



CEC Sunil Arora stuck
in U.S. due to global
travel shutdown
page 8



After one tests positive,
100 families self-isolate
at Rashtrapati Bhavan
page 8



Trump to sign executive
order to suspend
immigration into U.S.
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NEARBY



75 new COVID-19 cases reported in Delhi

NEW DELHI

Seventy-five new COVID-19 cases were reported in Delhi on Tuesday, taking the total number of cases to 2,156, according to the Delhi government. Of the total cases, 611 have recovered and 1,498 are still under treatment. No death was reported on Tuesday.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

Assam begins releasing 'declared foreigners'

GUWAHATI

The border wing of Assam Police has begun releasing "declared foreigners" who completed two years. The Gauhati High Court had on April 15 set a seven-day deadline for the conditional release of "declared foreigners", as per the Supreme Court's order.

NORTH & EAST ▶ PAGE 4

ICMR asks States to stop using rapid tests for the next 2 days

Rajasthan government on Tuesday said the kits were giving inaccurate results

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN
NEW DELHI

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) on Tuesday directed the States not to use the COVID-19 rapid testing kits for the next two days following reports of wide variations in results.

The kits would be tested and validated by ICMR teams and an advisory issued in the next two days. If they were found to be not up to the mark, replacements would be sought from the manufacturers, ICMR spokesperson Dr. R.R. Gangakhedkar said.

The Rajasthan government on Tuesday decided to halt rapid antibody tests after an experts' team questioned the use of the newly distributed Chinese kits following inaccurate results.

Chief Minister Ashok Geh-



In focus: Health workers collecting samples using the rapid antibody testing kits in Chennai. ■ B. VELANKANNI RAJ

ing the treatment and contain the spread of the virus."

Rajasthan Health Minister Raghu Sharma said, "We did rapid tests on 168 confirmed cases but only 5.4% tested positive for antibodies. The majority of the confirmed cases tested negative."

The ICMR said of the total COVID-19 tests conducted so far, 69% were asymptomatic cases and 31% symptomatic.

India on Tuesday registered over 1,336 new cases in the past 24 hours, taking the total number to 18,985. The total number of deaths stood at 603, while 3,259 people have recovered so far. The country has registered a recovery rate of 17.48%, the Health Ministry said.

Reports from the States put the death toll at 646,

with 15,498 active cases out of a total of 20,004 cases.

Dr. Gangakhedkar said 80% of cases came with no symptoms or very mild symptoms, 15% with moderate symptoms and 5% needed ICU aid.

"Four districts – Mahe [Puducherry], Kodagu [Karnataka], Pauri Garhwal [Uttarakhand] and Pratappur [Rajasthan], have not reported any fresh cases in the last 28 days. There are now 61 additional districts from 23 States/UTs that have not reported any fresh cases in the last 14 days," said Lav Agarwal, Joint Secretary, Health Ministry.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

MORE REPORTS ON ▶ PAGES 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 12

New drug to be tested

Can a drug used to treat sepsis be deployed for COVID-19 patients? Sepsivac, developed by Cadila Pharmaceuticals and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, will be tested in 50 patients at the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences in Delhi and Bhopal, and the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh. ▶ PAGE 10

Navy awaits test results

Naval authorities in Mumbai feel that the number of COVID-19 cases among sailors is only going to increase as the test results of several personnel at INS Angre, a shore-based logistics and administrative support establishment, is expected any time. Last week, 26 personnel had tested positive. The source of the contagion is an ex-serviceman. ▶ PAGE 9

Grim prediction

A central team has come up with projections for Mumbai's COVID-19 cases and the state of its health infrastructure:

Projections for Mumbai	April 30	May 15
Projected cases	42,604	6,56,407
Isolation beds without oxygen	(-) 30,481	(-) 4,83,385
Isolation beds with oxygen	(-) 5,466	(-) 84,932
ICU beds	(-) 1,200	(-) 27,688
Ventilators	(-) 392	(-) 13,63

BASIS FOR ASSUMPTIONS:

- Representations are based on data on facilities collected on April 16
- The infrastructure availability has been taken as constant
- Doubling rate is taken as 3.8 days
- Compounded average growth rate is taken as 20%
- Number of deaths as percentage of total cases taken as 6.4% (basis historical data)

Safety first: Thermal screening being conducted for slum dwellers in Dharavi on Saturday. ■ PRASHANT NAKWE



of which is with The Hindu.

The worst affected areas will be Dharavi, Worli-Mahalaxmi, Matunga/Sion, Parel, Andheri West, Govandi, Mankhurd, Nagpada and Byculla. A total of 8,434 volunteers will be needed to tackle the outbreak in these areas, the report said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

+ Ministerial team waits as Centre-West Bengal face off

MHA issues fresh letter asking State govt. to facilitate visit

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA/NEW DELHI

Almost 30 hours after an Inter-Ministerial Central Team (IMCT) landed in Kolkata, the West Bengal government facilitated the visit of the members on Tuesday to take stock of the COVID-19 situation. The team remained at the BSF headquarters in the city and was unable to move out till late in the afternoon.

The arrival of the two teams from Delhi on Monday allegedly without prior information to the State government, sparked off a tussle between the Centre and the State. While one team landed in the State capital Kolkata, the other is in Jalpaiguri district in north Bengal.

With the team unable to move into the field, the Mi-



Word of advice: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee with municipal workers in Kolkata on Tuesday. ■ ANI

nistry of Home Affairs (MHA) sent a fresh letter to the State government, asking it to "make all necessary arrangements for the IMCTs" even as the State government maintained its stand that such a team should have been sent only after consultations.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

2 Cong. rebels find a place in M.P. Cabinet

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Tuesday expanded his Cabinet for the first time by inducting five Ministers, two of them Congress rebels who joined the BJP, nearly a month after taking charge.

The new Ministers, three of them sitting MLAs and two former legislators, were sworn-in by Governor Lalji Tandon at a low-key ceremony at the Raj Bhawan here.

Among the new entrants are former Congress MLAs Tulsi Silawat and Govind Singh Rajput – supporters of former Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia, who along with 22 MLAs quit the Congress last month to join the BJP.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Hunger pangs



Testing times: Social workers handing out food and water to the homeless near the Southern Railways headquarters in Chennai on Tuesday, despite a ban on distribution near containment zones and hospitals. ■ B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

Will provide free ration to half of Delhi: CM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government will give 2,000 food coupons each to every MLA and MP in the city for distribution of ration to those who do not have any ID card, said Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday.

He said the Delhi government will give free ration to an additional 30 lakh people who have applied online for ration cards. "The Delhi government has decided to give free ration to around 30 lakh people who do not have ration cards. This way we will give free ration to around 1 crore people. Delhi has a population of 2 crore and we will give free ration to half of its population," he said.

REPORT ON ▶ PAGE 3



Urns placed inside a room at the Lodi Road crematorium as kin await immersion of ashes due to the lockdown. ■ AMIT BARUAH

You can see this room is full of urns containing ashes. People are storing the ashes in an urn (or kalash) here so that they can do the immersion after the lockdown is lifted, Dharminder, a pandit at the Lodi Road sham-

shan, told The Hindu on Tuesday.

"In many cases, the children [of the dead] are abroad and are unable to

even perform cremation rites. And, with all flights non-operational, they are doing the next best thing by storing the ash-filled urns

for future immersion," Dhar-

minder stated.

He stands inside a small room with some urns stacked neatly and others placed on the ground as space runs out. All the urns are labelled with the name of the dead person and the address so that there is no chance of mishandling.

According to Dharminde, who has been a pandit at the cremation ground for many years, he has never seen such a situation before. "If this [lockdown] situation continues, we will have to find more space to store these urns," he added.

Cremations, too, have become small affairs at Lodi Road. Getting to the cremation ground is not easy for most people, but policemen are usually cooperative in letting people through, even without a pass, for funerals.

5 of those arrested for Moradabad attack test positive for COVID-19

Policemen and others who came in contact quarantined

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GHAZIABAD

Five persons who were charged with attacking a health department team in Moradabad on April 15 have tested positive for COVID-19.

"Eighteen persons were arrested in connection with the attack. As they all hailed from a COVID-19 hotspot, their samples were taken in jail and sent to a government lab in Lucknow. The report has come today [Tuesday] and five of them have tested positive," said M.C. Garg, Chief Medical Officer, Moradabad.

"The police personnel and other staff who came in contact with them have been quarantined."

The 18 persons, including seven women, were arrested for allegedly attacking health



A vandalised police vehicle in Moradabad. ■ FILE PHOTO

workers who had gone to the Nawabpura area in the city to take family members of a COVID-19-positive patient into isolation. They hurled stones at an ambulance, injuring a doctor and three paramedics, and also damaged a police vehicle in the process.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath termed the attack "un-pardonable" and said those behind it will face action under the National Security Act.

On Tuesday, three more persons succumbed to the contagion, taking the total number of deaths in Moradabad to five. According to a health department official, the district has 73 COVID-19-positive cases.

Timings

DELHI

WEDNESDAY, APR. 22
RISE 05:49 SET 18:51
RISE 05:35 SET 18:15
THURSDAY, APR. 23
RISE 05:48 SET 18:52
RISE 06:05 SET 19:08
FRIDAY, APR. 24
RISE 05:47 SET 18:53
RISE 06:37 SET 20:02

Delhi Weather max min
Delhi City 35 19
Safdarjung 35 19
Palam 36 18

Delhi Palam Today
35°C The dry and very warm weather with partly cloudy sky to prevail during the day. Night will be enjoyable.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
33°C The dry and very warm weather with partly cloudy sky. Chances of rain and thunderstorm and lightning with gusty wind.

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THE HINDU
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Air quality of Delhi-NCR
Delhi 87 Gurugram 98
Ghaziabad 102 Faridabad 132
Noida 90 Greater Noida 108
■ Good ■ Satisfactory ■ Moderate
0-50 51-100 101-200
■ Poor ■ Very poor ■ Severe
201-300 301-400 >401
AIR QUALITY INDEX AT 4 P.M. YESTERDAY (AVERAGE OF PAST 24 HOURS) SOURCE: CPCB

IN BRIEF

North civic body sets up docking centres

NEW DELHI
The North Delhi Municipal Corporation on Tuesday said it has set up "docking centers" for sanitation workers deployed at containment zones. The first such centre has been set up in Jahangirpuri, said Standing Committee Chairperson Jai Prakash. As a form of precaution, sanitation workers would report for duty here, where they can change clothes and wear PPEs.

DUTA writes to Sisodia on non-release of grants

NEW DELHI
Delhi University Teachers' Association (DUTA) on Tuesday wrote to Education Minister Manish Sisodia, decrying the non-release of grants to 12 DU colleges funded entirely by the government. Employees at three DU colleges have not been paid for March, the DUTA wrote.

'Announce special package or release funds to pay salaries'

Sector financially stressed, industries in Gurugram tell Centre, State government

ASHOK KUMAR
GURUGRAM

The various industry associations in Gurugram on Tuesday demanded the State and Central governments to announce a special economic package or disburse the funds from the Provident Fund Organisation, Labour Welfare Fund or the Employees' State Insurance Corporation to pay wages to the workers for April.

It also said the industrial sector was financially stressed. The office-bearers of 14 industrial associations on Tuesday called on Deputy Commissioner Amit Khatri in this regard and submitted a memorandum.

Wait till May 3 now
The associations also expressed their resentment over the penal provisions such as registration of a First Information Report in case of violation of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) laid down for resumption of the industrial activity post-April 20, and said that a majority of the industries were discouraged by this and now preferred to wait till the end of the second phase of the lockdown



Representatives of various industry associations presenting a memorandum to Deputy Commissioner Amit Khatri on the need for a financial package to pay wages to workers for April, on Tuesday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

and must be utilised by the government in these difficult times to pay salaries to the workers.

NCR Chamber of Commerce and Industry president H.P. Yadav, also part of the delegation, said the penal provisions such as registration of cases and the sealing of premises in case of violation of SOPs were discouraging for the industry to resume their operations. He said initially the industrialists were upbeat about resuming the operations but were discouraged due to the stringent provisions and most of them now preferred to wait till May 3.

He said conditions such as maintaining social distancing during the operations and on transportation of the employees were not practical. "It would take almost three times the usual number of buses to transport the employees as per the SOPs. Also, it is not possible to maintain the stipulated distance of one metre during the work hours for many industries. Besides, no company can arrange for the workers to stay inside its premises maintaining the social distancing norms," said Mr. Yadav. He added that the remaining migrant labours would also return to their hometowns after the lockdown if the industry did not resume operations now.

Mr. Yadav rued the lack of support for the MSMEs from the Union government unlike in countries such as the U.S., the U.K., Spain and Italy. He also demanded to waive Goods and Services Tax, Income Tax and loan on interest.

Mr. Yadav said they had written to the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister in this regard several times, but there was no reply.

Mr. Mangla said the industry could not run in isolation without the support of repair and spare parts shops.

In times of lockdown, a case for media access to courts

Though restrictions are necessary given the situation, the courts must ensure that reporters can inform the public about legal proceedings, say lawyers

SOIBAM ROCKY SINGH
NEW DELHI

The unprecedented suspension of the functioning of the Delhi High Court and its subordinate courts in the Capital due to COVID-19 pandemic has presented it with the challenge of holding open court hearings.

Urgent cases are being heard through videoconferencing and daily orders are uploaded on official websites, but only those litigants/advocates appearing before the court know what transpired during the hearing.

While the Supreme Court has made special arrangements for a separate room on its premises where a limited number of journalists can watch the daily proceedings while maintaining social distancing, the same is not the case with the Delhi HC or its subordinate courts.

Gyanant Singh, Delhi-based advocate and columnist, said: "Reasonable restrictions are justified in the present circumstances but extraordinary challenges need to be met with extraordinary measures. Merely uploading orders are not enough, people have a right to get an impartial account of what transpires during proceedings."

"The court should ensure that regulation in this regard does not amount to imposing a restriction. It should use technology to strike a balance and ensure that freedom of the press and the peoples' right to know continue," said Mr. Singh, who previously worked as a legal journalist for over 15 years. Making a case for media access to court proceedings during the lockdown, M.K. Venu, Founding Editor of *The Wire*, said: "Capturing crowded courtroom drama is an inherent part of court reporting, especially in big political or criminal cases of public interest." Citing the example of the Indira Gandhi assassination trial, Mr. Venu said: "I wonder how that case could have been reported in circumstances that exist today... It does impinge on a journalists' right to take every aspect of court proceedings to the people."



Unlike the Supreme Court, the Delhi High Court has made no arrangements for journalists to witness hearings. ■ FILE PHOTO

example of the Indira Gandhi assassination trial, Mr. Venu said: "I wonder how that case could have been reported in circumstances that exist today... It does impinge on a journalists' right to take every aspect of court proceedings to the people."

COVID-19

In March 1966, a nine-judge Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court had emphasised about the efficacy of open trials for upholding the legitimacy and effectiveness of the courts and for enhancement of public confidence and support.

"All cases brought before the courts must be heard in open court. Public trial in an open court is essential for healthy, objective and fair administration of justice," the top court had said.

Over half-a-century later, in September 2018, the Supreme Court made a landmark verdict allowing live streaming of its proceedings in cases of constitutional and national importance.

Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, who was part of the three-judge Bench, in a separate but concurring judgment, had said: "Live streaming of proceedings is crucial to dis-

semination of knowledge about judicial proceedings and granting full access to justice to the litigant".

"Access to justice can never be complete without the litigant being able to see, hear and understand the course of proceedings first hand. Apart from this, live streaming is an important facet of a responsive judiciary which accepts and acknowledges that it is accountable to the concerns of those who seek justice," Justice Chandrachud said.

"By embracing technology, we promote a greater degree of confidence in the judicial process. The Chief Justices of the High Courts should consider adoption of live-streaming both in the High Courts and in the district judiciaries," Justice Chandrachud added.

While the verdict remains unimplemented, the COVID-19 lockdown nudged the top court to hear urgent matters through videoconferencing from March 27.

The hearings took place with judges and lawyers sitting at their respective homes. The feeds from the videoconference is made available only to a limited audience, including journalists, on the Supreme Court premises.

Before replicating the same system at the High Court, Mr. Singh cautioned, "We need to work out modalities given the fact that people may not yet be mature enough to understand the intricacies of law and legal proceedings and even observations could unnecessarily provoke violence in society."

Krishna Prasad, former Editor of *Outlook*, said: "It would be useful for the legal reporting fraternity to open a line of communication with the Delhi High Court and subordinates courts, to impress upon them the need for reporters to be given 'live' access, like in the Supreme Court," Mr. Prasad added.

JNU students write to HRD Minister on online classes

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union (JNUSU) has expressed its concern over the conducting of academic engagements, classes, and examinations online, in a letter to the Minister for Human Resource Development R. P. Nishank.

The JNUSU said nearly half the 8,500 students enrolled at the university come from rural areas where there is poor internet connectivity and therefore conducting classes and examinations online was not a viable option.

"If classes and exams were indeed to be held online, it would be impossible for many students to engage with their academic responsibilities," the JNUSU said.

The students appealed to the Minister that any decision that would push forth online academic engagements be seriously reconsidered. "It is our submission that a uniform extension of at least three months be provided wherein all academic backlog with respect to the completion of classes and lectures be undertaken normally in classrooms with sufficient allowance following this for the conclusion of exams," the students said.

They also pointed out that despite appeals to the JNU administration, the timely disbursal of scholarships to students during these testing times have not been undertaken, pushing students and families therefore towards further precarity. "Fellowships not only aid students for their studies but also grant them the ability to continue their education..." the students added.

Ensure food for stranded workers'

High Court tells govt. to assist inhabitants of Yamuna Pushta

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has directed the city government to continue taking necessary steps to ensure there is no dearth of food, potable water, power and sanitation in shelters where the inhabitants of Yamuna Pushta have now been relocated or the labour camps at Sarai Kale Khan, throughout the lockdown period.

Over 4,000 inhabitants

During the hearing, done through videoconferencing, Additional Solicitor General

Sanjay Jain, appearing for the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB), submitted that there were 4,229 inhabitants living at Yamuna Pushta.

Between April 14 and April 16, 3,600 have been shifted to different schools in east, west and north-west Delhi; 600 have been shifted to the Yamuna Sports Complex and 358 have been shifted to shelter homes being run by the DUSIB.

He stated that none of the daily wage workers are now stranded or living in the open at Yamuna Pushta.

On the issue of construction workers working at Pragati Maidan and living at a labour camp at Sarai Kale Khan, the counsel appearing for Shapoorji Pallonji and Company Private Limited, submitted that the workers are not directly employed by the company.

The counsel submitted that the labour camp was running smoothly, and provision has been made for power supply, fans, lights and toilets. The counsel also stated that the company is regularly releasing payments to all the sub-contractors.

'Schools justified in charging tuition fee as they are holding online classes'

Teachers are also discharging their duty during lockdown: HC

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has remarked that private school charging tuition fees is justified in view of the fact that almost all the institutions are conducting online classes and the teachers are discharging their functions during the lockdown.

Mr. Yadav said they had written to the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister in this regard several times, but there was no reply.

Mr. Mangla said the industry could not run in isolation without the support of repair and spare parts shops.

der which barred charging of any fees except tuition fees.

The High Court also noted that even those students who are unable to pay the fee due to financial crisis are being provided course-work and other materials.

"Such students are also permitted to avail online classes and courses. It is further clear that schools cannot deny access of online classes and other educational facilities due to non-payment of fees. Schools are also

not permitted to charge any new head of fees," the Bench noted after perusing the Department of Education's April 17's circular.

The court also disposed of a petition which sought a direction to give relaxation or suspend fees of private schools of any nature in terms of transportation or other charges except tuition fees for the month of April, May and June 2020 on account of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

ting at their respective homes. The feeds from the videoconference is made available only to a limited audience, including journalists, on the Supreme Court premises.

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While the verdict remains unimplemented, the COVID-19 lockdown nudged the top court to hear urgent matters through videoconferencing from March 27.

The hearings took place with judges and lawyers sitting

Many students don't have Net access, DU teachers tell V-C

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Teachers on Tuesday criticised the Delhi University's decision to send online forms for exams and details of courses to students.

"While we all are going through the challenging times of COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown, the university administration is popping up surprises through hastily designed formats and forms," Academic and Executive Development (AAD), including Academic and Executive Council members, wrote to

the Vice-Chancellor.

The university on Monday had issued a notice requesting students to fill in the forms by May 15. The AAD argued that the move did not take into account issues faced by students in the remote parts of the country who did not have proper internet access.

"We have been told that students are facing problems in filling up online examination form. The students are facing difficulty in accessing the portal, submitting and making corrections..." the AAD said.

States, UTs told to take steps to mitigate risks in waste disposal

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

In the first matter heard through videoconferencing at the National Green Tribunal on Tuesday, the green panel directed all States and Union Territories to take adequate steps to mitigate risks in terms of unscientific disposal of bio-medical waste in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

An NGT Bench said only 1.1 lakh of the 2.7 lakh healthcare facilities identified across the country

were authorised under the bio-medical waste management rules. "We have also observed that out of 2.7 lakh HCFs identified, only 1.1 lakh are authorised under the BMW Management Rules, 2016 so far. The State Pollution Control Boards and pollution control committees have to make efforts to bridge this gap to mitigate risk in terms of unscientific disposal of biomedical waste..." the Bench said.

This at a time when the entire business has been shut down due to the lockdown, the confederation said. "During this period of lockdown all operations are suspended and there are no sales. The companies are paying salaries to staff. You can understand the financial burdens on them. Since firms are following government's instructions, they are at pains to understand why they should pay renewal fees for a period when there is no business on account of order from the government," the CIABC wrote.

IN BRIEF

Civic bodies challan for spitting and urinating

NEW DELHI
The municipal corporations of Delhi have issued 50 challans for urination and spitting so far, representatives of the South and North Corporations said on Tuesday. While both municipal corporations had been able to realise only three challans, of ₹1,000 each, the rest have been forwarded to the magistrate, they said. The EDMC has issued three challans and one FIR. Civic bodies have been carrying out campaigns to spread awareness on account of COVID-19 pandemic.

Riots arrest: sections of UAPA invoked, say police

NEW DELHI
The Delhi Police on Tuesday said that sections of Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act have been invoked against a few persons, including Jamia Millia Islamia students Meenakshi Haider and Safoora Zargar, while responding to bail application. Haider and Zargar were arrested in connection with north-east riots.

Over 3,300 people held for lockdown violation

NEW DELHI
Over 140 cases were registered and 3,375 people detained here on Tuesday for violating lockdown orders, the police said here. According to the data shared by the police, 145 cases were registered under Section 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) of the Indian Penal Code till 5 p.m. PTI

Shopkeepers should get compensation too, says BJP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI
Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri on Tuesday demanded that ration shopkeepers in the Capital also be included under the ₹1-crore compensation scheme of the Delhi government in case they die after contracting COVID-19.

In a letter to Lieutenant-Governor Anil Baijal, he also demanded that the outstanding commission of these shopkeepers, from January to April 2020, be paid and they be provided PPE kits for their safety while citing a case from Roop Nagar where a ration shopkeeper has been declared COVID-19 positive.

He also raised concerns over the quality and quantity of food being served by the Delhi government to the poor. Mr. Bidhuri further demanded the extension of the expiry time limit of ration coupon to one month, stating that the current 48-hour time limit of coupons being sent to the poor for taking ration was too less. In his letter, he said that many poor needy people are being denied ration due to this time limit.

Lok Nayak Hospital panel report refutes allegations of negligence

This comes after kin of COVID-19 patient sought help in video

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A fact-finding committee of Lok Nayak Hospital on Tuesday said in its report that a daughter and wife of a person admitted at the hospital sought help from authorities, do not appear to be "ingrained in facts" and seems to be out of "emotional distress".

On Monday morning, the daughter and wife of a person infected with COVID-19 and admitted to a Delhi government-run hospital, had sought help in a video posted on social media stating that the person was suffering from high fever and the hospital was not taking care of him.

The video went viral and the government stepped in

We will be providing free ration to nearly half of Delhi: Kejriwal

MLAs, MPs to get 2,000 food coupons each to distribute to needy in their areas

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government will give 2,000 food coupons each to every MLA and MP in the city for distribution of ration among the needy, who do not have any ID card, in their constituencies in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic, said Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday.

30 lakh more people

He said that the Delhi government will give free ration to 30 lakh additional people who do not have ration cards but have applied online for it.

The Delhi government had already provided free ration to 71 lakh ration cardholders, 5 kg free ration to 10 lakh non-ration cardholders and had received nearly 38 lakh applications from the non-ration cardholders, Mr. Kejriwal said.

"The Delhi government has decided to give free ration to around 30 lakh people who do not have ration cards. This way we will give free ration to around 1 crore people. Delhi has a population of 2 crore and we will give free ration to half of Del-



We will give free ration to around one crore people in Delhi, said Arvind Kejriwal. • FILE PHOTO

hi's total population. These 30 lakh people are the people who have applied online based on their ID cards like Aadhaar but there are people in Delhi who do not have any ID card," he said.

From next month, the Delhi government will also give a kit containing essential items

New ambulances

"We have analysed the deaths due to COVID-19, and found that in 80% of the cases the patients were above 50 years and only 20% were below 50 years. This shows that senior citizens are more at risk. We have also found that 83% of patients who have died had serious medical conditions," he said.

The Delhi government today has ordered for 60 new ambulances, Mr. Kejriwal said.

Media persons to be tested from today'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI/GURUGRAM

The Delhi government will start testing media persons for COVID-19 from Wednesday. "We have received reports that in many States, journalists tested positive for COVID-19. Journalists are working in the frontline in this extraordinary time.

From Wednesday we are opening a centre where any journalist can visit for a COVID-19 test," said Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

Meanwhile, 30 mediapersons were tested for COVID-19 in Gurugram on Tuesday. All of them tested negative. In a first-of-its-kind initiative by any district in Haryana, the Gurugram authorities screened the scribes using rapid testing kits. The district administration decided to conduct the tests after 53 mediapersons had tested positive in Mumbai for COVID-19 and were asymptomatic.

For first time since April 8, no COVID-19 deaths in city

Total number of active cases has decreased: Delhi govt.

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

For the first time since April 8, no new death was reported due to COVID-19 in the Capital on Tuesday, according to the 24-hour health bulletin released by the Delhi government. The city, however, reported 75 fresh cases, taking the total to 2,156. The toll stands at 47.

Of the 2,156 cases, 611 have recovered, bringing down the tally of active cases to 1,498. On Tuesday, 180 people recovered and the total number of active cases have also decreased compared to Monday.

Containment zones

The Delhi government also added three areas to its list of containment zones, taking the total to 87.

Officials of south District said they have completed screening in Hauz Rani, which is a containment zone. "We have screened about 20,000 people in the area and 71 of them were found to be symptomatic. We are yet to start the rapid antibody testing in the district but will start soon" the official told *The Hindu*.

Meanwhile, in Ram Ma-

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virus from outside the hospital," an official said.

Another nurse tested positive before the pregnant woman's case and she might have contracted the virus from outside the hospital, said hospital officials.

A Delhi government official, meanwhile, said that a three-member committee formed on Monday to look into all COVID-19 deaths in the city was not a "new" procedure and was done during H1N1 outbreak also.

"The panel is yet to get any death reports from hospitals. This is not new and it was done at the time of H1N1 also. COVID-19 is a new disease and we want to understand it better. We want to see what caused death in each case. Whether it affected the respiratory system or kidney or any other part of the body," the official told *The Hindu*.

AIIMS deploys robots in COVID-19 ward

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN
NEW DELHI

The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in Delhi has deployed robots at its advanced COVID-19 ward to help promote physical distancing between health workers and infected patients.

AIIMS director Randeep Guleria said the institute is using two AI robots — Milagrow Floor Robot iMap 9.0 and Milagrow Humanoid ELF — in collaboration with consumer robotics brand Milagrow.

According to the company, Milagrow Humanoid ELF enables doctors to monitor and interact with COVID-19 patients remotely thereby significantly reducing transmission risk.

Patients in isolation wards can also interact with their relatives from time-to-time through this robot.

"The Humanoid ELF can navigate around the ward independently and record activities in high definition video and audio," noted a release issued by the company.

"As the outbreak continues to rise, our robots will help check the virus spread and protect the doctors, nurses and other staff from getting infected," said Rajeev Karwal, founder-chairman Milagrow.

Now the video will play in Newspaper



Ghaziabad administration enforces strict lockdown after increase in fresh cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GHAZIABAD/NOIDA

Heavy traffic jam was observed on Tuesday on Delhi-Ghaziabad border near Ghaziabad as the Ghaziabad administration enforced strict implementation of lockdown after six COVID-19 positive cases were found on Monday.

"After a review meeting with the health department, it was decided to make the implementation stricter. We had observed that some peo-

ple were misusing the lock-down passes. There were some government officials who were not required in the office but were still travelling.

The jam was because it was the first day. From tomorrow, we will be even stricter," said Manish Mishra, Superintendent of Police (City) Ghaziabad.

He denied the administration had become relaxed. "It is part of the review process," he said.

Neeraj Jadaun, SP (Rural),

said the district magistrate's order made a clear distinction between essential goods and services.

Paritosh Kumar, who works in the radiotherapy department of Max Hospital, said, "I come from Bhajanpur. It was difficult to convince the police officers to do this. As there were so many people with inadequate papers, the jam kept on increasing. I hope the situation would be streamlined by tomorrow."

According to the order, only government officials engaged in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic, medical professionals and goods carriers ferrying essential products, mediapersonnel would be permitted to cross the border. There would, however, be riders.

Constable alleges lack of hygiene in hospital

He had tested positive on April 17

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

and he was not given food till April 19 afternoon. "As per the statement of the nursing officer on duty, since the patient had arrived in surgical ward by 10 p.m. on April 18, and the dinner had already been served in the ward by then, the officer, considering the diabetic condition of the patient, gave him his own dinner. The next day, breakfast and other meals were served to the patient," the report said.

The report said the claim that the patient had a fever of 102 degree Fahrenheit and was unattended to at the hospital, appears to be "totally incorrect". "The nursing officer recorded the temperature by hospital thermometer, which was around 99.2 degree Fahrenheit," the report said.

Food served

The family had claimed that the person had reached the hospital on April 18 evening and provided help.

Emotional distress

"On the basis of the relevant information made available to the committee and in view of the paucity of time and different shift duties of the officers involved in battling the COVID-19 pandemic, the committee members feel that the allegations levelled against the hospital do not appear to be ingrained in facts, rather seem to be stemming from emotional distress of the family," the report said.

CMK

Govt. warns owners against smuggling of liquor from clubs

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Excise Department on Tuesday warned liquor vends and clubs of action, if they smuggle liquor out of their premises and sell it during the lockdown. An order mentioned that FIRs have been filed for the same.

"It has come to the notice of Excise Department that

some licensees are indulging in smuggling out liquor from their licensed premises and its unlawful sale, thereby violating the orders of the government. FIRs have been also filed in some cases," the order said. The order said that strict action, including cancellation of licence and blacklisting, shall be carried out.

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Gehlot takes up package issue with Centre

Financial condition of States has deteriorated with revenue collection plummeting during lockdown: CM

MOHAMMED IQBAL
JAIPUR

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Tuesday took up the issue of release of a package for the States to help them tackle the COVID-19 pandemic with the Centre, while pointing out that the States had made use of their resources in controlling the spread of the disease. The financial condition of States had deteriorated with the revenue collection plummeting during the lockdown, he said.

Mr. Gehlot raised the matter before a five-member Central team visiting Jaipur to study the measures being taken to control the pandemic. He demanded an additional 2% credit limit to the States from the Net Credit Limit and moratorium of three months in the payment of instalments due to the Reserve Bank of India and other financial institutions.



A Central team at the COVID-19 hotspot of Ramganj in Jaipur on Tuesday. ■ ROHIT JAIN PARAS

U.P. policeman suspended for assaulting S-I

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

A head constable was suspended and booked on Tuesday after he was caught on camera allegedly beating a sub-inspector with a lathi in Sitapur district of Uttar Pradesh. A 33-second footage of the incident was widely shared on social media following which action was taken against the head constable. In the video, Head Constable Ram Asray was seen hitting S-I Ramesh Chauhan with his lathi at a picket duty in the Kotwali area. The head constable lands at least six-eight blows on the S-I. The S-I asked Mr. Asray to stand guard when he found him sitting, said the police.

Pointing to the alarming resource gap between the State's anticipated receipts and committed expenditure, Capt. Amarinder has also demanded immediate release of ₹4,400 crore of pending GST arrears.

Punjab seeks ₹3,000 cr. compensation

CM points to resource gap between anticipated receipts and expenditure

VIKAS VASUDEVA
CHANDIGARH

A day after Rajya Sabha MP Partap Singh Bajwa asked the Union government to release Punjab's arrears, Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Tuesday demanded interim compensation from the Centre to the tune of ₹3,000 crore for the month of April on account of the COVID-19.

In a letter to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the Chief Minister asked for expediting the release of the State's GST arrears for the

crisis. "The Food Corporation of India's reserves are full of wheat stocks. The rabi crop harvesting has also been completed... There should be no issue in the release of wheat."

Mr. Gehlot said he had

spoken to Union Home Minister Amit Shah with the request to facilitate the return of migrants from Rajasthan stranded in other States because of the lockdown. A large number of labourers, employees in firms, traders

and shopkeepers living in other States were facing difficulties and wanted to come back to their home.

The Chief Minister said he was still waiting for the response from Mr. Shah, who had told him that he would take a decision by Tuesday. Referring to the students of coaching institutions in Kota, Mr. Gehlot said that after Uttar Pradesh, States like Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Uttarakhand had agreed to take them back, though Bihar and West Bengal were unwilling to make arrangements for their return during the lockdown.

159 new cases

Meanwhile, the tally of COVID-19 positive persons in Rajasthan increases to 1,735 with the detection of 159 cases from 12 districts on Tuesday. The highest number of 72 patients were found in Jaipur.



CM Amarinder Singh has also demanded immediate release of ₹4,400 crore pending GST arrears. ■ FILE PHOTO

last four months to help Punjab overcome its resource constraint.

Citing the lockdown that had substantial fiscal consequences for all States, Capt. Amarinder said the Union government should compensate Punjab for its loss of re-

venue due to COVID-19. While ₹3,000 crore for April was an estimate, he said "detailed assessment of loss and requirement of funds for relief and rehabilitation will be submitted in due course".

He said the State government had made a provision

of revenue receipts of ₹3,360 crore for the month of April this year in the State budget 2020-21. However, these receipts are expected to decline sharply as most economic activities in the State remain closed on account of the lockdown.

'Allow liquor sale'

Pointing to the critical fiscal situation of the State, the Chief Minister also sought the Centre's permission to allow sale of liquor, in a phased manner, to mop up VAT and excise revenue. He said the Union Ministry of Home should allow the State to take a conscious decision to allow the sale of liquor in certain areas in a phased manner with strict social distancing.

Odisha govt. steps up surveillance in three districts

Many COVID-19 patients had returned to Balasore, Bhadrak and Jajpur from neighbouring West Bengal

PRAFULLA DAS
BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government's Health & Family Welfare Department stepped up surveillance in Balasore, Bhadrak and Jajpur on Tuesday after it was found that many COVID-19 patients in the State had returned to these districts from neighbouring West Bengal.

Concerned over the trend, the State Health Department directed experts from medical colleges, senior health officers and rapid response teams to oversee containment measures in the three

districts.

While three rapid response teams proceeded to these districts, the SCB Medical College & Hospital, Cuttack, was asked to provide technical support to Jajpur district. The Fakir Mohan Medical College & Hospital at Balasore was supporting Balasore and Bhadrak districts, the Health Department said.

23 positive cases

In fact, a total of 23 COVID-19 cases were reported from the three districts till midnight of Monday. The State government had expressed

its worries on Monday evening saying that 24 of the 74 infected persons in the State till then had links with West Bengal.

Clandestine entry

Stating that most of these people had clandestinely entered the State, the government expressed satisfaction over the work done by representatives of Panchayati Raj institutions who did not allow them to enter the villages.

The panchayats had informed the district administration and ensured that

these people were placed in quarantine.

With detection of five more COVID-19 cases from Balasore by midnight on Monday, the total number of positive cases detected in the State has increased to 79.

Five more discharged

Meanwhile, five more COVID-19 positive cases – one each from Bhubaneswar, Dhenkanal, Kalahandi, Sundergarh and Kendrapada – were discharged from different COVID-19 hospitals on Tuesday. With this, the total recoveries in the State in-

creased to 29 and the number of active cases stood at 48. One person had died earlier.

Another patient from West Bengal, who had recently come for follow up treatment of cancer in a private hospital in Bhubaneswar and was detected as COVID-19 positive, passed away in the hospital on Tuesday morning.

His death, however, was not treated as COVID-19 death since after treatment he was found negative for the virus in two repeat tests, the government said.

The 'nowhere people' of COVID-19 need better legal safeguards

The migrant workers' plight during lockdown is a trigger to ensure they aren't left high and dry again during tough situations

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Post-COVID-19, whenever that happens, one of the most enduring images of it would be that of the multitudes of migrant workers who became, all of a sudden, nowhere people, no one's people. For the policymakers, it would be a trigger to rework a strategy for them and to ensure a better legal framework which doesn't leave them high and dry yet again during tough situations.

It is in this context that we need to revisit the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979. It was drawn up after repealing The Orissa Dadan Labour Act, 1975. Based on a very specific background, it couldn't perhaps see much beyond the then-existing migrant workmen system. The ISMW Act defines inter-State migrant workman as any person who is recruited by or through a contractor. This definition keeps away any migrant workman out of the ambit if he is not brought in through a licensed contractor.

It is common knowledge

that most of the migrant workmen are not routed through licensed contractors. This small catch, in the definition, has been sufficient to exclude bulk of the migrant workmen from getting any benefit out of the Act.

Furthermore, the Act is only applicable to any establishment in which five or more inter-State migrant workmen are employed. In reality, only a minuscule proportion of migrant workmen are placed under such establishments these days. So, if the establishment doesn't come under the purview of the Act, its migrant employees, numbering less than five, cease to be migrants, legally, even though they may actually be one!

Inadequacy of Act

The current crisis has comprehensively exposed the inadequacy of the ISMW Act. While it has become anachronistic, the need for legal safeguards and welfare measures for migrants has become even more pressing and urgent.

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The Act defines unorganised workers as home-based worker, self-employed worker or wage worker in the unorganised sector.

The Government of India has, in the recent past, introduced a host of social security schemes. Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan Yojana is meant to ensure old age

protection for unorganised workers. Atal Pension Yojana has been launched under the National Pension System. Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana is a life insurance scheme. Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana is an accident insurance scheme. Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana aims at providing health cover. The UWSS Act itself has two very vitally useful features, viz., (a) Registration of unorganised workers, and (b) Portable smart I-card with a Unique Worker's Identification Number. The coverage of

Doctor suspended in AMU's medical college for negligence

A man admitted to JNMC had tested positive on Monday

ANUJ KUMAR
GAZIABAD

An associate professor of the Department of Medicine in Aligarh Muslim University's Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College and Hospital has been suspended by Vice-Chancellor Tariq Mansoor for negligence and misconduct. The suspension has come after a person admitted to JNMC tested positive for COVID-19 on Monday. The 55-year-old man, who was on ventilator support, passed away on Tuesday afternoon, said Haris Mansoor Khan, Chief Medical Superintendent, JNMC.

"He was also suffering from diabetes and hypertension. He came late to the hospital," he said.

B.P. Singh, Chief Medical Officer, Aligarh, said the protocol would be followed during the burial. The district

administration on Monday had asked the JNMC why it didn't inform the district health department about the COVID-19 infected person in time and whether the protocol was followed.

'Not isolated'

According to the university spokesperson, the person had come to the hospital in an emergency situation, late on Sunday night. His test was conducted and the administration was informed the next morning. However, university sources said, it appeared that the doctor used his position to get the patient admitted to casualty when the protocol demanded that he be taken to an isolation facility. The doctor's wife runs a private hospital in the city, and according to sources, it is suspected that the infected

person was treated there as well.

After the incident, the district administration has quarantined the doctor and his family. On Tuesday, it was decided that a list of patients admitted to the isolation ward and emergency be sent to district officials in the morning and evening every day. District Magistrate Chandra Bhushan Singh has also ordered to seal and cancel the licence of a private X-ray lab in the city where the said infected person was tested despite showing flu-like symptoms.

"As the deceased had visited more than one medical facility, the number of cases could increase. We are doing contact tracing and also investigating the role of the doctors," said SSP Muniraj P.

INTERVIEW | TEJASHWI YADAV

'Bihar is lagging behind'

State govt. should have been proactive, says RJD leader

AMARNATH TEWARY

Tejashwi Yadav, Leader of the Opposition in the Bihar Assembly and RJD leader, has criticised the State government's "inefficiency" in combating the COVID-19 pandemic. In an email interview, he said free rations and more cash incentives should be given to the poor until the lockdown is lifted. Excerpts.

Are you satisfied with the Bihar government's efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in the State?

I think, the real problem is lack of intent in the leadership. Should the government surrender just because it doesn't have required ammunition? If a small and young State like Chhattisgarh can erect makeshift hospitals in record-breaking time, why can't Bihar? Had the government been proactively strategising in this lockdown buffer of almost 60 days, a lot could have been achieved on the medical infrastructure front.

Do you think the number of COVID-19 cases in the State is very low and there should be more rapid tests?

Yes, absolutely. The numbers of positive cases are lower only because of conservatively low testing. With dense population of 12 crore, the risk of virus's spread is very high in Bihar. Asymptomatic cases are surging and rapid testing will help in gauging the spread of contagion and breaking the transmission chain.

The government says it has

paid ₹1,000 into the bank accounts of the poor? Does this help?

Even a family of three persons can't live for more than three days with ₹1,000 during the lockdown.

The government should ensure free ration and more cash incentives on a weekly basis with more transparency until the lockdown ceases. Every day we have been interacting with thousands migrants. Even this cash hasn't been disbursed to 40%-50% of the beneficiaries.

The government says about 1.8 lakh migrants have returned to the State. Do you agree with this figure?

From where and how did the government mine this? Did the government facilitate their return? Has the government screened, tested and quarantined 1.8 lakh migrants? There are more than a million stranded outside the State, desperately wanting to come back home. Why has the government abandoned them?

Unlike the U.P. government, Bihar has refused to allow students studying in Kota, Rajasthan, to return home...

■ The Bihar govt. has double standards and discriminatory policies on the issue of Kota students. They give permission to bring back children of the high and mighty, like they issued a pass to a State BJP MLA to bring back his ward.

Assam begins releasing 'foreigners'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

The Border wing of the Assam police has begun releasing the "declared foreigners" (DFs) who completed two years to decongest six detention centres. The Gauhati High Court had on April 15 set the Border wing a seven-day deadline for the conditional release of DFs according to the order of the Supreme Court on April 13.

The deadline ended Tuesday, but the officials said the process may take some more time.

Border police officials declined to say how many DFs have been released but insisted they would be reaching their homes soon. Officials at the six detention centres - Dibrugarh, Goalpara, Jorhat, Kokrajhar, Silchar and Tezpur - said at least 80 of the 802 detainees have been released so far. "We shall be submitting the information to the HC," Special DGP (Border) Mukesh Agrawal told *The Hindu*.



Non-essentials can wait

While the flip-flop on e-commerce seems arbitrary, caution is best during a pandemic

The Centre's last-minute reversal of its decision to allow e-commerce companies to resume deliveries of 'non-essential items', as part of an easing of the lockdown curbs, is welcome given that India is still not out of the woods in its pandemic fight. On Sunday, the Home Ministry directed States to ensure that the movement of vehicles used by e-commerce operators for transporting non-essentials be 'excluded' from the list of additional activities that would be allowed from April 20 to mitigate public hardship. While the Ministry gave no reason for its U-turn, it would appear wiser counsel prevailed after some Opposition parties and the retail trade had raised the issue of a lack of level-playing field for brick and mortar retailers. Also, though it is true that the online purchase of a product and its doorstep delivery by an e-commerce firm minimises human interaction to a negligible level unlike a purchase in a store, the fact that the lockdown is aimed at restricting movement to the bare minimum in order to break the chain of transmission necessitates limiting exemptions. And with non-essential items ranging from apparel to books to electronics and home appliances constituting the bulk of the listings on e-commerce sites, every additional product category would involve that many more people getting activated along the supply chain – from a producer or supplier to the transport operators and additional delivery persons.

To be sure, given the immense economic costs associated with the shutdown especially to individual livelihoods, it would seem a reasonable argument that as many sectors and jobs that can be allowed to reopen with stringent safeguards mandated ought to be permitted to do so in a phased manner. Clearly, that was the underlying rationale behind the Centre's April 15missive. Among the sectors that can resume are agricultural and horticultural activities, banking, cargo transportation, construction, and manufacturing of specified goods including packaging material. Interestingly, while self-employed tradesmen such as electricians, plumbers and carpenters have been allowed to resume work, they would be unable to ply their trades if their customers are unable to furnish the relevant material at the work site because the shops and e-commerce firms selling these 'non-essential' goods are yet to resume operations. Lost here though is the very definition of what ought to be deemed essential. Is a packet of 'essential' cheese slices more vital than a 'non-essential' laptop for a person working from home or attending online classes? Also, as the lockdown extends to over a month, what might have been non-essential initially might turn essential later. Still, protecting lives must ultimately be prioritised over allowing commercial activity even when the line between 'essential' and 'non-essential' purchases remains a blur.

Futures shock

The steep fall in oil prices is not all good news for India

Five decades after the oil shock of 1973, when an Arab embargo on the supply of oil to some western powers including the United States sent the price of crude skyrocketing fourfold to \$12 a barrel, the global economy faces a fresh shock from a free-fall in oil prices. On Monday, May futures for the West Texas Intermediate (WTI) U.S. crude plunged below zero to touch a historic low of -\$40.32 a barrel. A negative price implies that a seller would have to pay the buyer to hold the oil to be supplied. While the unprecedented plunge in the particular futures contract could be partly explained away as a technical anomaly given that the May contract was set to expire on Tuesday, beyond which buyers would need to be ready to take physical delivery, the reality is that oil prices are desperately in search of a bottom. A perfect storm of a supply glut exacerbated in March by a price war that saw key producers Saudi Arabia and Russia ramp up output even as demand continued to contract on account of the COVID-19 outbreak sent prices into a steeper slide. Brent crude futures have tumbled more than 67% in 2020 to about \$21 a barrel as of Tuesday afternoon in London trading, while the WTI futures have plunged about 110% to \$5.78. The International Energy Agency observed this month that the confinement measures instituted worldwide have resulted in a dramatic decline in transportation activity which will erase at least a decade of demand growth.

With storage for crude – on land or offshore in supertankers – nearing capacity or becoming prohibitively expensive, oil producers are going to have little option but to curtail output. Saudi Arabia is reported to be considering output cuts even before a 9.7 million barrels per day deal it had struck with Russia to cut production takes effect from May. Still, merely closing the tap a notch or two is not going to redress the oversupply in the market at a time when the 'Great Lockdown' has destroyed demand on an unprecedented scale. India has prudently been using the sharp fall in both crude prices and domestic demand to accelerate the build-up of its strategic reserve. While the sliding oil prices would help significantly pare India's energy import bill, a protracted demand drought would end up hurting the government's tax revenues severely, especially at a time when it badly needs every additional rupee it can garner. Also, rock-bottom oil prices risk damaging the economies of producer countries including those in West Asia, hurting inward remittances. After the lockdown, the Centre ought to consider using this opportunity to cut retail fuel prices sharply by foregoing some excise revenue for a while in order to tease back momentum into the wider economy.

The key strategy is fiscal empowerment of States

The Centre must recognise that winning the war on COVID-19 is linked to the States being armed with enough resources



M. GOVINDA RAO

The scale of disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has never been seen before. Even as we are in the midst of the second phase of the national lockdown, there is no clarity on the time it will take to come out of the crisis, the extent of damage it will inflict, and the cost of relief and rehabilitation required. At a time when governments, both at the Centre and in the States, are fiscally stressed, the pandemic has forced them to undertake huge expenditures to save lives, livelihoods and reduce distresses and even more, to create a stimulus to revive the economy as we map the exit strategy.

Need for relief

The speed of economic revival will depend on how long it will take to revive economic activities and the volume of stimulus through public spending the government is able to provide. It now appears that the lockdown will be lifted in stages and the recovery process will be prolonged. The country is literally placed in financing a war-like situation and the government will have to postpone the fiscal consolidation process for the present, loosen its purse strings and finance its deficits substantially through monetisation. This is also the time for the government to announce relaxation in the States' fiscal deficit limit to make them effective participants in the struggle. It is also important for the States to

realise the importance of health and prioritise spending on health-care services.

Being closer to the people, the States have a much larger responsibility in fighting this war. Public health as well as public order are State subjects in the Constitution. In fact, some States were proactive in dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak by involving the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, even before the Government of India declared a universal lockdown invoking the Disaster Management Act, 2005. Of course, the Centre under Entry 29 of the Concurrent List has the powers to set the rules of implementation which states, "Prevention of the extension from one State to another of infectious or contagious diseases or pests affecting men, animals or plants". While Central intervention was done to enable, "consistency in the application and implementation of various measures across the country", the actual implementation on the ground level will have to be done at the State level. Furthermore, States are better informed to decide the areas and activities where relaxations should be done as the coronavirus curve is flattened. Hopefully, there will be better coordination between the Union and State governments instead of claiming credit and apportioning blame (see <https://bit.ly/3bDauif>).

Focus on health and economy
The acute shortage of protective gear, testing kits, ventilators and hospital beds has been a major handicap and the immediate task of States is to ramp up their availability and supply. In addition, the disruption caused by the lockdown has caused untold misery, and providing relief and rehabilita-



tion to migrant labourers and informal sector workers had to the focus. The pandemic has underlined the historical neglect of the health-care sector in the country. The total public expenditures of Centre and States works out to a mere 1.3% of GDP. In 2017-18, in per capita terms, the public expenditure on medical and public health varied from an abysmal ₹690 in Bihar and ₹814 in Uttar Pradesh to the highest of ₹2,092 in Kerala. The centrally sponsored scheme, the National Health Mission, is inadequately funded, micromanaged with grants given under more than 2,000 heads and poorly targeted. The focus of "Ayushman Bharat" has been to advocate insurance rather than building wellness centres.

Besides protecting lives and livelihoods, States will have to initiate and facilitate economic revival, and that too would require substantial additional spending. Hand holding small and medium enterprises which have completely ceased production, providing relief to farmers who have lost their perishable crops and preparing them for sowing in the kharif season are other tasks that require spending. In fact, States have been proactive. Kerala came out with a comprehensive package allocating ₹20,000 crore to fight the pandemic. Almost all States have ta-

ken measures to provide food to the needy besides ramping up health-care requirements.

Extensive revenue losses

While the requirement of States for immediate expenditures is large, they are severely crippled in their resources. In the lockdown period, there has virtually been no economic activity and they have not been able to generate any revenue from State excise duty, stamp duties and registration fees, motor vehicles tax or sales tax on high speed diesel and motor spirit. The revenue from Goods and Services Tax is stagnant and compensation on time for the loss of revenue has not been forthcoming. In Karnataka for example, it is reported that as against the estimated ₹12,000 crore every month, the State may not be able to generate even ₹300 crore in April. As the recovery process will be staggered, it is doubtful whether tax revenues will register any positive growth in 2020-21. Not surprisingly, the State has decided to monetise land through auctions to get money besides regularising unauthorised constructions by paying high fees.

The position regarding tax devolution from the Centre is even more precarious. To begin with, the tax devolution in the Union Budget estimate is lower than the Commission's estimate by ₹70,995 crore. In fact, the Budget estimate for 2020-21 itself is a huge overestimate when seen against the 11-month actual collections in 2019-20. The required growth to achieve the Budget estimate is 33.3% over the annualised actual collection. The projections are that the growth of nominal GDP in 2020-21 will be just about 4% and if the tax revenue increases by the same rate, devolution to the States

would be lower by ₹2.2-lakh crore than the Finance Commission's estimate. This results in a loss of ₹9,173 crore for Tamil Nadu, ₹9,000 crore for Andhra Pradesh, ₹8,000 crore for Karnataka, ₹4,671 crore for Telangana, and ₹4,255 crore for Kerala. There is a strong case for the States to go back to the Finance Commission with a request to make and give a supplementary report.

The war on COVID-19 can be effectively won only when the States are armed with enough resources to meet the crisis. But as mentioned earlier, they are faced with stagnant revenues while their expenditure commitments are huge. There is only limited scope for expenditure switching and reprioritisation now. Their borrowing space too is limited by the fiscal responsibility and budget management limit of 3% of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP). Faced with an acute fund crunch, Kerala floated 15-year bonds but was faced with a huge upside in the yield to 8.96%. The announcement by the Reserve Bank of India on the increase in the limit of ways and means advances by 60% of the levels prescribed in March 31 could help States to plan their borrowing better; but that is too little to provide much relief. Therefore, it is important for the Central government to provide additional borrowing space by 2% of GSDP from the prevailing 3% of GSDP. This is the time to fiscally empower States to wage the COVID-19 war and trust them to spend on protecting lives, livelihoods and initiate an economic recovery.

M. Govinda Rao was a Member, Fourteenth Finance Commission and former Director, National Institute of Public Finance and Policy

The fragile ceasefire in Syria's Idlib war

The Russia-Turkey agreement is destined to fail because the priorities of the countries concerned cannot be reconciled



KRISHNAN SRINIVASAN

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has called for warring parties the world over to cease fire in order to support the bigger battle against COVID-19. One such conflict is in Syria's Idlib province involving President Bashar al-Assad's military forces with support from Russia, and where Turkey's armed intervention and backing of anti-Assad militants, including Islamist terrorists, had been halted even before Mr. Guterres's appeal by a fragile agreement on March 5 between Russia and Turkey which no observer believes can endure long. In this imbroglio, described by many as the world's greatest humanitarian tragedy, it is necessary to disentangle the priorities of the several contestants.

To first summarise the ground situation, Idlib bordering Turkey is the last stronghold of jihadists funded by Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a terrorist unit designated by the United Nations, and assorted Syrian anti-government elements evacuated from areas liberated by Damascus. The region was spared a Syrian offensive in 2018 on Turkey's plea that it could not suffer any further influx of refugees be-

sides hosting some three-and-a-half million already. There are about 200,000 displaced persons on the Syria-Turkey border and 85,000 in refugee camps, in addition to nearly 400,000 people displaced by the Turkish offensive against Syrian Kurds.

A Turkey-Russia agreement of 2018 established a demilitarised zone (DMZ) with terrorists, including the HTS, leaving this zone, while so-called moderate rebels had to withdraw heavy weaponry. A chain of Turkish observation posts was established, and militants rejecting the plan were to be legitimately targeted by Mr. Assad's military. But Syria and Turkey accused each other of violations, with Russia increasingly agitated due to drone attacks against its airbase in Latakia from Idlib-based jihadists. With the rebels making territorial gains, Syria resumed its offensive in April 2019, retaking territory and targeting Saraqib that strides the M5 highway connecting Aleppo with Damascus.

The Syrian advances brought Turkey and Syria into direct clashes, with accusations by Damascus and Moscow that the Turks were supplying jihadists with weapons and shielding them by intermingling Turkish forces among them. The Turks denied this, objecting to their observation posts being encircled or bypassed by the Syrian army. Over 5,000 Turkish forces, with artillery and combat drones, have intervened and suffered 50 or more casualties, whe-

reas Mr. Assad's losses in men and material have been much higher, despite being assisted by Russia controlling the airspace and denying the Turks the use of aircraft other than drones. Moscow has also used direct air power in support of Syria, though this is denied. The conflict seriously strained Turkey's relations with Russia to their lowest level since the 2015 crisis and the downing of a Russian warplane by Turkey.

Tangled up in politics
The latest Russo-Turkish agreement reaffirms their 'dedication to combat and eliminate all terrorist groups in Syria'. Given the fact that the majority of the anti-Assad forces are HTS cadres that have been weaponised by Ankara, implementation appears highly improbable. The agreement provides for safe passage along the M4 and M5 highways linking Aleppo with Latakia and Damascus. The Syrian Army had gained control of M5 and was about to take M4 when the Moscow agreement was concluded. Both highways are important for Syria for commercial and strategic reasons. The new DMZ will bestride the M4 highway with

a 12-kilometre strip jointly patrolled by Turkey and Russia.

The Moscow agreement is destined to fail because the priorities of the countries concerned cannot be reconciled. Mr. Assad, recognised by the United Nations but not by the West, and openly supported by few of the nations that recognise him, now controls some 70% of his country and wishes to secure the remainder, but his forces remain dependent on Russia in the air and Iran and Hezbollah on the ground. He is in haste because his troops are exhausted by nine years of continuous fighting and he cannot count on Russian, Iranian and Hezbollah support much longer. Iran is in domestic turmoil apart from suffering U.S. sanctions and COVID-19, while the Hezbollah is deeply involved in Lebanon's complex domestic politics.

Turkey under President Erdogan, nominally a member of the western alliance against Russia, wishes to play a lead role in the Arab world, and has deliberately extended its reach in Syria and Libya to have a say in the futures of those nations. Upset with NATO for lack of support both during the failed coup of 2016 and his campaign against Syrian Kurds whom he regards as anti-Turkish terrorists, Mr. Erdogan has leveraged the refugee problem to extract €4.5 billion from the European Union and uses the refugees continuously as a bargaining counter. He also needs manageable ties with both Russia and the U.S. to play each off against the other. The

confrontation with Moscow four years ago led to severe economic difficulties for Turkey after Russian curbs on trade and tourism, which Mr. Erdogan would not wish to repeat. Both countries also have a vested interest in the TurkStream pipeline conveying Russian gas to southern Europe. Criticism of Mr. Erdogan has lately emerged domestically but his position is solid provided he retains his army's support by avoiding more casualties in Idlib.

Russia's call

Russia is now the country of first resort in Syria and its influence in the entire West Asian region has expanded remarkably in recent years. In principle it backs Mr. Assad exercising sway over the whole of Syria and has saved him from being toppled, but it now wishes to bring the Syrian conflict to an end with a negotiated settlement, avoid losses and more expenditure, while consolidating its naval and air bases in that country.

The Americans are content to be bystanders in the belief that they will be the gainers whatever the Idlib outcome. The Europeans have neither the will nor the means to affect developments, and the United Nations is continuing the thus-far futile enterprise of persuading the Syrian multi-party talks in Geneva to arrive at a new constitution to be followed by free elections.

Krishnan Srinivasan is a former Foreign Secretary

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.



Safety and dignity
Abuse, violence, social alienation, facing boycott, apathy from the hierarchy and government authorities are all situations a doctor has to face in professional life. More so when an unprecedented situation such as the pandemic exists. Disheartening incidents such as locals being aggressive towards health-care staff who are on rounds conducting checks and screening, gruesome incidents such as locals and mobs again disrupting the last rites of health professionals – examples being cases in Andhra Pradesh and Chennai – are instances which can only be attributed to the manifestation of underlying and deep-rooted stigmas present in certain sections of Indian society. The Indian Medical Association

has a right to lodge a protest against these atrocities. Of what use was there having the exercise of Indians clapping and banging kitchen utensils on March 22 to thank health-care professionals? This has not done any favour to health workers. The Centre should respond to the demand by doctors proposing an ordinance to protect hospitals, doctors and health-care workers. Dr. JAYASEKHAR V.P., Payyanur, Kannur, Kerala

■ It is upsetting that a doctor who lost his life to the coronavirus was denied dignity in his last rites. There is no dearth of news reports about doctors and public health personnel being manhandled while discharging their duties. Governments should stop this dangerous trend from

spreading further to avoid frontline workers becoming demoralised. Dr. D.V.G. SANKARARAO, Nelli marla, Andhra Pradesh

■ The highly condemnable incident has not only brought to the fore the ignorance and lack of understanding about the pandemic but has also laid bare the stigma associated with COVID-19-affected patients and the lack of empathy towards them. Doctors are risking their lives to save people from the jaws of death. When will this fact dawn on the rest of us? M. JAYARAM, Sholavandan, Tamil Nadu

■ The authorities and the media should be proactive now to dispel the fears and the apprehensions of the common man as far as the coronavirus is concerned. S. RAJA MOHAMED KAMIL, Vaniyambadi, Tamil Nadu

The media should realise its additional responsibilities of educating people instead of being involved in the pursuit of making news sound sensational and to elevate ratings. As people are heavily reliant on the media, especially during the lockdown, newswriters must enlighten the public. Dr. RAJESH KUMAR, Chembarambakkam, Chennai

Case of respect
I was taken aback by the news item (OpEd page, April 21), "President Gives Evidence in Court" ("From the Archives - Fifty Years Ago, April 21, 1970"), where the former President of India, V.V. Giri, created history – the first time that the country's President had appeared before a court of law. That Mr. Giri, as Head of State, was permitted to be examined in Rashtrapati

Bhavan but gave up this privilege and submitted himself to the court, as any other ordinary witness, is remarkable. This gesture showed how much respect constitutional heads and leaders gave to constitutional values and democratic procedures. Those who are a part of the political setting

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:
The report "Kia allowed to exhume bodies of militants in Baramulla" published by The Hindu on April 19, 2020, has been corrected for a factual error. The authorities did not grant permission to exhume bodies but only granted a curfew pass, which the family members misunderstood as the permission for exhumation. Now the corrected version of the story has a new headline: "Families of slain militants given curfew pass". There was also an updated report "J&K police file FIR on The Hindu report" (April 21, 2020), which gave the sequence of events that lead to the report of April 19.

In the OpEd article "Nurturing air power to meet rising demand" (April 21, 2020), the line "Translated to tonnage, that is almost 10 million tonnes" should read: "Translated to payload that is almost 10 million kgs". Another sentence, "However, a modern-day airlift of greater proportions has not been heralded as much" should be recast to say: "However, a modern-day airlift of similar importance has not been heralded as much".

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Putting the SAGAR vision to the test

As observer, India could learn from as well as support the Indian Ocean Commission



KATE SULLIVAN DE ESTRADA



"SAGAR seeks to differentiate India's leadership from the modus operandi of other regionally active major powers and to reassure littoral states as India's maritime influence grows." PM Narendra Modi in Seychelles in 2015. ■ PTI

In March 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited three small but significant Indian Ocean island states—Seychelles, Mauritius, and Sri Lanka. During this tour, he unveiled India's strategic vision for the Indian Ocean: Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR). SAGAR seeks to differentiate India's leadership from the modus operandi of other regionally active major powers and to reassure littoral states as India's maritime influence grows. As External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar signalled at the fourth Indian Ocean Conference in September last year, India's SAGAR vision is intended to be "consultative, democratic and equitable". India's recent admission as observer to the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) will put this vision to the test.

IOC, a trusted regional actor

Following a request from New Delhi, the IOC granted observer status to India on March 6 at the Commission's 34th Council of Ministers. Founded in 1982, the IOC is an intergovernmental organisation comprising five small-island states in the Western Indian Ocean: the Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Réunion (a French department), and Seychelles. Though Réunion brings a major power, France, into this small-state equation, decisions in the IOC are consensus-based, and while France's foreign policy interests are represented, the specifics of Réunion's regional decision-making emerge from its local governance structures. Over the years, the IOC has emerged as an active and trusted regional actor, working in and for the Western Indian Ocean and implementing a range of projects.

More recently, the IOC has demonstrated leadership in the maritime security domain. Since maritime security is a prominent feature of India's relations with Indian Ocean littoral states, India's interest in the IOC should be understood in this context. However, India has preferred to engage bilaterally with smaller states in the region. What India will not find

in the IOC is a cluster of small states seeking a 'brother' partnership. The IOC has its own regional agenda, and has made impressive headway in the design and implementation of a regional maritime security architecture in the Western Indian Ocean.

The IOC was one of the four regional organisations to launch the MASE Programme—the European Union-funded programme to promote Maritime Security in Eastern and Southern Africa and Indian Ocean. Under MASE, the IOC has established a mechanism for surveillance and control of the Western Indian Ocean with two regional centres. The Regional Maritime Information Fusion Center (RMIFC), based in Madagascar, is designed to deepen maritime domain awareness by monitoring maritime activities and promoting information sharing and exchange. The Regional Coordination Operations Centre (RCOC), based in Seychelles, will eventually facilitate joint or jointly coordinated interventions at sea based on information gathered through the RMIFC. These centres are a response to the limitations that the states in the region face in policing and patrolling their often enormous Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). They deliver an urgently needed deterrent against unabated maritime crime at sea, only partly addressed by the high-level counter-piracy presence of naval forces from the EU, the Combined Maritime Forces, and Independent Forces. Seven states in the region have signed agreements to participate in this multilateral maritime se-

curity architecture, and once ratified, will provide its legal foundation. Many major powers have expressed interest in accessing the RMIFC.

The IOC has also wielded a disproportionate degree of convening power. In 2018 and 2019, it served as Chair of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS). Leveraging the CGPCS Chair, the IOC held ministerial meetings in 2018 and 2019 on maritime security in the Western Indian Ocean, drawing state representations from the region plus major powers such as India, the EU, the U.S., the U.K., Australia, and Russia. These meetings, resulting in formal declarations, facilitated convergence around common, sub-region-specific definitions of maritime security threats and the legal way of dealing with them.

The IOC's achievements offer an opportunity for India to learn, and also to support. The IOC style of 'bottom-up regionalism' has produced a sub-regional view and definition of maritime security problems and local ownership of pathways towards workable solutions. A 2019 policy brief published by the IOC (with inputs from this author), 'Strengthening Maritime Security in the Western Indian Ocean', sets out how the counter-piracy response off the coast of Somalia delivered unprecedented regional and international cooperation in the domain of maritime security. However, it resulted in multiple players, the duplication of actions, and regional dependence on international navies. The IOC has been seeking more sustainable ways of ad-

dressing maritime security threats in the region, with the RMIFC and RCOC as part of this response. Its regional maritime security architecture is viewed locally as the most effective and sustainable framework to improve maritime control and surveillance and allow littoral States to shape their own destiny. Moreover, with proper regional coordination, local successes at curbing maritime threats will have broader security dividends for the Indian Ocean space.

How can India contribute?

The IOC's maritime security activities have a strong foundation, but they require support and buy-in from additional regional actors. India has already signalled a strong interest in the work of the IOC through its request to be admitted as an observer. The view from Ebène, where the IOC is headquartered, and from where its maritime security strategy is directed, is that major powers are warmly invited to support its initiatives. Nearly all littoral states in the Western Indian Ocean need assistance in developing their maritime domain awareness and in building capacity to patrol their EEZs. All would benefit from national information fusion centres that can link to those of the wider region. With its observer status, India will be called upon to extend its expertise to the region, put its satellite imagery to the service of the RMIFC, and establish links with its own Information Fusion Centre.

If India seeks to calibrate its Indian Ocean strategy away from outdated, neoimperialist conceptions of great power and spheres of influence that are costly to regional followership, one route will be to learn from and support sub-regional efforts such as those of the IOC. As a major stakeholder in the Indian Ocean with maritime security high on the agenda, India will continue to pursue its interests and tackle maritime security challenges at the macro level in the region. However, as an observer of the IOC, a specific, parallel opportunity to embrace bottom-up regionalism presents itself. There are those in the Western Indian Ocean who are closely watching how India's "consultative, democratic and equitable" leadership will take shape.

Kate Sullivan de Estrada is Associate Professor in the International Relations of South Asia at the University of Oxford

A change in migrant policy

Besides addressing the immediate distress conditions of migrants, the state needs to think of long-term solutions



DIPAK KUMAR SINGH & PUSHPENDRA

no compensatory sources of livelihood. The poor States may find it difficult to sustain themselves without the remittances. This will not only cause demand side setbacks but also impact nutrition, health, education and the well-being of the older population.

Fourth, in the case of epidemics, the exodus of seasonal migrants creates apprehensions about the spread of the disease and runs counterproductive to the very purpose of a lockdown. Working from home or getting paid leave is largely a middle-class luxury. Daily-wage earners do not have the capacity to stay at a destination without work. Their families back home depend on their daily savings. A considerable number of workers live within the manufacturing units or at work sites. Any lockdown results in loss of their accommodation too.

Fifth, the pathetic working and living conditions of migrants defy the very idea of decent work and general security. Slums and slum-like colonies are breeding grounds of ailments and communicable diseases. People living in these areas simply cannot practise social distancing. Lack of sanitation, hygiene, safe drinking water, health services, social security measures, and affordable housing have resulted in a low quality of life.

Delivering relief packages

Some amelioration may be in sight with the ₹1.70 lakh crore relief package announced by the Central government. However, despite the government's good intentions, the package will not benefit seasonal migrants.

Those migrants who are unable to return home and are not ration cardholders in the cities where they are stationed will not benefit from additional free foodgrains under the PDS. They cannot avail of increased MGNREGA wages until they go back home. As many seasonal migrants are landless or marginal farmers, they will not benefit from the grant to landholders. Neither will they get benefits under the Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board because of low registration. Thus, this workforce will remain largely deprived of the benefits under the present package at their destination places. The State needs to think out of the box in delivering relief packages.

Disasters provide opportunities to correct structural wrongs. The state could work out a strategy of addressing immediate distress conditions and simultaneously initiating long-term measures to bring structural changes in the policy towards migrants and the informal sector.

Dipak Kumar Singh is an IAS officer (Bihar cadre); Pushpendra is Professor and Chairperson, Patna Centre of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. Views are personal

Ill-equipped to deal with a crisis

COVID-19 has laid bare science policy deficits

KAMAL BAWA

In the U.S., despite egregious failures and missteps, science and informatics have been able to guide COVID-19 policy to some degree. It is time to think about the underpowered investments in science in India and about the stark social inequities that COVID-19 will lay bare, shorn of the protections afforded by science and data-driven policies, and effective decentralised governance.

Investments in science

India has invested very little in the type of science that is needed to meet contemporary environmental challenges. COVID-19 may be its most severe environmental challenge so far, but India faces devastating challenges such as assaults on biodiversity, floods and unmitigated pollution every year. Every disaster underlines national vulnerabilities, accentuated by inadequate science and research infrastructures.

Amidst the worst pandemic of modern times, India's medical research institutions and epidemiologists have a prominent role to play. In the daily White House press briefings, the two most prominent figures are noted epidemiologists Dr. Deborah Birx and Dr. Anthony Fauci. Every day they provide new data to direct policy. India is a global superpower in information technology, yet it has few scientists or institutes systematically deploying 'big data' and informatics to understand large-scale environmental challenges, including infectious diseases. India is a hotspot for emerging diseases—but to respond adequately, it urgently needs an expanded group of world-class specialists in this area.

The successful mitigation of COVID-19 in India will require rigorous testing, monitoring, and modelling to inform policy and action. In a country where access to data is limited, we will need good data on demographic changes, on how disasters push people into poverty, and the local interventions that pull people out of poverty and build resilience to these cyclic events.

Complex socio-environmental problems can only be addressed by integrating natural and social sci-

ences to generate multidimensional knowledge. Only such knowledge can guide adequate policy responses and action to confront a crisis. In India, very few research centres are capable of doing such work.

Building for the future

But there are some hopeful signs. The Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India, one of India's most accomplished scientists, is playing a critical role in policy responses. Directed by the Principal Scientific Adviser's Office, and with the Prime Minister's support, there are nine large national science missions in various stages of implementation. These include a mission in quantum computing and another in biodiversity and human well-being, with an important component on emergent infectious diseases.

India needs substantial investments in a science directed towards the well-being of all social sectors; a science for realising the UN SDGs; a science to build resilience against environmental disasters; and a science for healing humanity's relationship with Nature to ward off biodiversity loss and mitigate climate change—the "epidemic" that has been around us for some time.

A recent editorial in this newspaper rightly pointed out that by saving biodiversity alone can we ensure a sustainable future for ourselves. Yet there are also reports about policy decisions to kill nature—for instance, the Karnataka government's decision to continue with the proposal for the Hubballi-Ankola railway line through the last remaining forests of the Western Ghats. The scientific and environmental considerations underlying these decisions remain unclear.

India aspires to be a \$5 trillion economy. Such aspirations must envision a society that cherishes science and knowledge, enshrines equity, justice and decentralised governance, and respects our natural heritage. We must ensure healthcare as an individual basic right—and Earthcare as a collective right.

Kamal Bawa is Distinguished Professor of Biology at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, and President of the Bengaluru-based ATREE. Views are personal



DATA POINT

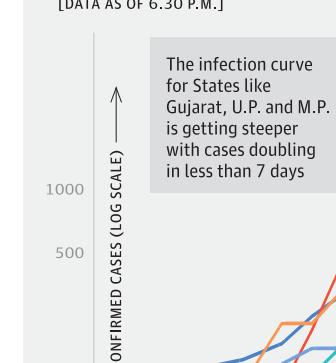
Doubling rates in testing times

Only Kerala has managed to slow down its rate of growth of COVID-19 infections substantially among major States and can be confident about arresting the spread because of an above-average testing rate. U.P. & West Bengal have a higher rate of growth of infections and very low testing rates. By Srivinas Ramani, Naresh Singaravelu

■ CASE PROGRESSION

The chart plots the day-wise progression of confirmed cases since the 50th case in each State

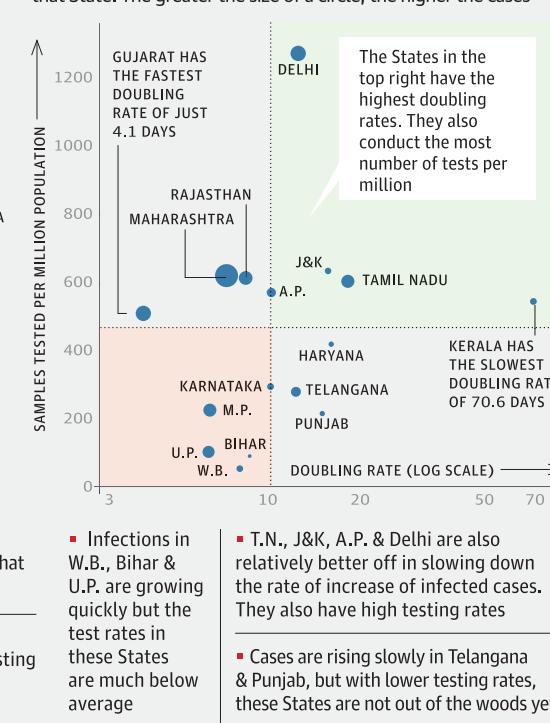
[DATA AS OF 6.30 P.M.]



- The infection curve for States like Gujarat, U.P. and M.P. is getting steeper with cases doubling in less than 7 days
- New cases in Kerala have reduced to a crawl (doubling rate of 71 days nearly) suggesting that the State has managed to flatten the curve
- Cases are growing quickly in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, but the high testing rates in these States suggest that more infected people are being identified

■ DOUBLING RATES

The chart plots the doubling rate* (in the last 10 days for a State with more than 250 cases) and the tests per million people in that State. The greater the size of a circle, the higher the cases



- Gujarat has the fastest doubling rate of just 4.1 days
- The States in the top right have the highest doubling rates. They also conduct the most number of tests per million
- T.N., J&K, A.P. & Delhi are also relatively better off in slowing down the rate of increase of infected cases. They also have high testing rates
- T.N., J&K, A.P. & Delhi are also relatively better off in slowing down the rate of increase of infected cases. They also have high testing rates
- Cases are rising slowly in Telangana & Punjab, but with lower testing rates, these States are not out of the woods yet

The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 22, 1970

Use of Lithium in Mental Illness

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has licensed the much-discussed drug, lithium carbonate, for treatment of an important form of mental illness. Some experts consider the drug to be the most effective treatment for the manic phase of manic-depressive psychosis. Lithium is widely used for that purpose elsewhere in the world, but has not previously been licensed in the United States because of concern over its potential dangers. The action by the drug agency indicates that its officers have decided the drug is too useful to be barred any longer, despite the fact that it must be used with caution. It has been under study in the U.S. for at least five years. It has been in use much longer than that elsewhere in the world. The study of lithium that is generally considered to be the definitive one on the subject was completed in 1954 by Dr. Mogens Schou of Denmark. It was first reported useful against mental illness in 1949 by Dr. J. F. J. Cade of Australia. Manic depressive illness is considered one of the two most common forms of serious mental illness in the U.S. The other is schizophrenia.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 22, 1920

The Oriya Problem.

History tells us how the territorial vivisection of the Oriya-speaking tracts of the four different provinces kept them scattered since the overthrow of Mukunda Deva, the last King of Orissa. From 1565, the unfortunate Province passed through various hands until 1803 when the British took possession of the present political Orissa division from the Bhonsles. Lord Curzon, after visiting Purulia and Bhubaneswar, took pity on this fallen community which resulted in the Government Resolution of 1903 to unify the Oriya-speaking tracts. Sir A. Fraser, the then Chief Commissioner of C.P., unfortunately however recommended only the union of the District of Sambalpur with Orissa division leaving aside the Oriya speaking tracts of the district of Raipore and Bilaspur and the Feudatory Seat of Bastar, Sarpagarh. The start thus given to the Oriya movement led to a national awakening and the Oriyas laid their weighty grievances before the Decentralisation Commission and waited in deputations upon different Governors-General and Provincial Pro-Consuls.

FROM PAGE ONE

ICMR asks States to stop using rapid tests

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan has written to the Health Departments of all States/U.T.s to ensure adequate availability of blood in banks in particular, for people in need of regular transfusion with blood disorders, Mr. Agarwal said.

"Portal 'e-Raktkosh' needs to be used for the real-time status monitoring of the current stock of each blood group. As part of the collaborative approach for COVID-19 management, Indian Red Cross has started a 24X7 control room in Delhi for blood services. The numbers are: 011-23359379, 93199 82104, 93199 82105," the Health Ministry said.

Addressing the problem of hospitals getting closed as some healthcare workers are becoming positive and some patients admitted for unrelated disease in non-

COVID-19 hospitals becoming positive, the Ministry has issued guidelines for detection of such cases in non-COVID-19 health facilities.

"The hospital infection control committee is now responsible for monitoring such issues. It shall ensure that the healthcare workers are oriented on infection prevention and control guidelines. Local health authorities have to be informed about the cases and transfer the patients to be treated in isolation for COVID-19. Such patients should be masked and only dedicated healthcare workers should attend these cases," Mr. Agarwal said, adding, "All close contacts shall be put on HCQ for a period of 7 weeks keeping in mind the contraindications of HCQ also".

(With inputs from Mohammed Iqbal)

Huge spike in cases likely in Mumbai: Central panel

"We are taking the projections with a pinch of salt even as we do not wish to discard them completely. The response of the State is now scaled up keeping in mind these numbers. Overall, the basis of using a Doubling Rate of 3.8 days has been questioned by us and not factoring in discharge patients and our methods of isolating high risk patients while drawing these projections," said a senior Maharashtra bureaucrat.

Several models

A senior State health official told *The Hindu* that several models were being used for projections of COVID-19 cases to gauge Maharashtra's preparedness based on these projections.

"All the models have derived varied results. Some predicted at least a lakh cases over the next few weeks while some have predicted a staggering explosion with several lakh of cases," said the official, adding that some of the figures seemed exaggerated and misleading.

"The State, as well as the Centre, is equally puzzled. We are all confused about which estimate to go by. However, it was decided to take a slightly higher projection

and work on those statistics in order to be better prepared rather than being under-prepared," he said.

The official also said the Government of India has now made its own tool that is currently being used in Maharashtra. "We are already in the process of carrying out a gap analysis based on the projections made by the new tool," he said.

Epicentre of outbreak

Mumbai, which has become the epicentre of the outbreak with the highest number of cases and deaths, is the State's biggest concern.

Of the 5,218 cases recorded in Maharashtra, 66% were in Mumbai alone. The city also contributed to 60% of the 251 deaths in the State.

The decision to convert the tertiary care Nair Hospital, attached to a medical college, into a COVID-19 facility taking large empty areas and converting them in quarantine facilities have all stemmed from anticipating the worst.

"We are preparing for the worse as Mumbai continues to be at the peak. The city's density poses a challenge," said a doctor who is on the newly formed task force by the government.

Ministerial team waits as Centre-Bengal face off

It was informed that they have been specifically restrained from making any visits, interacting with health professionals, and assessing the ground level situation. This amounts to obstructing the implementation of the Orders issued by the Central Government under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, and equally binding directions of the Supreme Court of India," Mr. Bhalla said.

However, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had expressed strong objections to the visit of central teams and wrote a letter to the Prime Minister calling the development "unilateral".

Cong. rebels find place in Madhya Pradesh Cabinet

The other Ministers who took oath are Narottam Mishra, Meena Singh and Kamal Patel, all sitting BJP MLAs.

Mr. Chouhan, who took charge on March 23 and was functioning as a one-man Cabinet since then, has sought to strike caste and regional balance.

The five Ministers hail from the Gwalior-Chambal, Bundelkhand, Malwa, Vindh and Central MP regions.

According to sources, Mr.

Scindia pushed for induction of most of his loyalists in the Cabinet, but the BJP central leadership agreed to reward only two with ministerial berths for the time being.

Six of Mr. Scindia supporters, including Mr. Silawat and Mr. Rajput, were members of the Nath Cabinet also. The three senior BJP leaders inducted as Ministers had been members of the previous BJP governments as well.

CBDT sticks with Budget's tax target

Letter sent to I-T officials last week reiterates personal income tax, corporation tax goals

MAHESH LANGA
AHMEDABAD

Even as the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown to combat it has brought the economy to a near standstill, the Centre has gone ahead and set its Income Tax authorities a daunting target of collecting ₹13.2 lakh crore for the fiscal year ending in March 2021.

In a correspondence to all Principal Chief Commissioners of Income Tax (PCCIT) dated April 16, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has spelt out zone wise targets for the collection of corporate tax, personal income tax and security transaction tax (STT).

The figures, which are a reiteration of the revenue receipt estimates spelt out by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Union Budget presented in February, comprise a corporation tax component of ₹6.81 lakh crore, personal income tax of ₹6.25 lakh crore and STT at ₹13,000 crore.

"The budget target of each cadre controlling

High estimates

A look at the ten regions with highest budgetary estimates of income tax collection for FY21

Region	Corporation tax	Personal Income tax	Total
Mumbai*	2,31,712	1,62,843	4,07,555
Delhi	1,12,116	76,957	1,89,073
Karnataka and Goa	63,236	77,595	1,40,831
T.N. and Puducherry	44,827	46,400	91,227
Pune	32,044	42,043	74,087
A.P. and Telangana	35,191	38,618	73,809
Gujarat	31,432	33,805	65,237
North west region	24,156	31,630	55,786
W.B. and Sikkim	30,377	20,740	51,117
M.P. and Chhattisgarh	16,174	14,264	30,438

All figures in ₹ crore

*includes security transaction tax

PCCIT has been fixed keeping in view the revenue potential of each region, which is based on the weighted average growth rate of net collections of last three years, giving highest weight to the immediately preceding year," the CBDT said in its let-

ter. After the budget, Revenue Secretary Ajay Bhushan Pandey had said that budgeted 12% growth in tax collections may look ambitious to some but was achievable in an economy projected to clock a 10% nominal GDP growth.

However, the pandemic has emerged as the single biggest challenge to the economy and the IMF earlier this month cut its projection for India's annual GDP growth in the current fiscal year to 1.9%, from an earlier forecast for a 5.8% expansion.

A senior income tax officer confirmed having received the CBDT letter with details of zone wise targets but declined to comment on whether the target was achievable. "You see the current environment and judge for yourself," quipped the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Several tax consultants told *The Hindu* that the Revenue Department and the CBDT would have little choice than to revise downward the zone wise targets handed out to the tax bureaus.

"No way it can be achieved in such a challenging environment with a variety of factors like the massive hit to the economy and massive lay-offs of em-

ployees in the corporate sector," a top tax expert from Ahmedabad said, declining to be identified.

Another expert from Mumbai said that the personal income tax collection would be affected hugely because most of the companies had cut salaries of employees or sent the employees on furlough (leave without pay). "All airlines, hospitality companies and several others have cut salaries and sent the employees on rotation basis on furlough, so that will hit the tax collections very badly," he added.

An entrepreneur running a mid-size manufacturing unit in Ahmedabad even expressed apprehensions of "tax terrorism" if the Ministry of Finance did not revise the targets given to the field offices of the tax department. "I sincerely hope the government will have a second look at the figures, otherwise field officials will go aggressive targeting businessmen and corporates," he added.

CEC stuck in U.S. due to travel curbs

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI

Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora, who went on a personal visit to the United States and was scheduled to return to Delhi on April 4, has been stuck in the country since March 23 when all international flights were stopped.

He said that he was on leave from March 7 and his return was on April 4. Now, like many others, he is waiting for the resumption of flights. Election Commission officials said Mr. Arora had been working remotely. The two Election Commissioners - Ashok Lavasa and Sushil Chandra - and other senior officials were in touch with him.

Mr. Arora said the ECI headquarters in Delhi, including his own office, was operational with a skeleton staff. The decision of the CEC and ECAs on a 30% cut in salary for one year to contribute to the COVID-19 response of the government was taken after conversations among the three, he said.

Citing security, Centre objects to 4G in J&K

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Centre and the Jammu and Kashmir administration objected in the Supreme Court on Tuesday to the idea of restoring 4G mobile Internet connectivity in the Union Territory during the lockdown, saying it would affect national security.

However, petitioners said the lack of proper access to 4G Net was handicapping business, education and health services during the lockdown.

A Bench led by Justice N.V. Ramana, hearing the case through video conferencing, directed the J&K administration and the Union government to file a counter-affidavit spelling out each and every reason as to why they are averse to restoring 4G in the Union Territory.

The court ordered them to file their response by April 26 with further hearing on April 27.

Attorney General K.K. Venugopal cited militancy as a major hurdle in restoring 4G in the Valley.

Secularism not subject to politics'

Naqvi says India should remain cautious of 'conspiracy to spread misinformation'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Union Minister for Minority Affairs Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi on Tuesday said secularism as an Indian value was a "perfect passion" in the country and not, as some assumed, subject to "political fashion".

Mr. Naqvi's statement, after he spoke to leaders of Muslim groups to send out messages of "at home" observance of the Ramzan fast, comes a day after India's Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Pawan Kapoor defended India's record on secularism.

Mr. Kapoor's intervention came when prominent sections of the UAE's ruling class took exception to divisive and anti-Muslim social media posts by Indians.

Mr. Naqvi reiterated that constitutional, social and religious rights of all the citizens, including the minorities, were India's constitutional and moral guarantees.

"Traditional and professional bogus bashing brigades are still active in conspiracy to spread misinformation propaganda

MUKHTAR ABBAS NAQVI,
MINISTER FOR MINORITY AFFAIRS



misinformation. We should remain cautious of such evil forces and we need to work united to defeat their nefarious misinformation propaganda," he said.

Fake news There was need to remain cautious of any type of fake news and conspiracies aimed at creating misinformation.

Ramzan strategy More than 30 State waqf boards had started working on the strategy to ensure strict and honest implementation of the lockdown, curfew and social distancing during Ramzan with the coordination and cooperation of all the Muslim religious leaders, imams, religious and social organisations, the Muslim

"All the Muslim religious leaders, imams, religious and social organisations and the Muslim community have jointly decided to offer prayers and perform other religious rituals during the holy month of Ramzan, which will start from 24th April, staying inside their home," he said.

Ramzan strategy

The authorities have been working for the safety and well-being of all citizens of the country. Such type of rumours and conspiracies are a nefarious design to weaken the fight against corona. We should work united to win this fight against corona by defeating any type of rumour, misinformation and conspiracy," he said.

community and local administration.

The entire country had been fighting united against the COVID-19 pandemic.

A decision was taken last week during a meeting of all the State waqf boards through video conferencing under the chairmanship of Mr. Naqvi that all the boards would ensure strict and honest implementation of the lockdown, curfew and social distancing during Ramzan, which will start from 24th April, staying inside their home," he said.

Regulatory body

It is to be noted that more than 7 lakh registered mosques, eidgah, imambada, dargah and other religious and social institutions come under the State waqf boards across the country. The Central Waqf Council is the regulatory body for State waqf boards.

"In view of the challenges of Corona pandemic, all the religious-social activities and mass gathering in all the temples, gurdwaras, churches and other religious & social places of the country have been stopped," he said, highlighting the universal nature of such prohibitions.

Evacuation of people from the U.S. not possible right now'

Govt. says representation can be made in specific cases



merits and take appropriate steps to ameliorate the conditions of those in the U.S.A.," the court ordered.

The Bench was hearing petitions, including one filed by senior advocate Vibha Datta Makhija, seeking evacuation of vulnerable Indian citizens from the U.S., particularly those on temporary visas. The Centre had earlier filed a status report setting out steps already taken by it.

"On such a representation being filed by the petitioners, the authorities concerned are directed to consider the same on its own proactive approach."

Withdraw case against The Hindu journalist: Guild

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Editors Guild of India has called the action taken by law enforcement agencies against *The Hindu* journalist Peerzada Ashiq and freelance photographer Masrat Zahra an "indirect way of intimidating journalists across the country."

The Guild has demanded that the Union Territory administration of Jammu and

Kashmir withdraw the charges against both Mr. Ashiq and Ms. Zahra forthwith.

Expressing shock at the FIR filed against Mr. Ashiq for a news story and slapping the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act against Ms. Zahra for social media posts, the Editors Guild, in a statement here, said, "Any recourse to such laws for merely publishing something in the mainstream or social media

is a gross misuse of power. Its only purpose can be to strike terror into journalists."

Mere social media posts of factual pictures can't attract the toughest anti-terror laws passed for hardened terrorists.

"And in the case of *The Hindu* reporter, the correct course was to escalate the complaint to the newspaper's Editor," the Guild said.

Rahul against use of stock for sanitisers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday took to Twitter to target the government over reports that surplus rice stocks would be used to make ethanol for hand sanitizers. "After all, when will India's poor wake up? You are dying of hunger and they are busy cleaning the hands of the rich...," he tweeted.

100 families self-isolate at Rashtrapati Bhavan

Movement within the Estate restricted



Navy anticipates a rise in cases among sailors in Mumbai

'Containment zones and buffer areas have been designated'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Naval authorities in Mumbai feel that the number of COVID-19 cases among sailors is only going to increase as the test results of several Indian Navy personnel at *INS Angre* is expected any time.

INS Angre is the shore-based logistics and administrative support establishment of the Western Naval Command.

Located at Kala Ghoda in south Mumbai, it is the base depot ship for the Command.

Officials said that after a thorough scrutiny, authorities have identified the source of the virus spread. The source of the contagion is now known to be a 55-year-old ex-serviceman living in Navy Nagar.

The ex-serviceman, who tested positive in early April, had come into contact with a foreign-return civilian in

March. One sailor at *INS Angre* had met this ex-serviceman. He tested positive on April 7. From him, the virus spread to 26 other sailors," the official said.

Given that the sailors live in barracks and consume food at a mess, the number of cases is expected to rise. Many sailors have been tested and the results are awaited.

There has so far not been a single COVID-19 case on board any ship, submarine or air station of the Indian Navy.

Aggressive testing

"The detection of the coronavirus cases is a result of meticulous contact tracing and aggressive screening/testing carried out by the Western Naval Command after one sailor tested positive on April 7. All these sailors continue to remain asymptomatic and are being monitored."

tored at the naval hospital INHS Avini, under the care of the best medical professionals," Indian Navy spokesperson Commander Meenal Karnik said.

Given that the sailors live in barracks and consume food at a mess, the number of cases is expected to rise. Many sailors have been tested and the results are awaited.

There has so far not been a single COVID-19 case on board any ship, submarine or air station of the Indian Navy.

Containment zones and buffer areas have been designated'

All other areas within the Naval premises have been under strict lockdown, and stringent quarantine and safety protocols have been enforced for personnel and their families, with door-to-door screening being undertaken for identification of cases, if any.

Maharashtra records 552 fresh cases

Tally touches 5,218; 19 deaths take toll to 252

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PUNE

Maharashtra reported an identical surge of 552 new COVID-19 cases in less than 72 hours as its tally soared past the 5,000-mark on Tuesday to reach 5,218 cases, while 19 new fatalities took the State's death toll to 252.

The State had recorded a spike of precisely 552 fresh novel coronavirus cases on Sunday as well, making both instances the highest single-day surge across Maharashtra so far. The State has reported nearly 1,600 new cases over a 72-hour period.

Twelve of the 19 deaths were reported from Mumbai city, while four fatalities were reported from Pune district, including one from Pimpri-Chinchwad. Two deaths were reported from Thane district, while State health officials finally confirmed the death of a 47-year-



Strict enforcement: Police personnel deployed near Gokhale Nagar in Powai, Mumbai. ■ MUKESH TRIVEDI

old district cooperative bank official in Sangli in their medical bulletin. The patient had succumbed to acute respiratory failure at the Government Medical College and Hospital in Miraj on Sunday evening.

"A total of 63% of the deaths reported had high-risk co-morbidities such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma and heart disease," said State Surveillance Officer Dr. Pradeep Awate. Despite the

rapid surge in cases, 150 patients were discharged from hospitals on Tuesday, taking the number of recovered cases in the State to 722.

Overwhelming number

In a familiar pattern, the overwhelming majority of new cases (419) was reported from Mumbai alone, as the city's tally shot to 3,451 cases with 151 deaths. Pune district witnessed another bout of fresh cases, reporting as many as 53 cases to take the district's tally to 726, with 51 being reported from Pimpri-Chinchwad. The district's death toll stands at 55, with two fatalities being reported from Pimpri-Chinchwad. According to Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation Commissioner Shravan Hardikar, no fresh case has been reported in the past 48 hours. The second death reported from Pimpri-Chinchwad was of a

12 new cases in Dharavi

STAFF REPORTER
MUMBAI

Dharavi reported 12 new COVID-19 positive cases on Tuesday, bringing the total number of cases in the area to 180 so far. It also reported its 12th death, that of a 62-year-old man from Mukund Nagar.

In Asia's largest slum that saw its first positive case on April 1, the number of cases have increased by leaps and bounds, reaching 180

positive cases within three weeks. The majority of these 180 cases are concentrated in five areas of Dharavi, including Kalyanwadi (44), Muslim Nagar and Madina Nagar (23), Mukund Nagar (27), Social Nagar (13) and Dr. Baliga Nagar (6). About 83 cases were found during fever screening. On

Tuesday, Dharavi reported 12 new cases, including five from Rajiv Gandhi Nagar and four from Muslim Nagar.

62-year-old wife of an ex-Army jawan.

A glimmer of hope amid the State's relentless rise in cases was the fact that no new cases were reported from Latur, Osmanabad, Washim and Hingoli districts in Maharashtra's rural hinterland.

"Currently, 93,569 people across the State are in home quarantine and 7,808 persons in institutional quarantine," said Dr. Awate.

Police official dies of virus in Ujjain

STAFF REPORTER
BHOPAL

A 59-year-old in charge of a police station in Ujjain died of COVID-19 on Tuesday morning while undergoing treatment at a hospital.

"He had contracted the illness during the course of his duty," said A.G. Sinha, Ujjain Chief Medical and Health Officer. She added that the inspector was posted at the Neelganga station, which fell under one of the containment area where infected cases had been reported.

The official, who died at 5.10 a.m. on Tuesday, was admitted to a private hospital in Indore 10 days ago in a serious condition. "He had bilateral pneumonia and difficulty in breathing.

Despite continuous treatment, he didn't show improvement," said Vinod Bhandari, a doctor who oversaw his treatment.

Towards the end, he was put on a ventilator. "Despite all efforts we couldn't save him," said Dr. Bhandari.

Gujarat sees 239 new cases, 19 deaths

Only eight patients discharged after recovery, suggesting slow recovery rate

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
AHMEDABAD

Novel coronavirus infections continued unabated in Gujarat, adding 239 cases and 19 deaths on Tuesday, bringing the State to the second position in both the number of cases (2,178) and deaths (90), after neighbouring Maharashtra.

On Tuesday, as many as 15 deaths were recorded in Ahmedabad alone, which is the single largest cluster with 1,373 cases and 53 deaths so far, two in Surat, and one each in Bharuch and Bhavnagar.

Only eight patients were discharged from the State after recovery, suggesting that the recovery rate is very slow, while new cases and casualties are surging. So far, only 139 patients have recovered and been discharged from hospitals.

The pandemic has now spread to as many as 28 out of 33 districts in the State.

According to the Health Department's data, as of Tuesday, there were 14 critically ill COVID-19 patients on ventilator support, while 1,935 are stable.

The State has so far tested 36,829 samples. Fourteen government laboratories and four private labs have been approved for carrying out tests by the Indian Council for Medical Research.

"The State has been witnessing a spike in infections and deaths, both extremely worrisome factors for Maharashtra," a State government official told *The Hindu*. He added that the situation is



Keeping a check: Border Security Force personnel on a patrol in the Behrampur area of Gujarat's capital Ahmedabad. ■ AFP

worsening in Ahmedabad and to some extent in Surat, the largest cities in the State.

Expand capacity

To deal with the surge in cases, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation has now decided to expand the capacity of its main S.P.V. Hospital from 500 beds to 1,000 beds, while it has also created a 2,000-bed COVID-19 care centre at the University hospital campus, where patients with mild symptoms

are treated, whereas serious patients are admitted in the SPV Hospital. In Surat, so far, 347 cases have been reported, alongside 12 casualties.

Meanwhile, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic spreading to more areas of the State, the government has roped in five senior IAS officers and rushed them to various districts to oversee arrangements, and monitor how the local authorities are dealing with the evolving epidemic.

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NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Tender No	Material Description	Due Date
202113 000079	Bleached Chemi-Thermo Mechanical Pulp-Hardwood 83 (Qty: 4500 ADMT±5%)	09.05.2020
202123 000020	Stoneground Softwood Pulp (Qty: 1000 ADMT ±5%)	09.05.2020

Detailed terms & conditions, Qty., Tender Fee, EMD, etc. are available in tender document at our websites: www.tnpl.com/ / www.tenders.tnpl.gov.in

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No: BBMP/EE/MD/TEND/02/2020-21 Date: 20.04.2020

INVITATION FOR SHORT TERM TENDER

(Two Cover System) (Through GOK e-Procurement Portal only)

The Executive Engineer Mahadevapura Division invites Item Rate Tenders from eligible tenderers for the works detailed in the table given below. The Tenderers may submit tenders for any or all of the works given in the table in appropriate class registered in Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike/CPWD/KPWD/Railways/MES/any State or Central Govt. Organization.

SL. No.	Name of the Works	Approx. Amount put to Tender ('L in Lakhs)	EMD (in ₹)
1.	Construction of RCC Drains at Nagondanahalli, Ramgondanahalli, Vinyakanagar (Danamandde) Siddapura and Hageduru at Ward no.84 (Hageduru)	500.00	75000/- (1.00 lakh through e-payment balance should be submitted BG before Opening of Technical Bid)
2.	Improvements to roads and drains at Prashanth Layout, Pai Layout, Pruthvi Layout, Upkar Layout and Mythri Layout Ward no.83 Kadugudi	90.00	180000/- (1.00 lakh through e-payment balance should be submitted BG before Opening of Technical Bid)
3.	Improvements to roads and drains at Patalamma Layout, Muneshwara Swamy Temple Road at Ramaiah Garden in Ward no.83 Kadugudi	90.00	180000/- (1.00 lakh through e-payment balance should be submitted BG before Opening of Technical Bid)

Calendar of Events : (1) Downloading of Tender Documents from 24.04.2020 from 4:00 pm. (2) Pre-bid Meeting is 27.04.2020 from 3:00 pm. (3) Last date of submission queries 02.05.2020 within 3:00 pm.(4) Last date and Time for Receipt of Tenders is 04.05.2020 upto 4:00 pm. (5) Date and Time for Opening of Technical bid 05.05.2020 at 4:30 pm. Further details may be obtained from the above office during office hours on working days or from website: [https://eproc.karnataka.gov.in](http://eproc.karnataka.gov.in)

Sd/- Executive Engineer - Mahadevapura Division

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Dated : 21.04.2020

QUOTATION NOTICE

In view of the Covid - 19 pandemic Govt. of Kerala has decided to procure antibody based Rapid Test Kits on an emergency basis. Online quotations are invited for the supply of the following.

Sl. No.	Quotation No.	Description	Last date of Online submission
1.	Q63/2020	Antibody (IgM, IgG) based Rapid Diagnostic Test Kit for COVID - 19.	25.04.2020 11.00 a.m.

Quotation documents and all other information related to the bidding process can be downloaded from the website www.kmsc.kerala.gov.in.

Sd/- Managing Director(Tender Inviting Authority)

Rajiv Gandhi Housing Corporation Limited,

(A Government of Karnataka Enterprise)

9th floor, E & F Block, Cauvery Bhavan, Bengaluru - 560009,

Tele:-080-2311888, Fax:-2247312 Website: [https://ashraya.karnataka.gov.in](http://ashraya.karnataka.gov.in) e-mail-cergh@gmail.com

Tender Notification (Through e-Procurement portal)

Rajiv Gandhi Housing Corporation Limited invites RFP for the following works through e-procurement from the eligible PMC Consultants

Name of work – The Consultancy Assignment for Project Management including Supervision and Quality Assurance for the work of Design, Build and Transfer of Multi Storey Residential Buildings (1 BHK and 2 BHK) housing project including infrastructures under "1 LAKH MULTI STOREY BENGALURU HOUSING PROGRAMME" and "NANNAMANE"- Packages – 6, 9A, 9B & Hunasemaranahally.

Tender Notification Nos.

Package 6: RGRHCL:176:OLH:PMC:02:2019-20

Drug for sepsis to be tested for COVID-19

It will be administered to 50 patients at AIIMS and PGIMER

JACOB KOSHY

NEW DELHI
Can a drug used to treat severe sepsis be deployed for critically ill COVID-19 patients?



Race for cure: Existing drugs are being used in trials to fight COVID-19.

cause inflammation of organs and can be counterproductive in protecting the body.

Keeping them in check is the goal of so called immuno-modulators, or medicines like Sepsivac.

"The advantage is that we have a ready made product and can be put into trials. We already have an approval for phase-3 [large trials] and can be scaled up if it shows promise," Dr. Vishwakarma added.

The drug uses the Mycobacterium w (formally known as mycobacterium indicus pranii) as it produces a different immune-system response.

Previous randomised trials in sepsis patients showed 11% absolute reduction and 55.5% relative reduction in mortality.

Sepsivac reduces the days on ventilator, in ICU and hospital and incidence of secondary infection, Cadilla Pharmaceuticals have claimed on their website.

A large quantity of cytokines, chemicals signalling the presence of an infection, are produced in the early stages of the body's response against an infection to stimulate the production of antibodies.

However, cytokines also

ria, that are known to cause life-threatening infections. Given the similarities in the immune-system response in critically ill COVID-19 patients, it is theorised, the therapy could stimulate a benign response.

Results from a human trial are expected in the next two months, Ram Vishwakarma, Director, Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine, Jammu, told *The Hindu*. IIM is a CSIR laboratory and was involved in the early development of Sepsivac.

Sepsivac was originally developed for treating sepsis by a class of pathogens called gram negative bacte-

@CovidIndiaSeva launched

People can pose queries and get answers on Twitter

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI
Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Tuesday launched the 'COVID India Seva', an interactive platform to establish a direct channel of communication during the pandemic.

The initiative is aimed at enabling transparent e-governance delivery in real-time and answering citizen queries swiftly, at scale, especially in crisis situations

like the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, an official statement said.

Through this, people can pose queries @CovidIndiaSeva and get answers in almost real time.

The @CovidIndiaSeva works off a dashboard at the backend that helps process large volumes of tweets, converts them into resolvable tickets and assigns them to the relevant authority for real-time resolution, the

statement said.

"Trained experts will share authoritative public health information swiftly at scale, helping to build a direct channel for communication with citizens," the Minister said in a tweet.

Over time, Twitter has proved to be an essential service for both the government and citizens to interact and exchange information, especially in times of need," Mr. Vardhan said.

Why are oil prices in negative terrain?

Sellers have to pay buyers to get rid of their crude, an unprecedented situation

RAGHUVIR SRINIVASAN

The story so far: Prices of West Texas Intermediate (WTI), the American benchmark for crude oil, fell to less than zero in Monday's trade. The price of a barrel of WTI fell to minus, yes, that's right, minus \$37.63 a barrel. What this means is that sellers have to pay buyers to get rid of their crude! This is unprecedented in the oil market, even accounting for its notoriety for being volatile.

Why did prices fall like this?

We need to understand a bit of oil market and trading dynamics here. WTI oil is traded as futures contracts in the NYMEX (New York Mercantile Exchange) where traders buy and sell monthly futures such as, for instance, May futures, June futures and so on. The sellers of such futures will have to deliver a barrel of crude oil at the contracted price in the contracted month just as buyers will have to take delivery at the contracted date.

As with all trading in commodities, there's a huge speculative participation in oil futures trading too. So speculators buy and sell contracts with no intention of taking delivery (in the case of buyers) or offering delivery (in the case of sellers) of the physical oil, on the contracted date. These speculators have to unwind their "positions" on the contract expiry date. If they fail to do so, they will have to take physical delivery of the crude oil on the contracted date.

What happened on Monday was that speculators who had taken large bets on May futures began to unwind their "positions". This was because the futures contracts are set to expire today, Tuesday. Those not intending to take physical delivery have to square off their contracts before the expiry date.



BACKGROUNDER

So, speculators who did not want to take delivery in May proceeded to unwind their "positions," leading to the massive fall in prices.

It could be that these were financial speculators who never take physical delivery and hence closed their contracts. Or, these could also be delivery-based traders backing out as the bottom has fallen off demand for oil. In reality, it would be a combination of both categories of traders. The bottomline, though, is that prices fell as demand for oil is falling and the world, especially America, is running out of storage space.

May WTI futures prices went negative but June futures prices are still at \$20.43 a barrel. Why?

This could be due to two reasons. Traders expect demand to recover by June as lockdowns are lifted across the world and economic activity resumes. Second, traders also expect that storage space may be created as existing inventory is drawn down. America is also talking of adding to their strategic storage by taking advantage of the low prices. This could create demand for oil. Finally, contract expiry for June contracts is still a few weeks away, giving speculators much more time to speculate.

The prices of Brent grade are still at \$20.58 a barrel for May futures. What's the reason for the difference?

Brent oil has traditionally quoted higher than WTI with the gulf being about \$6.7 a barrel between the two. Brent is a superior grade produced in the North Sea

Address daily wagers' problems: SC

Court asks Centre to look into plea submitted by activist Harsh Mander

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday asked the Centre to take steps as it deems fit to resolve "issues" raised by activist Harsh Mander concerning migrant workers, which include lack of basic amenities and payment of minimum wages.

A Bench led by Justice N.V. Ramana observed in a two-page order that "taking into consideration the material placed before us, we call upon the respondent, Union of India, to look into such material and take such steps as it finds fit to resolve the issues raised in the petition [by Mr. Mander]."

The petition, represented by advocate Prashant Bhushan, had sought the Centre and the States to jointly and severally ensure payments of



Families under strain: Most migrant labourers have not received any wages during the lockdown. ■ V. RAJU

wages/minimum wages to migrant workers within a week.

Mr. Bhushan, in the hearing held through videoconferencing, submitted that despite governmental measures, thousands of labourers still lack access to basic amenities.

He further argued that

studies conducted by NGOs indicate that there were several areas where the aid was not reaching to migrant workers.

On the contrary, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta referred to a status report filed by the Union Home Ministry to submit that measures were in place to address the

issues concerning migrant workers. He said helpline numbers had been provided to report issues concerning the implementation at the ground level.

He submitted that the authorities will address the issues immediately in case a complaint is made on the helpline. Direct benefit transfer schemes were already in place.

At one point, Mr. Mehta asked why the petitioners, instead of filing petitions, are not helping to better the conditions of the workers.

Mr. Bhushan replied that the petitioner has already volunteered and helped, but cannot be expected to feed 15 lakh people. He quoted from a study to say 89% of the surveyed people have not received payments since the lockdown was imposed.

IN BRIEF



Parliament control room for migrant workers

NEW DELHI
Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Tuesday said a control room would be set up in Parliament to connect with similar control rooms in the Assemblies for coordination in helping migrant labourers and students stranded due to the lockdown. Mr. Birla was speaking after chairing a video conference of the Presiding Officers of State Legislatures.

Centre to conduct telephone survey

NEW DELHI
The Centre will conduct a telephone survey on COVID-19, calling up citizens on their mobile phones to obtain feedback on the prevalence and distribution of symptoms.

"This is to be carried out by NIC and calls will come from the number 1921," a release said on Tuesday. "Please be aware of any other calls by pranksters or calls from any other number in the guise of such survey," the release added.

CPCB issues guidelines for COVID waste

NEW DELHI
Using double-layered bags, mandatory labelling and colour coded bins for the management of waste generated during the diagnostics and treatment of suspected and confirmed COVID-19 patients are part of the guidelines issued by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). The Board said specific guidelines are required to be followed by all including isolation wards, quarantine centres, sample collection centres, laboratories, ULBs and common biomedical waste treatment and disposal facilities, in addition to the existing practices.

Exemptions given to caregivers, some food processing units

Recharge facilities for prepaid mobile connections can open

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A 58-year-old staff member at the Lok Sabha secretariat has tested positive for COVID-19. He works as a housekeeper and is posted at the printing branch outside the Lok Sabha complex. Official sources said he had been at home ever since the House was adjourned on March 23 during the Budget session. He developed high fever on Friday night. He tested positive on Monday.

Officials at the Lok Sabha secretariat said that since none of the 3,000 staff at the Parliament complex came in touch with the patient, there is no question of testing or shutting down the offices.

In touch: Prepaid mobile phone recharge facilities have been exempted.

The letter said bedside attendants and caregivers of senior citizens residing in their homes would be exempted under the social sector clause of the previous guidelines.

Recharge facilities for prepaid mobile connections would be exempted under the public utilities clause, said Mr. Bhalla.

Under the supply of essential goods category, certain food processing units located in urban areas such as bread factories, milk processing plants, flour and dal mills would also be exempted. All types of rural food processing plants are already exempted.

All these exemptions have been permitted so long as the standard operating procedure for social distancing and sanitation are followed, in accordance with the previous guidelines.

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INTERVIEW | VIPUL MATHUR

'Pockets with lower contact intensity can have relatively shorter lockdown'

A policy that only looks at infection data without considering the extent of economic interaction can lead to contradictory outcomes, says faculty member of IIM-C

NISTULA HEBBAR

Vipul Mathur, faculty, Economic Group, Indian Institute of Management-Calcutta, has come up with a formula for exiting the COVID-19 lockdown based on a "contact intensity principle of employees", which is being widely discussed. Excerpts from an interview.

In your paper, you have spoken of the proximity model for assessing economic activity in order to make a staggered exit from the lockdown. Please explain.

■ Now, there are many ways to slice the question of exit strategy. One of the first things that immediately come to the mind is to identify the geographical hotspots of infections. Districts that have a higher proportion of cases should perhaps continue in a longer lockdown relative to districts which have a much lower proportion of infected cases.

Now, this approach largely makes sense but it is an incomplete idea. Let me elaborate. Imagine two districts, A and B, which are almost identical in every dimension but are radically different in two aspects: first, district A has a far higher number of infected cases than district B and second, every person in

district A has to go to an office but can accomplish his job without interacting with anyone whereas in district B, everyone still has to go to an office but is required to work in teams in a face-to-face interaction setting.

Now if one were to only consider the infections data, it would make sense to keep district A in a longer lockdown and allow the lockdown to be lifted in district B. But what would ensue after the lockdown is lifted in district B? Since people in district B work in a face-to-face setting, they have to naturally interact with each other, and therefore, the originally asymptomatic persons can likely infect their respective team members. And soon enough, the symptomatic infected cases would exponentially increase in district B, forcing it go into lockdown once again.

Eventually, the economy gets shut down in both the districts and also there are

more casualties in district B.

Now imagine if a counter-intuitive policy was enacted: if instead of district B, the lockdown was lifted in district A. Then people in District A would have gone to the offices and got the jobs done, and yet the infected cases would have stayed roughly the same as before because people in District A don't have to interact with anyone else to perform their respective jobs. The economy would be up and running in District A without the number of casualties increasing in either of the districts.

Clearly, the original policy, which was arrived at by only considering the infected cases, leads to a worse situation than what the two districts started with.

There is an important message here: by only considering the infection data and without considering the extent of economic interactions, the lockdown policy can lead to contradictory outcomes!

So what's the way out?

■ Now, the actual economy we live in is somewhere in between the hypothetical



I think of the exit plan as a number lock which has multiple digits that have to be cued in

cases of districts A and B and this economy is composed of myriad of activities. Every such economic activity is different in terms of the frequency with which one has to interact with other economic agents, especially in a face-to-face setting: a barber's occupation involves more contact relative to say, a mathematician.

Of course, in our daily lives we depend not only on our interactions with barbers and mathematicians but also everything in between. I have attempted to quantify the extent of all such economic interactions – formally referred to as economic contact intensity – at the level

of the district and economic sector by using firm-level data of the entire universe of Indian firms. I identify pockets which have lower economic contact intensity and, all else being equal, can be preferred to have a relatively lower lockdown.

How many districts have low proximity business?

■ I have assessed this via the data provided by the CMIE (Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy). On that basis, district level distribution is relatively more compact than the economy sector-wise distribution, naturally because a typical district contact intensity is an aggregation over a diversified set of economy sectors. However, there are some 85 districts which can be classified to have a very low contact intensity, whereas some 40 districts are really high contact intensity environment. The rest have a combination, and have to be nuanced.

Which sectors have low proximity business?

■ Sectors such as forestry, fishing, heavy machinery,

machine tools, finance, insurance, business services and consultancy, telecommunications, IT, electricity, gas and water supply are of relatively lower contact intensity.

Sectors such as education, banking, while being mid-to-high contact intensive, can be remodelled to a work-from-environment and therefore can be operated with a low contact intensity.

How to turn around small businesses like hair salons and restaurants?

■ The data tells us that small businesses have hugely variable proximity numbers. Businesses such as travel agents, photographers, food and beverages, personal care services and restaurants have high contact intensive businesses.

Certain other businesses like gems and jewellery, bakery products, computer peripherals and poultry are low-to-mid contact intensive. The small businesses have to obey the usual protocols of temperature check, masks.

Are the real estate, commercial and housing sectors dead?

technology will have to step in. The local malls will have to transpose themselves to a virtual space where the consumers can shop in.

Instead of the consumers converging at a mall, the mall will have to diverge to the consumers. That is the only way to dilute the contact intensity.

Contact intensity cannot be the only variable for opening up the economy, however.

■ I think of the exit plan for lockdown as a number lock which has multiple digits that have to be cued in. The lock gets opened only through the right combination of the digit keys, each set at their respective optimum value or cut-off.

Fiscal transfers, which would redistribute resources from low contact intensity pockets to high intensity pockets, can be instituted to even out the asymmetric cost implications.

The usual standard keys we know of, are indicators such as infection rate, population density, output share, per capita income, etc. The novel digit that I attempt to add to this list, is that of economic contact intensity that reflects the extent of proximity that is required to perform a job.

When set right in conjunction with other keys, the magic may indeed happen.

First lot of Indian crew to return today

144 stuck aboard U.S. cruise liner

ADITYA ANAND

MUMBAI
A total of 144 Indian crew on board U.S. cruise liner *Marella Discovery*, anchored off Mumbai, will be the first lot of seafarers to return to land on Wednesday.

These 144 Indians will disembark at the Mumbai Port Trust (MbPT) and will be subjected to COVID-19 test and remain in quarantine inside the port premises till their reports are received," MbPT chairman Sanjay Bhatia said. The Goa government said that it would organise transport to fetch the 90 Goan seafarers back to the State once they were approved for travel.

The Ministry of Home Affairs on Tuesday night issued the order allowing the sign on and sign off of Indian ship crew. This order will benefit close to 25,000 Indian seafarers.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Indian crew on *Marella Discovery* appealed to the government of India to announce its policy for seafarers immediately, as their ship would set sail for Europe within the next 24 hours.

Chris Dodds, the ship's captain, in an earlier address to the 750 crew, a vi-

deo of which was reviewed by this reporter, said that they had to draw the line somewhere and return.

"The Indian government has been making promises. But there is no direction. Hence, I recommended to the shipping company that we start sailing towards Europe," Captain Dodds said.

The Captain assured sailors from all over the world that he would disembark only after ensuring that the crew got home, a reason why the ship had been in Indian waters for the last 40 days.

In a separate video message, Goan seafarers onboard the ship had appealed to the Goa government as a final cry for help to take them home.

"We are now desperate as the government has not done anything to get us back for all these days," Rudrakshya Haldankar, a sailor said in a video message.

Frank Viegas of the Goan Seamen's Association of India in a press conference had warned that there was only one day in hand. "The Goa government needs to take a stand now or else their [seafarers] coffins will fly back from Europe," he said.

Bastar tribes keep virus at bay

Villagers have set up their own checkposts and are quarantining outsiders

SUVOJIT BAGCHI

KOLKATA
In the deepest villages of south Chattisgarh, partly dominated by the outlawed Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist), the people have adopted a plan to resist COVID-19.

They have set up makeshift check posts and are not letting outsiders into the village. Instead, they are arranging to quarantine the "outsiders" – local residents who went out to work – on the periphery of the village.

The umbrella organisation of the tribals, Sarva Adiavasi Samaj (SAS), is in the forefront of the initiative and Maoists are cooperating actively. Not one case of coronavirus infection has been reported from the Bastar division that has a population of about three million.

At this time of the year, thousands from the districts of the Bastar Division walk all the way to the Telangana or Andhra Pradesh border to pluck chilli.

Following the lockdown, "hundreds returned to their village," said the vice-president of SAS in Bastar Division, Dhiraj Rada.

The tribals kept the outsiders away from the village without being hostile.

"In the forest, under a banyan tree, in a school or An-



Virus barred: A checkpost set up at Bastar by tribal people to restrict movement. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

CRPF feeds 2 wedding parties

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI
A CRPF battalion deployed deep inside the Naxal hotbed of Gadchiroli in Maharashtra has been providing meals to two wedding parties for close to a month after they got stuck in the remote location due to the lockdown, officials said on Tuesday. Serving the wedding parties in

ganwadi (rural children's day care), the villagers set up a shack to house their returning friends and family members. Ration is provided during the quarantine period," said Mr. Rada.

Check posts have been set

Desaiganj Tehsil, about 60 km from the district headquarters, is a young ASI of the paramilitary force Sonu Kumar, who had to cancel his leave for travel to Uttar Pradesh. He was supposed to get married on April 5. While the marriages took place, the parties got stuck in the area after the lockdown was declared the next day.

up to keep them on the periphery of the forest villages. Police posts are on the main road.

"Trainings are conducted so that health activists can run awareness campaigns in Gondi and Halbi, two key

languages of Bastar," Mr. Rada said.

He, however, claims that it would have been impossible to carry out the programme without the support of the Maoists. "Party people gave us access to forest villages. Usually they do not let us go into areas they control," he said. He believes that village Sarpanches have had a word with the party people.

"Maoists, of course, realised that COVID may affect them as well," Mr. Rada said.

Tribal leader of the Bhartiya Janata Party and former MP Nandkumar Sai and Bastar journalists, Kamal Shukla and Mangal Kunjam, all admitted that "without the tacit support of the Maoists smooth quarantine management would have been impossible.

Deputy Inspector General of Bastar Range Sundarraj P, however, disagrees.

"The initiative is not influenced by the Maoists. Tribals have a traditional practice of restricting unnecessary movement from one village to another during festivals, which has helped," asserted Mr. Sundarraj. While the forces were monitoring vehicular movements in urban and rural areas, tribals had managed the quarantine well inside the forest, he said.



Slick style: No unruly hair during the lockdown.

Why Kandhamal tribes never have a bad hair day

It's a custom to trim each other's locks

SIB KUMAR DAS

BERHAMPUR
Almost every day, some members of Jagruti, a social organisation, practise a local tribal tradition of trimming each other's hair at Daringbadi in Kandhamal district of Odisha. Through it, they avoid visits to salons that may lead to spread of COVID-19 infection.

According to Jagruti Director Kailash Dandapat, help from near and dear for hair grooming is a long tradition among Kandhamal tribes. Only 5% of tribals of Kandhamal district may be going to barber shops, he added. So, except for urban pockets, the villages of Kandhamal do not have any barber shops.

Common phenomenon

Disaya Pradhan, a tribal activist, who hails from the remote Banjamahua village, gave a haircut to his compatriot Mahendra Parida on Jagruti campus on Tuesday. And it was reciprocated by Mr. Parida. "At our village, performing and receiving haircuts is a common phenomenon, which may seem awkward for people in other parts of the State," said Mr. Pradhan.

"The initiative is not influenced by the Maoists. Tribals have a traditional practice of restricting unnecessary movement from one village to another during festivals, which has helped," asserted Mr. Sundarraj. While the forces were monitoring vehicular movements in urban and rural areas, tribals had managed the quarantine well inside the forest, he said.

haircuts during funeral rituals. Women grow their hair long and trim it among themselves.

Unlike other parts of Odisha, tribals of Kandhamal never had a special sect of barbers for hair grooming. People needing haircut get together at a shady place near a stream. Mostly the youths prefer to do the haircut as novelty. Most tribal families have their own set of comb and scissors to provide haircut to each other.

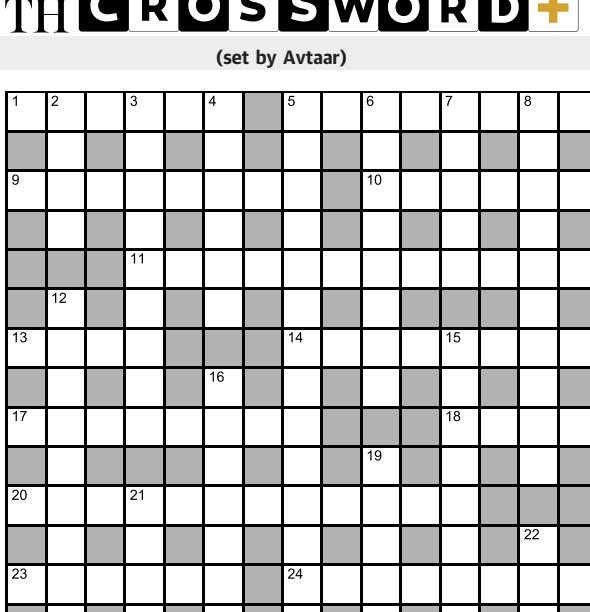
"During this time of COVID-19 threat, when villages are obeying lockdown norms, this practice of haircut by near and dear surely helps tribal people to block infection," said Mr. Dandapat.

But in urban centres such as Berhampur in adjoining Ganjam district, people have started calling up barbers to their homes for haircuts.

TH CROSSWORD + 12916

(set by Avtaar)

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



ACROSS
1 Central Asian king, attacking zealously, accidentally killed his leaders (6)
5 Plan to achieve set targets before the end of February (8)
9 Hue and cry in dance party by software company after final leg of samba is cancelled (8)
10 Auditory obstruction from blocking a red and white abscess on the left (6)

11 "Holmes vs Moriarty", say, is distributed mostly with tablets on Firefox's portals (6,2,4)
13 Bottom turned over by fellow (4)
14 Lead indicator of a second referendum in UK, perhaps? (4,4)
17 Tale about this Asian capital is interminable (8)
18 Even you speak almost completely in Urdu (2,2)
20 Thrashing black and blue after record goes missing? (8,4)
23 Lean, urbane dude stripped when dancing for a song in the morning (6)
24 During fall, man on board is minting money (6,2)
25 Switching of sides by leader of anti-national movement leads to a number of issues (8)
26 Contradict note about tips in yoga, for instance (6)
DOWN
2 Congress follower is arrested by Delhi's political heads promptly (1,1,1,1)
3 Engineer built dam across island without any preparation (2,7)
4 One part of an orchestra played this amazing hit originally (2-4)
5 Must call about Ethiopia's leader having issues and not playing ball (11,4)
6 The art of prose revealed in Herriot novel about dogs (8)
7 Concede fight after the point is docked (5)
8 Soldiers unwilling to accept worker – one overweight, extremely slow and not seen for ages (5,5)
12 Centre of English Royals, originally (10)
15 Expectation from two articles put out by President Reagan and the First Lady in 1987 (9)
16 Hamlet, for one, is another complex, absorbing character before Juliet (8)
19 Needle from Spooner's fish basket (6)
21 "Hasn't" is wrongly used for "Won't" (5)
22 A national park raised capital (4)

SUDOKU

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

Affordable luxury Enjoy the sportier appeal of the Coupe, get some extra performance at the pedal and more equipment
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

It is neither as spacious nor as practical as the regular car, and it isn't as sporty or fun as the AMG



Mercedes GLC Coupe facelift: In no man's land

SERGIUS BARRETO

When the GLC Coupe arrived in India in 2017, it was available solely as an AMG model and was a CBU import. Now with the launch of the facelift, not only is the GLC Coupe locally assembled, but Mercedes has also launched two regular variants: a petrol 300 4Matic and diesel 300d 4Matic.

Coming to the aesthetics, the headlamps get revised detailing, and while the model continues to sport a single bar, diamond-head pattern grille, much like the pre-facelift AMG Coupe, the pin heads are not chromed. The bumper is the same as on the regular GLC and gets aggressive cladding on the lower edge. At the side, the GLC Coupe retains the slim running board of the earlier car, and while the AMG had a black window trim, the updated model gets a full chrome surround. The 19-inch alloys also sport a new six-spoke pattern. At the rear, there are restyled tail-lights with the lighting element design now resembling the pattern on the regular GLC.

The interiors too receive a subtle makeover. A big update, though, is the introduction of the new Mercedes MBUX connectivity system along with the connected car experience with an onboard SIM. The new system is slick and easy to use with a touch-sensitive pad in the centre console, two mini touchpads on the new steering wheel along with a larger 10.25-inch touch-responsive screen. The system works really well and allows precise control. However, I would have preferred the older click wheel on the centre console as it is easier to con-



trol certain functions while on the move. There is also the new 'Hey Mercedes' voice command assistant for a hands-free experience; it can also recognise conversational voice commands. The system offers Android Auto and Apple CarPlay along with built-in navigation. Another small but welcome addition is wireless charging, but something that is not great is the switch to Type C USB ports. Unlike the standard GLC, the Coupe gets full digital dials that can be altered based on your preference and the driving mode too. There is also a memory function for the driver's seat.

Speaking of seats, the comfort in the car is top-notch and spending a day behind the wheel was not a back-breaking affair. Rear seating too is comfortable and offers good back support although tall occupants

might find headroom a bit tight. Mercedes has thankfully liberated more room in the boot with the space-saver now sitting under the boot floor rather than on it. The dipping roof, of course, still eats into space, but you can at least now get some bags in and have a spare tyre too.

As mentioned before, the GLC Coupe now comes with petrol and diesel mills. The petrol is a 2.0-litre, four-cylinder unit that delivers 250hp and 370Nm of torque while the diesel (the model tested



MERCEDES GLC 300 4MATIC COUPE SPECIFICATIONS

LENGTH:	4731mm
WIDTH:	1890mm
HEIGHT:	1620mm
WHEELBASE:	2873mm
TYRE SIZE (F/R):	235/55 R19
ENGINE:	1950cc, 4-cyl, turbo-diesel
POWER:	245hp at 4200rpm
TORQUE:	500Nm at 1600-2400rpm
GEARBOX:	9-speed automatic

manual mode, the gearbox will not allow you to hit the 5,500rpm redline. The gearbox is a smooth-shifter but isn't lightning quick. Compared to the 220d, the 300d does feel faster with Mercedes claiming a 0-100kph time of 6.6sec against the 220d's 7.9sec time.

Mercedes has also softened the suspension this time around. It works well to absorb bumps and ruts. At speed, however, there is some body float, and spirited driving in corners will have you wishing for a firmer sportier setup. The steering, which is influenced by the drive modes, was hefty enough at higher speeds and light enough at lower speeds.

Earlier, with the Coupe being available as an AMG-only model, things were a lot simpler – you either picked practicality or all-out fun. Now though, with the facelift, things get a little complicated. In a way, the new model sits in no man's land: it is neither spacious nor practical as the regular car, and it isn't as sporty or fun as the AMG. On the other hand, if you have always fancied the appeal of an SUV-coupe, you now do not have to go the whole hog into AMG territory and stretch your wallet too. You can enjoy the sportier appeal of the Coupe, get some extra performance at the pedal and a bit more equipment like a memory seat and an all-digital instrument panel, and all this for a not too much of a premium of approximately ₹6 lakh. The 300d Coupe 4Matic comes in at ₹63.70 lakh, while the regular 220d 4Matic diesel costs ₹57.75 lakh (ex-showroom, pan India).

It all boils down to your disposition towards SUV-coupes. If you are not a fan, look at the regular GLC. But if you love them, you now have more choice. And, oh, did I mention, Mercedes says the AMG is likely to follow too?

Q AND A WITH HORMAZD



A better-equipped car

Aman Virmani, Chandigarh: I am confused between the next-gen Honda City, new Hyundai Creta, Kia Seltos and MG Hector. Which one should I buy?

■ I would narrow down your choice to the Seltos and Creta as both these products, which share the same mechanicals and engines, are in a different league from the competition. It is hard to make a choice between the two and for many the design may be the clinching factor. The Seltos is considered to be better-looking in comparison to the new Creta's rather polarising front end. However, the new Creta is better equipped and that could be the clincher you are looking for. So our advice is, if you don't mind the new Creta's looks, buy it.

Try the XUV300 diesel

Harshit Purohit, Raipur: I am planning to buy a Mahindra XUV300 diesel. Is it a good time to buy an IC vehicle, as electric vehicles are just around the corner? Or should I wait for a month or two and buy an EV instead? My budget is around ₹10 lakh.

■ Electric cars are still far from becoming mainstream, and if it is your only car, you will be limited to driving in the city as there is no charging infrastructure on the highways. Also, you would need to have a charging point installed at your home or office to make using an EV practical in the first place. Even if you can meet all these criteria, for a budget of ₹10 lakh, you will get cars like the eKUV100 and the Tiger EV, which come with basic 72V architecture that severely limits range and performance. The XUV300 diesel has a strong and refined 1.5 diesel and is hence worth considering.

No Jawa Perak reviews yet

Santhu Anu, Bengaluru: I am planning to buy a motorcycle and am considering the Jawa Perak. Could you please post the review for the same. For me, reliability and refinement are important, the rest of the specs meet my requirements. I took a very brief test ride and felt the gear shifts were a bit chunky. I am 5'10", and thought the seating was a little upright. I'm not sure if this will be an issue over a one-hour ride through traffic.

■ Unfortunately, we cannot give you an answer here because Jawa has not given us a Perak test bike to review. There have been reports of some minor quality and finish issues, which is not surprising considering these are brand-new products. Hopefully, the company should be able to iron them out. However, we cannot comment on the reliability of any Jawas yet, because there simply haven't been enough bikes on the road for a long duration.

Hormazd Sorabjee is the editor of Autocar India. Mail your feedback and queries to roadshow@thehindu.co.in

Safest cars in India as rated by Global NCAP

Since 2014, automotive safety watchdog Global NCAP has conducted crash tests of nearly 40 Indian cars under its #SaferCarsForIndia programme. Here are the best performers till date...

RIVAN RS

3. Tata Nexon

Global NCAP rating: 5/5

While the Nexon secured four stars (13.56/17) the first time it was crash-tested, Tata upgraded all variants with a seat-belt reminder for the front seats (which has since become mandatory) and sent it in for Round 2. This time, the Nexon also managed to pass the UN95 side-impact protection requirements and became India's first 5-star car, securing 16.06 out of 17 for adult occupancy. The Nexon's child-occupancy rating is three stars (25/49). All variants come with two airbags and Isofix child-seat mounts as standard.

Do note, the model tested was the pre-facelift car and has since been upgraded to meet pedestrian protection norms. Currently, the Nexon range is priced from ₹6.95-12.50 lakh (ex-showroom, pan-India).



1. Mahindra XUV300

Global NCAP rating: 5/5

The safest car in India as rated by Global NCAP is the XUV300. Mahindra's sub-four-metre SUV was awarded five stars for adult occupancy (scoring 16.42/17) and four stars for child occupant protection (scoring 37.44/49). It subsequently won Global NCAP's first-ever Safer Choice award. Entry-level W4 and W6 variants (₹8.30-9.99 lakh) are equipped with two airbags, rear disc brakes and Isofix child-seat mounts. While the higher-spec W8 and W8(O) variants cross the ₹10 lakh mark (₹10.60-12.69 lakh, ex-showroom, pan-India), they come with more safety kit; the range-topping version gets seven airbags, front parking sensors, electronic stability programme, a tyre pressure monitoring system and a rear parking camera.



2. Tata Altroz

Global NCAP rating: 5/5

Tata's second model to get a 5-star rating for adult occupant protection (16.13/17), the Altroz didn't score as well on child occupant protection, securing three stars (29/49). Nonetheless, the Altroz ranks as the safest hatchback tested by Global NCAP. Standard safety kit across the Altroz range (₹5.29-9.29 lakh, ex-showroom, pan-India) includes two airbags and Isofix child-seat mounts. Higher variants add kit such as height-adjustable front seat belts, a rear parking camera, and front and rear fog lamps.



4. Mahindra Marazzo

Global NCAP rating: 4/5

The first made-in-India MPV to earn a 4-star rating is also the safest MPV in India. The Marazzo scored 12.85 out of 17 in adult safety and 22.22 out of 49 in child occupancy (two stars) thanks to kit such as dual front airbags, ABS, a driver's side seat-belt reminder, front seat-belt pretensioners and Isofix anchorages for the rear seats – standard across all variants. In BS-IV form, Mahindra's MPV was priced between ₹9.99-14.68 lakh (ex-showroom, pan-India), which means Marazzo prices are bound to increase in the near future.



5. Volkswagen Polo

Global NCAP rating: 4/5

Despite lacking some kit available on present-day models, such as ABS and seat-belt reminders, the VW Polo with two airbags managed to score a solid 4-star rating for adult-occupant protection (12.54/17) way back in 2014. It also scored three stars for child occupant protection (29.91/49) despite lacking the now-standard Isofix child-seat mounts. Top-spec variants of the hatchback now come with traction control, ESC, hill-start assist and a rear parking camera. Prices range from ₹5.82-9.59 lakh (ex-showroom, pan-India).



6. Tata Tiago and Tigor

Global NCAP rating: 4/5

The Tiago hatchback and Tigor compact sedan were both awarded four stars in the crash tests, managing to score 12.52 out of 17 for adult occupancy. Both also managed a 3-star child occupancy rating (34.15/49) – they were marked down for the lack of Isofix child-seat mounts. The Tiago's ₹4.60 lakh starting price makes it the most affordable car with a 4-star Global NCAP rating. Tata Tigor prices start at ₹5.75 lakh and go up to ₹7.49 lakh (ex-showroom, pan-India).

Trump to suspend immigration to U.S.

He says the temporary move is to protect local jobs; new green cards, work visas are likely to face ban

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN

CHENNAI / WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump has said he will temporarily suspend immigration in order to protect Americans' jobs.

"In light of the attack from the Invisible Enemy, as well as the need to protect the jobs of our GREAT American Citizens, I will be signing an Executive Order to temporarily suspend immigration into the United States!" he said on Monday evening (Wash-

COVID-19

ington time), in a reference to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tightening visa policies

While Mr. Trump did not clarify the scope – in terms of visa categories or time – of this planned order, it will likely temporarily stop new green cards and work visas, as per several reports.

The order is in line with the tightening of visa policies that the administration has

undertaken over the years, backed by immigration hawks such as Mr. Trump's adviser Stephen Miller.

The State Department issued 4,62,422 immigrant visas in the 2019 fiscal year – down from just over 6,17,752 in 2015, while U.S. Citizens and Immigration Services granted permanent residence to nearly 5,77,000 individuals.

Monday night's tweet on immigration could also be Mr. Trump's way of trying to push States to open up, after weeks of lockdown, a Washington DC source who works in the economic policy area told *The Hindu*.

With more than 22 million Americans seeking unemployment benefits over the last month, and with a general election looming, Mr. Trump has been keen on opening up the U.S. economy – battling with some Governors to open up States. Last week, Mr. Trump issued an advisory telling States they could open by May 1 or before. Some States such as

Tennessee, Georgia and South Carolina – all headed by Republican Governors – are planning to ease restrictions.

Call for easing curbs

On Twitter last week, Mr. Trump called for Michigan, Minnesota and Virginia – States with Democrat Governors – to be "liberated". Earlier, the President had claimed he had the power to "open up" States and conservative groups have backed protests against "stay at

home" orders across States.

National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien on Tuesday cast the President's announcement as a move to protect the American people's health. Mr. O'Brien said the temporary halt to immigration would not be "dissimilar" to limits on travel to the U.S. from China that Mr. Trump put in place in January. "We're trying to do everything, the President's trying to do everything he can to put the health of the

American people first during this crisis," Mr. O'Brien told Fox News.

"So this is one step. It's not dissimilar to the restrictions on travel from China that he implemented back on January 29 at the very outset of this public health crisis."

Asked about Mr. Trump's reference to jobs, Mr. O'Brien referenced the virus' economic toll. "There's been an economic cost here, too, and the President's looking out for Americans on both fronts at every turn," he said.

Mr. Trump has issued a number of immigration-related executive orders before after the pandemic began – such as allowing the immediate deportation of migrants without valid papers and the potential sanctioning of countries that do not accept their citizens back from the U.S. Like those, his temporary immigration suspension order will likely be challenged in court.

(With Associated Press inputs)



New measures: Donald Trump in Washington on Monday. • AP

Humans to blame for pandemic

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

PARIS Whether it came from a bat or a pangolin is not certain, but one thing is: the coronavirus outbreak comes from the animal world. It is human activity that enabled the virus to jump to people, and specialists are warning that if nothing changes, many other pandemics of this nature will follow.

The name given to diseases transmitted from animals to humans is "zoonoses", based on the Greek words for "animal" and "sickness".

They are not new – tuberculosis, rabies, toxoplasmosis, malaria, to name just a few, are all zoonoses.

According to the UN Envi-

ronment Programme (UNEP), 60% of human infectious diseases originate from animals. This figure climbs to 75% for "emerging" diseases such as Ebola, HIV, avian flu, Zika, or SARS, another type of coronavirus. The list goes on.

The emergence of zoonotic diseases is often associated with environmental changes or ecological disturbances, such as agricultural intensification and human settlement, or encroachments into forests and other habitats," says UNEP report.

"Changes in the environment are usually the result of human activities," it adds. Gwael Vour'h of INRAE, a French public re-

search institute, also blames human activity for the crossover between species. "Given the growth of the human population and its ever more intense use of planetary resources, the destruction of more and more ecosystems multiplies contacts," she says.

A key area of concern is deforestation to make way for agriculture and intensive livestock farming.

In terms of endangered wildlife, a study by American researchers published last week shows that those who share the most viruses with humans are precisely "populations declining due to exploitation and loss of habitat".

UN: global hunger could double due to COVID-19

REUTERS

GENEVA

The number of people facing acute food insecurity could nearly double this year to 265 million due to the economic fallout of COVID-19, the United Nations' World Food Programme (WFP) said on Tuesday.

"COVID-19 is potentially catastrophic for millions who are already hanging by a thread," said Arif Husain, chief economist and director of research, assessment and monitoring at the World Food Programme (WFP).

"We all need to come together to deal with this because if we don't the cost will be too high," he said.

Mr. Husain said it was critical to act quickly in order to prevent people already living hand-to-mouth, such as food vendors in Kenya, from selling their assets as it could take them years to become self-reliant again.

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China seeks to ease travel curbs to stabilise economy

It will set up a fast-track channel for S. Korean businessmen

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

BEIJING

China has reached an agreement with South Korea to set up a "fast track" procedure for businesspeople to travel between the countries as Beijing looks to ease an entry ban on foreigners imposed to curb the spread of the COVID-19.

Asked about Mr. Trump's reference to jobs, Mr. O'Brien referenced the virus' economic toll. "There's been an economic cost here, too, and the President's looking out for Americans on both fronts at every turn," he said.

With the deadly disease spreading globally, China last month blocked almost all foreigners from entering as authorities fretted over cases being imported from abroad.

Beijing is also in talks with other countries, including Singapore, to set up a similar channel to stabilise economic cooperation and ensure supply chains run smoothly, Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told a press briefing Tuesday.

The novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), first discovered in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in December, has since spread like wildfire and killed more than 1,67,000 people worldwide with cases reported in over 190 countries.

But there are signs that China is looking to relax some of its controls as the measures used to curb the pandemic place a huge economic strain on nations worldwide.

Ensuring supply

"China is in talks with relevant countries to set up fast-track channels allowing...

business and technical personnel to travel," Mr. Geng told reporters on Tuesday.

"The purpose is to stabilise important economic and trade cooperation... and to ensure the safe and smooth operation of international industrial and supply chains," he added.

Beijing has reached a con-



Eyeing normalcy: An airport staffer escorting passengers via the departure area in Beijing airport, in this file photo. • AFP

Pak. PM to get tested for COVID-19

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

ISLAMABAD

Imran Khan has agreed to get tested for COVID-19

after a well-known philanthropist was tested positive for the COVID-19, days after meeting the Pakistan prime minister, his doctor said on Tuesday. Faisal Edhi, the son of late philanthropist Abdul Sattar Edhi and chairman of the Edhi Foundation, met Mr. Khan last week. Mr. Khan's personal physician, Faisal Sultan, said that Mr. Khan would undergo COVID-19 test. The protocols

recommend self-isolation for people who meet those tested positive for the disease.

sensus with Seoul on the fast-track channel and both sides are working to implement the plan, he said.

China and Singapore have also discussed personnel exchanges via video conference, he said. Mr. Geng, however, declined to elaborate

Singapore extends curbs as cases surge

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

SINGAPORE

Singapore on Tuesday extended restrictions to fight the COVID-19 until early June as cases surged past 9,000 due to a growing number of infections among migrant workers. The city-state managed to keep its outbreak in check in the early stages due to widespread testing and contact-tracing, but is facing a second wave of infections. It reported 1,111 cases on Tuesday taking the total to 9,125, with the majority of new infections in foreign workers' dormitories, which have become the epicentre of the city's outbreak.

on which other countries authorities were negotiating with.

The Asian giant has tightened controls on returning travellers and drastically cut international flight routes after largely bringing its virus outbreak under control.

Pakistan removes names from terrorism watch list'

Move comes ahead of FATF review

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW YORK

Pakistan has quietly removed around 1,800 terrorists from its watch list, including that of the 2008 Mumbai attack mastermind and LeT operations commander Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, ahead of a new round of assessments by the global anti-money-laundering watchdog FATF, according to a U.S.-based start-up that automates watchlist compliance.

The name given to diseases transmitted from animals to humans is "zoonoses", based on the Greek words for "animal" and "sickness".

They are not new – tuberculosis, rabies, toxoplasmosis, malaria, to name just a few, are all zoonoses.

According to the UN Envi-

Beijing names disputed islands

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

BEIJING

China on Tuesday defended its naming of 80 islands and other geographical features in the South China Sea in a move likely to anger neighbours as the country asserts its territorial claims.

A joint announcement of the names on Sunday from the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Ministry of Civil Affairs came a day after China established new administrative districts for the contested Spratly and Paracel island chains.

The notice listed the Chinese names and coordinates of 80 islands, reefs, seamounts, shoals and ridges, 55 of them submerged in water.

Vietnam claimed the move "seriously violated" its territorial sovereignty.

S. Korea disputes Kim's illness report

Seoul-based website, citing anonymous sources, said he underwent heart surgery

CHOE SANG-HUN

SEOUL

South Korean officials on Tuesday disputed a news report that North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un, was receiving treatment after undergoing heart surgery.

Daily NK, a Seoul-based website that relies on anonymous sources inside North Korea to report on the isolated country, said late Monday that Mr. Kim received a cardiovascular procedure at Hyangsan Hospital, a clinic dedicated to treating the Kim family, on April 12.

The website said Mr. Kim was recuperating at a villa near the hospital, which is on the foothill of Mount Myohyang, north of Pyongyang, the North Korean capital. Most of the doctors called in from Pyongyang to treat Mr. Kim returned to the capital a week later because Mr. Kim had recovered enough, the

report said, quoting an anonymous source in North Korea.

Officially, the South Korean government said it had no comment. But government and parliamentary officials in Seoul privately questioned the veracity of the Daily NK report.

The office of President Moon Jae-in of South Korea



Health concern: A file photo of Kim Jong-un having a meal at a restaurant in Pyongyang. • GETTY IMAGES

had "nothing to confirm" about the Daily NK report,

said Moon's spokesman, Kang Min-seok. Kang added that South Korea "has so far detected no special signs inside North Korea," a stock phrase the South has often used to cast doubt on unsubstantiated news reports on North Korea.

Yonhap, South Korea's na-

tional news agency, quoted an unnamed senior government official in Seoul as calling the report "not true."

A member of the intelligence committee of the South's National Assembly said that the government's main spy agency also questioned the report.

Absence from key event

Mr. Kim last appeared publicly in the North's state media on April 11, when he presided over a meeting of the Politburo of the ruling Workers' Party.

His absence since from public view – particularly at an April 15 event honouring the birthday of his grandfather, Kim Il-sung, the country's founder – has raised speculation about his health.

Mr. Kim disappeared from public view for weeks at a stretch in the past, setting off similar rumours. NY TIMES



Queen marks 94th birthday with no fanfare

LONDON

Britain's Queen Elizabeth II celebrated her 94th birthday on Tuesday, but the traditional gun salute was called off this year because of the coronavirus crisis. The monarch was said to be marking the occasion with her 98-year-old husband, Prince Philip, at Windsor Castle, west of London. AFP

Iran frees 1,000 foreign prisoners temporarily

TEHRAN

Iran's judiciary said on Tuesday that it has temporarily released more than 1,000 foreign prisoners due to the pandemic, following criticism by UN human rights experts.

"We have granted furlough to over 1,000 foreign nationals," said judiciary spokesman Gholamhosse Esmaili. AFP

Sri Lanka EC announces polls on June 20; Opposition voices concern

The parties say they were not consulted before EC announced date

MEERA SRINIVASAN

COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's Election Commission has set the country's parliamentary election for June 20, after it postponed the April 25 polls in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sri Lanka has reported 309 coronavirus cases and seven deaths so far. A total of 33 infections were detected on Monday, the highest number to be recorded on a single day, prompting authorities to move 1,010 people from a working class neighbourhood in Colombo to quarantine.

MARKET WATCH

	PRICE	CHANGE
Sensex	30,637	-3.20
US Dollar	76.83	-0.39
Brent oil	20.88	-21.32

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	265.20	-5.30
Asian Paints	1726.00	-4.45
Axius Bank	420.65	-35.30
Bajaj Auto	2323.25	-55.05
Bajaj Finserv	4595.05	-287.20
Bajaj Finance	2099.75	-208.50
Bharti Airtel	500.50	10.20
BPCL	355.25	-13.15
Britannia Ind	2863.25	30.25
Cipla	592.10	6.70
Coal India	139.00	-5.20
Dr Reddy's Lab	4016.40	171.65
Eicher Motors	13495.00	-719.45
GAIL (India)	82.50	-4.90
Grasim Ind	509.55	-12.10
HCL Tech	455.70	-14.30
HDFC	1669.70	-58.00
HDFC Bank	921.65	-23.20
Hero MotoCorp	1827.55	21.70
Hindalco	107.10	-9.35
Hind Unilever	2317.40	-19.15
ICICI Bank	331.85	-29.45
IndusInd Bank	400.85	-55.85
Bharti Infralet	163.05	3.75
Infosys	633.20	-20.10
Indian Oil Corp	83.00	-4.55
ITC	179.60	-1.10
JSW Steel	159.60	-7.90
Kotak Bank	1130.15	-47.60
L&T	870.35	-45.25
M&M	332.05	-23.80
Maruti Suzuki	5001.10	-330.25
Nestle India Ltd.	17015.35	38.95
NTPC	97.30	-1.60
ONGC	69.35	-4.65
PowerGrid Corp	162.65	-2.85
Reliance Ind	1237.35	-6.45
State Bank	184.75	-7.75
Shree Cement	18828.45	-168.45
Sun Pharma	473.15	-0.25
Tata Motors	74.65	-5.80
Tata Steel	265.95	-20.45
TCS	1737.65	-81.00
Tech Mahindra	512.95	-11.90
Titan	936.70	-38.80
UltraTech Cement	3403.25	-113.30
UPL	345.95	-8.80
Vedanta	78.45	-3.00
Wipro	178.05	-3.05
Zee Entertainment	129.25	-11.40

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	76.64	76.96
Euro	82.99	83.34
British Pound	94.23	94.64
Japanese Yen (100)	71.37	71.67
Chinese Yuan	10.80	10.85
Swiss Franc	78.93	79.26
Singapore Dollar	53.53	53.76
Canadian Dollar	53.83	54.06
Malaysian Ringgit	17.42	17.52
Australian Dollar	48.11	48.31

Source: Indian Bank

REUTERS

LONDON/NEW YORK

June oil futures plunged on Tuesday, as the panic that sent U.S. May futures to below minus \$40 per barrel on Monday bled further into the markets due to worries about the COVID-19 pandemic's effect on fuel demand in a market overrun by supply.

U.S. crude futures slumped in dramatic fashion on Monday, with the front-month May contract, which expires Tuesday, falling to close at negative-\$37.63 a barrel. The fall came as traders scrambled to get out of that contract to avoid taking delivery of barrels for fear of nowhere to store the oil and lack of customers who want to buy it.

The decline shows that the market is worried that the overwhelming supply

Regulator sweetens TLTRO deal for banks lending to NBFCs

RBI, however, will levy penalty if funds are not deployed within 30 days

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India has allowed banks to exclude loans extended to non-banking finance companies from the funds availed under the Targeted Long Term Repo Operations (TLTRO) for determining priority sector targets. This is intended to incentivise banks to lend to NBFCs.

Securities kept in the held-to-maturity category will now be excluded from computation of adjusted non-food bank credit.

The banking regulator had announced TLTRO worth ₹50,000 crore for banks on April 17.

The funds availed of un-



If the funds are not deployed within the stipulated time, the interest rate would rise to the repo rate plus 200 bps. ■PTI

der the facility should be deployed in investment-grade bonds, commercial papers (CPs) and non-convertible debentures (NCDs) of NBFCs, the RBI had said. At

least 50% of the total funds availed should be invested in mid and small-sized NBFCs, including micro finance institutions, the RBI had mandated.

CUMI resumes partial operations at T.N. units

Firm says taking precautions for staff

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

Carborundum Universal Ltd. (CUMI), a Murugappa Group firm, has resumed operations partially at its manufacturing facilities at Hosur in Tamil Nadu.

The company has resumed operations at its industrial ceramics and bonded abrasives facilities with limited staff.

This was done after obtaining requisite permissions from the local administrative authorities," CUMI said.

On March 23, the company had released information about the temporary suspension of its manufacturing operations across various locations of the country in adherence with government advisories issued to fight COVID-19.

Further, its hydel power project operations at Maniyar in Kerala continue to be operative in power genera-

tion. "The health, safety and well-being of our employees and other stakeholders continue to be our top priority and we are taking the necessary precautionary hygiene and safety measures in this regard.

"We will inform of the resumption of operations at our other facilities as and when permitted by the respective local administrative authorities," CUMI said.

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ACC profit drops 6.6% on lockdown

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Cement major ACC Ltd. on Tuesday reported a 6.6% dip in its first quarter net profit to ₹323 crore as the company witnessed weak offtake due to the COVID-19-related lockdown.

ACC follows the January-to-December financial year. Cement sales volume declined by 12% during this quarter compared with the year-earlier period. Net sales declined by 11% to ₹3,433 crore. "With our robust business continuity plan guiding us towards the recovery path, I believe we will emerge stronger from this crisis," said Sridhar Balakrishnan, MD and CEO, ACC Ltd.

In view of prevailing conditions owing to the COVID-19 outbreak and considering the need to ease premium payments, all insurers are allowed to collect health insurance premiums in instalments, the regulator said.

Insurers have the option of offering the facility either as a permanent feature or as a temporary relief for 12

HDFC cuts home loan rates by 15 bps

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The central bank had further clarified that if banks failed to deploy the funds availed within 30 days, there will be steep penalties.

"However, if a bank fails to deploy funds within the specified time frame, the interest rate on undeployed funds will increase to the prevailing policy repo rate plus 200 bps (basis points) for the number of days such funds remain undeployed.

This incremental interest will have to be paid along with regular interest at the time of maturity," the RBI said.

The first tranche of ₹25,000 crore in the next round of TLTRO will be made on April 23.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has permitted insurers to collect health insurance premiums in instalments.

In view of prevailing conditions owing to the COVID-19 outbreak and considering the need to ease premium payments, all insurers are allowed to collect health insurance premiums in instalments, the regulator said.

Insurers have the option of offering the facility either as a permanent feature or as a temporary relief for 12

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

It can be a permanent or temporary feature, says regulator



months (one policy year) in respect of all health insurance policies due for renewal up to March 31, 2021, general manager (health) D.V.S. Ramesh said. The enabling provisions for insurers to add premium payment

Rupee slips as investors flock to safe havens

Falling oil futures strengthen dollar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

low for the currency was 76.87 a dollar which it touched earlier this month.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, rose by 0.25% to 100.2.

"The rupee witnessed a strong fallout again, due to likely overseas outflows from local stocks amid oil importers' dollar demand and a strong greenback," said Jateen Trivedi, senior research analyst (commodity and currency), LKP Securities.

"Adding fuel to the already weak sentiment, U.S. President Donald Trump's announcement that he would sign an executive order to temporarily suspend immigration into U.S. also weighed down," he said.

ICICI confirms exposure to troubled ILT

REUTERS

NEW DELHI

ICICI Bank on Tuesday confirmed in a regulatory filing, its exposure to the Singapore-based troubled oil trader Hin Leong Trading Pte. Ltd. and said it is taking steps to protect its interest.

According to a court filing reviewed by Reuters, Hin Leong Trading's founder and director had directed his firm not to disclose hundreds of millions of dollars in losses over several years. The company "suffered about US\$800 million in futures losses over the years but these were not reflected in the financial statements," he had said in the filing.

Health insurers may collect premium in instalments: IRDAI

They can't be prosecuted, says court

SONAM SAIGAL

MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Tuesday quashed criminal proceedings against top accounting firms BSR & Associates, a KPMG affiliate, and Deloitte Haskins and Sells, accused of connivance in the IL&FS Financial Services (IFIN) fraud.

The court said that the firms cannot be prosecuted as they had already resigned as auditors of IL&FS before the fraud came to light, and the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO) filed a complaint against them.

The court, however, did not stay the proceedings in the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) but stayed its order for eight weeks at the request of the Centre, allowing it to challenge the order before the Supreme Court.

Over 70% of businesses expect to shrink this year: FICCI survey

Govt. action insufficient, they say; 73% expected to cut jobs

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Use of saliva in cricket may be banned

S. DINAKAR

CHENNAI
The coronavirus pandemic has all but ensured that cricket will do away with one of its oldest practices – the use of saliva to polish the ball.

In the age of sanitisers and hand washes for saving oneself from COVID-19, the use of saliva on the ball carries dangers on multiple fronts.

It is learnt that the ICC and the various Boards are strongly contemplating banning the administration of saliva on the ball.

All that the fielders and the bowlers might be allowed to do would be to polish the ball on their trousers.

The banning of saliva will adversely impact reverse swing where one side of the sphere has to be kept shiny, and the other rough.

And teams will be apprehensive of ‘working’ on the ball as they normally do. The bowlers will find their job more challenging. Coronavirus could change the way we look at and play cricket.

IN BRIEF



Arjun Bhati sells torn shoes, raises ₹3.3 lakh

NEW DELHI
Young golfer Arjun Bhati, who had earlier donated ₹4.30 lakh by selling all his trophies, has now raised ₹3.3 lakh by selling his torn shoes which he wore during his triumphant campaign at the 2018 junior World Championships. The 15-year-old has donated the money to PM-CARES Fund. PTI

UEFA for completion of league seasons

LAUSANNE
UEFA made a “strong recommendation” on Tuesday that domestic European football league seasons, currently on hold because of the coronavirus pandemic, be completed. “There was a strong recommendation given to finish domestic top division and cup competitions,” European football’s governing body said. AFP

Bundesliga may resume on May 9

BERLIN
Germany’s Bundesliga could resume from May 9, leaders of the country’s two biggest States, Bavaria and North Rhine-Westphalia, said, although games can only take place without spectators to prevent coronavirus contagion. A decision is imminent with a video conference due to be held on Thursday between the DFL and 36 clubs in the first and second divisions. AFP

ICC meeting to discuss WTC deferment

BCCI to propose India touring as many full-member countries as possible for a series in near future

CRICKET

AMOL KARHADKAR

MUMBAI



Dominant show: Strong performances in the 2019 home season have put India on top of the World Test Championship table with 360 points. ■ FILE PHOTO: K.R. DEEPAK

Top executives of all the full members of the International Cricket Council (ICC) will discuss possible resumption of international cricket and rescheduling two new ICC tournaments – the World Test Championship and the ODI Super League – during a conference call of the Chief Executives’ Committee (CEC) on Thursday.

The CEC has been convened with cricket coming to a standstill due to the COVID-19 outbreak all over the globe.

The pandemic has thrown WTC out of gear while the start of the Super League – scheduled in June with a series between Sri Lanka and South Africa – has been postponed.

The *Hindu* understands that the CEC may propose to postpone the WTC by a year, which would mean the final could be moved from

June 2021 to June 2022. “All the cancelled series can thus be slotted in the window and the Boards can get additional time to rejig the

bilateral calendar,” said an insider.

The BCCI, meanwhile, is likely to propose India touring as many full-member

countries as possible for a series in the near future – without compromising on its commitments at home – once the situation eases.

Revenue dynamics

“It’s public knowledge that all the other countries’ revenue through broadcast deals depend on hosting India, so it will be our endeavour to try and help other boards as much as possible,” said a BCCI insider.

If the T20 World Cup in Australia (scheduled for October-November) can be postponed, it could give additional window for member boards to utilise it for their domestic leagues or bilateral commitments.”

In fact, BCCI is already considering touring South Africa for a limited-overs tour in August-September to resume India’s international calendar.

Gavaskar moots a T20 WC swap

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Sunil Gavaskar says India can swap the T20 World Cup with Australia and host it this year instead of the scheduled 2021 edition, provided the COVID-19 curve flattens in the country.



Sunil Gavaskar.
■ FILE PHOTO: VIJAY SONEJI

held in India this October-November and next year in Australia around the same time.”

“If it (T20 WC swap) happens that way, IPL is just held prior to T20 World Cup so there is enough practice for the players. Then you can have T20 World Cup in November and Asia Cup in December in UAE. December is a much better time to host a tournament in the UAE,” said the 70-year-old.

CA mulling five-match Test series against India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

SYDNEY

Cricket Australia is considering turning its four-match Test series against India later this year into a five-game contest as it continues looking for ways to compensate the financial losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

India’s tour of Australia will begin with a T20 tri-series in October and is scheduled to end with a four-match Test series in December. In between there is the T20 World Cup, scheduled for an October 18 start, but the mega event’s future is also shrouded in uncertainty.

“If you contemplate the prospect of the international season in particular being affected, we have an issue of

hundreds of millions of dollars on our hands,” Cricket Australia CEO Kevin Roberts was quoted as saying by the Australian Associated Press on Tuesday.

“So it’s very important that...we do everything possible to stage the season. Whether or not there’s people at the venue or not...we will explore all viable options,” he added.

Adding a fifth Test match in the series, which could be played in one city at a stadium without spectators, is one of the options discussed by the the financially-struggling CA.

“Fortunately we have a little bit of time to work through the different scenarios with the India series,” Roberts said.

Nadal makes debut in Instagram Live show

Waiting in chat room, struggles to get Federer and Murray into the mix

TENNIS

SPORTS REPORTER

BENGALURU

It’s that time of the year when Rafael Nadal is usually seen sinking his teeth into the European clay season and devouring every opponent en route to the customary French Open title.

Instead, on Monday, the Spaniard was making his debut in an Instagram Live show and looking anything but a natural, struggled to get Roger Federer and Andy Murray who were waiting in the chat room into the mix.

Murray takes a dig

Murray took a playful dig by writing: “this is brilliant... He can win 52 French Opens, but not work Instagram!”

When Federer finally joined Nadal, he seemed more relieved and joyous than he would have after cracking the Nadal code on clay.

“Are we in? Did we make

it? My god,” he said. Over the next few minutes, the two engaged in the kind of banter fans would have had only glimpses of during exhibition matches and the Laver Cup.

Thrilled

The Swiss was thrilled to know that Nadal hadn’t picked up the racquet since Indian Wells in early March. “Perfect, you won’t be able to play tennis anymore when you come back,” he said with a laugh.

He then asked Nadal, “if you are a righty, then why you play lefty?” cheekily hinting at a conspiracy to deny him more titles.

When Nadal said it was merely “a legend,” Federer appeared pleased. “Then I

This is brilliant... He can win 52 French Opens, but not work Instagram!

ANDY MURRAY,
on Nadal's predicament

cannot be angry, it's natural, that's fine."

In some encouraging news, Federer said his surgically repaired knee was doing well.

“I had a really good first six weeks, then things got a bit slower, now it's good again. But I have plenty of time.

“After the second surgery... I don't know how many [Nadal] have had... it is easier the second time around. I don't need to experience a third one, that's for sure!”

Carlsen tames Firouzja

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Magnus Carlsen pulled off a 2.5-1.5 victory over 16-year-old sensation Alireza Firouzja in one of the most awaited clashes of the Magnus Carlsen Invitational online chess tournament on Monday.

This second-round clash was followed with added interest since Firouzja stunned Carlsen 8.5-7.5 in the title-clash of the Banter Blitz Cup on April 16.

In the other match of the day, Hikaru Nakamura defeated Anish Giri by an identical scoreline.

The results (second round): Magnus Carlsen (Nor) bt Alireza Firouzja (FIDE) 2.5-1.5; Hikaru Nakamura (USA) bt Anish Giri (Ned) 2.5-1.5.

The two Vijays who finished as the nearly men of Indian cricket

Vijayakrishna and Vijaykumar served Karnataka with distinction for many years but could not make it to the national team



BETWEEN WICKETS

SURESH MENON

debates in school, players you hoped would make the grade soon as much by their own performances as by the strength of your prayers.

Fandom was different those days. There was room for the ignored-though-talented. If a player failed, no one took it as a personal insult, although the reverse was entertained – a century or a five-wicket haul meant basking in reflected glory.

This is the story of two Vijays who were contemporaries, both all-rounders. Vijayakrishna was a bowler who could bat, Vijaykumar a batsman who could bowl. They played key roles in Karnataka’s first Ranji win.

Vijaykumar made 66 and claimed four for nine in the final against Rajasthan while Vijayakrishna’s 71 was the top score.

My notebooks might have been full of the heroic deeds of the Test stars, but they also had pages devoted to others.

Vijayakrishna, born in the same year as Viswanath, was one of the most talented players not to have represented the country. As a left arm spinner, he came up against Bishan Bedi, as a batsman down the order against Eknath Solkar, and later Karsan Ghavri.

Difficult player
Yet, as a player and a character, Vijayakrishna will always have a special place in Karnataka cricket. He was a rebel.

Quite early he picked up a reputation for being “difficult”, and owed his entry into first class cricket to that finest of men and captains, V. Subramanyam who told the selectors he would “handle” him; Vijayakrishna was too gifted a player to be lost because he didn’t say “good morning” to a passing official.

Those were key words then. “Difficult” and “handle”. Players were expected to bow and scrape to officialdom; captains needed

guts and charisma to overrule silly decisions. We were too young to realise all this, although later we thrived at the rumour that occasionally a player would ask the 12th man to bring out a smoke at the drinks interval, or check which horse had won a crucial race.

Vijayakrishna could bowl both left arm wrist spin with a potent googly as well as orthodox finger spin which he focused on as his career progressed.

He was a terrific striker of the ball, once winning the trophy for the fastest century in the Ranji Trophy. He was also a brilliant fielder at short leg who assisted Prasanna and Chandra as a catcher. The presence of these two meant that Vijayakrishna’s opportunities were limited since they ran through most sides quite comfortably on their own.

Vijayakrishna stood out too for speaking his mind. Asked about his reaction to Sunil Gavaskar batting left-handed against Karnataka

in a Ranji semifinal, Vijayakrishna told a historian of Karnataka cricket, “I thought it was pathetic. I wanted to react to his left-handed batting by bowling under-arm. But Vishy (Viswanath) stopped me and said it was not worth it.”

Players were unhappy at Gavaskar’s gesture in a match where Karnataka’s other left arm spinner Raghuram Bhat claimed 13 wickets including a hat-trick.

They thought it lacked grace – although Gavaskar later justified it – but kept silent.

Vijayakrishna finished with 195 wickets from 80 first-class matches, scored two centuries and – the statistic he was happiest about – held 76 catches.

Less complicated
The other Vijay, V.S. Vijaykumar was less complicated, both as a person and an opening batsman. At a time when the cry was for an opener to partner Gavaskar in the Indian team, Vijaykumar might

have earned a call.

He was a fine striker of the ball, driving upright and pulling medium pacers with abandon.

He once made identical scores of 94 in a Ranji quarterfinal against Rajasthan, but that wasn’t thought good enough.

Not that it upset Vijaykumar too much. He was a cheerful, glass half-full kind of person. He opened the bowling for Karnataka too, and for years was the fulcrum around which the State Bank of Mysore team revolved, forming with M.S. Rajappa its most potent opening attack in the local league.

When he opened the bowling for South Zone in the Duleep Trophy, teammate Tiger Pataudi often took on the task of handing his Panama cap to the umpire as he walked back to his run-up.

It was a gesture that impressed us schoolboys. That an India captain should do this taught us what it meant to be part of a team. It was a useful lesson early in life.

Doordarshan to review programme selection process

Immense popularity of re-telecast *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* prompts action from I&B Minister



Old is gold: Doordarshan has seen a resurrection in its fortunes with the return of *Ramayan*. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

lecast over three decades ago as well.

Mr. Javadekar said the L1 method of serial selection was “unfortunately” introduced from the 1990s onwards.

“We want to review this fully. The best serials should be on the national broadcaster.

“This is our target.... We have decided that we must bring in good [programmes], allow the system to bring good serials and programmes so that people prefer public broadcasters over others,” Mr. Javadekar told PTI.

“L1 has destroyed... and low quality of our content was the problem which took DD down,” he added.

He noted that other old serials being re-telecast by

IIT-Madras alumnus appointed to U.S.’s National Science Board

Babu is the third from the institute to occupy the position

R. SUJATHA

CHENNAI

Sudarsan Babu, a 1988 graduate of the Indian Institute of Technology Madras, was appointed to the United States of America’s National Science Board on Monday. He is the third alumnus from the institute to currently occupy the Board. The members are appointed for a period of six years.

The other two alumni are Sethuraman Panchathan and Suresh V. Garimella. Mr. Sethuraman is tipped to become the director of another prestigious institution, the National Science Foundation. One of his predecessors is Subra Suresh, another alumnus of the Institute who is currently the president of Nanyang Technological University.

ing three alumni on the Board is a first for the institution.

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