to Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Odisha from their places of work in Rajasthan, Delhi, Maharashtra, Gujarat and so forth. Questions are being raised about their welfare and the lack of legal protection for their rights. Those working in the field of labour welfare have recalled a 1979 law to regulate the employment and working conditions of inter-State migrants, but feel that the lack of serious implementation has led to their rights being ignored. As part of the present regime's efforts towards consolidating and reforming labour law, a Bill has been introduced in Parliament called the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2019. The proposed code seeks to merge 13 labour laws into a single piece of legislation. The Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979, is one of them. Activists fear that specific safeguards given to migrant workers may be lost as a result of this consolidation.

What does the 1979 law envisage?

The Act seeks to regulate the employment of inter-State migrants and their conditions of service. It is applicable to every establishment that employs five or more migrant workmen from other States; or if it had employed five or more such workmen on any day in the preceding 12 months.

It is also applicable to contractors who employed a similar number of inter-State workmen. The Act would apply regardless of whether the five or more workmen were in addition to others employed in the establishment or by the contractors.

It envisages a system of registration of such establishments. The principal employer is prohibited from employing inter-State workmen without a certificate of registration from the relevant authority. The law also lays down that every contractor who recruits workmen from one State for deployment in another State should obtain a licence to do so.



SANDEEP RASAL

What are the beneficial provisions for inter-State migrants in it?

The provision for registration of establishments employing inter-State workers creates a system of accountability and acts as the first layer of formalising the utilisation of their labour. It helps the government keep track of the number of workers employed and provides a legal basis for regulating their conditions of service.

As part of the licensing process, contractors are bound by certain conditions. These include committing them to providing terms and conditions of the agreement or any other arrangement on the basis of which they recruit workers. These terms include "the remuneration payable, hours of work, fixation of wages and other essential amenities in respect of the inter-State migrant workmen".

The wage rates, holidays, hours of work and other conditions of service of an inter-State migrant workman shall be the same as those extended to other workmen in the same establishment, if the nature of their work is similar. In other cases, it would be as prescribed by the appropriate government. In no case, shall the wages be lower than what is prescribed under the Minimum Wages Act.

What does the proposed Code say on migrant workers?

The attempt to consolidate laws relating to occupational safety, health and working conditions means that many separate laws concerning various kinds of workers and labourers will have to be repealed. The proposed law seeks to repeal 13 Acts such as the Factories Act, Mines

Act, Dock Workers' Act, the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, and other enactments relating to those working in plantations, construction, cinema, beedi and cigarette manufacture, motor transport, and the media.

Regarding inter-State migrant workers, the Act includes them in the definition of 'contract labour'. At the same time, an inter-State migrant worker is also separately defined as a person recruited either by an employer or a contractor for an establishment situated in another State. The Code has a chapter on 'contract labour and inter-State migrant workers', but the Parliamentary Standing Committee has recommended that the provisions relating to migrant workers be covered in a separate chapter "so that the safety, health and working conditions of the Migrant Workers be clearly spelt out for implementation, besides making special provisions for them, as has been done by the State Government of Kerala".

The Code contains provisions similar to the 1979 Act regarding registration of establishments, licensing of contractors and the inclusion of terms and conditions on hours of work, wages and amenities. Further, both the old Act and the proposed Code envisage the payment of a displacement allowance and a journey allowance to inter-State migrant workers.

Is there a loss of benefits for inter-State workers if the Code comes into force?

Even though the Code seeks to preserve many of the protections and rights given to inter-State workers, trade unions feel that it is always better to have a separate enactment. The unprecedented distress and misery faced by migrant workers due to the current lockdown has drawn attention to a beneficial legislation dedicated to their welfare.

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) has highlighted the fact that both the States where they work and home States have obligations cast upon them in the existing law. Despite the fact that it has been poorly implemented, if at all, labour unions feel that preserving the separate enactment and enforcing it well is a better option than subsuming it under a larger code.

It is not clear whether the fund comes under the ambit of the RTI Act or oversight by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, although independent auditors will audit the fund. One RTI query to the PMO by activist Vikrant Tongad was refused, citing a Supreme Court observation that "indiscriminate and impractical demands under RTI Act for disclosure of all and sundry information would be counterproductive", while other RTI queries have not received a response even after the statutory 30-day period.

The PM CARES web page is opaque regarding the amount of money collected, names of donors, the expenditure of the fund so far, or names of beneficiaries. The PMNRF provides annual donation and expenditure information without any detailed break-up. The PM CARES Fund's trust deed is not available for public scrutiny.

The decision to allow uncapped corporate donations to the fund to count as CSR expenditure – a facility not provided to PMNRF or the CM's Relief Funds – goes against previous guidelines stating that CSR should not be used to fund government schemes.

A government panel had previously advised against allowing CSR contributions to the PMNRF on the grounds that the double benefit of tax exemption would be a "regressive incentive".

Bolsonaro's war with Brazil's institutions

President complains to judge on lockdown while his supporters call for 'invading' Supreme Court

SAO PAULO



On Thursday, Jair Bolsonaro crossed the Square of Three Powers on foot to visit Dias Toffoli, the Chief Justice of Brazilian Supreme Court. The President, accompanied by a bunch of top businessmen – all wearing dark suits and white masks – walked into the court for a "courtesy meeting" with Justice Toffoli. But the judge was taken aback when Mr. Bolsonaro began to complain about how the policy of physical distancing due to the coronavirus was "pushing the companies into Intensive Care Units". The meeting was shown live on social media – without the judge's knowledge.

Walking back towards the Square, which sits at the junction of the Pre-

sidential office, the Supreme Court and Congress in Brasilia, Mr. Bolsonaro continued to bat for "opening the economy" as it was "hurting businesses and jobs". "The economy is life. We can't keep it in the ICU," said Mr. Bolsonaro. As the President left the court, the country's judicial circles went into a tizzy.

"The President just ambushed the Chief Justice. He tried to pass the blame for the economic mess on to the judiciary," said a magistrate, who does not want to be named. "The executive takes care of the economy, not the judiciary."

Mr. Bolsonaro has reasons to corner the Supreme Court, which is supervising three cases that can open the way for his impeachment and spell doom for his three sons, who are under investigation for serious crimes. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the President has made it a wee-



kend ritual to call out his supporters on the street to break the physical distancing norms and make threats against the Supreme Court. On Sunday, as hundreds of his supporters blocked the roads in Brasilia with their cars, Mr. Bolsonaro appeared

in front of the unruly crowd, demanding that the Supreme Court and Congress be shut down. "I don't want to negotiate with anyone. The military is with me," he said to his delirious supporters – known as Bolsonaristas.

Bitter fight

The virus is not showing any signs of slowing down in Brazil. It is surging and threatens to flatten the country's institutions as the President is locked in a bitter fight with two other branches of the government.

Rodrigo Maia, the Speaker of the House of Representatives who has been urging the federal government to back the quarantine measures and provide financial relief to the people, has condemned Mr. Bolsonaro for sending a "wrong signal" to society. "I understand the concerns of businesses but we can't open them under pressure and end up having more deaths. It is almost criminal," Mr. Maia said, after Mr. Bolsonaro's meeting with Justice Toffoli sent rip-

ples across the national capital.

A nascent democracy, Brazil suffered a huge setback in 1964 when a U.S.-backed military coup toppled Joao Goulart's government to "save the country" from communism.

For the next 21 years, the Army ruled the country with brute force, tearing apart its Constitution and crushing the democratic institutions. When democracy returned in the late 1980s, the Army went back to the barracks but did not leave the scene completely. With the election of Mr. Bolsonaro, a former Army captain who openly eulogises the 1964 coup and praises Army officers who tortured political activists, the military came back into the business as the President packed his government with former and serving military officials.

Now, as the Brazilian leader faces the biggest test of his 16-month old presidency, all eyes are on the military leadership, which has refrained from criticising Mr. Bolsonaro.

Last week, the Supreme Court

opened a probe after former Justice Minister Sergio Moro accused the President of "interfering in the work of the Federal Police". The court has called three former Generals, who now hold top Ministries in the government, as witnesses. Reports in the local media suggest that the Generals are "offended" by the court for dragging them into the case. "This could be the beginning of the end of the Bolsonaro presidency. That's why he is putting pressure on the Supreme Court in all possible ways," says the magistrate.

As if taking their cue from their leader, a clutch of Bolsonaristas have set up a camp near the Square of Three Powers and called on his supporters to "invade Congress and the Supreme Court" on Sunday. "At least 300 trucks, with former military men and civilians, will come here to put an end to this stupid show by that damn House and the Supreme Court who have destroyed our nation," said a leader of the group in social media posts this week.

The bid to review the 18th Amendment

Govt. is keen on revisiting the amendment that curtailed presidential powers; critics are alarmed

LAHORE



While attending a talk show, Asad Umar, Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, was asked about the speculation on changing the 18th Constitutional Amendment. Mr. Umar said there were certain flaws in the amendment pertaining to administrative matters between the federal and provincial governments that should be removed.

The country passed the 18th Amendment in April 2010 when the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) was in power. The amendment brought Pakistan's 1973 Constitution back – in a way – to the original intent of its framers and was hailed as a historic move. It addressed the grievances of

the smaller provinces that had been demanding autonomy.

"All I said was that there have been debates about the 18th Amendment in the past and there is nothing new about it – this debate has been going on for almost five years now," Mr. Umar told *The Hindu*. "What I did say was and still maintain is that while dealing with COVID-19, we saw that there are some gaps due to health being a provincial subject. When the 18th Amendment was implemented, we found some lacunae and that are what I pointed out. Such gaps exist in other fields like education and industry. It does not mean that the government is thinking of changing it or not. The discussion came up and my response was regarding a question I was directly asked."

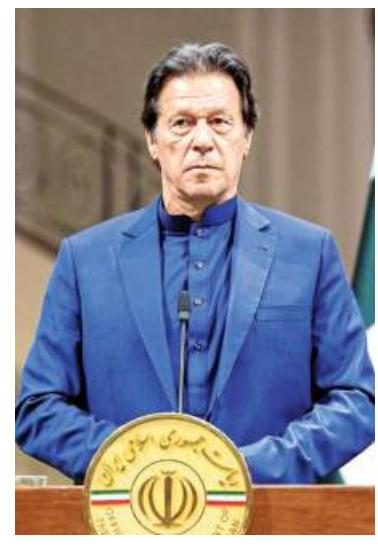
Other PTI leaders had also made critical comments on the 18th

Amendment in the past. On April 26, PTI legislator Faizullah Kamoka had said the provinces had failed to deliver after devolution of powers under the amendment.

More federalism

Opposition parties responded sharply to Mr. Umar's comments. Miftah Ismail, a former Finance Minister and senior leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, said there were many issues between the provinces and the Centre and the solution to such issues was more federalism and democracy.

"There are issues that need to be resolved and issues would come up from time to time that need to be amicably resolved but there is no going back on either giving the President of Pakistan more power vis-a-vis Parliament or the PM or circumcising the powers of the provinces. I believe that true federalism means that provinces not only have the power to act in various areas but they also have transferred responsibility in those



areas. It would be good if the provinces raised more revenues and not relied on the federation so much," he told *The Hindu*.

"If there is any need, I think the PML-N will be forthcoming but the ruling party has absolutely no de-

mocrated any need to amend any constitutional amendment."

The PPP said the amendment put to rest the simmering discontent against the Centre. "To revisit it at a time when provinces require more resources to face the challenges posed by COVID-19, this move will not go down well and will surely make the Centre look like an aggressor bent upon stripping hard-earned rights," said Senator Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar, spokesperson to PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari.

The Imran Khan government has dismissed criticism and has vowed to uphold the "spirit of federalism".

"The PTI government appreciates and recognises the importance and benefits of the 18th Amendment. At present, there is no legal draft which is proposing to alter the changes made vide the 18th Amendment, nor is now the appropriate moment to make any changes," Barrister Maleeka Bokhari, Parliamentary Secretary for Law and Justice, told *The Hindu*.

However, she added that all provi-

sions of the Constitution and laws are evolving and may be subject to amendment. "The PTI government is presently of the view that the 18th Amendment and NFC [National Finance Commission] Award requires a review and reconsideration in accordance with the lacunae and flaws identified during our term in office. Any constitutional amendment would require a two-thirds majority as set out in the Constitution, and consensus of political parties."

According to Salman Zaidi, director programmes at Jinnah Institute, there has been a consistent effort since August 2018 to sell a presidential system to the public or centralise powers and resources. "The 18th Amendment came after years of hard labour and grave lessons learnt in governance. The Opposition is right to criticise any moves to revoke the 18th Amendment, as it will reverse a decade of gains made in social service delivery, accountability, democratic empowerment and capacity built over time."

Familiar disruption, uncertain future

As sales and exports of fish crash, another huge crisis is staring at Sri Lanka's fisherfolk

COLOMBO



This is not the first time that their livelihoods are being disrupted or destroyed. From the nearly three decade-long civil war until 2009, to the invasive Indian trawlers that reigned their seas soon after, to conflicts with locals operating powerful mechanised boats, to migrant fisherfolk competing for their catch – Sri Lanka's northern fisherfolk have seen it all. After struggling through the post-war decade, to cope with the aftermath of the devastating war, and against the Indian trawlers' destructive fishing in Sri Lanka's waters – which prompted Sri Lanka to introduce tougher laws – things were just beginning to look up. And then the COVID-19 pandemic hit them.

On March 10, Sri Lanka reported its first local case of COVID-19, when a tour guide tested positive. Ten days later the government imposed a nationwide curfew, forbidding travel from one district to another. As of Saturday evening, Sri Lanka had reported 824 cases, 240 recoveries and nine deaths.

Despite the stringent curfew, the Sri Lankan government allowed fisherfolk to continue fishing. "We were very relieved they never stopped us from going to sea," said Annalingam Annarasa, a fisher leader in Kayts island, off Jaffna peninsula. "But even that didn't eventually help us," he said. COVID-19 not only pulled the shutters down on all major markets they relied on to sell their fish, but also severely affected exports and domestic pricing.

Sea food exports fetched Sri Lanka over \$250 million in the last few

years and ensured a steady demand for fish production in the north. With the adverse impact on the export market, where northern fisherfolk usually sold their expensive fish varieties, crab and exotic prawns, fisherfolk are having to sell their catch for a fourth or a fifth of the actual price in the domestic market.

"Normally, crab would go for about LKR 1,000-1,200 per kg in the export trade market, but now we are selling it for LKR 200 locally. Prawn sold for LKR 1,850 is now being sold for LKR 850. Our fishermen have no incentive to get into the deep sea because with this sort of pricing, we can't even recover the cost incurred on fuel for our boats," explained Mr. Annarasa, who heads the Federation of Fisher Cooperative Societies for Jaffna district.

The losses are severe. On an average a fisherman who earlier sold 15 kg of fish for LKR 1,000 per kg, would make a profit of about LKR 8,000 a day. But now, the same fish is being sold for some LKR 5,000, re-

sulting in losses day after day. Further, middlemen buying fish to be sold in other parts of the country made more money than the fishermen, according to small-scale fishers in Jaffna.

Tricky balance

"A tricky balance between lives and livelihoods." That is how Mullaitivu-based fisher leader Thirugnanatheepan Anthony Alfred described the current challenge. "We can't expect everything to go on as usual, these are very peculiar circumstances," he said.

While the main markets are shut, some fisher cooperative societies have taken permission from local authorities to auction their catch at a common venue. "Of course, we strictly enforce health safety measures like physical distancing. We don't allow people to crowd around the stall. These are tough times and we have to find ways to sustain our livelihood in whatever way possible," said K. Rajachandran, a fisher leader



in Karainagar, Jaffna. The district reported seven cases.

The impact of COVID-19 might have been less severe, had the fisheries sector been given some attention in the post-war years, according to Mr. Annarasa. "All governments

make promises, but nothing gets done. If different governments had invested in the fisheries sector, helping us modernise fishing, we could have increased production over the years and secured livelihoods."

Not all fisherfolk qualify for government assistance or loans, he added. "If you ask me, I will say fisherfolk are like daily wage labourers now. We earn something to eat and survive that day. That is all. We can't think much about the future."

Some are also questioning Sri Lanka's fisheries policy that has been oriented more towards exports, based on low-volume, high-margin catches by the fishermen, of crab or costly fish that most locals can't afford. Fisher leaders also point to the irony of the island nation importing seafood, worth nearly \$200 million in 2018, for local consumption.

"Whether it is UN agencies or our local authorities, their projects are all oriented towards exports. Now, our own food has become a question mark," a leader said.

Taliban reaches out to Shias

Ahead of intra-Afghan talks, the Sunni insurgency asks Shias to join the fight against the 'invaders'

KABUL



The Taliban insurgency seems to be pulling all the stops it can to gain political legitimacy in Afghanistan ahead of the intra-Afghan peace talks. In a new video message from the Taliban, released on April 22, the group seeks the support of the Hazara Shias and wants to recruit from the long persecuted minority.

The poorly edited video features the insurgency's newly appointed northern district Governor Mawlawi Mahdi Mujahid, an ethnic Hazara, Shia cleric, who incites his brethren to fight against the "Jewish and Christian invaders" alongside the Sunni-majority Taliban. "Weren't you holding our flags alongside the

viet? How can you forget that history? Why are you silent against these invaders led by the Americans?" he sermonises, with the use of dramatic gestures.

Prisoner swap

The video appeal comes ahead of a much-anticipated peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. The insurgent group has already signed an agreement with the U.S. administration, which paved the way for a possible peace deal with the Afghan government. Already, negotiation teams have been finalised, and prisoner releases from both sides are under way.

In this fragile period, by bringing members like Mahdi to the forefront, the Taliban may be attempting to re-fashion itself into a political entity to gain legitimacy, say experts. "My initial thoughts were that the Taliban



are trying to reach out to other sects and ethnicities in Afghanistan to score legitimacy now and perhaps after when and if they return to power," Sabir Ibrahim, a researcher at New York University's Centre on International Cooperation, said. "The

Taliban are perhaps being practical and making preparation for their return to Afghan politics. If and when they return to power, in whatever shape or form, they would need to work with the Shias."

While little is known of Mahdi, the new Hazara Taliban leader finds his roots in the very district he now controls – Balkhab in Sar-e-Pul. "He is a former Wahdat party affiliate, responsible for a number of attacks, abduction and extortion," shared Mr. Ibrahim, referring to the Hezb-e Wahdat party founded by Abdul Ali Mazari, a prominent Shia leader who was incidentally killed by the Taliban in 1995.

Mahdi, who has served six years in prison on criminal charges, allegedly controlled the mine-rich district as a strongman for Mohammad Moqaqqeq, the former Deputy Chief Executive of Afghanistan. In October 2018, people of Balkhab, fed up with Mahdi, rose up against him – he then fled the town. Mahdi returned a year later, allied with the Taliban. "Mahdi

sounded educated in religious studies and referred to Quranic verses. His messaging was in line with the Taliban's anti-West narratives," said Mr. Ibrahim.

The Iran factor

In his appeal, the Shia Taliban leader also addresses the "Shia brothers and religious scholars in Qom", underlining the Iran factor in the Taliban's strategy. The Taliban, in recent years, has warmed to Tehran. "Iran has ties with the Taliban, although Iranians do not want a complete return of the Taliban to power like in the 1990s. It is more of a political alliance with Iran than sectarian harmony. To add, Shia communities of Balkhab, Hazaras and Sayyeds, have close religious ties with Iran," Mr. Ibrahim added.

In the video, Mahdi also reiterates several times that the Taliban is an inclusive force devoid of racism, trying to portray a different picture of the insurgency which is known for its attacks on minorities and women.

While the Taliban did have few Hazara officials working for its regime in the 1990s, Mahdi is its first known Hazara Shia commander and district Governor.

"Historically, the Taliban have marginalised Shias. They banned Shia rituals in Kabul during Muhamarram in the 1990s and when the group captured Mazar-e-Sharif, their commander Abdul Manan Niazi said that 'Hazaras either should fully convert to Islam or pay tributes (like non-Muslims living under the Islamic states in the past)'. Similarly, in Herat, the Taliban had occupied a Shia mosque and named it after Mahawayya, who was an adversary of Imam Ali, Shia's first Imam. During those years, the Taliban massacred Shias in Hazarajat and in Mazar-e-Sharif," Mr. Ibrahim said.

Given the past of the Taliban's treatment of minorities, it may have to do more than appointing a Shia commander and releasing his videos if it wants to acquire the trust of the country's religious sects.

IN BRIEF



Hockey legend Balbir Sr. in critical condition

CHANDIGARH Hockey legend Balbir Singh Sr, a triple Olympic gold medallist, was admitted to a hospital in a critical condition on Friday after complaints of pneumonia. The 96-year-old was on a ventilator but in a better condition than on Friday, his grandson Kabir said. PTI

Barcelona stars back on the field

MADRID LaLiga champion Barcelona on Saturday allowed its 11 stars to enter its facility to prepare for a potential restart to football in Spain. Lionel Messi and Co. took the field at Joan Gamper training centre for individual sessions. At Milan, Inter Milan and AC Milan were both back training on Friday two months after the lockdown. AFP



NBA teams start to reopen as testing plans emerge

The NBA took tiny steps toward a return to normalcy, as a small number of practice facilities reopened for workouts and at least one team received permission from the league to test players and staff for the coronavirus. NBA commissioner Adam Silver told players that the league is still aiming to hold the full best-of-seven playoff series should the season resume, and that playing without fans is an obvious possibility. AP



Maradona signs shirt to help Buenos Aires poor

Buenos Aires Diego Maradona has lent a hand in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic in his hometown by autographing an Argentina national team jersey for a raffle. The sale raised money for an underprivileged area on the outskirts of Buenos Aires affected by quarantine rules. AFP

Lanning lends Ireland a helping hand

DUBLIN World Cup-winning Australia captain Meg Lanning has used the extra time in hand owing to the pandemic to provide a virtual batting class to the Ireland women's cricket squad. Lanning was joined by former Ireland skipper Isobel Joyce in the initiative that took place this week to help the players keep their skills sharp during the forced break. PTI



Pay parity: US women's football team files appeal

LOS ANGELES The US women's national football team has filed an appeal against a legal setback in its equal pay lawsuit, saying it is being paid less than the men's team even though it wins twice as many matches. "The argument that women gave up a right to equal pay by accepting the best collective bargaining agreement possible in response to the Federation's refusal to put equal pay on the table is not a legitimate reason for continuing to discriminate against them," said team spokesperson Molly Levinson on Friday. AFP

Rock 'n' roll pioneer takes a final bow

Little Richard's 1955 song *Tutti Frutti* helped the genre enter American life

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NEW YORK

Little Richard, whose outrageous showmanship and lightning-fast rhythms intoxicated crowds in the 1950s with hits like *Tutti Frutti* and *Long Tall Sally*, has died. He was 87.

Citing the rock 'n' roll pioneer's son, *Rolling Stone* magazine said on Saturday that the cause of death was unknown. Tributes quickly poured in, with co-founder of Chic Nile Rodgers calling it "the loss of a true giant".

With a distinctive voice that ranged from robust belting to howling falsetto, Richard transfixed audiences and became an inspiration for artists, including The Beatles, as he transformed the blues into the feverish new style of rock 'n' roll alongside Fats Domino and Chuck Berry.

His raunchy 1955 song



Perfect pitch: Little Richard performs in Memphis, Tennessee, in this photo dated December 31, 2004. ■ AFP

Tutti Frutti, even with its gay sex theme toned down for radio, became a sort of opening salvo of rock 'n' roll's entry into American life, starting with his nonsensical but instantly thrilling first line: Awop bop a loo mow/Alop bam boom.

But if his contemporaries kept the respectabilities of

old-time musicians, Richard stunned buttoned-down post-Second World War America with an otherworldly look of blindingly colourful shirts, glass-embedded dinner jackets, a needle-thin moustache and a 15-cm-high pompadour haircut.

And a younger generation of black DJs had little interest in an artist seen as embedded in the white mainstream.

Understanding how thermal comfort varies during extremely hot and cold conditions in the micro-environment of a car could help auto industries improve thermal comfort and minimise the associated health risks," Mr. Khaiwal told *The Hindu*. "This could mean designing

the worst for sedans... the percentage of persons dissatisfied (PPD) was observed to be 100% in all cases, showing dissatisfaction for all car models. The concentration of carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide ranged between 113-1,127 parts per million and 0-3.9 ppm, respectively, for the front of the car," the authors Ravindra Khaiwal, Neha Agrawal and Suman Mor, note in their paper. The PMV and the PPD are metrics to measure thermal comfort.

"The higher temperature in a sedan may also be due to its black colour, which is a good absorber of heat while the SUV and hatchback were white, which has higher reflectance," the study notes.

Mr. Khaiwal said conditions akin to a heatwave

could manifest and – given changes in climate and higher average temperatures – would lead to several more ailments such as heat stress, heat strokes and fluctuation in blood pressure.

Understanding heat waves in micro-environments is also important given warming trends. Last year was the seventh warmest since record-keeping commenced in 1901. The annual mean surface air temperature, averaged over the country, was 0.36°C above average. The average is defined as the mean temperature from 1980-2010.

The highest warming observed over India was during 2016 or 0.71°C above the mean. Temperature during the year 2018, which was the sixth warmest, was 0.41°C above the mean.

Study finds 'heat wave' like conditions in cars

Risks for passengers include stress, strokes and fluctuation in blood pressure

JACOB KOSHY

NEW DELHI The ambient temperature inside cars could shoot up to as much as 65°C and induce conditions akin to a heat stroke, says a study that measured temperature and relative humidity levels.

The objective of the study, led by researchers at the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), Chandigarh, was to assess "thermal comfort" (the degree of warmth that people deem as comfortable) in cars.

Along with the temperature and humidity, the study also evaluated people's experience of thermal comfort in sedans, sports utility vehicles and hatchbacks, in Chandigarh.

"The predicted mean vote (PMV) was observed to be

new materials that absorb heat better, or improving the air flow system in vehicles."

The measurements showed that the front of the car showed a higher maximum temperature than the back, while relative humidity was observed to be lower in the front than the back for all models. The temperature recorded in a sedan was higher than in a SUV and in a hatchback. The higher temperature was due to ambient conditions on different days and also due to the colour of the car, the researchers found.

"The higher temperature in a sedan may also be due to its black colour, which is a good absorber of heat while the SUV and hatchback were white, which has higher reflectance," the study notes.

Mr. Khaiwal said conditions akin to a heatwave

could manifest and – given changes in climate and higher average temperatures – would lead to several more ailments such as heat stress, heat strokes and fluctuation in blood pressure.

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'You innovate and exercise'

Neeraj confident of regaining fitness in two weeks once training restarts



Poetry in motion: Neeraj Chopra will be keen to be at his fluent best once he is back in action at the end of the lockdown period. ■ FILE PHOTO: BISWARANJAN ROUT

Neeraj Chopra was forced to return from his training base in Turkey on March 18 because of the COVID-19 outbreak. Stuck at NIS Patiala since then, with the imposition of the lockdown, the javelin thrower admits there is no training and no holding of the javelin.

"But it's ok. Frankly, there is no other option. So what is the point worrying or cribbing about it," Neeraj said in an interview with *The Hindu*.

The only concern is the slipping fitness levels. "SAI is taking care of the diet, but strength and stamina have gone down a bit. I am not worried about it. Once proper training starts, do *hafte me wapas fitness le ayenge* (I can be back to optimum fitness in two weeks)," he said.

With the grounds at NIS out of bounds, the saving graces are the staggered visits allowed to the gym and the

small open space at the elite athletes' hostel. "This phase has not been too difficult except for the training part, which is important for an athlete. Other than that, it's ok. Food is fine, it's safe here and the little space we have is used for staying active," he said.

"There is theraband in my

room for strength training. I do other exercises, core strengthening and abs exercises. You innovate and find ways to train. There is always something to do to stay fit," he added.

The 22-year-old agreed there could be no planning ahead unless the domestic and international calendars

are confirmed. "We will have to restart our training but can do so only after confirmation of the calendar.

"The AFI is hoping to start competitions in September, but before that the lockdown has to end and everyone given time to train. We will have to wait and see when that happens."

China overcomes India

Adhiban's loss proves decisive

NATIONS CUP

RAKESH RAO

NEW DELHI

India fought hard but could not deny top seed China a 2.5-1.5 victory in the ninth round of the FIDE Chess.com Online Nations Cup on Saturday.

Leading 2-1, India had reasons to hope for a win with Hari looking good to hold Jan-Krzysztof Duda. But Hari faltered in his bid to enlarge his advantage and Duda's victory gave Europe an important match-point.

The results: Ninth round: India lost to China 1.5-2.5 (Vidit Gujrathi drew with Wang Hao; P. Harikrishna drew with Wei Yi; B. Adhiban lost to Yu Yangyi; D. Harika drew with Hou Yifan); Europe 2.5-1.5; Russia drew with RoW 2-2.

Eighth round: Europe drew with India 2-2 (Maxime Vachier-Lagrave drew with Viswanathan Anand; Levon Aronian lost to Vidit; Jan-Krzysztof Duda beat Harikrishna; Anna Muzychuk drew with K. Humpy; China beat Russia 2.5-1.5; USA beat Rest of the World 3-1).

Standings (after nine rounds): 1. China (17 match-points), 2. Europe (12), 3. USA (11), 4. Russia (6), 5. India (5), 6. RoW(3).

it 2-2. After Anand proved equal to Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, Humpy chose to draw while a struggling Vidit did his confidence a world of good by beating Leon Aronian.

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right. So, wood or graphite, we connected the ball at the centre of the racquet."

Owing to a back injury, Zeeshan had to quit when he was 25, after winning seven National singles titles, including five on grass.

Ashutosh remembered how he learnt by following his discipline. Getting up on time, preparing well etc., said Ashutosh, who has also taken up coaching.

Getting the basics right

"We learnt the technique and basics very well. They were drilled into us," said Zeeshan.

"You need to have correct footwork and meet the ball

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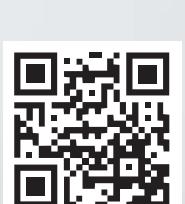
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