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Foodgrains stock comfortable to manage till next March: FCI chief
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Uproar after Trump suggests 'injecting disinfectant' as cure
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NEARBY



Delhi CM asks recovered patients to donate plasma

NEW DELHI
Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday termed "encouraging" the limited trial of plasma therapy on patients at a city hospital and appealed to recovered COVID-19 patients to step forward and donate their plasma to save the lives of infected patients.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

Three deaths, 138 new cases reported in Delhi

NEW DELHI
Three deaths and 138 new COVID-19 cases were reported in Delhi on Friday, taking the toll of dead to 53 and total number of cases to 2,514. Of the total cases, 857 people have recovered and there are 1,604 active cases.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

Can't bring students from Kota: Bihar govt.

PATNA
At a time when more than 12,000 students from Bihar are stranded in Rajasthan's Kota, the government in a reply to the Patna High Court said while it was "sensitive to the plight of stranded students, bringing them back would amount to violation of lockdown guidelines".

NEWS ▶ PAGE 9

India records largest single-day spike of 1,752 cases; toll hits 723

MHA terms situation in Chennai, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Surat 'serious'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Over nine lakh persons are under active COVID-19 surveillance in India, the Union Health Ministry said on Friday, as the total number of cases reached 23,452. The death toll stood at 723.

The country registered another biggest single-day spike with over 1,752 positive COVID cases since Thursday. India currently has 17,915 active cases, while 4,813 people have recovered, which puts the recovery rate at 20.57%, Joint Secretary in the Health Ministry Lav Agarwal said.

Separately, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), in a statement, said the situation in emerging and major hotspots, including Ahmedabad, Surat, Hyderabad and

COVID-19

Chennai, is serious. The statement added that violations of lockdown measures reported in some parts of the country pose a serious health hazard to the public and may lead to the spread of COVID-19.

Speaking at the daily press briefing, Joint Secretary in the MHA Punya Salila Srivastava noted that the Centre has sent five new Inter-Ministerial Central Teams (IMCTs)

Changing hotspots

The burden of COVID-19 cases has come down lately in Kerala, while it has spiralled in Gujarat. Whereas Maharashtra has consistently recorded the highest share of India's cases

Case burden: The table lists the % of cases from Jan. 30 to Mar. 24 (Period 1), from Mar. 25 to Apr. 10 (2) and from Apr. 11 to Apr. 24 (3)

State	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3
Maharashtra	19%	21%	31%
Gujarat	6%	5%	14%
Delhi	5%	13%	9%
Rajasthan	6%	7%	9%
M.P.	2%	6%	8%
U.P.	7%	6%	7%
T.N.	3%	13%	5%
Telangana	6%	6%	3%
Karnataka	7%	2%	2%
Kerala	19%	4%	1%

to Gujarat, Telangana and Tamil Nadu to assess the situation.

IMCTs are already in Mumbai and Pune in Maharashtra, Indore in Madhya Pradesh, Jaipur in Rajasthan and Kolkata and Jalpaiguri in West Bengal.

According to reports from the State Health Departments, the total number of cases in the country stood at 24,485, with 18,257 active

Ranil calls for regional cooperation

MEERA SRINIVASAN COLOMBO

The SAARC Secretariat should play an active role in the region's response to COVID-19, along with "someone in-charge", according to Sri Lanka's former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

"I don't know if it can be handled from Kathmandu alone. If you can, well and good. But you may need another city. It can be Bengaluru, Colombo, any city," he said on Friday.

"This is a good time for a regional cooperation programme. This is a global pandemic without a global leadership. Maybe the region can't provide leadership for all. But the first virtual meeting of SAARC leaders was good, looking at the background and the problems that are there."

INTERVIEW ON ▶ PAGE 14



Testing times: A health worker checking the temperature of a woman at a food distribution point in Noida on Friday. ■ PTI

ials to make preparations for keeping the migrants under 14 days of quarantine in their respective districts and to sanitise and vacate shelter homes well in time.

Additional Chief Secretary, Home Department, Awanish Awasthi, said the Chief Minister had instructed officials to send back migrants of other States who had completed 14 days of quarantine in Uttar Pradesh.

The move was praised by

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. "I have been pressing this issue and this is a significant step in that direction. To make this fully successful, a plan must be made for the return of other workers. If all of us cooperate with a positive attitude in national interest, then the fight against coronavirus will get a lot of strength," she tweeted in Hindi.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Bengaluru having tested positive, Ramanagaram has lost out on benefits allowed to rural industries in green zones of being able to resume operations. The relaxations were announced earlier in the day.

Former chief minister H. D. Kumaraswamy, whose As-

sembly constituency falls in Ramanagaram district, squarely blamed the State government for the district losing out its green zone hit area in Bengaluru."

Medical Education Minister K. Sudhakar, in charge of COVID-19 in the State, said the decision to lodge the accused from the affected areas in Bengaluru in a green zone could have been avoided.

With the undertrials from

Ramana

garam prison on Friday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

have to be quarantined. All 30 officials at the Ramanagaram District Prison will be quarantined based on the advice of the District Health Officer (DHO), said Director General of Police, Prisons, Karnataka, Alok Mohan.

The family members of the prison staff told Mr. Kumaraswamy that, "The prison officials were not given any protective gear like PPE suits. They were only given masks and forced to interact with the inmates brought from a COVID-19 hit area in Bengaluru."

In the video, reportedly

from Rohini's Puri Nagar area, two policemen can be seen addressing a few residents: "Sabe pehle baat... azan bilkul band hai... azan nahi hogi... L-G sahab ke order hain (First of all, there

Prayer and pandemic



A quiet Ramzan: A view of the Jama Masjid in Delhi on Friday. With the Ramzan moon sighted, Muslims begin the month of fasting from Saturday amid the nationwide lockdown. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPKAR

COVID-19 rocks Ramanagaram prison

District loses green zone tag after 5 from Padarayanapura test positive in jail

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT BENGALURU

The Karnataka government faced embarrassment as well as political heat on Friday as five of the 121 persons, who had been shifted to Ramanagaram district jail after they allegedly indulged in vandalism in Padarayanapura in Bengaluru last week, tested positive for COVID-19. While the patients have been shifted to a government hospital, others were shifted to the Haj Bhavan in Bengaluru.

There was palpable anger in Ramanagaram against the State government for lodging those undertrial in the district, which hitherto had earned the distinction of being a green zone with no case of COVID-19.

With the undertrials from



Virus impact: Inmates being shifted from Ramanagaram prison on Friday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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With the undertrials from

Azan controversy in Capital on Ramzan eve

Delhi Police clarifies it is permitted after constables' video draws flak on social media

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

Delhi Police on Friday got embroiled in controversy over a viral video in which two constables are seen telling a group of Muslims that reciting the azan, or the Islamic call to ritual prayer, has been prohibited by the Lieutenant-Governor. However, police later clarified that azan adhering to National Green Tribunal guidelines is permitted, and claimed that the constables in question got confused between namaz (prayer) and azan.

In the video, reportedly from Rohini's Puri Nagar area, two policemen can be heard addressing a few residents: "Sabe pehle baat... azan bilkul band hai... azan nahi hogi... L-G sahab ke order hain (First of all, there



Screen grab of the video. ■

will be no azan. This is the L-G's order".

A female resident then contends that there is no such order on azan and asks how those observing roza [fasting during Ramzan, beginning April 25] would break it in the absence of the evening azan. She also goes

on to inform the policemen that the L-G's order pertained to namaz and that no one is praying inside mosques during the lockdown. One of the constables then retorts that the residents should go ask the L-G if they need any clarifications. The arguments continue, with residents trying to make the duo understand that only azan will be recited inside the mosque for everyone to hear and offer prayers at home, but the policemen do not seem to budge.

Confusion with namaz' With the video drawing flak from many on social media, Delhi Police issued a statement saying that azan should be recited adhering to NGT guidelines. "While observing roza and prayers,

we expect everyone to follow the lockdown as per the guidelines. Azan may be carried out in accordance with NGT guidelines. It is requested that namaz may be performed while staying indoors," it said in a statement.

"The officials got confused between azan and namaz. There is no prohibitory order on the azan call. The officials have been briefed," said Deputy Commissioner of Police (Rohini) Pramod Kumar Mishra.

AAP MLA Amanatullah Khan, in a tweet, said he has spoken to the Commissioner of Police about the matter and the latter is looking into it.

'ENSURE MOSQUES CAN USE LOUDSPEAKERS FOR AZAN'
▶ PAGE 2

AN-NDNE

Timings

DELHI

SATURDAY, APR. 25
RISE 05:46 SET 18:53
RISE 07:12 SET 20:57
SUNDAY, APR. 26
RISE 05:45 SET 18:54
RISE 07:51 SET 21:54
MONDAY, APR. 27
RISE 05:44 SET 18:54
RISE 08:35 SET 22:50

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	38	20
Safdarjung	38	20
Palam	39	21

Delhi Palam Today	37°C
The weather will be warm and cloudy. Spell of dust storm and thundershower will occur.	

Delhi Palam Tomorrow	36°C
The weather will be warm and cloudy. Spell of dust storm and thundershower will affect.	

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THE HINDU
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Air quality of Delhi-NCR
Delhi 139 Gurugram 151
Ghaziabad 149 Faridabad 164
Noida 116 Greater Noida 126
Good 0-50 Satisfactory 51-100 Moderate 101-200
Poor 201-300 Very poor 301-400 Severe >401
AIR QUALITY INDEX AT 4 P.M. YESTERDAY (AVERAGE OF PAST 24 HOURS) SOURCE: CPCB

CAIT to launch e-commerce marketplace

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) on Friday said it would soon launch a national e-commerce marketplace to help local kirana stores take orders online in association with the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) and other bodies.

In the present situation, people who are especially in tier two and tier three cities, are particularly dependent on local stores for supply of goods but are facing many challenges, the CAIT said.

The platform is being developed to overcome this, it said, adding that this would be meant as a permanent e-commerce platform for digitising existing businesses.

UTTAR HARYANA BIJLI VITRAN NIGAM CORRIGENDUM-II NOTICE

SR. No.: 1, LETTER / MEMO. No. & DATE:- Ch-SPL-I/XEN/R-APDRP/F-114 dated 20.04.2020, NAME OF DEPT./BOARD/CORP/AUTH:- Chief Technology Officer, OLD REFERENCE/NIT/TENDER NO.: NIT No. 30/IPDS/RT-DAS/2020 Reg. Appointment of an agency for implementing the Real Time Data Acquisition System, NATURE OF CORRIGENDUM:- Date of closing of online e-tender 11.05.2020 upto 13:00 Hrs. Opening date of part-I of proposal on web portal 12.05.2020 at 16:00 Hrs., WEBSITE OF THE DEPT./ BOARD CORP/AUTH:- www.uhbvn.org.in, NODAL OFFICER/CONTACT DETAILS/EMAIL:- 9317554907, seprojets@uhbvn.org.in

EASTERN RAILWAY

Dated : 23.04.2020
Divisional Railway Manager (Commercial), Asansol Division, Eastern Railway invites e-tenders, competitive, single stage two packet system from food and catering service providers for the following works : Name of Work : Provision of catering services at Modular Catering Stall under General Minor Unit for a period of 05 years at following 'B' category stations : Sl. No. & Tender Notice No.; Station/Category; Location are as follows : (1) C8-GMU_B-CRJ-PF-1-02, dated 17.04.2020; Chittaranjan-B; On PF No. 1 near Water Booth Nos. 7 & 8 FOB at Howrah end. (2) C8-GMU_B-CRJ-PF-1-03, dated 17.04.2020; Chittaranjan-B; On PF No. 1 beside ASMF office. (3) C8-GMU_B-CRJ-PF-2-3-01, dated 17.04.2020; Chittaranjan-B; On PF No. 2/3 near Pole No. 237/12 at DDU end. (4) C8-GMU_B-PAN-PF-3-03, dated 17.04.2020; Panagarh-B; On PF No. 3/4 near FOB at Asansol end under PF shed between Seat No. 381-377 to 371-367. (5) C8-GMU_B-PAN-PF-1-2-01, dated 17.04.2020; Panagarh-B; On PF No. 1/2 Howrah end of Service Building (earlier stall place). (6) C8-GMU_B-PAN-PF-1-2-02, dated 17.04.2020; Panagarh-B; On PF No. 1/2 near OHE Mast No. 154/55. (7) C8-GMU_B-PAN-PF-3-4-01, dated 17.04.2020; Panagarh-B; On PF No. 3/4 near MCO and OHE Mast No. 154/60. (8) C8-GMU_B-PAN-PF-1-2-03, dated 17.04.2020; Panagarh-B; On PF No. 1/2 between Goods Office & Book Stall. (9) C8-GMU_B-BDME-PF-1-01, dated 17.04.2020; Baidyanath Dham-B; In front of Booking Counter at Waiting Hall opposite main entrance and portico Jasidih end. Reserve Price per annum : Rs. 82,730/- for each tender. Earnest Money : Rs. 8,700/- for each tender. The tender documents are available on IREPS portal www.ireps.gov.in Receipt of Bids : The bidder should submit his bid online on IREPS portal www.ireps.gov.in not later than 15.00 hrs. on date mentioned against each bid notice. Bids shall be opened on the same day on IREPS portal www.ireps.gov.in at 15.30 hrs. Manual offers are not allowed against this tender. Address for communication : Divisional Railway Manager (Commercial), Asansol Division, Eastern Railway, Office of Sr. Divisional Commercial Manager, Divisional Railway Manager's Office, Eastern Railway, Asansol-713301, Dist. Paschim Bardhaman (WB). E-mail : sdcmeras@gmail.com ASN-11/2020-21
Tender Notice is also available at websites : www.er.indianrailways.gov.in / www.ireps.gov.in

Published by N. Ravik at Kasturi Buildings, 859 & 860, Anna Salai, Chennai-600022 and Printed by S. Ramanujam at HT Media Ltd. Plot No. 8, Udyog Vihar, Greater Noida Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar, U.P. 201306, on behalf of THG PUBLISHING PVT LTD., Chennai-600002. Editor: Suresh Nambath (Responsible for selection of news under the PRB Act).

Regd. DL(ND)-11/6110/2006-07-08 • RNI No. UPENG/2012/4940 • ISSN 0971-751X • Vol. 10 • No. 99

IIT researchers develop tool to predict spread of COVID-19

It will provide three-week projections to help authorities plan efficiently

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology in Delhi have developed a web-based dashboard for predicting the spread of COVID-19 in India.

The institute on Friday said that the mobile-friendly dashboard, PRACRITI (PRediction and Assessment of CoRona Infections and Transmission in India) gives detailed State-wise and district-wise predictions of COVID-19 cases in India for a three-week period, which is updated on a weekly basis.

The institute said that re-



IIT-Delhi said the mobile-friendly dashboard gives State-wise and district-wise predictions of COVID-19.

* FILE PHOTO: SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

cently plan for different future scenarios and resource allocation.

Researchers said that a key parameter of interest on COVID-19 is the basic reproduction number (RO), pronounced 'R naught' and its countrywide variability.

"RO refers to the number of people to whom the disease spreads from a single infected person. For instance, if an active COVID-19 patient infects two uninfected per-

sons, the RO value is two. Reduction of RO is key in controlling and mitigating COVID-19 in India," the researchers added.

PRACRITI provides the RO values of each district and State based on data available from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, National Disaster Management Authority, and the World Health Organization. N.M. Anoop Krishnan, Civil Engineering Depart-

ment, IIT Delhi, said: "Getting the district-wise RO value is crucial as this will enable authorities to know the exact rate of spread in India locally." His colleague Hariprasad Kodamana, Chemical Engineering Department, said that the three-week prediction provided by the dashboard can be of immense help to policymakers for planning strategic interventions for controlling COVID-19 spread.

The model also accounts for the effect of different lockdown scenarios such as the effect of locking down district boundaries, and implementing different levels of lockdown within a district. The distinguishing feature of the model, the institute said, is the inclusion of the effect of movement of population across district/State borders in the spread of COVID-19.

Policeman shifted to private hospital

He had complained of poor state of quarantine facility

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

After an Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) of Delhi Police complained of the poor state of a quarantine centre in east Delhi, where he was being kept after testing positive for COVID-19, he was shifted to a private hospital on Friday morning.

A senior officer said the ASI, who was posted in Crime Branch office at Kotwali, tested positive for the virus on Thursday. He was then taken to staff quarters in Mandoli prison premises, which was made a quarantine centre. He has a spine problem and was unable to sleep on the floor and also

needed a western toilet but did not get one, said the officer, adding that the ASI alleged that there were no arrangements of mosquito repellent in the flat.

"Fumed over the facilities in the flat, the ASI recorded a video and forwarded it to other policemen. The case was then brought to the notice of senior officers after which a cot and a mosquito net were arranged. On Friday, he was shifted to Apollo Hospital," the officer said. It is suspected that the ASI got infected from a family in his neighbourhood in Shahdara.

"After scanning all of his [ASI] contacts, three policemen – who shared the same office room with him – have been sent into home quarantine," said the officer.

Meanwhile, the police have sanctioned ₹1 lakh to its personnel who have been tested positive during their duties.

There are 21 policemen who have tested positive for COVID-19.

Among them, 14 personnel are from Central district, one from traffic and six from north-west district. The police headquarters will arrange the payment from Delhi Police Welfare Society for the personnel expeditiously through the DCPs (Delhi) concerned, a letter stated.

NCLT seeks Gymkhana response on Centre's plea

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) on Friday sought response from Delhi Gymkhana Club Limited on a petition by the Centre to dissolve the General Committee of the 106-year-old club alleging mismanagement.

The tribunal has asked the club to respond to the contentions raised in the petition and posted the case for further hearing on May 13. In the

petition, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs sought permission of the tribunal to appoint 15 persons as directors of the General Committee of the Club to manage its affairs.

As an interim relief, the ministry also sought immediate suspension of the General Committee of the club and appointment of a central government nominated Administrator. Advocate Vikas Singh, who represented the club, said due to the CO-

VID-19 lockdown, the club was closed and appropriate response to the petition could be given only if the club was allowed to be open. The Ministry alleged that "the management of the company are not able to generate any income for this company (Club) on account of sports which is a major objective of the company and for which lease of land was allotted by the Ministry of Urban Affairs in the year 1928".

Zoo officials said the tigress was cremated inside its premises on Thursday.

therefore advised to remain on high alert; watch animals 24x7 using CCTVs for any abnormal behaviour/symptoms; keepers/handlers not to be allowed in the vicinity without safety gear, preferably PPE ; isolate and quarantine sick animals; and have least contact while providing food," the letter said.

The official said that all precautions were taken by the zoo staff to avoid any contact with the animal.

Earlier this month, the Central Zoo Authority in a letter to zoo officials said that COVID-19 has been confirmed in a tiger in a zoo in New York and directed all of them to be careful.

"We noticed on Tuesday that the tigress had become less active and had not eaten the food we gave on Monday. We alerted the doctors and treatment was started, but the animal died around 6 p.m. on Wednesday," a zoo official said.

Zoos in the country are

Jamia panel hits out at arrests

Students, activist framed in an 'imaginary conspiracy': JCC

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Jamia Coordination Committee (JCC) on Friday hit out over the arrest of two of its members as well as activist Umar Khalid in connection with the north-east Delhi riots, stating that they had been framed in an "imaginary conspiracy" behind the incident.

The two students, Meera Haider and Safoora Zargar, were active members of the JCC, a collective of students and alumni of Jamia Millia Islamia. They were active in protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the National Register of Citi-

'Ensure mosques are able to use loudspeakers for azan'

Delhi Minorities Commission writes to Baijal and Kejriwal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Minorities Commission (DMC) on Friday asked Lieutenant-Governor Anil Baijal and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to ensure that the police does not stop mosques from using loudspeakers for azan.

In a letter, the DMC said it had received reports from some districts that the police had been making announcements that carrying out of azan has been prohibited. Ramzan is starting from April 25.

The DMC assured officials that mosques will meticulously follow COVID-19 restrictions regarding social distancing and the number of people gathered at one spot.

"The issue of azan is very pressing due to the beginning of the month of Ramzan when Muslims fast and break their fast on hearing the azan at sunset. The Commission received information from some areas where policemen are telling mosques to stop azan and in some cases they have even removed the loudspeakers," the DMC said in its letter.

People wait outside Jama Masjid on the eve of Ramzan on Friday.
* SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

What the NGT said

Following a plea moved by NGO Akhand Bharat Morcha, which alleged that illegal use of loudspeakers at mosques in an east Delhi locality, was adversely affecting public health, the National Green Tribunal had last year directed Delhi Police to implement a surveillance mechanism and take action against those who violated noise pollution norms. In September 2017, the NGT had directed the Delhi government and the Delhi Pollution Control Board to ensure that religious places in the area strictly adhere to the guidelines on noise pollution.

The DMC also asked the L-G and CM to ensure that Muslims living in quarantine camps who will be keeping fast during Ram-

zan are given food according to the timings of their fast.

Probe deaths'

In the letter, the DMC also alleged that members of the Tablighi Jamaat in quarantine camps were not being treated well and that breakfast was being served at 11 a.m., and dinner at 10-11 p.m.

"The food is hardly edible. People are having stomach problems and some are vomiting. Medical facilities and medicines are not being provided... some of

IN BRIEF

Bajjal reviews measures taken by Health Dept.

NEW DELHI
L-G Anil Bajjal on Friday reviewed measures taken by the Health Department regarding hotspots and containment zones in the city. The meeting was attended by the Chief Secretary, ACS (Home), Principal Secretary (Health), Director, NCDC and other senior officers. Mr. Bajjal said he advised the officers to rationalise containment zones as per population and density to prevent micro-transmission of COVID-19.

Delhi's peak power demand reduces by up to 49%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Delhi's peak power demand has reduced by up to 49% with commercial and industrial activities virtually at a standstill due to the lockdown imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19, discom and power department officials said.

Official data stated that the peak power demand during the day has reduced by 40-50%, while the peak electricity demand during the night has reduced by around 20-30%.

The higher reduction in the day's power demand is due to the closure of commercial and industrial establishments.

HC seeks Centre's reply on central AC safeguards

Plea wants such units to take precautions

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Friday sought response of the Centre and the city government on a plea that no centrally air-conditioned buildings, including courts, be used without taking precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Bar Council of Delhi Chairman K.C. Mittal, in his petition, contended that "the cough, sneeze or tear dispersal of an infected person would be in aerosol form" and the "same can be picked, ingested and circulated by the central air-conditioning units", like the ones installed in the High Court.

He further contended that while droplet infection can be dealt with by sterilisation, once aerosol infection enters the air ducts of

CM appeals to recovered patients to donate their plasma, save lives

Two of the four who have undergone plasma therapy to be shifted out of ICU

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday termed "encouraging" the limited trial of plasma therapy on patients at a city hospital and appealed to recovered COVID-19 patients to step forward and donate their plasma to save the lives of serious patients.

Two of the four patients on whom the trial was conducted at Lok Nayak Hospital would be shifted out of intensive care three days after the therapy, he said.

He also said that Delhi government would ask for permission from the Centre to use plasma therapy on all serious patients based on the next trial.

"Our efforts in the fight against the virus are twofold. First is how to contain the spread of COVID-19, which includes social distancing, lockdown and various other measures, and the second is how to control the deaths caused by the pandemic... We got permission to conduct the trial on patients admitted at LNJP Hospital and we have tried the therapy on four patient. The results are satisfactory. We have Dr. Sarin, who is the head of ILBS hospital, to monitor the whole project," the Chief Minister said.



Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal addressing a digital press meet in the city. ■ FILE PHOTO

HELPLINE NUMBERS	
COMMON HELPLINE	+91-11-23978046
DELHI	- 011-22307145
GAZIABAD	- 010 4186453
NOIDA	- 8076623612/6396776904
GURUGRAM	- 108/ 0124-2322412/ 9911519296/ 7015523417/ 9654231756

Dr. S.K. Sarin said, the initial plan was to use plasma therapy as per the age-old tradition used in 1900s. If the therapy was used on a patient in the second stage of infection, which is the pulmonary phase (affecting the lungs and causes difficulty in breathing), it was possible to neutralise the virus as well as stop organ failure.

The main aim of therapy, he said, was to not let any infected person reach the third stage, which is called the 'cytokine storm', and cure their lung infection. Only the people who have recovered from COVID-19 will have to give their blood.

Show patriotism'

"We need people to show their patriotism by donating blood so the others can be treated. We have people who lost their lives because we did not get blood from anywhere... Plasma is extracted from the blood of the person who has recovered and the rest of the blood goes back into their body,"

he said.

"Donating blood is also good for your longevity and you feel young as new blood is developed... Plasma therapy is also inexpensive as compared to other medical treatments and medicines that our country cannot afford to import," Dr. Sarin said.

Excellent results'

According to Mr. Kejriwal, plasma transplant on two out of four patients was done on Tuesday.

Their respiratory rates and oxygen saturation levels had improved. While the first two patients would be discharged from the ICU, the remaining two had shown excellent results.

"We had got the permission for limited trials from the Central government. They had permitted us to conduct the trial on a few patients admitted to LNJP Hospital and then notify them based on their success for further trials. This has come as a ray of hope to us, and doctors are trying their best to save the lives of the patients," the Chief Minister said.

"It is the responsibility of the people, who have recovered, to come forward and help those who are recovering. You will be saving lives," he added.

Three deaths, 138 new cases

One area in east Delhi taken off containment zone list

NIKHIL M BABU
NEW DELHI

Three deaths and 138 new COVID-19 cases were reported in Delhi on Friday, taking the toll to 53 and total number of cases to 2,514. Of the total cases, 857 people have recovered and there are 1,604 active cases.

For the first time since the Delhi government started declaring areas as 'containment zones', one such area in east Delhi was on Friday removed from the list after authorities found no new positive case in the locality for four weeks. A containment zone has a stricter form of lockdown and entry and exit of people are not allowed in these zones.

More doctors infected

Meanwhile, a doctor at Safdarjung Hospital told *The Hindu* that "three doctors working in the medicine ward have tested positive in the last two days. They were working in a non-COVID ward but people with fevers were treated here. The doctors could have been infected by the patients."

A second doctor at the hospital also confirmed that three doctors were infected.

"In total, five doctors, one nurse and one technician of the hospital have tested positive so far. All of them were on non-COVID duty," the second doctor said.

When contacted, Dinesh Narayan, Public Relation Of-



Medical staff seen preparing for COVID-19 tests in New Delhi on Friday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Virus spread	
Total number of COVID-19 cases	2,514
Total deaths	53
New cases in the past 24 hours	138
New deaths in the past 24 hours	3

SOURCE: DELHI GOVERNMENT HEALTH BULLETIN

Jahangirpuri, including guards and nurses, tested positive for COVID-19 on Friday, taking the total number of infected staff to at least 20, according to a hospital document accessed by *The Hindu*. Jahangirpuri is one of the 92 "containment zones" in Delhi.

Meanwhile, results of about 160 journalists who were tested by the government for COVID-19 have all returned negative. "I pray for your safety and good health. You guys are also our frontline corona warriors [sic]," Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Twitter.

Meanwhile, samples of about 50 workers of a kitchen in Delhi government-run Lok Nayak Hospital have also been taken after a female dietician tested positive for the virus, a hospital official said on Friday. The results are expected in two days.

Also, at least four more people working at Delhi government-run Babu Jagjivan Ram Memorial Hospital in

Six test positive for virus in Gautam Buddha Nagar

Total cases in district rises to 109

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GAZIABAD

Six persons, including a CRPF constable, tested positive for COVID-19 in Gautam Buddha Nagar on Friday, an official release said.

The other five are residents of JJ Colony of Noida Sector 8, one of the hotspots in the district. According to district surveillance officer Sunil Dohare, all five were in institutional quarantine in Sharda isolation facility.

"The CRPF constable is a resident of Mayur Vihar in Delhi," he said. A health department official said that the constable and his wife got themselves tested at a private hospital in Sector 41 Bhatta, which is a hotspot.

After lockdown, IGIA to deploy queue managers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Delhi's IGI Airport is preparing to resume operations once the lockdown is lifted and has prepared a strategy to ensure social distancing across its premises and a sanitised environment.

The measures will include additional queue managers, seating arrangements where passengers form queues as well as UV machines to sanitise checked baggage.

The additional queue managers will be found at the entrance gate, check-in halls, security check areas and boarding gates to ensure passengers follow social distancing norms. There will be signages at various points as well as staggered seating arrangements.

There will be additional seating arrangements where passengers form queues, such as check-in facility, security area and immigration counters. This will be necessary as waiting time is expected to increase with only alternate counters operating to maintain required distance.

Self-service facilities

"Passengers will be encouraged to check-in at home or use self-service facilities such as self check-in, self bag tag, scan and fly, etc. The airport also plans to install UV machines to sanitise checked baggage," stated the white paper prepared by the Delhi International Airport Limited.

3 workers of sanitation dept. infected

Around 48 of their contacts have been put under quarantine

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

At least three people working in the sanitation departments of the south and north civic bodies have tested positive for COVID-19, senior officials said on Friday. Around 48 employees who came in contact with the staff have been put under quarantine.

In the South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC), 53-year-old sanitation worker Ramesh* posted in Daryaganj, and 43-year-old Rani* working in Tagore Garden tested positive. The

civic body's spokesperson said that neither of the employees were deployed at a hotspot or were engaged in disinfection work. Ramesh, who was admitted to AIIMS on Wednesday and is currently on a ventilator, had attended duty only twice this month, said the corporation. Meanwhile, nine of Rani's colleagues have been asked to self-isolate at home. Her husband, also a sanitation worker in the same ward, tested negative on Thursday but was called in for a re-test at Lok Nayak Hospital on Friday.

(*)Names changed

In the North Delhi Municipal Corporation, an Assistant Sanitation Inspector in the Rohini Zone has tested positive. A senior official said that the infected person had self-isolated as soon as he felt unwell. They added that all his contacts are in home quarantine and the family members were tested on Friday.

A total of 39 staffers in the Department of Environmental Services have been placed under quarantine, all of whom were reportedly asymptomatic. The

CISF proposes steps for post-lockdown metro services

Personnel who screen passengers and check baggage will wear face shields

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), which guards metro rail premises in the NCR, has asked its personnel to stock personal protective equipment, including face masks, for at least three months in a post-lockdown scenario when services resume.

It has been proposed that friskers and x-ray screeners should additionally wear face shields or visors to protect their face, especially eyes, from any kind of exposure.

The CISF has also proposed that the Delhi Metro

services will resume as the second phase of lockdown comes to an end on May 3, the CISF has prepared a detailed proposal.

It has been proposed that friskers and x-ray screeners should additionally wear face shields or visors to protect their face, especially eyes, from any kind of exposure.

The CISF has also proposed that the Delhi Metro

Rail Corporation deploy additional staff to ensure social distancing among passengers. It will also be mandatory to wear face masks while entering the metro channel.

Around 12,000 CISF personnel are deployed in the NCR to secure over 160 metro stations.

An official said that the Aarogya Setu app with in-built e-pass feature could be employed for identification

of suspected persons having COVID-19 infection, adding that it will not be compulsory.

The CISF said hand sanitisation or washing facilities should be available at entry points, and thermal screening will be done. The official said that those with high temperatures and symptoms of cold, cough and other flu-like symptoms will be denied entry.

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THE HINDU

India's National Newspaper

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A survey of migrant workers in distress in Delhi under the COVID-19 lockdown has shown that 65% of the respondents had not received any form of government support, either in the form of dry ration or cooked meals.

A majority of respondents who received food support said that the amount was inadequate.

The telephonic survey was conducted by the Delhi units of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) that have been

3.5% of the respondents did not have a ration card, Aadhar card or a bank account making them ineligible for any direct government support through the Public Distribution System or Direct Bank Transfer.

Survey was conducted by Delhi units of CPI(M) and CITU

State of workers

Survey was conducted with 506 "group leaders" representing 8,870 workers between April 10 and April 18



working to provide relief material to migrant workers stranded in the NCR. The survey was conducted with 506 "group leaders" representing 8,870 workers between April 10 and April 18,

11 new virus cases in Punjab, overall tally climbs to 298

Will go by the advice of expert panel on easing lockdown in the State, says CM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHANDIGARH

Punjab on Friday reported 11 fresh COVID-19 cases, taking the total tally to 298 in the State, according to an official statement.

State health department said on April 24 six new cases were reported from Patiala, two from Mansa and one each from Jalandhar, Ludhiana and Amritsar districts. Punjab has so far seen 17 COVID-19 related deaths. As many as 70 patients have so far recovered in Punjab, it added.

Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, meanwhile, said he would go by the advice of the expert committee, set up to formulate Punjab's lockdown exit strategy, in the matter of opening up the State.



BJP workers felicitating policemen in Amritsar on Friday. ■ PTI

During a online meeting with leading industrialists, economic experts and diplomats-ambassadors of various countries, the Chief Minister said any decision on lifting the lockdown-curfew would be taken on the basis of recommendations of the 20-member expert committee, which is expected to submit

its report on Saturday.

Reiterating that his priority was saving the lives of Punjabis, the Chief Minister said "the life of my Punjabis is more important. Factories can be restarted but we can't get people back."

If the expert committee, which includes medical experts and doctors, recom-

mends opening, either partially or completely, we will do so, he said in response to questions.

"I will go by their advice," he declared, but made it clear that the health of the people was the priority, even though the State government was aware that the lockdown could not be kept in place indefinitely.

Virus curve

Pointing out that Punjab had witnessed three peaks in the COVID-19 curve in the past 40 days, the Chief Minister said it may not be possible to lift the lockdown completely for some more time, but the State will examine the recommendations of the expert committee and the prevailing ground situation.

Man dies of COVID-19 in Meerut, death toll now 4

Another AMU doctor tests positive

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GAZIABAD

One person infected with COVID 19 passed away in Meerut on Thursday night, taking the toll in the district to four, an official release said.

Both his sons have also tested positive. One of the deceased's sons is the personal assistant of a local Bharatiya Janta Party leader. Though the leader and his family have tested negative, they have been quarantined for 14 days.

86 cases so far

A health department official said the deceased was a diabetic and had developed pneumonia. Meerut has recorded 86 COVID 19 cases so far.

On Friday, the borders of Shikarpur town in Bulandshahr were sealed after five persons were tested positive on Thursday. According to

the district information department, the town has 11 active cases. Most of them had come in contact with the Ayurvedic doctor who passed away in a Delhi hospital on April 10.

Meanwhile, in Aligarh's Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College and Hospital one more junior resident doctor was tested positive on Friday. "As per preliminary information, she didn't come in contact with the surgeon who was tested positive on Thursday. Her husband is also a resident at JNMH. The contacts of both of them are being traced. On Friday, reports of 60 health workers, including doctors, working at JNMC came out and only one was found positive."

Vice-Chancellor Tariq Mansoor urged Muslims to maintain social distancing and personal hygiene during the month of Ramzan.

No takers

Now the video will play in Newspaper



Five test positive in Odisha's Bhadrak, State tally 94

Contact tracing and follow-up action initiated in the villages from where the new cases were reported

PRAFULLA DAS

BHUBANESWAR

Five men, who recently returned to Odisha's Bhadrak district from neighbouring West Bengal, were found positive for COVID-19 taking the State's total to 94 on Friday.

Contact tracing and follow-up action was initiated by the State government's Health & Family Welfare Department in the villages from where the new cases were reported during the day.

According to the State government, the districts of Bhadrak, Balasore and Jajpur, which were close to West Bengal, have reported as many as 33 cases during the past six days. These cases



Villagers cover their faces as they head towards the market, on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar on Friday. ■ BISWARANJAN ROUT

include West Bengal returnees and their close contacts.

The State government has imposed a 60-hour-long complete shutdown in these three districts starting from

10 p.m. on Thursday to contain the spread of COVID-19. The shutdown restrictions are being strictly implemented by the administration and police.

'Remain vigilant'

Meanwhile, State government's chief spokesperson on COVID-19 Subroto Bagchi appealed to the people of the three districts to remain vigilant and ensure strict quarantine of those coming from outside. Only by ensuring quarantine of the returnees that the elderly people and

children in the villages can be kept safe, he said.

Informing that a family had recently managed to enter the State from West Bengal by misusing an ambulance, Mr. Bagchi said an ambulance, which engaged itself in carrying fake patients with the intention to make money, may not be free of COVID-19 itself. The family in question was caught at the border and the members were quarantined, he added.

On the other hand, with another exclusive COVID-19 hospital becoming operational in Kalahandi district on Friday the total number of such hospitals increased to 33 with combined capacity of 5476 beds.

Bihar teachers seek regular salary

Over 70,000 of them are teaching in middle schools, colleges

AMARNATH TEWARY

PATNA

Mahila College, told *The Hindu* over phone.

Mr. Kumar is also the State coordinator of a forum named *Anudan Nahi Veta-man*.

He also rued that recently the State Education Minister announced ₹4 lakh compensation on the death of contract and regular teacher but the non-funded teachers were kept out of this compensation.

"Since 2012 we've not been paid any salary...we made several representations to the government and for the last two years our petition is pending in the Patna High Court...as many as 16 of them have died of different diseases in last four months while coronavirus has taken just two lives in the State yet," Raushan Kumar, a non-funded teacher at Sonepur

tion to as many as 55% of students in Bihar and have been participating in all welfare schemes of the government like *Jan Jivan Hariyali* and others, but whenever we demand our salary the government choose to see the other way," said another teacher Ravindra Kumar Dubey, who teaches at MS College, Tajpur in Saran.

Like Mr. Kumar several other non-funded teachers like Manju Kumari, Vibha Kumari, Deepak Kumar, Ajay Jha too have appealed to the Bihar government to look into their demand like the eight other States have done for their non-funded teachers.

Over 1 lakh helpline calls in Haryana

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

CHANDIGARH

Haryana's COVID-19 helpline is proving to be very useful for the people and has received over one lakh calls so far this month, an official statement on Friday said.

The COVID-19 control room helpline number is resolving problems faced by people due to the COVID-19 lockdown and during this month, 1,07,995 calls were received. Additional Chief Secretary, Health and Family Welfare department, Rajeev Arora said in the statement.

Besides, tele-medicine service is also being provided on the helpline and anyone can get a free consultation from doctors over phone, the statement said.

Footwear sector hit hard by transport ban

Hub in Haryana had hoped to turn the tide during rabi harvesting season

ASHOK KUMAR
GURUGRAM

We have finished goods lying in our godowns, but don't have the permission to transport them

NARINDER CHHIKARA
Senior VP, Bahadurgarh Footwear Park Association

trial areas of Bahadurgarh, including the Footwear Park, around 1,000 footwear manufacturing units employ over two lakh workers, most of them migrant. Though Agra and Kanpur remain the hub for leather footwear, Bahadurgarh footwear manufacturers have around 50% share in the country's non-leather footwear industry. It exports good worth around ₹2,000 crore annually.

Though a large number of workforce stays in Bahadurgarh, a small section is settled in Delhi's Mundka and Nangloi areas as well.

Knotty issue

The transportation of the workers also remains a knotty issue for the industry. Though the administration had earlier allowed the workers staying within a radius of 150 metres to come through their own means, the limit has now been increased to five km after much persuasion. But the issues still remain.

Hooda demands relief for MSMEs in Haryana

'Govt. left them to fend for themselves'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHANDIGARH



Cong. leader B.S. Hooda

statement.

He said according to the Small Scale Industry Manufacturers Association most of the industries are on the verge of closure.

"This can result in large-scale of unemployment. Therefore, it is important to consider the demands of these industries while there is still some time for recovery and special economic relief should be given to them," said Mr. Hooda in a

Tribal people bring water to their two villages

Around 100 families in Odisha contributed money, labour for the project



Villagers of Tantaguda and Panaspunjji collecting water in the first week of March. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

a saviour during the lockdown," said Balaram Golari and Raghunath Hantal, the CPI(M) activists of the area. These two played a key role in uniting the local tribals for the project. Construction of the water supply project started on January 2 and got completed in first week of March.

The tribal people did not wait for any financial support from the government in the project.

"We never knew it will be

from walking over two kms to collect water from a mountain stream. An amount of around ₹3 lakh was spent on the project. The money was contributed by around 100 tribal families of the two villages. Every family contributed as per its financial condition. But all of them provided free labour for its construction.

The project includes a top

covered concrete tank at a hill top in which water of the perennial stream gets collected. An over 2 km-long pipeline transports water from this tank to the two villages. The project uses no pumps and gravity makes the water flow downstream. The localites designed the whole project without taking any technical support.

According to Mr. Golari, they are planning to extend the water supply to three more nearby villages through similar community effort.

Odisha secretary of CPI (M) Ali Kishor Patnaik lauded the party workers and tribals. "This project is an eye-opener for the administration that several remote villages in Malkangiri district are yet to get proper water supply."

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH

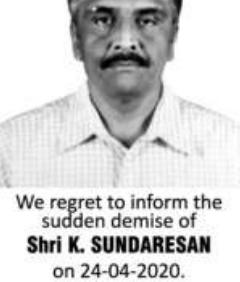
SAD DEMISE

23-04-2020



JOSHY RAPHEAL
Director
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Visakhapatnam
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In Grief Management and Staff



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DONATE EYES-GIFT SIGHT

Lightning claims 6 lives

STAFF REPORTER

BERHAMPUR

Six persons, including three youths, died when lightning struck at different places in Odisha on Friday.

Deaths were reported from Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar and Balasore districts. Three youths had gone for fishing near Badaputhura village under Khunti police station when lightning struck them.

The deceased were identified as Jamini Mohanta, Dibya Shankar Mohanta and Koshish Mohanta.

The tribal people did not wait for any financial support from the government in the project.

"We never knew it will be

Four-month-old dies in Kerala, 2 deaths in A.P.

Karnataka's new cases come from Ramanagaram jail and Bengaluru labour colony; 13 more test positive in Telangana

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/
VIJAYAWADA/BENGALURU/
HYDERABAD

The third COVID-19-related death in Kerala, of a four-month-old female baby, from Manjeri in Malappuram district, was reported on Friday morning. The infant, with congenital heart disease, and under treatment for pneumonia and respiration

COVID-19

tory problems, passed away at the Institute of Maternal and Child Health (IMCH), at the Government Medical College Hospital in Kozhikode.

Two deaths were reported in Andhra Pradesh, from Anantapur and Kurnool districts, taking the toll to 29.

In Karnataka, a total of 29 new COVID-19 cases were reported on Friday raising the total to 474.

The COVID-19 protocol

Some respite

Kerala government has allowed partial relaxation in lockdown norms in zones where no fresh cases were reported

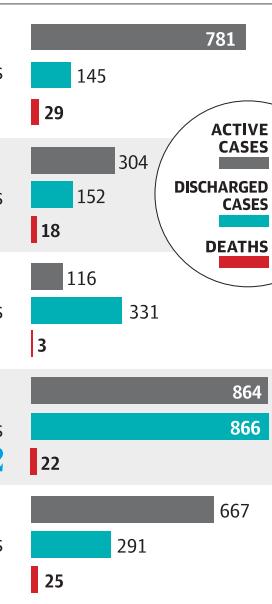


At work: An official dusting up files lying idle for nearly a month at the otherwise busy Kanayannur Taluk office in Kochi on Friday.

■ THULASI KAKKAT

was followed when interring the baby in Kerala. Samples from the child's parents were sent for tests. Doctors who cared for her in Malappuram were asked to be in quarantine, and work was on to trace the source of infection.

Condoling the death, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said it was a matter of concern that the source of the infant's infection remained unknown. Massive efforts were on to trace the epidemiological links and to



do testing on a large scale. On Friday, three persons tested positive in the State while 15 were declared disease-free, including a 62-year-old at Pathanamthitta who spent 47 days in hospital after testing positive.

Nearly 67% of cases were from Kurnool, Guntur, Krish-

All new cases were from Kasaragod and they contracted the disease through imported cases. Kerala had so far reported 450 positive cases. While 116 were in treatment, 331 recovered.

Kannur district has the maximum number of COVID-19 patients, with 56 persons in hospitals. Mr. Vijayan said as a stark warning that "nothing is over yet" on COVID-19. "We are looking at disease transmission projections which say we will have to arrange treatment facilities for several lakhs," he said, at the media briefing.

A.P. tests more

In Andhra Pradesh, 6,306 samples tested in a day turned up 62 fresh cases, taking the tally to 955. So far, 145 patients had recovered and been discharged, while 29 succumbed to the virus and 781 were under treatment.

Nearly 67% of cases were from Kurnool, Guntur, Krish-

na and Chittoor districts, the majority from old clusters, said Special Chief Secretary, Health K.S. Jawahar Reddy.

Bengaluru police personnel involved in quarantine and surveillance work would undergo testing for COVID-19, Primary and Secondary Education Minister S. Suresh Kumar said.

The latest cases included five from Ramanagaram district jail and 11 from the labour colony at Hongasandra ward, in Bengaluru.

GHMC area in focus

In Telangana 13 more persons tested positive on Friday, and the total was 983. In all, 29 were discharged, a category now totalling 291 people. The State had 667 active cases under treatment.

Health Minister Eatala Rajender said the Hyderabad Municipal (GHMC) area, Vikarabad, Suryapet and Jogulamba Gadwal districts were reporting cases.



The HC asked the State to get consent of the citizens before collecting data.

dence. The agreement prevented Sprinklr from using the data for other purposes.

It was stored in an encrypted form in Amazon Cloud and hence its confidentiality was guaranteed. Besides, the period of the agreement was for six months, beyond which the company could not retain the data. She argued that as the data was in India, criminal prosecution could be initiated under the provisions of Information Technology Act 2000 for breach of confidentiality.

On NIC services

Additional Advocate General K.K. Raveendranath submitted that none of the government institutions in the State were presently capable of big data analysis in a short time, which was the need of the hour. He submitted that the State government would take a call on utilising the services of the National Informatics Centre (NIC) for data analysis.

Assistant Solicitor General of India P. Vijayakumar submitted that sensitive personal data, such as those pertaining to health, should not be shared with a third party service provider. The State should have anonymised the data before sharing it. In fact, the NIC could have processed the data if the State had made the demand.

Assistant Solicitor General of India P. Vijayakumar submitted that sensitive personal data, such as those pertaining to health, should not be shared with a third party service provider. The State should have anonymised the data before sharing it. In fact, the NIC could have processed the data if the State had made the demand.

Anonymise data before handover, HC tells Kerala govt.

Sprinklr warned about confidentiality

K.C. GOPAKUMAR
KOCHE

A Division Bench of the Kerala High Court on Friday directed the State government to anonymise the data of COVID-19 patients and those under home quarantine, and to allow Sprinklr, the U.S.-based analytics firm with which the government has entered into a contract, to access the data only after the process is completed.

The Bench, comprising Justice Devan Ramachandran and Justice T.R. Ravi, also restrained Sprinklr from committing any act that will breach the confidentiality of the data entrusted with it. The court directed the State government to obtain the consent of the citizens before collecting data.

Health Minister Eatala Rajender said the Hyderabad Municipal (GHMC) area, Vikarabad, Suryapet and Jogulamba Gadwal districts were reporting cases.

The court passed the directives while admitting a batch of public interest litigations filed by Balu Gopalakrishnan of Thiruvananthapuram, Leader of the Opposition Ramesh Chennithala, and BJP State president K. Surendran among others, challenging the agreement.

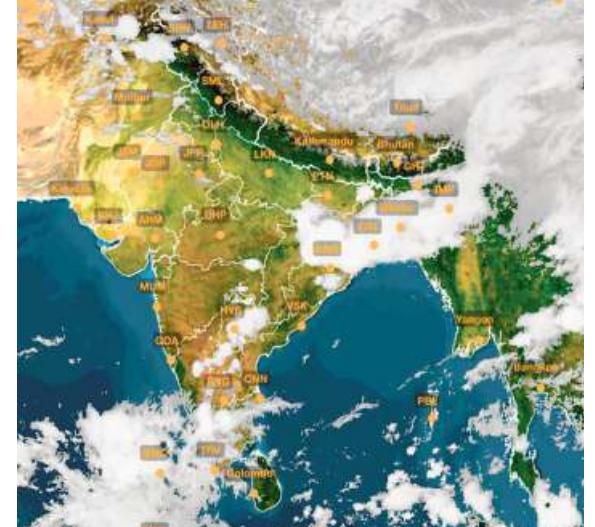
The court directed Sprinklr to immediately transfer the residual or secondary data back to the State government. Sprinklr was also restrained from advertising the project of the State government and using Kerala's name and emblem.

Govt. argument

When the petition came up for hearing, N.S. Nappinai, a Mumbai-based cyber lawyer appearing for the the State government, submitted that the privacy policy of the company and international data protection norms ensured a high level of confi-

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 Saturday: Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning likely at isolated places over Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, Telangana, Sikkim, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Karnataka and Kerala.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	7.8	30.5	21.0	Kozhikode	0.2	36.4	27.8
Ahmedabad	—	40.3	27.3	Kurnool	—	41.3	30.4
Aizawl	16.0	23.7	15.2	Lucknow	—	36.1	23.5
Aligarh	1.0	37.2	22.6	Madurai	—	39.2	27.5
Bengaluru	23.2	36.0	20.5	Mangaluru	—	36.9	27.2
Bhopal	—	40.4	23.6	Mumbai	—	34.9	26.2
Bhubaneswar	0.4	36.9	26.2	Mysuru	—	12.5	23.3
Chandigarh	—	34.7	20.3	New Delhi	—	38.4	20.2
Chennai	—	35.0	28.5	Patna	—	31.4	22.2
Coimbatore	—	36.9	26.0	Port Blair	—	32.9	26.5
Dehradun	—	32.8	16.6	Puducherry	—	35.2	27.6
Gangtok	3.1	18.6	14.5	Pune	—	38.6	21.3
Goa	—	34.4	27.0	Raipur	—	39.5	25.6
Guwahati	42.4	26.5	18.2	Ranchi	9.2	33.4	19.6
Hubballi	—	37.0	23.0	Shillong	12.4	33.3	—
Hyderabad	—	40.7	26.8	Shimla	—	21.6	11.1
Imphal	—	20.1	13.7	Srinagar	—	26.5	8.2
Jaipur	—	21.7	12.1	Thiruvananthapuram	5.6	34.8	26.4
Kochi	3.4	35.5	23.3	Tiruchi	—	40.2	28.0
Kohima	—	24.2	17.0	Vijayawada	—	39.2	27.1
Kolkata	4.6	32.9	23.1	Visakhapatnam	—	34.7	29.0

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

Forecast for Saturday: Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning likely at isolated places over Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, Telangana, Sikkim, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Karnataka and Kerala.

RAINFALL data in mm; temperature in Celsius

Pollutants in the air you are breathing Yesterday

CITIES	SO ₂ NO _x	CO	PM _{2.5}	PM ₁₀	CODE
Ahmedabad	21	13	46	.85	■ Poor
Bengaluru	10	18	42	.120	■ Moderate
Chennai	03	32	42	.32	■ Good
Delhi	18	—	112	.292	■ Good
Hyderabad	12	50	22	.60	■ Good
Kolkata	09	12	28	.20	■ Good
Lucknow	06	21	55	.155	■ Good
Mumbai	45	—	58	.60	■ Good
Pune	24	09	53	.30	■ Good
Visakhapatnam	—	—	—	.29	■ Good

In observation made at 18.00 hrs, data recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 204 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Aizawl, Mizoram, recorded a healthy AQI score of 13.

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.

NO_x: 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.

PM_{2.5} & 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.

IN BRIEF



'Arrangements in place for T.N. cancer patients'

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said here on Friday that Kerala, with the assistance of the Tamil Nadu government and the Regional Cancer Centre (RCC) here, has made arrangements to give follow-up care to patients from Kanyakumari and other border districts. A total of 560 persons from Kanyakumari and neighbouring districts in Tamil Nadu are regular patients at the RCC. It had made arrangements for the patients to get continued follow-up care.

Domestic violence: help is now just a call away

VIJAYAWADA
The Andhra Pradesh Women's Commission has launched WhatsApp and helpline numbers to protect women from domestic violence during the lockdown. Victims can contact WhatsApp no. 6301411137 for assistance. They can also use Helpdesk nos. 9701056808 (director R. Suez) or 9603914511 (secretary M.J. Nirmala), according to Mahila Commission Chairperson Vasireddy Padma.

Kerala govt. issues orders on salary deduction

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
The Kerala government has issued orders for deferring the disbursement of a component of the salary of employees from April to August. The order issued by the Finance Department on Friday said the payment of six days' salary for employees and teachers, including those in government-aided institutions, would be deferred. Those with a monthly gross salary below ₹20,000 have been exempted.



No 100% quota

SC ruling stresses that overzealous reservation tends to affect rights of other communities

The Supreme Court is right in considering cent per cent reservation as anathema to the constitutional scheme of equality even if it is for the laudable objective of providing representation to historically deprived sections. The verdict quashing the reservation of 100% of all teaching posts in 'Scheduled Areas' of Andhra Pradesh for local Scheduled Tribes is not against affirmative programmes as such, but a caution against implementing them in a manner detrimental to the rest of society. A five-judge Constitution Bench found that earmarking teacher posts in areas notified under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution adversely affected the interests of other candidates not only from Scheduled Castes and other backward communities but also other ST communities not native to those areas. Of course, what the State government did, in its original orders of 1986, and thereafter, in a subsequent order in 2000, was not without its own rationale. It found that there was chronic absenteeism among teachers who did not belong to those remote areas where the schools were located. However, its solution of drafting only members of the local tribes was not a viable solution. As the Bench noted, it could have come up with other incentives to ensure the attendance of teachers. Another aspect that the court took into account was that Andhra Pradesh has a local area system of recruitment to public services. The President, under Article 371D, has issued orders that a resident of a district/zones cannot apply to another district/zones for appointment. Thus, the 100% quota deprived residents of the Scheduled Areas of any opportunity to apply for teaching posts.

Affirmative action loses its meaning if it does not leave the door slightly ajar for open competition. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar observed during the debate in the Constituent Assembly on the equality clause, that any reservation normally ought to be for a "minority of seats". This is one of the points often urged in favour of the 50% cap imposed by the Court on total reservation, albeit with some allowance for relaxation in special circumstances. It is still a matter of debate whether the ceiling has innate sanctity, but it is clear that wherever it is imperative that the cap be breached, a special case must be made for it. Such a debate should not divert attention from the fact that there is a continuing need for a significant quota for STs, especially those living in areas under the Fifth Schedule special dispensation. In this backdrop, it is somewhat disappointing that courts tend to record *obiter dicta* advocating a revision of the list of SCs and STs. While the power to amend the lists notified by the President is not in dispute, it is somewhat uncharitable to say that the advanced and "affluent" sections within SCs and STs are cornering all benefits and do not permit any trickle-down. Indian society is still some distance from reaching that point.

Joining of giants

The coming together of Facebook and Jio is exciting, but there is a risk of a monopoly

Facebook's decision to invest ₹43,574 crore for a 9.9% stake in Reliance Industries Ltd.'s Jio Platforms marks a rare coming together of two giants who have a reputation for market domination. The focus of their combined might is the India retail sector, a difficult terrain as large parts of it are still unorganised. But then for the same reason, it holds potential for huge disruption. In recent years, the retail space has been an ongoing battlefield for behemoths such as Amazon and Walmart, themselves globally dominant players. The other interested parties in this are payment services companies such as the Softbank- and Alibaba-backed Paytm, and Google, which runs Google Pay. But the combination of Facebook and Reliance will be difficult to beat – they seem to have both the marketplace and the payment solution sides covered. For Facebook's WhatsApp messaging service, India is the biggest market with over 400 million users. It currently awaits regulatory approval for its payment solutions. Jio is now India's No. 1 telecom brand by user base, less than four years after it launched its service. And then, JioMart is a recently-launched commerce marketplace, which seeks to connect local retailers with consumers. And this is why, "the largest investment for a minority stake by a technology company anywhere in the world" (as a Reliance Industries press release put it to describe the Facebook move) has been notably accompanied by an agreement to "further accelerate" business on the Jio-Mart platform using WhatsApp.

In short, it is a win-win deal for both players. While its social media services and messaging services have been extremely popular in India, Facebook has however struggled to get past regulatory concerns in India over some of its ambitious projects such as its free limited Internet offering Free Basics and digital currency Libra. While it stays blocked in mainland China, Facebook now gets to participate in a stronger way in one of the world's fastest growing markets for e-commerce. Reliance can rely on the popular messaging service to accelerate the building of its marketplace. It has also received handy money to reduce its debt. The deal, coming as it does at a time when the world is fighting the coronavirus pandemic, is a thumbs up to India's potential. It is noteworthy that this is the largest foreign direct investment in the technology sector in India. But will the deal that brings together the world's largest social media company and the group that is a leader in everything from oil to data lead to more consolidation and fewer players, as it happened in the telecom sector? It is a big question mark, and the deal should not be passed without closely scrutinising this. For, the future of India's Internet economy is at stake.

Troughs and crests in the pandemic response

The nationalistic turn in global politics has affected vital institutions and partnerships at a time they are needed most



IRFAN NOORUDDIN

The novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, that causes the disease COVID-19, has proven the ultimate stress test for governance systems globally. And governments worldwide are failing, showing up for all to see how poorly prepared they were for this examination. Even those governments that are likely to be rated relatively highly by scholars of public policy studying this moment later will not pass the examination unscathed. Such is the virality and lethality of this pathogen that success will be measured in hundreds of lives lost, compared to the tens of thousands of fatalities experienced elsewhere. Yet, the common challenges faced by all governments to fight COVID-19 must not mask the considerable variation in their performance which holds lessons learned.

Stages in the response

Disease outbreaks, even global pandemics, are scarcely new. The playbook for dealing with them therefore is well understood and has been honed by practices and lessons gleaned from hard-fought battles. A first stage is early clear-eyed recognition of the incoming threat, and, in the case of COVID-19 at least, requires the unpalatable decision to lock down society.

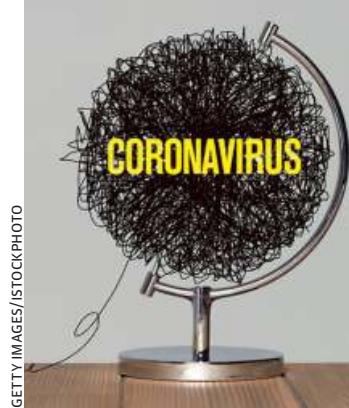
Ideally this is done with full consideration of how to support the most vulnerable members of society, especially in a country such as India, where so many survive hand-to-mouth. This is a phase aimed at buying time, of flattening the epidemic curve, so that public

health facilities are not overwhelmed; and, for using this time, paid for by collective sacrifice, to secure the personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical supplies necessary to save lives.

The second phase of the pandemic response is slowly to ease the burden on the economy by permitting a measured return of business activity so that livelihoods and supply chains can be restored. This stage can only be safely executed if accompanied by a war-footing expansion of testing capacity so that new infections can be identified and isolated at once, allowing contact tracing to be implemented by masses trained to do this crucial and painstaking work in communities across the country. The final stage, which for COVID-19 seems a lifetime away, is a mass vaccination programme and then the full rebuilding of economic and social life. None of this is easy, but, like an examination in a dreaded subject, one's only hope is early and persistent preparation and, at crunch time, remembering the lessons learned.

What drags systems down

So, why have governments failed to do better? And what separates successful responses from failed ones? Answers lie in three main limitations of contemporary governance systems. First, for all the defensive finger pointing, opportunistic politicking and xenophobic posturing – exemplified best by the preevish current occupant of the White House but hardly unique to him – this is not a crisis that can be tackled without robust and multidimensional international cooperation between nations. From the epidemiologists whose data-driven models inform policy debates about how and when to lift quarantines, to the medical community identifying more effective treatments, to the research scientists racing to find a vaccine,



we are watching in real time the benefits of intellectual collaboration that does not stop at national borders. But the nationalistic turn in global politics over the past two decades has reduced investment in and undermined the legitimacy of the very institutions that facilitate international partnership at the very time they are needed most.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi did well to convene the leaders of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) nations in mid-March to discuss the possibility of a regional response, but that video-conference call also highlighted that there have been no summit-level meetings of SAARC since 2014, in no small part due to India-Pakistan jingoism that has victimised the regional organisation. Similarly, last week's outburst by United States President Donald Trump that resulted in his demanding that the U.S. end its funding of the World Health Organization (WHO) not only endangers American lives by cutting off his own administration's access to vital international data, but also directly affects India which receives significant funding and expertise from WHO (with ~10% of its overall WHO financing in 2019 coming directly from the U.S.).

Second, pandemic response requires a whole-of-government strategy, for which political will

and legitimate leadership are vital to convene and maintain.

Textbook examples

Germany and Kerala provide two powerful though different examples of this in action. In Germany, in spite of a high level of federalism that gives its States (Länder) a lot of power, Chancellor Angela Merkel's ability to mobilise the entire system has allowed Germany to emerge as a success story in Europe. In Kerala, as Patrick Heller described in this daily last week (*The Hindu*, Editorial page, April 18, 2020), State Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan convened a State response team at the earliest possible moment and has provided the full weight of his office in support of a coordinated public health strategy that has been accepted by the State's citizens who have learned to trust the government in such situations. Yet these two examples stand out in part for how rare they are. Consider again the cautionary tale of the U.S. where some State Governors have yet to issue stay-at-home orders, and others are rushing to open the economy against the express advice of public health experts, all while the U.S. President urges citizens in States governed by his political opponents to seek "liberation".

Third, we are seeing first hand the consequences of starving public health systems of necessary funds and resources. The comparative advantage of the private sector is efficiency; the need of the hour in pandemic response is redundancy, or, more precisely, excess capacity. Most hospitals do not need invasive ventilators normally, just as they do not need vast stocks of PPE and extra intensive care units beds, but these are essential goods right now as we brace ourselves for a flood of sick patients into hospitals. Watching the advanced health-care system of northern Italy buckle under the unimaginable pressures to which

it was exposed over the past six weeks should be a cautionary tale for all countries that thought turning health care over to private actors was responsible governance. It is not. Again, consider Kerala, which has consistently ranked at the top of State rankings for health expenditures, and which has, as a result, a well-functioning local public health system capable of implementing the test-isolate-trace protocols critical for fighting COVID-19.

A State in contrast

For a sharp and worrying contrast to Kerala's success, consider Madhya Pradesh. While State Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan earlier earned plaudits for his investments in infrastructure, health expenditures are low, with the State ranking dead last in this category as in NITI Aayog's data. This will undermine the State's ability to fight the virus, which given the rapid growth of cases and a relatively high case fatality ratio, looks increasingly vulnerable to a debilitating outbreak. But even more worrisome is the abdication of good sense by the political class in the State. Even as the threat of COVID-19 was apparent, and as Kerala had put its State response into action, a soap opera in Madhya Pradesh was in full swing, with defections and the collapse of the Congress State government. Then, while the rest of the country was practising social distancing, Mr. Chouhan was at the centre of incongruous images of large-scale packed celebrations. Now, finally, a full month after its new-old Chief Minister was inaugurated on March 23, Madhya Pradesh finally has a Health Minister. Wish him luck; he is going to need it.

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Bihar's dystopian moments and a looming crisis

With the global and national order in reset mode, it is no longer an option for the State to ignore its chronic issues



YASHWANT SINHA &
ATUL K. THAKUR

Should the government of Bihar get the benefit of doubt or should it, along with its political partner, the Central government, not be held solely responsible for its poor performance today? The Centre's much-touted spirit of 'cooperative federalism' has been nothing more than a hollow promise. There is a glaring gap between stark ground realities and propaganda. India's federal system is badly challenged today with partisan Governors, misplaced policies and languishing financial assistance. Bihar is no exception.

States, including Bihar, have been in the throes of financial stress from before; the novel coronavirus outbreak and the national lockdown have further weakened their fiscal position. In fact, Bihar is still waiting for the elusive 'special status' that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had promised during elections and again soon after Nitish Kumar formed the government with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Sadly, it has proved to be another 'jumla'.

Bihar has had a long history of suffering because of a persisting feudal political culture that neglected efforts to create industrial capabilities and employment opportunities in the State. Conse-

quently, the exodus of labour has become a new normal since the 1990s. Despite the fact that construction of new roads and overbridges made through central assistance in Mr. Kumar's first term along with the contractual recruitments (especially in schools) could draw a few migrants back to the State, the situation on the migration front remained grim. Mr. Kumar has been in power for 15 years, yet the fate of these workers has not improved. They continue to be vulnerable and compelled to work without any legal protection.

The forgotten people

With the global pandemic and national lockdown causing unprecedented loss to lives and livelihoods, Bihar's vulnerabilities have come full circle. The State government has failed to ensure proper equipment and health-care facilities to the people. It has also dealt with migrants with disdain. A large number of Bihar migrants in Delhi, Mumbai and other parts of the country were left stranded when the lockdown took effect. Some of them tried their best to stay wherever they were, but finally gave up as they had no money or food to survive.

The heart-rending visuals of the poor and helpless migrants desperately walking from Delhi/National Capital Region back to Bihar reflect the hollowness of the State's approach to tackling a disastrous disease and the consequent lockdown. Also, some recent developments show that the government adopted a selective approach in disaster management.

In Bihar, public health was the next thing after education that became corrupted and collapsed.



ment. For example, while an MLA from the ruling party was issued a special pass to travel to Kota in Rajasthan to bring his child back from there, countless others were left to face socio-economic hardship and apathy.

Within the State, pauperisation is in full swing and the hunger is just killing; Biharis with no support of remittances are on the fringes in their own homeland. In Gaya and other parts of Bihar, children were seen eating roasted frogs. What could be more pitiful than this in a country that will have food grains of over 100 million tonnes in warehouses by the end of April, and as according to the Food Corporation of India (FCI), where the annual produce is expected to be record 292 million tonnes in year 2019-20? Reported-

ly, India has enough in macro projection. Reportedly, India has too little with lack of insight in disaster management in a trying time such as this.

Floundering health care

In Bihar, public health was the next thing after education that became corrupted and collapsed.

Opening of new hospitals including an All India Institute of Medical Sciences and few others were hardly beneficial for the poor living in rural areas since they do not have the means to avail them. Unlike the highly publicised claims of Mr. Kumar, health-care facilities at district and block levels are in pathetic shape.

As per National Health Profile 2019 of Central Bureau of Health Intelligence (CBHI), there are 7,13,986 total government hospital beds available in India. More precisely, this amounts to 0.55 beds per 1,000 population. Many States even lie below the national figure, Bihar is one of them, experiencing an acute shortage of government hospital beds with just 0.11 beds available per 1,000 population.

This is something alarming in a State that was once known for its socialistic leanings. The odd match-making of allies in the ruling government is not creating room for the resolve to help people.

Irrespective of the fact that Bihar has now a new grammar of politics, the State government has failed to give due weightage to the health sector. Even when Mr. Kumar may no longer be charmed with socialism, how can he overlook the unimaginable hardship of the poor, the unemployed and the marginalised? He must bargain for more from the Centre, because his alliance with the BJP has not benefited Bihar. The people of Bihar are still waiting for the fulfilment of the promises made by Mr. Modi and Mr. Kumar.

Ram Vilas Paswan, who holds

charge of Food and Public Distribution at the Centre must think of universalising the Public Distribution System. As a leader from Bihar, he should think of the migrants from Bihar and elsewhere in the country, and ensure basic supplies to them even without ration cards. Mr. Kumar should enable timely policy advocacy for this. Also, he should not be wary in seeking the views of the Opposition's views in terms of crisis management and a plan to rebuild.

As the global and national order is in a phase of reset, it is no longer an option for Bihar to ignore chronic issues such as industrial backwardness, unemployment and outbound migration. For Mr. Kumar, who was once known as 'Sushasan Babu', the time has come to follow Raj Dharma. What is expected from him is to be dutiful, not the balancing plays of caste arithmetic and crossing the fence merely for political survival. The state of affairs in Bihar is worrisome; accordingly, policies and plans have to be prioritised. Politics in the State should not defeat the aspirations of millions of Biharis who have already suffered too much.

For sure, the land of Bihar should never be known as the 'imaginary homeland' for its people who are now home-bound as the cities which they contributed to build have failed them.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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The options

It is dismaying that in a country of huge economic capabilities, where a major share of GDP is borne out of the toil of the labour class, they have, for many years, been marginalised when it came to the fruits of their labour. It is unfortunate that they have been denied their rightful entitlements as far as health, education and living conditions are concerned (OpEd page, 'Parley' – "How will India emerge out of the lockdown?", April 24). It may not be an exaggeration to say that we have been taken for a ride by the political class for over 70

years and we are still accepting of their excuses for not spending enough on health and other basic amenities. Take for instance the expenditure on health care, which is well short of the prescribed percentage for the overall well-being of the nation. Let us also not forget the underspending in education and living conditions. How long will we be under this political lockdown at the cost of our basic rights is for us to decide. The pandemic response is also the right time to question the political class about the priorities. Let us not forget that Victor Hugo said: "The

paradise of the rich is made out of the hell of the poor."

KARUMANCHI MANOHAR,
Ongole, Andhra Pradesh

■ For India, further stretching the lockdown poses huge economic challenges. Unlike a formulaic slump, where policies can be tailored to finance and raise demand, the challenge now is to keep productive capacity intact even as many firms and workers remain idle. As Nobel prize-winning economist Paul Krugman has argued, "The economic response to the crisis will have to include two parts – one, an immediate disaster

relief component that ensures survival of both firms and workers who have been rendered idle. And two, a stimulus component that aims to repair and restart production lines during the exit phase of the lockdown." For India, with a large informal sector and a weak social safety net, the first challenge is going to be tougher than the second one. R. SIVAKUMAR,
Chennai

Quarantine facilities
It is disheartening to know that doctors and medical staff in Rae Bareli had to face dismal living conditions (Page 1, "In Rae Bareli, a

doctors have untold stories of quarantine", April 24).

Frontline health staff need to be treated in a dignified way in view of their selfless service to society. Such incidents might cause people to stay away from getting screened.

DEEPIKA JAIN,
New Delhi

Flattening the curve
There is substance in the government's claim that the extended national lockdown has ensured that the growth of cases has remained linear (Page 1, April 24). But on the other side there can be no denying that the lockdown has inflicted untold misery

on migrant labourers, daily-wage earners, self-employed persons and the micro, small and medium enterprises sector. There is a great deal of doubt whether in a post-lockdown scenario the lot of the vast majority of the population would improve. Much would depend on whether India will be in a position to continue focusing on steps such as social distancing. As WHO has predicted that the pandemic is not going away in a hurry, the Centre and States will have to be on their toes. C.V. ARAVIND,
Bengaluru

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Power play during a pandemic

While the Congress government was fighting to retain its hold and the BJP was trying to wrest power, several medical professionals, police officials and others contracted COVID-19 in Madhya Pradesh. **Sidharth Yadav** reports on a State which did not appoint a Cabinet for nearly a month even as a pandemic raged on

In Madhya Pradesh, March 20 will be remembered for two things. It was the day when Kamal Nath bowed out as Chief Minister, bringing to a close a month-long power tussle in the State. It was also the day when four people tested positive for the novel coronavirus in Jabalpur.

Around noon, a political spectacle, long coming, played out at Nath's residence in Bhopal, atop the Shyama hills, overlooking the Upper Lake. Among the hundreds of journalists who had assembled there for a press meeting was a 62-year-old man, unknowingly carrying the virus. On the dais, in the open-air hall, stood a sullen set of Ministers. The government had been rocked by desertions from within the ranks. At the centre, a chair and table were set, from where Nath would later announce his resignation.

"Please come forward, and closer," Narendra Saluja, media coordinator for the Chief Minister, gestured to journalists. Chairs were pulled with a screech, and arms and knees rubbed against each other as journalists, perspiring in the heat, huddled together to catch sight of the Congressmen on the dais.

"I had no idea I was carrying it," the journalist, who remained asymptomatic through the 10 days of his treatment, said after his recovery. His daughter, 26, a postgraduate student in London, tested positive on March 22, days after her return. Hers was the first case in Bhopal.

Despite being faced with an unprecedented health crisis from March, by when cautious States had already closed down public places, prohibited gatherings, and ramped up health infrastructure and marshalled doctors, Madhya Pradesh was embroiled in political wrangling. The virus was knocking furiously at its gates. By April 12, SARS-CoV-2 had gripped Indore, where 10% of the infected had died, the worst case fatality rate for any Indian city. Worse, it had penetrated the State health unit. By April 24, as many as 110 health officials and their family members were infected in Bhopal. As for the police in Bhopal, 41 personnel and their family members have contracted the illness so far.

The signs of an impending crisis were clear. On March 2, when the Centre issued its fifth travel advisory, the Congress was busy rescuing its MLAs reportedly being held hostage by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at a Mame-sar hotel. On March 10, abandoning the State's preparation for the pandemic, Health Minister Tulsiram Silawat was cooped up at a Bengaluru resort with 21 rebel Congress MLAs, who quit later. Until that day, 63 COVID-19 cases had been reported nationwide. By March 16, the virus had infected 126 people and killed two. It had entered 13 States, including neighbouring Maharashtra and Rajasthan. That was when a vexed BJP, sniffing power, chided the Speaker's decision to adjourn the Vidhan Sabha session, in view of the pandemic's threat, as a ploy to buy time.

A single-man Cabinet

Madhya Pradesh reacted late to the pandemic owing to Shivraj Singh Chouhan's zeal for power, claimed Jitu Patwari, State Congress working president. "Otherwise, the State could have been saved. Around the time we planned to procure additional medical equipment, the Health Minister ran away. He had sold himself to the BJP," he said.

On March 4, Nath held the first secretary-level meeting on the illness. The next day, a helpline was set up. Next, the IIFA awards ceremony, Nath's long-cherished dream, was cancelled. On March 7, schools and colleges were ordered shut. Patwari alleged that the BJP "punctured a moving vehicle".

The day after Chouhan took oath as the Chief Minister on March 23, Prime Minister Narendra Modi imposed a nationwide curfew. Nath alleged Parliament was made to function just to offer a chance to the Speaker to run the Madhya Pradesh Assembly too. "This was so that my government could be toppled," he alleged.

The turmoil not just delayed the State's reaction, but the Centre's too, said Sachin Jain, of the Right to Food campaign. "The lockdown was imposed 10 days late. Airports could not have shut operations as MLAs had to be flown to different cities citing horse-trading," he said.

The day after taking charge, Chouhan looked away from the uptick in the COVID-19 cases to seven, instead preferring to reverse decisions taken by the outgoing regime first. He ordered the closure of the case of an economic offence against Jyotiraditya Scindia, who had crossed over to the BJP, cancelled appointments made to various commissions, and shunted out the Rajgarh Collector.

For nearly a month, Chouhan ran a single-man Cabinet. An opinion piece published by the public relations department even dubbed his role heroic,



"Shivraj Singh Chouhan waving at BJP supporters at the party office in Bhopal on March 20, after Congressman Kamal Nath resigned as the Chief Minister around noon that day." (Below): Congresswoman-turned-BJP leader Imarti Devi, who was the Minister for Women and Child Development in the Kamal Nath government, being greeted by BJP workers upon her arrival in Bhopal from New Delhi on March 21. ■ A.M.FARUQUI



C The State could have been saved. Around the time we planned to procure additional medical equipment, the Health Minister ran away. He had sold himself to the BJP.

JITU PATWARI
State Congress working president

describing him as a "one-man army". It was only on April 21 that five Ministers were appointed. Two of the Ministers, including Silawat, have held the health portfolio in the past. "Along with Chouhan, they did not develop the health infrastructure in the State, for which they owe an explanation now," said Rasheed Kidwai, Visiting Fellow, Observer Research Foundation. In addition, the setting up of a COVID-19 task force, headed by State BJP president V.D. Sharma, has drawn flak for having on its ranks only politicians and their lackeys. "Compare Maharashtra's team, comprising health experts, with ours, composed of only political lackeys," said Kidwai.

An unlikely hotspot

On April 3, at 11 p.m., the Bhopal district administration released a list of new patients after deleting one name from it. The virus had penetrated the Health Department, the institutional bulwark supposedly meant to guard the State against its advance. Two days later, it was declared that an IAS officer, tasked with procuring drugs and equipment for the State, and also the Ayushman Bharat Yojana MD, had tested positive. No one knows where he got the illness. Today, the office of the Directorate of Health Services has turned into Bhopal's biggest, and most unlikely, hotspot.

Cases within the department, to its embarrassment, have refused to ebb. The virus is taking down at least two officials every day. Directors heading different verticals, doctors, peons, personal assistants, clerks and drivers have all been infected. The six-floor office complex, Saptapura Bhawan, was evacuated, sealed for 15 days, and sanitised repeatedly. Officials self-quarantined, as operations were moved online.

The case of the Principal Secretary, Public Health and Family Welfare, who tested positive the next day is the most peculiar. For at least three days, the department's senior-most bureaucrat refused to be admitted to a hospital. Meanwhile, the residential enclave for bureaucrats and Ministers in Bhopal, Char Iml, was cordoned off. She continued releasing media bulletins every evening, and Chouhan hailed her resilience.

Pressure mounted on her after a photograph of four health workers, dressed in personal protective equipment and

tending to her house, went viral on social media. Moreover, she was publicly accused of not self-isolating, despite her son's return from the U.S. The Madhya Pradesh Human Rights Commission stepped in, seeking a response from the government over officials sidestepping treatment protocol. In the end, she relented and moved to a private hospital along with other infected officials. Not a dedicated 'COVID-19' facility until then, the hospital was immediately designated as one.

Meanwhile, other infected health workers showed reluctance to be treated at the AIIMS, Bhopal, with many alleging inadequate facilities. Another private facility was already treating their co-workers, and they were eager to shift there. "Well, they were infected together and wanted to recover from it together," said Faiz Ahmed Kidwai, Health Commissioner.

Within the disease incubation period, an unusual bustle had taken over the Directorate March-end. Files changed numerous hands, back-to-back meetings were held, and officials moiled in the emergency mode against the pandemic. The National Health Mission staff also moved to the building to give a leg-up to mitigation efforts, but only to cram the space further.

Making matters worse, the community medicine department of the government-run Gandhi Medical College, which guides the State government in tackling the outbreak, went into quarantine on April 10, after a junior resident in the department tested positive. The team included a member of the COVID-19 technical advisory panel to the government. As of April 24, six staffers of the AIIMS, including doctors, had been infected too.

The Principal Secretary, the Ayushman Bharat Yojana MD, and an Additional Director are the primary nodes of the spread within the department. The Deputy Secretary of the Medical Education Department and an Officer on Special Duty with the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme, both IAS officers, have been infected too.

COVID-19 affects cops too

The day the Health Department registered its first case, the police found four of its personnel infected too. "Officials from the two departments were in con-

tact at the workplace or casually," said Rahul Rajak, a researcher who is mapping the outbreak in Bhopal.

Cases from the two departments converge mainly in TT Nagar, where a police housing society and a battalion are located, and several doctors reside. Health workers from different areas infected at least three policemen residing there while they were on duty. But in one case, a doctor and a policeman, both residing in TT Nagar, had mutual contact.

These policemen unwittingly carried the virus to their workplace, to the Aishbagh and Jahangirabad police stations. Batons, wireless sets, arms and log-books changed hands with co-workers at the end of shifts. It was common for cops to squeeze into a patrol vehicle or a riot-control bus, awaiting orders. Infected officials unintentionally brought the virus upon family members – wives and mothers are infected mostly – in 19 different areas across the city. Stepping out for casual meetings or buying groceries, they in turn became potential carriers. To break this chain, the entire city police, 2,100 personnel, have checked into hotels.

Decoding the purpose of a meeting is important, said Rajak. "It reveals a patient's physical proximity and the level of interaction with primary contacts, crucial for infection." Swift action is the key to trump the virus, so once the infection is confirmed, patients get a call from a centre asking for who they met, and how.

More than half the infected in Jahangirabad, another hotspot with 55 cases, are primary contacts such as family members. Bhopal stared at the grim prospect of the densely populated area becoming like Indore's congested hotspots. The Bhopal administration swung into action and took 1,000 samples for testing, to pre-empt an outbreak.

There is no single source for the infection in Bhopal. Several isolated cases have sprung up in 23 hotspots, having at least three cases each. All patients have been categorised along four verticals – the police, the health department, Tablighi Jamaat members, and others. Contrary to Chouhan's claim, experts are yet to come across a strong link of the Jamaat members who have tested positive and other cases, either in Bho-

C Cases are surging rapidly and no one seems in control. The appointment of a Health Minister, at last, is a good step.

Journalist who tested positive for the virus

pal, where 23 members are infected, or in Indore.

From one tragedy to another

In an eerily familiar pattern now, eight of the nine who succumbed to the illness in Bhopal were survivors of the gas tragedy in 1984, which compromised their immunity severely. Two of them died on a hospital bed. After developing symptoms, the rest carried the virus unaware, hopping from hospital to hospital, scrambling to negotiate the paralysed healthcare system and a crippled referral system. Some landed outside shut hospitals, others were denied admission by hospitals fearing infection. Pushed to the brink, the patients could manage to reach a COVID-19 hospital only too late.

In one case, a man, gasping for breath, was taken to a government-run hospital, where no one provided him with oxygen support. Worried seeing his condition worsen, the sons lifted him out of an ambulance, but he died on the way inside within seconds. Another was denied ambulance service and admission by two private hospitals.

The virus attacked six of them so viciously, and swiftly, that they could not even wait for their test results to come in. Illnesses such as asthma, tuberculosis or cancer, caused by the methyl isocyanate leak from a pesticide plant in 1984, hastened the process. From 1998 to 2016, 50.4% of the survivors suffered from cardiovascular problems, 59.6% from pulmonary problems and 15.6% from diabetes, according to the Bhopal Memorial Hospital and Research Centre (BMHRC).

Five of the deaths occurred when the ICMR-run BMHRC, the only super specialty facility for the survivors, remained out of bounds for them for 23 days. On March 23, tens of admitted patients were arbitrarily discharged as the facility was converted into a COVID-19 facility. Three died later of non-COVID-19 diseases. The government, facing flak, has restored the facility to treat only the survivors.

Not all who died were publicly declared the gas tragedy's survivors by the Bhopal district authorities. Rachna Dhingra, of the Bhopal Group for Information and Action, said the ICMR-run National Institute for Research in Environmental Health, Bhopal, tasked with intervening for the survivors' health, had not made any effort so far to identify, screen or test the gas tragedy survivors who also had chronic illnesses. "The institute should be pulled up for dereliction of duty for the deaths," she said.

Referring to instances of patients being denied treatment in non-COVID-19 hospitals, Prabhakar Tiwari, Bhopal Chief Medical and Health Officer, said, "No hospital can deny admission to patients. Screening has been authorised at the six State-run hospitals too." Thanks

C Along with Shivraj Chouhan, they (Tulsiram Silawat and Narottam Mishra) did not develop the health infrastructure in the State, for which they owe an explanation now.

RASHED KIDWAI
Visiting Fellow Observer Research Foundation

to the intervention by the Madhya Pradesh High Court, all patients of the BMHRC will be screened for COVID-19 now.

Outbreak in Indore

The largest and most populous city of Madhya Pradesh, Indore, had a close shave with the virus in January. Two Indian students had returned from China's Wuhan, jostling with the pandemic then, but tested negative. Three months later today, a terrifying spectacle is playing out. Numbers have surged to four digits, deaths are piling, yet authorities are clueless about the outbreak's source.

By April 12, deaths in Indore had shot to 32. Salil Sakalle, Professor, Community Medicine Department at the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Medical College (MGMMC), believes this could be explained by the fact that 55.3% of the 47 dead by April 17 having had illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, morbid obesity and chronic renal failure. These illnesses, combined with the virus to cause their deaths quickly. In addition, he said, 74% of the dead were above 50, with most reporting late to hospital. "They already suffered from respiratory distress by the time they first contacted the health system. And some carried a higher viral load," he said. In fact, nearly 30% of the deceased suffered from such acute distress, they didn't survive to see their COVID-19 test results.

Ujjain also sends its patients to Indore for treatment. As many as 10.7% of its patients have died of the illness until April 24. So, health experts are wondering whether the strain is of a more virulent type. "Most mortalities in the State have occurred in this area, and we are trying to find out the cause," said Jyoti Bindal, the college's Dean. Indore has recorded 55 of the 92 deaths in the State, and neighbouring districts Ujjain, Khargone and Dewas with it make up 85% of all the deaths. The college will send samples to the National Institute of Virology for automated gene sequencing virus culture, to ascertain the strain's nature.

As recent cases were mostly primary contacts of the infected, already in quarantine, it was helping to stop the spread to newer areas, said Akash Tripathi, Indore Commissioner.

The outbreak in Indore, which detected its first case on March 22, had occurred in densely populated adjoining clusters, with no single source. In most cases, the spread in newer areas had separate carriers. By April 14, cases had grown by almost four times in 10 days to 427. As of April 24, the number had soared to 1,029, making up around 66% of the State's tally.

Faced with spiralling cases and deaths, 12 doctors and seven nurses getting infected until April 22 and health workers being roughed up and chased away on two occasions while conducting a survey, Indore authorities have started regulating the information flow.

First, the MGMMC was divested of its daily task of releasing a three-page comprehensive media bulletin. By contrast, district authorities have been issuing a single-page bulletin. Second, an Additional Director in the State Public Relations Department, Mangla Prasad Mishra, has been deputed by the State government to "resolve the crisis within Indore's electronic media, especially pertaining to official figures," as he put it.

On April 18, the State bulletin inexplicably removed 17 cases in six districts over the previous day, to bring down the tally. On April 16, the government claimed to have tested 3,896 samples, a dubious 41% jump from the previous day. This further dented the credibility of official figures, as the spike was incongruous with individual testing data from centres and much higher than testing patterns nationwide.

In Bhopal, another journalist who took part in Mr. Nath's meeting tested positive later. "Cases are surging rapidly and no one seems in control. The appointment of a Health Minister, at last, is a good step," said the first journalist who tested positive for the virus.

On April 22, Narottam Mishra was appointed to helm the Health Department, rudderless for 40 days. But the political drama, and backroom manoeuvring, is far from over. Though the virus is here to stay and gnaws at a crumbling health system, 24 seats in the State Assembly will be up for grabs within five months. "No matter how important an event, human life must come first," said the journalist.



FROM PAGE ONE

India records largest single-day spike

Dr. Paul added that India with its surveillance system ensured that the government's effort to control the disease became a Jan Andolan.

Sujit Kumar Singh, director, National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) giving his presentation on how surveillance is being used to gather epidemiological intelligence and take required measures accordingly to contain the COVID situation said that currently in India actively monitoring 94,000 people.

"Surveillance network has been set up at district level as well, so that household survey, quarantine and isolation are done as part of cluster containment plan. It is because of the combined efforts that the early infection rates were reduced," he said.

"During the initial period of lockdown, doubling time of cases decreased since people infected already were being detected; later it improved as lockdown put a brake on the spread of the infection. Our seven day doubling time increased from 4.2 in April 6 has gone up to 8.6 days on April 20. We had started our surveillance mechanism even before the first COVID-19 case was reported in India. This

has played an important role in helping us contain the spread of the infection," Mr. Singh said.

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Friday interacted with all the State Health Minister and Health Secretaries through a video conference to review the preparedness and actions taken for management of COVID-19.

He urged the States to focus on surveillance, house-to-house active case finding, early identification of cases and proper clinical management to ensure that the patients get timely treatment and mortality is reduced," Mr. Agarwal said.

Union Health Ministry has on Friday also written to States/UTs to ensure that all the facilities under National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP) remain fully functional in public interest and ensure that the diagnosis and treatment of TB patients goes without any interruption notwithstanding the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

The Ministry has added that even if the TB patient is unable to approach the health facility, arrangements should be made by the facility to deliver drugs at the doorstep of the patient wherever possible.

India must be self-reliant, says Prime Minister Modi

The Swamitva programme, he said, would help rural India leverage property for institutional credit and other benefits.

The Prime Minister lauded panchayats and villages across India for implementing lockdown rules and social distancing norms. It showed how "rural India has channelled our traditional values to combat the pandemic in a way that astounds those with fancy degrees from abroad."

Total lockdown in 5 Tamil Nadu cities

A senior official told *The Hindu*: "The data from the health bulletin for the past three days showed there were more cases in urban centres, especially Chennai. It was felt more people were out on the streets for various reasons. Unless there is a strict enforcement of restrictions, the lockdown will not yield fruitful results."

"Though the spread of the novel coronavirus has come under control in rural areas, there are chances of more spread in the urban pockets, especially in the areas where people gather in large numbers. Hence, there is an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases in such Corporations as Chennai, Coimbatore and Madurai," said a government order issued later in the day.

At a discussion on Friday, medical and public health

experts opined that the spread of COVID-19 could be brought under control only if the lockdown was further intensified in urban areas.

"The movement of the public would be restricted in other areas of the Corporations completely. Severe action would also be initiated against those who violate the lockdown conditions, besides the seizure of vehicles," the order stated.

"Wholesale vegetable markets such as the one in Koyambedu would function after complying with appropriate rules. Likewise, the sale of vegetables and fruits would be allowed only on mobile carts. There is no permission for other shops to operate during these days," Mr. Palaniswami said.

He said the stringent restrictions would be imposed in containment zones and disinfectants would be sprayed daily.

UP. to bring back migrant workers in phases

After the U.P. government recently sent 300 buses to bring back its students stranded in Kota, Rajasthan, Opposition leaders, including Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, had stressed that something similar should be done for labourers and workers stuck in other States.

More than 8,000 students were brought back to the State, as per government estimates.

Ayodhya became the 57th district in the State to record a positive case; a 25-year-old pregnant woman of Poora-

kandar area tested positive at a private lab.

District Magistrate Anuj Jha said the staff and doctors of the hospital where she was being treated – she visited it first on April 19 before getting tested on April 22 – along with her relatives were put under quarantine. "The corona positive lady is having no symptoms of the disease, she has no problems at the moment," Mr. Jha said. The village she was from had been sealed as per protocol and medical staff were going door to door for contact tracing, he said.

No plan to ease fiscal deficit targets

States should trigger their own escape clauses, says Chairman of 15th Finance Commission N.K. Singh

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Despite the strain on government finances due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is no credible proposal to amend the legislation meant to control the fiscal deficit, Chairman of the 15th Finance Commission N.K. Singh said.

Speaking to presspersons after a two-day meeting of the Commission's Economic Advisory Council, Mr. Singh said the government was currently looking to see how to ameliorate economic hardship while staying within the broad framework of the existing law.

While presenting the Union Budget in February, the Finance Minister had in-

C It is important to ensure that the State governments get access to adequate funds to undertake their fight against the pandemic

MEMBERS OF ECONOMIC ADVISORY COUNCIL

voked the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act's escape clause to relax the fiscal deficit target for 2020-21 by 0.5% percentage points to 3.5% of the GDP. If the government wishes to increase spending further in light of the current crisis, as many economists have recommended, it may need to amend the Act.

The State governments have been demanding that

clauses, he said. He also cautioned that the States need to weigh the cost of borrowing from the market, and whether there would be appetite for their bonds.

According to an official statement, Economic Advisory Council members felt that options need to be considered for financing the additional deficit. It is important to ensure that the State governments get access to adequate funds to undertake their fight against the pandemic, they said, adding that different States may come out of the pandemic's impact in different stages.

Council members all felt that earlier projections of real GDP growth will need to

be revised downwards considerably, though Dr. Singh declined to quantify the drop until fourth quarter macroeconomic data becomes available. Noting that the lockdown's impact on public finances will be significant, with a large shortfall in tax and other revenues, the Council recommended a nuanced fiscal response, with a focus not just on the size but the design of any stimulus package.

A support mechanism for cash-starved small enterprises needs to be a top priority, along with partial loan guarantees and other measures to protect non-banking financial companies, the Council said.

BJP pushed M.P. into crisis, says CPI(M)

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

With a spike in positive cases in Madhya Pradesh, CPI (M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury said the BJP should be held accountable for pushing the State into a health crisis.

"Responsibility for these shocking numbers in the entire Madhya Pradesh falls solely on the BJP whose top leadership was singularly focused on toppling an Opposition government, instead of being concerned about the grave health crisis in the State," he tweeted, adding that their lust for power had jeopardised States' efforts to contain COVID-19.

Unions hit out at govt. for freezing DA and DR

AIBEA says the decision is arbitrary

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Government activities and services meant to combat the spread of the pandemic COVID-19..." it said.

The CITU said the government did not consult unions and federations of its employees before taking the decision.

The All India Bank Employees Association (AIBEA) said the decision was "highly arbitrary and unfair".

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The All India Bank Employees Association (AIBEA) said the decision was "highly arbitrary and unfair".

"The very basis of payment of DA and DR is to compensate the employees and the pensioners for the increase in the cost of living... After the cost of living has gone up, it is unfair to deny the compensation to the employees," it said in a statement.

'DA, DR cut inhuman, insensitive'

Govt. constantly hitting at the income of its employees and middle class: Congress

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday accused the Central government of "hurting" its employees and pensioners by freezing their Dearness Allowance (DA) and Dearness Relief (DR) instead of cutting down on "wasteful expenditure" during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Ministry has added that even if the TB patient is unable to approach the health facility, arrangements should be made by the facility to deliver drugs at the doorstep of the patient wherever possible.

Former party chief Rahul Gandhi took to Twitter to term the government move "insensitive and inhuman".

In a tweet in Hindi, he said that instead of suspending the bullet train project and the Central Vista beautification project, costing lakhs of crores [of rupees], the government had taken an insensitive and inhuman deci-

ful expenditure, the government has been constantly hitting at the income of its employees and the middle class people," he said.

At what cost?

Mr. Surjewala said that the decision to cut the DA allowance until June 2021 would give the government only ₹38,000 crore at the cost of its employees, including armed forces personnel and pensioners.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi has deducted ₹11,000 crore of the 15 lakh serving armed forces personnel and nearly 26 lakh military pensioners. Is it not an indicator of the entire private sector of the country to follow suit and cut wages and allowances of their employees? Is it not an indication to the State governments?" Mr. Surjewala said.

"Modiji, on the one side you are telling the State go-

sion to cut the DA of its employees, pensioners and jawans, who are serving the public by fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

At an online press conference, Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala echoed his leader. "Instead of curbing its waste-

ful expenditure, the government has been constantly hitting at the income of its employees and the middle class people," he said.

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vernments, as also the private sector, not to cut wages and salaries. On the other side, you yourself are cutting the DA and DR worth ₹38,000 crore of 113 lakh Central employees and pensioners. Is it not an indicator of the entire private sector of the country to follow suit and cut wages and allowances of their employees? Is it not an indication to the State governments?" Mr. Surjewala said.

In the past one month, the government had slashed the interest rates of small savings instruments, savings bank accounts and fixed deposits of public sector banks, hurting the common people who depend on the incomes from their savings, he said.

wami, represented by senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, justified the "extremely urgent circumstances" as several FIRs were registered against him by Congress party members in States ruled by the party or their political allies. Mr. Rohatgi argued that the FIRs were filed by Congress members in retaliation to his TV shows on Republic TV on April 16 and R. Bharat on April 21.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, for the Maharashtra government, countered that comments igniting communal violence cannot be protected as free speech. He said nothing prevented Congress members from filing complaints. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is appearing in defamation cases filed by BJP members in several States.

FIRs could be filed against anyone. The police should be given a free hand to investigate.

In the hearing, Mr. Goswami

opined that the spread of COVID-19 could be brought under control only if the lockdown was further intensified in urban areas.

The Bench stayed further action on other FIRs registered against him in States like Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Punjab, Telangana and Jammu and Kashmir.

Mr. Goswami had moved the Supreme Court late on Thursday night. It had waited in the next couple of hours listed the plea for quashing the FIRs before Justice Chandrachud's Bench.

In the hearing, Mr. Goswami

Arnab granted 3-week protection from police

SC allows case to be shifted to Mumbai

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

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Resume child, maternal care in Rajasthan'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

Health activists in Rajasthan on Friday called for the resumption of immunisation services for children and antenatal care for pregnant women, which had come to a standstill last month following the enforcement of lockdown.

The Jan Swasthya Abhiyan, which acts as the State chapter of the People's Health Movement, said the suspension of these services would lead to an abnormal rise in maternal and child health-related morbidities and mortalities.

Though the State had claimed that the services were being provided at health facilities, very few people had availed them

during March and April.

their families, and to be among their own language-speaking people is an overpowering desire that cannot be suppressed for too long in the name of a lockdown.'

The overwhelming mood and desire among migrant persons (and their families) is that, after May 3, they should be allowed to go back to their home states/villages. The desire to go back to their home states, to join

their families, and to be among their own language-speaking people is an overpowering desire that cannot be suppressed for too long in the name of a lockdown.'

The resolution on Thurs-

day, the Congress Working Committee (CWC) – the par-

ity's highest decision-making body – urged the government to arrange for the return of the migrant workers to their hometowns.

"The CWC draws the attention of the Central Government to the necessity of framing a policy under which migrant workers who wish to return to their home states/villages (1) may be allowed to travel under strict conditions of health safety,

(2) be provided with adequate money and food in the interim; (3) be allowed to return to work post the lockdown (4) compensation for the families of those migrant workers who have lost their lives in this period of crisis," the resolution said.

Police sources said the migrants were travelling in a car along with the abducted policeman when they were stopped near a checkpoint by the Army and the police at Kharpora, Arwani in Bijbehara in Anantnag district, leading to a shootout.

The policeman was kidnapped when he was heading home in Kulgam on Friday. It was second such attempt in the past two days in Kulgam. Earlier, militants abducted a policeman on Thursday evening but the police managed to rescue him. On Sunday, one policeman was killed in his house in Anantnag.

The police on Friday said they allowed three families which identified slain militants killed in an encounter on Wednesday to participate in their burial in Sonamarg two days ago. "Three out of the four slain militants were identified by their families. These families participated in the burial in the presence of a magistrate," Mr. Kumar said.

The policeman was kid-

napped when he was head-

ing home in Kulgam on Fri-

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attempt in the past two days

in Kulgam. Earlier, militan-

tants abducted a police-

man on Thursday evening



Farmers urged not to burn wheat straw

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, farmers' bodies in Punjab have come forward to ensure wheat straw is not burned on the fields this harvesting season.

Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) general secretary Jagmohan Singh said the bodies decided to make an appeal to all farmers as health experts suggested that smoke contributed to respiratory diseases, aggravated by the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19. "The farmers will have to incur some expenses, but the decision has been taken in the larger interest of society," he said.

But Mr. Jagmohan Singh demanded that the State allow paddy transplantation and not set any date for the process to be completed. "Because of labour shortage, more time is required to complete sowing."

Ajmer Singh, president of the BKU (Lakhawal), said his organisation would also urge farmers not to burn wheat straw on their fields. "We will spread awareness in villages."

Darshan Pal of the Krantikari Kisan Union also urged farmers to break with the practice.

The BKU (Krantikari) supported the call, its president Surjit Singh said, but it wanted the State to pay farmers a bonus of ₹200 per quintal of wheat.

Wildlife Board nod for mining in Assam elephant reserve

Environmental activist says the Environment Ministry has overturned its own adverse remark on 'rampant violation of local forest laws'

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

Amid the countrywide lockdown, the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) has recommended coal mining in a part of an elephant reserve in Assam.

The NBWL's Standing Committee had on April 7 discussed a proposal for use of 98.59 hectares of land from the Saleki proposed reserve forest land for a coal mining project by North-Eastern Coal Field (NECF), a unit of Coal India Limited.

The NBWL is under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

Saleki is a part of the Dehing Patkai Elephant Reserve that includes the Dehing Patkai Wildlife Sanctuary covering 111.19 sq km of rainforest and several reserve forests in Sivasagar, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts.

Panel set up

The NBWL had in July 2019 formed a committee comprising its member R. Sukumar, Assam's Chief Wildlife Warden, and a representa-

tive of the local wildlife division for assessing the mining area.

In the April 7 meeting, Mr. Sukumar stated that 57.20 ha of hilly forestland had already been broken up by the user agency (NECF) and the remaining 41.39 ha was unbroken.

He recommended a "cautious approach" for preserving the "basic integrity of this forested hill slope" that is a part of the elephant reserve in Assam adjoining Arunachal Pradesh's Deomali Elephant Reserve with

Assam Forest Department has completely failed in protecting the biodiversity

ROHIT CHOWDHURY
Activist

a sizeable population of elephants".

After detailed discussions, the Standing Committee "recommended for approval" the proposal for mining in the broken-up area after the user agency submits a rectified site-specific mine reclamation plan in

consultation with the Assam Forest Department.

"For the unbroken area, the matter will be considered after the user agency submits a feasibility report for underground mining, and also submits compliance report regarding fulfilment of all other conditions" as recommended in a meeting on January 21, the NBWL committee said.

Congress MP Pradyut Borodoloi asked, "What can you expect from a government that has defanged all environment and wildlife regula-

tory bodies? The recommendation reflects the disdain this government has for green assets, particularly a biodiversity hotspot to benefit the mining lobby."

Green activist Rohit Choudhury said the MoEFCC overturned its own adverse remark on "rampant violation of local forest laws" in November 2019 to fast-track coal mining in the Saleki forestland.

The remark followed the local wildlife division's report pointing to illegal coal mining in the Tikak open

cast pit mining in Saleki. The division also said 4,800 tonnes of coal from "unauthorised breaking up" of 16 ha of the area had been seized. "The Assam Forest Department has completely failed in protecting the biodiversity of the State and has allowed all illegal mining of coal, stone, sand, etc., violating all rules and regulations. It is obvious that there is a corrupt nexus in operation and the State Forest Minister has become a mute spectator," Mr. Choudhury said.

Joy amid lockdown



Fresh hope: Sushila, an elephant used for safaris, gave birth to a male calf at the Tadoba Andhari tiger reserve in Maharashtra on Thursday. Elephant safaris have been closed due to the lockdown in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. ■ S. SUDERSHAN

IIT-D's coronavirus detection assay gets ICMR approval

Team is looking at largescale deployment of the kit

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

IIT Delhi said it has got the approval from the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) for a probe-free coronavirus detection assay developed by it.

The institute, in a statement on Thursday, said the assay had been validated at ICMR with a sensitivity and specificity of 100%, making IIT-D the first academic institute to have obtained ICMR approval for a real-time polymerase chain reaction (PCR)-based diagnostic assay. The assay was developed by researchers at IIT Delhi's Kusuma School of Biological Sciences (KSBS).

"Using comparative sequence analyses, the IIT Delhi team identified unique regions (short stretches of RNA sequences) in the COVID-19/SARS COV-2 genome. These regions are not present in other human coronaviruses,



Clean code: The team has identified unique regions (stretches of RNA sequences) in the SARS COV-2 genome. ■ IIT-DELHI

providing an opportunity to specifically detect COVID-19," the statement read.

It added that the method used primers targeting unique regions of COVID-19 that were designed and tested using real-time PCR.

"These primers specifically bind to regions conserved in over 400 fully sequenced COVID-19 genomes. This highly sensitive assay was developed by extensive optimisation using synthetic

DNA constructs followed by in-vitro generated RNA fragments," it further read.

The research team said the assay would be useful for specific and affordable high throughput testing. "This assay can be easily scaled up as it does not require fluorescent probes. The team is targeting large-scale deployment of the kit at affordable prices with suitable industrial partners as soon as possible," the team said.

+ On birthday, Goa CM returns to first job as Ayurveda doctor

Sawant shows support to the medical team fighting COVID

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, who turned 47 on Friday, returned to being a doctor by examining patients at a district hospital, where he was once employed.

A Bachelor of Ayurveda Medicine and Surgery (BAMS), Dr. Sawant spent a few hours volunteering with a team of doctors at the district Asilo hospital in north Goa's Mapusa.

Dr. Sawant said that he had volunteered to assist the government hospital's outpatient department (OPD), to show support to the medical team fighting from the



Pramod Sawant

front lines in the battle against COVID-19.

"Serving the people has always been my passion and source of immense satisfaction. On my birthday today, I volunteered to join the team of doctors at OPD of the District hospital, Mapusa," Dr.

'Centre hasn't done enough for the poor'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Indian government has to be more aggressive about spending money to support the poor during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown, according to Nobel Prize-winning economist Abhijit Banerjee. In fact, India should not be afraid to print money to fund an expansion of welfare benefits, he told the BBC.

The Chief Minister quit his government job as a doctor of alternative medicine to join politics more than a decade ago.

During his visit, Dr. Sawant condemned the attack on medical staff and front line personnel battling COVID-19 in some parts of the country.

Officials said that the Chief Minister spent half a day in the hospital, took a round and examined about 10 patients. "I am examining patients at this hospital for the first time since 2008, when I was employed here," Dr. Sawant said.

The Chief Minister quit his government job as a doctor of alternative medicine to join politics more than a decade ago.

During his visit, Dr. Sawant condemned the attack on medical staff and front line personnel battling COVID-19 in some parts of the country.

"Earlier we would all gather every day to distribute the food, but now, as more [COVID-19] cases get reported, we realise we too are at risk and therefore take turns. We, of course, wear masks and gloves. We put the food in disposable plates and people pick them up," she said.

Among the most active groups helping the needy are Let's Help, which is run by Debayan Datta, and a network of former and current students of Jadavpur University coordinated by Iman Kalyan Lahiri, a professor of International Relations.



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Bengali actor Ushasie Chakraborty has set up a community kitchen



Timely meal: Bengali actor Ushasie Chakraborty serving food to the hungry in Kolkata. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

about 50 people. Then we started cooking for 150 people. Now we provide rations to those who have stoves to cook and prepare food for about 120 people who don't have the means to cook," she said.

"We are a team of eight people, including the lady who cooks. Apart from me, there are six local boys, Swaroop, Sourav, Chiranjeet, Kinjal, Arnab and Rangan – who oversee the cooking and distribute the food," she said.

"When the lockdown began, we were cooking for

includes rice and dal and a vegetable.

Occasionally egg curry joins the menu, and on a couple of occasions there was chicken.

Volunteers donate

Ms. Chakraborty said, "We pool in money to run the kitchen. We receive donations from friends. A few of my friends in the U.S. helped out. The film fraternity is helping too. People like [director] Kamalashwar Mukherjee and [actor-writer] Padmanabha Dasgupta have been helping. [Mr. Mukherjee] arranged for 50 kg each of potato and onion. [Music director] Debojyoti Mishra has also contributed."

"Earlier we would all gather every day to distribute the food, but now, as more [COVID-19] cases get reported, we realise we too are at risk and therefore take turns. We, of course, wear masks and gloves. We put the food in disposable plates and people pick them up," she said.

The food is cooked in a place called Bijaygarh in Jadavpur, and the daily menu



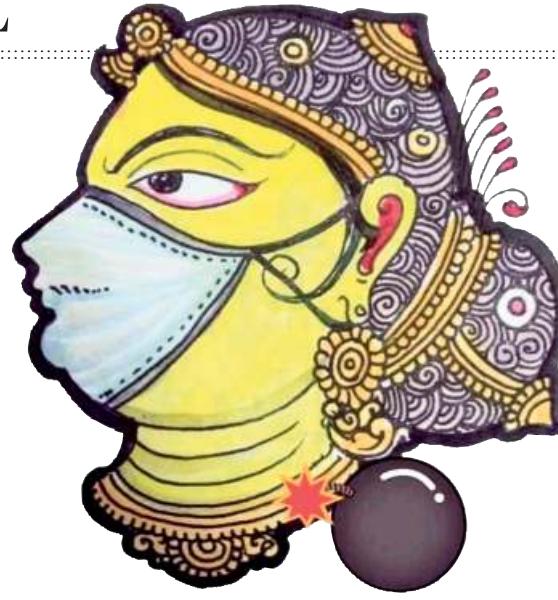
LAILA TYABJI

"The Corona epidemic has broken our back," says a normally cheerful Aarti Patra, part of a group of sabai-grass basket-makers in an Odisha village. Rajkumari Joshi, a crafts-woman from Sadhna, a women's cooperative we work with in Rajasthan, agrees. "All the women here are feeling completely helpless and in need. We do not have work," she says. Other artisans tell Dastkar they wonder what will finish them first – the virus or hunger.

It is a curious time. Not just fear of a possibly mortal disease, but a lockdown of all social and economic activity. For craftspeople, dependent on daily production and sales, life has come to a halt – there are no *melas*, no sales, no raw material, no money to feed their families. We have worked with them for decades, now we share their pain.

"All our orders have been cancelled," Vinay Kumar, a young Rajasthani potter, explains. "Even if we try our best, we will not be able to clear this stock for two years at least. This will cause not only debt, but a decrease in production. Craftspeople will be out of jobs for a long time," he adds.

Will crafts and their makers survive? Those videos, of jobless migrant workers walking homewards, were incredibly moving. Craftspeople, equally affected, remain invisible and therefore ignored – by the Government, by the media, even by those who used to buy their products. Outside the safe-



ty net of regular salaries or social security, they are helpless.

The global economy is predicted to contract 3%. Even as Italian fashion house Armani makes protective overalls, and Louis Vuitton turns out face masks instead of luxury luggage, craftspeople will too need to adapt to changing times. Craft is sadly not an essential; it is the first thing to be struck off consumer wish lists when purchasing power diminishes.

Different crafts and communities need different solutions – disposing of existing stock, planning their re-entry into what will be a very changed market.

Skills have to be targeted to differing markets; some making functional products of everyday use, others creating one-of-a-kind pieces for high-end buyers.

Lessons in resilience

Though many fear the impact of COVID 19 may be the end of craftspeople, still reeling from demonetisation and the unplanned imposition of GST, it is their creativity and resilience that could save them.

I remember what Ajrakh master craftsman Ismail Bhai Khatri said after the 2001 Kutch earthquake, standing in the ruins of his devastated home, "All we want is the means to stand on our feet again, we will rebuild our own lives ourselves."

Sitting at our makeshift work-stations, answering appeals from craftspeople all over India, Dastkar is moved by that same resolute spirit. Women used to making fine embroidery or *bandhani* are turning their hands to mask-making. Urmul Seemant in Bajju made 5,000 masks in the first two weeks, Rangstrut has distributed 26,000.

Craftspeople, not content to sit lament-



ing, realising that art is communication, are using it to create awareness – much needed in rural areas with little access to news or medicare. Bhilwara in Rajasthan had numerous early fatalities. Kalyan Joshi, a local traditional *phad* painter, created a series of colourful posters, inspired by WHO health directives. Bhilwara is now free of infection.

Mohan, a Sanjhi paper cutter from Mathura, followed suit with a piece on 'Krishna in the Time of Coronavirus'. He quips that with schools closed, it is a great time to pass on his family tradition: "Normally my son is busy with school and play. In this lockdown, he has thoroughly enjoyed learning the family skill, and I'm enjoying teaching it to him."

Hirabhai and Laxmiben Chauhan from Gujarat, both over 70, have been appliquéd artisans all their lives. Suddenly sales have come to an end. Undaunted, they are using the lockdown "to think and create new designs for our next exhibition. Moreover, we look forward to the wedding of our grandchildren when this lifts (if we are still alive

and healthy). For that we are preparing new songs". Many crafts communities are reaching back to old folk stories, family songs and rituals for comfort. They see no need to congregate at *mandirs* and mosques. "Worship happens in your heart," says one.

Others are rediscovering long-lost techniques. Like Madhubani craftsman Devendra Jha, who has been using chemical colours for years. Unable to buy paints in the lockdown, he went back to making natural colours at home.

In it together

As Dastkar responds to distress calls from across India, we know our aid is a temporary sop. Craftspeople, the second largest employment sector in India, need sustained investment and assistance. House-bound, it's easy to feel helpless. But the courage and spirit of these artisans keeps us from despair.

Government, crafts organisations and designers need to come together and work closely with the craftspeople, listen to their voices, build on their strengths, think out of the box. Anand Mahindra's response to the plight of banana farmers – getting his factory canteens to substitute banana leaves for plates – is a brilliant example.

To end with master craftsman, Prakash Joshi, "We are artists and the artist shapes the tomorrow with his art, dissipating the negative energy because after a thick dark night there is always a golden morning."

While we celebrate that spirit, we need also to help craftspeople rediscover that golden morning.

Laila Tyabji of Dastkar has been working with artisans all over India for the last 40 years



Art talk (clockwise from above) An artisan embroidering fabric, Kutch Rabari with her embroidery, Sanjhi paper cutout artist Mohan, Kashmiri copper craftsman Aslam, a phad painting by Vijay and Vivek Joshi and Aarti Patra

* SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



burger patties (300g for ₹275).

Most of their products are pre-cooked. The mince was not, of course. We cooked it with spices, mixed it with boiled potatoes, covered with crumbs and air-fried it. The mutton burgers reminded me of those days when we had mince cutlets in restaurants – the ground meat, lightly spiced, would be shaped into thin patties (not the chunky kind that you get in burgers) and made for an excellent main dish. The chicken ham, however, was rather dry and a bit too salty.

With the pork cuts, I am preparing a dish that is a great favourite at home – *pandhi* curry. Months ago, I had ordered the Kachampuli vinegar and the special Coorgi masala that you use in the *pandhi* curry. Watch this space for more about the curry.

Deli Chic was started in 2016 and has been keeping a close eye on quality. Initially, its owner Girish Wadhwa tells me, the meat was sourced from Mumbai, but now most of the processed pork products come from Gurugram. The processed food is then packaged by Deli Chic in a glass chamber. The products were earlier sold in cardboard boxes, but now come in vacuum packed packages. The personnel – including delivery boys – maintain high hygiene, he says.

The site also includes a sweet corner. I am happy with the pork ham. Breakfast tomorrow will be a dream come true.

The writer is a seasoned food critic



Instapick

Carnival 2020: Around this time of the year, celebrities like Rihanna are usually in the Caribbean islands for a string of celebrations. Now, the US Virgin Islands has opted for a virtual carnival, with live streaming of traditional dance and music. On April 30, there is a Zoom party with DJs from the region, and every Saturday at 1.30 am IST, DJ Avalanche will spin dance tracks – for those who are up late anyway, why not join in? Follow @usvfestivals



Talking point

Watches & Wonders: More than 30 premier brands are bringing this show (formerly SIHH) to virtual life from 4.30 pm IST. An important showcase in the watch world, it will have Richemont marques and smaller independent brands. Details at watchesandwonders.com. Meanwhile, Cartier is launching a standalone site today, with new pieces. Clearly, the Covid-19 crisis is accelerating change.

Sometimes, you've just got to have breakfast at dinner, and there must be ham



RAHUL VERMA

I'd been dreaming of an open sandwich piled with all kinds of goodies, for a while. There'd be a layer of iceberg, topped with sliced tomatoes, onion rings, and cheese. Chopped cucumber would go on top of that and then a dash of ketchup. Finally, there'd be a moist piece of ham, dotted with mustard sauce.

Lockdown does this to you. It makes you imagine the unimaginable. But as the short man with a palm inside his coat lapel told us,

nothing is impossible. I am (as I have often confessed) not much of a carnivore. But with all abattoirs shut, I have been getting a desperate urge for something meaty.

I did a frantic search on the Net, and found that something called Deli Chic was delivering pork, meat, and fish across the city even in this period of lockdown (A-21 Nangal Dewat Basement - behind Indian Spinal Injuries Hospital – Vasant Kunj; 011-26132971, 9810002023 for WhatsApp messages; Delhichic.co.in). I called and placed my order. I asked for some pork ham (250g for ₹325) and pork frankfurters (250g for ₹390). Deli Chic added some chicken seekh kababs (250g for ₹165) to the order.

The food arrived, and I had breakfast for dinner that day – frankfurters grilled to a nice shade of brown, ham on toast, and some feta-tossed salad on the side. The frankfurters were huge – one was



Food urges (From top) Oven roasted chicken ham, Keema mince chops

* SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

enough for two – and soft. The ham was nicely moist and somewhat lean. We had the seekh kababs the next day, and thought they were superb. The meat was succulent, yet firm, and had not been coloured or over-spiced.

My friends (all equally antsy in this terrible period) ordered some pork and mutton products, too. For

unknown reasons, one friend asked for chicken bacon. I went back to the website and found that they had something called chicken oven-roasted ham (250g for ₹275). We placed an order for that, along with boneless pork cut (400g for ₹315), chicken mince (500g for ₹200) and, since we had not had mutton in a while, some mutton

Looking for some laughs this weekend? Kanan Gill made his Netflix debut yesterday with *Yours Sincerely, Kanan Gill*. He shares his achievable goals of the past and dissects the relationship between Indians and the art of small talk-big talk. He goes head to head with Bhargav Ramakrishnan on Amazon Prime Video. In *KungFu Bonda*, Ramakrishnan talks about growing older, his observations on adulting, parents, marriage and surprisingly, grill gates, to leave you a little more at peace with your own life's developments.

We have a busy day today on Instagram: at 9 am, 21-time Ironman finisher Deepak Raj will be in conversation with Sunalini Mathew from *The Hindu*, about fitness in what are hopefully the final days of the lockdown. At 6 pm, Nischay Parekh of Parekh & Singh will share his playlist of Indian independent artists to listen to during self-isolation, with music writer Anurag Tagat. And in her Sunday session, columnist Vasudha Rai will be joined by nutritionist Shonali Sabherwal for a chat about gut health. At 5 pm,



Singalong with ARR

Concerts, stand-up and other online events you just can't miss.

The event preview and calendar will resume in a few weeks.



Get a green thumb

Farmer, agriculturist and home gardening expert Prabhakar Rao is conducting a series of Zoom workshops on how to grow fresh, organic food at home, with no access to gardens, soil, commercial fertiliser or seeds. Follow hariyleefarms.org for the schedule. LazyGardener, a retail platform, has a 21-day series, now available on their YouTube channel, which covers topics like growing microgreens and preparing your plants for the hot days ahead. They are now sharing vlogs documenting a day in the life of plant parents. Details: girls4tech.com



STEM for kids

From making a balloon-powered car to building a bridge from spaghetti, Dyson has come up with 44 science and engineering challenges for children to attempt during the lockdown. For kids aged seven and above, each challenge comes with a plan, a list of materials, tips to complete it, and a scientific explanation. On jamesdysonfoundation.co.uk. Mastercard's signature STEM curriculum, Girls4Tech, features cryptography, detection and big data modules, which are now accessible on their website. Details: girls4tech.com



Focus on folk

India's Culture Ministry is all set to showcase the country's traditional arts through YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. Today, the lineup includes string puppetry, marginalised folk practices of West Bengal and Punjab and tribal musical instruments. Artis are also supporting the folk music community with a relief fund through Anahad Foundation. *Let's Folk Together* is a series on their YouTube and Facebook channels, featuring Shankar Mahadevan, Amit Trivedi, Papon, Raghu Dixit, Mame Khan and more. Till April 30.



Clicking in quarantine

If you want to upgrade your photography and post-production skills, sign up for these upcoming workshops with *Chennai Photo Biennale*. Today, CPB co-founder Varun Gupta will conduct a one-day virtual session on photo archive management and digital processing using Adobe Lightroom. From 10 am to 4 pm. A #TeenPhotoAcademy workshop begins on April 28, and will be held every Tuesday and Thursday at 5 pm, till June 11. At ₹5,000 per head. Details and registration on chennaiphotobiennale.com



Double bill

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#LockdownWithWeekend

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Pick of the week

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How the others are coping

The catalogue goes digital: Having shifted select March and April sales from on-ground to online – the iconic Cartier art deco bracelet will go under the hammer between April 24 and 28 – Sotheby's has launched immersive digital catalogues on its website. Featuring video and interactive media formats, they present objects in a more modern setting. Details: [sothebys.com](#)

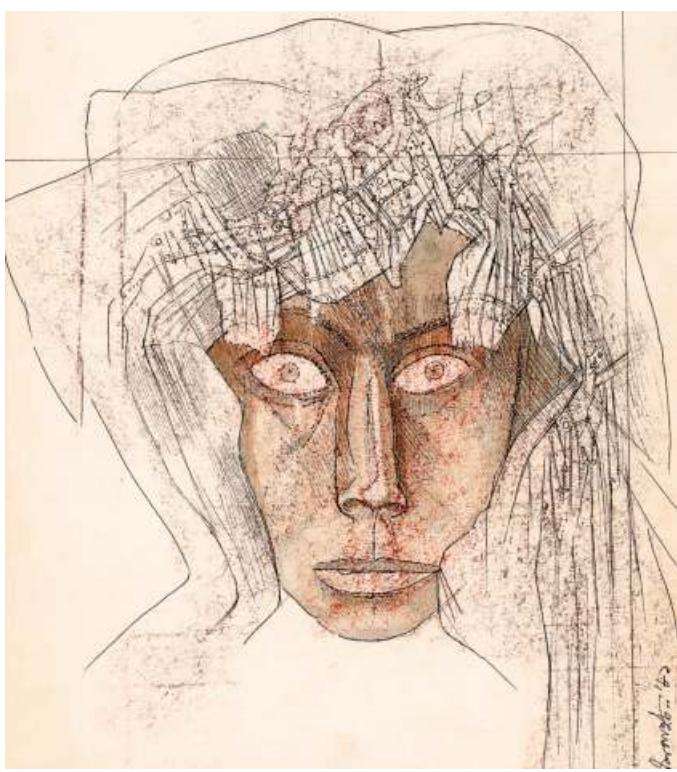
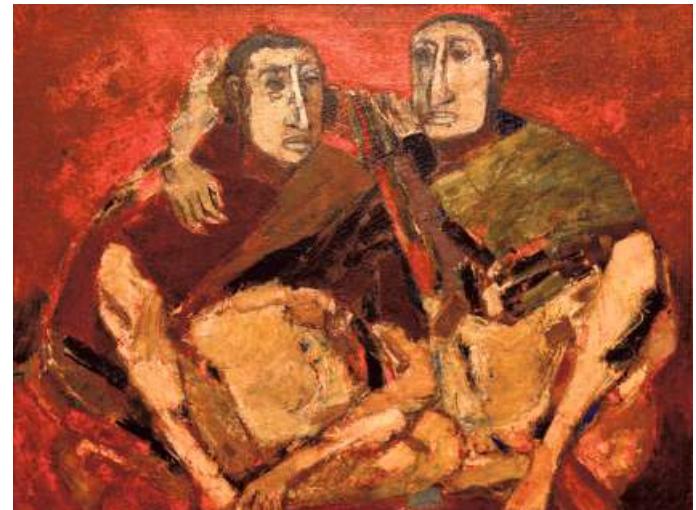
Big masters, small formats: AstaGuru plans to present a lineup of auctions immediately after the lockdown, starting with a modern art sale of smaller format works by Indian masters. Tushar Sethi, CEO of the Mumbai-based online auction house, believes that the current situation is far from making live auctions irrelevant. He adds that auction rooms will fill up as soon as there's a vaccine for COVID-19 because "both live and online auctions have their own charm". Details: [astaguru.com](#)



(Clockwise from far left) Sonal Singh, a painting from Dutch collectors Jane and Kito de Boer's collection, Ganesh Pyne's self portrait, and a Tyeb Mehta art work

Pursuing the digital collector

From Zoominars to a roster of online-only sales, here's how auction houses like Christie's are expanding their digital footprint



KRUTIKA BEHRAWALA

One of Sonal Singh's treasured possessions is a book in which she jots down the tail numbers of every aircraft she has been on. "I've always had an obsession with planes," laughs the managing director of Christie's India, whose job requires her to frequently fly in and out of her base in Mumbai to connect with collectors and build relationships with the art community.

For instance, at the end of Fe-

bruary, she was in Chennai for the Rotary Club of Madras' annual charity art auction (supported by Christie's). A few weeks later, she was set to fly to New York for two modern and contemporary Indian art sales – but the auctions and her trip were put on hold due to COVID-19. "I don't think I will be going back to that pace of life anytime soon," says Singh, adding that now "all our interactions with clients, colleagues and the broader art community are through our phones".

Virtual is real

With much of the world struck by the pandemic, the screen has become the foremost way to experience art – museums and art

After consolidating its London and New York sales into a compact affair in June, and postponing its Spring auction calendar to July, Christie's recently announced 40 online-only sales for April and May. "We've more than tripled the schedule," says Singh, sharing that the themed sales include Andy Warhol's Polaroid prints, furniture from the 18th century, jewellery, watches and handbags. "The luxury departments have also been enhancing their sales calendar, converting a number of live sales to online. And we are exploring the possibility of an online sale for Indian art as well," she says.

Pushing the market

If the recent auction results of Christie's and Sotheby's are anything to go by, collectors haven't lost their appetite for art. Last month, Sotheby's Modern and Contemporary South Asian Art sale in New York totalled \$4.8 million with 91.1% of lots sold. Christie's online auction of rare wines and spirits (March 24 to April 7) brought in \$1.1 million, while its sales in London – like the 'Chieveley House, Berkshire and Five Private Collections' auction – were also well-received, selling 95% by value. "These results indicate that our collectors' passions are very much alive," observes Singh.

To continue engaging with their audiences, Christie's has now enhanced its Private Sales offerings. The online viewing rooms have been upgraded to make them "visually more interesting and help clients have a better insight of the objects on sale", alongside other aids such as "our online consignment tool and enhanced preview capability for catalogued property".

The team is also working on 'Zoominars' (webinars on Zoom) to be offered by specialists, and efforts are "going into all social media opportunities such as the Mini-Programs on WeChat" – Christie's endeavour on the mobile app where its 1 billion users can browse its sales calendar, get real-time results and learn more about the lots through online catalogues, condition reports and editorial stories. "We are looking at the positives and opportunities, as a chance to re-centre our business and accelerate innovation," concludes Singh.



Inside Kundoo's house

In Apple TV+'s new show, *Home*, architect Anupama Kundoo brings her Wall House back into focus, with its adjustable walls and *guna* roof

DIVYA KALA BHAVANI

Now that we are social distancing and self-isolating, we are becoming more spatially aware. How do we get more natural light in? How do we revamp the energy of a space? Cue shows on OTT platforms – from *Grand Designs* to *The Creative Indians* – that can inspire us to make our homes our sanctuary. One of the latest to join this subculture is *Home* on Apple TV+, a deep and personal dive into a dwelling's cultural identity, the historical ethnography of the architect, and the collective impact on architectural design and lifestyle. The story of Auroville's famous Wall House, and its creator Anupama Kundoo, encompass the 'India' episode (Apple approached the architect after seeing her work in Italy, where she created a replica of the house at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2016).

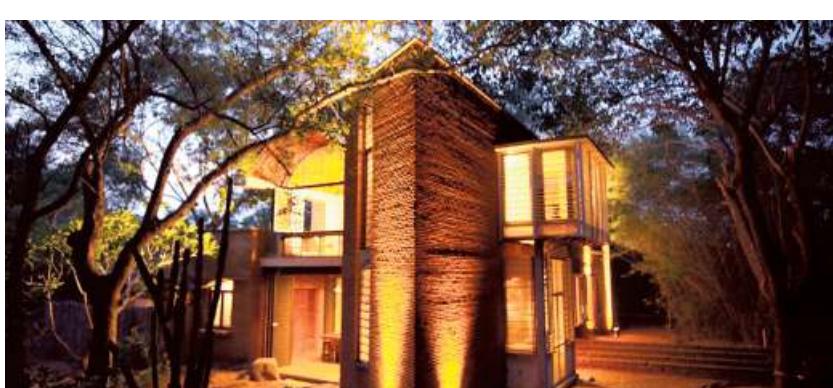
"I am at peace with the lockdown," Kundoo, 53, tells me over the phone from Berlin, "because I did not wait for an outer circumstance to be able to live on the inside. The main resource I have is time and how I spend that is a great inward experience." On the show, her house – a linear yet massive structure of wood and other earthly elements –

is a reflection of her personality: sure of itself and unrelenting in creativity.

Spaces with life

The nine-part docuseries that visits innovative houses around the world begins with Anders Solvarn's Nature House in Sweden. There is also the community space, Listening House, in Chicago, and a 344 sq ft apartment in China that seems limitless. As for Kundoo's house, well, Auroville (where it is located) is a hub of architectural goldmines – buildings such as Satprem Maini's Vikas Settlement and Roger Anger's Matrimandir Temple come to mind. But the foundation of Wall House stands out for its functional appeal as well as striking design. It features brick masonry, an arching roof of *guna* (burnt clay pipes), and long steps to establish spatial parameters. Living up to its name, the spaces inside can be redefined with adjustable walls (she worked with local craftsmen to create ferrocement screens that can be pulled and pivoted to open up the main living spaces).

Reduced energy demands of the 20-year-old house are entirely met by solar photovoltaics for electricity, along with a solar water heater



and pump. But more importantly, Kundoo was mindful about not using steel; all experiments were undertaken to minimise reliance on materials like steel and cement. These materials, she points out, require huge energy and infrastructure to produce and exclude local building skills and participation.

View from within

Until production for *Home* actually unfolded, Kundoo says she did not realise where the project was headed. "Its concept is refreshing because it does not look at a home as an object created for others. In today's culture, I have often seen that people are very concerned with how things appear to others, what kind of statement it makes. The show looks at a home from the inhabitants' points-of-view. I'm really happy about that because, as an architect, I get to see how people understand that the home is an extension of oneself."

The episode also sees international experts in the field examining Wall House. "I would say it is primarily an art object," says Ra-

Homes on screen

Tiny House Nation: The show sees renovation pros John Weisbarth and Zack Giffin travel across the US to showcase ingenious small spaces and their inventive owners. (Netflix)

Lockdown language: The way we use our space is changing. More homes are opening back up to a mud room, a space to leave your outerwear and shoes before proceeding inside. Dedicated home offices as well as DIY standing desks are becoming a thing.

Ask the pros: The home-conscious Insta-community has been getting in touch with interior designers for advice. In turn, designers and companies such as ArchitectureLive.in, Peter Ippolito, Clodagh and Royce Epstein are enjoying new demographics through Instagram Live.

Self-sufficiency: A greener attitude to power and water consumption are on citizens' minds, so much so that #MyKitchenGarden and #GreenLife are trending on social media.

hul Mehrotra, Founder Principal of architecture firm RMA Architects of Mumbai + Boston, adding, "The house has many contradictions inherent in it and these come from [Kundoo's] impulse to experiment. It is experimentation with craft." Sean Anderson, curator, Museum of Modern Art, brings the builders into focus. "[Kundoo] recognises that building with materials is not just about the thing itself but the people. It is a house that is made by many hands and their fingerprints remain," he comments.

As for Kundoo, ask her what the West can learn from India in terms of architecture and she responds: "Since we are not a mainstream industrialised nation, we still engage directly with the way we make things. The West can learn a lot about personal engagement... actually, it is already happening given we are all staying at home now and reflecting. It is not just how your home looks but also your food culture, your morning routine... one now has the chance to reconfigure all of that."

THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13347

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- THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13347
1 Across
1 Petrol jelly used in flame-throwers (6)
2 Supernatural (6)
22 Sexually attractive? (5)
23 Vanquish (6)
3 Down
1 Add on at the end (6)
4 Go faster, horse! (3,2)
7 Give birth to piglets (6)
8 Stylish (6)
9 Disgusting waste matter (4)
10 Firmly tethered (8)
12 What holds the main microchips in a computer (11)
17 Superior skill (8)
18 Heavy dull sound (4)
20 Firmly tethered (8)
21 Supernatural (6)
22 Sexually attractive? (5)
23 Vanquish (6)
4 Diagram showing the relationship between variable quantities (5)

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

- 5 Sovereign (7)
6 Ceremonial procession (6)
11 Place for keeping bits and bobs (9)
13 Sea creature's tentacles served as food (7)
14 'The', definitely (7)
15 Pair of similar things (7)
16 Hard dark-brown wood used furniture (6)
18 With a smooth, gleaming surface (5)

The solution will appear on April 30, 2020.

Solution No. 13346

C	U	S	T	A	R	D	P	O	W	D	E
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Playing with walls (Clockwise from top left) Anupama Kundoo, the Wall House in Auroville, and its adaptable interiors • APPLE

INTERVIEW | RANIL WICKREMESINGHE

'South Asia needs a humanitarian response to the COVID-19 pandemic'

The former Sri Lankan Prime Minister says India has to play a leading role in formulating a SAARC-led regional response to the crisis

MEERA SRINIVASAN

As the world combats the deadly coronavirus pandemic, Sri Lanka's former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe underscores in an interview the need for a collective response in South Asia, focussing on both, health and economic revival.

Edited excerpts:

Well before the COVID-19 crisis hit us, you have been an advocate of greater regional cooperation. How can it help at such a time?

You see, this is a good time for a regional cooperation programme. This is a global pandemic without a global leadership. Maybe the region can't provide leadership for all. But the first virtual meeting of SAARC leaders was good, looking at the background and the problems that are there. We must treat this as a humanitarian issue and come up with a regional response. Maybe one or two countries, for instance, India and one other, could put up a proposal, which then can be looked at by others, and possibly amended. Let us all work together. We [Sri Lanka], for instance have a good public health system. So has

Kerala. We can work together on that.

Countries in the region have each pledged money towards the recently set-up SAARC COVID-19 Emergency Fund. But each country is administering its funds based on requests made bilaterally, rather than through a common pool...

There has to be a common centre. The SAARC Secretariat and someone who is in-charge. The Secretariat itself has limited staff, so you must have someone in-charge of it. I think it may be better if they are placed somewhere more centrally, working with relevant medical authorities.

What do you mean by centrally located?

I don't know if it can be han-

dled from Kathmandu alone. If you can, well and good. But you may need another city. It can be Bengaluru, Colombo, any city.

But you see a greater role for the Secretariat too?

Yes, the Secretariat works with the one in-charge. One person overall, who has everyone's confidence, should deal with it. In regard to the Secretariat, the advantage is that the ambassadors accredited to SAARC are there. That is the plus point of Kathmandu.

We are seeing some tensions in the SAARC COVID-19 response, with Pakistan saying the SAARC Secretariat should handle the funds.

You need someone in-

charge there. I'm not saying it is not the Secretariat. But India has a leading role. Pakistan can't match India's funding. Let Pakistan make a proposal and one another country should get together. Someone should make a pro-



This is a global pandemic without a global leadership

posal and give it to the Secretary General who will talk with the others, and then we finalise it.

It is not India-led, the effort is SAARC-led, but let India give the input. Similarly, let Pakistan, Bangladesh give their inputs. Let the Secretariat put it together. We have to look at issues pertaining not only to health, but also to our economies.

The World Bank's Chief Economist for South Asia recently told *The Hindu* that managing migrant returns, service sector revenue losses and ensuring food security for the poorest will emerge key priorities for the

region. Do you agree?

Well, there's one more. Keeping enterprises going big or small – if they collapse, the whole formal sector goes. It's the total economic activity that is at stake, other than production of safety [PPE] suits, gloves and medicines. I think SAARC can also develop a standby industrial base on this.

How so?

We could start companies to start manufacturing. Of course, when they start their prices may not be that competitive, but we decide on it and everyone buys from one or two companies earmarked for it.

Job creation will also be a major challenge, isn't it? Especially since migrant workers from the region, who were working in West Asia, are returning and may not go back.

We have to work this out. Remember tourism is big in

the Maldives, Sri Lanka, parts of India, Nepal. How do you manage that? I would look at some of the climate change issues, and also modernising agriculture. We have got to create jobs. You have to have helicopter money. The thing is the problem we have with our debts and the amount we owe to the international sovereign bonds. So, it is more a question of dealing with the London Club than the Paris Club, but I think a common approach would help us.

For Sri Lanka, while the bilateral debts are perhaps negotiable, the terms of the sovereign bonds are ruthless, aren't they?

That's a big one, yes. That is why you can't do anything on the rupee debt. We'll have inflation. That is one thing we can work on as a unit.

More broadly, do you also see a potential shift in the region towards expansionary fiscal policy, a basic income? We see that talk picking up globally.

You have to. You have to move away from some of those [past policies]. If you look at the IMF reports, they say it is bad this year, it might pick up next year. I don't know, if we don't find a remedy quickly, next year is also going to be bad. We should plan for two years.

When you say move away from some established policies, what do you mean?

You have to look at some sectors that you are going to pump in money into. We have focused on inflation, but inflation is really down. Then, the question of raising money – commercially and otherwise, how much can the London Club give us? That is really the big issue for all of us. And the fact that for India and Pakistan, it is a big amount, maybe a few billion dollars. So it is better to go as a team and take it on.

Speaking of the pressures of the international money market, do you think it's time to rethink the prevailing economic model?

Well, the free markets have to flow. But some of the countries that are doing well [in their COVID-19 response] have a more social market economy.

How do you think COVID-19 will impact the global order? China and the U.S., two powerful countries, have been hit so badly.

Europe is going to get the worst of it. And what will the U.K. do? They've lost a market, and in this situation, you can't gain a market in a hurry. What President Trump is trying to do is to keep the economy going so he won't be second-guessed by China. But China actually had a lockdown and they are now restarting. The problem for China, like all of us in different ways, is that the markets are in the western world. Until the western world picks up, we have to move towards other markets also. I think India should reconsider coming into the RCEP [The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership], even at a later stage.

'China may have known of virus in Nov.'

Pompeo reiterates United States' demand for sample of the SARS-CoV-2 detected in Wuhan

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo charged on Thursday that China may have known of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) as early as November, renewing accusations that Beijing has not been transparent and again drawing ire from China.

"You'll recall that the first cases of this were known by the Chinese government maybe as early as November, but certainly by mid-December," Mr. Pompeo said.

"They were slow to identify this for anyone in the world, including the World Health Organization," he told conservative radio host Larry O'Connor.

COVID-19

Mr. Pompeo said the U.S. still wanted more information from China, including the original sample of the SARS-CoV-2 virus detected in the metropolis of Wuhan.

"This issue of transparency is important not only as a historical matter to understand what happened back



Rising anger: Demonstrators taking part in a motorcade in Washington as part of a protest against the Trump administration's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. ■ AFP

in November and December and January, but it's important even today," he said. "This is still impacting lots of lives here in the U.S. and, frankly, around the world."

China hit back on Friday, saying Mr. Pompeo's remarks were "totally groundless and entirely for the purpose of blaming others".

Mr. Pompeo's comments

ran "counter to the general consensus of the global community", Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said at a daily press briefing, adding that China had "provided timely information to the world".

China initially closely guarded information of the virus and silenced whistleblowers. The first official acknowledgement of what became a global pandemic came on December 31.

Critics say that Mr. Trump is seeking to deflect from his own handling of the crisis, which he claimed to have "totally under control" in January but has since killed more than 50,000 people in the U.S. – more than any other country.

U.S. death toll crosses 50,000

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

The novel coronavirus has killed more than 50,000 people in the U.S., after one of the deadliest days of the pandemic which saw 3,176 deaths, according to a tally on Thursday from Johns Hopkins University. It now has 870,468 confirmed cases.

Johnson is recovering'

REUTERS
LONDON

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson continues his recovery from COVID-19 at his country residence and any decision to return to work in London will be taken on the advice of his doctors, his spokesman said on Friday.



Donald Trump

jection, ingestion or any other route," said the statement from Reckitt Benckiser.

Mr. Trump has often talked up prospects for new therapies and offered rosy timelines for the development of a vaccine as he encourages states to move to reopen their economies.

Sunlight, humidity

On Thursday, the White House also pitched "emerging" research on the benefits of sunlight and humidity in diminishing the threat of the coronavirus.

Past studies have not found good evidence that

warmer temperatures and higher humidity of spring and summer will help check the spread of the virus.

But William Bryan of the Department of Homeland Security said at a White House briefing on Thursday that there are "emerging results" from new research that suggest solar light has a powerful effect in killing the virus on surfaces and in the air. He said scientists have seen a similar effect from higher temperatures and humidity. A biocontainment lab in Maryland has been conducting testing on the virus since February, Bryan said.

The virus is dying at a much more rapid pace just from exposure to higher temperatures and just from exposure to humidity," Mr. Bryan said.

"I hope people enjoy the sun. And if it has an impact, that's great," Mr. Trump said, adding, "It's just a suggestion from a brilliant lab by a very, very smart, perhaps brilliant man."

Iran's missile launch is of significant concern: U.K.

REUTERS
LONDON

The U.K. said on Friday that an Iranian satellite launch earlier this week was of significant concern and inconsistent with a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution.

"Reports that Iran has carried out a satellite launch using ballistic missile technology are of significant concern and inconsistent with UNSC resolution 2231," a Foreign Office spokesman said.

said in a statement. "The UN has called upon Iran not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons. Iran must abide by this," the spokesman said.

"We have significant and longstanding concerns... over Iran's ballistic missile programme, which is destabilising for the region and poses a threat to regional security," the spokesman added.

Former V-P says it is the only way the President thinks he can possibly win'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

Presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden has predicted that U.S. President Donald Trump will try to postpone the country's November election in an attempt to win.

"Mark my words, I think he is gonna try to kick back the election somehow, come up with some rationale why it can't be held," Biden said

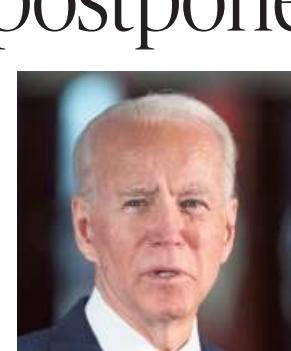
during an online fundraiser Thursday.

The 77-year-old former Vice-President said it is "the only way he thinks he can possibly win."

Six months before U.S. voters head to the polls, Trump's mind is already in election mode.

But with a pandemic

raging and job losses climbing to 26.4 million on Thursday, Mr. Trump's path to victory



Joe Biden

may be harder than he anticipated.

Mr. Biden, highlighting

Mr. Trump's recent threat to

veto emergency funding for the U.S. Post Office, claimed it was an example of the President's intention to "do all he can to make it very hard for people to vote."

While mail-in voting and absentee ballots remain methods many say could help limit voters spreading coronavirus, Mr. Trump maintains they create the potential for fraud.

Media briefings?

Meanwhile, dozens of U.S. States have postponed their primary races, which will of-

ficially determine who will be the presidential nominee.

The 73-year-old Mr. Trump has been criticised for turning his daily White House coronavirus briefings into campaign events – rallying his base and taking swipes at his detractors such as Mr. Biden, who is sheltering at home.

"We have a sleepy guy in a basement of a house that the press is giving a free pass to, who doesn't want to do debates because of COVID," Trump said during the Thursday briefing.



Hungary, China sign deal for rail project

BUDAPEST
Hungary signed on Friday a China-financed loan agreement for a high-speed railway linking Budapest and Belgrade, billed as Hungary's biggest ever infrastructure investment and one whose contract details could be kept secret for a decade. The 350-km-long high-speed rail line would form part of a planned railway connection linking central Europe with the Chinese-run Piraeus port in Greece. The project is part of China's ambitious "Belt and Road" initiative. AFP

12 rangers killed in attack in DR Congo

GOMA
At least 12 rangers were killed on Friday in an attack in Virunga National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site in the restive east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, a park spokesman said. It was one of the deadliest attacks in the park, Africa's oldest and most biologically diverse protected area. Another six people were wounded, the spokesman told AFP, adding that four other civilians passing through the area were also targeted. AFP

German court tries IS jihadist over genocide

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
FRANKFURT

An Iraqi man, who is believed to have belonged to the Islamic State, accused of genocide and murdering a child belonging to the Yazidi minority who he held as a slave, went on trial in Germany on Friday.

Taha al-Jumaily, 27, also stands accused of crimes against humanity, war crimes and human trafficking in the case in Frankfurt. His wife, a German woman, has been under trial at a Munich court.

We will build ties in the neighbourhood: Taliban

'We don't want any foreign outfit using Afghan soil to target another country'

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

The Taliban would like to build ties with all neighbouring countries, including India, said its spokesperson Mohammad Suhaib Shaheen, and claimed that the group would even enact a law against foreign terror groups conducting operations against any other country, if it comes to power.

"We would like good relations with all countries in the neighbourhood on the basis of mutual respect and mu-



Mohammad Suhaib Shaheen

tual interests," said Mr. Shaheen when asked about ties with India. "We will never want any foreign organisation using Afghan soil to target another country. We will bring a law to stop any such activity," he added, speaking to analysts during an internet-based seminar organised by Delhi-based think-tank, "Global Counter-Terrorism Council" (GCTC).

lasting peace in Afghanistan, and discussed "the need for both the Afghan government and the Taliban to accelerate prisoner releases, support a prompt reduction in violence, and start intra-Afghan negotiations," which are currently at an impasse.

Dependent on Pakistan

Speaking at the GCTC "web seminar", Amar Sinha, member of the National Security Advisory Board and former Ambassador to Kabul, said there was little point in participating in a dialogue process involving the Taliban, while it remains dependent on Pakistan for support and

safe havens, and until it eschews violence.

India has thus far not recognised the Taliban, which has had links with terrorist groups like the Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, who have targeted Indians in Afghanistan. India was also not invited to a UN-led

MARKET WATCH

	PRICE	CHANGE
Sensex	31,327	-1.68
US Dollar	76.46	-0.53
Brent oil	21.55	-4.94

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	270.65	-6.95
Asian Paints	1827.55	5.90
Axis Bank	403.95	-26.10
Bajaj Auto	2445.35	14.70
Bajaj Finserv	4389.80	-339.80
Bajaj Finance	1976.25	-196.20
Bharti Airtel	494.25	-1.75
BPCL	350.45	-4.70
Britannia Ind	3062.15	114.75
Cipla	599.30	12.60
Coal India	137.00	-3.90
Dr Reddys Lab	4002.80	-24.30
Eicher Motors	13589.20	-479.15
GAIL (India)	81.50	-1.75
Grasim Ind	499.05	-1.40
HCL Tech	468.10	-9.60
HDFC	1580.30	-83.15
HDFC Bank	938.05	-16.90
Hero MotoCorp	1894.80	29.80
Hindalco	103.65	-7.60
Hind Unilever	2283.10	-34.40
ICICI Bank	334.85	-18.10
IndusInd Bank	382.90	-27.05
Bharti Infralet	152.00	-14.10
Infosys	658.00	-21.30
Indian Oil Corp	81.50	-1.60
ITC	180.05	-0.50
JSW Steel	153.25	-6.70
Kotak Bank	1239.55	-10.10
L&T	851.20	10.60
M&M	334.30	-13.20
Maruti Suzuki	5045.65	-110.70
Nestle India Ltd.	17406.05	-30.00
NTPC	93.40	-1.80
ONGC	67.60	0.25
PowerGrid Corp	159.15	1.15
Reliance Ind	1417.00	46.10
State Bank	179.75	-6.95
Shree Cement	18587.45	-120.30
Sun Pharma	485.55	8.10
Tata Motors	74.20	-1.45
Tata Steel	267.55	-2.75
TCS	1818.55	-59.70
Tech Mahindra	503.45	-20.25
Titan	906.05	-6.55
UltraTech Cement	3307.95	-134.25
UPL	335.85	-13.05
Vedanta	77.95	0.35
Wipro	177.75	-3.15
Zee Entertainment	145.15	-12.40

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	76.25	76.57
Euro	82.04	82.39
British Pound	94.03	94.43
Japanese Yen (100)	70.82	71.11
Chinese Yuan	10.77	10.82
Swiss Franc	78.04	78.37
Singapore Dollar	53.52	53.75
Canadian Dollar	54.16	54.39
Malaysian Ringgit	17.46	17.55
Australian Dollar	48.24	48.48

Source: Indian Bank

MRF commits ₹25 crore for COVID-19

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

Tyre major MRF Ltd. has committed a sum of ₹25 crore to support various initiatives to address the exigencies arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a press release, the company said that it would contribute to the PM Cares Fund at the Central level, and support various government measures in those States where MRF's factories are located.

ALL buys 3.36% stake in leasing arm

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

Ashok Leyland Ltd. (ALL) has bought the balance 3.36% stake in its arm Hinduja Leasing Finance Ltd. (HLFL) for ₹188 crore.

On March 21, the board had allowed ALL to buy 6.99% stake from Everin Holdings and Hinduja Group for a total consideration of ₹390.49 crore. The acquisition was proposed to be completed in tranches before July 31, 2020. With the purchase of 3.36% stake, the acquisition of 6.99% stake is now completed fully, ALL said.

Debt funds pose no systemic risk: AMFI

Brokers want SEBI, FinMin to intervene following Franklin Templeton winding up six schemes

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

A day after Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund decided to wind up six debt funds due to illiquid, low-rated securities, the mutual fund industry clarified that the issue is limited to just one fund house and there is no market or systemic risk posed by debt funds.

The Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI) highlighted the fact that while credit risk funds account for a very small portion of the overall debt assets, more than half of the assets in debt schemes have a rating of AA or above.

"While around 20% to 30% of the total debt AUM (assets under management) are AAA rated or in cash, another 30% to 50% would be in AA+ or AA rating," said Milind Barve, managing director, HDFC Asset Management Company, during a media conference call arranged by AMFI.

"It is not appropriate to put all credit risk funds in



Retail investors should not panic. Money in credit risk funds is not at any significant risk, says HDFC's Barve ■ PAUL NORONHA

the same category. Retail investors should not panic. This is a one-off instance and money in credit risk funds is not at any significant risk," he added.

On Thursday, Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund announced that it has decided to wind up six debt funds that have combined assets

A majority of our funds should not have any impact due to an isolated instance at one MF

NILESH SHAH
chairman AMFI

ton Mutual Fund. The schemes that have been shut are Franklin India Low Duration Fund, Franklin India Dynamic Accrual Fund, Franklin India Credit Risk Fund, Franklin India Short Term Income Plan, Franklin India Ultra Short Bond Fund and Franklin India Income Opportunities Fund.

5% of overall debt AUM
Nilesh Shah of Kotak Mutual Fund, who is also the chairman of AMFI, highlighted the fact that credit risk funds account for mere 5% of the overall debt AUM.

"A majority of our funds should not have any impact on operations due to an isolated instance of winding down at one mutual fund," said Mr. Shah, while speak-

ing to the media during the AMFI conference call.

The Association of National Exchanges Members of India (ANMI), the umbrella body of stock brokers, believes that the abrupt closure of six schemes has created a panic in the markets.

It has requested the Ministry of Finance and the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to intervene and take swift action to protect investor money.

"ANMI humbly requests the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and SEBI to take swift action for protecting the hard-earned savings of lakhs of investors who have invested in FTMF (Franklin Templeton MF)."

"An expert committee of mutual fund professionals should be formed by them to determine the precise problem in FTMF schemes," it said in a letter written on Friday. ANMI believes that it is of paramount importance as the confidence of investors in debt mutual funds is at risk, it added.

ceive an approval for the moratorium from their lending institutions, if the same is not received in due course, ICRA would review its stance on default recognition," ICRA said.

Following the nationwide economic lockdown, the Reserve Bank of India has allowed banks to extend the repayment moratorium for three months on term loans. Banks are not allowed to change the asset classification status of the loan even if a customer had applied for loan moratorium. However, it is the discretion of banks whether to allow the moratorium to their customers.

Among non-banking finance companies, Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Limited, has applied for moratorium. A few micro-finance institutions have also applied for the moratorium.

Most banks have so far denied any loan moratorium to non-banking finance companies, including housing finance companies.

ICRA list names 328 such entities

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

Several large industrial houses, including groups like Tata and Jindal, have sought moratorium on loan repayment from their banks.

Rating agency ICRA has compiled a list of 328 entities that have sought to defer loan repayment for three months.

The list includes Tata Power, Jindal Power, Jindal Steel and Power, JSW Steel, Tata Power Renewable Energy, Piramal Enterprise, Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals, Kalyan Jewellers, TV Sundaram Iyengar and Sons, Rashtriya Ispat Ni-gam Ltd., Jay Shree Tea, Bharat Aluminium and Indian Terrain Fashions, among others.

ICRA said the list was not a comprehensive one, as information about some rated entities was not readily available as of now.

"It may be noted that for the entities that are yet to re-

Sensex falls 535 points on weak global cues

Debt schemes closure hits sentiment

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

Weak global cues pulled down the Indian benchmark indices on Friday, with the abrupt closure of six debt schemes by Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund also affecting investor sentiment. The 30-share Sensex lost 535.86 points, or 1.68%, to close at 31,327.22. The broader Nifty ended the day at 9,154.40, down 159.50 points, or 1.71%.

Elsewhere in Asia, the benchmarks of Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, China and Singapore, all ended in the red.

"One hopes that this is a one-off case and we will not see more such cases even though the economy is yet to come out of this difficult phase," Mr. Jasani added.

Meanwhile, institutional investors were net sellers, with both foreign and domestic institutional investors ending Friday as net sellers at ₹207 crore and ₹94 crore, respectively.

Refrain from dividend payouts, insurers told

Reassessment based on firms' results

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD

frain from dividend payouts from profits pertaining to the financial year ending March 31, 2020, till further instructions," a circular from the regulator on Friday said. This position will be reassessed by the Authority based on financial results of the insurers for the quarter ending September 30, 2020, Member (Finance and Investment) Pravin Kutumbe said.

The regulator had also wanted insurance companies to critically examine their capital availability and solvency margin for 2020-21 as well as rationalise expenses of management.

Deposits growth robust, credit growth declines

Loans fall as economic activity limited

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

Deposits registered a healthy growth in the first fortnight of the current financial year, while loans declined, in a period which is marked by limited economic activity due to the nationwide lockdown.

According to latest data released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), liabilities of banks grew by ₹1.47 lakh crore for the fortnight ended April 10. During the same period, bank credit contracted by ₹31,562 crore.

The government imposed a nationwide lockdown in the last week of March to

control the spread of COVID-19.

The 21-day lockdown was later extended till May 3. Some economic activities like harvesting has been allowed in the second phase of lockdown. Bank loans grew by a whopping ₹2.31 lakh crore in the fortnight ended March 27, 2020, indicating robust loan demand.

Credit growth for the year ended March 27 was 6.1%, one of the lowest in many years, which was 13.3% in the previous year. Deposit growth for the financial year 2019-20 was 7.9% as compared to 10% in the previous year.

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No happy hours: With the entire country in a lockdown mode, the portents are grim. ■ RITU RAJ KONWAR

shut with the lockdown. Yatin Patil, president, AIWPA told *The Hindu* that, "On-premise, which accounts for over 40% of wine sales, is going to take a lot more time to come back as social distanc-

ing is likely to continue; for how long, no one knows. "We hope people who used to consume wine in restaurants will now start bringing them home and therefore, the net sales decline will be minimised by at least 20%," Abhay Kewadkar, MD, Tetrad Global Beverages, said the lockdown had brought the wine industry to a complete standstill. "The stakeholders in the industry, including winemakers, vineyard owners, farmers, support staff, others in the supply chain and consumers are affected. In India, wine is predominantly a social beverage and its consumption outside home will suffer as long as social distancing norms are continued," added Mr. Patil.

However, retailing can be boosted if the government al-

lows sale of wines in grocery stores under essentials, added Mr. Kewadkar, an industry veteran with over 30 years of experience.

Call-in facility

SHORT TAKES



French Open could be delayed by another week

The organisers of the French Open, who were criticised for unilaterally moving the tournament to a September start without consulting other tennis federations, could delay the event by another week, a report said on Friday. The claycourt Grand Slam could now start on September 27 instead of September 20, preceded by a week of qualification matches, *Le Parisien* newspaper said. AFP

European athletics championships cancelled

PARIS
The 2020 European athletics championships, set to be held in Paris this summer, have been cancelled due to the Coronavirus pandemic, organisers announced on Thursday. AFP



Ding Liren jumps to third

NEW DELHI
Ding Liren benefited from a stunning blunder from Maxime Vachier-Lagrave in the decisive fifth game that lasted just 16 moves and posted a 3-2 win to occupy the third spot in the \$250,000 Magnus Carlsen Invitational online chess tournament on Thursday. **The results:** Third round: Ding Liren (Chn) bt Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (Fra) 3-2; Ian Nepomniachtchi (Rus) bt Anish Giri (Ned) 2.5-1.5. **Standings (after three rounds):** 1. Magnus Carlsen (Nor, 8), 2. Hikaru Nakamura (USA, 7), 3. Ding Liren (Chn, 6), 4-6. Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (Fra), Ian Nepomniachtchi (Rus), Fabiano Caruana (USA) (5 each), 7-8. Anish Giri (Ned) and Alireza Firouzja (FIDE) (0 each).

Women in Blue's England tour put off

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON

The Indian women's team's tour of England, starting June 25, has been postponed as the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) on Friday suspended all forms of professional cricket in the country until at least July 1.

The Indian women were supposed to play four ODIs and two T20 Internationals during their two-week trip that would have ended on July 9. The ECB clarified that nine rounds of fixtures would be lost in the County Championship season but "blocks for red-ball cricket and white-ball cricket will be held in a revised schedule."

ECB CEO Tom Harrison said: "Our priority will be to protect the vulnerable, key workers and society as a whole."

Pro League season extended

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The second season of the Hockey Pro League would continue till June 2021 although when it would resume is still uncertain.

The complete lockdown of sports activities due to COVID-19 has forced the International Hockey Federation (FIH) to stretch the competition into next year, it said in a communiqué on Friday.

The Pro League was originally scheduled to be held from January to June 2020 in the run-up to the Tokyo Olympics but only 1/3rd of the Games were completed till early March. The third season has been re-scheduled from Sept. 2021 to June 2022.

CM YK

Testing times for Indian speedsters

Keeping them fit will be the biggest challenge for coach Bharat Arun

S. DINAKAR
CHENNAI

These are unprecedented times for Indian cricketers. In particular, the pacemen who need to be monitored continually.

But there is no cricket happening, no grounds, no gyms, and even the NCA is shut down.

When the Indian team members are away from the National side, they are given a follow-up schedule – it differs from cricketer to cricketer – by the side's strength and conditioning coach Nick Webb.

Generally the span of each workout routine is three weeks after which the player concerned has to get back to Webb on the progress made. In fact, there is constant online interaction between Webb and the team members.

Spike in injuries
But then, lockdowns can upset the best of systems. In fact when there was a lock-out in the NBA for 161 days in 2011, there was a spike in injuries when the athletes returned. Many were simply not match-fit on their return.

In the case of the Indian cricketers, in particular the pacemen, the situation is



Task on hand: Being battle-ready when action resumes will be high on the priority list of bowling coach Arun and his fitness-conscious boys. • FILE PHOTO: K.R. DEEPAK

challenging to put in mildly. Running is crucial and while they can use a treadmill, the Ground Reaction Forces (GRF) when you run in the open spaces are absent.

And the GRF is critical to the development of strength and conditioning of a cricketer. Aware of the stumbling blocks, these will be times when the Indian team-man-

agement and the NCA will be coordinating closely online.

Metabolic conditioning is crucial for pacemen to maintain their fitness and take it to the next level. Here the athlete goes through a series of exercises, different in nature in quick succession.

The metabolic energy pathways are particularly helpful in assessing the strength and cardio efficien-

cy of an athlete, a leading Indian trainer said to *The Hindu*.

Someone like the Indian bowling coach Bharat Arun has a testing job, in keeping his pacemen battle ready.

Shadow bowling'

He could suggest 'shadow bowling' – bowling with a shortened run-up if the paceman concerned has a gar-

den in his home.

Then Arun can ask the bowlers to visualise bowling at different batsmen; this can enable the bowler to evolve mentally even as he stays battle ready, in his mind at least.

Overweight trap

But then, this is a period when the cricketers could be in a horizontal position at home, watching endless television and putting on a lot of weight.

Then they become out of shape, and unfit for battle. Fortunately, the present bunch of Indian pacemen are fitness conscious and, with the stakes so high, are unlikely to fall into the 'overweight' trap.

Not for nothing has Arun stressed depth in pace bowling and a pool of pacemen. India has quite a few pacemen waiting in the wings of international cricket but sadly, with IPL out of the picture, they too would be short of match practice.

For those like Ishant Sharma, whose ankle injury flared up in New Zealand, the lockdown period will offer quality time to recover and rehabilitate.

Keeping the Indian paceman match-fit in these times is Arun's biggest challenge.

Kohli says he will never leave RCB

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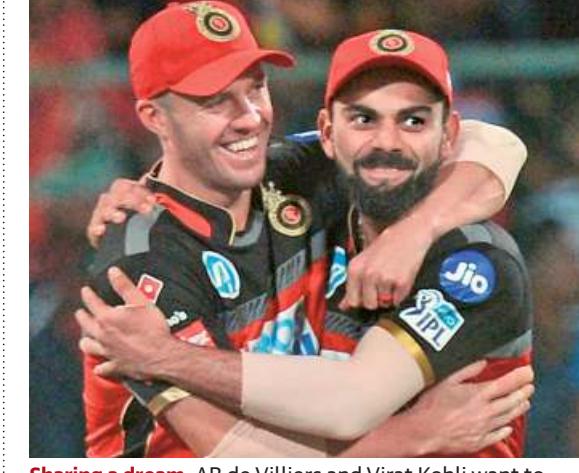
dream, winning the IPL together. There is no scenario where I could think of leaving the team ever.

"You can feel emotional about the season not going well, but till the time I am playing IPL, I am never leaving this team.

The fans, their loyalty has been amazing," said the India skipper.

The South African echoed Kohli's words.

"Same for me. I never want to leave RCB, but to do that I got to keep scoring runs. I am not the captain you see," said the de Villiers in jest.



Sharing a dream: AB de Villiers and Virat Kohli want to win the IPL together. • FILE PHOTO

ICC explores safe ball-polishing

Use of substance under supervision being considered

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The use of artificial substances to polish the cricket ball, which effectively means ball tampering, could be considered for legalisation when the game resumes after the COVID-19 pandemic that has made bowlers wary of applying saliva on the red cherry.

ESPNcricinfo has reported that administrators are "open to the option of allowing for the use of an agreed artificial substance to polish the ball under the supervision of the umpires."

The matter of saliva being unsafe was raised by the ICC's medical committee and it would be addressed



Unsafe: Saliva or sweat is the most convenient substance for cricketers aiming to shine the ball on the field. • REUTERS

before cricket resumes. Shining the ball is an integral part of cricket as it helps the bowlers swing the ball.

Following the chief executives meeting of the ICC on

Thursday, its medical committee, headed by Peter Harcourt, had issued an update.

Next step

"Our next step is to create a road-map for the resumption of international cricket which will include criteria for decision-making and check-list for what needs to happen," Harcourt said.

Former India pacer Venkatesh Prasad supports the idea of not using saliva on the ball.

"When action resumes, they should use only sweat for some time as safety of the players is paramount," Prasad, who played 33 Tests and 161 ODIs for India, told PTI.

Decided against seeking an extension for a third two-year term.

"Manohar is going but he will probably stay on for another two months as the annual meeting in June looks highly unlikely at the moment considering the global situation," an ICC

This followed an announcement on the relaxation of restrictions by Nagaland's Chief Secretary Temjen Toy on Thursday evening.

Nagaland has not recorded any COVID-19 positive cases so far, although a resident tested positive in Assam soon after being referred by a private hospital in the State's commercial hub Dimapur on April 12.

Ganga Ram Hospital a few days ago and was battling diabetes and high blood pressure for a long period. She breathed her last while undergoing treatment on April 21.

Union Minister of Petroleum and Steel Dharmendra Pradhan appreciated Gambhir's gesture.

"Always believed in dignity irrespective of caste, creed, religion or social status. Only way to create a better society."

"That's my idea of India! Om Shanti," said the 38-year-old Gambhir.

Media reports in Odisha said the 49-year-old Saraswati hailed from a village in Jajpur district.

She was admitted to Sir

Manohar gets two-month extension

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

Apiary or honeybee farming and transportation of beehive products were among a slew of major economic activities that resumed in the State from Friday.

This followed an announcement on the relaxation of restrictions by Nagaland's Chief Secretary Temjen Toy on Thursday evening.

Nagaland has not recorded any COVID-19 positive cases so far, although a resident tested positive in Assam soon after being referred by a private hospital in the State's commercial hub Dimapur on April 12.

Inter- and intrastate movement of planting materials and honeybee colonies, honey and other beehive products have also been permitted to operate but in rural areas.

Officials of the Nagaland Beekeeping and Honey Mission (NBHM), a State government undertaking, said the relaxation would help the cottage industry associated with apiculture get some respite.

Other activities allowed include collection, harvesting and processing of minor and non-timber produce by a certain category of people, and plantation, processing, sale and marketing of bam-

Parisian dreams still alive for Javia, Vaishnavi

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI

The Parisian dreams of Dev Javia and Vaishnavi Adkar, who won the Roland Garros junior wild card tennis tournament in February, are still alive.

The organisers of the second Grand Slam of the season were quick to postpone the tournament to September 20 in light of COVID-19.

With nearly 150 days to go, there is still hope that sports events of such magnitude will revive normal life.

"The tournament is postponed and we are working on a new date for the final of the Junior Wild Card. We advise you to temporarily stop



Dev Javia and Vaishnavi Adkar with Mary Pierce.

applying for visa. We will send you the updated invitation letter as soon as we have the new dates," wrote the organisers to the two players.

Unlike India, where it was

co had an elaborate programme scheduled, featuring over 200 athletes playing over many stages. The event was also scheduled in China and Brazil.

The champions from the four countries will compete in Paris. The champions from the Paris tournament will get a junior wild card for the Roland Garros tournament.

While Dev Javia, the talent left-hander from Ahmedabad, is keeping himself busy by training with bands and focusing more on the mental aspect, Vaishnavi Adkar is utilising the "rebound sports equipment" to stay in touch with tennis.

"It is a big advantage to stay in a joint family. Vaishnavi, my brother's children, and my younger daughter Asmi are enjoying these compulsory days," said Vaishnavi's father Nihar Adkar.

Daily sessions

"There are also daily, joint zoom sessions and tasks assigned by her coach Kedar Shah, that keep Vaishnavi busy and happy," added Nihar.

Javia, meanwhile, said: "The plans were to prepare for the French Open. But the virus has put a stop to it. Still, the goal stays the same."

Gambhir performs last rites of domestic help

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Former India opener Gautam Gambhir performed the last rites of his deceased domestic help after her mortal remains could not be sent to her home in Odisha due to the national lockdown.

Gambhir, also a BJP Lok Sabha MP, posted a tribute on his Twitter page for his employee Saraswati Patra, who was working at his residence for the past six years.

"Taking care of my little one can never be domestic help. She was family. Performing her last rites was my duty," he tweeted.

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Media reports in Odisha said the 49-year-old Saraswati hailed from a village in Jajpur district.

She was admitted to Sir

Nagaland eases curbs with a buzz

Honeybee farming among the activities that resumed

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

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Other activities allowed include collection, harvesting and processing of minor and non-timber produce by a certain category of people, and plantation, processing, sale and marketing of bam-

boo, areca nut, cocoa and spices plantation.

Food processing industries, stone crushers, sawmills and brick kilns have also been permitted to operate but in rural areas.

According to the NBHM, the annual per capita consumption of honey in Nagaland is 100 gm compared to the national average of 8 gm.

Range of honey
The State produces a range of honey with varying colours and taste such as sweet, bitter-sweet and sweet-tangy. The most valued honey is from the rock bees and stingless bees.

Some 14,000 beekeepers in more than 400 villages accounted for 420 metric tonnes of honey that Naga-

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