



Rajnath clears abolition of 9,304 posts in Military Engineering Services

page 8



Madhya Pradesh CM Chouhan announces major labour reforms

page 10



Candidates can take Management Aptitude Test from home

page 11



Coronavirus 'attack' is worse than Pearl Harbor & 9/11: Trump

page 12

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## NEARBY



Four States want U.P. labourers to stay

NEW DELHI

The Chief Ministers of Punjab, Karnataka, Haryana and Gujarat have dialed their Uttar Pradesh counterpart Yogi Adityanath to prevent the flight of workers and the grounding of economic activities. U.P. was the first State to announce plans to bring back migrant workers.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 10

City reports one death and 448 new cases

NEW DELHI

The Capital on Thursday reported one death and 448 new COVID-19 cases. This is the highest single-day jump so far, said government officials. The total number of cases stands at 5,980 while the death toll has touched 66.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

Delhi court orders FIR over 'communal remarks'

NEW DELHI

A Delhi court has ordered registration of FIR against two women for allegedly passing communal remarks against Muslims living in Lal Kuan here while also violating lockdown norms by roaming without permit. "If incidents like the one in question are not taken to law, it will lead to communal disharmony," the judge said.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

## Vizag gas leak claims 11 lives; over 350 hospitalised

■ Chemical plant situated in a densely populated suburb

■ Gas reportedly spread over a radius of 3 km, affecting five villages

■ About 2,000 people were evacuated from nearby areas

■ A.P. CM announces compensation of ₹1 crore for families of deceased

SUMIT BHATTACHARJEE  
VISAKHAPATNAM

Eleven people, including a six-year-old girl, died and over 350 were admitted to hospitals after styrene monomer gas leaked from a chemical plant belonging to LG Polymers India at R.R. Venkatapuram in Visakhapatnam on Thursday.

The gas leak began around 3.30 a.m. in the plant, which is situated in the midst of a densely populated area. It was set up in 1961 in the area, then a suburb.

The gas reportedly spread over a radius of about 3 km, affecting at least five villages – R.R. Venkatapuram, Padmapuram, B.C. Colony, Gopalapatnam and Kamparapalem. About 2,000 people were evacuated from the 3-km radius.

Visakhapatnam Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar Meena said that among those killed, two were accidental deaths – a 19-year-old medical student fell from the balcony of the second floor of his house after he was blinded by the fumes and the other fell into a well while trying to escape the gas. The others were declared brought dead at hospitals.

Of those affected, 100 have been shifted to King George Hospital (KGH), where the condition of 20 was stated to be critical. They have



been put on ventilator, said P.V. Sudhakar, Principal, Andhra Medical College.

### Chaotic situation

According to eyewitnesses, people initially thought it was a fire accident. But as the pungent smell spread, people rushed out of their homes, carrying children and supporting the elderly. Many, running out of their houses leaving doors unlocked, fell unconscious on the road.

Two people, who tried to

flee on a two-wheeler, died after the vehicle fell into a drain.

The police reportedly received an emergency call at 4 a.m., and by 4.20 a.m. the first team reached the spot.

FULL COVERAGE PAGE 9

Collector V. Vinay Chand, who was supervising the evacuation process, said people were shifted in about 30 ambulances, police jeeps and government vehicles. State Road Transport Corpo-

## Toxic killer

The deaths in Visakhapatnam on Thursday are suspected to have been caused by styrene gas. A look at the health effects caused by exposure to the gas:

■ According to the U.S.-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, inhalation of styrene gas causes tiredness, sense of inebriation, slowed reaction time, concentration problems, balance problems and changes in colour vision

In distress: A girl being rushed to hospital after inhaling the gas that leaked from LG Polymers in Visakhapatnam in the early hours of Thursday. ■ K.R. DEEPAK

■ Short-term exposure can lead to respiratory issues, eye irritation, and gastrointestinal problems

■ Styrene concentrations that cause these effects are more than 1,000 times higher than the levels normally found in the environment

■ The number of studies of styrene

clinical neurotoxicity remains low. Moreover, no clinical studies have been carried out to understand harmful effects from exposure at

extremely high concentrations lasting a couple of hours

■ Chronic exposure to styrene can affect the central nervous system with symptoms such as headache, fatigue and weakness. It can also cause memory dysfunction and hearing loss

■ As of now, no studies have reported deaths from short-term exposure to styrene

ration buses were also pressed into service.

The gas is not lethal but prolonged exposure to it could affect the central nervous system, which may lead to depletion of oxygen to the brain and cause nausea, vomiting and breathlessness, said KGH Superintendent Arjun.

### CM visits hospital

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy reached Visakhapatnam from Amaravati in a chopper

and visited the affected persons in KGH. He announced compensation of ₹1 crore for family members of the deceased.

"This amount includes the compensation to be paid by the company," he said. He also announced that a four-member committee, headed by the Special Chief Secretary, Environment and Forests, would inquire into the incident.

### PROBLEM IN TEMPERATURE CONTROLS ▶ PAGE 9

### EDITORIAL ▶ PAGE 6



A gas leak victim being shifted to a hospital.

■ C.V. SUBRAHMANYAM

## Gasping villagers rush out at dawn

HARISH GILAI  
VISAKHAPATNAM

It was around 3.30 a.m. on Thursday when thick fog engulfed villages in the R.R. Venkatapuram locality. The unusually foggy dawn in summer surprised the early risers, who suspected it was due to a fire accident nearby. But they were caught unaware by the pungent smell and breathlessness.

As news spread and people indoors also suffered from nausea and dizziness, the residents understood that something had gone horribly wrong.

People came out of their houses and ran helter-skelter but many fell unconscious on the road. Sensing that there might have been a mishap at LG Polymers India, situated in the middle of the locality, some residents dialled the police.

Some people left in their own vehicles, while auto-rickshaw drivers picked up neighbours. Police also rescued many residents from the surrounding areas, who had locked themselves up in their houses in panic.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

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Police reached the spot immediately on jeeps, patrol vehicles and ambulances in tow. And the evacuation began. Several buses also joined the operation.

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## Timings

DELHI

FRIDAY, MAY 10
RISE 05:36 SET 19:01
RISE 20:09 SET 06:16
SATURDAY, MAY 9
RISE 05:35 SET 19:02
RISE 21:17 SET 07:04
SUNDAY, MAY 10
RISE 05:34 SET 19:02
RISE 22:20 SET 07:56

Delhi Weather

max min

Delhi City 38 22

Safdarjung 38 22

Palam 39 22

Delhi Palam Today

38°C A pleasant morning turns

very warm day with partly

cloudy sky. Night will be

enjoyable.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow

39°C A hot and cloudy day.

Spell of duststorm and

thundershower with strong

winds is likely.

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## IN BRIEF

## Newborn from H.P. recovering in hospital

GURUGRAM

A three-day-old child, born with 'Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome', a complex heart condition, was transported 320 km in an ambulance from Himachal Pradesh to Artemis Hospital in Sector 50 here within three hours, amid lockdown. The operation went successful and the baby is recovering in the ICU. Dr. Aseem Ranjan Shrivastava, Head, Paediatric Cardiac Surgery, Artemis Hospital said, "When we received the baby, he was struggling to survive."

**THE HINDU**  
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## Market Info

## A Business Initiative

**CGU OFFERS RS 5 CR SCHOLARSHIP**  
**C**onsidering the selfless services of 'Corona Fighters', i.e. doctors, nurses, paramedical staff, police, sanitation workers, media persons and staffs of other emergency services, the C.V. Raman Global University (CGU), Odisha has announced a scholarship of Rs 5 crore for the children of these "Corona Fighters". Shri Sanjib Kumar Rout President of the CGU, announced that a special reservation of seats will be made available from this academic session 2020-21 in all the branches of engineering and other professional courses for these children. He further stated that a Special Management Committee has been formed to analyse the JEE ranks and other academic qualifications of the deserving applicants.

## GOOD SAMARITANS COME FORWARD FOR COVID WARRIORS

**T**o show respect and support to police personnel, the Covid warriors, the members of NALCO Foundation and NALCO Mahila Samiti have come forward to provide food packets to these police personnel. The team led by Smt Sasmita Patra, President, NALCO Mahila Samiti, along with Smt Prativa Mishra, Secretary and other members of NALCO Mahila Samiti in association with Senior officials of NALCO Foundation, distributed about 1500 hygienically prepared food packets at various check posts. Distribution of these food packets shall continue on a regular basis initially for next 07 days in first phase.

## AIR FORCE SHOWERS FLOWER PETALS ON KIMS

Indian Air Force showered flower petals on Kalinga Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS) Covid Hospital, Bhubaneswar in a flypast from its helicopters today as a mark of gratitude from the Nation to the medical professionals fighting Covid-19. The IAF took this unique initiative to boost the morale of the Covid Warriors, who have dedicated themselves to save lives of the patients affected by novel coronavirus. The KIMS Authority has expressed pleasure for the show of solidarity by the IAF.

## RSP DISTRIBUTES PERSONAL HYGIENE PRODUCTS TO CISF JAWANS

**A**s an appreciation of the relentless service being rendered by the CISF personnel deployed in SAIL, Rourkela Steel Plant during the trying times because of the Corona Virus, RSP presented hampers containing personal mask, soap and fruit juice packets to the Jawans on 5th May. The programme was organised in the CISF barrack, adhering to the social distancing and other preventive measures pertaining to Covid-19.

# 'Nation not prepared for communal disharmony during COVID-19 crisis'

Delhi court orders FIR against 2 women for 'communal remarks' against Muslims



SOIBAM ROCKY SINGH

NEW DELHI

A Delhi court has directed registration of FIR against two women for allegedly passing communal remarks against Muslims living in Lal Kuan here while also violating lockdown norms by roaming on the roads without any permit.

Advocate Rishabh Kapoor, at the Tis Hazari Courts, remarked that "the area of occurrence is a sensitive area which has already witnessed a communal tension on previous occasions..."

"If the incident like the one in question are not taken to law, it will lead to communal disharmony and disturbance in public peace and tranquillity, for which the nation is not prepared in the present time of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis," the judge said.

Advocate Shadman Ahmed Siddiqui, who represented the complainant – a resident of the locality – stated that on April 16 at about 11.30 p.m. at Rodgram, Lal Kuan, two unknown women carrying rods came roaming in the streets and passed communal remarks.

The complainant also alleged the two women smashed the doors of the residences and shops in the vicinity. The incident was captured and video recorded.

Advocate Siddiqui argued that the incident was reported to the Police Station Hauz Qazi, but no FIR has since been registered.

In the Action Taken Report (ATR), Delhi Police stated that the women involved were identified as one Mamta and one Suraiya, who were feeding the stray dogs on the streets. It stated that Mamta was carrying a stick in the hand and people of Rodgram had a heated exchange of words with both the women.

The ATR also stated that

## COVID-19

no religious comments were passed by the women, who were working with NGO Mahe Samiti.

The court, however, noted that the nature of remarks passed by the women have been specifically narrated by the complainant and that the incident had occurred on April 16 during the nationwide lockdown.

"Therefore, it emerges

that they have prima facie acted in contravention of section 188 IPC, which is a cognisable offence," the court said.

The court, additionally, remarked that, "the vicinity of occurrence has already witnessed a communal tension on a previous incident owing to a parking dispute, and the video recording of the present incident also stands uploaded on YouTube, which may lead to escalation of communal disharmony in the vicinity".

The court ordered the Police Station Hauz Qazi to register an FIR for offences under Section 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant), 153A (promoting enmity on ground of religion), and 295A (deliberate acts intended to outrage religious feelings).

## Youngsters roped in to help needy fill online forms for govt. schemes

Initiative has led to filling up forms for 7,300 families so far

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

In outer-north Delhi's Narela, five youngsters have been roped in to help technologically challenged and needy people with online application for services provided by the Delhi government.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer North) Gaurav Sharma said that in order to overcome the issues faced

by people who are not educated or are not technologically sound to be able to fill up online applications for free ration and other services, the five tech-savvy youngsters have been hired for filling these forms free of cost.

**Implementation plans**  
"People have to pay ₹50 to ₹300 to get it done otherwise," Mr. Sharma said, adding

ding that the initiative has begun only in a few areas and will be implemented across Narela in phases.

Mr. Sharma said that the initiative has led to filling up forms for 7,300 families, that is 29,236 members, on these websites and "this drive will be continued till each and every poor and needy person gets the benefit of these government schemes".

## Haryana may unveil Land on Lease Policy

Move to woo more investors to State

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GURUGRAM

With a view to address the issue of swelling land cost for industry, Haryana may soon come up with Land on Lease Policy. It would enable investors to operate on land taken on lease and at a later point in time convert it to a freehold asset, subject to certain terms and conditions.

Rajesh Khullar, Principal Secretary to Chief Minister and Chairman, Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (HSIIDC) informed this at the State's first webinar held in Chandigarh on Wednesday. This initiative to cut down the cost of doing business in Haryana received overwhelming response from the investors. The webinars are aimed at facilitating shifting of manufacturing from China to Haryana.

During the webinar, a de-

tailed discussion was held on the special policies of the government that would make Haryana a viable destination for immediate shifting of manufacturing units from China. It also elicited suggestions for promoting business resilience of many sectors whose supply chains have been disrupted by the Corona pandemic.

**Suggestions galore**  
The inclusion of Information Technology electronic products in the list of essential items and promoting a truckers park in the State were some of the suggestions at the first of a series of webinars with multiple investors. Prominent Multinational companies like Dell, Yazaki India, Danisco India Pvt. Ltd., Johnson Matthey India, Jyoti Apparels, Hind Terminals UAE, Ascendas First Space, Reliance and Coca-Cola India participated in the event.

## Forum calls for rethink on online teaching

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Joint Forum for Movement on Education (JFME) has written to Human Resource Development Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal, asking him to rethink the government's decision to promote online teaching, assessment and examinations as a systemic alternative to formal education.

"While academic engagement through e-resources during the period of lockdown is unexceptionable, any attempt to formalise it as online teaching/examination through specific modes is unreasonable and unacceptable," the forum said.

It also said that in India, there was lack of institutional support with uneven internet access and non-uniform and non-conducive domestic environment for learning.

## Revise circulars'

"Education is about continuous human interaction and critical engagement through dialogue and questioning for which a formal classroom space is essential," the forum said, urging the Minister to revise circulars and policies in this regard.

The JFME is an umbrella organisation representing associations of university and college teachers, schoolteachers, non-teaching university staff, students, parents and other organisations working for scientific and democratic education.

## Constable's last rites performed in presence of medical team

Kin, senior officers waited outside as the body was cremated

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The last rites of Delhi Police constable Amit Kumar, who died of COVID-19 two days ago, were performed on Thursday in the presence of his family members and senior police officers.



Flowers were showered on the ambulance that carried the mortal remains of constable Amit Kumar. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

and a few others from his village were also present.

As the ambulance carrying the constable's body entered the crematorium, flowers were showered on the vehicle to bid him a final goodbye.

An officer present at the site said that according to the protocol, the body was taken inside the cremation ground by the medical team while everyone else waited outside.

Mrs. Arya said that she had spoken to Kumar's family on

## Over one-third of cases in city recorded from May 1 to May 6

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Of the total 5,532 COVID-19 cases reported in Delhi till Wednesday, more than one-third were recorded from May 1 to May 6.

On Wednesday 428 fresh cases were reported in the Capital, the largest number in a single day. The previous largest spike in a day was 427 on May 3.

From May 1-6, 2,017 cases were recorded.

Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain said on Wednesday that cases in Delhi were now doubling in 11 days, which was 13 days earlier. "It is so because a lot of reports were pending whose results are now coming out," the Minister said.

## Students express solidarity with Safoora

They seek legal action against trolls

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Women students on Thursday expressed solidarity with jailed Jamia Millia Islamia student Safoora Zargar, who is three-month pregnant and is being trolled online over the identity of her unborn child's father.

The students used #WithSafooraAgainstSlander on social media, demanding that the online "slandering" against her must stop.

Some students even posted their pictures carrying placards with slogans like 'Free Safoora' and 'Drop charges against her' and sought a legal action against those maligning her online.

Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union president Aische Ghosh tweeted a picture of Ms. Zargar and wrote, "A pregnant woman, sent to Tihar jail.

## Jamia Millia announces reworked schedules for academic session

Last date for submission of online application is May 31

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Jamia Millia Islamia on Thursday announced that the Academic Council of the university has reworked the schedules for admissions for the session 2020-21. The last date for submission of online application forms for the session 2020-21 has been extended to May 31 and the entrance tests will start from August 1.

The new academic session was taken in an online meeting of the council.



September 1. The decision was taken in an online meeting of the council.

The university said that the online classes will be held till May 30 and students will have to submit all assignments by June 5.

"Examination for only final semester/year students will be held offline between July 1 and July 31 at the university. Summer vacations, the university said, have been scheduled between June 15 and June 30.

The university will reopen and classes for regular students will start from August 1.

## Press e-Tender Notice No.01/EE (FY) /2020-21

Dated: 06/05/2020

## Notice Inviting e-Tender

The Executive Engineer, Department of Fisheries on behalf of the Governor of Tripura, invites e-Tender for Supply, Installation & Commissioning of cages (64 units) for fish culture in Reservoir, through e-Procurement website <https://tripuratenders.gov.in>. Bid submission end date on 27/05/2020, 3.00 PM.

(ER. P. K. DAS)

Executive Engineer  
Department of Fisheries  
Tripura, Agartala.

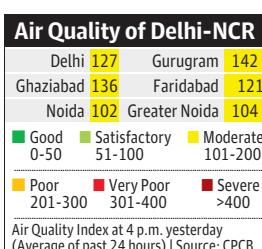
(HWH-04/2020-21)

## EASTERN



**Peace and protest:** (From left) Migrant workers cycling to Bihar taking a breather at a bus stop in Dilshad Garden on Thursday; residents of Vishwakarma Nagar in east Delhi protesting against the administration for not implementing strict guidelines.

■ R.V. MOORTHY; SANDEEP SAXENA



## 'Give COVID-19 results in 48 hrs or face action'

City reports one death and 448 new cases, says government

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government has warned action against all COVID-19 testing labs if they do not give results of samples collected within a maximum of 48 hours.

The warning came on a day when the city reported one death and 448 new COVID-19 cases. This is the highest single-day jump so far, said government officials. The total number of deaths stands at 66 while cases at 5,980. Of the total cases, 1,931 people have recovered and there are 3,983 active cases.

The order read: "From May 7, 2020, reports of all samples collected must be given within 24 hours and not later than 48 hours, in any case... Non-compliance of the orders will be viewed seriously and action will be taken immediately as per the provisions of the Delhi Epidemic Diseases, COVID-19, regulations, 2020 and other



A worker sprays disinfectant in Laxmi Nagar on Thursday.  
■ R.V. MOORTHY

Rules and regulation in this

lockdown till May 3.

"Under the current lockdown, stranded people can be shifted. So we are shifting them. We have sent lists of people to other States," Mr. Jain said, adding: "COVID-19 is going to be here for a long time; it is not going to end in one or two months. We have to learn to live with it."

**New containment zones**  
In a related development, four more areas in the city were delisted as "containment zone" by the Delhi government on Thursday.

On Wednesday, Health Minister Satyendar Jain had said "thousands of pending results are coming now".

Mr. Jain on Thursday said they were in talks with other States to send back people, who were connected to a religious gathering in Nizamuddin here in March. He added that these people, who had tested negative for COVID-19, after they completed the quarantine period, were not sent back to their States because of the

## Only paid quarantine for IGIA passengers

Revised order says passengers from other States will be quarantined for 14 days

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

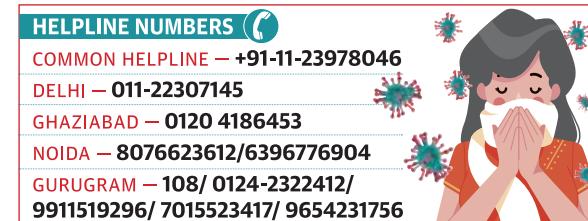
The Delhi government on Thursday issued a "revised order" on guidelines for handling of passengers arriving at the Delhi airport from abroad.

The earlier order issued on Wednesday had given an option of home quarantine or government quarantine facility, which is free, as an option for passengers to undergo the mandatory 14-day quarantine. The revised order only mentions "paid institutional quarantine centres" as an option for the passengers.

"The passengers will be quarantined at a paid institutional quarantine centre. Also, as per the new order, passengers from other States will also be quarantined for 14 days by the Delhi government," a Delhi government official told *The Hindu*. The earlier order had said that passengers who are not residents of Delhi can be looked after by the Resident Commissioners and nodal officers of their respective States, including "boarding and lodging in Delhi and transportation to their respective states".



Passengers will be escorted by airline staff to health counters of the Airport Health Organisation for initial screening. ■ FILE PHOTO: V. V. KRISHNAN



Industrial Security Force (CISF) officer. The passports would be handed over to the team head and not to the passengers.

The passengers will then move to the luggage belts to collect the luggage and passengers will proceed further through the customs. The passengers will then move to the designated triage area manned by Delhi government officials. Here, the passports of the entire batch will be handed over to the medical officer-in-charge at the counter. Next, passports will be given to the escort team, who will take them to the designated quarantine centres.

Passengers deboarding a flight will be escorted by airline staff to health counters of the Airport Health Organisation (APHO) for initial thermal screening those with symptoms would be isolated and moved to designated hospitals.

After screening, the remaining passengers will be al-

lowed to move to the designated immigration counters with passports and a copy of the SRF (Self-Reporting Form). After clearance of immigration, passports of the passengers will be retained by the immigration officials and passengers in batches of 30, will be handed over to an escort team headed by a Central

## Liquor delivery scam surfaces in Capital

Excise department registers complaint

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

The excise department has registered a complaint with the Delhi Police after cyber-criminals were found siphoning off money from people after promising home delivery of liquor during lockdown, a senior police officer said on Thursday.

A senior excise department officer said that flying squad, keeping a watch on bootlegging and other illegal sale of liquor, got several complaints about cyber-criminals cheating people on the pretext of delivering 24X7 liquor at home.

"There are fake sites running to fool the public. They approach gullible customers via social media. Online complaint has been submitted to Delhi Police Cyber Cell for necessary action," said the officer.

**Decoy customer**  
He added that a team of the excise department had approached one such mobile

number as a decoy customer and placed an order but after they transferred the money, the seller neither received calls nor delivered the ordered liquor.

The people behind this gang operate from States outside Delhi. They offer doorstep delivery to callers and demand digital payment.

However, neither the orders are delivered nor further calls received. In some cases, they demand full or half payment, he said.

Alok Kumar, Assistant Commissioner of Police, excise department, said that due to the ongoing lockdown, no sale and supply of liquor is permitted in the National Capital Territory of Delhi. The department has set up teams to check such fraud advertisements.

Enquiry by excise department revealed that no liquor was being provided by these mischievous elements and that they are just using this modus operandi to cheat the customers.

Hospital workers held for molesting virus patient

**NOIDA**  
A 20-year-old COVID-19 coronavirus patient was allegedly molested by two staffers at a private hospital in Greater Noida where she was undergoing treatment, with the police said on Thursday, adding that the accused have been arrested.

A first information report has been registered at the Knowledge Park police station against the staffers – a sanitation worker and a store worker – on a complaint by the hospital authorities.

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A policeman disperses a crowd outside a liquor shop during the nationwide lockdown, on Thursday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

at liquor shops.

"Following the guidelines of the Central government, the Delhi government has given permission to open about 200 shops across the national capital from Monday. However, due to overcrowding and long queues in some areas,

**COVID-19**

order issues during the sale of

liquor in the city, the Delhi go-

vernment has decided to introduce the e-token system," an official statement said.

The link was not working on Thursday evening and the government said that it was due to "heavy rush". The link will start working soon, the government said.

## Speeding car kills three; police hunt for absconding accused

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Three persons, including two 10-year-old boys, were killed when a speeding car ran them over in Outer Delhi's Mundka area on Wednesday, the police said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer) A. Koan said that one person identified as

Udai Raj, a resident of Gitanjali Enclave who runs a factory in Narela, has been arrested and the offending car has been seized.

A police officer privy to the probe said that a PCR call was received around 3.30 p.m. regarding the accident of two boys.

"When the police reached

the spot in Tikri Kalan, they found the two boys, later identified as Abhishek and Nasir, dead at the spot. They were taken to Sanjay Gandhi Hospital," the officer said.

The police were informed that the speeding car first hit the two boys, who were crossing the road, and then hit another 22-year-old man

who was walking near the pavement.

**2 managed to flee**

The car came to a halt after hitting the divider. Two occupants of the offending vehicle managed to flee while the third one was caught by the locals and thrashed before being handed over to

the police. The man who was hit by the vehicle was taken to a private hospital where he was declared dead. He was identified as Abhishek, the police said.

A case has been registered on charges of rash driving and causing death by negligence and teams are looking for the absconding accused.

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**Executive Vice President**

# Define way forward, Punjab CM asks Modi

Amarinder reiterates his demand for revenue grants to States for three months to meet shortfall

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHANDIGARH

Asking Prime Minister Narendra Modi to clearly define the way forward for the country's economic revival and an exit strategy from Lockdown 3.0, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Thursday reiterated his demand for grants to the States for three months to meet the shortfall in revenue and the higher expenditure being incurred on relief and health-care for COVID-19 containment and management.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, the Chief Minister said: "The exit strategy may not only lay down the parameters to contain the COVID-19 within safe limits but



The CM also called for a directive to the Finance Commission to review its report for the current year. ■ FILE PHOTO

should also define the path of economic revival. It should consider and focus on fiscal and economic empowerment of the States."

The Chief Minister also

called for a directive from the Centre to the 15th Finance Commission to review its report for the current year, as the situation has completely changed due to

COVID-19. He also said that the 15th Finance Commission should recommend devolution of funds for five years, beginning April 1, 2021, instead of 2020, after factoring in the impact of COVID-19.

Captain Amarinder urged the Prime Minister to issue necessary directions to various ministries in this regard, in order to enable the States to formulate clear strategies and path, post-Lockdown 3.0 on May 17.

The Chief Minister pointed out that this was necessary as COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdowns had led to unprecedented loss of jobs, businesses and economic opportunities, and its

true impact was yet to be known. Pointing out that it was very well known that the economy had slowed down and the GDP will not rise, the Chief Minister said Punjab's revenues had declined by 88% in April 2020.

#### Poor worst affected'

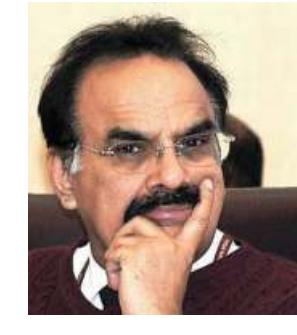
"The poor have been the worst affected with damage to all aspects of their socio-economic living. The threat of poverty, hunger and health deprivation are far more imminent now. If socio-economic living of the common man is not restored immediately, there could be serious psychological dismemberment of our society," he said.

#### INTERVIEW | ARVIND MAYARAM

'Centre should allow States to devise their own economic strategies'

Former Finance Secretary advocates bottom-up approach

MOHAMMED IQBAL



*Former Union Finance Secretary Arvind Mayaram, who is now Economic Advisor to the Rajasthan Chief Minister, heads a task force for suggesting appropriate measures on restarting the economy in the State to mitigate the COVID-19 aftermath. In a written interview to The Hindu, Dr. Mayaram says the Centre should not issue detailed guidelines for the entire country. Edited excerpts:*

**How do you view the lockdown as a strategy to control the COVID-19 pandemic? Will it succeed in 'flattening the curve'? Would you also correlate it with demonetisation of currency notes in 2016?**

■ The task force had a limited remit to suggest the manner in which the State's economy can be restarted. This would require massive efforts by both the Centre and the State and that would require huge resources. Unfortunately, with the economic activities down to zero, tax collections have plummeted. By closure of liquor shops alone, Rajasthan was losing ₹30 crore each day. Therefore, the report also recommends certain measures that the Central government should take to shore up State's resources.

**How will the most vulnerable sections of the society be able to get back their livelihood?**

■ The first step has already been taken by the State government by ramping up the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. Works have started all over the State and the number of persons reporting for work is touching 12 lakh per day. These are returning migrants, landless labourers, small and marginal farmers, artisans and even small shopkeepers. Rajasthan has been the perhaps the first State to ramp up MGNREGA works so quickly. Work at MGNREGA sites puts money in the hands of the poor and it is expected that the consumption cycle would slowly start from the

bottom of the pyramid.

The division of districts in red, orange and green categories on the basis of spread of contagion, as recommended by you, has been accepted by the Centre as well. What should be an effective strategy to contain the virus within the hotspots without completely stopping the wheels of the economy?

■ The need is to intensify testing and isolate contagion in small but tight circles as it erupts. The norms for social distancing, wearing masks, use of sanitisers, etc., has to be strictly enforced. However, economic activities including retail must start, not just for sale of essential items but for things of general use. Supply chains should be aggressively restored, right down to the retail level. For quick start, it is very important to keep the instructions simple and easily understandable. The manner in which guidelines are issued with innumerable addendums and clarifications, even the most adroit administrator would find it difficult to follow.

I have consistently said that the Central government should not issue detailed guidelines for the entire country but allow the State governments to devise and implement economic strategy which reflects the State's reality. Within the State too, the local administration must have enough autonomy to act according to the ground realities within an overall framework. The country would pay a very heavy economic price if we continue to work without an overall comprehensive strategy for restarting the economy or continue with an over-centralised control system.

## U.P. clears ordinance exempting businesses from labour laws

### Move a bid to get industrial activity in State back on track

OMAR RASHID

LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government has cleared an ordinance exempting businesses and industries from labour laws, except for a handful, for the next three years as a measure to get the State's industrial activities back on track in wake of the COVID-19 crisis.

The State Cabinet gave its nod to the 'Uttar Pradesh Temporary Exemption from Certain Labour Laws Ordinance, 2020'.

The provisions would apply to all existing and new businesses and factories,

the government said.

The extended lockdown against the COVID-19 crisis has "slowed down" industrial and economic activities in UP, bringing production by industrial establishments and factories to a halt, the government said.

After giving its nod to the ordinance in a Cabinet meeting on Wednesday, the government said in a statement, "Opportunities for new industrial investments must be created to bring the industrial activities on track."

All factories and manufacturing establishments

will be exempt from existing labour laws for three years under the new ordinance, the government said.

#### No change

However, some labour laws

would continue to operate, the government said. Labour laws provisions related to women and child will

continue to exist. So will The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, Building and Other Construction Workers Act 1996, Section 5 of Payment of Wages Act,

1936 and Workmen Compensation Act 1923.

## Former Punjab DGP Sumedh Saini booked

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHANDIGARH

Punjab Police has booked former State Director General of Police Sumedh Singh Saini and six others in connection with a case related to disappearance of a man, following a terrorist attack in Chandigarh in the year 1991.

The police said that the case against Mr. Saini, in the matter of disappearance of Balwant Singh Multani, was filed on the basis of a fresh

### 7 die in Bengal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA

Seven more deaths were reported in West Bengal due to COVID-19 in the past 24 hours, taking the number of deaths of person infected by the contagious virus to 151.

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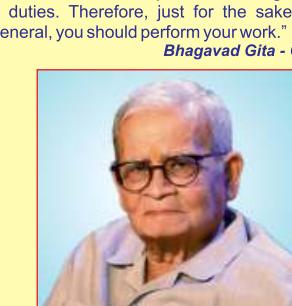
#### DEATH

#### SAD DEMISE

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Bhagavad Gita - Chapter 3 Verse 20



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Husband KRN Menon, Sons, Daughters in law and Grandchildren

arjaymen24@gmail.com





## Toxic disaster

The gas leak tragedy is a reminder that safety is paramount when exiting the lockdown

**T**he disastrous leak of a toxic chemical that has killed several people and left hundreds sick near Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh comes as a shock to a nation struggling to cope with a prolonged lockdown. Residents of habitations around Gopalapatnam, close to the site where the LG Polymers plant is located, passed out as the hazardous styrene vapour swept through the area at night. Several deaths took place as people tried to flee, and the chemical rendered them unconscious. There are horrific stories of people falling from buildings, or into wells and ditches as they lost consciousness. They have become the first victims of the exit from the lockdown, when industrial units were allowed to resume their operations. Styrene, the chemical involved in the disaster-struck plant that produces polystyrene products, is included in the schedule of the Manufacture, Storage and Import of Hazardous Chemical Rules, 1989. The rules lay down strict norms on how it should be handled and stored. Although it will take an inquiry to establish what caused the incident, the company and the State government knew that the chemical was hazardous, characterised by poor stability under a variety of conditions that could even lead to explosive situations. It is also reasonable to assume that the safety mechanism built into the storage structures of something so hazardous was either faulty or allowed to be overridden. Was the reopening work at the factory left to unskilled people, as some city officials have said? These aspects must be probed in the inquiry to fix accountability.

The Andhra Pradesh government must focus immediately on the medical needs of those who have been grievously affected by the gas leak, which has inevitably led to comparisons with the 1984 Bhopal gas disaster. As a harmful chemical, styrene could have chronic effects beyond the immediate symptoms. International safety literature cites it as a substance that may cause cancer; there is thus no safe limit for exposure to it. Solatium payments and compensation for the victims and families are important, but so is access to the highest quality of health care for the victims. What happened in Gopalapatnam is also a warning for industries across India. Although some may see the incident as a consequence of the lockdown, the States have the authority under the Central government's orders to exempt process industries. It needs no special emphasis that safety of industrial chemicals requires continuous watch, with no scope for waivers. As India aims for a wider manufacturing base, it needs to strengthen its approach to public and occupational safety. Transparent oversight is not a hurdle to industrial growth. It advances sustainable development by eliminating terrible mistakes.

## Slow, but steady

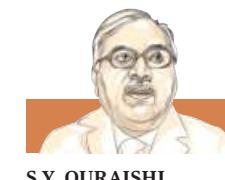
Only more testing and isolation of infected people can slow the spread of COVID-19

**W**ith 52,469 confirmed cases and 1,771 fatalities as on May 6, 2020, India entered the list of the top 15 countries with the highest number of people infected by the novel coronavirus. The infection count in India accounted for only 1.41% of the overall COVID-19 cases in the world over, but this proportion has increased from 0.13% (536 cases) on March 24, the day when lockdown measures were announced, to 0.58% (11,487 cases) when the lockdown was extended to what it is currently. The number of infections continues to surge in the U.S., where as on May 6 there were more than 1.2 million cases, nearly a third (32.7%) of the world's total. While severely affected countries such as Italy, Spain, the U.K., France, Germany, Turkey and Iran finally seem to be experiencing a relative slowdown in the growth of new cases, emerging economies such as Brazil and Russia have shown no flattening of the curve as cases continue to exponentially increase in these countries. This is indicated by the doubling time for cases in the last week: 11 and nine days, respectively, for these two countries. Brazil has also registered 7,921 deaths due to the virus, much higher than in India (1,771) and Russia (1,451). But worryingly for India, cases have continued to double every 10 days, and the surge experienced in the last week has put it in the same bracket as Brazil and Russia in terms of the upward trend in cases and fatalities.

The fact that despite two extensions to one of the most stringent lockdowns in the world, India has not managed to flatten the curve suggests that the lockdown might have been necessary but it is not sufficient. The common theme among countries that have substantially arrested the spread of the virus has been early contact tracing and testing during the outbreak. Some countries such as South Korea have managed to flatten the curve simply by community testing and surveillance. It was always going to be difficult to test at such high rates in India, but even within the limited testing protocols, a closely monitored testing and surveillance strategy has paid dividends for States such as Kerala. Other States that have registered a sudden increase in COVID-19 cases, such as Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Haryana, must continue to ramp up testing and isolation of positive cases for the lockdown strategy to work. Fortunately, these States have had only a few fatalities unlike Maharashtra, Gujarat (which have tested more samples per day than the national average) and West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh (which continue to test at a rate lower than the national average). The country cannot afford to lock down its activities indefinitely. Ramping up testing and public health infrastructure, besides protecting the vulnerable, remains the best way for India.

# Conducting elections during a pandemic

The Election Commission could consider the measures that South Korea took to prepare a foolproof plan



S.Y. QURAISHI

**A**s Maharashtra struggled to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, its people were staring at a unique problem. The deadlock between the Governor of Maharashtra and Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray looked like it would continue for long and cost Mr. Thackeray the post of Chief Minister. But thanks to the intervention of the Prime Minister and the prompt action of the Election Commission of India (EC), the impending constitutional crisis has blown over in Maharashtra.

### Averting a political crisis

Mr. Thackeray, who took oath as Chief Minister on November 28, 2019, has to become a member of the legislature within six months, which ends on May 27. This would not have been a problem for him had the elections, scheduled to be held on March 26, not been postponed indefinitely due to the pandemic, by the EC, which used its powers under Article 324 of the Constitution, along with Section 153 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951. A double application of Article 164(4) to extend this period for another six months was out of the question as the Supreme Court, in *S.R. Chaudhuri v. State of Punjab and Ors* (August 17, 2001), had declared that it would be tantamount to a subversion of the principle of representative government.



Consequently, the Chief Minister was left to take the nomination route. In pursuance of this, the Cabinet, headed by Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, submitted a proposal to the Governor to nominate Mr. Thackeray to the Legislative Council. Article 171(3)(e) coupled with Article 171(5) empowers the Governor to nominate an individual with "special knowledge or practical experience". The Governor, however, put the proposal in limbo for over a fortnight.

Given this situation, political analysts speculated whether Mr. Thackeray would knock on the door of the Supreme Court or follow the route Lalu Prasad took in Bihar in 1997 after being forced to resign following conviction in a criminal case. Instead of seeing the end of his political career, he brought his wife Rabri Devi to replace him as Chief Minister. Analysts wondered if Mr. Thackeray would similarly hand over the reins of power to his son, an MLA.

However, better sense prevailed and the political leadership managed to avert a major crisis. The Prime Minister's intervention and the EC's prompt action averted the

political impasse – polls to nine legislative council seats in Maharashtra will now be held on May 21.

By deciding to hold elections during a pandemic, the EC has taken up a big responsibility. Though only the 288 members of the Vidhan Sabha will be voting in this election, the EC will have to ensure strict implementation of the Health Ministry's guidelines. Knowing the EC's capabilities and years of experience, this will be a cakewalk. South Korea just conducted its national election with 44 million voters in the midst of the pandemic. It is a good source of inspiration for the EC.

But a bigger cause for concern for the EC are the upcoming Assembly elections for Bihar (which must be concluded by November 29, 2020), West Bengal (May 30, 2021), Assam (May 31, 2021), Kerala (June 1, 2021), Tamil Nadu (May 24, 2021) and Puducherry (June 8, 2021). Unlike the Rajya Sabha/Legislative Council elections which can be postponed indefinitely, the EC can postpone elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies for a period of only six months, the constitutionally de-

fined limit between two sessions of the House/Assembly (Article 85 (1) and Article 174(1)) of the Constitution, respectively.

For a further period of extension, the ball is in the executive's court, which will be faced with two possibilities. The first is proviso to Article 172(1) whereby during a state of Emergency, an election can be postponed for one year in addition to a period of six months after Emergency is lifted. The rider, however, is that a state of Emergency can be declared only if there is a threat to the security and sovereignty of the nation, not if there is an epidemic or a pandemic. The second option is to declare President's rule in the State, enabled by Article 356(1) of the Constitution. But its limits have been repeatedly defined by the Supreme Court.

### Lessons from South Korea

Some experts say that the COVID-19 pandemic could last for two years. Deferring elections for such a long time would be against the spirit of democracy and federalism, which are the basic components of the Constitution. As a result, holding elections seems to be the only way out. It is noteworthy that India will not be the only country to hold elections during this pandemic. According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, nine countries have already held national elections and referendums during this public health crisis. Among them is South Korea, which, under strict guidelines, managed to pull off a near-perfect national election recording the highest voter turnout of 66.2% in 28 years.

The EC could take into account the measures that South Korea took to prepare a foolproof plan. South Korea disinfected polling centres, and mandated that voters practise physical distancing, wear gloves and masks and use hand sanitiser. Voters had their temperatures checked on arrival at the booths. Those who had a temperature above 99.5 degrees Fahrenheit were sent to booths in secluded areas. The interests of infected voters and the interests of those suspected of having the virus were not ignored: COVID-19-positive voters were allowed to mail their ballots, while self-quarantined voters were allowed to vote after 6 p.m.

Unarguably, the population of States like Bihar (9.9 crore) is huge compared to South Korea's population (5.16 crore). The EC could adopt targeted measures for older voters who are more vulnerable to COVID-19. Options like proxy voting under a well-established legal framework, postal voting, and mobile ballot boxes can be explored. The EC has a difficult task of sticking to its goal of 'No Voter Left Behind' while also ensuring that the elections do not turn into a public health nightmare.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a big threat to the established world order. It is quickly transforming fragile and vulnerable democracies into autocracies in the name of public safety. How India, a large and well-established democracy, responds to this crisis is the biggest challenge before it.

*S.Y. Quraishi is former Chief Election Commissioner of India and the author of *An Undocumented Wonder – The Making of the Great Indian Election**

## India needs to enact a COVID-19 law

Ad hoc and reactive rule-making reveals the lack of co-ordination between the Union and State governments



MANURAJ SHUNMUGASUNDARAM

**T**he nationwide lockdown has been central to the government's strategy to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. With businesses closed, supply chains disrupted, timelines extended and contracts terminated, this exercise has caused the organised sector unprecedented economic losses. In the unorganised sector, there has been a complete breakdown with little or no legal recourse for those who are affected. While the lockdown has helped contain community spread of the disease, a legal and legislative audit of this exercise has evaded scrutiny so far. As we are now in the seventh week of the lockdown, it is imperative and timely that we assess its underlying legislative soundness.

### Laws governing lockdown

The lockdown has been carried out by State governments and district authorities on the directions of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs under the Disaster Management Act of 2005, which was intended "to provide for the effective management of disasters and for matters connected therewith."



sued orders to impose Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code in public places.

Cumulatively, these orders constitute the legislative umbrella governing the lockdown that has been in place since March 24. The invoking of the Disaster Management Act has allowed the Union government to communicate seamlessly with the States. However, serious questions remain whether the Act was originally intended to or is sufficiently capable of addressing the threat of a pandemic.

Also, the use of the archaic Epidemic Diseases Act reveals the lack of requisite diligence and responsiveness of government authorities in providing novel and innovative policy solutions to address a 21st century problem. Another serious failing is that any violation of the orders passed would be prosecutable under Section 188 of Indian Penal Code, a very ineffective and broad provision dealing with disobedience of an order issued by a public servant.

In contrast, the U.K. enacted

the Coronavirus Act, 2020, which is a comprehensive legislation dealing with all issues connected with COVID-19 including emergency registration of healthcare professionals, temporary closure of educational institutions, audio-visual facilities for criminal proceedings, powers to restrict gatherings, and financial assistance to industry. Similarly, Singapore has passed the Infectious Diseases Regulations, 2020, which provides for issuance of stay orders which can send 'at-risk individuals' to a government-specified accommodation facility.

Both the U.K.'s and Singapore's laws set out unambiguous conditions and legally binding obligations. As such, under Singaporean law, the violators may be penalised up to \$10,000 or face six months imprisonment or both. In contrast, Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code has a fine amount of ₹200 to ₹1,000 or imprisonment of one to six months. Even then, proceedings under Section 188 can only be initiated by private complaint and not through a First Information Report. As such, offences arising out of these guidelines and orders have a weak basis in terms of criminal jurisdiction thereby weakening the objectives of the lockdown.

**Union-State co-ordination**  
In India, both Houses of Parliament functioned till March 23,

2020, when they were adjourned *sine die*. There were a number of interventions regarding COVID-19 by Opposition members through the session. However, the Union government showed no inclination towards drafting or enacting a COVID-19-specific legislation that could address all the issues preemptively. In fact, there has been little clarity on a road map to economic recovery after the announcement by the Union Finance Minister last month.

Worryingly, a consolidated, pro-active policy approach is absent. In fact, there has been ad hoc and reactive rule-making, as seen in the way migrant workers have been treated. The flip-flop of orders regarding inter-State movement has left the fate of hundreds of thousands of migrant workers to be handled by district administrations with inadequate resources. This has also exposed the lack of co-ordination between the Union and State governments.

In past instances, the Union government has not shied away from promulgating ordinances. These circumstances call for legislative leadership, to assist and empower States to overcome COVID-19 and to revive their economic, education and public health sectors.

*Manuraj Shunmugasundaram is an Advocate at the Madras High Court, and Spokesperson, DMK*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

### Visakhapatnam tragedy

The horrible gas leak accident reported from a polymer plant in Visakhapatnam reminds one of the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy. What is worrying is that this accident has taken place during the COVID-19 pandemic. The styrene gas leaked from the factory would have caused a lot of damage to people's lungs and weakened their respiratory system, which will make them more susceptible to viruses like SARS-CoV-2. Once this incident is investigated, we need to fix accountability. We cannot let those responsible for the tragedy get away yet again.

**SHAYAN DAS,  
Gobardanga**

**Privacy concerns**  
The Aarogya Setu team's response to the hacker's claims don't seem

trustworthy ("Hacker sees security flaws in Aarogya Setu," May 7). India desperately needs a data protection and privacy law. There are fears that the government may use this app for surveillance, just as China is doing. China scores its citizens based on their behaviour and uses those scores to decide who can get access to loans, air travel, etc. India, a democracy, cannot be allowed to take a step in that direction.

**VIDHYA B. RAGUNATH,  
Thanjavur**

**Taboo topics**  
India's school system has a serious sex education problem. When I was in school, my teachers skipped the chapters on human reproduction; there was no space for a healthy discussion on gender and sexuality ("Police arrest

'Bois Locker Room' group admin," May 7). In Indian homes, there is always an awkward silence when something explicitly sexual is played on TV. With such stigmatisation, desire and sexuality have become taboo topics. With no mature guidance on these delicate subjects, students turn to pornography to learn about them. Watching porn they learn about violence, as porn films often show women being degraded and humiliated. Boys think this is what desire is. All this leads to such locker room chats. Further, many of our films objectify women – while a film like *Grand Masti* becomes a box office success, a film like *Lipstick Under My Burkha* gets heavily censored. We can be outraged about this incident but it'll soon be forgotten until another

emerges in a few months. The problem in our education system, and in society, runs deep.

**GARIMA PLAATWAT,  
New Delhi**

**Migrant workers**  
It is shocking that migrant workers, who are the pillars of our economy, are being treated in this manner ("Back in U.P., migrants stare at an uncertain future," May 7). COVID-19 was earlier believed to have hit the elites, but it has left the deepest bruises on the underprivileged. What is more shocking is that these impoverished people were even asked to pay for their travel back home after losing their jobs and accommodation! Now it looks like their native States, too, cannot assure them any security. Policymakers should urgently work to provide

these workers immediate relief. They must think of ways to create employment. Otherwise, the damage will be irreparable.

**DEEPIKA JAIN,  
Delhi**

**The Karnataka government's flip-flops on the migrant workers issue show how callous governments can be ("Migrant labourers fume as Karnataka cancels trains," May 7). It not only caused anger and frustration among workers who have already been treated badly, but also unrest in some areas. Why can't major decisions be taken with planning and foresight?**

**V. PADMANABHAN,  
Bengaluru**

**Opening TASMAC shops**  
It is not surprising that hundreds thronged

**TASMAC shops in Tamil Nadu without maintaining physical distancing. There is now fear that many asymptomatic people may have spread the virus. How far could authorities have implemented the 'one bottle per person' order of the High Court?**  
When policemen found it a Herculean task to restrict the movement of people during the 'lockdown' within 'lockdown' period, how could they possibly have controlled crowds in front of TASMAC shops? The crowds now endanger the health of the entire community. Who will be held responsible if the numbers of the infected swells soon?

**THARCIUS S. FERNANDO,  
Chennai**

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**A ND-NDE**

# Should healthcare be a fundamental right?

PARLEY

The Centre and the States need to cooperate on funding; but health has to remain a State subject

*India has never spent more than 2% of its GDP on healthcare. And healthcare facilities across the country straddle different levels of efficiency and sufficiency. The impact of COVID-19 has shaken even States like Kerala and Tamil Nadu that traditionally did well in the area of healthcare. In a discussion moderated by Ramya Kannan, public health experts Abhay Shukla and T. Sundararaman discuss whether healthcare for all can be a fundamental right. Edited excerpts:*

**The COVID-19 epidemic has been unprecedented in its impact on society. While we can argue that no country in the world can actually be fully prepared to handle an emergency, do you think the time is ripe to push the agenda of healthcare as a fundamental right for all citizens?**

**Abhay Shukla (AS):** I would say that one of the most positive impacts of this otherwise very damaging epidemic has been that it has opened the eyes of people to the importance of universal and robust public health services and the need for everybody to be covered by quality healthcare, or for health services to be accessible to everyone. And this epidemic, because it has been concentrated in large cities and has also affected the middle class, has become a matter of high priority.

So, this is a ripe time to actually take forward the agenda of right to healthcare and because the right to healthcare, if it is to be real, it always has to be universal. In that sense, right to healthcare is very much on the agenda and I think we all need to push for that.

**T. Sundararaman (TS):** Yeah, so, in some sense, this notion of right as different from a commodity that can be purchased on the market must be made. In classical economic terms, this is a public good, it is a good with a very high degree of externality. So perhaps you can get away politically by not providing healthcare for a lot of our population. Or if you believe the theory

that it is enough to provide them a minimalist healthcare, the rest is left to the markets. But here, you actually have paid a huge price for doing so. Everybody has, but the poor have paid the most. Because, at some point, there is a huge amount of the cost of this whole pandemic, total lack of preparedness for it and that it can strike everybody. And it doesn't affect only health, but all sectors of the economy.

The idea was that if we give immunisation and some antenatal care, that's enough, but that's not the case. We need very good disease surveillance, we need an integrated primary care system that can deliver in the field. We need tertiary care with the most sophisticated of ventilators. And we need surge capacity, meaning we need an excess redundant capacity that can take care of any health emergency that happens.

**During the pandemic, there has been a great deal of imagination in dispensing healthcare and stretching the limits to cover as many people as possible, more than before. Does this give you hope that India can deliver quality healthcare for all? And what range would be sufficient as a percentage of GDP?**

**AS:** So, if we see the situation today across the country, despite the fact that public health services [have been] historically understaffed, under-resourced, [and don't have] sufficient number of doctors and other resources, they have really stretched themselves to meet the challenge of the COVID-19 epidemic.

And I would say reasonably creditably. And in States such as Kerala of course, public health services have done a remarkable job of containing the spread of the epidemic, especially through their primary healthcare activities.

So, what we are seeing is that until now in the public imagination, at least the middle-class imagination, the model of healthcare has been [of] large private hospitals. And generally, public health services, especially primary healthcare, have



been kind of invisible and mostly neglected.

But now, we are seeing with the COVID-19 epidemic a completely different kind of situation coming forth. And, the public imagination is also beginning to change.

So, this is leading to, or it can lead to, a change in people's perception and it can lead to a rejuvenation of public health services, because political will flows from the public. And, if the public takes a greater interest, then obviously, governments also have to respond.

If this trend continues even after the epidemic has died down, then there's no reason why we cannot achieve access to quality healthcare for everyone in the coming 5-10 years in most States across the country. And, as for a budget, around 3-4% of the GDP for public healthcare, and publicly organised healthcare, would be a good starting point for putting in place at least a basic kind of universal healthcare (UHC) system.

**TS:** So, I think the pandemic is still, in India, in an early stage, and it will play out. I am concerned about the way our country handled the economic crisis. In the West, for example, lockdown means a huge burden on the state because you have complete social security commitments, unemployment benefits to give, but over here, there is a lot of relief being distributed, but it is just not the same. On the other hand, much of the burden is shifted to the poor.

Similarly, in healthcare, there are States whose main approach has been to repurpose existing hospitals

providing comprehensive, tertiary, care, many of them are prefer-

**In the public imagination, at least the middle-class imagination, the model of healthcare has been one of large private hospitals**

ABHAY SHUKLA  
Public health expert

secondary healthcare for COVID-19. And the patients that are therefore pushed out because of this, have to either seek care in the unaffordable private sector. And, I don't think our democracy has yet reached that stage of maturity or robustness where we are able to say "Oh, you need to build new hospitals, you need to create extra beds," like China, or Spain did. You just can't use the public system as residual care.

But in India, we need to be much more articulate about human rights and the fundamental issue, or else this burden will get unfairly pushed on to people. The ₹15,000 crore allotment for the health sector that was sanctioned, along with the first lockdown, is a welcome step. My only point is that much more was needed in the routine annual budget of this year, and over the past four years.

And I am worried that, as July approaches, it might slowly spread into the hinterland. This is the way the Spanish Flu started in India. It started as an all-Bombay problem from the ships. It was in Bombay for a long time, then spread slowly through the country, and then you had all places affected.

I hope that at some point the government does get into strengthening the public services because the private institutes are not even offering care, many of them are prefer-

ring to stay shut till the worst of the pandemic is over.

**Both of you seem to have experience with drafting universal healthcare policies. Professor Sundaram and Dr. Shukla, I believe you worked on the draft proposal of healthcare for all for the government. And Dr. Shukla, you've done some work on this in Maharashtra. Can you elaborate on what constitutes a universal healthcare policy?**

**TS:** I think there are three big issues that in our last effort held us back. And I think we need to have a closure on all these three issues before we can actually go ahead. On the first, I think it is an easy one, that the right to health and the right to healthcare are different things. The right to healthcare is enforceable in a certain way, but in this context, the right to healthcare is something that should be done immediately.

In doing so, there is one fundamental issue. Healthcare is a State subject. Should we make it a Central subject, because then the Central money will flow? But even the response to this pandemic shows that actually that doesn't work.

Well, for many of these decisions the States have to take, they need a high degree of cooperation. So, whereas the Centre and the States must have an agreement on the funding, a lot of it will need to remain a State subject. Definitely, one of the problems is inherently constitutional – but it should not lead to over-centralisation. And the third issue is of course, the most fundamental one. You have to put your money where your mouth is, you have to actually get the resources that are required for it and that requires a transfer of resources. Again, a transfer of resources without populist shaming or saying that you are giving subsidies. We have to recognise that if you want a metric of equal health quality, you need to invest more on the healthcare of the poor and the middle class, the upper class, the ruling privileged persons will have to pay a price.

**AS:** About the issue of universal healthcare, we need a system for universal healthcare, which is a complement to the right to health-

care kind of scenario. A group of public health experts and health activists in Maharashtra has over the last three years, developed a framework that... could be achieved in the next five years, and in a very realistic kind of scenario. So, this is not a pipe dream, it is something which is possibly provided that there is political will for it.

But to develop this kind of a system, there are a few constraints which we need to overcome. Right now, we have a fragmented health system. We have one health system for the poor, another for the middle class and another for the rich and the super rich. What we need to do is to move from this fractured system towards a single healthcare system for everyone.

So, even after the epidemic has receded, the idea that the government can regulate private hospitals, harness them in public interest will remain, and I think that opportunity, which is being opened up in the period of the COVID-19, should not be lost. It has to continue till we reach a system of universal healthcare, which involves regulated private providers.

**Prof. Sundararaman, can you weigh in on the private healthcare angle? Clearly, the private healthcare sector, which was all powerful, has sort of stepped back to play a supportive role in COVID-19. Does this mean the role of the private healthcare sector in India may actually change in future?**

**TS:** Even the Prime Minister's health insurance scheme [allowing people to access insurance cover for treatment in private hospitals] has been such a failure today. It is only the high-charging patients without insurance cover that are using the private sector.

Today, it is the public system, with all its problems, that has risen to the occasion. So, in this sense, even the 'worst public health States' have stood by the people. But it doesn't mean that the private sector has no role. We need for the private sector, a much clearer regulatory regime and ways of contracting that are useful and it is most important that they supplement, not substitute, the strengths of the state.



**Abhay Shukla**  
is the national convener of Jan Swasthya Abhiyan



**T. Sundararaman**  
is former executive director, National Health Systems Resource Centre



Scan the QR code to listen to the full conversation online

## Water wisdom during a pandemic

More awareness is needed on climate-resilient actions like protecting carbon sinks

PRAKASH NELLIYAT

World Water Day was observed more online than in-person this year on March 22, given the guidelines notified by the WHO in the light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, yet its broader aim remained constant: to raise awareness on the importance of freshwater and advocate for its sustainable management.

More than any previous year, there was a recognition of the importance of water in handwashing and personal hygiene practices, an action that is as important as social distancing and nationwide lockdowns in breaking the circuit of coronavirus transmission.

The choice of theme for the event this year, "Water and Climate Change" reflected the desire of policymakers to address the impact of climate change on the water sector. Water is the primary medium through which climate change impacts trickle down to the community and individual levels, primarily through reduced predictability of water availability.

More broadly, climate change and water are inextricably linked. Growing populations and their demand for water increases the need for energy-intensive water pumping, transportation, and treatment. It contributes to the degradation of critical water-dependent carbon sinks such as peatlands. Due to climate change, water cycles experience significant change, which reflects in water availability and quality. A warmer climate causes more water to evaporate from both land and oceans; in turn, a warmer atmosphere can hold more water, roughly 4% more water for every 1°F rise in temperature.

### Extreme weather events

These changes are expected to lead to negative consequences in the water sector, with increased precipitation and run-off (flooding) in certain areas and less precipitation and longer and more severe scarcity of water (droughts) in other areas. Hence, wet areas are expected to become wetter and dry areas drier. This influences almost all aspects of the economy including drinking water, sanitation,

health, food production, energy generation, industrial manufacturing, and environmental sustainability and ultimately the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In coastal areas when more freshwater is removed from rivers and aquifers, saltwater will move farther upstream into the river mouth and the aquifer, which will put pressure on the limited freshwater available on the coast, forcing water managers to seek costly alternatives like desalination plants.

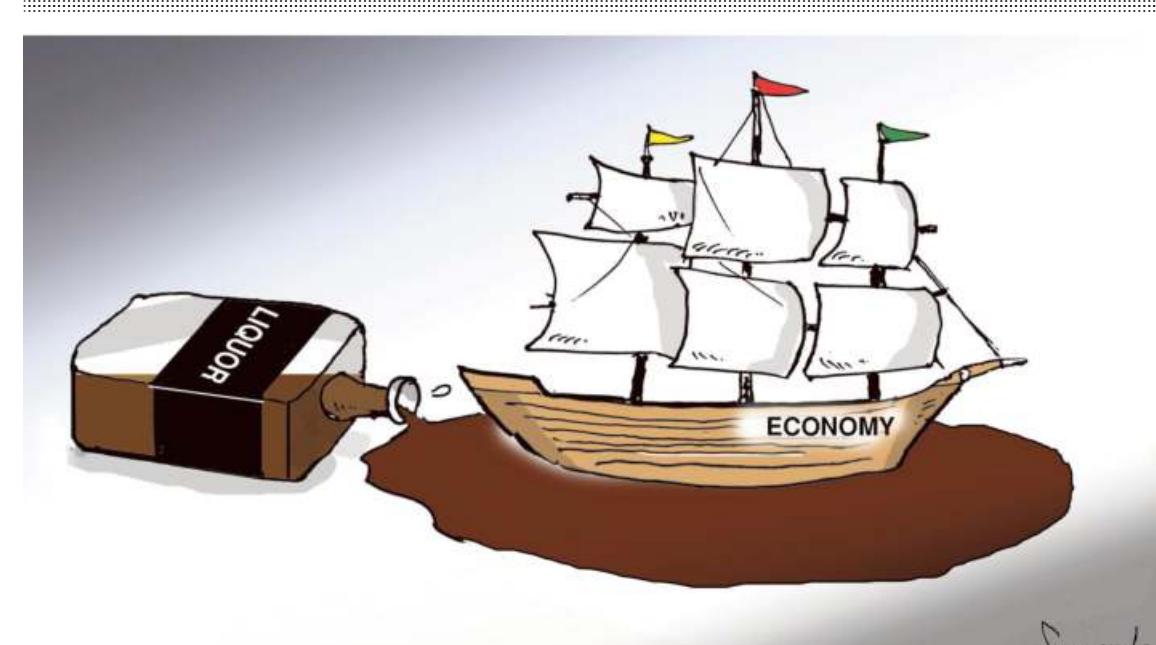
Water is a common pool natural resource that sustains ecosystems, biodiversity, food security, economies, and society; hence, its judicious use with balancing multiple water needs is significant. In developing countries like India, a large population depends on climate-sensitive sectors like agriculture, fisheries and forestry for its livelihoods. We cannot afford to let climate change-induced hydrological challenges overtake us.

**Mitigation strategies**  
India has come up with climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies and appropriate policy measures. The government is implementing the 'National Action Plan on Climate Change' through eight National Missions, including the Water Mission. However, effective policies need the support of the local governments, corporates and NGOs.

Water resources planning must be given due consideration while dealing with climate impacts. As tanks and ponds can store and recharge the excess rainwater to the aquifer, their rejuvenation (desilting) facilitates flood and drought management. We need to revisit our rich tradition and culture of water wisdom in water resources management.

More public awareness on the need for climate-resilient actions, including protecting carbon sinks like oceans, wetlands, peatlands, and mangroves, adopting climate-smart agricultural techniques, rainwater harvesting, waste-water reuse, and judicious use of water, should be generated and inculcated in each citizen.

Prakash Nelliyat is a Chennai-based researcher



### NOTEBOOK

## Will this headline make you read the story?

A print caption needs to be made search-friendly to reach digital readership

MANDIRA MODDIE

In 2015, *The Independent* sported a front-page headline, "Somebody's Child", with a picture of a child washed onto a beach. The headline transcended details. It had nothing to indicate what the story was about, yet told a poignant story of young Aylan Kurdi, who had drowned when trying to reach Greece from Turkey. The corresponding headline on the paper's website spelt it out: "If these extraordinarily powerful images of a dead Syrian child washed up on a beach don't change Europe's attitude to refugees, what will?"

Why the stark difference in headline writing? For those of us who work in digital journalism, there are many aspects of print headline writing that we have had to forget.

Our conversations in the digital newsroom everyday invariably revolve around

the search engine optimisation (SEO) title and headline of a story. This means that we must (re)write headlines with words that people are likely to search for.

In a print story we can get away with a headline like 'The road less travelled'. However, in an online story, the only thing that a reader sees is the headline. Because the news is coming to you on your personal device, which is often the size of your palm, space constraints ensure that you see only the headline. Another way in which you find news is by going to a search engine and keying in a few words. If the article's headline has been written well, you are bound to find it in the search results.

There are of course other elements that ensure a good SEO: clear and concise introductory text, keywords at the beginning and throughout the story, and metadata such as keywords

and tags that help categorise content, but the headline is key. It needs to be factual, informative and engaging, in order to draw the reader's attention.

*At The Hindu*, we started adapting the headlines of the stories published in the paper to deal with this issue. A recent editorial titled 'Casting out stigma' could, by itself, refer to any number of issues. Online it has been retitled 'Casting out stigma: On appalling images at quarantine centre,' which makes for better SEO value.

**Key questions to ask**  
With the consumption of news becoming more personal and algorithm-led, our job as editors and writers is to get the news to where people are. While the story continues to be the focus, we present the news in different forms, such as videos and data stories, serving multiple audiences. Some questions

we ask ourselves in the newsroom are: Does the headline make the reader curious to read more? Does it trigger emotion in the reader while stating facts? Is it factual without being sensational? Does it hold back just enough information to entice the reader to click and open the story? If some of these elements are included, I believe we have the best of both the print and digital worlds.

Technology and the evolving nature of the medium too is on our side: we have display headlines for people visiting the site, while retaining the article headline for search engines. We often combine both print and digital headlines. Headline testing with active readers helps us decide how to rewrite headlines on the go. On social media sites, we rewrite the headlines and posts creatively to entice the reader, while ensuring the headline remains SEO-friendly.

### The Hindu

#### FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO May 8, 1970

A Press Meet without Questions

Intentionally or otherwise the Japanese press to-day [May 7] snubbed Foreign Trade Minister, Mr. B. R. Bhagat by asking him practically no questions at an hourlong press conference which had been arranged for him under the auspices of the National Press Club. Whatever the intentions, the attitude of the reporters reflects an utter lack of interest on the part of Japanese press in Mr. Bhagat's current visit here [Tokyo]. The press conference was attended by over 20 reporters representing major Japanese newspapers and news agencies. After Mr. Bhagat had made his opening remarks, the floor was thrown open to questions, but for an embarrassingly long time no one came up with one. To save the situation the presiding officer, Mr. Susumu Ejiri, Secretary-General of Japan Newspapers Publishers and Editors Association, started the ball rolling with a question on India's economic situation. But after Mr. Bhagat had answered it, the ball failed to keep rolling and there ensued another embarrassingly long silence. An Indian correspondent came to the rescue with a question. Then silence again, with the Minister's party desperately looking in all directions to see if anybody would shoot a question. At last, the reporter for Japan Broadcasting Corporation came up with a question. However, till the end, the press conference dragged on in this fashion. In one hour, there were only five questions of which only two came from Japanese press.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO May 8, 1920

Congress propaganda work.

Mr. V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and Vakil Subbier arrived here [Kyalpatnam] on Thursday evening [May 6]. A fitting reception was accorded to Mr. Pillai. A public meeting was held at the beach. It was very largely attended. Many came from Tiruchendur, Kulasekharapatnam etc. Mr. Pillai addressed the audience on the burning questions of the Reform Act and Khilafat. He pointed out in detail the hollowness of the Reform Act and exhorted the audience to start a vigorous constitutional agitation to attain self-government. He dwelt at length on the Khilafat question and appealed to the audience to do their duty and be prepared to adopt non-cooperation programme if necessity arose. He warned them that if only they did their duty they were bound to succeed. He also asked the audience to join the Provincial Conference at Tinnevelly. Mr. Iyer also spoke on Hindu-Moslem unity.

FROM PAGE ONE

## Gasping villagers rush out at dawn

"There was thick fog on the road. Some people fell unconscious on the road while running. We were frightened and locked ourselves in the house. Many police personnel also fell sick," said Mani Kumar, a mechanical engineer from the area.

People came running till the Simhachalam-Pendurthi road. Locals in the surrounding areas of Pendurthi, Gopalapatnam provided them with water.

"We had breathing problems and were unable to see the road properly due to fog. I heard few fell in the

drains while running," said Ramana, another resident of RR Venkatapuram.

### Man falls off terrace

A man went up to the terrace of his house to see what exactly happened. But, he fell off the terrace and sustained severe injuries. He was shifted to a hospital.

Around 20 animals including cattle and stray dogs reportedly died.

Many villagers also went to the LG Polymers plant site and staged a protest demanding stringent action against the authorities.

## India registers 3,561 new cases, 89 deaths in a day

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Thursday said that in comparison to other countries, India was in a better condition as the fatality rate was 3.3% and recovery rate was 28.83%.

### Testing increased

"Currently there are 4.8% patients in ICU, 1.1% on ventilators and 3.3% on oxygen support of the active cases. The testing capacity has increased in the country and it is now standing at 95,000 tests per day with 327 government laboratories and 118 private laboratories. Cumulatively 13,57,442 tests have been done so far for COVID-19," he said.

The Minister said that currently there were 180 districts with no new cases in the past week, 180 districts with no new cases in 7-13 days, 164 districts which had not had any new case in

14-20 days and 136 districts with no new cases since the last 21-28 days.

"There are 13 States/Union Territories – Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir UT, Kerala, Ladakh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Odisha – which have not reported any case in the last 24 hours. While Daman and Diu, Sikkim, Nagaland and Lakshadweep have not reported a single case till date," Dr. Vardhan said.

Dr. Vardhan on Thursday launched the 'Sanjivani' App and two AYUSH-based studies related to COVID-19. The Minister said COVID-19 management had provided a potent platform for alliance between the Health Ministry, the AYUSH Ministry and other scientific bodies.

## Some relief for migrants as first batch departs

Even as several migrant workers boarded the Shramik Special train to Madhya Pradesh on Thursday, over 40 labourers from various districts of the State resumed work at a construction site here in south Delhi's Saqiq Nagar area, officials said. A total of 48 people, including six women and four children, from Madhya Pradesh were stranded at the construction site at Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya due to lockdown, they said.

"When construction activities were allowed by the government a few days ago, the labourers were not inclined to return to work and wanted to be sent home. But today, all the labourers resumed work after rigorous persuasion," said DCP (South) Atul Kumar Thakur.

(With inputs from Saubh Trivedi)

## SBI cuts lending rate, interest on fixed deposit

It would offer an additional 30 bps interest rate on five years and above tenor only. "To safeguard the interests of senior citizens in the current falling rate regime, the bank introduces a new product 'SBI Wecare Deposit' for senior citizens in the retail TD [term deposit] segment," SBI said.

This scheme would be in effect up to September 30, 2020. Since deposit rates for senior citizens are already 50 bps higher than the rate for other depositors, under this scheme the effective deposit rate would be 80 bps higher than the ordinary deposit rate.

HOW THEY FARE	
<b>SBI</b>	
1 year MCLR: 7.25%	from May 10
FD rate (1 year to less than 2 years): 5.5% from May 12	
<b>ICICI Bank</b>	
1 year MCLR: 7.75%	
FD rate (18 months to 2 years): 5.8%	
<b>HDFC Bank</b>	
1 year MCLR: 7.95%	
FD rate (1 year, 1 day to 2 years): 5.8%	

However, the additional 30 bps would not be payable in case of premature withdrawal of such deposits, SBI said.

## Karnataka to restart trains for migrants

N. Manjunath Prasad, nodal officer for inter-State travel, has written to the Railways and the governments of nine States – Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Odisha – requesting at least one train to these destinations every day from May 8 to 15.

**Two trains sought**  
Karnataka has sought two special trains every day to Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jhark-

hand, West Bengal and Odisha, as most of the migrant workers come from these States and make up the bulk of those registered on Seva Sindhu, a portal for travel out of the State. Bihar has approved only one train per day.

"The State is ready to run as many trains as needed. But trains can be organised only after receiving consent from the States. There are logistics issues in these States owing to return of so many migrants," he said.



## India taking all possible steps'

Country is also fulfilling global obligations amid the COVID-19 pandemic, says PM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said India was taking all possible steps to save lives during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as responding to calls for help from other countries.

"Today, India is making every effort to save the life of every Indian and is also fulfilling its global obligations equally seriously," he said.

Mr. Modi was delivering the keynote address during a virtual Buddha Purnima celebration organised by the Culture Ministry and the International Buddhist Confederation.

He said the teachings of

Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing the nation on the occasion of Buddha Purnima on Thursday.

Buddha were more relevant today as the world went through an upheaval.

"The message and resolve to remove the difficulty of every life have always shown direction to India's civilisation and culture. Lord Buddha has further enriched this culture of India...Buddha is synonymous with service and dedication...And look at the good fortune of all of us, at this time we are seeing

many people around us who serve others, treat a patient, feed a poor person, clean a hospital, maintain law and order on a road...they are all working round the clock. In India, outside India, every such person deserves a salute, a tribute."

Buddha's teachings were "even more relevant" today when there was "turmoil in the world", he noted and cited those related to mercy, compassion and acceptance.

"... Beyond the profit and loss, able and unable, for us, this hour of crisis is to help others as much as possible to forward the hand of help," he said.

## 'Naikoo was under the radar for six months'

He escaped multiple raids, say police

PEERZADA ASHIQ  
SRINAGAR

The J&K Police on Thursday said it had been "tracking the movement of Hizbul Mujahideen's chief operation commander Riyaz Naikoo for the past six months" and received the "pinpoint tip-off" on him two days ago.

Meanwhile, 34 people, including 18 police personnel, were injured and a civilian reportedly was killed in clashes in Pulwama, forcing the authorities to continue the suspension of Internet and calling services on mobile phones for the second day on Thursday.

"We busted five of Naikoo's hideouts this year. He was under the radar for the past six months. We also carried out multiple unsuccessful raids to nab him. Of late, we managed to arrest six or seven of his underground workers and they were interrogated. Finally, we got a pinpoint tip-off about his presence two days ago," Inspector-General of Police (IGP), Kashmir Vijay Kumar said at a press conference in Srinagar.

Mr. Kumar said Naikoo was the third top militant commander, besides Qari Yasin and Burhan Woka, killed since January in Kashmir.

### Protests in valley

This year, security forces had managed to kill 64 militants in 27 operations, and arrested 25 militants, the police said.

Meanwhile, one civilian was killed and 34 people were injured in protests in south Kashmir sparked by the killing of the militant commander Jehangir Yusuf Wani, 32, a resident of Pulwama, reportedly died of bullet injuries on Wednesday. "Around 15 people who threw stones and 18 police personnel were injured in the protests," Mr. Kumar said.

Separately, the Railways said that it has converted 5,231 coaches into COVID Care Centers. These can be used for very mild cases in areas where the State has exhausted facilities and needs to augment capacities. Of the 215 railway stations earmarked for the deployment of these 'COVID Care Centres', the Railways will provide healthcare facilities at 85 stations. At the remaining 130 stations, the requesting States will need to provide staff and essential medicines.

In line with the recommendations made by the Committee, based on the proposal of Engineer-in-Chief, MES, the proposal of abolition of 9,304 posts in MES out of the total 13,157 vacancies of the basic and industrial staff has been approved by the Defence Minister," the Ministry said in a statement.

One of the recommendations was to restructure the civilian workforce in a manner that the work of the MES could be partly done by departmentally employed staff and other works could be outsourced, it stated.

It was aimed at making

the Railways has so far run 189 'Shramik Special' trains, transporting about 1.9 lakh migrants stranded in different parts of the country.

"Today [Thursday], so far we have run 40 Shramik Special trains, taking the total tally of such trains to 189 trains," a railway spokesperson said, adding that a couple of more such trains were planned for Thursday. Till Wednesday, the railways had run 149 Shramik Special trains.

Each train, with 24 coaches, can carry 1,000-1,200 passengers.

"In line with the recommendations made by the Committee, based on the proposal of Engineer-in-Chief, MES, the proposal of abolition of 9,304 posts in MES out of the total 13,157 vacancies of the basic and industrial staff has been approved by the Defence Minister," the Ministry said in a statement.

These recommendations, if implemented over the next five years, can result in savings of up to ₹25,000 crore in defence expenditure.

of these, the first batch of 65 recommendations pertaining to the Army were approved in August 2017.

The party also launched a 'UP mitra' (friend) helpline [73999 01414] to assist stranded workers from the State in other States as well as those who are from other areas and are currently stuck in the State.

## 'Rich State' Telangana reels under double whammy

Twin blows of slowdown and lockdown reduce the government's income in April to a meagre trickle

M.L. MELLY MAITREYI  
HYDERABAD

Telangana, often touted as a "rich state" by its Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao, finds itself reeling under the twin blows of the economic slowdown that preceded the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown. While slower economic growth left its finances substantially dependent on GST compensation, the State's own revenues have now hit rock bottom due to the latest public health crisis and the drastic measures taken to mitigate it.

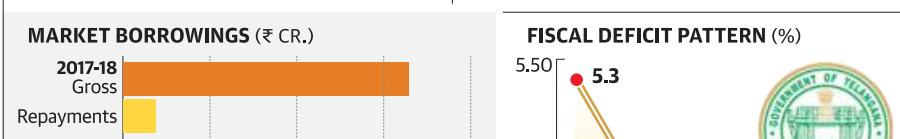
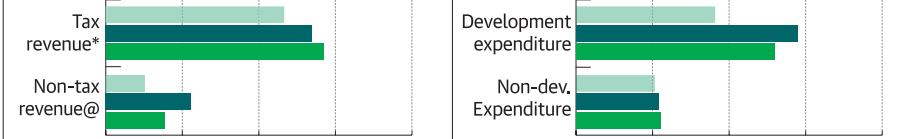
Mr. Rao, who has extended the lockdown in the State till May 29 despite a trying financial situation that has resulted in the State receiving barely 5% of its own revenue in April, has given indications that his patience is wearing thin with the Centre not responding to his various suggestions to infuse funds into economy.

The lockdown was announced a few weeks after the State presented its Budget outlay of ₹1.82 lakh crore for 2020-21, with an increase of 28.7% over the revised estimate of 2019-20. At the time, the outlay was perceived as being ambitious given the country's economic slowdown and the fact that the GDP growth rate at current prices for 2019-20 was revised down to 12.1%, from 14% in 2018-19. But no one could have foreseen the havoc wrought on the State's revenue and growth estimates by the pandemic. The budget had earlier estimated the State's fiscal deficit for 2020-21 at ₹33,000 crore.

The State, which used to be proud of its robust revenue

### The sorry condition of a "rich State"

Telangana, which was once proud of its revenue growth, is now reduced to seeking "helicopter money".



\* includes share in Central taxes | @ includes grants from Centre

SOURCE: RBI STUDY OF STATE FINANCES 2019

revenue growth rate, became eligible for GST compensation in 2019-20 as its own revenue growth fell sharply to 7%, from the 16.1% expansion recorded in 2018-19. The recommendation of the 15th Finance Commission cut the State's share in Central tax devolution to 2.1% from 2.4%. And delays and shortfalls in the release of the State's share of IGST and GST compensation added to its woes.

The overall income for Telangana, including Central funds and loans, is about ₹15,000 crore a month with the State's own tax revenue

amounting to ₹10,800 crore to ₹11,000 crore. But Telangana's income from all sources was only ₹1,600 crore in April, with the State's own tax revenue slumping by 95% to ₹500 crore, Mr. Rao had said recently.

Making a case for liberal sanction of funds to the States at a time when they were reeling under the impact of slowdown, compounded by the COVID-19 crisis, and yet spending from their meagre resources on relief and welfare of the poor and migrant workers, Mr. Rao's argument is that the

broad fiscal policy rests with the Centre. "Either Centre should sanction more funds to the States or transfer power to the States to make their own decisions," he said.

Mr. Rao has also repeatedly – once in a videoconference on the ongoing crisis with the Prime Minister and also in a written representation – urged the Centre to accord sanction for what he termed 'Helicopter money' (a direct infusion of money to the public by the RBI or the Central government) and increase the FRBM limit from 3% to 5%.

Telangana's government spends close to ₹40,000 crore on welfare schemes and its budgeted capital expenditure of ₹44,000 crore includes ₹22,000 crore of capital outlay for the creation of assets. Its debt servicing expenditure for the year was put at ₹21,131 crore.

## IMD includes PoK in weather forecasts

Gilgit-Baltistan, Muzaffarabad covered

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

The India Meteorological Department's Regional Meteorological Centre has started including cities in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) in its forecasts, a departure from its previous format, officials said on Thursday.

The development assumes significance as India has maintained that the area under PoK belongs to India. The inclusion of Muzaffarabad and Gilgit-Baltistan comes amid Pakistan's Supreme Court allowing elections in Gilgit-Baltistan this week, to which India had strongly reacted.



Rescue and relief: As victims of the gas leak were brought to the King George Hospital in Visakhapatnam on Thursday, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy arrived to console them.



• C.V. SUBRAHMANYAM, SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

## NDRF team evacuates 1,200 families

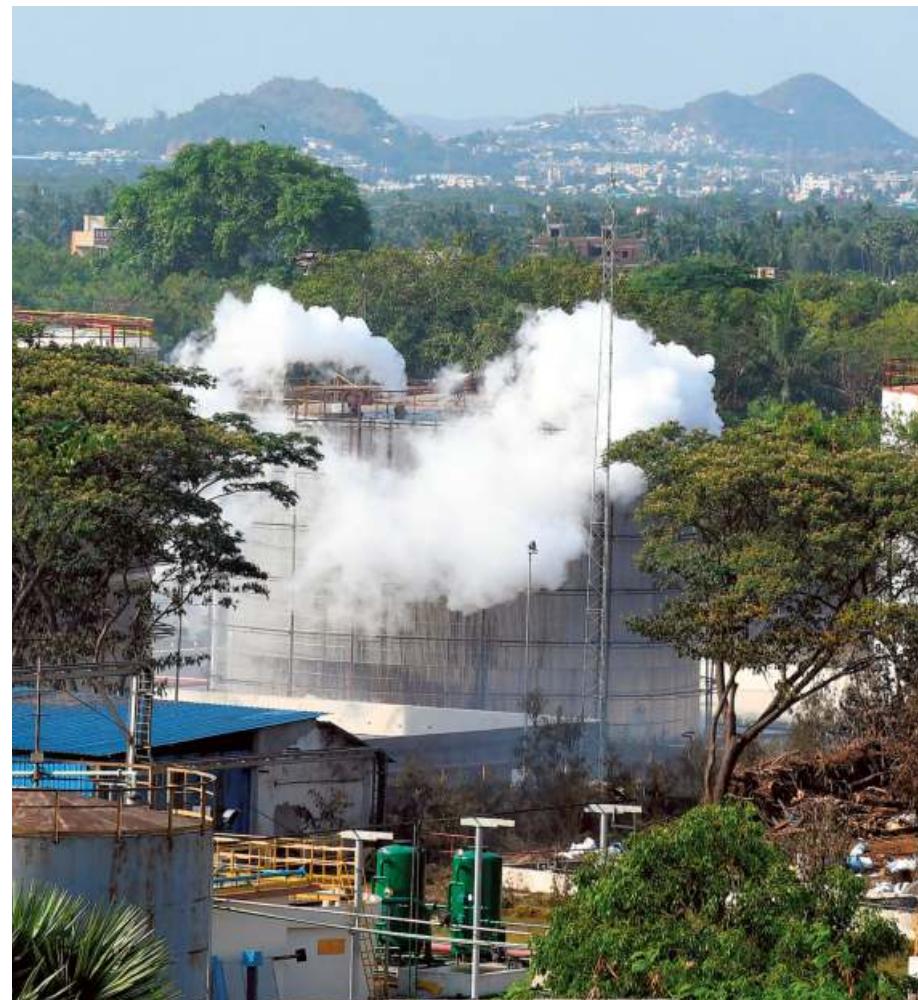
Chemical defence team deployed for rescue operation

STAFF REPORTER  
VIJAYAWADA

National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) 10th Battalion Commandant Zahid Khan, who closely monitored the rescue operations in the gas leak incident in Visakhapatnam, said the trained chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) defence team of the force rushed to the spot and evacuated 1,200 families to safe locations, and 400 people were admitted to hospital.

"Six areas were affected by the gas leak, with the residents of R.R. Venkatapuram bearing the brunt of it," Mr. Khan told *The Hindu*.

The NDRF Regional Response Centre team was attending to the rescue operations along with Fire Services, and police and revenue personnel at R.R. Venkatapuram and other villages. "Styrene gas leaked around 3 a.m. The NDRF team went inside the LG Polymers facility and shifted the victims to King George Hospital," the Commandant said.



Unfolding tragedy: Gas leaking from tanks at the factory of LG Polymers in Visakhapatnam in the early hours of Thursday. • K.R. DEEPAK

Spoke to officials of MHA and NDMA regarding the situation in Visakhapatnam, which is being monitored closely. I pray for everyone's safety and well-being in Visakhapatnam



I'm shocked to hear about the #VizagGasLeak. I urge our Congress workers & leaders in the area to provide all necessary support & assistance to those affected. My condolences to the families of those who have perished. I pray that those hospitalised make a speedy recovery



RAHUL GANDHI, CONGRESS

CPI(M) extends deep condolences to the families of the deceased and hope for the speedy recovery of the hospitalised. We demand compensation for the families

STATEMENT ON TWITTER

The incident in Vizag is disturbing. Have spoken to the NDMA officials and concerned authorities. We are continuously and closely monitoring the situation. I pray for the well-being of the people of Visakhapatnam

AMIT SHAH, UNION HOME MINISTER

plant had been running, the material would have been fed into the reactor."

As per preliminary investigation, the plant had just begun functioning and there was some problem in the temperature controls. "Due to which, it appears that styrene monomer, which is stored at minus 20 degrees Celsius in liquid form, vapourised and burst out of the safety valves and spread across a 1.5-3 km radius, affecting the population," Collector V. Vinay Chand said.

The company was earlier called Hindustan Polymers. It was taken over by the South Korea-based LG Chem in 1997 and it manufactures polystyrene, a basic material used in fibreglass and rubber for making toys and appliances, according to a company official.

At the site, general manager of the plant Mohan Rao told the media that it was not running for the last 40 days due to the COVID-19 lockdown. "There are two tanks that store styrene monomer, a raw material for polystyrene. It happened in a tank of 2,400 tonne capacity, which contained 1,800 tonnes of styrene. If the

reaction had been running, the material would have been fed into the reactor."

As per preliminary investigation, the plant had just begun functioning and there was some problem in the temperature controls. "Due to which, it appears that styrene monomer, which is stored at minus 20 degrees Celsius in liquid form, vapourised and burst out of the safety valves and spread across a 1.5-3 km radius, affecting the population," Collector V. Vinay Chand said.

The Gopalapatnam police have registered a case against the management of LG Polymers under Sections 278 (making atmosphere noxious to health), 284 (negligent conduct with respect to poisonous substance), 285 (negligent conduct with respect to fire or combustible matter), 337 (causing hurt by act endangering life or personal safety of others), 338 (causing grievous hurt by act endangering life or personal safety of others and 304 (II) of the IPC.

## Chemicals airlifted from Gujarat to neutralise gas

PM takes stock of the steps taken



Emergency run: Gas leak victims being rushed to a hospital in Visakhapatnam. • K.R. DEEPAK

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Around 500 kg of chemicals were airlifted from Gujarat and sent to Visakhapatnam on Thursday to neutralise the impact of the hazardous gas styrene that leaked at a plant.

Due to the lockdown, officials at LG Polymers Private Ltd, where the gas leak took place, requested the government authorities to arrange a chemical called 4-Tertiary Butylcatchol (PTBC), available with a chemical factory in Gujarat, to contain the reaction at an early stage.

"The matter was discussed in the Home Ministry and within 20 minutes, the chemical was arranged and dispatched from the Daman airport to Visakhapatnam," a senior government official said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired a high-level meeting to take stock of the steps taken. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah and Ministers of State for Home Nityanand Rai and G. Kishan Reddy participated.

Randeep Guleria of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences said at a press conference that the chances of a long-term impact on residents, similar to the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy, was less and it was an "illness that is universally not fatal".

"Irritation in throat can lead to breathing difficulty, wheezing and respiratory distress. It affects the brain leading to headache, nausea, vomiting, unsteadiness and problems in walking. In cases of high exposure, it can lead to coma and an irregular heartbeat. Effect on skin is mild and can also affect eyes," he said.

He said there was "no specific antidote and no treatment to reverse" its impact and the treatment was mostly supportive. "On exposure, clothes are to be removed, exposed eyes can be washed with water... some will have to be put on ventilators. Many will require oxygen facility. Nebulisation can also be given. In serious cases, steroids have been given. This is an illness that is not universally fatal."

## IN BRIEF



NHRC issues notices to Centre, A.P. government  
NEW DELHI  
The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on Thursday issued notices to the Central and Andhra Pradesh governments on the gas leak in Visakhapatnam. It took suo motu cognisance of media reports of the incident, which it said was a "serious violation of human rights".

### Trade unions demand action against company

NEW DELHI  
Trade unions on Thursday demanded action against the LG Polymers chemical plant in Visakhapatnam. They also demanded compensation for the victims. In a statement, the All-India Trade Union Congress said the incident "again brings forth the issues of occupational safety and health, not only for those who are at the work place but also for all those who happen to be living in the vicinity of such plants".

### National Green Tribunal to hear the matter today

NEW DELHI  
The National Green Tribunal (NGT) on Thursday took cognisance of the gas leak in Visakhapatnam and is likely to hear the matter on Friday.

Earlier, the NGO Centre for Wildfire and Environmental Litigation Foundation sought constitution of a committee of judges and officers, not below the rank of Joint Secretary, to look into the incident.

HC takes up case *suo motu*  
It asks govt. to respond by next week

STAFF REPORTER  
VIJAYAWADA

Taking cognizance of the gas leak accident at LG Polymers in Visakhapatnam on its own, the Andhra Pradesh High Court has directed the Central and State governments to explain the laws applicable to it.

It has observed that the lessons should have been learnt from the Bhopal gas leak tragedy.

While posting the matter to next week, the court appointed High Court Bar Association president Y.V. Ravi Prasad as *amicus curiae*.

Chief Justice J.K. Maheswari and Justice K. Lalitha Kumari said it is not to be

treated as an adversarial litigation, but one that is intended to support the State government's measures.

### CJ's poser

The Chief Justice sought to know how such an industrial unit was located in a highly populated area and said he took note of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's visit to the site of the accident and the Prime Minister being apprised of the situation.

The judges have reportedly made some oral observations on the incident and the manner in which it should have been dealt with.

According to the Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the health effects due to inhalation of styrene gas include tiredness, feeling drunk, slowed reaction time, concentration problems, balance problems and changes in colour vision.

The styrene concentrations that cause these effects are more than 1,000 times higher than the levels normally found in the environment.

According to the U.S.-based Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), short-

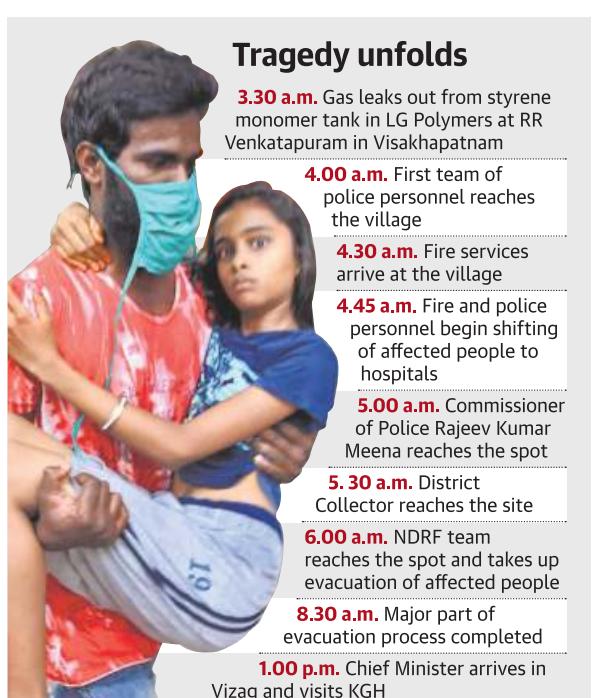
term exposure to styrene can lead to respiratory effects, such as mucous membrane irritation, eye irritation, and gastrointestinal effects. Chronic exposure affects the central nervous system with symptoms such as headache, fatigue, weakness. It can also cause central nervous system dysfunction including memory, visuomotor speed, hearing loss and peripheral neuropathy.

Clinical studies of volunteers and workers exposed to styrene have demonstrated both the central and the peripheral nervous systems toxicity.

The number of studies of styrene clinical neurotoxicity is rather small.

Acute exposure to styrene via inhalation at 376 ppm for 25 minutes had resulted in nausea, a sense of inebriation and headache. But no studies have been carried out to understand the harmful effects from exposure at extremely high concentrations lasting a couple of hours.

Currently, no studies have reported deaths from short-term exposure to styrene gas. Hence, it is not clear if the deaths were caused by styrene gas or some other chemical or a combination.



### Tragedy unfolds

3.30 a.m. Gas leaks out from styrene monomer tank in LG Polymers at RR Venkatapuram in Visakhapatnam

4.00 a.m. First team of police personnel reaches the village

4.30 a.m. Fire services arrive at the village

4.45 a.m. Fire and police personnel begin shifting of affected people to hospitals

5.00 a.m. Commissioner of Police Rajeev Kumar Meena reaches the spot

5.30 a.m. District Collector reaches the site

6.00 a.m. NDRF team reaches the spot and takes up evacuation of affected people

8.30 a.m. Major part of evacuation process completed

1.00 p.m. Chief Minister arrives in Vizag and visits KGH

## Unconscious and breathless victims fill hospitals

Youth rush to take people away from the gas leak site; children as young as five in critical condition

B. MADHU GOPAL  
VISAKHAPATNAM

A little girl, about five years old, survived after treatment at a 30-bed hospital at Gopalapatnam.

She looked around, perhaps not knowing what was happening as a doctor and nurse made her sit on a bed.

"Someone brought her here, placed her on the bed and left. We do not know who her parents or relatives are. Her condition was critical when she was brought here. We managed to rescue her and now she is okay," said the doctor treating her, even as he rushed to tend to another patient.



Taken unaware: Children being treated at the King George Hospital in Visakhapatnam. • K.R. DEEPAK

Many local youth rose to the occasion and rushed the sick to hospitals. Several ferried children and others to safer places on two-wheelers and left beside the highway about 5 km away.

The little girl may have

been brought by someone and her rescuer may have rushed back to help others, it is suspected.

### Tough measures

A young man with a handkerchief tied around his wrist, blood oozing out, was seen outside the hospital. "I broke a windowpane to rescue someone and my wrist got cut in the process. Had we got the information a bit earlier, we [local youth] could have rescued more persons," said the good samaritan, who did not even wish to reveal his name.

Similar scenes were witnessed at the King George

Hospital (KGH), where over 100 people are being treated.

The hospital witnessed a stream of ambulances, Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation buses and police vehicles ferrying the affected people. Despite the lockdown, even auto-rickshaws were seen carrying people.

"We just picked up unconscious people from their houses and those lying on the roads, and shifted them to hospitals. Many, including children, are separated from their families. We will unite them later," said inspector Raghuveer Vishnu.

## No scientific studies report styrene gas causing deaths

It is not clear if the casualties were caused by it or by some other chemical or a combination



Unsparring killer: Cattle lying dead near the plant. • K.R. DEEPAK

concentration problems, balance problems and changes in colour vision.

The styrene concentrations that cause these effects are more than 1,000 times

higher than the levels normally found in the environment.

According to the U.S.-based Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), short-term exposure to styrene can lead to respiratory effects, such as mucous membrane irritation, eye irritation, and gastrointestinal effects. Chronic exposure affects the central nervous system with symptoms such as headache, fatigue, weakness. It can also cause central nervous system dysfunction including memory, visuomotor speed, hearing loss and peripheral neuropathy.

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Currently, no studies have reported deaths from short-term exposure to styrene gas. Hence, it is not clear if the deaths were caused by styrene gas or some other chemical or a combination.

Earlier, the NGO Centre for Wildfire and Environmental Litigation Foundation sought constitution of a committee of judges and officers, not below the rank of Joint Secretary, to look into the incident.

CMYK

## IN BRIEF



## Health expert warns against herd immunity

BHUBANESWAR  
K. Srinath Reddy, health expert and adviser to the Odisha government, warned against pursuing the herd immunity strategy to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic. "Herd immunity might prove to be dangerous as it carries the risk of high fatality. It is better to focus on herd protection by emphasising on disease containment," Dr. Reddy said.

## Two BSF personnel succumb to COVID-19

NEW DELHI  
Two Border Security Force (BSF) personnel died and 41 others tested positive for COVID-19 on Thursday. One of the deceased was at the BSF headquarters in Delhi when he complained of uneasiness and was rushed to the hospital on May 3. The other personnel was suffering from a critical disease and had contracted the infection.

## 388 cases and 29 deaths in Gujarat

AHMEDABAD  
Gujarat's COVID-19 cases jumped to 7013, with the addition of 388 new cases on Thursday. Number of fatalities thus far is 425, including 29 deaths on Thursday. The pandemic continues its run with over 300 cases and over 20 deaths a day for the last five days. In Ahmedabad, 275 cases and 23 deaths were reported.

## Eight die of infection in Madhya Pradesh

BHOPAL  
Eight persons died of COVID-19 in Madhya Pradesh on Thursday while undergoing treatment. The death toll climbed to 193, said the Directorate of Health Services. Two persons died in Indore, Bhopal and Ujjain each and one in Jabalpur and Khargone each. The case fatality rate has surged to 5.9%.

## 4 States want U.P. labourers to stay

As economic activity resumes, CMs assure Yogi that workers will be taken care of

NISTULA HEBBAR  
NEW DELHI

Uttar Pradesh was the first State to announce plans to bring back migrant workers from other States by buses and other means as the lockdown took effect in late March. Now, the Punjab, Karnataka, Haryana and Gujarat Chief Ministers have dialled their U.P. counterpart Yogi Adityanath to prevent the flight of workers and the grounding of economic activity.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, Mr. Adityanath received calls from the four Chief Ministers, assuring him that migrant workers from his State needn't leave and would be taken care of as a graded exit from the lockdown looms. While the Chief Ministers are worried that economic revival in their States post lockdown would be hampered as more



**Crucial link:** A migrant worker and his family leaving for Uttar Pradesh from Mohali in Punjab on Thursday. ■ AKHILESH KUMAR

labourers left, Mr. Adityanath had, a month ago, put in place some systems to change the status quo in Uttar Pradesh.

## Job creation

"More than a month ago, Yogi set up a committee with

Agriculture Produce Commissioner Alok Sinha and representation from the Rural Development, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), Labour and Panchayati Raj Departments. As MSME Minister, I was told that the mandate of the com-

mittee was to explore ways to ramp up employment opportunities to those returning. The goal we have been given is around 15 lakh jobs, with a target of five lakh jobs for my department alone," said Siddharth Nath Singh, Minister for MSME.

It was three weeks after the setting up of the committee that Mr. Adityanath declared he would coordinate with other States to bring migrant workers back. Till date, 6.5 lakh migrants have returned.

"In those three weeks, we have worked hard to ramp up banking proposals. I held three meetings with banks and we have cleared more than 20,000 loan proposals for tiny businesses [which can employ 4 people, excluding the owner] pending since before the pandemic hit. This credit flow will kick in once the lockdown is lifted," he said.

Five deaths were reported

## Maharashtra breaches 17,000 mark; 1,216 new cases

With 43 fatalities, the State's death toll increases to 694

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
PUNE

A staggering 1,216 new COVID-19 cases were reported from Maharashtra on Thursday as the State breached the 17,000-case mark to reach 17,974. A record single-day surge of 43 fatalities saw the State's death toll soar to 694.

As per the State Health Department, 26 of the fatalities were from Mumbai city (including that of a Mumbai resident who died in Sindhudurg district in the Konkan, and two other residents each hailing from Bihar and Manipur respectively) to take the city's death toll to 437 till date, while seven deaths were reported from Pune district to take the cumulative fatalities there to 129.



**Keeping distance:** Persons maintaining physical distance while collecting relief materials in Dharavi. ■ PRASHANT NAKWANI

from Vasai-Virar in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) to take the area's toll to nine, while two deaths were reported from Solapur district to take its cumulative toll to 10, one from Akola city as the district's toll surged to 13, while one death each was reported from Palghar and Aurangabad. This was Palghar's second reported

fatality while Aurangabad's too has now risen to 13.

"About 67% of deaths reported on Thursday had high-risk co-morbidities such as diabetes, hypertension and heart disease," said State Surveillance Officer Pradeep Awate. As many as 207 were discharged, taking the cumulative discharged till date to 3,301.

## Construction of Rath Yatra chariots allowed

Ensure social distancing norms: govt.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has allowed the construction of chariots for the annual Rath Yatra at Jagannath Puri in Odisha.

In a letter to the Chief Secretary of Odisha, who had sought clarification from the Ministry in the wake of the ongoing lockdown, the Home Ministry said that no religious congregation should be permitted as it was a workplace and not a public place that was accessible to all.

The Home Ministry said that the complete segregation of the construction site should be ensured and so-



A view of the Jagannath temple in Puri, Odisha.

cial distancing norms followed. "The decision regarding the holding of the Rath Yatra is to be taken by State government, keeping in view the conditions prevailing at that time," the Ministry said.

The Rath Yatra is expected to be held on June 23.

## Factory working hours increased in M.P.

Chief Minister announces sweeping reforms to labour laws; hours increased from eight to 12

STAFF REPORTER  
BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh on Thursday allowed employers to increase working hours in factories by four hours, from eight to 12. It has also allowed up to 72 hours a week in overtime.

"The increased working hours are applicable only if employees are willing to work. And they must be paid for overtime," Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said while announcing the changes to labour laws.

Newly opened industrial units can organise third-party inspections. They will be exempted from the requirement of keeping registers and inspections. Industries

can change shifts at their convenience.

New industries will be exempted from all Sections of the Factories Act, 1948, except for Sections 6, 7, 8, 21-41 (H), 59, 67, 68, 79, 88 and 112. "We have relaxed the Sections for three months and proposed to the Centre to extend the relaxation for 1,000 days," Mr. Chouhan said during a live video address from Bhopal.

**Exemption for new units**  
The new units will be exempted from the entire Section in the Act on 'right of workers' that empowers workers to obtain details of their health and safety at work. Further, the employer

workers and allowing for advance payments will not apply to new units.

Mr. Chouhan said the aim was to generate employment opportunities, encourage industrial activities, bring in investments, protect the rights of workers, bring about transparency in the administrative procedures, re-rail industries hit by COVID-19 and convert the challenges of a distressed economy into opportunities.

"Many firms across the world want to relocate now. And we want to invite them here. The changes, with workers' rights kept in mind, became necessary as investors were stuck in a web of laws and red-tapism," Mr. Chouhan said.

is not bound to provide to workers ventilation, lighting, toilets, sitting facilities, first aid boxes, protective equipment, canteens, crèches, weekly holidays and interval of rest.

Further, maintenance of a register of adult and child

## Venkaiah, Birla look into 'virtual' panel meets

Rajya Sabha, Lok Sabha Secretaries-General asked to explore the feasibility

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Rajya Sabha Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla have directed the Secretaries-General of both the Houses to explore the feasibility of holding "virtual" meetings of the standing committees, following a growing demand from various committee chairpersons and members.

The decision was taken on Thursday after the two presiding officers met at Mr. Naidu's residence. With a prolonged lockdown and all domestic flights shut down, the two, as per a statement from the Rajya Sabha Secretariat, felt that conventional meetings of the committees

might not be possible in the near future and there was need to enable alternative means.

The budget session of Parliament abruptly ended on March 23 and there had been no meetings of parliamentary panels since then.

**Confidentiality clause**  
So far, both the Secretaries-General had maintained that committee meetings can't be held via videoconferences since it violates the confidentiality clause.

"The government reveals crucial information at these meetings. How can anyone ensure that the member at the other end of the video call is alone and no one else is sitting in the meeting other

than him or her," a Lok Sabha official said.

The Secretaries-General have been asked to examine in detail the pros and cons of holding such meetings by videoconference by taking into consideration the present Rules of Business, the practices and experiences of various countries in respect of such virtual meetings and the time required to enable secure technology platforms required for such mode of meetings.

"The report of the two top officials of Parliament will form the basis for a considered decision by both the Presiding Officers in the matter," a press note said.

Chairman of the IT committee Shashi Tharoor and

Chairman of the committee on Home Affairs Anand Sharma had written to Mr. Birla and Mr. Naidu seeking permission to hold meetings, but were denied. After this, Chairman of the committee on Labour B. Mahtab wrote to Mr. Birla, urging him to reconsider his decision citing extensive use of videoconferencing for parliamentary work in many nations.

Many other MPs, too, had flagged the issue. Congress MP Manish Tewari, who is a member of the standing committee on Finance, had written to panel chairman Jayant Sinha, urging him to arrange for a meeting since the pandemic has worsened the already precarious economic situation.

## \$40 charge for sea evacuation by Navy

It will be collected from Indians embarking on ships from the Maldives



Preparations under way on INS Jalashwa to repatriate Indians from the Maldives on Thursday. ■ PTI

This is the first of the two ships sent to the Maldives under Operation Samudra Setu launched by the Navy for the evacuation of Indians stranded due to the pandemic. INS Magar, the second ship, is scheduled to reach the Maldives on May 10.

Defence sources and MEA officials had confirmed that sorties on naval ships and Air Force aircraft would be on payment basis and that would be determined by the Ministry of External Affairs in consultation with the Department of Military Affairs.

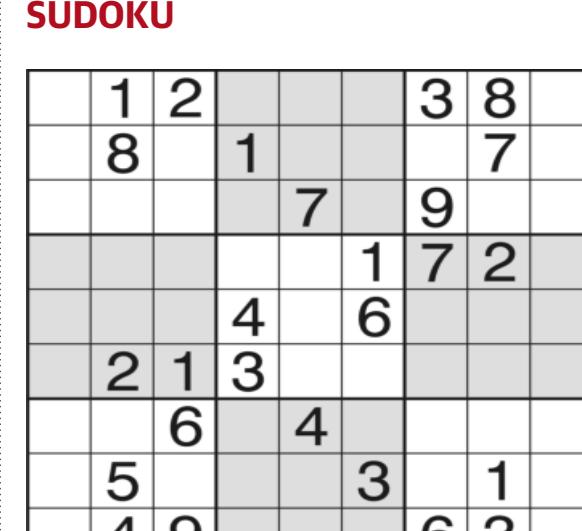
On the precautions to be followed on board, the Navy said, "The ship will be zoned to prevent intermingling of the crew with the evacuees."

INS Jalashwa, the Navy's Landing Platform Dock (LPD), has a capacity to generate 3MW of electrical power, 60,000 gallons (212 tonnes) of fresh water a day and has extensive medical facilities. The ship has been provided relief and COVID-19 protection material, as well as medical and administrative support staff, the Navy added.

INS Shardul and INS Airavat are heading to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for evacuation and are in addition to the civilian aircraft being sent.

However, official sources said modalities at the port of entry at the UAE are still being finalised and should be in place over the weekend.

## SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Solution to puzzle 12929

C	A	S	T	I	N	G	V	O	T
C	R	K	N	L	A	B	B		
U	S	A	T	H	I	G	H	B	O
D	N	D	R	B	U	N	D		
G	E	T	A	G	A	B	L	I	M
E	I	D	Y	E	S	U			
F	L				A	N			
P	O	N	D	E	R	R			
A	N	D	R	A	C	I			
L	A	I	R	W	O	R			

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

## FAITH

She made Him popular!

Lord Narayana is known for His patience. And this is seen in the story of Brghu's visit to His abode. Brghu had had a lukewarm welcome from Brahma and Siva. So, Brghu was in a rage when he arrived to meet Lord Narayana. Finding the Lord relaxing on His snake bed, and apparently unaware of the sage's arrival, Brghu kicked the Lord on His chest. But the Lord did not punish the sage. Instead, He nursed Brghu's foot, wondering if it had been hurt by the kick.

The

# Air India's website poses a major hurdle

Bookings interrupted by crashes, unresponsive buttons

JAGRITI CHANDRA  
NEW DELHI

Many Indians and foreign citizens planning to fly out in one of the special flights arranged by the government are fighting against all odds to book a ticket, which include an inefficient and snag-prone Air India website. Many have stormed the airline's timeline on Twitter to complain about incomplete transactions, unresponsive buttons, website crashes and "misleading information" on visa norms.

"The website is unstable. It crashed last evening when I was booking a ticket to Newark. In this chaos, most of the seats were already booked," said Shyamal Subramanyam, a U.S.-based scientist planning to travel from Pune.

"The website has contradictory information and tra-



vel advisories. I know their advisory for U.S. travellers, which says only U.S. citizens and holders of permanent residency will be allowed, is not a requirement laid down by the U.S. government. It also contradicts the Home Ministry order which allows Indians with a visa valid for a year," said another traveller planning to go to Newark.

When these questions were posed to an Air India official, he replied, "The website is a non-issue. We are dealing with a mammoth logistical issue. In any website, the coding is such that a sudden spurt in traffic will lead to problems in the be-

ginning but this stabilises over a period of time."

Sanchit Vir Gogia, chief analyst & CEO, Greyhound Research, said, "Typically, airlines do demand mapping over a few [financial] quarters and a few months and then do the server sizing and the website works fine. But during an unplanned traffic surge, there are problems. This happens often but it doesn't justify that their website was crashing. All it requires is to move the surge to a public cloud."

What is missing is an efficient interface, especially at a time thousands of passengers are under distress. "A website which is frequently inaccessible, difficult to navigate, or poorly designed, inevitably detracts from the airlines' image," IndiGo's Chief Commercial Officer Willy Boultre said.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Two flights returned to India on Thursday with 363 passengers, including nine infants, on board Air India Express flights from Abu Dhabi to Kochi and from Dubai to Kozhikode. A flight from New Delhi departed for Singapore at 11.15 p.m. to bring back stranded Indians. The government has decided to allow foreign nationals and Indian citizens to book a ticket on outbound flights to Singapore, the U.K. and certain destinations in the U.S.

But the government's standard operating protocols have only thrown more questions, some of which have been answered below based on information from government officials.

How can passengers travel to an airport located in a different city or State to catch a flight?

After being flooded with qu-

eries, the Ministry of Civil Aviation clarified on Wednesday, "as per MHA guidelines, except in containment zones, movement on roads [with seat restrictions] is duly permitted" to travel to reach an airport in a different city. Passengers are being helped by the District Commissioner to procure e-passes.

Can passengers book a transit flight? For instance, can a traveller wishing to travel to Canada book Air India's flight to London and then book another airline for the onward journey as there are no flights announced by the government yet?

Air India is operating only "point to point flights as of now", said a senior airline official.

Passengers on outbound flights are allowed only if the destination country permits travellers from another

country to enter. Therefore, while Air India is flying to 12 countries, only flights destined for Singapore, U.K. and Chicago, Newark, San Francisco and Washington in the U.S. will ferry passengers from India.

It is expected that there will be flights to Canada in subsequent phases and the Indian government is pursuing the matter with Canadian authorities.

## EXPLAINER

Are H1B and H4 visa holders allowed to board flights to the U.S.? The Air India website says only Permanent Residency visa holders and U.S. citizens are allowed, but this

information is different from the MHA order that requires a person to have a visa valid for a year or a Green Card or OCI Card. It is also not clear from the MHA order whether a visa needs to be valid for a year

process of identifying these facilities, those like Delhi have issued an order saying that these will be a paid service such as hotels. The Delhi government has also asked all its District Magistrates to ready these facilities under their jurisdiction. A list of these hotels is yet to be released.

What are the criteria for selecting who gets to board one of the flights returning stranded citizens to India?

The order issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs on March 5 states that passengers found to be symptomatic on arrival at an Indian airport will be taken to a medical facility as per the protocol laid down by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. However, all other passengers will be sent to a quarantine facility arranged by the respective State and Union Territory governments. While many State governments are in the

death of a family member.

## U.S. pat for India's role in Afghanistan

Khalilzad meets Jaishankar, Doval

SUHASINI HAIDAR  
NEW DELHI

The U.S. recognises India's "constructive contribution" to Afghanistan, said U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad, who came to Delhi on Thursday and met with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval to brief them on progress in the peace process that has faltered in the past few weeks.

Expressing "deep concern" about the increase in violence in Afghanistan, Mr. Jaishankar and Mr. Doval made a particular mention of the need to protect "Afghan Hindus and Sikhs," and said India supported the call for a ceasefire to deal with the coronavirus pandemic.

The U.S. side recognised India's constructive contribution in economic development, reconstruction and humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. They laid importance to India's crucial and continuing role in sustainable peace, security and stability in Afghanistan," a statement issued by the Ministry of External Affairs said after the meeting, which was also attended by U.S. National Security Council Director Lisa Curtis and U.S. Ambassador to India Kenneth Juster.

### Regional talks

In Delhi, Mr. Khalilzad was due to "discuss the important role of India in a sustainable peace in Afghanistan and the region." India was not included in a UN-coordinated "G+2+1" meeting of Afghanistan, its neighbours and U.S. and Russia on April 16, an exclusion New Delhi is understood to have protested.

However, Afghan officials have hinted that they are speaking to the UN, U.S. and others about a broader "G+4" formation for regional talks on Afghanistan soon, which would include India.

The MEA declined to comment on whether Mr. Khalilzad had discussed this further.

In a reminder of India's concerns over Pakistan's role, the MEA said Mr. Jaishankar and Mr. Doval "emphasised that putting an end to terrorist safe havens and sanctuaries is necessary for enduring and sustainable peace and stability in Afghanistan".

Mr. Khalilzad is in the middle of a three-city trip to Doha, Delhi and Islamabad. "At each stop, he will urge support for an immediate reduction in violence, acceler-



Zalmay Khalilzad

erated timeline for the start of intra-Afghan negotiations, and cooperation among all sides in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic in Afghanistan," a U.S. State department release.

The trip is meant to build support for the full implementation of the U.S.-Taliban agreement, which has been derailed by differences between the Afghan government and the Taliban over the release of prisoners.

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## Management Aptitude Test can be taken at home

AI tools will be used for remote invigilation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Applicants for the Management Aptitude Test (MAT) – for MBA course admissions in more than 600 business schools across the country – can now take the test sitting at home. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown, MAT authorities have decided to introduce an internet-based test with remote proctoring through artificial intelligence-based tools this year.

"Given that social distancing will be the norm in the foreseeable future, remote proctoring of examinations and tests is the way forward, for both students and recruiters. It is secure, with AI-based live proctoring by invi-



New normal: Academic testing is increasingly being offered online. • GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

gulators and you can take it from the safety of your home any time," says Rekha Sethi, director-general of the All India Management Association, which conducts the examination.

The MAT was approved by the Human Resource Development Ministry as a national-level standardised test in 2003, and is conducted four times a year in about 60

cities in February, May, September and December. Although not as prestigious as the Common Admission Test (CAT) developed and used for admission into the elite Indian Institutes of Management, MAT scores are used as input for the admission process in at least 600 B-schools. Approximately one lakh candidates appear for the test each year.

So far, candidates have had two options: to write a paper-based or computer-based test. The AIMA is now adding the option of an Internet-based "anytime-anywhere" test as well.

Candidates can choose to appear for the test from within their own homes if they have a computer with a webcam and internet connectivity which meets certain technical specifications.

Invigilation will be done remotely using artificial intelligence-based tools which have been tested in similar international tests.

Candidates found to be violating pre-specified behavioural norms will first be warned, and then disqualified if they repeat the offence.

AIMA says it is scheduling a series of mock tests to allow candidates to familiarise themselves with this new mode of testing.

## JEE-Advanced to be conducted on August 23

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

NIT at Tiruchirappalli and six top Central universities.

The modifications announced on Thursday will allow other NITs to join the scheme if they are among the top 25 institutions under the National Institute Ranking Framework (NIRF). It will also open the doors for lateral entry into the programme for students who have already completed one or two years in a PhD programme at these institutions.

Students who have completed their pre-doctoral studies at a non-PMRF institution earlier required a GATE score of 750 in the relevant subject. Now, a GATE score of 650 or above will be considered sufficient.

## Zomato plans to enter alcohol delivery

REUTERS  
NEW DELHI

Food delivery company Zomato aims to branch out into delivering alcohol, according to a document seen by Reuters, as it seeks to cash in on high demand for liquor during the lockdown.

Alcohol stores, closed nationwide on March 25, were allowed to reopen this week,

generating queues of hundreds of people outside some outlets in some cities and leading to baton charges by police to enforce social distancing protocols.

**No provision now**  
There is currently no legal provision for home deliveries of alcohol in India, something that industry body

International Spirits and Wines Association of India (ISWAI) is lobbying to change in conjunction with Zomato and others.

"We believe that a technology-enabled home delivery based solution can promote responsible consumption of alcohol," Mohit Gupta, Zomato's CEO for food delivery, wrote in a

business proposal to ISWAI. Zomato would target "areas that are relatively less affected by COVID-19," Mr. Gupta wrote. ISWAI's executive chairman Amrit Kiran Singh said States should allow alcohol deliveries to help boost State revenues hit by the lockdown.

Zomato did not respond to a request for comment.

## IAF's Mi-17 helicopter force-lands in Sikkim

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

A Mi-17 helicopter of the Indian Air Force (IAF), on a routine air maintenance sortie from Chhatra to Mukutang in Sikkim, made a forced landing on Thursday morning.

All six personnel – four IAF crew and two Army personnel on board – were safe and one sustained an injury, the IAF said.

The helicopter got airborne at 6.45 a.m. and en route, it force-landed 10 nautical miles short of the designated helipad due to bad weather, the IAF said.

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No. 03 /OSMC/HR/2020 Date: 07.05.2020	
<b>Advertisement for recruitment (Revised Dateline)</b>	
In view of the lockdown due to COVID 19 situation and in pursuance of Odisha State Medical Corporation Ltd. (OSMCL) advertisement no. 02/OSMCL/HR/2020, dated 07.03.2020 published for the posts of Sr.Manager-IT, Biomedical Engineer and Logistics Assistant and Office Order No.4131, dated 06.04.2020, the last date of submission of online application form is further extended to 31.05.2020, 11:59 PM and the last date for receipt of applications and documents by speed post / registered post is further extended to 12.06.2020, 5:30 PM. Applications received by Speed Post / Registered Post after 12.06.2020, 5:30 PM for the aforesaid post will be rejected.	
Sd/- Managing Director Odisha State Medical Corporation Ltd. Regd. Office: Odisha State Medical Corporation Ltd, In front of Ram Mandir, Convent Square, Bhubaneswar-751007, Odisha OIPR-1012/11/0005/2021	

Government of Odisha Office of the Superintending Engineer, Northern Circle, Rural Works, Angul.						
e-Procurement Notice for Bridge work in Odisha Bid Identification No. Bridge Online - AGL-01/2020-21						
No. 643 // Dt. 02.05.2020 //						
1. Name of the Work : Bridge Works 2. Total No. of Work : 01 No. 3. Estimated Cost : Rs.358.00 Lakhs 4. Class of Contractor : 'A' & Special Class 5. Period of Completion : 15 (Fifteen) Calendar Months 6. Other details :						
Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of Tender On-line for bidding		Last Date & Time of seeking Tender Clarification	Date & Time of Opening of Tender	
		From	To		Technical Bid	Financial Bid
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Superintending Engineer, Northern Circle Rural Works, Angul.	Bridge Online AGL-01 / 2020-21	08.05.20 at 10.00 A.M.	26.05.20 up to 5.00 P.M.	18.05.20 to 1.00 P.M.	27.05.20 at 10.00 A.M.	29.05.20 at 10.00 A.M.
(1) For detailed Notice inviting Tenders, Please visit to the website <a href="http://www.tendersorissa.gov.in">www.tendersorissa.gov.in</a>						
Sd/- Superintending Engineer, N.C., Rural Works, Angul OIPR-25049/11/0001/2021						

## CSIR contributes to genome database

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has submitted as many as 53 genome sequences of the novel coronavirus to a global genome database, a move that may help in better understanding the virus and developing a vaccine.

The country's premier research and development organisation is also planning to submit the data of another 450 genome sequences of the virus by May 15, its Director-General Shekhar Mande said.

The CSIR's Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (IGIB), Delhi, the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad, and the Institute of Microbial Technology, Chandigarh, are currently sequencing the genomes of the novel coronavirus. Other CSIR institutes are also expected to join the process.

SOUTHERN RAILWAY				
E-Tender Notice No. SA/E/2020-21/W/ Dated 07.05.2020				
The Divisional Railway Manager/Electrical/Salem Division, Salem - 5 for and on behalf of the President of India invited E-Tender for the under mentioned work. Online bids only will be accepted. For detailed NIT, qualification criteria, bidding document, tender submission etc can be viewed/downloaded from website portal <a href="http://www.irops.gov.in">www.irops.gov.in</a> . The Cost of Tender and EMD shall be made in online gateway Payment only.				
Item No. Name of the work				
1.	SA/E/2020-21/W1: Salem division : Improvements to LT Earthing arrangement at Various locations over SSE/E/Salem and SSE/E/Erode Jurisdictions.			
2.	SA/E/2020-21/W2: Salem division : Hiring of Road Transport vehicle of 5 tonne capacity for the use of Senior Section Engineer/Electrical/Salem for the period of Two years.			
Item No.	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1.	35,63,750			

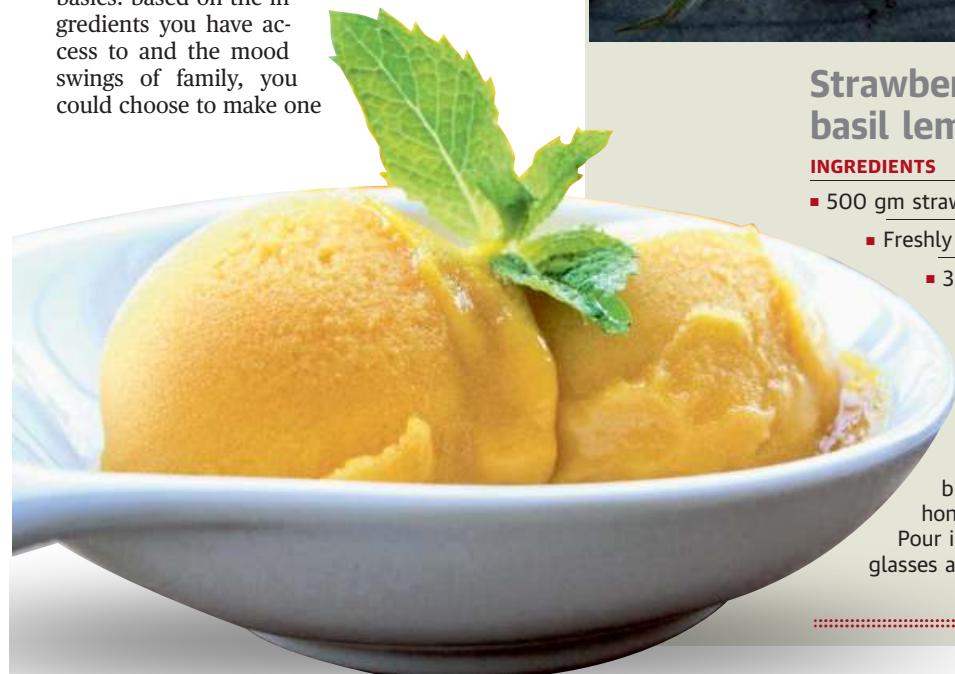
Homemade ice cream is always fun, but rarely as luscious as the scoops from our favourite, much-missed parlours and brands. Professionals explain the gap and how to bridge it

# Freshly frozen

MEGHNA MAJUMDAR AND PRABALIKA BORAH

Sudheer Grover is a busy man this week. With the toughest among the restrictions of the nationwide COVID-19 lockdown being lifted, his eight-year-old paleta brand Frugurpop is back in the game. "We are stocking up at our Nature's Basket outlets," he manages to say over a hurried phone call from Mumbai.

What is a paleta, you ask? It is a Mexican, fresh-fruit-only version of a popsicle: something that Furgurpop has been whetting appetites for both in Mumbai and Gurugram. Most of their flavours are customised, so who better to advise on the joys of simple, creative ice creams? But before we dive in, let us cover our basics: based on the ingredients you have access to and the mood swings of family, you could choose to make one



Karnataka's *naati* pineapples cannot be exported this year. As a Bengaluru NGO and a cooperative try to salvage tons of it, recipes fly thick and fast in one particular neighbourhood



# To the rescue of pineapples

SUVASINI SRIDHARAN

There is a surfeit of pineapples in Bengaluru's Indiranagar. Resident WhatsApp groups are abuzz with questions, all pineapple-related: What are you making? Has anyone tried making pineapple *pakoda*? Do you have a recipe for pineapple *gojju*?

It all started when a resident read an article on pineapple farmers in Karnataka. Their stock, normally exported, was stuck during the lockdown. To help them out, an NGO, Vande Bharatam, tied up with Horticultural Producers' Cooperative Marketing and Processing Society (HOPCOMS) to get the pineapples to people's doorsteps.

Other residents showed interest in helping out, but most of the produce was being sent to apartment complexes and gated communities, where more sales were likely. But that did not stop Sneha Nandihal of I Change Indiranagar, a federation of Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) in Indiranagar, from reaching out to the folks at HOPCOMS.

Between its now-closed stores and restaurants, Indiranagar predominantly comprises independent homes. "We asked HOPCOMS to organise vans of pineapples to sell in the area," Sneha said. "We weren't expecting to sell too many."

Various WhatsApp groups were informed, and I Change Indiranagar drew up a schedule, coordinating with the van drivers to cover as much area as possible. "We borrowed mega-

phones from the police," said Sneha. "Resident volunteers followed the van, urging people to buy." These volunteers also made sure physical distancing was strictly followed.

Each van contained 500 pineapples, and Sneha and team hoped to sell at least a couple of vans' worth. "We ended up selling 10 vans of pineapples," she said. "That's nearly 10 tons!"

The pineapples are not the regular sweet variety. They are a local *naati* variety: less sweet, shorter shelf life, but very nutritious. Many did not know what to do with them but bought them anyway, wanting to show support.

That is when Lata Amashi, another resident, stepped forward. A former banker who now serves the disadvantaged and is an active member of Rotary Bangalore Indiranagar, she has been busy organising relief material during the COVID-19 outbreak. But she found the time to write down over 30 recipes featuring pineapple as the star ingredient.

A passionate cook, Lata's recipes included everything from pineapple chutney and coleslaw to *rasam* and jams. The recipes were scanned and forwarded to all the neighbourhood WhatsApp groups. There is a Part 2 of pineapple recipes in the offing too.

Vande Bharatam and HOPCOMS are so pleased with the response that they are considering selling *naati* pineapples here next year. As Sneha said, "It's been wonderful and heartening to see how the neighbourhood rose to the occasion to help our farmers."



## Strawberry and basil lemonade popsicle

### INGREDIENTS

- 500 gm strawberries
- Freshly squeezed juice of 5 lemons
- 3 tbsp honey
- Finely chopped basil leaves
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- A pinch of salt

### METHOD

Blend the strawberry and lemon juice in a blender. Remove from blender and stir in the honey, chopped basil leaves, olive oil and salt. Pour into popsicle moulds or in small steel/plastic glasses and freeze for eight hours.

*Recipe by Sudheer Grover*

of the following. A full-fledged ice cream based heavily on cream, complete with stabilisers (like egg yolk) to reduce air bubbles and crystallisation. Silkier, denser gelatos that, as a rule, have far more whole milk than cream and are usually eggless. Light and dairy-free sorbets that are essentially just fruit puree and sugar, blended and frozen just right. Or, popsicles that can be made out of anything.

### Dream it up

When we say anything, we mean literally anything. "You can do something with sweet fruit, or you can experiment. We have also done things like frozen soup on a stick," he says. There are, however, some broad rules he prefers you keep in mind.

"When you are picking your fruit, make sure they are on the ripe side. They should be overripe, basically, so they are sweet enough that you do not need to add any more to it. The sweetness should come from the fruit itself."

His second tip is, "Once you make your mix, it should be frozen immediately. Home freezers usually take about eight to nine hours to freeze it properly. So if you don't put it in quickly, it can lose its nutritious value, or sometimes even its flavour. In commercial terms, we say the quicker the freezing process, the higher the shelf life and the tastier the product."

There is only so much you and I can do, in the absence of industrial-grade equipment. But beyond these tips, Sudheer encourages you to mix and match, and play with flavours. Not that we need encouraging, if the popularity of their flavours like sugarcane mint chia, sugarcane cotton candy, and floral surprise, including rose and jasmine are anything to go by.

Another experimental addition to Indian palates, is avocado. Just ask Sharath Reddy Gattu, founder and CEO of Hyderabad-based Kiaro farms, who introduced avocado gelato this season. While he is aware of the popularity of avocado gelato in Europe and America, he wasn't sure how many days it would take him to sell it here. "It was sold in two days. Besides being pleased, I also realised there is a growing number of people who look for healthy alternatives. Avocados are perfect for gelatos for its creamy texture. Its natural fats provide the body that gelatos need. I am also doing a passion fruit and apple sorbet."

With so many fruits and flavours to pick from, what will you make first?

## HORS D'OEUVRÉS



### A heat-resistant chocolate bar

Confectionery giant Mars (yes, the one behind Mars bars) does not seem to have stopped innovating and experimenting, even in these tough times. Earlier this week, the firm patented a heat-resistant chocolate, designed not to melt even at 105°C. Cocoa butter – one of the main ingredients involved in making chocolate – melts at around 37°C. So, researchers at Mars have been using organic sugar sweeteners known as polyols in a bid to make more heat-resistant chocolate. Polyols have a much higher melting point than cocoa butter, with some compounds thought to be able to withstand heat of up to 105°C. Cadbury and Nestle had also filed patents for heat-resistant chocolate years ago, but both companies are yet to bring the products to market.



### Virtual cook-off

Culinary Arts Academy Switzerland hosts a virtual culinary competition, Cook 'N' Battle. Open for anyone over the age of 16, who is interested in pursuing further studies in culinary arts in Switzerland, it will test the creativity of future culinary leaders and encourage sustainability by highlighting local ingredients. To enter, participants are to send in a five-minute video in which they introduce themselves and present their creation. All entries, that can be sent till May 24, will be reviewed by an acclaimed jury, including Anton Mosimann, Pooja Dhingra and Vladimir Mukhin. Seven people will be selected for the final round to be held on June 6. Connected online via Zoom, they will cook in their home kitchen and present their dish virtually to a jury of professional chefs. The winner will be featured in the next Culinary Arts Academy Switzerland video and also stands to win a scholarship. For details, visit [www.cooknbattle.com](http://www.cooknbattle.com).

■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK AND K PICHUMANI

Download By - Chhaya  
Source-website



## Pineapple panna

### INGREDIENTS

- 4 pineapples
- ½ teaspoon black pepper powder
- ½ teaspoon roasted cumin powder
- ½ teaspoon black salt
- ¼ cup sugar
- Juice of one medium-size lemon
- Mint leaves minced, one tablespoon

### METHOD

Peel the pineapple and cut into pieces and roast in a pan till it is cooked well. Juice the pineapple, add all dry ingredients to it. Mix well and then add lemon juice and salt. Serve the juice in a glass by adding a pinch of cumin powder and some mint leaves. Serve chilled.

*Recipe by Lata Amashi*



## Tangy and spicy pineapple chutney

### INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups pineapple cubes
- 1 teaspoon oil
- 1 cardamom
- 1-inch piece of cinnamon
- 2 sprigs of curry leaves
- ½ teaspoon turmeric powder
- 1 teaspoon red chilli flakes
- 1 teaspoon chilli powder
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- ¼ cup water
- Salt to taste

### METHOD

Heat oil in a bottom-heavy pan, and when hot add cardamom, cinnamon and curry leaves and allow to crackle. Add turmeric, chilli powder, red chilli flakes, sugar and water. Add salt and allow to cook for a minute. Then add the pineapple chunks, simmer and cook on slow flame for 8 to 10 minutes. Switch off the stove and let it cool. Then store in a glass jar.

*Recipe by Lata Amashi*

A ND-NDE



# Finding inner piece

PRIYADARSHINI PAITANDY

DJ Ma Faiza has been sitting at her table for eight hours today, piecing together a puzzle. This is day five. She has been spending a few hours every day over the past four days, trying to complete this 1,000 piece jigsaw. At 11 p.m., she is finally done. With a triumphant smile and an aching back, she gets up and takes a picture of the completed work, shimmering with glitter.

"It took me 16 hours on the whole to get this done," says the Pune-based DJ, adding, that she was occasionally helped by her mother and friend. "Each piece that fits gives one the sense of finding a treasure. While working on it, I try not to look at the box for help. In the beginning, it took a while but I finished the last half of the puzzle rapidly," she explains.

A puzzle enthusiast, Ma Faiza has not had time for her hobby for the past 30 years, given her touring schedule: till the ongoing lockdown to tackle COVID-19 began. "Solving this has reinvigorated my joy for it. Maybe it comes for my love for fitting things and sorting them. I love arranging and segregating according to colour," she laughs.

Once the stores open up, she wants to get herself a 2,500 piece puzzle. The bigger the challenge, the more Ma Faiza thrives on the thrill of fixing it.

She is not the only one. Social media is suddenly brimming with pictures of puzzles in various stages. Some of the completed ones truly look like works of art. No wonder, a lot of avid puzzlers choose to frame their completed work and put it on display.

The new crop of puzzles are complex and sophisticated and some even come in non traditional shapes. While you can get pieces that come together to create the Burj Khalifa, Avengers, Harry Potter or famous art works, the tougher ones are just the gradient of one colour, instead of images.

"The quality has improved over the years and pieces stick better. Images too are better and of high resolution," says C Senthilnathan, who along with his wife Subhata R, launched Chennai-



Keeping it together (Clockwise from top) The Forbidden Fruit puzzle; Piecework Puzzles founders Rachel and Jena; Ma Faiza's finished work; two enthusiasts on a puzzle; and an example of how intricate jigsaws are these days ■ PIEWORK, UNTANGLE AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



## A PUZZLING HOBBY

It is believed that jigsaw puzzles originated in the 1760s when European mapmakers pasted maps onto wood and cut them into small pieces. John Spilsbury is said to have invented the first puzzle.



based Untangle – House of Puzzles, which stocks 300 to 400 boxes of jigsaw puzzles and other such brain flexers, in February this year. At his space, a 1,500 piece puzzle of an island holds pride of place. It was done by his 62-year-old mother. "During this stay-at-home period, between my wife, four-year-old daughter and I, we have finished at least six large (600 to 1,000 piece) puzzles," he says.

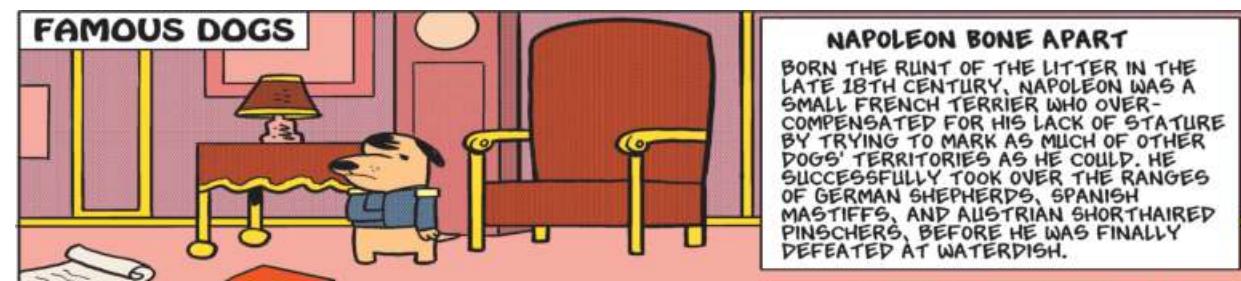
The biggest puzzles Senthilnathan has are a 6,000 piece one – that when put together reveals an image of the Sistine chapel – and a 24,000 piece that depicts the evolution of life form. "Like baking and cooking, solving puzzles has become a sought-after activity during this lockdown. In the U.S., some of the largest brands have run out of stock," he adds, stating that over the last few weeks, he has received messages from clients thanking him for the inspiration to start off on puzzles, an activity that has kept them occupied at home.

He believes that the reason for this popularity is because "people want to do something that is gadget free. It's a way of giving a workout to the brain while keeping the hands busy." It's also a mood lifter as it gives one the sense of accomplishing something, says Senthilnathan.

"They are meditation for the modern age," says U.S.-based Rachel Hochhauser who, along with Jena Wolfe, started Piecework, a line of designer puzzles, last summer. Priced between \$26-\$36 USD, these are primarily for adults. So far, their most popular product is Forbidden Fruit that features a table laden with papaya, grape fruits, kiwano melon, lemons and a cocktail glass with a paper parasol. "It's also challenging because of the monotone background. Most people solve it in about a week's time," says Rachel.

She says that the demand has skyrocketed ever since physical distancing started. "We have completely sold out," she adds. Though Piecework normally ships internationally, it had to pause for the time being owing to COVID-19.

## POOCH CAFE



## PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



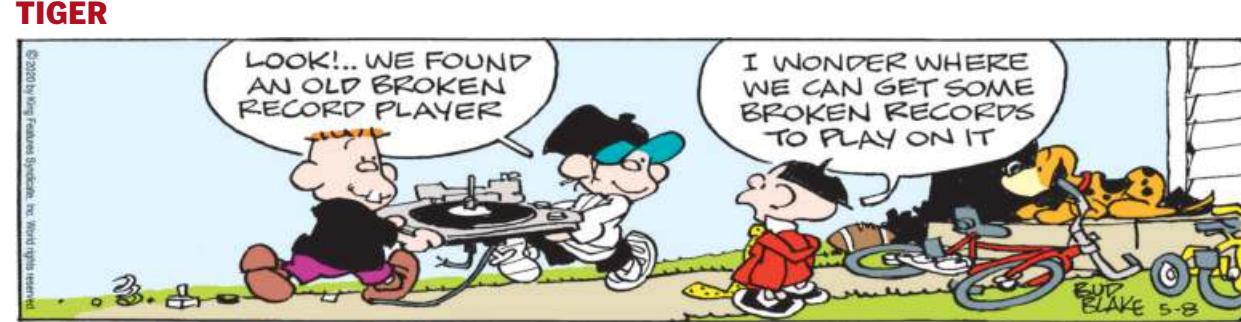
## HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



## PEANUTS



## TIGER



## CALVIN AND HOBBES



## Survival of the frugal

Survive COVID, a game launched by a Chennai NGO, challenges players to survive lockdown with fewer resources than they are used to

You would need money to see this lockdown through. But you have no savings.

### WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Walk 12 Kms to your employer's house to collect the prorated salary of Rs. 3000.

OR

Borrow 6000 on Interest of 10% from the nearest money lender.

Your turn A snapshot from the game ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

AISHWARYA UPADHYE

Imagine this: You are a domestic help with a family of four to support and you have zero savings. The Government has just announced a 21-day lockdown. Will you walk 12 kilometres to collect your salary of ₹3,000 from your employer, or borrow ₹6,000 from a lender at 10% interest? A few days into lockdown, your son suddenly complains of fever and chest pain. You have read that these are symptoms of COVID-19. Would you spend ₹4,000 on getting him tested or would you feed him home remedies?

Chennai-based NGO Yein Udaan's game 'Survive COVID' throws these questions at its players who are expected to survive 21 days with limited money. Launched on April 27, the game is gaining laurels for sensitising people on the problems of daily wagers. The founder of Yein Udaan, Vedika Agarwal, who works with low-income families, came up with the concept of the game. It was developed by XR Labs, a solutions company that works with augmented and virtual reality.

"I had tried writing blogs and posts about their problems but it did not seem to make an impact. That is when I came up with the idea of creating a game that puts the user in the shoes of a domestic help who supports her alcoholic husband, an in-law, and two sons. You are ex-

pected to survive 21 days with a few thousand rupees that you may have. You lose the game if you run out of money or your risk of contracting COVID-19 reaches 100%" explains Vedika.

Vedika who has been working closely with daily wagers learnt how the lockdown was a privilege that most poor families could not afford. "When I spoke to them I realised several of them are surviving on one meal a day. Buying masks or hand sanitisers is a luxury for them. The guidelines suggest that we wash hands for 20 seconds several times a day but there are hundreds of people who do not have access to running water. They have to use stored water for drinking, cleaning the house, and washing clothes and utensils. In such cases washing hands often is a privilege." She says the aim of the game is not just to garner funds to help these families. "It is also to sensitise people about their struggles. Having stripped off their savings, they are struggling to survive."

At the end of 21 scenarios, the game provides the users with a link through which they can donate to Yein Udaan which is organising grocery-donation drives for over 500 low-income families. They are also distributing activity books and stationery to the kids of these families.

You can play the game at <http://covid.xrlabs.cloud/que?no=22>



## Bharatanatyam goes electronic

Bharatanatyam dance opera, 'Antariksha Sanchar', which recently premiered on redbull.com, combines the Indian classical dance form with live Carnatic-electronic music and visuals from the India's first cultural adventure videogame 'Antariksha Sanchar: Transmissions in Space'. Envisioned by visual arts director Avinash Kumar (Thiruda) and electronic music producer Sri Rama Murthy (Murthovic), with Bharatanatyam exponent Jayalakshmi Eshwar, the project first opened at the Royal Opera House in Mumbai in 2018, followed by shows in Delhi and Bengaluru. And now, two of these music albums – a set of originals heard in the dance opera and remixes of these, are out on the Red Bull website. With the release of the albums, Avinash Kumar and Murthovic will be live in conversation on Red Bull India's Instagram, on Saturday and Sunday, discussing the dance opera, its inception and future.

# 'Virus attack worse than Pearl Harbor'

Trump continues to target China, says COVID-19 could have been stopped in the country of its origin

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

WASHINGTON

Donald Trump has said the COVID-19 pandemic is a worse "attack" on the U.S. than either Pearl Harbor or 9/11, taking aim once again at China, which he said should have stopped the disease in its tracks.

The President has ramped up his rhetoric against Beijing in recent weeks, as the death toll in the U.S. has continued to climb, and as he agitates to re-open the shuttered – and stuttering – economy.

While some European and Asian nations have started



**Frontline warriors:** Members of U.S. nurses union staging a protest by placing shoes, representing health workers who died fighting COVID-19, outside the White House. ■ REUTERS

easing lockdowns, experts have warned that despite the economic pain, social distancing measures remain necessary until a vaccine is developed.

Globally, the virus has infected 3.7 million people and killed more than 260,000 – a quarter of them in the U.S.

"It should have never happened," Mr. Trump said of the disease that emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan last year.

"Could have been stopped at the source. Could have been stopped in China."

"This is really the worst attack we've ever had," Mr. Trump told reporters. "This is worse than Pearl Harbor. This is worse than the World Trade Center."

The Japanese assault on the Pearl Harbor naval base in Hawaii drew the United States into Second World War.

The September 11, 2001 jihad attacks on that killed about 3,000 people and triggered two decades of war.

**'Toll set to rise'**  
So far, more than 73,000

## ELSEWHERE



**Former Iraqi intelligence chief takes over as PM**

BAGHDAD

Iraq's former spy chief was sworn in as Prime Minister by lawmakers early on Thursday after weeks of tense political negotiations as the country faces a severe economic crisis spurred by plummeting oil prices and the COVID-19 pandemic. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo welcomed Mr. al-Kadhimi's new government. ■ AP

**'U.S. military killed 132 civilians globally in 2019'**

WASHINGTON

One hundred thirty-two civilians were killed last year in U.S. global military operations, the Army said on Wednesday, a number far lower than those published by NGOs. The Department of Defense "assesses that there were approximately 132 civilians killed and approximately 91 civilians injured during 2019," the Pentagon said.

# Venezuela to try two Americans

They were captured during a failed raid; U.S. vows to bring them back home

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

CARACAS

Venezuela will try two Americans allegedly captured during a failed raid by mercenaries. President Nicolas Maduro said on Wednesday as the U.S. vowed to "use every tool available" to bring them home.

Venezuela announced on Monday that it had arrested the pair on suspicion of trying to topple Mr. Maduro in an operation supported by the U.S.-backed opposition.

"They are convicts, confessed, caught red-handed and are being judged by the republic's Attorney-General, by Venezuela's civil courts, and the process will be full of guarantees and fair," said Mr.

# Chinese envoy's meet with NCP leaders a solidarity call: Gyawali

Move seen as part of Beijing's effort to repair rift within the party

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE

NEW DELHI

The recent meetings between the Chinese Ambassador to Nepal and leading political figures of the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) were part of China's efforts to strengthen Kathmandu's fight against COVID-19, Minister for Foreign Affairs Pradeep Kumar Gyawali said on Wednesday. Mr. Gyawali conveyed Nepal is in touch with both China and India for dealing with the crisis caused by the pandemic and acknowledged support from both countries to counter the emerging humanitarian challenge.

The meetings between the Chinese Ambassador and leaders of the NCP were part of their message of solidarity to Nepal's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Nepal's Foreign Ministry usually facilitates such meetings, and it is with the



**Pradeep Kumar Gyawali**  
permission of the Foreign Ministry that diplomats of other countries are allowed to meet our leaders," said Mr. Gyawali.

### Protocols followed

He maintained that the protocols were followed when Ambassador Hou Yanqi last week met leaders such as Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda", Madhav Nepal and Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli.

The meetings were interpreted as China's attempts to repair the internal rifts in

the NCP which could have toppled Mr. Oli's government.

The meetings, which also included one between the Chinese envoy and President Bidhya Devi Bhandari, materialised in the backdrop of growing challenge to Mr. Oli from Mr. Prachanda, who had asked him to resign. Unconfirmed reports suggest that following the meetings, Mr. Prachanda agreed not to challenge Mr. Oli.

The interactions had drawn criticism as some viewed them to be an interference in the internal affairs of the country. Former Ambassador to India and Nepali Congress leader Deep Kumar Upadhyay said these meetings were beyond the realm of usual protocol. "Nepali people usually disapprove of such meetings as these are not actions covered by official protocol," said Mr. Upadhyay.

"That is incorrect," he said. "We live in a hostile world of evolving threats, and the

tary of State Mike Pompeo said the government would "use every tool that we have available to try to get them back." President Donald Trump had denied any involvement by his administration with the mission, and Washington accused Mr. Maduro of launching a "disinformation campaign". Russia hit out at Mr. Trump and described his denials as "unconvincing."

Venezuela's Attorney-General Tarek William Saab said opposition leader Juan Guaido, who is backed by the U.S. had signed a \$212 million contract with "hired mercenaries" using funds seized by the U.S. from the state oil company PDVSA. In Washington, U.S. Secre-



Venezuelan officials put on display documents of U.S. citizens, identified as Luke Denman and Airan Berry, in Caracas. ■ AFP

Mr. Maduro showed the passports of Mr. Denman and Mr. Berry on state TV. The U.S. military has confirmed they were ex-members of the security forces.

In Washington, U.S. Secre-

contracted and died of COVID-19.

"He was very ill but did not want to go to the hospital," Victoria, a Mexican nanny in New York City, said of her 69-year-old husband who had kidney problems and diabetes.

"After two weeks, when he could no longer walk or breathe, my daughter took the risk, loaded him into the car and drove him there. He died three weeks later."

### Staggering recession

Across the Atlantic in Europe, the worst-hit continent, new coronavirus cases and fatalities have seen a levelling off recently, and many nations have started easing the lockdowns.

Despite the good news on the medical front, the economic outlook remained grim as the European Union forecast a historic recession, with a staggering 7.7% contraction this year.

Governments are attempting economic revival by slowly lifting restrictions but trying to avoid a devastating second wave of infections.

Germany has unveiled plans for a return to near-normality, including sending students back to school this month and shops resuming business, but Spanish lawmakers extended a state of emergency keeping lockdown measures in place for at least two more weeks.

In Britain, the nation with the second-highest number of deaths, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said some lockdown measures could be scaled back from next week, though he warned against moving too briskly. "It would be an economic disaster for this country if we were to pursue a relaxation of these measures now in such a way as to trigger a second spike," said Mr. Johnson.

As a result, many have

# Russia tops Germany, France after record spike in infections

It now ranks fourth in the overall number of cases globally

REUTERS

MOSCOW

Russia's coronavirus cases overtook France and Germany on Thursday to become the fifth highest number in the world after a record daily rise, and Moscow's mayor said the real figure, not captured by official statistics, was much higher.

The official tally surged to 1,77,160, meaning Russia now has more registered cases than Germany or France, as the number of new cases of the novel coronavirus jumped by 11,231 in the past 24 hours.

More than half of all cases and deaths are in Moscow, the epicentre of Russia's outbreak, which on Thursday reported a record overnight increase of 6,703 new cases, bringing its official total to 92,676.

But Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said research showed the real number of cases in the Russian capital was around 3,00,000, or more than triple the official figure.



**Severe crisis:** Doctors inside an intensive care unit of a COVID-19 hospital in Moscow ■ AP

tified so many sick people is a huge plus, not a minus," Mr. Sobyanin told state TV.

Russia's official death toll, which remains far lower than in many countries – something that has been called into question by some Kremlin critics – rose to 1,625 on Thursday after 88 people died overnight, official figures showed.

Despite rising infections, he said there were some encouraging signs and that the number of people being hospitalised in Moscow in the past two weeks had stabilised.

# Surge in domestic violence: WHO

60% rise in calls by women subjected to violence in Europe

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

COPENHAGEN

Emergency services across Europe have seen a sharp rise in domestic abuse calls under sweeping lockdowns imposed across the continent, the World Health Organization's regional office said Thursday.

Billions of people are subject to some form of stay-home orders across the globe, and experts say women and children are most

vulnerable to abuse.

WHO's regional director for Europe, Hans Kluge, said countries "are reporting up to a 60% increase in emergency calls by women subjected to violence by their intimate partners in April this year, compared to last".

According to the organisation, domestic violence often increases in times of crisis, and is exacerbated due to restrictions and containment measures put in place

to limit the spread of the new coronavirus. "We have an increase in reporting from almost all countries," said Isabel Yordi, Technical Officer for Gender and Health at WHO Europe.

The UN agency for sexual and reproductive health (UNFPA) has estimated that there would be 31 million more cases of domestic violence worldwide if lockdowns continue for another six months.

# Trump vetoes Iran resolution

A rare bipartisan move sought to restrict him from going to war with Tehran

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump on Wednesday vetoed what he called a "very insulting" congressional resolution seeking to limit his war powers in Iran.

In a statement, Mr. Trump said he had used his veto because the resolution – a rare bipartisan rebuke to the President approved in March – was based on "misunderstandings of facts and law."

The measure stemmed from fears among both Mr. Trump's Republicans and Democrats that the White House was stumbling into war with the Islamic republic.

In the statement, Mr. Trump said the Congress misinterpreted his constitutional authority as being limited to "defence of the U.S. and its forces against imminent attack."

"That is incorrect," he said.

"We live in a hostile world of evolving threats, and the



**Close call:** A file photo of Iranian Navy vessels sailing near a U.S. military ship in the Persian Gulf near Kuwait. ■ AP

The assassination has inflamed tensions between the two countries.

Soleimani was widely seen as the architect of destabilising activities by Iran around the world, but Democrats and many experts condemned the decision to kill him as disproportionate and provocative.

Tehran retaliated with a strike against bases used by the U.S. military in Iraq without causing any fatalities, easing fears of a dramatic escalation.

The Trump administration claims it has put Iran back in its box. But a recent verbal escalation following an incident between US ships and Iranian speedboats in the Gulf showed that tensions remain high.

Democratic Senator Tim Kaine hit out at Mr. Trump for blocking the resolution. "I urge my colleagues to join me in voting to override his veto – Congress must vote before sending our troops into harm's way," he tweeted.

# Netanyahu secures backing to form new Israeli government

Parliament moves to end a year-long political deadlock

ASSOCIATED PRESS

JERUSALEM

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu formally received the support of a majority of lawmakers to lead a new government on Thursday, paving the way for a controversial power-sharing deal with rival-turned-partner Benny Gantz.

Venezuela's Attorney-General Tarek William Saab said opposition leader Juan Guaido, who is backed by the U.S. had signed a \$212 million contract with "hired mercenaries" using funds seized by the U.S. from the state oil company PDVSA.

Mr. Netanyahu and Mr. Gantz to share the premiership and end a year-long political deadlock.

will have two weeks to form a government.

The decision essentially ended the country's prolonged political stalemate and prevented Israel from being plunged into a fourth consecutive election in just over a year.

After battling to three inconclusive elections over the past year and with polls predicting a continued stalemate, Mr. Netanyahu and Mr. Gantz, a former military chief, announced last month they would be joining forces to steer the country through the coronavirus crisis.

Critics had challenged the deal in the Supreme Court.

# Turkish band member dies during protest

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ANKARA

A second member of a left-wing popular folk music group that is banned in Turkey has died of a hunger strike in protest of the government's crackdown on the band, the group said on Thursday on its Twitter account.

Grup Yorum said bass guitarist Ibrahim Gokcek, 41, died in a hospital in Istanbul. He was placed in intensive care after he abandoned his hunger strike two days ago. He had been fasting for 323 days prior to that.

The group's singer, 28-year-old Hemin Bozok, lost her life on April 3.

AN-NDNE

## MARKET WATCH

	07-05-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	31,443	-0.76
Brent oil	30.66	4.43

## NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	282.40	-12.25
Asian Paints	1594.30	-16.35
Axis Bank	397.35	8.50
Bajaj Auto	2406.55	-65.30
Bajaj Finserv	4673.40	-19.50
Bajaj Finance	2060.55	-45.70
Bharti Airtel	528.05	-17.95
BPCL	329.55	-14.25
Britannia Ind	2915.35	-72.35
Cipla	589.55	-2.20
Coal India	130.80	-2.95
Dr Reddys Lab	3837.65	-14.85
Eicher Motors	14010.50	150.55
GAIL (India)	91.50	-3.20
Grasim Ind	485.20	2.80
HCL Tech.	511.75	-7.35
HDFC	1703.90	-28.25
HDFC Bank	925.00	-21.40
Hero MotoCorp	2000.30	-26.45
Hindalco	117.65	-0.95
Hind Unilever	1992.05	-18.15
ICICI Bank	336.75	-4.65
IndusInd Bank	454.35	28.85
Bharti Infratel	172.80	11.90
Infosys	664.95	-0.95
Indian Oil Corp	75.75	-0.80
ITC	161.00	-2.90
JSW Steel	172.20	6.40
Kotak Bank	1199.80	-46.15
L&T	822.85	-14.45
M&M	400.65	13.50
Maruti Suzuki	4749.30	-39.95
Nestle India Ltd.	17142.45	-166.85
NTPC	90.45	-4.25
ONGC	75.60	-3.65
PowerGrid Corp	161.75	-3.65
Reliance Ind	1506.95	46.20
State Bank	170.75	-0.35
Shree Cement	18432.40	-30.50
Sun Pharma	452.20	-2.20
Tata Motors	82.50	-0.70
Tata Steel	275.85	-1.90
TCS	1891.65	-11.95
Tech Mahindra	516.35	9.50
Titan	849.10	-27.35
UltraTech Cement	3252.85	-71.55
UPL	368.40	-10.60
Vedanta	78.55	-0.90
Wipro	184.10	-2.95
Zee Entertainment	147.35	-5.30

## IN BRIEF

## CARE downgrades Ashok Leyland bank facilities

CHENNAI

CARE Ratings has downgraded commercial truckmaker Ashok Leyland Ltd's (ALL) bank facilities totalling to ₹4,200 crore, and debentures from AA plus to AA with a negative outlook due to the uncertainty associated with growth demand in the commercial vehicles sector in FY21 due to COVID-19. Earlier, CARE had revised the rating outlook assigned to the bank facilities and instruments of ALL on March 24, 2020, from 'stable' to 'negative'.

# Volatile markets hit equity MF inflows

Investors pump in ₹81,600 cr. in schemes in 2019-20, a 27% drop from ₹1.2 lakh cr. in preceding fiscal

## PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI Investors pumped in ₹81,600 crore in equity-oriented mutual fund (MF) schemes in 2019-20, registering a decline of 27% from ₹1.2 lakh crore inflow in the preceding fiscal.

However, this was the sixth successive year of net inflows in equity mutual funds, according to data by the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI).

## Break from investment

The flows into equity funds in the last fiscal were lower than the flows in 2018-19 primarily due to the equity markets displaying volatility, which made some investors take a break from making fresh equity investments. According to the data, net inflows into equity funds,



Fangs of fear: The markets witnessed extreme volatility amid concerns over the impact of COVID-19. ■ EMMANUEL YOGINI

which also include equity-linked saving schemes (ELSS), were ₹81,600 crore in the last fiscal, as against ₹11,858 crore in 2018-19.

Net inflows in these funds

were ₹1,71,069 crore in 2017-18, ₹70,367 crore in 2016-17, ₹74,024 crore in 2015-16, and ₹71,029 crore in 2014-15.

However, they had witnessed a net outflow of

₹2,269 crore in 2013-14. Of the total inflow in the latest fiscal, investors poured ₹1,485 crore in March, which was the highest level in 11 months.

This comes even as the broader market witnessed extreme volatility amid concerns over the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Himanshu Srivastava, senior analyst-manager research at Morningstar India, said extreme volatility in the stock markets on the back of

the pandemic did not deter investors from investing into equity funds in February and March.

The assets under management (AUM) of equity MFs dropped to ₹6.03 lakh crore at the end of March 2020 as against ₹7.73 lakh crore in March 2019.

However, SIP (systematic investment plan) contribution to the industry surged to over ₹1 lakh crore from ₹92,693 cr. in 2018-19.

₹2,269 crore in 2013-14.

Of the total inflow in the latest fiscal, investors poured ₹1,485 crore in March, which was the highest level in 11 months.

Also, they had invested ₹1,730 crore in February, the highest level in 11 months.

This comes even as the

## RBL Bank Q4 net plunges 54% on higher provisions

₹115 cr. additional due to COVID-19'

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Private sector lender RBL Bank reported a 54% decline in net profit to ₹114 crore for the quarter ended March 31, due to higher provisions.

The net interest income for the bank went up 38% year-on-year to ₹1,021 crore, while non-interest income grew 22% to ₹501 crore.

Core fee income was up 21% to ₹470 crore. Net interest margin for Q4FY20 was 4.93% as compared to 4.6% in the previous quarter and 4.2% in the fourth quarter of FY19.

The bank has made a provision of ₹614 crore during the quarter as compared to ₹198 crore during the same period of the previous

year. "There was ₹115 crore additional provision with regard to COVID-19," Vishwanar Ahuja, MD & CEO, RBL Bank, said. He said the bank had provided full 10% on the standstill accounts in the fourth quarter as against 5% each in two quarters which was allowed by the regulator. One third of the bank's book was under the loan moratorium.

Mr. Ahuja said the loan moratorium was extended to all the 3 million customers of the micro-banking segment, which is 13% of the bank's total advances.

In credit cards, which form 18% of the bank's total advances, only 24% of the amount was under moratorium.

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Private sector lender Yes Bank reported a net profit of ₹2,629 crore for the quarter ended March 31, 2020 compared with the ₹1,507-crore loss recorded in the year-earlier period.

The profit came from an extraordinary gain of ₹6,297 crore (net of tax) following the write-down of additional tier-1 bonds of ₹8,415 crore.

Excluding the extraordinary gain, the bank posted a loss of ₹3,668 crore loss for the quarter ended March 31.

Provisions for the quarter stood at ₹4,872.34 crore compared with ₹3,661.70 crore. Provision for invest-

## Yes Bank posts ₹2,629 crore Q4 profit on bond write down

Lender continues to witness sharp erosion in deposit base



sified conglomerate." COVID-19-related standard asset provision was ₹238 crore.

Gross non-performing assets as a percentage of total advances was 16.8% as on March 31 compared with the 3.22% a year ago. Net interest income fell 49% year-on-year to ₹1,274 crore.

The bank's deposit base saw a sharp reduction from ₹2,09,497 crore as on September 30, 2019 to ₹1,02,717 crore as on May 2, 2020.

The capital adequacy ratio of the bank continued to fall below the minimum regulatory requirement though it improved on a sequential basis due to capital infusion by new shareholders.

## Aviation may face up to ₹25,000 cr. loss: CRISIL

'Will take 6-8 quarters to bounce back'

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The aviation industry will be one of the most adversely affected sectors of the economy this year, with a revenue loss of ₹24,000-25,000 crore this fiscal, CRISIL said.

Even though the roads and highways sector would be impacted to a large extent, its rebound will be faster, the ratings agency said in a report.

Jagannarayan Padmanabhan, Director and Practice Leader, Transport & Logistics, CRISIL Infrastructure Advisory, said the airlines would be the worst-affected, contributing more than 70% of the losses, or ₹17,000 crore, followed by airport operators with ₹5,000-5,500 crore, and airport retailers (including retail, food and beverages and duty-free) with ₹1,700-1,800

crore. "This would reverse the trend growth of 11% per annum the industry has logged over the past 10 years, making it one of the most adversely affected sectors of the economy," he added. "We expect the aviation sector to take at least 6-8 quarters to reach pre-pandemic levels. These are preliminary estimates, and aggregate losses could increase if the lockdown is extended beyond the first quarter," he added.

Daimler, BMW, others resume operations

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

Daimler India Commercial Vehicles (DICV), Tube Investments of India Ltd. (TIIL) and BMW were among the companies that resumed operations on Thursday.

DICV was able to restart operations at Oragadam plant in less than 24 hours after receiving permission from the local authorities, the company said.

TIIL said it resumed operations in a partial manner in about two-thirds of the plant locations.

Isuzu Motors India received approval from the authorities to recommence production at its Sri City plant. BMW also resumed operations at its Chennai plant on Thursday.

## High taxation makes petrol, diesel expensive

Retail prices 3 times basic refining cost

## Piyush Pandey

MUMBAI

VAT inbuilt in the retail prices. Consumers will be denied the benefit of falling crude oil prices as the government has appropriated the same. Retail prices will remain the same and will not fall, as they would have, if the government had not increased duties.

For the oil companies, it is a notional loss of margins as they have now been forced to completely pass on the benefit of lower prices to their consumers.

"Higher marketing margins would have helped OMCS offset some of the losses due to lower fuel demand, weakness in refining margins and inventory loss," Paras Bothra, president equities, Ashika Stock Broking told *The Hindu*.

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) on Thursday wrote to Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, expressing inability to pay full salaries for April to their employees amid pressure from trade unions.

The letter, dated May 7, stated that "under the circumstances it is becoming more difficult...to pay full salary for April...since the traders are undergoing a tremendous financial crunch and full payment of salary for the April month is next to impossible."

Asking the minister to look into the "ground realities", the CAIT sought government intervention in the issue.

However, SIP contribution to MF industry surged to over ₹1 lakh cr. from ₹92,693 cr. in 2018-19.

₹2,269 crore in 2013-14.

Of the total inflow in the latest fiscal, investors poured ₹1,485 crore in March, which was the highest level in 11 months.

Also, they had invested ₹1,730 crore in February, the highest level in 11 months.

This comes even as the

the pandemic did not deter investors from investing into equity funds in February and March.

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# 'Emerging stronger a priority'

Preparations are on to restart as soon as possible: BWF secretary general Lund

**RAYAN ROZARIO**

COIMBATORE  
The Badminton World Federation (BWF) faces its biggest test, as it deals with the consequences of COVID-19. However, it firmly believes it will survive this storm. BWF secretary general Thomas Lund spoke to *The Hindu* about it. Excerpts:

It was the year of the Olympics - but not anymore. How challenging has it been? Our main priority has been to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of all athletes. At the same time, we are deeply concerned about the cancellation of tournaments and the flow-on effect this has on elite players and coaches whereby they could now be in a position of temporary unemployment.

It is our responsibility to ensure we are ready to present top-class badminton to fans - and thereby also support the livelihood of players in a situation where very few tournaments will happen before September 2020.

Like many organisations, BWF has also not escaped the financial implications of CO-



**Ready to fire:** Ashwini and Sikki, who are part of BWF's Star Creation programme, will be keen to get back on court.

VID-19. However, we do not have any cash-flow issues now.

Players and coaches wait for clear-cut decisions from the BWF every day...

One extreme difficulty has been making sense of the fast-changing landscape, but we have worked in a structured, efficient and prioritised way to ensure that bad-

minton comes out stronger on the other side. We have also been in close contact internally with all stakeholders, including the BWF Athletes' Commission, and it is my impression that all are aware that it is presently difficult to predict the immediate future. Is it going to be a wait-and-watch approach?

We are monitoring all up-

dates closely but at this point it is difficult to predict when international movement and entry restrictions will be lifted by individual countries and territories.

However, preparations are being made to be able to start tournaments and activities as soon as the situation allows us to do so.

This includes formulating a revamped BWF tournament calendar for 2020. Some say the decision to hold the Worlds three months after the Olympics will dilute the event...

The tournament schedule will now be packed with the HSBC World Tour Finals to follow shortly after the Worlds, but we are confident that the new dates for Huelva 2021 will allow players to have a clear focus for the year in which they will have dual objectives of both the Olympics and Worlds.

The COVID-19 situation

will have adverse effects on many activities. However, we are very satisfied with the scheduling solutions we have been able to establish for the World Championships in 2021.



Thomas Lund.  
• FACEBOOK.COM/BWF

## India ready to achieve great results at Olympics'

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
COIMBATORE

we get to the Olympics in 2021, their team will be ready to achieve great results."

### Global popularity

The BWF, in a bid to further boost badminton, has partnered with leading digital and social consultancy agency Seven League to deliver its 'Star Creation Programme', designed to increase the global popularity of both the players and the sport.

Five leading athletes, including India's Ashwini Ponnappa, graduated from phase one of the pilot programme.

"The team helped me understand the importance of social media and interacting with fans," said Ashwini. "I loved the creative ideas that were shared and I have definitely enjoyed posting and being more open about sharing things."

The second batch, which includes Chirag Shetty and Sikki Reddy, has begun its weekly sessions.

### IN BRIEF



Aguero, Courtois to race in virtual F1 race

**MANCHESTER** Formula One says Manchester City forward Sergio Aguero, Real Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and Barcelona midfielder Arthur will compete alongside drivers in this weekend's virtual Spanish GP. Charles Leclerc, Lando Norris, Alex Albon, Antonio Giovinazzi, George Russell and Nicholas Latifi will be the F1 drivers in Sunday's event. AFP



Juventus star Dybala recovers from COVID

**TURIN** Defending Serie A champion Juventus has said star forward Paulo Dybala has recovered from COVID-19. The club said, a double check with diagnostic tests (swabs) for the virus had come back negative. "The player has, therefore, recovered and will no longer be subjected to the home isolation regime," Juventus said. Dybala had tested positive for coronavirus in March, following his teammates Daniele Rugani and Blaise Matuidi. IANS



Iniyam to play online chess marathon

**CHENNAI** GM P. Iniyam will play an online chess marathon from May 15 to 17 to raise funds for COVID-19. Anyone can play with the 17-year-old from Erode and get his / her games analysed. The tournament will be played in blitz time control. The amount raised through the event will be sent to the Chief Minister and Prime Minister Relief Funds. Call / WhatsApp 98428 78471 / 98427 78471.



Holyfield to make a comeback for charity

**NEW YORK** Four-time heavyweight boxing champion Evander Holyfield, 57, is to fight in exhibition matches to raise support for Unite4OurFight, which helps learning and emotional development projects aimed at children whose schooling has been disrupted. AFP



Australian Open organiser admits cancellation possible

**SYDNEY** Tennis Australia conceded Thursday that January's Australian Open faces cancellation under a worst-case scenario, but said it was looking at a range of options in hope the COVID-19 crisis eases. This year's tennis calendar has been suspended until at least July 13 and, with global borders closed, there is uncertainty about when the international circuit can resume. The Australian Open is scheduled to take place from January 18-31, and Tennis Australia said it would abide by whatever restrictions were in place at that time. AFP

**LONDON** Anthony Joshua's promoter says the world champion's next title defence may not be staged behind closed doors despite the coronavirus crisis. Eddie Hearn is considering moving Joshua's next fight against Kubrat Pulev, which was originally scheduled for the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium on June 20. The London bout has been postponed indefinitely due to the pandemic and Hearn would be willing to move it to the Middle East if an audience is allowed there. AFP



Long strides: A tiger caught on a camera trap installed by the West Bengal Forest Department.

**Tiger Reserve and during the second period, 272 camera traps (136 pairs) were installed in the 24 Parganas (South) Division," the State Forest Department said.**

The Sunderban mangrove forest is spread over 2,585 sq. km and includes the Sunderban Tiger Reserve and the 24 Parganas (South) Division. While 23 tigers were found in 24 Parganas (South) Division, 73 big cats tigers were recorded inside the four divisions of the Sunderban Tiger Reserve.

Estimation of the number of tigers in the Sunderbans, a world heritage as well as a Ramsar site, has always been a challenge because of the difficult terrain that comprises dense mangrove forests, with creeks and rivulets, and floods twice a day during the high tides.

"Considering the images of tigers, which we received during the estimation exercise, we can say that the habitat can sustain more number of tigers in future," Mr. Banerjee said.

The estimation revealed that of the 96 tigers, 23 were identified as male and 43 as female, while the sex of 30 big cats could not be determined. The survey also re-

## India loses to Europe and China to bring up rear

Vidit's form a cause for concern

**RAKESH RAO**

NEW DELHI

Vidit Gujrathi's poor form proved decisive as India lost to China and Europe 2.5-1.5 on the second day of the FIDE Chess.com Online Nations Cup chess tournament on Wednesday.

These results pushed India, with just one match point, to the bottom of the six-team table. India has now suffered three straight losses.

On Wednesday, Viswanathan Anand, P. Harikrishna and K. Humpy drew their games to remain unbeaten, but, in four rounds, three defeats for Vidit and one for his replacement, B. Adhiban, has hurt India.

After Levon Aronian pun-

## Bundesliga moves restart by a day

Stuck in India, tennis player Dmitrii Baskov lends a helping hand to feed the poor



**On the job:** Dmitrii Baskov, centre, packs food along with Pramesh Modi, right, director of Ace Tennis Academy and Ami Pramesh Modi, founder Shree Sava Foundation. • AFP

## From Moldova with love in time of crisis

They were found in the latest study of one of a pair of binary brown dwarfs



A depiction of Luhman 16A.  
• NASA

the researchers have found the actual structure of the clouds - that they form bands over one of the pair (Luhman 16A) of brown dwarfs.

Subsequently, many astronomers detected polarisation of brown dwarfs. But what is special in the newest study of Luhman 16 is that

celestial body.

Luhman 16 is a binary star system, the third closest system to the Sun after Alpha Centauri and Barnard's star. At a distance of about 6.5 light years from the Sun, this pair of brown dwarfs referred to as Luhman 16A and Luhman 16B orbit each other, casting a dim light. Brown dwarfs are also called failed stars, because their masses are intermediate to the largest planets and the smallest main sequence stars. Their masses being too small, they are unable to sustain fusion of their hydrogen to produce energy. It is believed that some of the more massive brown dwarfs fuse deuterium or lithium and glow faintly.

The faintness of the glow proved to be providential in finding the cloud bands. Un-

like a star whose brightness would be too high, or an extrasolar planet orbiting a star, where the extra light from its star would have to be cut off to make the measurement, the light of the brown dwarfs was just right.

The group, by using the Very Large Telescope at European Southern Observatory, Chile, found that Luhman 16A had band-like clouds in its atmosphere, whereas the same was not true of Luhman 16B.

"While, the polarisation of Luhman 16B can be interpreted to have its origin in the asymmetry caused by rotation-induced oblateness of the object, the polarisation of Luhman 16A needs inhomogeneous band distribution," said Professor Sengupta. The work has been published in *The Astrophysical Journal*.

## Tiger population in Sunderbans rises to 96

Bengal Forest Department indicates that the count has increased by 8 in 2019-20

**SHIV SAHAY SINGH**

KOLKATA

The latest estimation of tiger numbers in the Indian Sunderbans indicate an increase in the population of big cats. According to the West Bengal Forest Department, the tiger count for the year 2019-20 rose to 96, from 88 in 2018-19.

The Sunderbans delta, spread over India and Bangladesh, is the only mangrove forest in the world inhabited by tigers. Giving details of the tiger estimation exercise, West Bengal Forest Minister Rabindra Banerjee said that the increase in the number by eight was significant as it was the biggest annual jump reported from the Sunderbans. Previously, the highest yearly increase of tigers in the Sunderbans had been seven, he added.

Consideration of the images of tigers, which we received during the estimation exercise, we can say that the habitat can sustain more number of tigers in future," Mr. Banerjee said.

The estimation revealed that of the 96 tigers, 23 were identified as male and 43 as female, while the sex of 30 big cats could not be determined. The survey also re-



**Long strides:** A tiger caught on a camera trap installed by the West Bengal Forest Department.

vealed the presence of 11 tiger cubs. The estimation exercise was carried out in two phases: the first period commencing on December 16 and ending on January 13, and the second phase starting on January 22 and ending on February 19.

"For the first period, a total of 1,156 Cuddeback camera traps (578 pairs) were installed in the Sunderban

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