



Give free rations to 8 cr. migrants within 15 days, Paswan tells States

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Northern theatre command needs Navy element: General Rawat

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M.P. CM seeks help from his counterparts to tackle migrant rush

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Donald Trump hopeful of COVID-19 vaccine by year-end

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NEARBY



COVID-19 cases cross 9,000 mark in Delhi

NEW DELHI
Delhi reported 438 new COVID-19 cases in the past 24 hours, taking the total to 9,333, said the government health bulletin. Six more deaths were reported, pushing the toll to 129.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

Amarinder extends lockdown till May 31

CHANDIGARH
With COVID-19 cases declining in the past four days, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Saturday said the lockdown would continue till May 31, but the curfew restrictions would go. He indicated that limited public transport would resume from May 18.

NORTH & EAST ▶ PAGE 4

Bengal to pay for return of migrants: Mamata

KOLKATA
The West Bengal government will bear the entire cost of movement of the State's migrant workers by special trains to enable their return from other States, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on Saturday.

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Govt. throws open defence production and coal sectors

Fourth tranche of stimulus focuses on reforms across industry, aviation & space

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Steps to indigenise defence production by banning the import of some weapons and platforms while hiking foreign direct investment into the sector were among the highlights of the fourth tranche of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan package, which seemed to focus more on industry reforms than any sort of economic stimulus.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman also announced measures to introduce commercial mining in the coal sector, liberalise the mineral sector, ease airspace restrictions and encourage private involvement in space and atomic energy projects.

Boost for growth

"Many sectors need policy simplification. Once we decongest sectors, we can also provide the necessary boost for growth and employment," Ms. Sitharaman said, noting that structural reforms were the focus of Saturday's announcements.

"These sectors with these reforms are going to be the new horizon for growth and, therefore, we see great potential in more investments which can be drawn with the

Breaking down walls

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a set of structural reforms across sectors as a part of the efforts to boost a sagging economy



COAL

Commercial mining on a revenue sharing basis to be introduced. Companies in the private sector will be allowed to carry out exploration



MINERALS

Composite exploration-cum-mining-cum-production regime for minerals to be announced. 500 mining blocks will be auctioned



DEFENCE

A list of weapons/platforms for ban on import will be notified. FDI limit in manufacturing under automatic route to be raised to 74%



CIVIL AVIATION

Restrictions on utilisation of the airspace will be eased so that flying becomes efficient. Now, only 60% of the airspace is freely available



POWER

Power departments/utilities and distribution companies in U.T.s to be privatised. It will be in line with the tariff policy which is to be announced



SPACE

Privatisation to be introduced. Planetary exploration, outer space travel to be opened to the private sector



ATOMIC ENERGY

Research reactor in PPP mode to be set up for the production of medical isotopes



Put money in the hands of people: Rahul

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Union government should not act as a *sahukar* (money lender) giving loans to people; instead it should help them with direct cash transfer, former Congress president Rahul Gandhi said on Saturday. He appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to rethink on the economic stimulus package.

Interacting with journalists of regional media via videoconference, Mr. Gandhi said that as an Opposition leader, he was trying to put pressure on the government to directly transfer money into people's hands, and warned that an "economic storm" was on its way.

'Govt. should rethink'
He reiterated that exiting the lockdown was not an event or an on-off switch.

The sectors covered are of strategic importance but these policies will be rolled out over a 3-6 month period, and any implication for supporting or reviving the economy as it comes out of lockdown is missing," he said.

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MORE REPORTS ON ▶ PAGES 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 12

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CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6
CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6



Fatal journey: Police personnel carrying out rescue operations near Auraiya in Uttar Pradesh on Saturday. ▶ PTI

24 migrants die in U.P. road accident

Trailer rams into lorry near Auraiya

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

Twenty four migrant workers were killed and several injured when a trailer truck they were travelling on rammed a lorry near Auraiya in Uttar Pradesh early on Saturday, police said.

The larger trailer truck, laden with bags of supply material, was coming from Jharkhand. The supply truck, which was going from Delhi to Madhya Pradesh, had stopped near a dhaba on the side of the highway near Chiruhali, when the trailer, which was allegedly carrying over 50 persons, rammed it from the rear. Both vehicles overturned, police said.

Auraiya District Magistrate Abhishek Singh said the incident took place around 3.30 a.m.

"A big truck with Rajas-

than number plate, laden with cement bags, rammed into it from behind," said the DM. "Maybe the driver fell asleep," he added.

An injured woman said they had stopped the vehicle so that they could refresh themselves.

Most from Jharkhand

Of the deceased, 12 were from Jharkhand, four from West Bengal and two each from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Many of the injured were from Madhya Pradesh. Fifteen of the seriously injured were shifted to the Safai Medical College, Auraiya. Archana Srivastava said 24 persons were declared brought dead to hospitals.

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8 WORKERS KILLED IN MADHYA PRADESH ▶ PAGE 8

+ Gujarat 'super-spreaders' spike national tally

Country registers highest single-day increase of 4,820 COVID-19 cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI/AHMEDABAD

India recorded its highest-ever single day increase of 4,820 COVID-19 cases on Saturday, with Gujarat accounting for 1,057 of them.

The Gujarat numbers spiked after its Health Department announced that 709 "super-spreaders" were found positive, besides the 348 infections recorded in the past 24 hours. Over 6,500 samples of "super-spreaders," including vegetable vendors and grocery shop owners were tested.

According to data from the State Health Departments, India has 90,582 cumulative cases, and 54,531 active ones. The death toll stood at 2,874.

With 30 municipal areas accounting for almost 80% of the country's COVID-19 cases, the Union Health Ministry on



A child with food from a distribution centre in west Delhi. ▶ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

sioners and other officials from these areas.

"These 30 municipal areas are from States/UTs including Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and Odisha," a Health Ministry release said.

Maintaining high vigilance and monitoring areas of old cities, urban slums and other high density pockets along with the camps for migrant workers are crucial, the release said. The Ministry noted that in densely populated urban areas further challenges need to be considered like poor socio-economic conditions, limited health infrastructure, lack of social distancing, issues faced by women among others factors.

In its release, the Ministry admitted that in the last 24 hours, 2,233 patients were declared as cured, taking the total recovery rate to 35.09%. The average number of new cases everyday since May 9 has gone up to 3,754, while the average number of fatalities per day for the period is 110.

Admitting that health care personnel working in hospitals are at increased risk of acquiring the COVID-19 disease,

if there is a breach in the personal protection while managing patients, the Health Ministry has now issued a revised advisory for healthcare workers in COVID and Non-COVID areas of hospitals, which directs use of buddy system, use of appropriate PPE at all times while on duty and immediately informing about any breach in preventive measures.

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Umesh, a welder employed by a private company in Noida's Sector 5, said the lockdown had made it seem like "everything had ended." Though his company had reopened, his longing to see his two children was stronger than the urge to join back work. "At least I'm going home now to my family. I don't know whether or when I will be back. I don't feel like staying here because of the novel coronavirus threat and what contracting the infection could do to me and my family," he said.

Mahendra Prajapati, who is employed at a printing press in Aurangabad, said he was visiting his relatives in Dadri and was scheduled to leave around the time the lockdown was announced.

"Not only my relatives but a number of others from my village were stuck here because of the lockdown. We were all staying at the Chhaura village in Noida. This train is a relief which has come a little late but I am glad it has come, after all," he said.

Mintu Shah from Chhapra said he was stranded in Dadri

since arriving here on March 19 with his sister Nirmala to attend a court hearing in a compensation case involving their father Ramesh, a painter who died in a road accident. "We were stuck here for two months. It was difficult to arrange food for us and my two nieces who accompanied my sister. We had no idea everything would be shut," he said.

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Timings**DELHI**

SUNDAY, MAY. 17	RISE 05:30 SET 19:07
MONDAY, MAY. 18	RISE 05:29 SET 19:07
TUESDAY, MAY. 19	RISE 05:29 SET 19:08
	RISE 03:37 SET 16:09

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	41	24
Safdarjung	41	24
Palam	41	25

Delhi Palam Today
41°C The weather will be hot and dry with warm winds during the day. The evening is expected to be warm.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
42°C Rise in temperature. The sky would remain mainly clear. Dry and hot weather with warm winds to prevail.

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THE HINDU

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Air Quality of Delhi-NCR		
Delhi	179	Gurugram 194
Ghaziabad	208	Faridabad 120
Noida	158	Greater Noida 152
■ Good 0-50	■ Satisfactory 51-100	■ Moderate 101-200
■ Poor 201-300	■ Very Poor 301-400	■ Severe >400
Air Quality Index at 4 p.m. yesterday (Average of past 24 hours) Source: CPCB		

IN BRIEF**Migrants get temporary shelter at DPCC office**

NEW DELHI
A 50-bed arrangement has been made at the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (DPCC) office for migrant workers who intended to return to their hometowns, the party said on Saturday. DPCC president Anil Chaudhary said, "Temporary shelters to accommodate migrant workers have been made where they are provided three meals, clean accommodation, face masks and sanitisers, till they depart for their States."

Waiting for a train home

Countless families of stranded migrants are camping at the New Delhi railway station, some for over 50 days

HEMANI BHANDARI

NEW DELHI

will have to stay here only," he said, clutching on to his bags as Sameer sat on his lap.

While leaving on Friday evening, Pratima said she had made 30 chapatis and tomato chutney for the journey which will last till Saturday night at most.

"We didn't know how we would manage food but have been told that there is a school where the government is providing food. I will go there," said Mr. Kumar.

For Sameer's hunger bouts at odd hours, they had kept biscuits and mixture packets.

For water, the couple said that they bought a two-litre bottle for ₹20 from a public convenience opposite to a toilet facility, however, money is charged for using the toilets.

While others sitting nearby agreed that the public convenience was charging for services, the caretaker denied levying charges and said that the place is shut unless people need to use it in an emergency.

"Paani bhi soch soch ke pee rahi hain (We have to think before drinking water)," said Mr. Kumar.



Pramod Kumar, his wife Pratima and son Sameer in New Delhi on Saturday. ■ HEMANI BHANDARI

The travel home cost the couple close to ₹10,000 as opposed to ₹2,000 in normal times. It's a major blow to their finances but: "Bas ghar jaa paa raha hain, isse badi koi baat nahin hai (We are able to go home, there's nothing more important than that)," he said.

Here since March 21'

Sitting next to the family was Riyadhi, a *kinnar* from West Bengal's Kolkata.

"I have been living here since March 21," she said.

Hopping between Delhi's Malviya Nagar and Kolkata with her group, Riyadhi was clueless about any government facilities except a hunger relief centre.

"I have ₹1,000 left. I will use it to buy a general ticket back home whenever normal services resume. My group left for Kolkata on

March 21. I came to the station on March 22 to buy a ticket and board the train but then the lockdown was announced and I got stuck here," she said, adding that her group used to dance on auspicious occasions to earn money.

She claimed that five days after reaching the railway station, her purse got stolen which had her phone charger. Now, the phone is off and she has been unable to contact anyone for over 50 days.

Riyadhi gets meals twice a day at a nearby government school and goes to public convenience for relieving herself and bathing.

If public transport starts sooner than the trains, I will go back to Malviya Nagar where I know people. My mother back home in Kolkata might be worried about me," she said.

1,300 persons arrested for north-east Delhi riots: police

'Proportion of accused from two communities almost same'

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police on Saturday said that about 1,300 accused persons had been arrested in 750 cases concerning the recent communal violence in north-east Delhi, stressing that "in terms of proportion of the arrested accused, the numbers from two communities are almost identical to each other".

Responding to a comment piece published in *The Hindu* by two secretaries of the Peoples Union for Democratic Rights, the Delhi police PRO M.S. Randhawa stated, "The police actions in all such situations are guided by the twin principles of providing relief to the victims and ensuring legal action against the perpetrators."

All arrests in the riot cases, Mr. Randhawa claimed, were based on scientific and technical evidence since the responsibility cast upon the police is to prosecute the arrested accused before a court of law where every bit of evidence is scrutinised threadbare.

"Each arrested accused was produced before the judicial magistrate as man-



Scene at Chand Bagh after riots ripped through the area in February this year. ■ FILE PHOTO: SANDEEP SAXENA

dated in law where legal aid was available to him / her in the form of private counsel or a legal aid counsel from the Delhi Legal Services Authority," he pointed out.

Separate FIRs
The PRO said a perusal of the list of people who had applied for compensation from the Delhi administration would reveal that the "sufferance has been almost equal for all victims".

The PRO also claimed that for every single murder case, the Delhi Police had registered that as any as 750 cases had been registered following the communal riots in Delhi. "It is difficult to find a similar precedent," Mr. Randhawa added.

charges brought against Delhi Minorities Commission chairman Zafarul Islam Khan under Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and the riots in north-east Delhi.

According to the PRO, it needed to be "clearly understood that the conduct of [the] DMC chief and the subsequent criminal action against him is distinct and separate from the northeast riots".

Stating that the police was committed to ensuring justice for the victims, he pointed out that as any as 750 cases had been registered following the communal riots in Delhi. "It is difficult to find a similar precedent," Mr. Randhawa added.

BJP sets up centre to assist migrant workers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

BJP State general secretary Sidharthan on Saturday provided food and other necessities to the migrants, leaving for their hometowns, at the Migrant Workers Assistance Centre set up by the party at the Delhi-Haryana border.

Leader of the Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said, as

many as 1,400 migrant workers were currently staying at the shelter.

The Delhi government should find out how many of the Auraiya accident victims in Uttar Pradesh had gone from Delhi and provide financial assistance of ₹10 lakh to the families. Over 6,200 workers have registered to return home on the Delhi government website," he said.

Nuh shatters wrong notions in its fight against COVID-19

The Haryana district, accounting for more than one-fourth of the State's active cases in the second week of April, now has seven patients left, which is less than 2% of the State tally of 360 cases

ASHOK KUMAR

NUH

A Muslim-dominated region, Nuh's challenge to combat COVID-19 has been different. And so is its response.

No wonder this Haryana district, accounting for more than one-fourth of the State's active COVID-19 cases in the second week of April, mostly linked to the religious congregation in New Delhi, now only has seven under-treatment patients left. This amounts to just 2% of the State's tally of 360 cases.

This, despite twin handicaps – the lowest literacy rate in the State and extremely poor health infrastructure.

Seemingly relieved, Nuh's Deputy Commissioner Pankaj says the district officials' public image of being "impartial", "transparency in dealing with the situation" and the "prompt action" are the cornerstones of their multipronged approach to tackle the crisis. "The situation could have easily gone out of hand had we not been able to trace the Tablighis swiftly. The cases could have even run into thousands due to community spread. Maintaining law and order was another major challenge as rumours could turn things ugly in no time," says Mr. Pankaj, a 2009-batch IAS officer.

Sudden spurt

Not having a single case till the end of March, Nuh saw a sudden spurt soon after the religious congregation in the Capital and topped the State's COVID-19 tally with 38 cases on April 9. The administration responded quickly to the emerging situation realis-

ing its gravity to "trace" 655 Tablighi members, including 50-odd foreign nationals, within 48 hours after the Nizamuddin episode hit the headlines.

But it soon dawned upon the authorities that the battle was far from over. The local religious leaders, voicing the perception of the large Muslim population, expressed apprehensions that the Tablighis could be "ill-treated" inside the quarantine centres and opposed to them being kept at government centres. They demanded that Tablighis be kept at mosques or madrasas.

Potential flashpoint
Given the long history of the local population's lack of faith in the government agencies, as also evident from their opposition to the vaccination drives, and more so in the wake of the Citizenship Amendment Act recently, the situation could be a potential flashpoint.

But the administration, going against the protocol, allowed the maulanas escorted visits inside the centres and to talk to the under-treatment Tablighis to assure them they were not in "custody".

Reputation of Mr. Pankaj, who has completed almost two years in the district, and Additional Deputy Commissioner Vikram, and their understanding of the local sentiments helped save the situation.

Another possible flashpoint was reached when the Haryana government ordered seizing of the mobile phones and the original identity cards of the Tablighis inside the centres, but the district administration again acted judiciously to convey the ground

situation to the higher-ups and a mutually agreed upon solution was found.

Nuh model
Mr. Vikram, a 2014-batch IAS officer, says that close coordination of all district departments and ensuring the participation of the locals in the form of "Theekri Pehras" inside the containment zones has been another highlight of the "Nuh model".

On April 8, as many as 33 villages and two urban areas, Nuh and Punhana, were declared containment zones to prevent the spread of the deadly virus. In four villages, even stricter restrictions were put in place and the residents were supplied with the essentials at their doorsteps.

The health department constituted 289 teams, comprising the ASHA workers, Aganwadi workers and lab technicians, under the overall supervision of the doctors for a door-to-door survey. Mr. Pankaj says the entire 12 lakh population of the district has been checked twice for symptoms, besides random check-ups for the policemen, paramedical staff and cart pullers.

The Chief Medical Officer, Virender Yadav, suggested to modify a mobile van to minimise a doctor's interaction with the suspects during sample collection to go around the scarcity of Personal Protective Equipment. It was a great success. In fact, none of the medical and paramedical staff in the district has contracted the virus so far.

The district administration simultaneously analysed the death figures for the villages on a daily basis to detect emergence of any new pattern suggesting

possible community spread. All vegetable markets were shut in April itself in a pre-emptive move and the shops, now allowed to open, follow the odd-even scheme.

Amid all this, the administration also arranged for the procurement of Rabi crop and ran relief centres for migrants walking through the district.

Countering rumours
Being one of India's most backward regions – Nuh figures on the NITI Aayog's 100 aspiration districts list – the locals have little access to social media and electronic and print media. The administration arranged for announcements from the mosques with the active support of the religious leaders to put across the authorities' directions and counter the rumours. Radio Mewat, a community-radio station run by SMART,

SMART, an NGO, also acted as vital bridge between the administration and the locals.

"Our team has been running the programme 'COVID-19 Se Jung Radio Mewat Ke Sung'" since mid-March and broadcasting 3-4 hours of content on the deadly virus. It has been fighting myths, misinformation and rumours," says Archana Kapoor, founder director SMART/Radio Mewat.

The religious leaders also helped persuade the locals not to go to the mosques during Ramazan and stay indoors. "In fact, they had a very important role in implementing the administration's orders on the ground in our fight against COVID-19. These leaders also convinced the Tablighis inside the centres to not gather for offering namaz and maintain social distancing," says Mr. Pankaj.

Tense relations
Mewat Vikas Sabha president Salamudeen Meo says the region managed to win the fight against the COVID-19, but a campaign of hate against the Muslims labelling them as "corona spreaders" has impacted the relations between the two communities in and around the district. Though no major incidents of misbehaviour or violence were reported in the district, a former Muslim serviceman was beaten up in Sangal village of Nuh by a crowd in April accusing him of spreading



Clockwise from top: Women maintain social distancing as they wait outside a co-operative bank; the market in Ferozepur Jhirk wears a deserted look during the lockdown and a reporter presents a programme from the Radio Mewat studio, a community radio run by an NGO, in Nuh. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Clockwise from top: Women maintain social distancing as they wait outside a co-operative bank; the market in Ferozepur Jhirk wears a deserted look during the lockdown and a reporter presents a programme from the Radio Mewat studio, a community radio run by an NGO, in Nuh. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ing the virus. Mr. Meo says there were also reports of the local Hindus not buying vegetables and fruits from the Muslim vendors in the area.

Similarly, a few ASHA workers and paramedical staff had also alleged misbehaviour by the local villagers during the door-to-door survey.

Local journalist and social worker Mohammad Younis Alvi says the local police registering attempt to murder cases against the village sarpanches for failing to inform the authorities about the visitors from outside helped contain the spread. "All the cases in Nuh were linked to those coming from outside. The fear of police action led to quick reporting of the outsiders and the spread was contained in time. The political and religious leaders also played an important role in ensuring adherence to the directions of the administration. But the district administration lacked in its efforts to create awareness on the matter," says

IN BRIEF

9 cases against landlords for demanding rent

NEW DELHI Nine cases have been registered against landlords for allegedly asking students to pay rent during the lockdown period in north-west Delhi's Mukherjee Nagar, said officials. The cases were registered under Section 188 of IPC. Ministry of Home Affairs had on March 29 issued an order, which stops landlords from demanding rent from students, workers and migrant labourers for a month.

Noida SI beats woman in queue for ration

NOIDA Two women standing in a queue to procure ration were allegedly assaulted by a sub-inspector in Noida on Saturday, prompting his immediate suspension by the authorities, officials said. Departmental proceedings have also been initiated against the policeman, according to the district police.

'Give report on illegal activities in Aravallis'

NEW DELHI Following a plea alleging non-forest activities in the Aravallis in Gurugram, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) directed the Haryana Forest Department to furnish a compliance report. The tribunal said adequate steps must be taken to curb the same. A Bench headed by NGT Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel said: "It is necessary to ensure that no forest activity is allowed in the forest area without following due process of law. A further compliance report may be filed by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Haryana by Sept. 25."

Man found dead in Narela

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI A 27-year-old man allegedly shot himself in Narela on Friday, the police said on Saturday.

The man from Kotla Mubarakpur went to Narela to meet a woman he loved, who is married but her husband is an underworld prisoner, the police said. He killed himself after she refused to go with him. He was undergoing treatment.

The police said they received a call at 11 a.m. regarding a quarrel after which they reached the spot and found that the man had been taken to a hospital. The man was carrying a gun. A case has been lodged and an investigation is underway, the police added.

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

Art and culture: the show must go on

The virtual platform has enabled the world of art to nourish the human spirit despite the closed museums, empty auditoriums and deserted cultural spaces

RITU SHARMA

In times of crises which threaten economy and livelihood of so many people, we tend to cut budgets and live lean. The first cut is applied often to spending on art and culture activities.

COVID-19 has not only brought economic disaster but locked us down in our shelters. You can hardly get to venture out for gathering essential supplies, let alone satisfy the urges of appreciating art and enjoying cultural shows.

Apprehensions aplenty
Being the Director of National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), I can feel the impact it has brought on the art and culture world. It's impossible – rather unimaginable – to ask people to visit the gallery where masterpieces of legends decorate the walls and halls. Everywhere, it's closed museums, empty auditoriums and deserted cultural spaces. The response from the art management fraternity has been that 'we are devastated and doomed and we don't know what the future holds for art and culture'.

Like any idea which needs to be told and propagated,

COVID-19 cases cross 9,000 mark

Delhi reports 6 deaths, 438 cases in 24 hours; two more hospitals roped in by govt.

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

In the past 24 hours, Delhi reported 438 new COVID-19 cases and six more deaths, stated a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Saturday.

With this, the total number of cases stands to 9,333 and deaths at 129. This is the first time that Delhi has recorded more than 400 cases for three consecutive days.

Of the total number of cases, 3,926 people have recovered and there are 5,278 active cases.

Of the 5,818 cases, or 62.3%, were reported in the first 16 days of May; though the first case was reported on March 2.

The total number of deaths reported by the government has been less than data from hospitals.

The bulletins mentioned that only cases where the "primary cause" of death is found to be COVID-19, as per the report of Death Audit Committee, will be counted as COVID-19 deaths.

"All hospitals sent death



A group of migrants walk towards the Delhi-U.P. border near Ghazipur amid the lockdown on Saturday. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

reports to the Death Audit Committee. The committee goes through the reports and only the ones that fall into the criteria mentioned in the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) guidelines will be certified as COVID-19 deaths," a Delhi government official said.

The government on Saturday declared two more private hospitals – Batra Hospital and Research Centre and Cygnus Orthocare Hospital – as "COVID Hospitals" in view of the "shortage" of isolation beds in private hospitals.

"In view of shortage of isolation beds in private hospitals, additional private hospitals are also declared as COVID hospitals for admitting confirmed/ suspected cases of the virus on payment basis," an official order on Saturday read.

A total of 90 beds will be kept for isolation. While only a part of the Batra hospital will be made into a COVID-19 treatment facility, the whole of the other second one will be converted.

A total of 110 healthcare workers of the government-

run Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Hospital have tested positive for the virus, said officials. However, there has been no case on Saturday, they said.

The Hindu had earlier reported that apart from officials, family members of many workers, including a two-and-a-half-year-old son of a healthcare worker, have positive.

The Federation of Delhi Govt. Nurses on Saturday wrote to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and other officials, seeking action against hospital officials for their alleged negligence that led to these many healthcare workers getting infected by COVID-19.

"The Federation of Delhi Govt Nurses once again approach you to look into the matter, constitute a committee to make a thorough and fair inquiry, fix the accountability those who are responsible and take the befitting action again the wrongdoers to stop the repetition of such acts in future," the association told the Chief Minister.

Rahul Gandhi meets home-bound migrant workers at Sukhdev Vihar

Congress workers arrange to ferry them back at his request

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Saturday hit the streets and met a group of migrant workers at Delhi's Sukhdev Vihar area.

The group of 20 migrant workers, all from Madhya Pradesh, were resting during their long journey home in Jhansi from Ambala in Haryana when Mr. Gandhi stopped for an hour-long 'impromptu' meeting.

Photographs released by the Congress showed women and children among the group of migrants.



Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi interacts with migrant workers near Sukhdev Vihar flyover in Delhi on Saturday. ■ PTI

ferred to drop us to the Noida border. When we asked him if he could make some arrangements to ferry us a little more distance, he said he will try," the worker added.

At Mr. Gandhi's request, volunteers from the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee arranged 8-10 vehicles to help the group get back to their village by following all social distancing norms.

Responding to rumours on social media claiming that the migrant workers Mr.

14 new cases in Gurugram

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHANDIGARH

Haryana reported 33 COVID-19 cases on Saturday, with Gurugram alone recording 14 new infections, taking the total in the State to 887. Gurugram has reported a total of 193 cases out of which 103 are active.

The State has so far reported 13 deaths.



15 Rohini jail inmates, one official infected

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 65-year-old Noida resident, who was hospitalised with pneumonia and found COVID-19 positive, died on Friday, said officials.

He was the fifth COVID-19 fatality in U.P.'s Gautam Buddha Nagar. The man from Noida's Sector 8 was admitted to GIMS in Greater Noida on May 12.

Earlier, four men from Gautam Buddha Nagar – two of them aged 62, one 60 and another 71 – have died due to the virus, said district officials.

Meanwhile, four more people tested positive for the virus in Noida, pushing the number of cases to 247, District Surveillance Officer Sunil Dohare said. "Total 41 reports have been received in the last 24 hours, of which five [including the deceased man] were COVID-19 positive. The number of confirmed cases in Gautam Buddha Nagar now stands at 247," he said.

Director General (Prisons) Sandeep Goel said the test of 19 inmates who shared barrack with the prisoner was conducted last week.

"Fifteen out of these 19 inmates have tested positive. Samples of five staffers have been sent for testing. A Head Warden has tested positive," he said. The officer said so far, all the persons, including

those who tested positive, are asymptomatic. "The inmates, who have tested positive, are in isolation quarantine barrack. The jail staff has been sent for the home quarantine. Some of the other staff have also been sent to home quarantine," the DG said. "The sanitisation process is being done," the DG said.

On May 10, a 28-year-old inmate of Rohini jail had visited DDU Hospital when he complained of an intestine issue. After surgery, he tested positive for the virus. The inmate, who was the first COVID-19 case in all of three Tihar complexes, didn't show any symptoms.

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THE HINDU
India's National Newspaper

₹1 lakh raised in a day for 7 domestic helps

Volunteers give ₹10K each to the women

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A group of volunteers raised funds to the tune of ₹1 lakh for domestic staff and handed over the money to them on Saturday.

The help arrived a day after a report in The Hindu highlighted that around seven househelps were rendered jobless as their employers refused to let them enter their homes.

These house helps, including Sangeeta who is eight months pregnant, were also ill-treated by their employers.

Some of the domestic helps said they were using traditional stove and wood in their homes as they did not have enough money to refill gas cylinders.

On Saturday, the seven

women were handed ₹10,000 each. The money was raised online by a group of 10 to 12 persons, who work under the name 'Kisse Kahaniyaan'.

Sanitary pads given

Ankit Gupta from Bhopal, an Urdu poet, who manages the group, said he visited also gave sanitary pads to the women.

"I gave a call for a fund to help these women. Fortunately, we were able to raise ₹1 lakh in a day. But there are many generous people who came forward and donated to help these women.

These house helps, including Sangeeta who is eight months pregnant, were also ill-treated by their employers.

Some of the domestic helps said they were using traditional stove and wood in their homes as they did not have enough money to refill gas cylinders.

On Saturday, the seven

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Date: 17-05-2020

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e-NIT No: 05/E/J of 2020-21 Dt. 14-05-2020

On behalf of Managing Director, Jammu & Kashmir Projects Construction Corporation Ltd., the Deputy General Manager, Unit Electrical JKPC Ltd., Jammu invites e-tenders from approved and eligible electric contractors registered with JKPC Ltd./J&K Govt./CPWD/Railways and other State/Central Govt., undertaking for the following work:

S. No	Name of work	Estimated Cost (₹ in lakhs)	Cost of Document	Earnest Money (₹)	Time of Completion	Class of Contractor
1.	Providing and installation of LT Panels and LT Cables for Rajiv Gandhi Hospital at Ganguly Jammu	Rs 24.00 Lacs	Rs. 1,000/-	Rs. 48,000/-	In tandem with civil works	"A"
2.	Pre-Bid Meeting	14.05.2020 to 14.05.2020 up to 1400 hrs.				
3.	Bid submission dates along with proof of cost of Tender Document and EMD.	18.05.2020 at 1230 Hrs. in Office of Dy. General Manager, Unit Electrical JKPC Ltd., Rail Head Complex, Jammu				
4.	Date of opening of technical Bid.	23.05.2020 to 23.05.2020 up to 1400 Hrs.				
5.	Status of funds	Available				
6.	Hard Copies of Technical Bid will be invited from L1 only.					

Any other information regarding e-tendering process can be had from the office of undersigned or e-tendering Cell, Jammu.

Sd/-
Deputy General Manager,
Unit-Electrical, JKPC Ltd., Jammu

stranded in the city and had appealed to the WB government to create a database for migrant workers from West Bengal stranded in Shahpur Jat.

The Hindu had earlier reported on the embroidery workers from WB's Paschim Medinipur district, who were

this regard, a detailed database is urgently required for shifting of migrant labourers to their hometowns."

The labourers, who have been in the city for over a decade, had said how most of their employers, the boutique owners, had refused to provide monetary relief

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NIQ No. 232/Const-158/2020, Dt. 22.04.2020

Name of work:- Round the Clock Operation and Maintenance Management of Dry Dock.
Deshapran Fishing Harbour.
Schedule of Dates:-
Date of Receiving of the Quotation 28/05/2020 at 3.00 p.m. instead of 11.05.2020
Date of opening of the Quotation 29/05/2020 at 3.30 p.m. instead of 12.05.2020
All other terms and condition will remain unchanged.

ICA-T1879(3)/2020

Sd/-
MANAGING DIRECTOR

UNIDENTIFIED DEAD BODY

General Public is hereby informed that one female **Namely: Unknown D/o: Unknown, Address: Unknown** was found dead on Pavement, under Barapulla Flyover, Nizamuddin, Delhi on **15.05.2020** at 9:15 am. The body has been preserved in AIIMS Hospital, Delhi. In this regard a case has been lodged vide **FIR/DD No. 11A, dated 15.05.2020** at P.S. Hazrat Nizamuddin, Delhi. The description of the dead female is as under:- **Age: 55 years, Sex: Female, Height: 5', Complexion: Shallow, ID Mark: A Tattoo mark "Saugand bai Ramkee' on right arm, Wearing: Pink colour T-shirt and lower body covered by black colour blanket.** If any one having any information about this dead female please inform undersigned. **SHO P.S. Hazrat Nizamuddin, Delhi Ph: 011-24355758, 8750870929**

DP/68/SE/2020

CENTRAL PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
NOTICE INVITING e-TENDER Press Notice

The Executive Engineer, President Estate Project (PEP), CPWD, Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi (Phone No: 011-23793470 Email Id-bb.sharma61@gov.in) on behalf of The President of India invites Request for Proposal (RFP) on line bid two-bid system for the following work:

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6. Date of Pre-bid meeting: **3:00 PM on 22/05/2020**

The bid forms and other details can be obtained from the website www.tenderwizard.com/CPWD. The press notice is also available on www.eprocure.gov.in.

EASTERN RAILWAY

E-tender is invited by Principal Chief Engineer, Eastern Railway, Kolkata from and reputed and eligible contractors of Railways and those of approved list of Govt. of India/Public Sector undertaking for the under mentioned work: **E-Tender No.: WT_623_19_8_185_Z1_20-21R**, Dated: **14.05.2020**. Name of the work and its location: Zone No. I: Civil maintenance including water supply, sanitary and horticulture works at Fairlie Place Building areas, Eastern Railway, Kolkata for the period ending 30.06.2021. Approximate cost of the work: ₹ 62,00,000. Earnest Money Deposit: ₹ 1,24,000. Date & time of closing of tender: 08.06.2020 at 14.00 hrs. The details of tender documents are available at website www.ireps.gov.in. Tenderers are requested to submit their offer online on the above website. No manual offer will be accepted. (MISC-19/2020-21)

Tender Notices are also available at website: www.er.indianrailways.gov.in/www.ireps.gov.in

Bengal to pay for return of migrants, says Mamata CM shares official letter to Railways

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

The West Bengal government will bear the entire cost of movement of the State's migrant workers by special trains to enable their return from other States, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on Saturday.

Ms. Banerjee shared on social media a letter from State Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha to Railway Board Chairman Vinod Kumar Yadav, requesting that instructions be issued to railway officials that no costs should be claimed from those boarding the Shramik Special trains.

"Saluting the toil faced by our migrant brethren, I am pleased to announce the decision of GoWB to bear the entire cost of movement for our migrant workers.... No migrant will be charged. Letter to Rly Board attached," Ms. Banerjee posted on Twitter.

The State government has announced that it will facilitate 105 trains between May 17 and June 15. State Home Secretary Alapan



Mamata Banerjee. ■ FILE PHOTO

Bandyopadhyay said that about 2.9 lakh people had sought help in the form of transport facilities to return to the State.

Earlier on Saturday, the State announced a compensation of ₹2 lakh to the families of migrant workers from Purulia who had lost their lives in U.P.'s Auraiya district.

17 lakh stranded

Mr. Bandyopadhyay said the government had prepared a database of about 17 lakh people from the State who were stranded across the country. He said this included workers, students, tourists and pilgrims.

NRC blamed for PM-KISAN fund anomalies

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

Preparation of documents "in a hurry" by the Agriculture Department officials who were engaged in the exercise of updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC) has been blamed for anomalies in distributing funds under the Prime Minister's Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana.

Assam Congress president Ripun Bora had on Friday accused the BJP-led government in the State of large-scale corruption and manipulation in the list of beneficiaries under the scheme. He alleged that 40% of 39 lakh beneficiaries shown by the government were bogus.

Mr. Bora cited the example of central Assam's Moriagona district where 22,000 government employees, businessmen, panchayat presidents and economically sound people have been listed as beneficiaries of the scheme. The Congress also appealed to the Central Bureau of Investigation to take cognisance of the alleged scam.

Amarinder extends lockdown till May 31

Curfew restrictions will go, says Punjab Chief Minister

VIKAS VASUDEVA
CHANDIGARH

With COVID-19 cases declining in the past four days, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Saturday said the lockdown would continue till May 31, but the curfew restrictions would go. He indicated that limited public transport would resume and curbs would be eased further in the non-containment zones from May 18.

Details on Monday

In a statement, he said the containment zones would be sealed for shops and small businesses to reopen in the non-containment areas. The government would announce details of relaxations by Monday, factoring in the Centre's new guidelines for Lockdown 4.0.

However, Mr. Singh made it clear that educational institutes would remain closed.

He said that in its suggestions to the Union Home Minister, the State recommended that the nationwide lockdown be extended to May 31, though with more relaxations.



Migrant workers in Jalandhar on Saturday outside a registration camp to travel back to their native places. ■ PTI

said the rate of doubling cases stood at 44 days.

But he warned that the number could go up as more migrant workers and non-resident Indians would enter the State. As of now, 60,000 Punjabis from other States and 20,000 from abroad had registered themselves for return.

Capt. Amarinder appealed to the people to be cautious and urged the Opposition not to indulge in petty politics over the pandemic.

Odisha gears up for cyclone

Districts on alert though it may head for the Bengal coast

SATYASUNDAR BARIK
BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government on Saturday said it would not be complacent in its preparation even if initial analysis of the impending cyclone's track suggests that the system might spare the State.

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik held videoconferencing with senior officials of 12 districts to take stock of the situation. He asked the District Collectors to put extra efforts for preparedness and try to ensure zero casualty.

shelters have been identified in the area. Around 105 such shelters are presently being used as quarantine centres for COVID care. Tests of the persons accommodated in these centres are being done expeditiously so that those with negative report can be sent for home quarantine," said Mr. Tripathy. As a contingency arrangement, alternative buildings were identified, he said.

It is suspected that Balasore, Bhadrak, Kendrapara and Jagatsinghpur could be hit by the cyclone. "Around 403 cyclone

Srinagar bakers prepare for Id amid COVID-19

Workers are being given PPE kits, trained on hand hygiene

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

With the festival of Id just a week away, the stringent lockdown imposed in Kashmir for over three months now will oversee a 'sweet' exit policy for bakery sale soon, where all the bakers will be tested for COVID-19 before they start service.

With bakery and confectionery central to Id celebrations in Kashmir, Deputy Commissioner, Srinagar, Shahid Iqbal Choudhary, has launched a two-week training module programme designed for popular bakers in capital Srinagar.

"More than 500 workers of around 180 bakeries in Srinagar city are being imparted training... Existence of coronavirus pandemic is a reality and people will have to learn to live with it by following all precautions," Dr. Choudhary said.

The administration has directed bakers to resume functioning but in a "professional, safe and hygienic framework". "All bakers have been instructed to only sell packed products and to avoid loose bakery items," he added.

The Srinagar district administration plans to train more than 10,000 service providers in selected sectors.

"These programmes are being organised for a host of important service providers, including vegetable vendors, milk suppliers, hair dressers, laundry, public transport, telecommunications, house-keeping among other services," the spokesman said.

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TAMIL

Tightrope walk



Treading carefully: A toddy tapper moving from one coconut tree to another using ropes in Meenakshipuram, Palakkad district, on Saturday. ■ K.K. MUSTAFAH

Police cane migrant workers in A.P.

Nearly 500 labourers were walking towards their home States from Tamil Nadu

STAFF REPORTER

VIJAYAWADA

The police on Saturday used force on migrant labourers who were walking to their home States. A few workers suffered injuries in the lathi-charge.

More than 500 labourers, who were walking on the National Highway, were provided shelter at the Vijayawada Club. When they came to Kanakadurgamma Varadhi in Guntur district on Saturday, the police asked them to go back. When the workers tried to continue their journey, they were caned.

The labourers from Bihar, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and other States



Acting tough: A policeman wielding a lathi on migrant workers in Guntur district on Saturday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

had migrated to Tamil Nadu a few months ago. The COVID-19 pandemic put them out of work, forcing them to

return to their home States. On the directions of Chief Secretary Nilam Sawhney, they were shifted to shelter

homes and provided food. On Friday, they were shifted to Vijayawada Club.

Never return to A.P.: "We will never return to Andhra Pradesh. Hundreds of workers are walking on roads for more than a month, and the officials did not even offer us a packet of biscuit. Instead of helping the poor labourers, the police are beating us mercilessly," a woman labourer said.

Earlier, incidents of police beating up the migrant workers had been reported from Mangalagiri, Kovvur, Polavaram and other places in the State during the lockdown period.

Announcing Karnataka's intention to have hotels inspected over complaints on private quarantine facilities, Primary and Secondary Education Minister Suresh Kumar said: "In such cases, BBMP should cancel the licence of the hotel. I will speak to the BBMP commissioner and ask him to initiate immediate action."

A day after recording the biggest spike in the number of positive cases on a single day and crossing the 1,000 mark, Karnataka on Saturday reported 36 new cases, taking the total to 1,092.

With 14 new cases, Bengaluru reported the majority. All the 14 were contacts of a housekeeping staffer of a hotel in Shivajinagar. The individual had become a super-spreader, having infected 29 persons in one week, said Mr. Suresh Kumar.

One more passenger in Udupi, who had returned from Dubai, and 11 inter-State travellers who returned from Mumbai, Maharashtra and Ahmedabad tested

positive. Of the new cases, eight were reported from Kalaburagi, four from Hassan, three from Shivamogga, and one each from Udupi, Mandy, Dharwad, Davangere, Ballari, Bagalkote and Vijayapura.

All four and three cases in Hassan and Shivamogga respectively, one each from Kalaburagi, Dharwad and Bagalkote had a travel history to Mumbai, and the lone case

COVID-19

in Ballari had travelled to Ahmedabad.

Shadow of market

Chennai's Koyambedu wholesale market contacts continued to push the figures in Andhra Pradesh, as 31 of 48 cases were linked to the hotspot. Also, 101 patients recovered in the State.

Out of the 477 new COVID-19 cases, 93 persons had returned from abroad and from other States. This took the total tally of positive cases in the State to 10,585.

(With inputs from Bengaluru, Chennai and Thiruvananthapuram Bureaus)

IN BRIEF



5 T.N. men held in A.P. for smuggling liquor

CHITTOOR
The Nagari police seized liquor bottles along with an SUV and took five men, belonging to Tiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu, into custody at the inter-State border checkpost at Punimangadu on Saturday.

Acting on a tip-off that an SUV carrying liquor was on its way from Nagari to Chennai, a police team intercepted the vehicle and seized the liquor, which included seven full bottles, three half bottles and 120 quarter bottles.

Three Keralites die in Nizamabad accident

NIZAMABAD
Three Keralites died and two others sustained injuries when their SUV hit a stationary tipper lorry from the rear on NH-44 at Naka Tanda in Telangana on Saturday. The three died while undergoing treatment at the Government General Hospital in Nizamabad. The deceased were identified as Aneesh Thomas, 32, his daughter Analia, 18 months, and Stalin, 21. It is suspected that the accident occurred as Stalin, the driver of the SUV, dozed off at the wheel.

Navy on high alert for cyclone relief efforts

VISAKHAPATNAM
As the depression over South Eastern Bay of Bengal, presently about 1,000 km south of Paradip, is likely to intensify rapidly into a cyclonic storm in the next 12 hours and further into a severe cyclonic storm during the subsequent 24 hours, the Naval ships at Visakhapatnam are on standby to proceed to the affected areas to undertake Humanitarian Aid Distress Relief, evacuation, logistic support, including providing medical aid. Additionally, 20 rescue teams with Gemini boats and medical teams are also kept ready.

Kerala to source weather inputs from private agencies

IMD's network of 15 stations found 'unreliable, inadequate'



Getting ready: A file photo of monsoon clouds looming over Valiyathura in Thiruvananthapuram. ■ M. MAHINSHA

IMD had promised to set up 15 stations before the 2020 monsoon. But they have not yet materialised. Moreover, "near-time data streaming is minimal to nil. Just about five stations are providing live data in the State." Due to this, the State will be unable to issue localised alerts. The IMD is not issuing alerts even at the taluk level, ac-

cording to the department.

In its latest order, the government asked the KSDMA to come up with a protocol for issuing warnings and alerts based on these inputs in consultation with the Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre, which has been utilising inputs from private weather services.

The KSDMA pointed out that the IMD had only 15 automated weather stations in the State. The KSDMA had transferred land for establishing 73 more and the

"Migrant labourers are walking in scorching heat on the highways, and their flip-flops hardly last for a couple of days after which they are forced to walk barefoot. It pained us to see them walking in such difficult conditions," said Golugiri Nagireddy, president of the Vizianagaram Petroleum

Dealers' Association.

"We are collecting footwear of different sizes and offering them whatever fits. We are also giving them pain balms and creams as a majority of them are suffering from acute leg pain. The kits are being donated to labourers from Odisha and Chhattisgarh at places like Rajapulova and Bhogapuram," he added.

BJP leader Perla Sambamurthy, who contested the Srikakulam Parliament seat in the last elections, is providing shelter and food for migrants at his theater complex in Srikakulam. "Many of them are facing multiple health problems after walk-

ing continuously in the heat. Proper rest will help them regain their health," he said.

Balaga Foundation president Balaga Prakash provided transport to some labour-

Decks cleared for aid to lockdown-hit industries

Payments in 2 months, says A.P. govt.

STAFF REPORTER

VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government issued a G.O. on Friday facilitating the delivery of financial incentives to lockdown-hit industries, especially Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The major component of this stimulus package is pending incentives amounting to ₹904.89 crore payable to 11,238 MSME manufacturing and allied units.

For large and mega units, fixed/demand charges (electricity) against the CMD are being deferred for three months (April-June) without interest or penal charges.

It was stated in the G.O. RT. No.103 dated May 15 that MSMEs have been contributing approximately 8% of the national GDP, 45% of manufacturing output and 40% of exports.

Product range

The MSME sector in Andhra Pradesh manufactures a variety of products with a high concentration of MSEs in food, mineral, building materials, drugs and pharmaceuticals, fabricated materials, and trading and service sectors.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



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

Forecast for Sunday: Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning likely at isolated places over Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Gilgit-Baltistan, Muzaffarabad, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Maharashtra, Goa, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Lakshadweep, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

CITY RAIN MAX MIN CITY RAIN MAX MIN

Agartala 13.4... 34.0... 25.0 Kozhikode 0.1... 33.0... 27.0

Ahmedabad ... 42.0... 30.0 Kurnool ... 42.0... 30.0

Aizawl ... 32.0... 18.0 Lucknow ... 40.0... 26.0

Altahabad 0.1... 42.0... 25.0 Madurai ... 39.0... 27.0

Bengaluru 35.0... 24.0 Mangaluru ... 35.0... 26.0

Bhopal ... 41.0... 26.0 Mumbai ... 32.0... 26.0

Bhubaneswar ... 38.0... 26.0 Mysuru ... 35.0... 24.0

Chandigarh ... 38.0... 22.0 New Delhi ... 41.0... 24.0

Chennai ... 37.0... 29.0 Patna ... 39.0... 27.0

Coimbatore ... 37.0... 25.0 Port Blair ... 5.8... 32.0... 26.0

Dehradun ... 36.0... 20.0 Puducherry ... 37.0... 28.0

Gangtok ... 36.8... 19.0... 15.0 Pune ... 21.8... 38.0... 25.0

Goa ... 33.0... 27.0 Raipur ... 2.8... 38.0... 25.0

Guwahati ... 33.0... 23.0 Ranchi ... 37.0... 25.0

Hubballi ... 33.0... 26.0 Shillong ... 0.05... 23.0... 14.0

Hyderabad ... 38.0... 27.0 Shimla ... 26.0... 15.0

Imphal ... 31.0... 18.0 Srinagar ... 24.0... 11.0

Jaipur ... 39.0... 25.0 Thiruvananthapuram ... 18.2... 33.0... 25.0

Kochi ... 8.6... 33.0... 25.0 Tiruchi ... 40.0... 28.0

Kohima ... 30.0... 22.0 Vijayawada

Kolkata ... 36.0... 28.0 Visakhapatnam ... 35.0... 28.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing Yesterday

CITIES SO. NO. CO PM2.5 PM10 CODE

Ahmedabad ... 22 18 ... 56 107 ■■■

Bengaluru ... 3 82 ... 25 ... ■■■

Chennai ... 16 56 ... 113 ... ■■■

Delhi ... 24 23 16 ... 174 130 ■■■

Hyderabad ... 4 59 23 ... 82 59 ■■■

Kolkata ... 8 9 19 ... 16 26 ■■■

Lucknow ... 5 35 55 ... 151 116 ■■■

Mumbai ... 27 9 11 ... 36 110 ■■■

Pune ... 31 54 ... 40 39 ■■■

Visakhapatnam ... 11 12 6 ... 22 ... ■■■

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Muzaffarpur, Bihar recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 222 indicating poor air quality. In contrast, Aizawl, Mizoram recorded a healthy AQI score of 16.

AQI Quality Code: ■ Poor ■■ Moderate ■■■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO₂: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease.

Chennai market link pushes up cases in Andhra Pradesh

One dies in A.P.; Karnataka to inspect quarantine hotels after complaints

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

One more person with COVID-19 died in Andhra Pradesh and 48 fresh cases were reported on Saturday, after 9,628 samples were tested.

Kerala reported 11 positive cases, all of them imported. Seven were expatriates who came home recently and the rest, Non-Resident Keralites from Chennai and Maharashtra.

Karnataka announced it would have hotels inspected after several complaints were raised over poor quality of food and unhygienic accommodation provided in private quarantine facilities.

Karnataka announced it would have hotels inspected after several complaints were raised over poor quality of food and unhygienic accommodation provided in private quarantine facilities.

On track

Andhra Pradesh government has organised special trains to take migrant workers from Visakhapatnam, Vizianagram and Srikakulam districts to their hometowns



Patient wait: People standing in a queue outside the Visakhapatnam Railway Station to board train to Rajasthan on Saturday.

■ K. R. DEEPAK

FROM PAGE ONE

Govt. throws open defence, coal sectors

Mr. Srivastava noted that the only direct budgetary cost in this tranche was the ₹8,100 crore to be provided as a hiked 30% viability gap funding to boost private investment in social sector infrastructure.

In a bid to enhance self-reliance in defence production, Ms. Sitharaman said the Centre would notify a list of weapons and platforms that could not be imported, and widen it every year as domestic capacities grew.

A separate budget provision for domestic capital procurement would help reduce the defence import bill, she said, adding that indigenisation of imported spare parts would also be given priority. The FDI limit in defence manufacturing under automatic route will be raised from 49% to 74%.

In another major policy change, the Minister announced that Ordnance Factory Boards would be corporatised and eventually listed on the stock market to improve autonomy, efficiency and accountability, emphasising, however, that they would not be privatised.

The government monopoly on coal would be removed with the introduction of commercial mining, said Ms. Sitharaman, allowing any private player to bid for a coal block and sell it in the open market. Earlier, only captive consumers with end-use ownership could bid for coal blocks. Almost 50 blocks will be offered immediately as part of efforts to promote indigenous manufacturing and reduce the defence import bill.

"We shall notify a list of weapons and platforms not allowed for import. They will have to be bought in India. Every year, this list will be increased as the capacity to make weapons that meet the necessary standards grows.

Indigenisation of some imported spares will also be given priority," she said, while stressing that 'Make in India' was absolutely necessary for self-reliance, especially in critical sectors such as defence production.

With regard to civil aviation, Ms. Sitharaman said six more airports are up for auction on private-public partnership mode, while additional private investment will be invited at 12 airports in a move expected to net ₹13,000 crore for the Airports Authority of India.

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IN BRIEF



Odisha extends home quarantine period

Bhubaneswar
Odisha government on Saturday extended home quarantine period from 14 days to 28 days for people returning to urban areas from abroad and other States. Those having separate rooms and bathroom can stay in home quarantine, and standard operating procedure for monitoring in urban areas has been issued, the government said.

51 found in container truck in Assam

Guwahati
The police in Bongaigaon district of western Assam on Saturday intercepted a container truck from West Bengal and detained 51 people, mostly migrant workers, who were travelling in it. They managed to elude the police and health officials at Srimpur, 80 km west on the Assam-West Bengal border, where every individual entering Assam has to undergo a mandatory test for COVID-19. The police said the people are from various districts of Assam, and it was not immediately known where they had come from.

13 pregnant women among fresh cases in J&K

Srinagar
Jammu and Kashmir reported 108 COVID-19 cases on Saturday, the highest single-day increase. Among them were 13 pregnant women. With one death, the toll has increased to 12. Twelve pregnant women from Anantnag and one from Kargil in south Kashmir tested positive. "It was the highest single-day increase in such cases, taking the total number to 24 in Kashmir," an official said. The government has made testing mandatory for all pregnant women.

BSF battalions worst hit by COVID-19 in Tripura

Agartala
The total number of COVID-19 cases in Tripura rose to 165 on Saturday with the detection of 11 more cases, with seven of the new cases from 86th battalion of the BSF. The 86th and the 138th battalions are the worst hit by COVID-19. Of all the positive cases in Tripura, 159 are of BSF personnel and their family members.

Punjab orders crackdown on liquor smuggling

Chandigarh
Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Saturday directed the police to crack down on all kinds of liquor smuggling, bootlegging and illicit distillation of liquor to protect the State from incurring any revenue losses. DGP Dinkar Gupta issued directives to identify liquor smugglers-suppliers-bootleggers district-wise and police station-wise by May 23. He warned that in case of failure to do so, the concerned SHO will be shifted out and departmental action taken against him as well as the defaulters.

Navy to aid Northern theatre command'

Naval fighter aircraft can be deployed in the Western desert areas: Gen. Rawat

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

The proposed Northern theatre command along the border with China should also have a small Navy element in it as some of the naval systems are useful there, said Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Gen. Bipin Rawat. He also said the naval fighter aircraft can be deployed in the Western sector in the desert areas when not required at sea to effectively utilise existing resources.

"Theatre commands (land) will mainly be between the Army and the IAF. While it is the northern border there should also be a small Navy element," Gen. Rawat told a small group of journalists during the week. Referring to the Navy's fighter jets, he said, "Can we not bring some of the naval assets to the land borders?"

Saying the naval fighter jets can operate in deserts and the IAF jets there can move to the other borders, Gen. Rawat said, "There is not much of difference between sea flying and desert flying."

Gen. Rawat had in the past said the capabilities of the Navy's P-8I long range maritime surveillance aircraft were used for observing the Chinese movements during the Doklam stand-off in 2017.

The first of the integrated commands in the works is the integrated Air Defence (AD) command headed by the IAF followed by a maritime command and then the land based theatre commands.

Separately, Army chief Gen. Manoj Naravane said at an event they have carried out a few brainstorming sessions but the specifics of the theatre commands have not been firmed up at – like



Theatre commands will mainly be between the Army and the IAF. While it is the northern border, there should also be a small Navy element

GEN. BIPIN RAWAT
Chief of Defence Staff

whether the entire western front can be one theatre or the northern front can be one theatre.

"Soon we will have a presentation by the IAF with the representatives from Army and Navy and we will flush out the contours of the AD command," Gen. Naravane said. "We will do it as per the Indian operational requirements and with Indian characteristics."

Gen. Rawat said the study on the AD command is under way and he already had the first presentation and the standing instructions should be issued by year end. In 2-3

years it should take shape, he said.

Gen. Rawat said the idea is that all air defence resources of the three Services should be under one Commander and ensure that there is no fratricide. "The command and control instructions should come from one person."

"In three years, operational instructions will be issued on the theatre commands," Gen. Rawat said adding it will take shape after that. The Navy has already started a study on the maritime command.

The next step in the inte-

gration is having common communications which presently the three Services have their respective set up and also common training establishments and equipment where possible. Basically with integration, maintenance and logistics elements go down and bring in a lot of savings, he said.

NSS draft to be finalised

Asked about the proposed National Security Strategy (NSS) that is being formulated by the Defence Planning Committee headed by the National Security Adviser (NSA), Gen. Rawat said the draft is being finalised but did not give a timeframe for its completion.

"The draft was ready. But with the CDS coming in, it needs some changes. That is being done," he said. He said without the NSS too, the three Services have their operational directives and India has a Union war book which integrates everything in terms of war or calamities.

Maharashtra records 1,606 fresh cases, toll rises to 1,135

Mumbai records 884 new cases and 41 deaths

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Despite the lockdown, Maharashtra reported the highest number of deaths on Saturday. As many as 67 people lost their lives to the novel coronavirus taking the State's cumulative death toll to 1,135. It also recorded 1,606 new cases, the second-highest single-day jump, pushing the tally to 30,706.

However, State health officials said that only 22 of the 67 deaths were recorded in the last 24 hours while the remaining deaths were from April 14 to May 14.

Mumbai recorded 884 cases and 41 deaths on Saturday. The Mira-Bhayandar re-

gion recorded one death, Thane and Pune seven deaths each, Aurangabad five, Jalgaon three and Nashik and Solapur one each.

Health officials said that of the 67 patients who died, 47 were men and 20 were women, and 44 of them had suffered from such co-morbid conditions as diabetes, hypertension and heart disease. While four patients

were below the age of 40, 25 were in the age group of 40-59 and 38 were above 60.

Nearly 66% of the total number of cases in the State have been recorded this month alone. On Saturday, 524 patients were discharged. Health Minister Rakesh Tope said this was the third consecutive day when the State had discharged over 500 patients.

In a statement issued in New Delhi.

The letter happens to be the communication between its author and the addressee and it is not made public particularly when it is between highly placed dignitaries," he added.

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

Days after J&K High Court Chief Justice Gita Mittal had publicly shared the contents of a letter asking the Centre to establish special benches of the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) in Srinagar and Jammu, CAT Chairman Justice L. Narasimha Reddy on Saturday not only denied having received any formal communication on the subject but also took strong objection to the manner in which the correspondence had been made public.

"I contacted Union Minister of State Dr. Jitendra Singh about the subject but he has not received the letter either in the form of a hard copy or through e-mail," Justice Reddy said in a

statement issued in New Delhi.

"The letter happens to be the communication between its author and the addressee and it is not made public particularly when it is between highly placed dignitaries," he added.

In a statement issued through the J&K information department recently, Justice Mittal had revealed that she had written to Dr. Singh and sought the establishment of a CAT with multiple benches, with permanent seats at Jammu and Srinagar.

Justice Reddy said, "It appears that the Chief Justice expressed concern over the ability of the tribunal to handle the service matters of the Union Territory as and when transferred."

Govt of India (GoI) in partnership with the State of Karnataka is implementing the National Health Mission in Karnataka which comprises of various programs, with the objective of improving medical facilities in the areas and seeks to provide accessible, affordable and quality health care to the population, especially the vulnerable sections. To facilitate implementation of NHM, State and District level entities (Health Societies) have been registered which work under the administrative control of the Department of Health & Family Welfare. The Karnataka State Health and Family Welfare Society®, invites "Proposal for audit" from firms of Chartered Accountants empanelled with C&AG and eligible for major PSUs audit for the year 2019-20.

India opposes rejoining RCEP over China concerns

MEA official flags 'overdependence'



SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

As the deadline for a response to a fresh proposal of India rejoining negotiations on the ASEAN-led trade Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) ran out on Friday, a senior Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) official indicated that global post-COVID-19 concerns over China had strengthened India's opposition to the grouping.

"If anything the COVID-19 experience and the experience of countries that have been overly dependent on imports from China or one country would have reinforced and revaluated the decision to stay out of the RCEP," said Ashok Malik, policy adviser in the MEA.

The letter sent by the RCEP's Trade Negotiating Committee (TNC) Chairperson last month, had an offer to reconsider India's objections to giving market access for a "limited number of products", if it would rejoin the talks.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced India's decision to quit the grouping, which includes the 10 ASEAN nations, Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea in November, citing lack of protection for country's agricultural sector among others.

After pulling out of the grouping, India skipped at least two separate meetings it was invited to, including one in Bali in February, and a virtual meeting in April. At the April RCEP-TNC meeting, negotiators who ironed out legal issues with the pact committed to signing the agreement by the end of 2020.

"The RCEP will provide a more stable and predictable economic environment to support the much-needed recovery of trade and investment in the region, which has been adversely affected

by the COVID-19 pandemic," said a statement issued on April 30, which added that "Against this backdrop, the 15 [countries] reaffirmed their commitment to continue working with India to address its outstanding issues...[and] would welcome India's return to the RCEP negotiations."

However, Mr. Malik said India's experience of trade pacts in the past was that they had "hollowed out" manufacturing in the country, and would hamper the government's renewed commitment to the 'Make in India' policy. "At a time when our 'Make in India' programme is moving from Level 1 to Level 2, and it has to go to Level 10, I think it was a good decision [to leave RCEP]," he said, speaking at a web seminar organised by the Carnegie India Foundation.

Significantly, Australian High Commissioner-Designate Barry O'Farrell cited the 'Make in India' policy as the reason for India to join. Australia and Japan have been at the forefront of efforts to convince India to rejoin the RCEP as a possible counterweight to China in the grouping that would represent a third of global trade.

"If India did want to rejoin the [RCEP] negotiations, there would be no better time than now, because it would send a signal to the world that not only is India an attractive place to invest, but also, its potential of being a global manufacturing hub as envisaged by the government's 'Make in India' policy was realisable" Mr. O'Farrell said.



Need of the hour: Shree Shiv Chhatrapati Sports Complex in Pune is now a quarantine facility. ■ JIGNESH MISTRY

CAT chief slams J&K CJ's public sharing of letter

Justice Reddy denies correspondence

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

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GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER WATER RESOURCES (NORTH) HANUMANGARH

No.: F.2/Actt/NIB/2020-21/6364 Dated:- 7/5/2020

NIB NO.01/2020-21

This office invites bids from eligible bidders for work of supply, Installation, Testing, Commissioning, operation and Maintenance of SCADA Based Canal monitoring for Bhakra & Ganga Canal System of Water Resources Department Rajasthan under National Hydrology Project (NHP) estimated 752.00 Lacs respectively. The other details can be seen per bid documents published on websites, www.djpr.rajasthan.gov.in, http://water.rajasthan.gov.in, http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in, http://sppp.rajasthan.gov.in UBN No.: WRN2021WLOB0010

Chief Engineer

DIPR No. 3362

BRUHAT BENGALURU MAHANAGARA PALIKE

Office of the Executive Engineer, Kengeri Division, R.R. Nagar Zone, No. 144, 2nd Main, Jagajyothi Layout, Bangalore - 560 056.

Date : 15-05-2020

INVITATION FOR SHORT TERM TENDER NOTIFICATION (IFT)

(Through GOK e-Procurement Portal only)

The Executive Engineer, Kengeri Division invites tenders on behalf of the Commissioner, BBMP, Bengaluru from eligible Tenderers for the Construction of works detailed in the table below.

SINGLE COVER SYSTEM - CALL - 1

SL. No.	Name of the Work	Approx. Value of Work (Rs. in Lakhs)	EMD (in Rs.)
1.	Supply of Drinking Water by Tankers in Ward No. 130. Reservation of Works to : Others	15.00	37,500/-

TWO COVER SYSTEM - CALL - 1

2.	Drilling of Borewell and Providing Water Supply in Ward No. 130.	99.00	2,00,000/-
3.	Improvements to Roads and Drains in Ward No. 130.	51.00	1,02,000/-
4.	Drilling of Borewell and Providing Water Supply in Varahasandra Colony SC-ST Area in Ward No. 198.	100.00	2,00,000/-
5.	Comprehensive Development Works in Ward No. 72.	150.00	2,25,000/-
6.	Improvements CC Drain, CC Roads and Culverts at Jnanabharathi Layout 1st Block Surrounding Areas in Ward No. 130, Ullal.	60.00	1,20,000/-
7.	Improvements to Roads and Providing Asphalt, Resurfacing Patch Repairs and Asphalt to Bad Reaches in Nagadevanahalli Limits at Ward No. 130.	90.00	1,80,000/-
8.			

For these migrants, partition plays out on their never-ending journey back home

Borders are created within the country, people are moving like cattle, says a worker on his way home 1,300 km away

SIDHARTH YADAV
JOHARIYA (DATIA DISTRICT)

Crossing three States, mostly plodding in the furious heat 13 days on, Vikramjeet Verma believes the longest journey of his life, to get back home, is more about never returning to Ahmedabad, some 1,300 km away.

With every step on the highway, hauling feet heavy with crushed dreams, his resolve only fortifies: "Ab kabhi vaaps nahi jana hai udhar [I don't have to go to there ever again]."

On Saturday, he reached the Madhya Pradesh-Uttar Pradesh border along with two friends. "This whole period feels like *Gadar* is play-

ing out," quipped Mr. Verma, 21, a carpenter who made ₹400 a day, referring to the film set in the 1947 Partition. "Borders are created within the country; people are moving like cattle; there are checkpoints everywhere. And all is uncertain now, like at the time of Independence."

For eight days at least, they reached the Ahmedabad railway station every morning. "We stood in the queue to board a train," said his friend Ajay Verma. As the lockdown kicked in – and has continued since – hunger and draining cash has felt like a curse for leaving home. And the government's tardy

response to their plea for returning home sapped all security. Now, only home, its warm embrace, could lend them succour. So they set out towards Gonda district of Uttar Pradesh. "We will work as agricultural labourers for ₹250 a day," he said.

With Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh finally agreeing to set aside differences over the passage of returning workers, an overwhelming wave has struck the Johariya border in Datia district of Madhya Pradesh, the busiest border point Uttar Pradesh is scrambling to manage. Around 50,000 workers returning from Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra are



Arduous journey: Migrant workers headed towards Uttar Pradesh huddled in a truck on Saturday. ■ A.M. FARQUI

crossing over every day, said Rahul Srivastav, Additional Superintendent of Police (City), Jhansi, overseeing arrangements at the border.

Faced with the uncertainty caused by the lockdown,

workers are making a desperate attempt to return home, packed inside lorries, riding two-wheelers, perched atop goods trucks and huddled up in buses.

Around 100 government

run buses from Madhya Pradesh's Bijasan border with Maharashtra are arriving at Johariya every day, from where workers are sent by the Uttar Pradesh government buses onward. Those on bicycles are loaded in trucks.

At the checkpoint of Madhya Pradesh, an official from the Education Department, requesting anonymity, said, "Given the volume of traffic, it's difficult to check for documents from each of them. So we are letting everyone pass. We have to ensure they reach home first."

Six car mechanics in Pune are riding on motorcycles arranged by their contractor.

"You don't know who's carrying the novel coronavirus in a truck when people are forced to travel like sheep

and goats. Then, they may take it to their villages. Why can't the government run all trains when the damage is already done," wondered Tanveer Ansari, 34, lying supine in an abandoned dhaba.

Adjusting a spare tyre around the handles of his motorcycle, Amin Ahmed, 22, the youngest in the group, points to a mini-bicycle strapped to its rear.

"That belongs to my nephew, who is six. He went along with my sister in a truck to Kanpur. He cried a lot, saying he wouldn't go anywhere without the bicycle," said Mr. Ahmed, listing the essentials he carried.

"We have left behind utensils and the LPG cylinder, and will return next year."

For those riding auto-rickshaws from Mumbai and Su-

rat and two wheelers, the searing heat along highways in the arid Gwalior-Chambal region became unbearable on Friday afternoon. Workers slumped in almost any patch of shade around trees, under flyovers, and next to bushes lining medians.

A group of 50 villagers from Mamoni Khurd in Shivpuri district, clutching red flags, took a break under the shade of shuttered shops along the highway on their 100-km pilgrimage to the temple of a local deity.

"I have been told by the Ratangarh Mata to bring all villagers to her abode so that the lockdown won't affect us," said Mallu Adivasi, who claimed she experiences the spirit, as trucks loaded with migrant workers whizzed past.

Centre tells States to upload details of migrants online

The govt. has created a portal for speedy communication

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Centre has asked the States to upload the details of migrants on an online dashboard that would help in speedy communication among them and aid in contact tracing. A unique ID will be generated for the migrants and their mobile numbers could be used for "contact tracing and movement monitoring during COVID-19."

Other details such as Aadhaar card number, train or bus details will be collected and fed into the system. The dashboard – National Migrant Information System (NMIS) – has been developed by the National Disaster Management Authority



Central nodal Ministries can also monitor the movement through the portal.

(NDMA). Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla wrote to all the States on Saturday asking them to utilise the system as the "portal will maintain a central repository" and help the States and districts sending as well as re-

ceiving the migrants to seek and receive approval in an online format seamlessly. "This system will help in speedy communication between States without creating additional work at the level of the field officers," Mr. Bhalla said.

The letter said the Central nodal Ministries can also monitor the movement through this portal.

An explainer provided by the MHA said: "Further to provide facility of contact tracing, both individual particulars and spatial identifiers [origin, destination address] need to be captured ... many of the workers may undertake reverse journeys in the near future. A ready database can be of help..."

M.P. overwhelmed by migrant rush

CM Chouhan asks his counterparts in other States to coordinate with him

NITSLA HEBBAR
NEW DELHI

Apart from a late start in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic due to political developments, Madhya Pradesh is also besieged by lakhs of inter-State migrant labour, en route on foot from States such as Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, towards Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Responding to this, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has asked his counterparts of the States from where the labourers are starting and their home States, to coordinate with him in order to ensure that "nobody needs to go on foot."

"Madhya Pradesh is en route to anyone wishing to go from Maharashtra or



SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN
Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister

southeastern States to further north, and we have had a build-up of lakhs of people crossing over towards U.P. and Bihar. My government has deployed over 1,000 buses everyday to ferry them to the borders of the States ... We are also providing food, water, temporary shelter and even footwear for our brothers and sisters making this difficult journey," he said in a video presser from Bhopal on Saturday.

'Better arrangements'

"I have called up the Chief Ministers of both the States where these groups of people are walking from to the destination State as well. If the States can inform us in advance as to how many people to expect, we will be

better prepared to help, and the States where they are headed will also be able to make arrangements when they reach their borders," he said. "Our government has managed the return of over 3.84 lakh of its own people from various States, and we feel no one, from any State, should be forced to into this arduous on-foot journey. They are all our people."

"Everyone wants to go home in times of trouble, we cannot hold it against our brothers and sisters," he said.

According to an estimate,

almost 70% of all inter-State labour from Maharashtra was headed towards M.P., with most of them to walk further to U.P., Bihar and other States.

Mr. Chouhan acknowledged that the State's finances were a worry but his government was trying to do some off-budget borrowing for specific projects. He added that like other States, he had also asked that suitable amendments be made to the Fiscal Responsibility and Budgetary Management Act, wherein the limit for borrowing for the States be raised

from 3.5% to 5.5%. "We will be able to raise ₹15,000-16,000 crore through this and it will give us some breathing space fiscally."

Relief for farmers

The Chief Minister said he expected farmers to profit from the amendments made to the Mandi Act, where the farmers and private organisations have been allowed to directly deal with each other. He also expected the changes made to labour laws would help kick-start the economy and said he would announce a cash package for those engaged in professions such as washermen and barbers, who cannot hope to return to work very soon.

"Till now, Madhya Pradesh has seen an enrolment of upto 19 lakh people under the Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Act," he said.

Informal settlements marked 'vulnerable' zones

Govt. issues guidelines to tackle challenges

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN
NEW DELHI

Informal settlements within cities have been identified by the Union Health Ministry as among the vulnerable urban settlements for the spread of the COVID-19.

Stating that a substantial percentage of the population here are migrant workers employed in industrial and other informal sectors, the Ministry said these areas are characterised by poor structural quality of housing, inadequate access to safe water, poor sanitation and insecure residential status. There are gaps in health and healthcare services.

"In the context of COVID-19 or any other respiratory in-



Close quarters: The Ministry notes that such localities are often overcrowded, making social distancing difficult. ■ AP

tectious disease for that matter] implementing strategic interventions such as surveillance, physical distancing, isolation, quarantine and communicating the risk to the dwellers could be challenging," notes the Ministry.

In a note – Preparedness and response to COVID-19 in Urban Settlements – issued on Saturday evening, the Ministry notes that these locali-

ties are often overcrowded, with many people crammed into very small living spaces, thus posing a major challenge for following social distancing.

Local bodies

It said in these areas local bodies should cover the management of COVID-19 and focus on challenges unique to such populations.

"An incident-response

system should be put in place depending upon the geographic extent of the settlements and its population size," says the Ministry.

It said enough quantity of hydroxychloroquine will be stocked in civil dispensaries, health posts, health & family welfare centres for chemoprophylaxis of healthcare workers and high-risk contacts of confirmed cases of the COVID-19.

It has directed for a contingency plan to be put in place to move the high-risk population to alternate or temporary sites.

The latest advisory also advocates for passive surveillance stating that in addition to the government health facilities serving these populations, surveillance network linkages need to be established with private medical practitioners working in such localities.

More than virus, migrants back in Bihar fear rejection

Returning workers allege 'inhuman treatment' by officials

AMARNATH TEWARY
PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar meets officials every day and directs them to help migrant workers returning to the State. But some workers

allege "inhuman treatment" by officials in their own State and others praise the Uttar Pradesh government for lending them a hand in their arduous journey back home.

Driven by desperation, thousands of migrants have been returning to their home districts, crossing inter-State highways, fleeing not only the virus but also poverty, hunger and death. "You fear the disease but we fear poverty and hunger more than

corona," said a young emaciated migrant in a video released on social media. "More than corona, the pain is of rejection by our own government," others chip in.

Praise for U.P.

In the video, they say that after they entered Bihar, the government did not give them anything, not even a bottle of water. "The policemen and even villagers shooed us away as if they would contract the virus by speaking to us..." said one.

But they took out biscuit packets, snacks and water bottles from a bag and placed them on the road to say, "Look, these have been

provided by the Uttar Pradesh government... The Yogi Adityanath government has done a lot for us..., but we got only pain and rejection by our own government."

Asked whether they received ₹1,000 after the Bihar government said it had deposited the sum in 19 lakh bank accounts, they said, "Kuch nahi mila hai [Nothing has been received yet]." Whereas, they said, they had to pay ₹3,000-₹5,000 to truck owners. Stories of pain have come from quarantine centres, too. On Friday, migrants in Madhubani, Araria, Vaishali and Jamui complained about lack of amenities and worm-infested food.

In another accident in Barwani, Aniket Thakur, 22, was killed when another vehicle rammed the truck he was travelling in.

SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

CM
YK

Seven more virus deaths in West Bengal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Seven persons died and 115 new cases of COVID-19 infections were recorded in West Bengal in the past 24 hours. The number of total cases in the State increased to 2,576 while active infections remained at 1,452. Of the seven deaths recorded in the past

Stop suppression of Huawei, says China

U.S. government's actions destroy global manufacturing, supply and value chains, says Beijing

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIJING

Beijing has urged the U.S. to stop the "unreasonable suppression of Huawei and Chinese enterprises" after Washington announced new export controls to restrict the tech giant's access to semiconductor technology.

The latest restrictions on the world's second-largest smartphone manufacturer, which is at the centre of U.S. spying allegations, are a new escalation in the U.S.-China battle for global technological dominance. "The Chinese government will firmly uphold Chinese firms' legitimate and legal rights and interests," the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement Saturday. "We urge the U.S. side to immediately stop its unreasonable suppression of Huawei and Chinese enterprises."

The Ministry said the Trump administration's actions "destroy global manufacturing, supply and value chains". The U.S. Commerce Department said on Friday the controls would "narrowly and strategically target Huawei's acquisition of semiconductors that are the direct product of certain U.S. software and technology."

Espionage efforts

U.S. officials have repeatedly accused the Chinese technology giant of stealing American trade secrets and aiding China's espionage efforts, ramping up tensions with the rival superpower while both sides were involved in a trade war. As a result, Huawei has increasingly relied on domestically manufactured technology, but the latest rules will also ban foreign firms that use U.S. technology from shipping semiconductors to Huawei without U.S. permission. The new



Shoppers return: People throng a pedestrian shopping street in Beijing on Saturday. ■ AP

U.S. House passes \$3 trillion relief Bill

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

Democrats have powered a massive \$3 trillion coronavirus relief Bill through the House, an election-year measure designed to brace a U.S. economy in free fall and a healthcare system struggling to contain a pandemic still plummeting the country.

Friday's 208-199 vote, with all but one Republican opposed, advances what boils down to a campaign-season display of Democratic economic and healthcare priorities. It has restrictions will cut off Huawei's access to one of its major suppliers, the Taiwanese chipmaker TSMC, which also manufactures chips for Apple and other tech firms.

The U.S. last year banned Huawei from using U.S.-manufactured semiconductors in their products. China has threatened retaliation

no chance of becoming law as written, but will likely spark difficult negotiations with the White House and Senate Republicans. Any product would probably be the last major COVID-19 response Bill before November's elections.

The enormous Democratic measure would cost more than the prior four coronavirus Bills combined. It would deliver almost \$1 trillion for State and local governments, another round of \$1,200 direct payments to individuals and help for the

unemployed, renters and homeowners, college debt holders and the struggling Postal Service.

"Not to act now is not only irresponsible in a humanitarian way, it is irresponsible because it's only going to cost more," warned Speaker Nancy Pelosi. "More in terms of lives, livelihood, cost to the budget, cost to our democracy." Republicans mocked the bill as a bloated Democratic wishlist that was dead on arrival in the Senate and faced a White House veto threat.

against the U.S., including through restrictions on U.S. firms and putting them on an "unreliable entity list", according to a *Global Times* report. U.S. giants Apple, Qualcomm and Boeing are among the firms that may be targeted, the report said.

U.S.-China relations are again on the rocks with

Russia on Saturday recorded its highest daily death toll yet from COVID-19 while new cases fell to the lowest level in two weeks. Russia is in second place in the world to the U.S. with 2,72,043 cases, with 9,200 new cases announced on Saturday, the lowest number since May 2. But the number of deaths announced on Saturday for the last 24 hours was the highest yet in Russia, at 119. The total number of officially confirmed deaths is now 2,537, lower than a number of other countries with fewer cases.

Washington and Beijing trading barbs over the origins of the pandemic. Over the past week, China has also threatened retaliatory measures against the U.S. for restricting the visa stay limits of Chinese journalists, and for several lawsuits filed by U.S. lawmakers against China for the pandemic.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

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ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

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Trump hopeful of having COVID-19 vaccine by year-end

He says U.S. will 'donate ventilators to our friends in India'

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN

U.S. President Donald Trump said he hopes there will be a COVID-19 vaccine by the end of the year while officially announcing a new effort to combat the pandemic, "Operation Warp Speed".

"Its [Operation Warp Speed's] objective is to finish developing and then to manufacture and distribute a proven coronavirus vaccine as fast as possible. Again, we'd love to see if we could do it prior to the end of the year," Mr. Trump said at a press conference in the Rose Garden on Friday, flanked by officials, including Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar and Defence Secretary Mark Esper.

Mr. Trump said former head of vaccines at pharma company GlaxoSmithKline, Moncef Slaoui, and General Gustave Perna, who heads the U.S. Army's Material Command, would lead the vaccine development and distribution effort.

Mr. Trump said that roughly 100 vaccine candidates from around the world were evaluated of which 14 were considered promising

and the list is being narrowed further.

Mr. Trump's claims around the coronavirus and the U.S.'s response to it have often been at odds with the facts on the ground. Experts, including current and former members of the administration, have cast doubt on how quickly a vaccine can be ready for large scale distribution. Rick Bright, a vaccine official-turned whistleblower who had been removed from his role, recently told the U.S. Congress that even a 12-18 month framework for vaccines was optimistic.

Clinical trial data

However, the President's timescale for vaccine production was echoed by Mr. Slaoui. "I have very recently seen early data from a clinical trial with a coronavirus vaccine. And this data made me feel even more confident that we will be able to deliver a few hundred million doses of vaccine by the end of 2020," Mr. Slaoui said.

Mr. Trump also said the U.S. was working with other countries on developing the vaccine. "We want to get to

the solution. We know exactly where the other countries are, and we'll be very happy if they are able to do it. We'll help them with delivery. We'll help them with – in every way we can. We have no ego when it comes to this. No ego whatsoever."

In response to a request for a message to Indian Americans, Mr. Trump said India and the U.S. were working together and that many Indian Americans were working on the vaccine. "And we're working very much with India too. And we have a tremendous Indian population in the U.S. And many of the people that you're talking about are working on the vaccine too. Great scientists and researchers," he said.

Mr. Trump also told reporters he was sending ventilators to India, a subject he also tweeted about. "I am proud to announce that the United States will donate ventilators to our friends in India. We stand with India and @narendramodi during this pandemic. We're also cooperating on vaccine development. Together we will beat the invisible enemy!"

Key State Department watchdog fired

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump has fired the State Department's Inspector General, an Obama administration appointee whose office was critical of alleged political bias in the agency's management. The ouster is the latest in a series of moves against independent executive branch watchdogs.

A senior department official said Mr. Trump removed Steve Linick from his job on Friday but gave no reason.

In a letter to Congress, Mr. Trump said Linick, who had held the job since 2013, no longer had his full confidence and that his removal would take effect in 30 days. Mr. Trump did not mention Mr. Linick by name.

Democrats in Congress

immediately cried foul, with the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee suggesting that Mr. Linick was fired in part in retaliation for opening an investigation into Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Mr. Linick will be replaced by Stephen Akard, a former career foreign service officer who has close ties to Vice President Mike Pence, said the official.

U.S. to file anti-trust charges against Google

Separate suits at federal, State levels

CECILIA KANG
DAVID MCCABE
WASHINGTON

The Justice Department is planning to file anti-trust charges against Google as early as this summer, said two people with knowledge of the situation, in what would be one of the biggest anti-trust actions by the U.S. since the late 1990s.

The Justice Department is still investigating the Internet company and has been making progress on its case, said the people, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The regulators are focused on Google's dominance in the online advertising industry, and the case will also involve allegations that the company abused its dominant position in online search to harm competitors,

the people said. State Attorneys General are likely to file their own anti-trust lawsuits against Google or join the Justice Department case sometime this year, said a person with knowledge of the state investigation.

The moves would also set a bench mark for how regulators and lawmakers proceed with investigations into other large tech companies such as Facebook and Amazon, which the Federal Trade Commission, State Attorneys General and Congress are scrutinising for their market power and corporate behaviour. ■ NY TIMES

American officials scrambled on Friday to keep Afghanistan's tenuous peace process from falling apart, blaming the Islamic State (IS) for horrific attacks that have recently killed dozens of people and further inflamed tensions between the Taliban and the government.

Zalmay Khalilzad, the chief U.S. negotiator for Afghan reconciliation talks, acknowledged "challenges and difficulties" in moving ahead with plans to create a power-sharing government that were outlined more than two months ago.

But he urged the Taliban and Afghan officials to resist returning to violence that could threaten efforts to strike a peace deal and to withdraw U.S. troops after more than 18 years of war. He blamed the IS's Afghan

Stay the course on peace deal: Khalilzad

U.S. envoy blames IS for attacks; urges Afghan govt. not to return to violence



No end to hostilities: People fleeing a healthcare facility after an attack in Kabul, Afghanistan, on May 12. ■ NY TIMES

wing for stoking horrific attacks, including this week on a maternity hospital in Kabul, as the terrorist group seeks to inflame tensions.

Blame on Taliban

Afghan officials have blamed the Taliban for both the hospital attack that killed at least 15 on Tuesday and a bombing, the same day and about

100 miles away, against a funeral procession of a police commander that killed at least 25.

President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan has vowed to resume military offensives against the Taliban, while the Taliban has accused the Kabul government of falsely using the recent attacks as an excuse to abandon the peace

agreement.

Mr. Khalilzad maintained that the IS had targeted both the hospital and the funeral procession and said that he was eager to see any evidence that the Afghan government could provide that would indicate otherwise.

He acknowledged that the Taliban had not fully ended its attacks. But Mr. Khalilzad said the group had not explicitly violated an earlier agreement to ease hostilities that was a condition of opening direct peace talks with the government.

The U.S. military is still on track to draw down its forces in Afghanistan to roughly 8,600 troops, Jonathan Hoffman, a Pentagon spokesman, said on Friday. That benchmark was outlined in the deal with the Taliban.

The current U.S. troop number in the country is just under 12,000. ■ NY TIMES

Rwanda genocide financier held

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS

French police on Saturday arrested one of the last key suspects in the 1994 Rwandan genocide, describing him as its "financier".

Felicien Kabuga was living under a false identity in the Paris suburbs, the prosecutor's office and police said in a joint statement. The operation, carried out at dawn, resulted in the arrest of a fugitive "who has been sought by the judicial authorities for 25 years", the statement said.

Mr. Kabuga is accused of creating the notorious Interahamwe militia that carried out massacres in the 1994 genocide. He also helped create the equally notorious Radio-Television Libre des Mille Collines that incited people to carry out murder.

INTERVIEW | PATRICIA SCOTLAND

'Commonwealth collaboration has never been more important'

India has acted swiftly to tackle the pandemic and the survival rate in the country is one of the best in the world, says Commonwealth Secretary General

NARAYAN LAKSHMAN

As the world continues to grapple with the debilitating human toll and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, multilateral organisations are doing what they can to coordinate policy responses worldwide. The Commonwealth Secretariat, whose administrative hub in London covers 54 countries encompassing over 30% of the world's population, has been at the forefront of this global institutional response. Its Secretary General, Baroness Patricia Scotland, spoke about the specific goals of its multi-country initiatives. Edited excerpts:

Government Meeting,

"Lives have been lost, economies are shrinking, and livelihoods have been shattered. It is difficult to predict what the new normal will look like." How can Commonwealth nations reach that new normal?

One of the things we must do is understand how we can collaborate even more trenchantly, because the tragedy that we are facing is that COVID-19 has touched every single part of our lives. There is going to be no turning back to how we were before. Our reality now is that this pandemic may be the first pandemic that we face and not the last.

It is putting enormous strain on each of our countries, because it is not just a health pandemic. We are going to be facing a climate crisis,

and those two [crises] intersect in such a way that we will potentially have to face an economic tsunami.

These three coming together means that Commonwealth collaboration has never been more important. If humanity is to survive, we must come up with a different construct. I believe this is going to be our new normal.

How will Commonwealth nations face up to the health aspect of this challenge? In India, for example, we may be facing a shortage of critical medical equipment, including PPEs, ventilators, and testing kits.

Four years ago, when I became Secretary General, the Commonwealth Health Ministers were already focusing on the reality that in order to

critical things that we had to have was a universal healthcare system. But the variance between the universal health systems was wide. Some were extremely expensive and were seen to be beyond the reach of a number of our small and developing states.

So, we asked a different question: How do we develop a Commonwealth-identifiable method which could be potentially applicable to all? How do we design the essence of what will deliver a cost-effective and cost-efficient mechanism that will enable us to have universal coverage, which would enable us to respond to epidemic and pandemic health issues?

The wonder of the Commonwealth is that each country was willing to say that it would give its brothers

and sisters within the Commonwealth everything it knew about how to work together. India has produced so many exciting new developments.

We are using the Indian ability for *jugaad* – to take things and make them better – as something that the whole Commonwealth can join into. This is an area of real challenge.

How can Commonwealth nations, including India, balance the trade-off between nationwide lockdown as a means to enforce social distancing, and their devastating economic impact especially on migrant workers?

In order to have long-term wealth, we have to have health. What is the price of a human life? I believe that In-

dia has been an exemplar because what Prime Minister Narendra Modi did was to act swiftly.

If you look at the 1.3 billion population of India, the cost to India in terms of loss of life, which might have been a similar percentage to what has happened in many European countries, would have been unbearable and, thankfully, unimaginable. The COVID-19 lockdown is estimated to cost India \$4.5 billion each day, but that price, which has been paid by India, has meant that the survival rate in India has been one of the best right the way across the world.

Yes, the COVID-19 pandemic is radically changing what we know to be our position, but it is producing innovative solutions for our young people – 60% of our Commonwealth is under 30 years of age – leading to new jobs, industries and futures.

how is that approach impacted by the pandemic?

The Commonwealth has always been at the forefront of the climate change agenda, not because of the rhetoric, but because our Member States were suffering the consequences of climate change.

Whether the U.S. will choose to wake up to our reality is not a matter that we can have undermine our understanding of the reality. We must do that which we can do in order to protect our Member States and the world.

Given the U.S. withdrawal from the multilateral approach to fighting climate change, what options does the Commonwealth think are feasible presently, and

Street vendor loans an uncharted turf for big banks

Commercial banks have no experience extending such loans; small finance banks, MFIs with speedy disbursal could help

MANOJ SAHA

MUMBAI

The recent announcement by the government to offer loans to street vendors has caught commercial banks of the country off guard. The reason is simple: hardly any such loans were extended by these banks in the past.

They have virtually no experience in extending loans of that size and to this sector, who are mostly in the urban clusters.

The scheme, which was announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday, proposes bank credit facility for initial working capital up to ₹10,000 for each vendor. There was no business for these street vendors for the last 50 days with the nationwide lockdown in place. This scheme will cover urban as well as rural vendors doing business in the adjoining urban areas.

Extending a loan of ₹10,000 does not excite a



Tough call: There's no time to build savings habit, as a vendor needs loan immediately, says an official. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

mainstream banker. It is expected that 50 lakh street vendors (data collected from state governments) will be benefited under this scheme and a credit of ₹5,000 crore would flow to these sectors, the finance ministry said adding that use of digital payments and timely repayments will be incentivised through monetary rewards.

Only a fraction of these 50 lakh may have a credit history. Some bankers suggested the self help group model

which are followed to extend loans in the rural areas. Under this model, a group comprising women borrowers mostly, is formed with 10-12 individuals of a neighbourhood in a rural area, where individuals of the group take responsibility for timely repayment by other members. These groups are required to show savings habit, for at least six months, before lending can start.

"The problem is that it may not be feasible to form such a group in urban areas as people there are apprehensive to be a guarantor of another borrower in the group," said another bank official. "Also, there is no time to build savings habit as the vendor requires the loan immediately," the official added.

The question is how to do the credit appraisal for an entity without a credit history. Some bankers suggested the self help group model

player to make the scheme a success. SFBs and micro-finance institutions have customers who belong to these community, and have expertise in extending small ticket loans.

For the scheme to become acceptable for lenders, certain key aspects should be kept in mind while formulating the scheme, bankers said.

"First is about the interest rate. Yes, there is a need for an interest cap for such loans, but that should be linked to the cost of funds. Ideally, it should be linked to the MCLR [marginal cost of funds based lending rate] rather than the government prescribing a particular rate," said the chief executive of a small finance bank.

In such a scenario, the micro-lenders and small finance banks that focus on lending to the urban poor could emerge as the key

tion short and simple.

"It should be a one-page document. The purpose of this loan is speed and the convenience at which it is delivered. If you make the borrower run around for a week, he will lose interest. Customer delight is key for the scheme to be a success" the chief executive said.

The other issue is with the credit guarantee part. Loans under this scheme are likely to be under the Mudra scheme. Mudra loans are guaranteed by Credit Guarantee Trust for Micro And Small Enterprises (CGTMS).

According to bankers, it is not easy to get claims for CGTMS in case there is a default. "So many questions are asked for settling claims. They want to see the loan appraisal report. Everyone is wiser in hindsight...it is easy to say the appraisal was not proper once a loan turns non-performing," said a banker.

Ordnance Factories Board is a 'cautious bet'

'Lot depends on funding, govt. control'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The government's decision to corporatise the Ordnance Factories Board (OFB) and look at listing it on the bourses will offer investors an opportunity to own shares in a niche company, but a lot would depend on how the government would act it in terms of funding, order flow and bureaucratic control, say market players.

On Saturday, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that the long-pending corporatisation of OFB had been approved and while the entity would not be privatised, the government would look at listing the entity to enhance the transparency in its operations.

"Defence is a lucrative niche segment, but has huge working capital requirements and government control," said Paras Bothra, president - Equity Research, Ashika Stock Broking.

"Ordnance factory would enjoy limited competition due to licensing related entry barriers, but at the same time it would be dependent on a single customer, which is the government. It will have to deal with bureaucracy and order flow could be erratic due to slow decision making. So, there would be certain impediments as well," added Mr. Bothra.

"The government has many ordnance factories and in all probability, there would be some sort of reorganisation to classify them into different categories and then list them on the bourses with clear indication that these companies would not be privatised. Another advantage for the company could be that once it is listed, it could get exposure to overseas markets as well which may not be the case today," he added. A section of market participants, however, feel that investors would take a cautious approach.

"According to bankers, it is not easy to get claims for CGTMS in case there is a default. 'So many questions are asked for settling claims. They want to see the loan appraisal report. Everyone is wiser in hindsight...it is easy to say the appraisal was not proper once a loan turns non-performing,' said a banker."

The OFB manages the network of ordnance factories across the country that are engaged in indigenous production of defence hardware and equipment for the Indian armed forces.

"This offers savvy investors an opportunity to buy into profitable, well-managed niche companies serving only the armed forces," said Arun Kejriwal of Kejriwal Research and Investment Services.

RIL rights issue to open on May 20

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The rights issue of ₹53,000 crore by Reliance Industries Ltd. will open on May 20 and close on June 3, 2020.

"RIL's Issue Committee of the Board of Directors, in its meeting held on May 15, 2020 has approved the rights issue schedule," the company said in a filing to the exchanges. The compa-

ny will file the 'letter of offer', with the stock exchanges - BSE Limited, National Stock Exchange of India Limited and market regulator SEBI. "Abridged Letter of Offer, Application Form of Rights Issue, and Rights Entitlement Letter, will be sent to the eligible equity shareholders of the Company," the company said in a statement.

Coal, mineral reforms to help reduce imports

Coal sector will get a boost as private parties can now bid for 50 blocks: CARE Ratings

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The Centre on Saturday opened up export of non-medical, non-surgical masks, which was prohibited so far.

According to a notification from the Directorate General of Foreign Trade, dated May 16, all types of masks, made of cotton, silk, wool, or knitted fabric, is permitted for exports, except medical and surgical masks.

"Our assessment is that if it is implemented at the earliest, these much needed reforms will double these sectors' contribution to the GDP," Ajay Kapur, CEO - Aluminium & Power Business, Vedanta Ltd., said.

Saurabh Bhatnagar, partner and national leader, Metals & Mining, EY India said, "The introduction of compe-



Introducing private sector participation in the coal sector is expected to build transparency of mine valuations. ■ REUTERS

tition, transparency and private sector participation in the coal sector will automatically build transparency of mine valuations, force rigorous mine planning and

compliance, and invite investments for enhancing operational efficiency to justify the bids made at the time of mine acquisition. These were much-needed reforms

in the mining sector as India is a mineral rich country and any sectoral reforms to attract investments which adds to India's GDP through this sector and save precious foreign exchange are welcome." According to CARE Ratings, the coal sector gets a boost as the private sector can now bid at the auctions for 50 blocks, enhancing supplies, reducing imports, which is good for the economy. The government also plans to auction Coal Bed Methane (CBM) blocks.

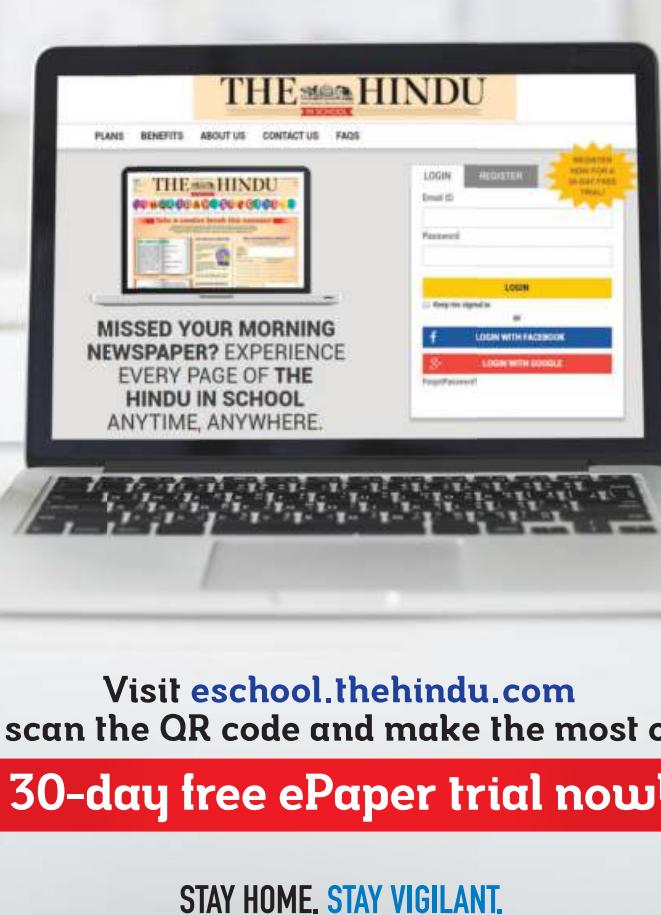
Tirtha Biswas, programme lead at Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) said, "The Government of India's big plan

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Centre gives nod for export of masks

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

COIMBATORE

The Centre on Saturday opened up export of non-medical, non-surgical masks, which was prohibited so far.

According to a notification from the Directorate General of Foreign Trade, dated May 16, all types of masks, made of cotton, silk, wool, or knitted fabric, is permitted for exports, except medical and surgical masks.

Textile exporters in Tirupur and Coimbatore, who recently ventured into production of masks and personal protection equipment on a large-scale, have welcomed the announcement.

Chairman of Apparel Export Promotion Council A. Sakthivel said India has the potential to export masks worth \$1 billion in the next one month. The exports were prohibited for almost two months now. Textile hubs such as Tirupur will benefit from this and the manufacturers will be able to meet the international standards.

Raja M. Shanmugam, president of Tirupur Exporters' Association, said countries such as Vietnam had already exported large quantities of cloth masks. "There is a surge in demand internationally for cloth masks and brands also want to sell it as an accessory. This is big opportunity for Indian exporters," he said. Convenor of Indian Textile Exporters Federation Prabhu Dhamodharan urged manufacturers in Tamil Nadu to tap the opportunity.

Privatising discoms of UTs will improve finances

New tariff policy expected to remove cross-subsidies: CII

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The Centre's decision to privatise power distribution companies in union territories is seen as a move that will improve government finances and bring much more efficiency to the sector.

Anish De, partner and national head, Energy and Natural Resources, KPMG in India, said, "Our power, the past two decades of tepid results, despite corporatisation and regulation, have clearly indicated that the state owned enterprises have been unable to deliver efficiency, customer service and governance standards required from a modern power sector. Private ownership should bring in greater efficiency and better governance and help address some of the deep seated pro-

blems of the sector. UTs are a good place to start, though it should be propagated further into state owned discoms."

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) said that the new tariff policy for the power sector can be expected to remove cross-subsidies that are adding to manufacturing costs and make Indian goods more competitive in the global market.

"It is heartening that the government has taken another step on the path of distribution reforms by indicating early implementation of the National Tariff Policy," Sumant Sinha, CMD, ReNew Power, said.

The government plans to introduce a tariff policy with

Aviation sector measures on expected lines'

MRO hub plan will help save forex and enable local overhauling of planes

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The three key announcements of Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman concerning the civil aviation sector have been viewed as those on expected lines, while the announcement on MRO (maintenance, repair and operations) needed more clarity on the tax incentives, industry experts said. They said the measures were a positive for the sector.

"The announcements are on expected lines. MROs, more airports through PPP mode, and flexible use of air-space have been on government agenda. We may expect better implementation and execution," said Kapil Kaul, CEO & Director, CAPA Advisory.

"There is no relief likely [for the airline industry] and medium to long term down-sizing of the industry is inevitable unless promoters are able to recapitalise signifi-

cantly. The industry was not promised anything by the government and they will now have to look within for outcomes," Mr. Kaul said.

Commenting on the announcements, GVK Reddy, founder and chairman, GVK Group said, "The move to invite PPP in six more airports will provide AAI the resources to develop smaller airports across the country and popularise the government's Udaan scheme."

"The biggest upside will be its ability to create new jobs and a strong global value chain with the civil-defence business interface, which remains constrained and under-leveraged," he said.

Sujoy Bhattacharya, partner and head, Corporate, Chandhok and Mahajan law firm said,

"Airport privatisation in India has a chequered history. Recently, India privatised six airports, all of which were awarded to the Adani Group via competitive bidding. The key concern in airport privatisation here is - in which cities? For an airport to be successfully privatised, it needs to have the kind of volumes necessary to ensure that the entity that wins the bid actually makes money."

"The only cities that could potentially fit the bill are Chennai and Kolkata. However, these cities were on the privatisation block back in 2014, and neither of them could move forward because of local resistance," he said.

Vishesh C. Chandhok, CEO, Grant Thornton India, said, "We need to see more details on the tax simplification, which will help in making India an MRO hub. I would have also liked to hear more relief measures for the civil aviation sector to keep it alive post-COVID-19."

exchange and enable Indian airlines to get their aircraft serviced locally," he said.

Vasudevan S, partner, Infrastructure Government and Healthcare, KPMG in India said, "Rationalising the MRO tax structure has been a long-pending demand of the industry and it is good to see that happening finally, but more needs to be done to create a level-playing field, attract foreign investment and make it profitable. If only the FM can extend the benefit to cover input tax reduction and waivers at least for exported services, as with other industries, it will become a game changer."

"The plants to make India a global MRO hub will ensure savings of precious foreign

WHO backs COVID-19 vaccine trials that deliberately infect participants

The guidelines say it would be 'substantially faster' as far fewer participants need to be exposed to candidate vaccines

R. PRASAD

In new guidelines issued on May 6, the World Health Organization has said that well-designed human challenge studies could not only accelerate COVID-19 vaccine development but also make it more likely that the vaccines ultimately deployed will be far more effective.

In human challenge studies, healthy participants are first administered the candidate vaccine and then deliberately exposed to novel coronavirus. In conventional clinical trials, healthy participants are administered the candidate vaccine, and the safety and efficacy of the vaccine is assessed through natural infection.

Compare and select

The guidelines say that it would be "substantially faster" to carry out vaccine field trials through human challenge studies as far fewer participants need to be exposed to candidate vaccines to "provide (preliminary) estimates of efficacy and safety". It says this approach will make it possible to compare the efficacy of multiple vaccine candidates and select the most promising vaccines for larger studies.

In addition to accelerating vaccine development, human challenge studies can help validate tests for immunity to the virus, identify correlates of immune pro-



Long history: Such studies have helped accelerate the development of vaccines against typhoid and cholera ■ GETTY IMAGES

tection, and investigate the risks of transmission by infected individuals, it says.

COVID-19 can kill millions (over 3,00,000 people have already died) and strain the healthcare system worldwide. While physical distancing can help to reduce virus spread, it can disproportionately affect the underprivileged groups.

Successes and risks

While human challenge studies are ethically controversial, such studies have been performed safely in tens of thousands of people in the last 50 years and helped accelerate the development of vaccines

against typhoid and cholera. Such a study for Zika virus was also conducted.

According to the guidelines, challenge studies would be least risky for young healthy adults aged 18-30 years, as the hospitalisation rates in this age group is about 1% and fatal infection rates around 0.03%. But a March 27 study in the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* found that 20.8% of patients aged 20-44 had severe disease which required hospitalisation, and 4.2% of patients developed critical disease, which required admission to an ICU.

Human challenge studies are to

be carried out only in specialised centres where close monitoring and ready access to early supportive treatment for participants, including critical care if required is available, the WHO says.

But what makes such studies for COVID-19 particularly risky and challenging is the fact that pathogenesis of the disease is poorly understood and there is no approved treatment available in case participants develop the disease.

Potential benefits and risks should be assessed, quantified and compared with other feasible study designs, and the expected benefits should be maximised and the risks minimised, the guidelines say. "Given the ethically sensitive nature of SARS-CoV-2 challenge studies, assessment of their potential benefits and risks should be especially rigorous," it says.

Meanwhile, the U.S. National Institutes of Health is also preparing the ground for human challenge trials for COVID-19 vaccines. The vaccines working group is preparing the scientific and practical considerations for COVID-19 human challenge trials, the *Financial Times* reports.

Michael Felberbaum, a spokesman for FDA told *WIRED* that challenge trials are one of the methods it is considering to speed up COVID-19 vaccine development.

Prof Andrew Pollard, who is

leading the trial of the vaccine developed by the team at the University of Oxford's Jenner Institute told *The Guardian* that there is "huge interest" in the possibility of challenge trials among those working on coronavirus vaccines. "At the moment, because we don't have a rescue therapy, we have to approach challenge studies extremely cautiously," Pollard said.

Ethical framework

"Recognizing the uncertainties, risks from SARS-CoV-2 human challenge studies appear comparable to the risks from some other research and activities similar to research," says Seema K. Shah, a medical ethicist from North Western University, in a paper in *Science* authored by her that lays out an ethical framework for conducting such studies. "Given the extraordinary nature of the pandemic, our framework and analysis support laying the groundwork for coronavirus challenge studies." Dr. Shah is also part of the WHO working group that developed the guidelines.

Meanwhile, *NBC News* reports that the multinational testing company SGS and London-based hVIVO are planning human challenge studies. Nearly 20,500 people from 102 countries have already volunteered to participate in such studies.

Traditional belief and today's science

AYUSH can fight COVID-19, while Ganga Jal can only carry it



SPEAKING OF SCIENCE

D. BALASUBRAMANIAN

A fortnight ago, the union minister in charge of the National Mission for Clean Ganga approached the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) to conduct research on the use of Ganga river water (Ganga Jal) as a cure to the COVID-19 virus infection. The ICMR pointed out that the data available on this work are not strong enough to start any clinical trials, and possibly decline – touché.

River Ganga is regarded by millions of people as the holiest and most sacred among all the rivers of the world. Starting from the Gangotri glacier at Gaumukh in the Himalayas (3.9 km or 13,000 feet above sea level), it gathers water from several streams on the way to become River Ganga at Devaprayag near Haridwar in the Uttarakhand state. It flows all the way to the Bay of Bengal 2,525 km, with river basins across all the northern Indian flatlands such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. People (mostly Hindu, but some others too) all across its course worship it, bathe in it, take its water home for pooja and related purposes (I saw it being sold abroad as well, for example, in Indian shops in California). Such is the belief and reverence for Ganga Mata.

The Sacred and the profane

Unfortunately, in the Haridwar region itself, pollution of its water has been going on for centuries – largely through human waste disposal and some commercial pollution as well. R. Bhutania and colleagues have published a paper titled: "Assessment of Ganga River Ecosystem at Haridwar, Uttarakhand, India, with reference to Water Quality Index" in the journal *Applied Water Science*, 6, 107-118 (2016), link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s13201-014-0206-6.pdf, which is not at all a happy reading. And the most recent contamination study of river Ganga water has appeared in the December 23, 2019 issue of the *New York Times* (nytimes.com/2019/12/23/health/ganges-drug-resistant-bacteria.html). This study summarises the ongoing analysis (by a group of researchers at the IIT Delhi) of the pollution, and the presence of dangerous bacteria in the water, which are resistant to the currently used antibiotic drugs. In other words, right where it starts to flow into the country, *Ganga Jal* is harmful for human and animal health. As it flows downstream, industrial wastes from factories are further dumped, making its water quality and safety even worse. Indeed, a recent report from the holy city of Varanasi says that the current lockdown period has helped the river's water quality improve by 40-50% (*India Today*, April 6, 2020).

How have we allowed this profanity? Surely, a large number of humans who use Ganga water are believers; even many heads of the various industry groups still hold Ganga as sacred, and even offer pooja using its water from time to time, and yet go ahead and pollute it. [It is important to note here that the word 'profane' is not necessarily a denial of belief, but refers to mundane individual concerns, and not 'good versus evil', or 'God versus Satan']. It is a 'what is in there for me' attitude, which is ethically (perhaps even morally) wrong. Given this dichotomy, *Ganga Mata* does not appear to have a safe and clean future.

Learn from dolphins, gharials

Getting back to science, given this abundance of poisonous germs (and harmful chemical wastes), one wonders how the 140 fish species, 90 amphibians, reptiles, birds, and the famous Ganges river dolphins and the gharials (fish eating crocodiles) cope with the conditions in the water, particularly, since it is also polluted now by COVID-19. Do they have special immunity, and do they generate antibodies to fight against such pathogens? This is an issue that needs to be studied with care and adapted for human defence against coronaviruses.

Some interesting insights have come about from some recent immunity studies displayed by unusual animals such as llamas, camels and sharks. Mitch Leslie writes in the May 1, 2020 issue of *Science*: "Biologists invent a new way to fight viruses with llama blood and molecular superglue". Miniature antibodies are seen to be pumped out by the immune cells of llamas, camels and sharks, which are about half the size of standard antibodies. The main message here is that these animals generate mini-antibodies, which can be easily synthesised in biology labs and used as weapons to win over viral infection. A detailed paper on how this can be done has just been published in the journal *Cell* (see: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cell.2020.04.031>). More relevant to the dolphins is a paper by C. Celentello and coworkers, "Insights into dolphins' immunology: Immuno-phenotypic study on Mediterranean and Atlantic stranded cetaceans"; <https://doi.org/10.3389/2019.00888>. The Mediterranean Sea is highly polluted while the waters in Canary Islands are purer.

I believe we can take a lesson from these studies, research on the Ganges river dolphins and the gharials, identify their mini-antibodies, synthesise them in the lab, and adapt them for human use against COVID-19 and other such coronaviruses. The DBT laboratory, National Institute of Animal Biotechnology (NIAB) at Hyderabad might be a possible centre to initiate this.

Where the twain do meet

In stark contrast to the above minister, is a request from the minister in charge of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy) to conduct a randomised controlled clinical trial to assess the efficacy of Ashwagandha, Yashtimadhu, Giloy and a polyherbal formulation (called Ayush 64), as prophylactic interventions against COVID-19. This should be conducted since there is sufficient evidence that molecules in traditional herbs and plants have therapeutic properties, and their active molecules discovered, synthesised and used by drug companies. And the polymath M S Valiathan has spent the last two decades, collaborating with Ayurvedic practitioners, biochemists, cell biologists, geneticists and nanotechnologists to evaluate the effects of traditional formulations using today's scientific methods. (Read, for example, his medal lecture: "Ayurvedic Biology: The First Decade" published in *Proceedings of the Indian National Science Academy* 82, No. 1, March 2016, pp. 13-19, where he cites many experiments on Ayurveda using today's science, and their confirmatory results; available free on the web). One such example is: "In vivo effects of traditional Ayurvedic formulations in *Drosophila melanogaster* model relate with therapeutic applications", by V. Dwivedi et al., *PLoS One*, 2012; 7(5):23711-[doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0037113](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0037113). Here is how tradition and today's science meet and merge.

AYUSH can fight COVID-19, *Ganga Jal* can only carry it.

Make masks at home with cotton and silk

ASWATHI PACHA

Across the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced governments into mandating the use of face masks. The general public has been advised to use cloth masks and not hoard N95 and surgical masks which are reserved for the healthcare workers. But how do we make a good mask? Which material should we use? A new paper in *ACS Nano* shows that a combination of cotton and silk or chiffon is the answer.

Supratik Guha and team from the University of Chicago carried out various studies on commonly available fabrics such as cotton, silk, chiffon, flannel and their combinations. They used an aerosol generation and mixing chamber to produce particles ranging from 10 nanometre to 10 micrometre in diameter. Using a fan, the aerosols were blown through the cloths at two different air flows corresponding to a person's respiration at rest and moderate exertion.

Cotton and chiffon
The number and size of particles in air were measured before and after passing through the fabric. One layer of cotton along with two layers of chiffon showed the highest filtration efficiency of 97%.

The researchers point out that the tightly woven cotton can act as a mechanical barrier to the aero-

sols and the chiffon serves as an electrostatic barrier. "As kids, we used to do this experiment where we would rub a comb on our dry hairs to lift small pieces of paper. Electrostatic filtration effectively works on the same principle. Some fabrics such as natural silk and chiffon can hold static charges. When small particles come in close proximity to these fabrics, they are attracted and trapped inside them, thus acting as filters," explains Abhinav Prakash, a post-doctoral researcher and one of the authors of the paper in an email to *The Hindu*.

However, even a small 1% gap in the mask drastically reduced its efficiency. "The importance of a good fit needs to be emphasised. Even for a mask as good as an N95 mask, the filtration efficiency can drop significantly if they are not properly worn," he adds.

The idea behind using cloth masks using common fabrics is that they can be made readily available to the general public in the current COVID-19 situation where there is a shortage of N95 and surgical masks," writes Dr. Prakash.

"Their reusability and best ways of treating them still need to be studied. Also, we haven't performed any tests on how long they can be used. We are currently working on studying the effect of different wash cycles on the filtration efficiencies."

SHUBHASHREE DESIKAN

A team from Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru (IISc) has developed a three-layered antimicrobial composite material of low-cost for making masks. And another team, including members from IISc, is involved in testing masks and developing a way of recycling them.

The mask material consists of three layers. The outermost layer is made of polyester fabric with polymeric nanofibre deposited on it to make it water-repellent. The middle layer is also a polyester fabric on both sides of which polymeric nanofibres containing antiviral and antibacterial agents are deposited. This layer inactivates both bacteria and virus when it comes into contact with it. The innermost layer is a comfort layer consisting of cotton fabric.

Testing anti-virus action
"The middle layer also has positively charged polymer (polycations) which inactivate the microbes that come in contact with this layer," explains Suryasari Bose, from Department of Materials Engineering, who is a leader of the project along with Kaushik Chatterjee also from the same department.

The material was tested by Umesh Varshney's team in the Department of Microbiology and Cell

bacterial filtration efficiency, blood penetration, breathing resistance (difficulty in breathing), and how good a fit to the face the mask is.

Physical parameters
According to Akshay Naik of Centre for Nanoscience and Engineering, IISc, right now, their team tests masks for two factors: efficiency of particle filtration and breathing resistance. For instance, N95 masks are supposed to filter out 95% of particles of size 0.3 micrometre and above.

"The entire system is built with components that we could source from our labs and some components that we could 3D-print," says Prof. Naik. "The idea was to help hospitals or other agencies check the quality of new masks received or to test decontaminated masks for possible reuse."

Prof. Naik is quick to reiterate, "We obviously make it clear that this is not a substitute for legal certification. We also prohibit people from using the data that we provide or test that we do for any commercial use."

The team is also working on ways to decontaminate the masks and the number of times it can be recycled. However, they are clear that masks, especially the N95, are meant to be used just once, and reusing them after decontamination is really the last option.

Reinfections possible

Reinfection is mighty possible with at least three of the four coronaviruses which cause common cold. "The reasons for this reinfection are not fully known, but evidence suggests that possibilities include both short-lived protective immunity and re-exposure to genetically distinct forms of the same viral strain," they write.

"Detection of IgG and neutralising antibodies is not synonymous with durable immunity," they write. A small study posted in a preprint server *bioRxiv* found

that four rhesus macaques that were infected with coronavirus and recovered did not get reinfected when exposed to the virus 28 days after the first infection. Whether humans too will exhibit such protection is not known, though no cases have so far been reported of people getting reinfected.

The detection of over 220 cases of "reinfection" in South Korea was found to be a case of virus remnants being detected and not reinfection or reactivation.

According to them, only well-designed longitudinal studies involving those who have recovered from COVID-19 for recurrent illness can help provide the much-needed information about reinfection and the duration of protection by the antibodies.

R. PRASAD

The World Health Organization has condemned the "dangerous" concept of herd immunity for managing the coronavirus pandemic.

Dr. Michael Ryan, executive director of the WHO's health emergencies programme said it was wrong to think that countries can "magically" make their populations immune to novel coronavirus.

During a press briefing on May 12, Dr. Ryan said the concept of herd immunity is generally used for calculating how many people will need to be vaccinated in a population in order to protect those who are not vaccinated.

"We need to be careful while using terms in this way around natural infections in humans because it can lead to a very brutal arithmetic which does not put people, life and suffering at the centre of that equation," he said.

It was mistakenly assumed that as this disease

spreads across the world, only the severe cases become apparent while most people would indeed be infected as reflected in sero epidemiology results. Greater proportion of people getting infected would mean that the pandemic will be over soon and people can go back to normal business.

"But the preliminary results from in vitro epidemiology studies are showing the opposite. The proportion of people with significant clinical illnesses is a higher proportion of all those who have been infected. This is because the number of people infected in the total population is probably much lower than we expected. That means we have a long way to go. This is a serious disease, this is public enemy number one. We have been saying this over and over again," he said.

"No one is safe until everyone is safe," Dr. Ryan added.

The WHO director also warned about the dangerous assumption that as this disease

that have had "lax measures and haven't done anything [that they] will all of a sudden magically reach some herd immunity" by losing a few old people along the way. "This is a really dangerous calculation. We need to get our priorities right as we head to the next phase of this fight," he said.

Other challenges
Achieving herd immunity through natural infections has other challenges. While antibodies (IgG and IgM) against novel coronavirus generally develop in one-three weeks after infection, some people do not seem to develop a humoral immune response, as reflected by detectable antibodies. It is unclear why this happens. Writing in a Perspective in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA), Dr. Robert D. Kirkcaldy, from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S., and others say the relationship between antibody response and clinical improvement is still not

clear. Though a small study involving just nine patients found a direct correlation between clinical severity and levels of antibody response, "antibody detection and higher titers have not always been found to correlate with clinical improvement in COVID-19", they say. Also, mild infections can resolve even before detectable antibodies are produced.

Durability of response
Also, how long neutralising antibodies against the virus would last is currently not known, though one study found that they persist for up to 40 days from symptom onset. In the case of the 2002 SARS, levels of IgG remained high for nearly four-five months before declining during the next two-three years. For MERS, the antibodies persisted for up to 34 months.

"Detection of IgG and neutralising antibodies is not synonymous with durable immunity," they



Reforms and agriculture

What are the measures announced by the government to deal with the farm crisis across the country?

PRISCILLA JEBARAJA

The story so far: With *mandi* closures and supply chain disruptions causing havoc in agricultural marketing, the COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on some of the critical infrastructure gaps and long-pending governance issues that plague the farm sector. The third tranche of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan listed measures to deal with those gaps, though there has been no announcement on an immediate economic stimulus for the sector.

What are the reforms announced in the farm sector?

The third tranche announced on Friday focused on long-term issues in the agricultural sector, by promising financing to strengthen infrastructure, build better logistics and ramp up storage capacities, as well as proposing three major governance and administrative reforms that have been in the pipeline for many years.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's rationale for the third tranche was that improving farmers' income needed such long-term investments and changes, rather than a focus on short-term crop loans.

However, a number of farmers and activists said that in the light of the COVID-19 crisis, immediate support and relief in the form of cash transfers, loan waivers, and compensation for unsold produce should have come before long-term reforms.

How will they change the agriculture sector?

Taking the opportunity of a crisis situation, the Finance Minister has pushed through reforms that the Centre has been trying to implement for years.

For instance, the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 came into being at a time of food scarcity and famine; last year's Economic Survey called it an "anachronistic legislation". It allows the government to control price rise and inflation by imposing stock limits and movement restrictions on commodities, giving States the power to regulate dealer licensing, confiscate stock and even jail traders who fail to comply with restrictions. Earlier this year, it was used to control soaring onion prices.

Traders have long complained of harassment under the Act on the suspicion of hoarding, black marketing and speculation, while food processors and exporters have also pointed out that they may need to stock commodities for longer periods of time. The Act has disincentivised construction of storage capacity and hindered farm exports.

Discussions about amending or repealing the Act have been going on for almost two decades. On Friday, the Finance Minister announced that the Act would be amended to deregulate six categories of agricultural foodstuffs: cereals, pulses, edible oils, oilseeds, potato and onion. Stock limits on these commodities will not be imposed except in times of a national calamity or a famine, and will not be imposed at all on food processors or value chain participants, which/who will be allowed to store as much as allowed by their installed capacity.

Exporters will also be exempted.

It is hoped that the amendment will bring more private investment into warehouses and post-harvest agricultural infrastructure, including processors, mills and cold chain storage. It could help farmers sell their produce at more competitive rates if there is no fear of government intervention to artificially suppress market prices, and is likely to give a boost to farm exports.

What about the other planned reforms?

The Centre plans to bring in a new federal law to break the nearly half-century long monopoly of the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) *mandis*. It has already tried the route of trying to coax State governments into adopting its Model APMC Amendment Act which aims at developing unified State-level markets by offering a State-wide licence and single point levy of market fees while also allowing private markets, direct marketing, ad hoc wholesale buying and e-trading.

However, only a few large States ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party, including Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, have amended their Acts. Now, the Centre proposes to bypass States altogether by bringing in a federal law to abolish inter-State trade barriers.

The hope is that these reforms will bring in more options for the farmer, offering more competitive prices if there is a wider choice of buyers. The plan to bring in a legal framework for contract farming also aims to provide more certainty and choice for farmers, although some experts caution that recent drafts of contract farming law promote the interests of the large corporate player at the expense of safeguarding the small farmer.

How are infrastructure investments expected to help?

Reforming governance structures is of no use unless there is infrastructure on the ground to enable farmers to take advantage of the wider choices with which they are being provided. A ₹1-lakh crore agriculture infrastructure fund run by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development will help create affordable and financially viable post-harvest management infrastructure at the farm gate and aggregation points.

The Finance Minister emphasises that her announcements would also bring better infrastructure and logistics support to fish workers, dairy and other livestock farmers, beekeepers and vegetable and medicinal plant growers.

She also offered support to lakhs of small informal food processors, mostly women, who need technical upgradation and marketing support in order to compete in a changing marketplace.

How will the COVID-19 relief for MSMEs help?

Will micro, small and medium enterprises be able to kickstart their businesses? How do the proposals make it easier for banks to lend?

RAGHUVIR SRINIVASAN

The story so far: In his address to the nation on May 12, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a ₹20-lakh crore economic relief package titled Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan. The relief package is being unveiled in tranches (from May 13) by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The first tranche, aimed at micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) and at some individuals was announced by her on Wednesday.

What are the proposals aimed at offering relief to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs)? The government has proposed to offer collateral-free loans to MSMEs which will be fully guaranteed by the Centre. There will be a principal repayment moratorium for 12 months and the interest rate will be capped and there will be no guarantee fee.

All MSMEs with a turnover of up to ₹100 crore and with outstanding credit of up to ₹25 crore will be eligible to borrow up to 20% of their total outstanding credit as on February 29, 2020. These loans will have a four-year tenure and the scheme will be open until October 31. A total of ₹3-lakh crore has been allocated for this.

How will this benefit MSMEs?

This will act as initial seed money for these small enterprises hit by zero cash flow due to the national lockdown. This loan will help them buy raw materials, pay initial bills and daily wages to employees. In short, this will be like working capital for cranking up their businesses again.

Banks, though flush with funds, have been unwilling to lend to this category of borrowers as they fear that the money will not be repaid. These small businesses have also pledged all their assets already for other loans and do not have any more assets to pledge.

It is to break this logjam that the government has said that it will backstop banks up to ₹3-lakh crore and said that these loans do not need collaterals. Banks are now expected to be more comfortable in assisting this category of borrowers because the risk is zero (since the loans are guaranteed by the central government).

This is the single biggest proposal in the last three tranches of announcements under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan and small businesses are expected to benefit from this in a big way. About 45 lakh MSMEs are expected to gain from this proposal.

Are these the only proposals for MSMEs?

No. A partial credit guarantee scheme has been extended to enable promoters of these units to increase their equity. A total of ₹20,000 crore will be funnelled through the Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) whereby banks will lend money to promoters which can be infused as equity in their businesses. About two lakh stressed MSMEs with non-performing assets (NPAs) are projected to benefit from this. The CGTMSE will offer a partial credit guarantee to banks.

There is also a proposal to infuse equity into MSMEs through a Fund of funds system where the government will provide ₹10,000 crore as initial corpus of the Fund. This will be leveraged to raise ₹50,000 crore which will be used to support MSMEs in desperate need of equity through 'daughter funds' of the main Fund of funds. The aim is to expand size and capacity of the MSMEs with equity and help them get listed on the stock exchanges.

Was not a change in the definition of MSMEs also



KAMAL NARANG

About 45 lakh micro, small and medium enterprises are expected to gain from the government's measures. Banks are likely to feel more comfortable to help these borrowers as the loans will be fully guaranteed by the Centre

announced?
Yes, henceforth MSMEs will be defined not based on their investment alone but also on their turnover. The definition has been tweaked and the existing distinction between manufacturing and services units has been eliminated.

Henceforth, a unit with up to ₹1 crore investment and ₹5 crore turnover will qualify as a micro unit, investment up to ₹10 crore and turnover up to

₹50 crore will qualify as a small unit, and investment up to ₹20 crore and turnover up to ₹100 crore will qualify as a medium enterprise. It has been a long-standing demand from industry to hike the investment limits, as with inflation, units often cross the threshold that will bring them benefits. To prevent this, they either run their operations at a reduced level or incorporate multiple units so that turnover is distributed in a way that they remain within the threshold that will give them the benefits. The decision to add turnover criteria to investment is seen as a good decision as there are units that leverage a small capital to post large revenues.

What are the proposals for non-banking financial companies (NBFCs)?

NBFCs, housing finance companies and micro finance institutions are finding it difficult to raise debt capital due to a confidence crisis in the debt markets. The government has, therefore, announced a special liquidity scheme of ₹30,000 crore to pick up investment grade debt paper from both primary and secondary markets. Such paper will be fully guaranteed by the government. This is expected to break the low confidence cycle in the market for lending to the above category of borrowers.

In addition, to help low rated finance companies to raise debt, the existing partial credit guarantee scheme has been extended to cover primary market debt paper wherein the first 20% loss will be borne by the government.

A total of ₹45,000 crore has been set aside for this Partial Credit Guarantee Scheme 2.0 that will offer liquidity to paper rated AA and below and even unrated paper.

Do electricity distribution companies (discoms) also feature in the first tranche announced?
Yes, discoms are in a huge liquidity crisis and unable to pay their dues to electricity generation companies. Their cash flow and revenues have been hit due to low demand from industrial consumers for power during the lockdown. The various State discoms together owe about ₹94,000 crore to their suppliers, the generation and transmission companies.

The government, through Power Finance Corporation-Rural Electrification Corporation, will infuse liquidity of ₹90,000 crore to discoms which will be securitised against their receivables from consumers. The loans given for the purpose of discharging their dues to generation companies will be against a guarantee from the respective State related to the discom. This emergency liquidity infusion will avert a crisis where generation and transmission companies stop supplies to discoms that are in default.

What are the measures for the common man?

In March, when the first relief package called the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana was announced, the government offered to pay the 24% provident fund contribution (employer+employee) for those earning up to ₹15,000 a month as salary and working in units that employ less than 100 workers for three months. This has now been extended for another three months up to August. The statutory PF contribution for those employed in the private sector (and not in the category of establishments above) has been reduced to 10% (from 12% now) for the next three months in order to increase liquidity in their hands. This is expected to benefit 4.3 crore people and 6.5 lakh establishments and release a total of ₹6,750 crore liquidity.

In addition to the above, the rate of tax deducted at source (TDS) and tax collected at source (TCS) has been reduced by 25% for a whole range of receipts. Thus, in payments to contractors, professional fees, rent, interest, commission, brokerage, etc, the TDS will be 25% lower. The TCS paid while buying a car of over ₹10 lakh in value and TCS collected in property transactions will also be lower.

The lower TDS is not applicable on monthly salaries that employees receive.

In the cases where TDS/TCS has been reduced, the tax liability is not reduced. It will be payable while filing return or while paying advance tax. The idea is only to offer immediate cash relief to people. The lower TDS/TCS kicks in right away and will stay until March 31, 2021.

Will migrants benefit from the Centre's measures?

What role will State governments play? How will the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme help?

SRINIVASAN RAMANI

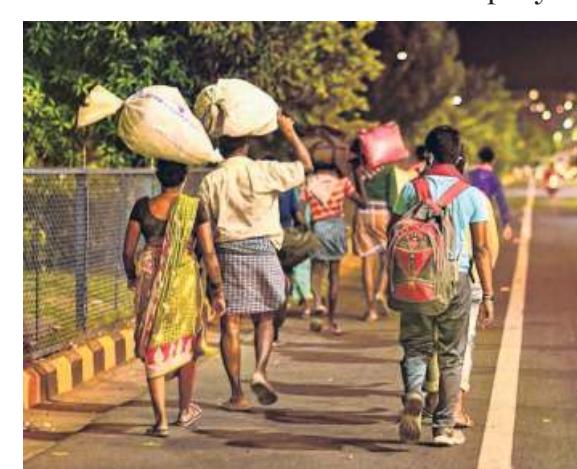
The story so far: In her second tranche of COVID-19 relief package announcements, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the steps taken by the government for migrants and farmers during the national lockdown, including free ration for stranded workers. Acknowledging the significance of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) during the pandemic, she said it had helped provide jobs to returning workers in rural areas and advised States to continue the process in the monsoon season as well. Migrant workers, the urban poor and small farmers are the targeted beneficiaries of these announcements.

Why and how have migrant workers suffered during the lockdown?

One of the most severely affected sections of the population due to the extended lockdown has been migrant workers, especially those in urban areas across the country. The recent Periodic Labour Force Survey conducted in 2017 by the National Sample Survey Office of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, had estimated that there were around 14,953,750 urban workers who had vulnerable jobs. These workers included helpers in a household enterprise and who did not receive a regular salary and casual labourers who received daily wages; besides this, the number considers only those in the bottom 50% of the wealth pyramid in 2017-18, based on their monthly per capita expenditure. This number extended to an estimated 2.5 crore people if those who had salaried jobs but did not receive any paid leave and other benefits were included. Migrant workers numbered more than 81 lakh people among this segment.

Once the national lockdown was announced, it was this segment of the population which was hurt the most as many of them lost their jobs (the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, or CMIE, estimates unemployment to have reached 24.2%, with urban unemployment being 26%) and had barely any income to tide over the lockdown. Many migrant workers sought to return home to their home towns, but the absence of transport prevented them from doing so. State governments were supposed to set up relief camps and shelters providing food and other amenities for these workers, but implementation was skewed (69% of the overall shelters and camps were situated only in Kerala, according to an affidavit submitted by the Union government to the Supreme Court in early April).

With increasing distress, many migrant workers took



recourse to their own means of transport to go home – many had no other option but to walk long distances – before the central government finally notified the start of services of "Shramik trains" to transport them. Migrant workers have continued to travel to escape distress conditions at their places of work and in the absence of any social security net.

What has been announced for migrant workers?

The Finance Minister acknowledged the significance of the MGNREGS in providing jobs to workers returning to rural areas. The government noted that work off-take increased in May. This followed instructions from the Centre to restart the scheme after work hours fell drastically in April. The Centre has now advised States/Union Territories to provide work through the scheme and to extend this to the monsoon season as well in providing jobs in plantations, horticulture, livestock-related work. The CMIE's latest unemployment survey report also found that while various segments (small traders, salaried employees, entrepreneurs, etc) have suffered significant job losses, the number of farmers in the survey had increased, indicating that farm work has been a source of livelihood during the lockdown.

The government has promised a free supply of 5 kg of foodgrain per person and 1 kg *channa* per family per month for two months, for those migrants who are neither beneficiaries of the National Food Security Act (2013), nor possess State cards. The government expects eight crore migrants to benefit from this scheme and the Centre will spend ₹3,500 crore on this. States will be in charge of implementation and distribution.

Distribution System coverage close to the level legally mandated by the NFSR of 67% of the population. Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan has said that if the number exceeds eight crore, the Centre is ready to provide additional foodgrain for free supply but it would leave it to States to identify genuine beneficiaries. "States can directly supply free ration at shelter camps, or issue distress coupons or adopt any suitable method for free distribution of the food grains and *channa*," Food Secretary Sudhanshu Pandey clarified at a briefing on Saturday.

What about the One Nation One Ration Card scheme?

The Centre has also said that the One Nation One Ration Card scheme will be enhanced by assuring national portability of 83% by August 2020 and 100% by March 2021. The scheme should allow migrant workers to access food in States other than that of their permanent residence. But concerns remain about availability of ration in shops to allow for distribution to migrant workers as well. In places where the scheme has been implemented so far, the utilisation of the scheme has been very low (800 workers on an average in a month before the lockdown and an average of only 200 workers during the lockdown).

Besides these steps for immediate relief to the workers, the government has also announced that it will launch a scheme under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) to convert government funded housing in the cities into affordable rental housing complexes under PPP mode through a concessionaire.

A special credit facility with liquidity of up to ₹5,000 crore has been announced for street vendors through a special scheme that will facilitate easy credit and will be launched in a month.

Will small farmers benefit?

Among steps announced to ease credit for small farmers, the government said that the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) will extend an additional refinancing support of ₹30,000 crore for crop loan requirement of rural cooperative banks and regional rural banks.

The Finance Minister has pushed through reforms that the Centre has been trying to implement for years, such as amending the Essential Commodities Act and proposing a federal law to break the monopoly of Agricultural Produce Market Committees

Reforming governance structures is of no use unless there is infrastructure on the ground to enable farmers to take advantage of the wider choices with which they are being provided. A ₹1-lakh crore agriculture infrastructure fund run by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development will help create affordable and financially viable post-harvest management infrastructure at the farm gate and aggregation points.

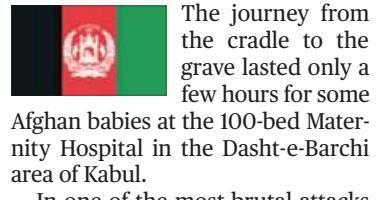
The Finance Minister emphasises that her announcements would also bring better infrastructure and logistics support to fish workers, dairy and other livestock farmers, beekeepers and vegetable and medicinal plant growers.

She also offered support to lakhs of small informal food processors, mostly women, who need technical upgradation and marketing support in order to compete in a changing marketplace.

Massacre in the maternity ward

The terrorist attack on a Kabul hospital that killed 24 is likely to delay the intra-Afghan peace talks

KABUL



The journey from the cradle to the grave lasted only a few hours for some Afghan babies at the 100-bed Maternity Hospital in the Dasht-e-Barchi area of Kabul.

In one of the most brutal attacks in the recent past, the hospital, which is operated by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in a predominantly Hazara-Shia neighbourhood, was attacked by the Islamic State terrorists on Tuesday, killing 24, including newborns, mothers and medical staff. The group has previously also targeted areas populated by minority groups. In March, a gurdwara in Kabul came under attack, in which 25 people were killed.

"While pregnant women and ba-

bies, in one of life's most vulnerable states, were seeking healthcare, an unknown number of attackers stormed the maternity ward through a series of explosions and gunfire, lasting for hours," the MSF said in a statement issued after the attack.

"The first few hours after the attack started, were very very difficult," said Dr Bina Najeeb, head of department and paediatric cardiac surgeon at the French Medical Institute for Children (FMIC), one of the few hospitals specialising in childcare in Kabul. "This is not the first time a hospital has been attacked in Kabul. This is one of the worst conflict scenarios, but what was truly worse was that this was a maternity hospital with mothers and their children."

"When a lady delivers a baby, it is hard for her to move for 20-24 hours. She is physically exhausted. And here, we saw mothers in labour try-

ing to escape gunmen shooting at them and their babies," he said, the emotional toll of the previous 48 hours heavy in his voice.

MSF also shared that while the attack was under way "one woman gave birth to her baby, and both are doing well". The images of the aftermath shared by the medical non-profit organisation showed bloodied floors next to the hospital cribs for newborns. "I have been working in Afghanistan for nearly two decades, and this is definitely the most brutal attack I have seen," Dr. Najeeb said.

Many of the children injured during the attack and brought to the hospital are being treated by Dr. Najeeb and his team. Some of them were unidentifiable because they only had small tickets on their hands with the names of their mothers. "We had to launch an immediate campaign to help search for their parents and families within communities," the doctor said. As of Saturday afternoon, six of the 19 babies still remain unidentified in Kabul hospitals.



The sheer brutality of the attack shocked Afghans who had been expecting a reduction in violence during the sacred month of Ramzan, and owing to a deal signed between the U.S. and the Taliban in a bid to end the 19-year-long conflict. While

the Taliban has denied responsibility for the attack, the Afghan government has blamed the growing nexus between the IS and the Haqqani Network, a close ally to the Taliban, for the increasing violence.

"Evidence shows that the Taliban are in a celebratory mood for massacring 'Shias' in a maternity hospital in Kabul," Vice-President Amrullah Saleh tweeted. "We have the IS chief evil for South Asia Abu Omar & chief evil for Khorasan Aslam Farooqi in our custody. Dots are connected. Neither the Taliban hands nor their stained consciousness can be washed of the blood of women, babies & other innocent [people] in the latest senseless carnage."

For many Afghans, the mounting casualties have added to the growing frustration against the Taliban. "Whoever did this, I would say animals are better than them. They continuously prove that they are not following God's way, or the prophet's way," said Balqes Ehsan, a civil activist from Kabul. "Our religion is not

safe because they attack our Masjids and kill our religious scholars, our education is not safe because they attacked my university and I came close to losing my sister," said the young activist, a graduate of American University of Afghanistan, which was attacked by the Taliban in 2016. "And now, our children and mothers are not safe because now they attack our hospitals."

The attack is likely to throw a wedge into the much-delayed intra-Afghan peace talks. The Afghan President has already suspended the Taliban prisoner release, a trust-building gesture to start the talks, and announced that an offensive would be launched against the group.

"You cannot sign peace deals with those killing babies and their mothers. The two things cut each other like fire and water," Mr. Ehsan said. "We had put a heavy stone on our hearts to try and forgive the Taliban for their past and start to talk about peace for the future. But they don't seem to want to cooperate."

Online hate and its offline costs

Facebook apologised for the rumours spread on its platform during the 2018 anti-Muslim riots

COLOMBO



At a time when the world is feeling sorry for itself, amid a pandemic that is laying bare all that is wrong and unjust about it, an apology from Facebook made headlines in Sri Lanka.

Over two years after an ugly episode of anti-Muslim violence in the island's Central and Eastern provinces, Facebook has said it "deplores" the misuse of its platform then. The mob violence, unleashed by hardline Sinhala-Buddhist groups, led to at least two deaths and enormous loss to property. Perpetrators carried out planned arson attacks, targeting dozens of mosques, shops and homes of Muslims, even as rumours and hate speech spread like wildfire on Facebook. Then President Maith-

ripala Sirisena declared an emergency and briefly banned Facebook that was seen as a co-conspirator.

"We recognise, and apologise for, the very real human rights impacts that resulted," the tech giant told Bloomberg News. The admission came after human rights consultancy Article One, hired by Facebook to conduct an investigation, in its recent report noted that the hate speech and rumours shared on Facebook "may have led to offline violence".

Facebook has since hired "dozens more" Sinhala and Tamil-speaking moderators, to review and remove content violating what it calls its "community standards". "We deployed proactive hate speech detection technology in Sinhala to help us more quickly and effectively identify potentially violating content," according to a statement from Miranda



Sissons, director of human rights at Facebook. Further, the company said it launched a third-party fact check programme, partnering AFP Sri Lanka and Fact Crescendo to counter misinformation.

What does Facebook's apology

mean to social media users in Sri Lanka? It was both overdue and welcome, says Sanjana Hattotuwa, doctoral scholar at the University of Otago, New Zealand, researching social media and politics.

In his view, the recently released report acknowledges Facebook's failure to heed warnings from Sri Lanka for nearly a decade, around how the platform and other products were being used and abused to spread racism, Islamophobia, hate and violence against specific communities.

Not a passive observer

No one blames Facebook for the prevalent racism or discrimination in society, but incidents like the violence in Digana town in 2018 show the platform might be more than a passive observer. And even now, "they are not apologising for the company's inability and unwillingness to respond to user-generated reports and research noting the increasing risk of the digital spilling over to the physical and kinetic vio-

lence," Mr. Hattotuwa said.

While the company claims it has invested more resources to monitor content in all languages, the platform's "enduring unevenness" of making redress or reporting tools available in English, accessible in Sinhala and Tamil is a concern, given that inflammatory content goes viral in no time. Despite its attempts to automate detection of content that could incite hate crimes, the company lacks contextual awareness and grounding, said Mr. Hattotuwa.

Moreover, guidance, help, redress and reporting tools are all there on the platform, but many users are unaware of them. "It's hard enough in English. It's close to impossible in Sinhala. There are ways the company can make these more visible, at specific times, or to specific users and groups, in specific languages, over each product. It is the company's choice to do so, and not a technical inability."

Tamil pages too present the risk of highly polarised debates, according

to Jaffna-based journalist Benislos Thushan. "While you see some constructive pages, like the Jaffna Photography Society's, I see a lot more of arm-chair criticism or rant, especially from users among Sri Lankan diaspora who have strong views on developments here. The debates get risky because they are highly polarising," he told *The Hindu*.

Young Sri Lankan Tamils and Tamil-speaking Muslims are quite active on Facebook, according to Mr. Thushan. "There is a lot of cross-pollination in terms of content, but little accountability."

Of Sri Lanka's 21-million population, Facebook has 6.85 million monthly active users and 4.4 million daily active users, according to Article One. Like any company geared towards profits and a greater market share, Facebook too would count its users in numbers. Not dealing with hate might have offline costs for users, but dealing with it might, for the company. Will the tech giant see beyond numbers?

Low-tech Japan struggles to move life online

From work from home to banking and schooling, Japanese find it tough to adapt to the new order

TOKYO



In the popular imagination, Japan is a high-tech conurbation of robots and gadgets. In reality, living here can feel like being stuck in the 1980s, when fax machines were haute-tech and neon passed for cutting-edge. While in neighbouring countries like China, even beggars have begun to use QR codes for receiving alms, in Japan many transactions remain strictly cash-only.

Opening a bank account requires a mountain of paperwork to rival Mt. Fuji and making online payments involves physical trips to the bank every time a new payee has to be added. In 2018, Yoshitaka Sakurad, the deputy head of the government's cybersecurity panel, made headlines

when he admitted to never having used a computer in his professional life.

In normal times, it is just possible to rose-wash the requirement to fax in information requests to government offices as endearingly quaint. But in the world of COVID-19, the deleterious impact of Japan's failure to embrace digital transformation is amplified.

When, following the declaration of a state of emergency, people were told to stay at home and work remotely, it became clear that most companies were ill-equipped to facilitate telework. In a March survey conducted by IT research group, ITR, 45% of corporations said they had no systems in place to allow staff to work from home. Only 28% said they were ready to make the switch. Some employees did not have laptops at home (even though a third of

Japanese households have fax machines). Others found it difficult to do without the constant supervision and approval of superiors, given the strict hierarchies of the workplace that are the norm.

Obstacle to physical distancing
But it was the *hanko*, or personalised carved seal, that emerged as the greatest obstacle to physical distancing. Most official documents in Japan still require the physical stamp of a company *hanko*, which is expected to remain in the office. Consequently, the most commonly cited reason for people not following work-from-home edicts was the need to go into stamp documentation.

The government's emergency declaration-target was to reduce office attendance by 70%. But on April 8, the day after the emergency was called, Yahoo data showed only a 26% drop in user's movements.

Another lacuna exposed by the pandemic is Japan's backwardness in the field of telemedicine. For years,

the government had failed to approve measures like remote medical exams for first-time patients, in part due to opposition from lobbies like the Japan Medical Association. COVID-19 has finally prodded the authorities to lift some of these restrictions, but an array of hurdles remain. A large number of Japanese clinics don't even accept credit card payments, the most basic building block of telemedicine. According to an article in the *Nikkei Asian Review*, 65% of patient health records are still kept in hard copy.

But for many families, the most frustrating aspect of the current emergency measures has been the school closures. While internationally, schools have switched to online learning, in Japan, public schools have remained stubbornly offline.

Arisa Koyama, a mother of two boys, 8 and 12, recalled how her younger son's elementary school, which is located in a posh Tokyo suburb, had supplied families with hard copies of Math and Japanese lan-

guage worksheets. That was the totality of the school's involvement in their student's education since it closed in late February. Parents were given an answer-key and expected to correct the work themselves. Teachers occasionally telephoned parents



to check in on how they were coping, but had no direct contact with the children themselves.

In almost three months, the school has remained unable to figure out how to set up an online learning system that would allow teachers to post videos or enable any two-way communication between students and teachers. "It's really not that hard, but I think the problem is that they (the school administrators) only follow the commands of the government's education board and cannot take any initiative themselves," said Ms. Koyama.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a bugle call, alerting countries around the world of the need for change. In Japan, the imperative to heed the warning is perhaps more urgent than for most. Following decades of economic stagnation, the archipelago has flailed finding its feet in the 21st century world order. The post COVID-19 period will be a make-or-break one for the renaissance that remains Japan's goal.

Trump first, Brazil next

Bolsonaro's foreign policy, focused on Trump's U.S., triggers outrage in Brazil's political circles

SAO PAULO



In a sudden move on Thursday, the World Trade Organization (WTO)

Director-General Roberto Azevedo announced that he would leave his post in August. Mr. Azevedo (in picture) who became the first WTO chief in its 25-year-old history to quit the post, said he was leaving for "family reasons" and to "facilitate the reforms" at the global organisation. The decision by the veteran Brazilian diplomat to leave the WTO when the world is plagued with a pandemic and an economic turmoil in its wake sent shockwaves across the globe – from Beijing to Brasilia.

Even as a guessing game was going on why Mr. Azevedo quit, a hint came from Washington. "I am fine

with the decision. You will be seeing many changes, many reforms in the WTO soon," said U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday, when asked to comment on Mr. Azevedo's move. Mr. Trump has been slamming the Geneva-based trade body since his election campaign in 2016, accusing it of an "anti-U.S. bias". With his trade war with China heating up in recent times, Mr. Trump was going after the WTO with all guns blazing. In January, he dragged the Brazilian diplomat to a press conference at the Davos meeting and declared that they had discussed a "very dramatic" change for the WTO's future. Mr. Azevedo looked a bit perplexed.

Though it is not known if the Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, a self-declared fan of Mr. Trump, played any role in the resignation of Mr. Azevedo whose diplomat-wife is a vocal cheerleader of the far-right leader, international observers see it as a triumph for Mr. Trump. "I was astonished to see his argument about quitting the post to facilitate reforms at the WTO. By choosing to step down in August, he only em-

powers the Trump administration," said Rubens Ricupero, a former Brazilian Minister of Finance. "I don't see any prospect of reform of the WTO as long as Mr. Trump is in power. He wants to have a free hand to apply unilateral sanctions and to use and abuse the anti-dumping procedures," added Mr. Ricupero, who also served as a Brazilian Ambassador to Washington.

While Mr. Trump may now have his way at the WTO, Brazil has lost a major voice in a multilateral organisation. In fact, Brazilian diplomacy has been retreating since 2019 when Mr. Bolsonaro became President and decided to ally closely with Mr. Trump. This has raised such an alarm in all major political parties that a former President, five former Foreign Ministers, a former Finance Minister and a former senior diplomat, wrote an open letter last week to express their "concern with the way in which the country's foreign policy has systematically violated the principles of Brazil's interna-

onal relations" as defined in its Constitution. "The foreign policy of the current administration does not reflect the views of the majority of Brazilian people. Our intention is to tell our friends in the developing world that we have not turned our backs on them," said Mr. Ricupero, one of the signatories of the letter.

Concessions to U.S.

In his 16 months as President, Mr. Bolsonaro has granted major concessions, including the use of Brazil's rocket launching facilities, to the U.S. without getting much in return. Mr. Bolsonaro's much-flaunted proximity to Mr. Trump has caused frictions with Venezuela and an unease with its major trading partners like China and Iran. "What worries me the most about our foreign policy is that it is not only a total submission to the U.S. agenda but to President Trump's agenda and to the extreme right-wing in the U.S. Brazil never did anything like that before. In pursuing such policies, we are going

against our own interests," said Celso Amorim, who was Brazil's Foreign Minister between 2003 and 2010. "Brazil is abandoning the leadership we always had in the international arena," said Mr. Amorim, who also signed the open letter.

The COVID-19 crisis is now exposing the flaws in Brazil's foreign policy. As the virus goes out of control and the country struggles to get equipment to contain it, Brazil's top Ministers have been busy attacking China, with which the country has an annual trade of \$100 billion.

"It is a complete disaster. In the short run, we are losing on the assistance from a country that has the most capacity to help in combating the pandemic with equipment we need. In the long run, when the world will reorder itself, China will have a crucial role. If there is any kind of Marshall Plan, it will be a Xi Jinping plan. We will be affected badly by this silly attitude," said Mr. Amorim, who served as Foreign Minister under two Presidents.



Shobhan Saxena
is a journalist
based in Sao Paulo

IN BRIEF



Djokovic says he can 'win the most Slams'

PARIS Novak Djokovic said he is confident he will end his career as the greatest Grand Slam title winner of all time and break the record for weeks at World No. 1. He has 17 Majors, three behind Roger Federer's record 20 and two behind Rafael Nadal. "I believe that I can win the most Slams and break the record for most weeks at No. 1. Those are definitely my clear goals," Djokovic told in a TV show.

Balbir Sr 'stabilising' but still on ventilator

CHANDIGARH Hockey legend Balbir Singh Sr didn't suffer any more 'cardiac events' and his condition "is stabilising" though he is still on ventilator support, his grandson Kabir said on Saturday. He said his grandfather had not still regained consciousness.

Dortmund back in style

Steamrollers Schalke in Ruhr Derby; Leipzig held at home



Breaking free: Dortmund's Erling Haaland celebrates after scoring the opener against Schalke in the first game following resumption of the Bundesliga on Saturday. ■ AFP

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BERLIN

Norwegian sensation Erling Braut Haaland stole the limelight on Saturday as the German Bundesliga became the first major European football league to return since the coronavirus lockdown, with teams playing in empty, echoing stadiums.

The 19-year-old striker claimed the first goal in Germany's top flight for over two months to set Borussia Dortmund on the way to a 4-0 win over its local rival

Schalke in the 'Ruhr Derby'.

Portuguese international Raphael Guerreiro then added two goals either side of a Thorgan Hazard strike as second-placed Dortmund moved to within a point of leader Bayern Munich, which is chasing an eighth straight title and plays Union Berlin away on Sunday.

Elsewhere, third-placed RB Leipzig was held to a 1-1 draw at home to Freiburg, leaving it four points off top spot. Defender Manuel Gulde

gave visitors Freiburg a shock lead and celebrated by elbow-bumping teammates, before Leipzig striker Yussuf Poulsen grabbed a late equaliser.

The results: Borussia Dortmund 4 (Haaland 29, Guerreiro 45, 63, Hazard 48) bt Schalke 04 0; RB Leipzig 1 (Poulsen 77) drew with Freiburg 1 (Gulde 34); Hoffenheim 0 lost to Hertha Berlin 3 (Akpoguma 58-og, Ibisic 60, Cunha 74); Fortuna Dusseldorf 0 drew with Paderborn 0; Augsburg 1 (Brooks 54-og) lost to VfL Wolfsburg 2 (Steffen 43, Ginczek 90+).

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