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NEARBY



Two deaths, 93 new cases in the Capital

NEW DELHI
The Capital on Friday reported two deaths and 93 new COVID-19 cases. The death toll now stands at six with the total number of cases jumping to 386. Of the 93 new cases, 77 are from the centre run by the Tablighi Jamaat in Nizamuddin.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

Lockdown lifts Delhi's air quality to 5-year high
NEW DELHI
The lockdown has pushed pollution levels in Delhi to a 5-year low and, across India, the number of cities that recorded 'good' on the air quality index jumped from 6 on March 16 to 30 on March 29, according to the Central Pollution Control Board.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 9

Supreme Court quashes I-T case against NDTV
NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court on Friday quashed an income tax reassessment notice issued against New Delhi Television Limited. The department had accused NDTV of "round-tripping" finances in connection with a July 2007 issuance of step-up coupon bonds amounting to ₹100 million through its U.K. subsidiary.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 8

Coronavirus toll touches 62; revised testing norms likely

2,653 cases confirmed across country, 647 of which are from Nizamuddin cluster

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The number of COVID-19 cases continued to rise in the country with 336 new cases reported in the past 24 hours taking the total tally to 2,547, while 18 more deaths were reported, the Union Health Ministry said on Friday.

India has registered 62 deaths due to COVID-19 so far, while 162 patients have been discharged. Nationwide, 66,000 samples have been tested so far, which includes repeat tests on patients to confirm health status.

COVID-19

"India, due to its early measures, had been able to keep its COVID-19 numbers low but one incident has caused our numbers to rise, which highlights the need for absolute compliance. The 647 coronavirus cases reported over the last two days are linked to the religious gathering of the Islamic sect Tablighi Jamaat in Delhi. These cases are spread across 14 States. Some deaths have also been linked to this," Joint Secretary at the Union Health Ministry Lav Agarwal said at the Minis-



In the slow lane: Essential commodities being transported on a bullock cart in New Delhi on Friday, amid the lockdown restrictions. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

try's daily press briefing.

According to reports from State Health Departments, the total number of confirmed cases nationwide was 2,947 with 2,655 active cases. The death toll rose to 83.

Maharashtra continued to report the most cases at 417, followed by Tamil Nadu and Delhi where numbers have spiked to 411 and 386 respectively. Kerala reported 286 cases, while Telangana reported 229 cases.

Despite the rise in cases, Mr. Agarwal said the revised testing guideline is still un-

der consideration and would be released by Saturday. He added that the Ministry's newly launched app – Aarogya Setu – had been downloaded by 30 lakh people.

Rapid antibody test

In an interim advisory, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) recommended the use of the rapid antibody test in the country's coronavirus hotspots.

The decision was taken at an emergency meeting on Thursday of the National Task Force dealing with the

COVID-19 crisis. "Population in hotspot areas may be tested using rapid antibody test. Antibody positives to be confirmed by RT-PCR (reverse transcription-PCR) using throat/nasal swab, and antibody negatives to be quarantined at home," the ICMR advisory said.

The official said the Health Ministry was in touch with the States to trace, track, isolate and treat cases.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8
MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 5,
6, 9, 10 & 12

PM: on Sunday, light lamps for 9 minutes from 9 p.m.

He calls for demonstration of collective will to fight virus

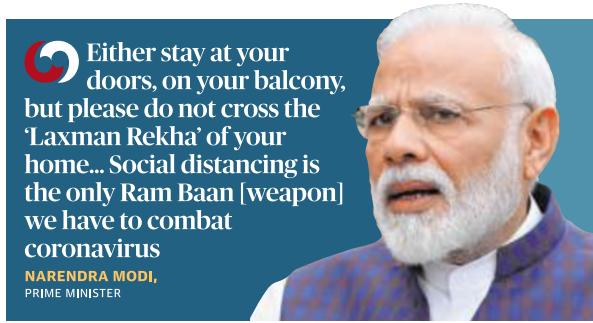
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

On the 10th day of the nationwide lockdown imposed due to the pandemic, Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked the countrymen to demonstrate a collective will to fight coronavirus, a token demonstration of which, he said, would be to light candles, lamps and hold mobile phone torches for nine minutes from 9 p.m. on April 5.

In an address to the nation, he noted, "There is no bigger force than our conviction and resolve. There is nothing we cannot achieve with these forces."

Mr. Modi made it very clear that the coronavirus threat could only be combated with the full cooperation of the people, and that the collective strength was what would take the country out of what he termed "darkness that engulfs us" in the form of coronavirus.

We are not alone'
The plight of the poor, with the grinding halt of all economic activity, was also foremost in the Prime Minister's speech. "We have to take our poor brethren towards the light and certainty. To defeat this darkness, we have to shine the light in every direction," he said.



Disappointing, says Oppn.

Opposition leaders expressed disappointment over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's video message asking citizens to light lamps in their homes on Sunday. Congress MP Shashi Tharoor called him a "showman and a photo-op Prime Minister", while

former Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram questioned why the government had not announced a second financial action plan. CPI leader D. Raja said people expected Mr. Modi to come out with substantial measures. ▶ PAGE 8

in some parts of the country, Mr. Modi made it a point to say that nobody should repeat it.

"Either stay at your doors, on your balcony, etc., but please do not cross the 'Laxman Rekha' of your home... Social distancing is the only Ram Baan [weapon] we have to combat coronavirus"

As his earlier exhortation to applaud essential services workers during the Janata Curfew of March 22 saw instances of mass gatherings

EDITORIAL ▶ PAGE 6

NSA to be filed against 6 for harassing nurses

They used obscene language, gestures

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW/ GHAZIABAD

The Uttar Pradesh government has said that six persons associated with the Tablighi Jamaat who have been accused of misbehaving with women staff at the district hospital in Ghaziabad will be charged under the National Security Act (NSA).

Though the government is yet to issue an official statement, Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Awanish Awasthi attributed the direction to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

"Ye na kanoon ko manenge, na vyavastha ko manenge, ye manava ke dushman hai... [They don't follow the law or the system, they are enemies of humanity]," Mr. Awasthi said in an

official WhatsApp group quoting Mr. Adityanath.

The police had filed an FIR against the six persons who attended the Tablighi Jamaat's congregation in Delhi and were admitted to the MMG District Hospital.

Nurses there accused them of inappropriate behaviour and complained to Medical Superintendent Ravinder Singh, who wrote to the Uttar Pradesh police.

Dr. Singh said the six were using obscene language and were making vulgar gestures at the staff. His letter said that some of them were moving around in a state of undress and were demanding bidis and cigarettes.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

A battle won



Hailing a hero: Colleagues cheer as nurse Reshma Mohandas leaves the Kottayam Medical College Hospital after being cured of COVID-19 on Friday. She got infected while treating two elderly patients, who too have been discharged. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

SC calls for quick end to Kerala-Karnataka border row

Patients seeking treatment in Mangaluru denied access

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday ordered the Centre, Kerala and Karnataka to confer immediately and "formulate parameters for passage of patients for urgent medical treatment at the interstate border at Talapadi".

The order by a Bench of Justices L. Nageswara Rao and Deepak Gupta came on a series of petitions highlighting Karnataka's blockade of the border. The blockade, the court was informed, had resulted in deaths as ambulances bound for Mangaluru (in Karnataka) were not being permitted to cross the border.

The court listed the case for hearing next on April 7.

The order came on petitions to facilitate the free movement of vehicles carry-

The Supreme Court has listed the case for April 7.

ing persons for urgent medical treatment across the border between Kerala and Karnataka (Talapadi). The court, meanwhile, issued formal notice on an appeal filed by Karnataka against the Kerala High Court order of April 1 allowing patients to cross the border for treatment.

Karnataka has argued that the blockade was in the in-

terest of public health. The situation regarding coronavirus was "really dire", it said. Karnataka has warned that opening the blockade would cause a law and order issue as the local population wanted the border to remain sealed.

Karnataka argued that Kerala was the "worst-affected" state in the country with nearly 194 coronavirus cases. In this, Kasaragod, adjoining Karnataka, was the "worst-affected" district of Kerala with over a 100 positive cases.

The court separately considered a writ petition by Karsargod MP Rajmohan Unnithan for an order to forthwith open the border. He said Karnataka's blockade was "ill-planned and dangerous" and had already led to the loss of lives.

Doctors who escaped mob return next day

'Country needs us... don't step back'

SIDDHARTH YADAV
Bhopal

A day after they were heckled, pelted with stones and chased away from a locality in Indore, doctors Trupti Katdare and Zakiya Sayyed returned to the same spot. Back to finish an incomplete task, they refuse to abandon the role that could help save lives.

"I am not afraid. The profession we picked is a noble one," says Dr. Sayyed in a message. "And right now, the country needs us. So, don't step back, step forward and help the country."

The incident in Indore on Wednesday, where cases have soared to 112, left both the doctors, and the country, shocked and outraged. "Not even in our dreams could we imagine it," says Dr. Katdare. As they traced contacts of a patient in Tatpatti



Trupti Katdare and Zakiya Sayyed in Indore. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Balkhal, tempers flared on requests for quarantine, and a mob chased them out. Dr. Katdare fell to the ground and hurt herself, while others were injured as stones landed from behind.

After managing to escape in the tehsildar's car, they met the Collector who motivated them. But the push from their husbands proved most useful: "They said you should not give up this easily," says Dr. Katdare. And they returned the next day.

36 QUARANTINED IN INDORE
LOCALITY ▶ PAGE 4

In Coimbatore, take your daily bread & leave cash in the box!

Stall set up by baker elicits good response from locals

R. AKILESH
COIMBATORE

With physical distancing being underscored repeatedly to avoid the spread of COVID-19, a sweet shop owner at Rathinapuri in Coimbatore city, has set up a temporary stall outside his closed shop, stocked with loaves of bread but with no shop attendant. The customers can simply pick up a loaf and leave ₹30 in a cash box placed nearby.

With grocery shops being instructed to down their shutters before 2 p.m. amid the COVID-19 lockdown, this initiative has garnered a good response from the residents, said A. Vignesh, owner of Moondru Kambaram Nellai Muthu Vilas Sweets and Bakes.



Assured supply: A customer collecting bread from the self-service counter of a shop in Coimbatore. ■ M. PERIASAMY

"We set up this stall last Tuesday evening itself," he said, referring to March 24, when prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the CrPC came into force across Tamil Nadu at 6 p.m.

Throughout the day. The bread is baked in Mr. Vignesh's bakery behind the sweet shop. "A simple meal would cost ₹40. There are some who cannot afford it. At least they can have this bread for one meal," says the 24-year-old.



The Supreme Court has listed the case for April 7.

The court separately considered a writ petition by Karsargod MP Rajmohan Unnithan for an order to forthwith open the border. He said Karnataka's blockade was "ill-planned and dangerous" and had already led to the loss of lives.

Timings

DELHI

SATURDAY, APR. 04
RISE 06:08 SET 18:41
RISE 14:35 SET 03:33
SUNDAY, APR. 05
RISE 06:07 SET 18:42
RISE 15:43 SET 04:18
MONDAY, APR. 06
RISE 06:06 SET 18:42
RISE 16:51 SET 05:01

Delhi Weather max min
Delhi City 28 14
Safdarjung 28 14
Palam 29 14

Delhi Palam Today
28°C A hazy morning lies ahead. A warm afternoon is likely. Weather will remain mainly sunny and dry.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
30°C Haze will prevail in the morning. A rise in day temperatures is likely. A sunny sky will prevail.

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THE HINDU

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IN BRIEF

Plan to use stadium as quarantine site deferred

NEW DELHI
The Delhi government has deferred using the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium as a quarantine facility as the authorities believe the spread of COVID-19 infection is under control here, said sources on Friday. On March 30, south-east District Magistrate had issued an order asking the Sports Authority of India to hand over the stadium to the district administration for setting up of a quarantine facility.

JMI student sent to custody in violence case

NEW DELHI
A Delhi court has sent a student of Jamia Millia Islamia, arrested for allegedly hatching a conspiracy to incite communal riots in north-east Delhi, to three days police custody, said a lawyer. Meenar Haider, a PhD student, is the president of RJD youth wing's Delhi unit. Metropolitan Magistrate sent Mr. Haider for custodial interrogation after the police said it was required to unearth larger conspiracy.

'100 workers found fit after disinfecting Nizamuddin'

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI
Nearly 100 municipal workers, engaged in disinfecting the Nizamuddin area from where several COVID-19 cases have been reported, were found to be fit after screening by a panel of doctors, said the South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) said on Friday.

Among 95 public health workers, including 59 sanitation workers, did not show any symptoms of Covid-19, the civic body said. They have been told to keep a check on their health and consult a doctor immediately if they have a cold or cough or fever. The SDMC said Personal Protection Equipment was being distributed to field workers deployed in high-risk areas.

An intensive sanitisation drive was carried out in Kasturba Niketan, Lajpat Nagar, Bakkarwala Quarantine Center, Kapashera Extn. and Kalkaji by deploying tankers for spraying 1% sodium hypochlorite solution. Regular action plans have been chalked out and are being followed to disinfect and sanitise the major hot spots of COVID-19 in all four zones, said officials, adding that special sanitization and cleaning drives are being conducted in densely populated areas specially in JJ colonies.

Two more deaths, 93 fresh COVID-19 cases in the Capital

Local contact cases are stable, says Kejriwal; Delhi govt. launches helpline

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Capital on Friday reported two deaths and 93 new COVID-19 cases. The toll now stands at six with the total number of cases jumping to 386. Of the 93 new cases, 77 are people from a centre run by the Tablighi Jamaat in Nizamuddin, which has been evacuated by the authorities.

A total of 259 people from the centre have tested positive for COVID-19 so far just in Delhi alone, said officials, adding that this is 67.1% of the total cases reported in the city. Till Thursday, Delhi had 293 COVID-19 cases.

"Of the two people who died, one was a 36-year-old man from Tamil Nadu who was connected to the markaz [centre] event. He died on March 31 and his test came back positive on Friday," an official said. The second death was of a 70-year-old man from Delhi. "We are still tracing how he got infected," the official added.

79% positive
"All the people from the markaz (centre) who have been taken to hospitals (536) have been tested and many of the results are still awaited. Till now, 79% of them have tested positive, but many of the results are still awaited," a Delhi government official told *The Hindu*.

The official said that they have been checking and evacuating people from other mosques in the city who had visited the Tablighi centre in March. Till



People wait outside a bank to withdraw money in Dilshad Colony. FILE PHOTO: R. V. MOORTHY

HELPLINE NUMBERS		
COMMON HELPLINE — +91-11-23978046		
DELHI — 011-22307145		
GHAZIABAD — 0120 4186453		
NOIDA — 8076623612/6396776904		
GURUGRAM — 108/0124-2322412/ 9911519296/7015523471/9654231756		

now, around 400 people have been evacuated.

"The ones with symptoms have been moved to hospitals and others have been moved to quarantine facilities. They will be tested from Saturday onwards," the official said.

Earlier in the day, the Delhi government launched a COVID-19 helpline to provide updated information on the virus. "Information on centres where food is available for the needy, COVID-19 symptoms, measures taken by the Delhi government to deal with the pandemic and all other information can be gathered by calling up 8800007722," said

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal during a digital press conference.

He added that of the total number of COVID-19 cases 58 had a history of foreign travel and 38 cases were from local transmission through foreign travel patients. "The figure for cases that have arisen through local contact and transmission is constant and stable, which gives us hope that there is no spreading of COVID-19 in Delhi," Mr. Kejriwal said.

"I am holding regular meetings with the Health Department of Delhi and the doctors. If there is an outbreak of COVID-19, we are fully prepared to han-

dle the situation," he said.

Mr. Kejriwal added that the government had taken several measures to provide relief to the marginalised sections of society who have been affected by the lockdown, which includes provisions of 7.5 kg of ration to 72 lakh people.

"We have also devised a scheme to provide ration to those who do not have ration cards, and in a few days, we will start providing ration to them as well," he said, adding that as many as 1,780 centres are providing food to the needy.

Shelter and food

On Thursday, these centres provided lunch for 6,52,850 people and dinner for 6,30,000 people, said the CM. "A total of 328 shelters have also been opened in Delhi for migrant workers and people from outside Delhi. These shelters can accommodate 57,270 people; 11,443 people are living in these shelters right now," he added.

Mr. Kejriwal also instructed all MLAs to ensure that citizens in their respective constituencies got the benefits of all ongoing government schemes.

While reviewing the enforcement of the ongoing lockdown, Raj Niwas said that Lieutenant-Governor Anil Baijal had asked officials to ensure proper social distancing during food and ration distribution in addition to strict vigil of quarantine cases.

Mr. Kejriwal also spoke to Opposition BJP MLAs via video conference to seek their suggestions on tackling COVID-19.

Crime Branch sends notice to head of Tablighi Jamaat

Financial details of the organisation and of visitors sought

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Crime Branch of Delhi Police has issued a notice to Maulana Muhammad Saad Kandhlawi, head of Tablighi Jamaat, for violating lockdown orders, said a police officer on Friday. A senior officer said it is a routine rotation process after the lockdown in Delhi. "Seven police personnel of

Seven policemen sent on leave for 10 days

NEW DELHI

Seven policemen, who were part of the team that went to evacuate the Tablighi Jamaat Nizamuddin Markaz, have been sent on leaves, said officers on Friday. A senior officer said it is a routine rotation process after the lockdown in Delhi. "Seven police personnel of

tained any curfew pass or details of passes they had applied for. We also demanded banks statements of the last one year and income tax returns of the last three years," the officer said.

The Crime Branch has not specified a deadline for the notice.

Massive drive

Meanwhile, the police said that they have launched a massive drive across the city to identify people who attended the event at the Nizamuddin centre. "We have asked all district heads to get details of people staying over there and verify their identity and journey details. If any person is found to have attended the event after March 12, then he would be shifted to the quarantine with the help of health department," said the officer.

Two nurses test positive for COVID-19

Cancer hospital shut down after incident, says government

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

Two nurses of the Delhi State Cancer Institute (DSCI) have tested positive for COVID-19, the Delhi government said on Friday. The DSCI was shutdown on Wednesday and was sanitised after a doctor working at the institute tested positive for COVID-19.

"A senior resident from DSCI tested positive. His brother had come back from the U.K. a few days back and had met him.

SATYENDRA JAIN
Health Minister

into the reason behind his case," Health Minister Satyendar Jain had said.

Meanwhile, the government has announced that OPD services at LNJP Hospital and GB Pant Hospital will

be closed from Saturday, but emergency services of both hospitals will function. Both these hospitals are among the five facilities in Delhi designated for treatment of COVID-19 patients. The Trauma Centre at RML Hospital will function as a dedicated COVID-19 isolation ward while the Safdarjung Hospital's super specialty block has been converted into a state-of-the-art isolation management centre, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said on Friday.

Man arrested after son complains about him violating lockdown orders

35 FIRs lodged against people for flouting quarantine rules

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

A 59-year-old man from south-west Delhi's Vasant Kunj was arrested after his son lodged a complaint that his father was allegedly violating lockdown orders by going for evening walks, an officer said on Friday. He was later released on bail.

The complainant said he wanted the help of police to make his father understand the situation "but they took us to a police station and registered an FIR against my father".

The police said they received a call on April 1 about a man violating lockdown orders in Rajokri. A team then reached there and found a man requesting his father to not step out of the house.

"My father has a habit of going for a walk every-

day at 8 p.m. to meet his friends. He is old and is therefore vulnerable to COVID-19. When he insisted on continuing his routine, I made a PCR call in order to convince him with the help of police men," said the son.

An officer said an FIR was registered under Indian Penal Code Section 188 (disobeying rules and endangering life, health and safety of another person). The officer added that going out for walks is prohibited during the lockdown period. Beat constables are taking rounds in various parks across the city to take action against walkers and joggers.

On Friday, the police said a total of 35 FIRs have been registered against people for flouting home quarantine rules so far.

Ghost town



Connaught Place wears a deserted look during a nationwide lockdown in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic in New Delhi on Friday. ■ PTI

Capital records wettest March in history, says Met

Strong winds, rain and ongoing three-week lockdown clean in the city

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

According to data released by the Meteorological Department, last month was the wettest March on record, with the Capital receiving 109.6 mm of rainfall, which was 589% above normal.

The normal rainfall for March is 15.8 mm, said Met department officials.

The wettest March before this was in 2015, when the Capital received 97.4 mm of rainfall.

It was also a colder month with the mean maximum temperature settling at 28.2 degrees Celsius,

VII-19 have led to considerably cleaner air in the Capital.

Contributing sources
According to a report by the Central Pollution Control Board on the effect of the lockdown on Delhi's air, there was a substantial improvement in air quality of Delhi-NCR.

"The major contributing sources to particulate matter and NOx emissions [prominent pollutants in Delhi-NCR] have been restricted. On March 23, the air quality index [Air Quality Index] in Delhi-NCR was 'moderate', with an exception in Gurugram

which had a 'satisfactory' AQI. As the lockdown progressed, the air quality improved to 'satisfactory' across the board under the cumulated effect of restricted vehicle movement and commercial activities," the report said.

Ghaziabad and Noida

"Between March 28 and 29, the AQI improved to 'good' in Delhi, Ghaziabad and Noida due to higher wind speed and increase in mixing height [height at which pollutants are spread out in the atmosphere]. Higher mixing height leads to lower pollution," it added.

Labourers, migrant workers complain of overpriced essentials

Prices of vegetables also go up as security beefed up in Nizamuddin

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Daily-wage labourers and migrant workers living in and around Nizamuddin have complained of overpriced essential goods and vegetables in the area. Mean-

while, police have beefed up security in the region after it emerged as the biggest hotspot for the spread of coronavirus in India.

In Sarai Kale Khan, which is less than five kilometres from Nizamuddin West, onion is retailing at ₹60/kg, tomato at ₹50/kg, potato at ₹40/kg, while other seasonal

Jangpura, Lajpat Nagar and Okhla Mandi. Many work in local kirana shops, which are exempted from the ongoing lockdown enforced to combat coronavirus.

"Everything has become expensive in Sarai Kale Khan after the Nizamuddin incident. There is more police security now. With no job and less money, survival has become difficult. On top of it, kirana shops in the area are selling essentials at prices higher than MRP," Sarai Kale Khan houses a large number of migrant workers who work in Ashram, Nizamuddin, Bhogal, Bihar, said.



Food for thought: People queue up to receive food being distributed by Delhi police at Durga Park in Sagarpur, New Delhi on Friday. • V.V. KRISHNAN

IN BRIEF

Online activities for classes KG to VIII start

NEW DELHI
The Delhi government has kick-started its online learning activities for students of Class KG to Class VIII with assignments sent via SMS, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said. He said that the daily activities will involve tasks on memorising new things, brushing up their speaking skills and improving their writing skills. "After the schools reopen, these assignments will be checked by their respective teachers. These activities will be a part of the students' internal assessment," Mr. Sisodia said.

DU admission registrations on hold

NEW DELHI
Admission registrations for all courses in Delhi University for the academic year 2020-21 have been put on hold, the university announced on Friday. Given that the university has been declared closed until April 14, the registration process for admissions to undergraduate, postgraduate, M.Phil and Ph.D courses have all been put on hold until further orders, DU said. Those concerned may also check the website for updates, it added.

'Evacuation of Indians from other countries impossible'

NEW DELHI
The Central government on Friday informed the Delhi High Court that due to the lockdown in the wake of COVID-19, it was "not possible" to organise any evacuation of Indians from Bangladesh or any other countries. The Centre's response before the court came on a petition filed by advocate Gaurav Kumar Bansal seeking direction to the authorities to take steps for safe return of Indians, who are stuck in Bangladesh. The MEA said the Bangladeshi government too has announced a similar lockdown from March 26 to April 4.

Youth walks 5 km with torn intestine; son misses funeral

In the jhuggis of Mayapuri, lockdown has left people helpless and devastated; strict police and unresponsive ambulance teams compound woes

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

It was a painful five-kilometre walk for 19-year-old Gautam Prasad from his house in congested Mayapuri to ESI Hospital in Bali Nagar on Tuesday. His intestines were ruptured, but denied even an ambulance, he ended up walking the entire stretch.

Gautam had a bout of fever for two-three days. But on Tuesday morning, he complained of excessive pain and was taken to the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital, accompanied by his father Radhey Shyam, a factory worker, and

neighbour Ram Kirpal Prajapati. Here again, there was no option but to walk.

At DDU hospital, the staff allegedly told the family that they will give him pain-relief medicine. But as his pain aggravated, they decided to get an ultrasound scan at a nearby private hospital.

"We were informed that his small intestine has ruptured and he needs to be operated upon. They said it would cost around ₹60,000," said Ram, adding that the family decided to take him to ESI Hospital for monetary reasons.

When walking back home,



Family members and neighbours of Gautam Prasad, who walked from Mayapuri jhuggi to ESI Hospital. • SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

his pain increased and he gave up. Ram dialled an ambulance, but no one picked up. After persistent buzz, so-

meone did, but bluntly refused to send one.

"The hospital said they don't have any," Ram al-

leged.

Fear factor

Hopeless, they started walking. Though Ram owned an e-rickshaw, he didn't offer the vehicle for fear of getting impounded. "They don't even let us go out on the street. They will take the vehicle if we use it," said Ram.

Worse still, they had to keep off the police, as they feared getting stopped. Finally, they reached the hospital, where he was operated on an emergency basis. On Wednesday, Ram and Gautam's father Shyam were stopped

by the police on their way to the hospital. After several pleas, they allowed the father to go. Gautam's sister Vandana too had to walk.

Faraway funeral

In another jhuggi in the same locale, Anita and her brother Annu Prasad, both employees of a private company, got a phone call on Thursday morning, informing the death of their father Kailash Prasad in a village in Uttar Pradesh's Azamgarh. With no mode of transportation, they told relatives back home that they wouldn't be able to

attend the funeral.

"The last rites were performed by my sister's son," said Annu, the only son of Kailash. The father, he said, was diagnosed with blood infection on March 23.

"We spoke to a police officer and a local leader. They said they couldn't help. We didn't know about e-pass. Above all, we were told that even if we reach U.P., we will be put in separate shelters and won't be allowed to go home," said Annu, adding that he didn't get a chance to speak to his father or see him one last time.

Lockdown blues: no transport to reach hospitals

While some ride bicycle with patients, a few are left with no option but to walk

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

Five-year-old Laxmi, along with her brother Subhash (17), mother Rekha and sister Vandana came to Acharya Shree Bhikshu Hospital on Friday afternoon on a bicycle. She was suffering from high fever.

Subhash, who rode the bicycle about 3.5 km from Uttram Nagar to Moti Nagar, said that they got scared after Laxmi got a bout of high fever, which is a COVID-19 symptom.

"We don't have a vehicle and people in the area refused to help so I took the bicycle. Thankfully, the police did not stop us," he said, adding that he brought Vandana and his mother along because he was unsure of the diagnosis.

But at the hospital, a staff told them that the doctor would come only after lunch and they should either come back the next day or wait. They decided to leave, as

they reckoned it was not safe to hang around, said Subhash.

Deserted hospital

Inside the largely deserted hospital, announcements were being made, instructing people to visit hospitals only if it is absolutely necessary. Sitting on the pavement outside the hospital was 20-year-old Priyanka with her six-year-old brother Hari Om, who had suffered a fracture on his left hand. They had walked three kilometres from their

house in the jhuggis of Punjabi Bagh to reach the hospital.

"He got the plaster on his hand about a month ago and it had to be cut today, so I had to bring him. There was an e-rickshaw, but the driver was asking for ₹50-60 which I could not afford," she said, adding that buses did not stop. "If they wanted to impose a lockdown, they should have at least kept open options for us to reach hospitals," she said.

Standing at the bus stop near the hospital, a 45-year-

old man, who did not wish to be identified, said he had to show his office ID card to board a bus.

COVID-19

old man, who did not wish to be identified, said he had to show his office ID card to board a bus.

Ambulance woes

At the Deen Dayal Updhyay Hospital, which also wore a deserted look, Heera Devi stood with her son Ravi outside the emergency ward waiting for a vehicle to go home. Ravi was suffering from typhoid and she had brought him to the hospital in an ambulance.

"I don't have any money. My husband is a construction worker and is not able to earn a penny these days. In the morning, I had called for ambulance on 102. The operator denied once. I called again and said I was poor and had no other option, after which they sent an ambulance. Now, I am calling them again, but no one is picking up," she said.

The woman, who had to

Rickshaw-puller in city helps people fight lockdown crisis

Rickshaw owners not asking for rent for the vehicles'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A rickshaw-puller outside Moti Nagar metro station here, on spotting an old woman with stooped shoulders walking towards the station with a bag in her hand, asked her: "Kahn chhor doon mataji? [Can I drop you somewhere?]."

"I don't have money," the woman responded. The rickshaw-puller took the bag from her hand while saying: "It's okay. Come sit."

The woman, who had to

reach her residence in Raghubir Nagar, was on her way back from Acharya Shree Bhikshu Hospital. The rickshaw-puller, later identified as Uttam Kumar Singh, dropped the woman at Rajouri Garden, a few metres away from the police barricades there as he was gripped in the fear of getting stopped. Mr. Singh also gave the woman

water to drink. He said he did not charge money keeping in mind the situation due to the ongoing lockdown.

Only a few rickshaws are available outside metro stations and hospitals owing to the lockdown and the rickshaw-pullers said that they have not been riding more than a kilometre or two at a stretch because police officers stop them and use batons, "especially after 6 p.m."

Mr. Singh, a resident of Kirti Nagar, who has a family of seven to feed, said he had to



Subhash rode the bicycle for 3.5 km to take his sister to hospital. • HEMANI BHANDARI

they reckoned it was not safe to hang around, said Subhash.

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Uttam Kumar Singh outside Moti Nagar metro station on Friday. • HEMANI BHANDARI

Inmates at Gurugram relief camp bored, homesick and restless

Despite providing food and shelter, several of them are a concerned lot

ASHOK KUMAR
GURUGRAM

It has been only five days since Lala Ram, 25, found shelter at a makeshift relief camp at a community centre in Sector 15 Part-II here. He already feels 'homesick' and 'bored'.

"We need not worry about food at the camp, but we also have no work to do. We are not allowed to step outside on the road because of lockdown. It makes us feel bored and homesick. Every time we call our families, we feel more miserable," he lamented.

Dinesh echoed similar sentiments. He added that since it was a harvest season for Rabi crop, the govern-



People at a gaushala, converted into a relief camp, at Manesar in Haryana. • V.V. KRISHNAN

ment should have made better arrangements for their stay in villages. "It will help us get some work. The local farmers will also benefit." Al-

so, the quality of the food has deteriorated over the past couple of days," complained Bablu.

now, they need not worry about two square meals a day anymore. "It is comfortable here, but the food served is not inadequate. Al-

so, the quality of the food has deteriorated over the past couple of days," complained Bablu.

Ashish, another inmate,

said they would sit outside the shelter for a few hours daily maintaining a proper distance. Staying at Manesar relief camp, Vijay, a migrant worker at a textile unit in Panipat, feared a further extension of the lockdown.

Neelam's worry was different. "It is very uncomfortable for me as a woman to stay at the camp with the males all around. It is all the more difficult with a two-year-old child. The government should at least consider sending [those with] families to their native places. There are very few women and children at this centre," said Neelam.

Support for govt.
Despite the hardships, many at the Sukhrali relief camp supported the government's decision for lockdown. Having left his home to stay at a relief

camp, Rajesh, a tailor, said the decision had hit everyone hard and more so the poor, but the government had little choice.

"I have read in newspapers that countries like Italy and China are struggling, so our government had little choice. But a little planning could have eased the pain of the poor," argued Rajesh.

He said that he would flash the light from his mobile phone to support the centres. He claimed the administration supplied food to around 75,000 people every day within the municipal limits, including those in the slums.

Meanwhile, RTI activist Ramesh Yadav felt the government should arrange transport for those in the camps to return home instead of counselling them. He reckoned that many could also be employed as labourers for harvesting.

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THE HINDU

India's National Newspaper

EASTERN RAILWAY CORRIGENDUM

Corrigendum to Open Tender Notice No. TM/Out-Sourcing/Box Porter(ASN)/2019-21, dated 02.03.2020 published earlier by S Divisional Operations Manager, Eastern Railway, Asansol. In the above tender, Opening Date 07.04.2020 at 12.30 hrs, is hereby extended upto 15.06.2020 at 12.30 hrs. due to Corona outbreak. Other terms & conditions will remain unchanged. ASN (01/2020-21)

PROCEDURE FOR ON-LINE CANCELLATION OF COUNTER TICKETS

Journey tickets booked from PRS Counters can also be cancelled on-line through IRCTC website. For on-line cancellation of counter tickets following procedure may be followed : Go to the IRCTC website (www.irctc.co.in), and under the Trains section, go to Cancel ticket and choose Counter ticket. Enter the PNR number, train number and the Captcha shown on the page and follow the instructions. Following link may also be used for cancellation of counter tickets : <https://www.operations.irctc.co.in/ctcan/SystemTktCanLogin.jsf>

Chief Commercial Manager/PM

EASTERN RAILWAY

IAS officer tests positive for COVID-19

SIDHARTH YADAV
BHOPAL

The Madhya Pradesh Ayushman Bharat Yojana CEO and Managing Director tasked with procuring drugs and equipment for public healthcare institutions in the State tested positive for COVID-19 on Thursday night, said sources in the Health Department.

"It's true that an official of the Health Department has tested positive. However, his fever went away on Friday, but he remains admitted to a hospital," said Pallavi Jain Govil, Principal Secretary, State Public Health & Family Welfare.

An official, requesting anonymity, confirmed to *The Hindu* the 2011-batch Indian Administrative Service officer, who was the MD of the Madhya Pradesh Public Health Services Corporation Limited, had contracted the illness.

'Give us lamps, we will light them'

For daily wagers, the PM's appeal is intact but their options are running out

ANUJ KUMAR
GHAZIABAD



Migrant workers in Ghaziabad. ■ ANUJ KUMAR

home on Meerut road but they returned as they found the place too crowded. Here near the railway line, beneath the flyover, they felt better placed.

'We need food'
Guddu, a construction worker, chipped in. "When I work, I eat 10 chapatis in one meal. My appetite can't change overnight. I need at least two-three. We believe in the PM, but we need food as well."

Speaking to a cross-section

of daily wagers in Ghaziabad revealed that Narendra Modi's appeal was intact. Almost all the workers *The Hindu* spoke to knew about what the PM asked them to do on Sunday, right up to the duration. It is just a minor adventure in their arduous lives. After the exodus, they are getting used to the attention of the administration.

Jag Pravesh, a construction worker residing in a Vasundhara slum, said the lockdown has turned the focus on the

poor. "I guess the rich feel that we might bring the disease to them. I see scared faces around. That's why the police want to keep us inside. In the last 10 days, we have once received 5 kg flour, a packet of tea and sugar. I didn't expect it."

As for lighting the *diya*, Mr. Pravesh, who hails from Sitarmarhi in Bihar, said what was the harm in it. "This man (PM Modi) knows how to bring people together," he said.

A few blocks ahead, at another cluster of the slum of construction workers from Mahoba, Mahesh said for the first time he had seen residents and police taking note of their presence. "A few days back, locals came with puris but the police stopped them as they came with their own supply. We voted for Modi and we would do whatever he asks us to do. But I fear that even he is running out of options."

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GURUGRAM

More than 1,300 Tablighi Jamaat workers have been traced by the Haryana Police in 15 districts of the State over the past 48 hours. Eight of them have tested positive for COVID-19 so far.

Haryana Director General of Police Manoj Yadava on Friday said that 1,305 workers of the religious body have been traced after the police were alerted by Central agencies about the situation.

He said that about 500 of them admitted to having visited the Banglewali Masjid located in the Nizamuddin area of Delhi. Eight persons, three each from Palwal and Nuh and two from Ambala, have tested positive for the virus so far.

The DGP further said that

106 Tabligh workers were foreign nationals, tracked down in Faridabad, Ambala, Panipat, Palwal and Nuh. They mostly belonged to Indonesia, the Philippines, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Thailand. "All of them have been placed under quarantine and their passports taken into possession. Five FIRs have been registered under the IPC and Foreigner's Act," said Mr. Yadava.

Samples taken

Besides, 933 Tabligh workers from Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Assam and Bihar, who were in Haryana for Tablighi work, have also been tracked and placed in quarantine centres or in the mosques. Their samples have been taken.

The Haryana Police also

tracked 266 Tabligh workers belonging to Haryana who had visited different States and had returned over the past ten days to their villages. They have also been placed under quarantine. Most of them belong to Gurugram, Panchkula, Yamunanagar, Panipat, Nuh, Sonipat, Jind and Palwal.

'Many traced in Nuh'
Around half of the Tabligh workers tracked throughout Haryana were found in the district Nuh, said Mr. Yadava. "In fact, 636 Tabligh Jamaat workers, including 57 foreigners and 528 from other States, have been tracked to Nuh," he said.

Also, 948 FIRs have been registered and 1,374 people arrested for violation of the lockdown in the State since March 25.

36 primary contacts quarantined in Indore

The country has received the message of not fearing isolation, says doctor

SIDHARTH YADAV
BHOPAL

Residents of Indore's Tatpatti Bakhla locality, who chased away a team of doctors and health workers tracing contacts of a patient on Wednesday, have been more responsive since, not panicking at the possibility of isolation. The team had quarantined 36 primary contacts of three patients in different localities until 5 p.m. on Friday.

"Although we are working more today, mentally we are more relaxed," said Dr. Trupti Katdare, who works at a Primary Healthcare Centre in Kshipra and was among those heckled and pelted with stones.

The incident had sent

across a clear message, believes Dr. Zakiya Sayeed — who was also with Dr. Katdare on Wednesday — resulting in a positive change in attitudes. "A tenant from a building where a patient was found positive insisted on isolation for himself, although he had not had any contact. The country has received the message of not fearing isolation."

People's support
"If doctors can work in such adverse conditions, those who had contact with positive cases can come forward and help society too," said Dr. Sayeed, who works at a Primary Healthcare Centre at Kampti. "If people follow

this, within one week we can have control over the spur in the city."

The cause for distrust, said Dr. Katdare, stemmed mainly from rumours being spread on the social media. For instance, one message advised residents to resist quarantine at a different location as they would be huddled into a bus, taken to an undisclosed location and hideously be injected with the virus.

"It's not about the lack of awareness, but a wrong message being spread around, people being misguided," she said.

To dispel this uncertainty, good counselling is the only key, believe the doctors. "If you counsel them well, there will be no issues. People are

afraid of being quarantined, as it is shrouded in uncertainty. If you tell them the government is working for their own good, a positive message is sent across. Doctors, just do your duty!" said Dr. Katdare.

The misgiving about economic costs of a quarantine drives people away too. "They need to be assured all arrangements will be taken care of by the government," said Dr. Sayeed, who admitted it is a challenge to trace contacts in the city's congested clusters where the outbreak happened.

With most patients having no contact or travel history, doctors are yet to trace the source in Indore.

Hungry labourers appeal to PM

'Provide us daily ration, we are surviving on biscuits'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

Around 30 stranded migrant workers from Bihar uploaded a video appeal online on Friday here, asking the local administration and Prime Minister Narendra Modi for help in providing them with daily ration.

Motilal Kushwaha, 35, a painter by profession from Bihar's Bettiah district in West Champaran, said around 30 migrant labourers have run out money and food items due to the ongoing lockdown, forcing them to make the video appeal.

"We are having biscuits in our meals. We have no cash to return home. We are unable to buy daily food items. I

appeal to the PM to intervene and help us in shifting to Bihar or in providing food items. It's getting difficult for all of us here," Mr. Kushwaha told *The Hindu*.

These 30 labourers arrived in Srinagar in the first week of March and are staying in a two-room accommodation, run by Shakeel Ahmad, in Shalimar area, 14 km away from Srinagar's main commercial hub.

Not allowed to move'
"We have been coming to Kashmir for over a decade now. We could fetch good money here. However, since we arrived here we just worked for a couple of days and it suddenly stopped due

to the lockdown. We are not allowed to move around nor have access to food," said Motilal, 42, from Bihar's Bettiah district.

These workers earlier managed to get in touch with Member of Parliament Kedar Nath Singh of the RJD from Baniapuri constituency. "The MP's intervention did help in the third week of March. We were provided with around 30 kg of rice and some vegetables by the local administration.

However, it's a prolonged lockdown and we are again running out of essentials," said Motilal, another labourer.

Kashmir hosts over four lakh non-local labourers annually.

WHO team visits Tonk to study situation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

A team from the World Health Organisation is visiting Rajasthan's Tonk district, where the COVID-19 positive cases registered a sharp increase from 4 to 12 in a day, to conduct a survey and study the situation. The total number of confirmed cases in the State soared to 147 on Friday.

Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot said the State government would strictly adhere to the report and guidelines to be issued by the WHO. "Prevention and containment of the virus spread is the our utmost priority," he tweeted.

Locals resist cremation of virus victim

Last rites of Padma Shri awardee delayed in Punjab town

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

The cremation of Bhai Nirmal Singh Khalsa, a Padma Shri awardee, who died of COVID-19 was delayed as residents of his native town in Punjab feared it would spread the deadly virus in the locality.

Soon after the information spread that Mr. Khalsa would be cremated at a local crematorium in Verka town, several residents of the vicinity reached the cremation ground and surrounded



Bhai Nirmal Singh Khalsa

it. They were opposing the cremation out of fear that it could result in outbreak of COVID-19 in the area.

"Out of some misplaced sense of fear that the crema-

tion could result in outbreak of the virus, few people resisted the cremation. After negotiations with locals, who offered a secluded village common land a little distance from the cremation ground, the last rites were held in the evening," Shiv Dular Singh Dhillon, Deputy Commissioner Amritsar told *The Hindu*.

Mr. Dhillon said the residents also announced that they will build a memorial for Mr. Khalsa at the site of the cremation.

Activists decry Akhil Gogoi's serial rearrest in Assam

They question his detention in view of SC directive to decongest jails to prevent spread of virus

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

A group of 28 social activists and professionals across India have decried the serial rearrest of peasant leader Akhil Gogoi in Assam and questioned his detention in view of the Supreme Court's directive to decongest jails for preventing the COVID-19 contagion.

In a joint statement, the activists deplored the "deliberate circumvention of the norms of natural justice" in

detaining Mr. Gogoi in case after case to make the bail orders ineffective. They said his continuous detention by the Assam government through repeated arrests in various cases despite being granted bail by the courts could have worrying consequences for the democracy in India.

Mr. Gogoi was arrested in eastern Assam's Jorhat on December 12, 2019, for alleged links with CPI(Maoist) and role in instigating violence during the anti-Citizenship

(Amendment) Act in Assam. He was handed over to the National Investigation Agency, which failed to charge-sheets him within the mandatory 90 days.

The NIA's special court granted him bail but he was rearrested in connection with a year-old case and taken to eastern Assam's Sivasagar on March 19. A week later, he was granted bail in a case registered in January at a police station in Guwahati.

Before he could be released, he was "shown arrested" on March 28 in a case registered with the Chabua police station in eastern Assam's Dibrugarh district. This coincided with the granting of

bail in the Sivasagar police station-related case.

'Liberty violated'
"By repeatedly re-arresting him in old cases, the police violated his personal liberty. Keeping him in detention by digging up old cases is an attempt at circumventing the judicial scrutiny of executive actions," said Apurba Kumar Baruah, former professor of North Eastern Hill University and one of the signatories of the statement.

Lockdown halts harvesting season in forests

Lakhs of tribals, dependent on sale of non-timber products, stare at uncertain days



Tribals stitch leaves, collected from forests, to make plates in Odisha's Rayagada district. ■ FILE PHOTO: BISWARANJAN ROUT

tendu leaves, tree-borne oil seeds, mohua flowers, siali and sal leaves," said Chittaranjan Pan, a leading expert on NTFP economy in the country.

From mid-March when the issue of COVID-19 and its likely impact started to hog headlines of all local and national newspapers, the middlemen (buyers) had stopped coming to villages. Since March 22 when the 'Janata curfew' was imposed, the weekly markets in tribal-dominated regions also started to fall apart. Thus the NTFPs collected by tribals could not be disposed of.

Mr. Pan said, "in Odisha, majority of population are landless in tribal region. The

earnings from forest products in 3-4 months period contribute to 60 to 80% of their annual income. As per conservative estimate, Odisha's NTFP market pegs at ₹5000 crore."

Collection centres
The State government should immediately establish and ensure collection centres function under the Van Dhan Vikash Kendra scheme, he pointed out, adding that for tribals dependent communities must be assured of minimum support price and total procurement of minor forest products collected by them.

Of the 156 VDVKs proposed in Odisha, only one centre at Kuchinda in Sam-

Pay salary for COVID-19 fund donation'

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

A member of a tribal council in Meghalaya has sought part-payment of her salary, pending for two years, to enable her to contribute to the State's fund for combating the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sadharan M. Sangma, a Congress member representing the Dengnakpara constituency of the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC), said it was her duty as an elected representative to donate for mitigating the problem. "I can only do so if I get my salary which has been pending for 24 months," she told *The Hindu* from Tura, the main urban centre of Meghalaya's western half comprising the Garo Hills.

"The worth of 10 months' salary out of the 24 months pending salary may be released immediately so that I can contribute to Chief Minister's Relief Fund... to fight against the dreaded virus collectively," Ms. Sangma wrote in her letter to GHADC's Chief Executive Member Dipul R. Marak on Thursday.

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OBITUARY &
REMEMBRANCE

DEATH





TELANGANA **Throwing caution to the wind:** Though physical distancing is necessary to avoid the spread of COVID-19, people hardly follow the rules. (From left) Farmers waiting at the agriculture market in Khammam for free meals; women collecting potable water supplied once in four days at Ambedkar Colony in Bengaluru; people preparing a plot for vegetable farming in Thiruvananthapuram; and pensioners outside a bank near Old Jail Road in Visakhapatnam on Friday. ■ G.N. RAO, K. MURALI KUMAR, S. MAHINSHA & K.R. DEEPAK



Telangana sees 75 more virus cases

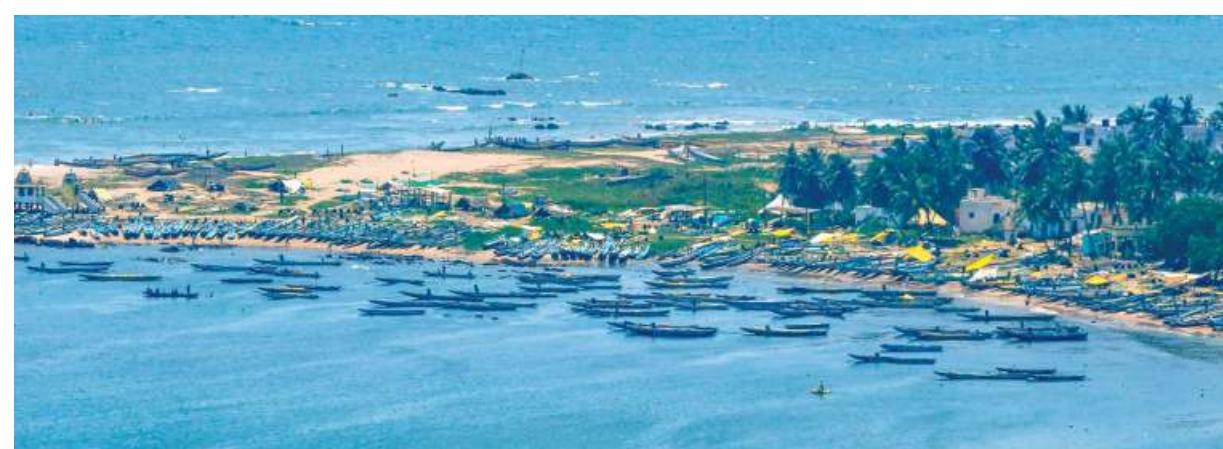
More cases linked to Tablighi Jamaat event confirmed in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
HYDERABAD

Telangana had a fresh spike of 75 new coronavirus infections reported on Friday, taking its tally to 229. Andhra Pradesh confirmed its first COVID-19 death, while Karnataka had four new cases, of which one died, and Kerala registered nine.

Eleven patients have died at various hospitals in Telangana, two of them on Friday, while 32 were discharged after treatment. There were 26,586 persons with a history of foreign travel and their contacts under home quarantine.

In Andhra Pradesh, it was



Standing still: Boats anchored at Jalaripeta, Visakhapatnam, due to the lockdown on Friday. ■ K.R. DEEPAK

check-up. His blood swab was sent for examination but in the meantime he died around 12.30 p.m. The patient was also suffering from hypertension and cardiac problems and was diabetic.

The delay in confirming the cause as coronavirus was due to his other ailments, State nodal officer Arja Srikanth said in a press release. The man's son tested positive for COVID-19 on March 31 and was in quarantine.

"We have identified 29 others who came in contact with him and they were also sent to quarantine," Mr. Srikanth added.

Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister (Health) A.K.K. Srinivas said over 140 of 161 coronavirus positive cases in

A.P. were related to the Jamaat event.

"Of the 881 blood samples of those who attended the Jamaat event, 108 turned positive. Results of another 65 are awaited."

"Also, 32 of their contacts too tested positive for coronavirus," Mr. Srinivas told reporters after a high-level review meeting with Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy. The Deputy CM said of the 1,085 people who attended the Jamaat event from A.P., 946 had since returned and among them, only 881 had been traced so far.

Cases from Delhi

In Karnataka, four people, including three who attended the Jamaat meet in Delhi, tested positive for the coronavirus on Friday, taking the State total to 128, the Health department said in Bengaluru. The three men from Belagavi had attended the Jamaat meeting from March 13 to 18, while the fourth was a 75-year-old resident of Bagalkote, who died late at night.

The official bulletin said as of Friday, 128 COVID-19 cases had been confirmed in Karnataka, including four deaths and 11 who were discharged.

Of 114 active cases in the State, 111 (including a pregnant woman) were in isolation at designated hospitals and were stable, while three were in ICU (one on oxygen and two on ventilator).

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tested positive for the coronavirus on Friday, taking the State total to 128, the Health department said in Bengaluru. The three men from Belagavi had attended the Jamaat meeting from March 13 to 18, while the fourth was a 75-year-old resident of Bagalkote, who died late at night.

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(With inputs from Vijayawada, Bengaluru and Thiruvananthapuram)

firmed were transit passengers of Kerala, who landed at airports in Karnataka and were being treated in the State.

Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa asked the labour department to deposit an additional ₹1,000 from the Construction Workers Welfare Fund in the accounts of 15 lakh labourers.

More cases in Kasaragod

Kerala reported nine new cases on Friday, with seven from the worst affected Kasaragod district, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said. One case each was detected from Thrissur and Idukki.

(With inputs from Vijayawada, Bengaluru and Thiruvananthapuram)

Heightened police vigil at quarantine ward in Adilabad

Jamaat returnees created ruckus, complain RIMS staff

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD

Police enhanced vigil at the quarantine wards at the Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Adilabad, on Friday after doctors and other medical staff manning the wards complained that they felt threatened by six Jamaat returnees, who are in isolates.

The six had refused to cooperate with the hospital staff. They refused to subject themselves to medical tests, declined to sleep in the ward and shouted at the staff, sources said.

"The COVID-19 suspects demanded cigarettes and were tampering with instruments," a RIMS source said. "They used foul language with the staff," he added.

"We have received the complaint and deployed more force in the quarantine wards. After the period of quarantine, the persons accused in the complaint will be proceeded against as per the law," Superintendent of Police Vishnu S. Warrier said.

Quoting the provisions of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, which are applicable in this instance, the SP said everyone is required to



The Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences, where six Jamaat returnees have been kept in isolation. ■ S. HARPAL SINGH

lims. The names of some officials including Subodh Yadav, an IAS official who earlier served in Karnataka, also figure in the list of 1,500 sent by the Centre.

Meanwhile, Jawaid Akhtar, Additional Chief Secretary, Health and Family Welfare, said the State has received a stock of 1.39 lakh Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) kits in the last one week and of that 53,000 is still remaining with the department. The rest have been distributed. While an order for one lakh kits has already been placed, an order for two lakh more will be placed soon, he said.

(With inputs from Bengaluru)

Bankers' panel protests against police notice

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The State Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC) has objected to the notices issued by the police to banks warning them of stern action if excess staff are found on duty in violation of the COVID-19 lockdown norms.

The SLBC has taken up the matter with State police chief Loknath Behera, convenor of the committee N. Ajit Krishnan said here on Friday. The panel has intervened after such a notice has been slapped on a State Bank of India branch in Kottayam.

Disbursal of pension

According to the SLBC, more personnel are needed to handle the increase in customer flow. Bank branches are witnessing

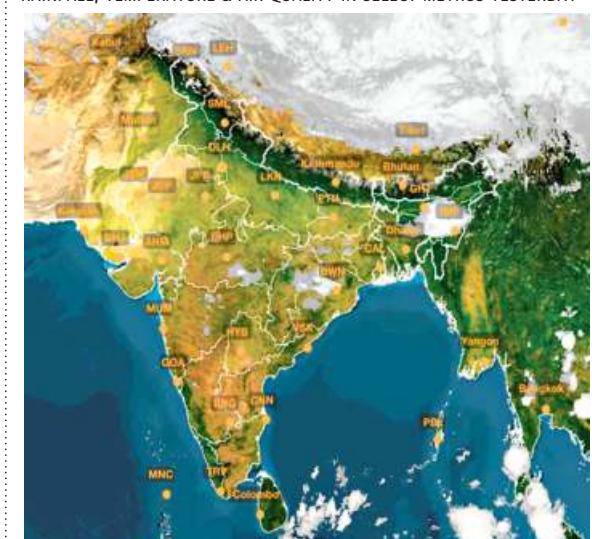
heavy traffic on account of Jan Dhan account payments and disbursal of welfare pensions. The rush is expected to continue for at least 10 days as the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-Kisan) payments also are due.

On April 1, Kottayam District Police Chief emailed all Station House Officers (SHOs) pointing out that many banks were seen to be functioning with their full complement of staff, which was against the government instructions.

The SHOs were asked to issue notices to the banks asking them to ensure that only personnel required for carrying out essential transactions were put on duty. Failure to comply with the directive would invite legal action, the notice said.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD; POLLUTION DATA: CPCB; MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 19.00 HRS)

Forecast for Saturday: Thunderstorm accompanied by lightning and gusts likely at isolated places over Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Chhattisgarh and Odisha.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	~36.4	22.2	9.0
Ahmedabad	~38.9	21.2	11.0
Aizawl	17.4	33.2	16.9
Altahabad	~36.8	17.8	10.0
Bengaluru	~35.6	23.0	12.1
Bhopal	~19.0	19.0	10.0
Bhubaneswar	~38.8	24.8	11.6
Chandigarh	~29.0	13.6	10.0
Chennai	~34.0	27.2	17.0
Coimbatore	~37.2	24.4	17.0
Dehradun	~29.5	23.0	12.1
Gangtok	1.6	20.8	11.6
Goa	~33.4	25.6	17.0
Guwahati	~35.2	19.3	10.0
Hubballi	~37.0	21.1	12.0
Hyderabad	~35.2	26.4	17.0
Imphal	1.8	31.2	14.7
Jaipur	~33.6	20.8	11.6
Kochi	~33.6	27.2	18.0
Kohima	2.2	24.2	11.6
Kolkata	~36.6	27.0	19.0
Mysuru	~1.0	20.0	10.0
New Delhi	~30.1	15.4	10.0
Patna	~35.2	22.8	17.0
Port Blair	~31.4	25.2	17.0
Puducherry	~34.3	25.6	17.0
Pune	~38.3	18.4	10.0
Raipur	~38.2	20.5	10.0
Ranchi	~33.6	22.0	10.0
Shillong	~25.5	18.4	10.0
Shimla	~19.3	6.8	10.0
Srinagar	~17.5	2.6	10.0
Thiruvananthapuram	~32.9	26.0	10.0
Tiruchi	~38.5	25.0	10.0
Vijayawada	~38.5	25.4	10.0
Visakhapatnam	~33.1	27.4	10.0

TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD; POLLUTION DATA: CPCB; MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 19.00 HRS)

Forecast for Saturday: Thunderstorm accompanied by lightning and gusts likely at isolated places over Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Chhattisgarh and Odisha.

CITIES **RAIN** **MAX** **MIN**



Light and sound

Symbolism has its place, but it must be part of a sustainable action plan

Full of sound and piety but signifying little, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's third and latest address to the nation on the COVID-19 pandemic hardly calmed frayed nerves. Anxieties triggered by the pandemic are on the rise among all sections of society. The lockdown enforced on March 24 has brought the economy to a halt: small businesses are bleeding, and companies are scurrying to keep their heads above water. Migrant labourers are stranded and hungry; health workers and security personnel are already stretched. The extent of the pandemic itself remains uncertain, meanwhile. It is only natural that 130 crore Indians, the audience that the Prime Minister calls out to in all his speeches, have a lot of angst regarding all this. They did expect a reassuring action plan from the Prime Minister and a clear picture of the challenge ahead. They expected some clarity on the post-lockdown course for the country. They hoped for more mitigation measures, beyond those announced by the Finance Minister and the Reserve Bank of India Governor. Chief executives of many democracies have personally addressed the people with detailed and material plans of action since the outbreak. They have also kept the interaction alive, and two-way. The political leadership at the Centre has largely remained aloof. Mr. Modi himself continues with his monologues, shunning all questions.

Rhetoric to rally the nation in a moment of crisis can actually do good. Unifying and galvanising the country is very critical in combating the pandemic. To the extent that it sought to achieve those goals, the Prime Minister's message was purposeful. But gong and cymbals that drown out substantive conversations can be counterproductive. If the pandemic itself was not mind-boggling enough, now the country has a unique puzzle to resolve – which is about the nine-minute light ceremony at 9 p.m. on Sunday, April 5, that the Prime Minister has called for. Unsurprisingly, an industry has instantly sprung up online interpreting the choice of number nine as a stroke of celestial genius, forcing the Press Information Bureau to issue a clarification. "Don't fall for the rumours and unscientific reasoning on the appeal for lighting diya..." it said. The Prime Minister himself has repeatedly asked people to stay away from rumours and misinformation about the pandemic, and rely only on trusted media platforms. Mr. Modi has a formidable following among the Indian public and his words carry weight. But no country can talk its way out of a pandemic and an economic collapse. If words are all one has, the virus is not going to be kind. Nor is an economy going to stop its free fall at the sight of candles. Symbolism is infused with meaning only through corresponding action.

A million and counting

The global spread of the virus is continuing despite mitigation efforts

On April 2, the number of novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) infections in 181 countries/regions crossed one million, and deaths passed 50,000. On April 3, the total number of cases and deaths stood at 10,39,166 and 55,092, respectively. With 2,45,646 cases, the U.S. accounts for 24% of the global total, while Italy, with 13,915 deaths, has over 26% of total mortality. Four countries – the U.S., Italy, Spain and Germany – have more cases reported than China. The exponential increase becomes striking considering that the time taken to report 1,00,000 more cases has been reducing. If it took 12 days to double to 2,00,000, it took just three days each to cross 0.3 and 0.4 million. Thereafter, 0.1 million more cases have been reported every two days except on two occasions – the increase from 0.6 million to 0.7 million and 0.9 million to 1 million happened in a single day. Yet, the cases reported so far might be a small percentage of the actual numbers in most countries. The main limiting factor in knowing the true spread has been the restricted number of tests done in most countries, India included. In about a month after restrictions on testing were loosened, the number of tests in the U.S. crossed one million on March 30. While this may be a huge number, there is still a bottleneck in the number of people being tested. According to *The Washington Post*, as on March 28, only 2,250 tests per million were performed, which is two-thirds of what South Korea did three weeks earlier.

Besides missing out those exhibiting mild symptoms and under-reporting by countries, the actual number of infections might be manifold higher as most countries have not made attempts to test those who do not show symptoms. There is accumulating evidence suggesting that a "substantial fraction" of people infected with the virus are asymptomatic. For instance, in South Korea, more than 20% of asymptomatic cases did not develop symptoms during hospitalisation. If in Italy the virus was spreading silently for about 50 days before the first case was reported on February 20, in Iceland, nearly half of the 20% who tested positive for the virus were either asymptomatic or showed only mild symptoms. The *South China Morning Post* said more than 43,000 people in China who tested positive by end-February were asymptomatic and unreported. Since April 1, China has been reporting new cases that are asymptomatic. China's National Health Commission reports that as on March 31 there have been 1,541 asymptomatic cases. The World Health Organization maintains that the virus mainly spreads through droplets and contact with contaminated surfaces, and the risk of getting infected by an asymptomatic person is "very low". In India, it is important to test travellers and trace and monitor their contacts. Otherwise, there remains the risk of continued spread once the lockdown is withdrawn.

The spectre of a post-COVID-19 world

The pandemic could not have come at a more difficult time; the global order could see major changes



M.K. NARAYANAN

As COVID-19 spreads exponentially across the world, and the figures of those testing positive as also the numbers of deaths keep increasing in near-geometrical progression, profound uncertainty and extreme volatility are wreaking havoc of a kind seldom encountered previously. It might, hence, be wise to start thinking of what next, if at least to try and handle a situation created by the most serious pandemic in recent centuries.

China's pivotal role

The problem with the novel coronavirus is that with the exception of China, which battled another coronavirus epidemic in 2003 – the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic – there is little available for most nations on which to base their assessment of what next. What is known is that China's growth rate has further plummeted, even as it was confronting an economic slowdown which had been in the works for some time. The consequences for the global economy of China ceasing to be the world's biggest exporter of manufactured goods are considerable, and with no country in a position to replace it, this development will precipitate a further economic downturn internationally.

It is not the intention here to minimise the human costs of the tragedy that has unfolded, and which is still unfolding, consequent on COVID-19. If China was the worst affected nation initially, the United States, Spain, Germany and Italy have since eclipsed China. Many other countries are today facing a serious plight, and few, if any, remedies are as yet available even as

the human costs keep mounting. Still, it is important to think of what lies ahead.

The COVID-19 pandemic could not have come at a more difficult time. The world was already having to contend with an uncertain economic environment, with industries in turn facing newer challenges such as having to adjust to a shift from cost efficiencies to innovation and breakthrough improvements. Added to this were: a global slowdown, increasing political and policy uncertainties, alterations in social behaviour, new environmental norms, etc. Newly emerging economies, such as India, were even more affected by all this, than some of the older established ones.

Prognosis for India

At one point, India was estimated to be among the 15 most affected economies by the COVID-19 epidemic, but as the pandemic has raged unchecked, all bets are off. An early estimate by the Asian Development Bank, soon after the epidemic was declared, was that it would cost the Indian economy \$29 billion. A recent industry estimate pegs the cost of the lockdown at around \$120 billion or 4% of India's GDP. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) had at one point warned that the COVID-19 impact, and the existing stress in the financial sector, meant that India would require up to six months even after the entire course of the COVID-19 epidemic is over to restore normalcy and business continuity.

India has, no doubt, acted with speed in the wake of the pandemic and declared a lockdown early on. Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared the pandemic as a serious global crisis, and in the course of two national broadcasts in mid-March, announced a series of steps such as a one day 'peoples curfew' (on March 22) 'social distancing', the setting up of a COVID-19 Taskforce under the Finance Minister to come up with

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO



measures to mitigate the economic hardship engendered by the pandemic, and finally a three-week-long lockdown. Several precautionary measures based on guidelines in vogue elsewhere in the world for preventing pandemics of this kind, have also been introduced including 'home isolation', 'home quarantine', etc.

The prognosis as to what lies ahead is indeed bleak. On the economic plane, according to most experts, a global recession seems inevitable. Uncertainty, panic and lockdown policies are expected to cause demand worldwide to decline in a precipitous way. This will inevitably lead to a vicious downward cycle, where companies close down, resulting in more lay-offs and a further drop in consumption. A precipitous decline in GDP would follow. To compensate for this loss, massive inflows of government funds would be needed, but most governments, India included, might find it difficult to find adequate resources for this purpose. Equally important, if not more so, is that such massive inflows of funds (if they are to be effective) should be here and now, and not later, by which time the situation may well have spiralled out of control. Global coordination was a must in the extant situation.

Pandemic as disrupter

COVID-19 is, in turn, expected to bring about major changes in the global order. Some of these changes have, no doubt, been in the making for some time, but would get accelerated. As of now, though the U.S. is no longer the global

power that it once was, it is hardly in retreat. It is, without doubt, increasingly disinclined to act as the world's gendarme, as instanced by its retreat from Afghanistan after a dubious accord with the Afghan Taliban, but this was not the end of the road as far as U.S. power was concerned.

Post COVID-19, however, and given that the U.S. is among the countries badly affected by this pandemic, together with existing uncertainties affecting its financial markets, the U.S. can be expected to step back even further – from one of assertion to neutrality in global affairs.

Already, U.S. command of the global commons has weakened. Meantime, China and Russia have strengthened their relationship, and improved their asymmetric capabilities. The challenge from China is becoming more obvious by the day – measured by purchasing power parity, the U.S. is not the largest economy in the world as of now. Even more daunting from a U.S. standpoint, and also representing a sea-change from the recent past, Russia has become far more economically and politically stable and an important power broker in West Asia. These shifts cannot but, and are likely to, have a direct impact on the liberal international order. It could, in turn, give a boost to authoritarian regimes and authoritarian trends.

Social concerns

Moving away from the political and economic consequences of COVID-19 are other concerns arising from an extended lockdown, social distancing and isolation. Psychologists are even talking of an 'epidemic of despair' arising from a fear of unknown causes, resulting in serious anxiety and mental problems. Extended isolation, according to psychologists, can trigger a different kind of pandemic even leading to possible suicidal tendencies, fits of anger, depression, alcoholism and eccentric behavioural patterns.

Another fallout from the current epidemic might well be the extent to which inequality in incomes impact segments of the population, facing a common malaise. Countries lacking a comprehensive nationwide health system would find this an even more difficult situation to handle. Meantime, as the economy weakens, accompanied by job losses, those without high levels of skills would fall further behind.

This is evident to some extent already given recent reports of mass migration across the Indian landmass. Out of work migrant labour, unable to find new jobs since they lack the necessary skills, are attempting to return to their normal habitat, bringing in their wake untold suffering and, perhaps even the spread of the virus. This has all the makings of a huge human tragedy. Existing curbs on their movement would further exacerbate the problem, and could even lead to a major law and order situation.

Digital factor

One possible, and unexpected, aspect of the COVID-19 epidemic could be the thrust it could provide to 'digital authoritarianism'. China's authoritarian methods seem to have helped it to contain the spread of the virus – at least for the time being. Somewhat similar tactics are being employed by some other countries as well. In turn, leaders across many nations may find China's methods, and the embracing of technology to refresh authoritarianism for the modern age irresistible, and a standard to be adopted, even if they profess to be democratic. The rise of digital autocracies could lead to digital repression, and in the age of AI-powered surveillance, create a capacity for predictive control, or what is often referred to as 'social management'.

M.K. Narayanan, is a former National Security Adviser and a former Governor of West Bengal

Only through the prism of science

India needs its top leader to make people realise why science has no substitute in the battle against COVID-19



ATUL MISHRA

On Friday, April 3, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made his third COVID-19 address to the nation. To raise the people's morale, Mr. Modi asked them to light up candles, *diyas* (lamps), torchlights and mobile flashlights for 9 minutes at 9 p.m. this Sunday. Soon after his address, the citizens' outreach portal of the Government of India tweeted a video explaining the 'science' behind the Prime Minister's request.

The video had a former president of the Indian Medical Association claiming that the request was based on a yogic 'principle of collective consciousness'. The doctor said that if the people collectively thought that they would not be afflicted by the coronavirus, then their collective consciousness would ensure that this happens. This, he said, was based on a 'quantum principle'. The tweet was soon deleted. But the incident shows how pseudoscience may be endangering India's public health policy at this critical moment.

Need for scientific temper

At no point in its modern history has India needed its people as now

to urgently understand how microbiology impacts public health. The Central and State governments are making huge efforts to give us a crash course on the spread and arrest of COVID-19. But in our country, the Prime Minister's voice on national issues carries the most weight. In this hour of national crisis, India needs its top leader to make the people realise why science has no substitute in battling the virus. How has Mr. Modi fared as a promoter of scientific temper?

In October 2014, the Prime Minister made two claims linking cutting-edge life sciences to Indian myths, including the *Mahabharata*. In a speech delivered in Hindi, he said that Karna's birth was a result of stem cell science and technology. He also said that the world's first plastic surgery was performed on Ganesha, giving the deity his elephant head. And, he made these remarks while inaugurating a hospital in Mumbai.

Invoking 'Mahabharata'

On March 25 this year, a day after announcing the national lockdown, Mr. Modi interacted with the residents of Varanasi. Invoking the *Mahabharata* again, he told them that the *Mahabharata* war was won in 18 days and India would win its war against the virus in 21. In his English translation of the epic, Bibek Debroy, the Chair of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, doubts that



the war of the scale described in the epic took place. Or that "miraculous weapons and chariots were the norm".

The Prime Minister's 2014 remarks mixed up science and mythology, and sent out the following public message: our epics are historical truths; the fantasies within them are records of our ancient accomplishments in cutting-edge science and technology; and since the 'knowledge' they contain has come down to us as part of our unbroken tradition, our indigenous wisdom can solve the problems that the life sciences currently face. One wonders how those who believed his 2014 remarks would have responded to his projection of winning the war against the pandemic in 2020.

Since Mr. Modi's 2014 remarks, a number of Central and State leaders as well as lawmakers belonging to his party have peddled pseudoscience and untenable claims that fracture the backbone of the life sciences. For instance, in 2017-18, the then Minister of

State for Human Resource Development, Satyapal Singh, called the theory of evolution 'scientifically wrong' and demanded its removal from the school curricula. Such views are illustrative of a thriving ecosystem of opinions masquerading as 'indigenous' science.

Although this ecosystem has been around for long, it has strengthened in recent years. Chief Ministers, Union and State Ministers, lawmakers, film personalities, businesspersons, gurus and other notables with large public following have repeatedly made pseudoscientific statements. Science gatherings have been used to peddle such ideas. And public defenders of science have been marginalised.

Dispelling the darkness

It is not surprising therefore that a 'theory' that sound vibrations kill the virus recently found a large number of takers. Nothing but the acceptance of this myth masquerading as science explains the outrageous interpretation of the Prime Minister's call to thank the nation's essential service providers with applause, bell-ringing and banging of metal *thalis* (plates). Several groups of people hit the streets on the evening of March 22 to 'celebrate' the 'Janata Curfew'. They practised intense social proximity and banged metal utensils merrily and mercilessly. Did these actions increase the danger of the

community spread of the virus? If they did not, then why did the Prime Minister tweet the next day that many people had not taken the lockdown seriously?

Mr. Modi did not ask people to erupt on the streets and endanger public health. However, it is not implausible that it happened because his message was interpreted by groups of people influenced by the present anti-science ecosystem. Dozens of pseudoscientific solutions to the pandemic are floating within this ecosystem. After Mr. Modi's Friday morning address, claims about the prowess of light to fight the virus have begun circulating on social media. The Prime Minister has for years had the authority to crack down on this ecosystem. We would have been better placed in the fight against COVID-19 had he done so.

And thus, the challenge: we are confronting a pandemic that only science and technology can fight in an ecosystem rife with belief in pseudoscience. The 20th century philosophers of science, Karl Popper and Imre Lakatos, argued that pseudoscience was a great danger to liberal societies. We can only hope that it is not irreversibly damaging India's public health in this moment of crisis.

Atul Mishra is an associate professor of International Relations at Shiv Nadar University. The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

Needed, a torchbearer

Instead of indulging in periodical illusory acts of light and sound shows, we need to sit back and stare at some hard questions. Is the COVID-19 testing in India faster than the spread of the virus? Have the isolation wards and hospitals been well-equipped, so that they are safe for the patient as well as the physician? The sea waves did not stop when King Canute said "freeze". Nature's laws are rooted in science and need not obey an individual's diktats.

P. DAVID BALASINGH,
Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu

■ The people of this country have exhibited remarkable

resilience in times of adversity, time and again. This is seen from the fact that lakhs of migrants left jobless and reconciled themselves to the situation. In this context, it was expected that the Prime Minister would spell out measures to assuage the feelings of the distraught migrants, elderly and sick. However, his call to the nation to light lamps has trivialised the the issue.

V. SUBRAMANIAN,
Thane, Maharashtra

China's secrecy
China quite apparently was not transparent in its reporting when the SARS-CoV-2 virus broke out in Wuhan as early as in

December last year, despite the fact that it knew about the great dangers the virus posed to peoples' lives. As a powerful member of the United Nations, it failed badly in its responsibility to help other member countries on this issue. Further, there was some lapse on the part of the World Health Organization too. The health body termed this outbreak a 'global emergency' on January 31 but waited for more than one more month to finally declare it a pandemic, well after the deadly disease had penetrated many parts of the world and taken many more lives. If the pandemic pronouncement had come a month earlier, some

countries would have taken early preventive steps like imposing lockdowns, getting sufficient ventilators, testing kits hospital beds, etc. and consequently thousands of lives would have been saved in Italy, Spain and other badly affected countries ("Wuhan initially downplayed crisis, says China expert," April 3).

A. MOHAN,
Chennai

■ In the middle of a battle
Prime Minister Narendra Modi's proposal of a staggered exit to the 21-day lockdown may defeat the very purpose of the exercise. The threat of COVID-19 will remain real even at the end of the period. Hence, the

prohibition on gatherings and implementation of social distancing should be continued for at least another month. The formula of testing, tracing, quarantining and isolating people can go a long way, if it translates well on the ground. Though the

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

A report headlined "India to raise Sheikh Saeed case at FATF after Pakistan court orders its release" (April 3, 2020) erroneously said Sheikh Saeed, while in Delhi, allegedly kidnapped four British tourists. It should have said four tourists including three Brits and an American.

The long march to uncertainty

Blamed for leaving their homes in defiance of the lockdown, hungry, and cash-strapped, migrants struggle in packed shelters, while those who managed to reach their native places face hostility. **Ajeet Mahale, Jatin Anand and Omar Rashid** report on their plight

"In my 20 years in Mumbai, I have never seen such a sight," said Gopal Das as he recounted his ordeal on March 21 at the Lokmanya Tilak Terminus. Gopal was among the sea of people who had attempted to board what would be the last few trains out of the city to their homes hundreds of kilometres away. Gopal, a construction worker, did not manage to board the train. And nothing had prepared him for what was to follow.

Gopal is from Bhagalpur, Bihar. He said he and his friends spent nearly four hours trying to get tickets. "A few people who had clambered on to the trains fell on the platform. A little later, we heard that all the trains had been cancelled. Since there was no public transport, we walked for three hours to our room in Bandra (East) with ₹250 in our pockets. We were still hoping they would start the trains. We didn't think it would last this long," he said.

Visuals of hundreds of workers wearing *gamchhas*, carrying heavy backpacks and wailing children, and walking on national highways, boarding tractors, and jostling for space atop multi-coloured buses became defining images for days to come in India. To fight the novel coronavirus, States began imposing restrictions on the movement of people. Then the Prime Minister announced a nationwide 21-day lockdown. This tough measure was met with fear, anger and frustration in many parts of the country, including Mumbai.

No transport, no jobs, no food

In its own capacity to contain the spread of COVID-19, the Maharashtra government put in place a series of restrictions in the days leading up to the March 24 nationwide lockdown. On March 20, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray imposed a lockdown in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, Pune, Pimpri-Chinchwad and Nagpur until March 31. Suddenly, in just a few hours, lakhs of migrant workers living in the city found themselves without work. To make matters worse, there was little or no guarantee that they would get basic amenities such as food and water. This forced thousands of migrant labourers to flock to the city's major train termini – the Lokmanya Tilak Terminus and the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus – as well as train and bus terminals in other cities. Following the Chief Minister's announcement, the Railways operated 14 special trains on March 20 and 21, eight of them from Mumbai, to various destinations such as Patna, Howrah, Dhanapur, Gorakhpur, Manduadih and Balharshah. Long-distance passenger services were initially shut only on March 22 on account of the Janata Curfew. However, the suspension of services was extended to March 31 and then to April 14 after the Prime Minister announced the lockdown. Shahrukh Malik, a driver of Ola and Uber cabs, said: "Had we known this was going to last this long, we would have gone home much earlier and returned after two-three months."

Worse was to follow. City-based civic organisations were flooded with distress calls from workers across the city, who were in dire need of food. Sadruddin Sheikh's phone has been ringing constantly for a week. He and his team, spread across the city, are part of the Jharkhandi Ekta Sangh. "We have managed to give ration to only 1,200 people. This is a fraction of the number of people who need help at the moment. With each passing day, the calls increase. I am now getting around 1,000 calls every day," he said.

According to the 2011 Census, Maharashtra has the highest number of migrants in the country (2.3 million). But activists say that the Census fails to capture seasonal migration that occurs for around four to five months. For 20-year-old Digambar Rai, the last week has been a nightmare. He arrived in Mumbai from Jharkhand on March 21 in the hope of earning for a few months before returning home. He had no idea about the lockdown; he was told that he could earn around ₹400 a day as a construction worker. "I have not even worked a day, so I have no money. I am struggling to get ration. I am relying on other workers from Jharkhand to help me," he said.

According to Raghav Mehrotra, a researcher at Aajeevika Bureau, an organisation that works with migrant labourers, what connects all the migrant workers in the region now is that they have all lost their jobs and wages. "In the communities that we work in, migrant workers typically work in small garment workshops. They stay at the site of work and rely on local dhabas for their daily food. We have managed to get them basic ration by transferring money to their nearest grocer, but cooking the food is a real challenge," he said.

Many migrant workers have banded together to ask for help. Manas Raut from Odisha lives and works in Rabale on the outskirts of the city. Raut said he and 70 other workers from his State were provided aid after they sent a distress call on the Internet. Many set up their own helpline numbers. "None of



Migrant workers begin to walk to Madhya Pradesh from Mumbai. (Below): Migrants from Delhi in Lucknow. ■ ARUNANGSU ROY CHOWDHURY/PTI



our employers have been in touch with us. We are struggling to make both ends meet during this lockdown," he said.

The lockdown has also exposed the lack of a safety net for migrant workers. For instance, many construction workers found that they were not eligible to receive funds under the Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Fund. Gopal said several contractors he knew had left for their homes after realising that there was going to be no business. "None of them have picked up my phone in the last one week," he said.

A shelter for nobody

In Uttar Pradesh, 10 days after the Prime Minister's announcement, facilities such as the Jaypee Sports Complex on the Yamuna Expressway, the largest of its kind created by the U.P. government in Gautam Buddha Nagar to provide shelter to migrant workers possibly stranded in the sprawling district, lay vacant. The complex has the capacity to accommodate 2,000 people.

Sprawled over approximately 12 acres en route to Agra, the camp consists of an estimated 57 large tin sheds, some designated 'family sheds', all lined with wooden panels to protect occupants from the sweltering summer. The sheds have mats with clean white sheets, bedding, sanitation and potable water facilities. There are separate toilets for men and women. What the complex lacks since it became ready on March 30 is something very significant: the very people for whom it exists.

"No one is coming here. What can be done about it? It looks like all of them have left. But when the administration decided to set up this camp it must have done so based on some logic," said an official associated with the upkeep of the camp, the largest among the 28 created over 60 kilometres between the U.P. border, which commences at Noida, and Jharkhand, where India's largest airport is scheduled to come up. The State administration had sought to put arrangements in place to provide shelter to 6,050 migrant workers according to an order issued on March 29 evening.

These measures, in addition to ap-

peals made by the Chief Ministers of U.P. and Delhi and the Prime Minister himself, seemed to have been too little too late. Most such shelters in the Gautam Buddha Nagar district, sources in the U.P. government familiar with developments in this regard said, were either vacant or had "very thin occupancy". In the capital, though there was significant occupancy at such shelters, food arrangements could only be made incrementally over several days.

A trickle and then a deluge

On the night of March 28, the Indian Railways announced that all passenger trains would be suspended, there was a trickle of migrant workers – most of them daily wage earners who no longer had the means to sustain themselves and the family members accompanying them. The trickle turned into a deluge at certain points by March 28 – places in Anand Vihar in Delhi bordering U.P.'s Ghaziabad; in Manesar, Faridabad and Gurugram in Haryana; and in Noida and Greater Noida in U.P.

While a majority of the migrants were seen boarding buses already overflowing with passengers, hoping against hope to reach their homes hundreds of kilometres away, others, sources in the government said, had walked endlessly on highways linking States before the borders were sealed. They walked along the banks of the Yamuna river, through the wilderness of U.P., and through un-used railway tunnels before being told that the borders were shut.

Those who had tried and failed, over two consecutive days when the lockdown was eased in U.P., to find any means of travelling home returned to their rented accommodations to live a life of uncertainty. Some from States such as Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal, located far away from the NCR, decided to stay back. "We first thought of going. Even if the trains were not operational we thought

we would take buses. We packed our bags and went to Zero Point because our family begged us to try and travel somehow as things seemed to be getting worse. But there were no buses except to Agra and they were mostly full. It would have taken us weeks to get to Kolkata. So we came back," said Pradeep Halder, employed as a security guard in Greater Noida.

"Did you see what they (the police) are doing to people looking for buses? I shudder to think how many times they will beat my husband and me if we try going to Ranchi. And what for anyway – getting on those crowded buses will expose us to the risk of contracting the infection," said Manju Kumari, a resident of Jharkhand, employed as a house help in Greater Noida's Omega-I.

On March 28 morning, a Saturday, Zero Point on the Yamuna Expressway was packed with migrant workers who chose to put their urge to reach home above the need to practise social distancing lest they contract SARS-CoV-2. They were there as the district administration had announced that 200 State-run buses had been arranged to ferry commuters to various locations in the rural parts of U.P. every two hours from the area. Bound mainly to Agra, Aligarh and Lucknow, migrant workers and their families thronged to the location to try their luck at boarding any vehicle, en route home, till midnight.

Manish Kumar, who was employed at a factory in Kasna and was among the hundreds seeking to inch closer home, in his case to Kanpur, said: "Any form of transport which takes me anywhere close to my destination from here will do at this point. I'm going to die soon anyway. If I stay here it will be of hunger; there is no one here to even beg for food. Everyone's pockets are empty. If I contract the infection I can at least die on my own soil."

Families carrying whatever they could get their hands on before under-

taking their journey lined the boundary wall of the highway as small groups of civil society volunteers offered them vegetable biryani, sealed cups of water and hand sanitiser.

Animesh Kumar, an out-of-work factory hand who sought to travel to his home in Bihar's Munger, was among them. "Things are really bad here. You know what is happening; then why do you keep asking? I've told you I'm on my way. I have nowhere else to go, I will come home soon, trust me," he assured his mother over the phone as he broke down. "They should have allowed us to come here two days ago," he complained when asked what was wrong and if he needed any assistance. "For two days – first in the morning and then in the evening – I tried to come here so I could catch a bus or use any other means to go home. The police beat me every time I tried to reach the expressway on both days. I will get on any bus, any vehicle; I'll start walking from wherever it drops me," he said.

After many hours, having realised the futility of their efforts, many decided to return to their rented accommodation. Anand Kumar, who operates a pan shop in the Alpha-I area near the transit hub of Pari Chowk, was engaged in an animated discussion with his roommates Sunil Kumar Gupta and Gupta's sibling, Anil. "They are charging ₹1,000-₹2,000 per passenger and the buses themselves are jam-packed. Where will you people sit? What if you get infected?" he asked the Gupta siblings.

At the end of a four-hour-long wait, Sunil and Anil decided to abandon their effort to find a ride. According to a police official deployed on duty near the point, they were not among the "fortunate" ones who had been able to find transport till midnight on Saturday. "What's the point of being stuck with nothing on either side of Zero Point," Sunil asked. "Let's go back home," he told Anil and Anand as they began their five-km-long walk back "home".

On Monday morning, as strict enforcement of the lockdown returned to the area, the same police personnel who were trying their best to assist migrant workers board the buses used their batons and sticks to "persuade" hapless migrant workers to go to shelter homes.

As those like Ram Kumar and his family of seven, who had travelled from Bihar and could reach Zero Point in Greater Noida only on Monday morning, sought to try their luck, Sunil and Anil were busy persuading their landlord against throwing them out since they would be late with the rent this month. "We were able to convince him; both of us pooled in some money. It looks like it will be enough to tide us through the lockdown till April 14," Sunil said on Thursday, almost a week after he tried – and failed – to keep his

promise to his mother that he would return home.

Not quarantined

U.P. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath instructed officials to prepare a list of migrants who had started moving into the State last week. He said they must be identified, medically inspected and put under home quarantine if they were suspected of having the virus.

However, officials on the ground find it difficult to contain the people in these quarantine homes. In districts like Sultanpur, Rae Bareli, Hapur, Hathras and Azamgarh, the police have lodged cases against people for jumping quarantine. In Sultanpur, 26 persons of a 115-capacity quarantine home fled after jumping from the second floor of the building using a bedsheet. All of them were later located. In Lakhimpur Kheri, a Dalit man who had returned from Gurugram was found hanging in the field after the police allegedly beat him up for jumping quarantine. The matter is under probe. In Hathras, the quarantined persons gave the panchayat secretary the slip when he left the premises after dinner.

While a number of migrants said they underwent thermal screening at the bus station of their native district when they deboarded, many slipped under the radar. A group of migrants from Sitapur district returning from Gurugram on March 29 said they went straight to their homes without getting screened as they arrived in the wee hours. "Our bus arrived at 3:30 a.m. There was nobody there," said Shivpal Singh. No official approached him either, he said. Another migrant in Gorakhpur district narrated a different story, however. After reaching his village, the locals forced him to get a medical test done before allowing him entry, even though he didn't show any symptoms, he said. As a bargain, he later decided to stay under quarantine in his house and not at the primary school built outside the village.

As efforts to control the pandemic continue, U.P. has witnessed a sharp rise in figures over the past week, coinciding with the entry of migrants and the revelation of the Tablighi Jamaat event in Delhi.

Meanwhile, in Mumbai, apart from the pandemic and the economic situation it is a bleak future that worries people. For the construction workers of Mumbai, the peak season consists of the months of March, April and May as construction activity stops once monsoon starts to set in. With most of the season lost in the crisis, several workers will have to head back home. Digambar, who had come to the city in hopes of earning some extra money, said that he would be taking the first train back. Gopal agreed with him. "There is no question of staying back. The city will be half empty once the trains start," he said.



FROM PAGE ONE

Coronavirus death toll touches 62 in India

"Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan has appealed to patients and their families not to create any obstacle and allow the medical staff to discharge their duties. He is concerned about the violence against medical staff being reported from various part of the country," Mr. Agarwal said.

Meanwhile, the Home Ministry launched two more COVID-19 related helpline numbers - 1930 (all India toll free number) and 1944 (dedicated to Northeast) in addition to the existing seven.

NSA to be filed against 6 for harassing nurses

Manish Mishra, Superintendent of Police (City), Ghaziabad told The Hindu, that the complaint was against six Jamaatis who were picked up from the Masuri area of Ghaziabad.

Shailendra Kumar Singh ADM (City) said the six persons, including the one who has tested positive, have been shifted to another quarantine facility. It has been

cy care center, trauma centre and corona screening centre while at Safdarjung he took reviewed facilities available at the super specialty block which has been converted into a COVID-19 isolation management centre, with 400 isolation and 100 ICU beds.

"Listened to the Pradhan Showman. Nothing about how to ease people's pain, their burdens, their financial anxieties. No vision of the future or sharing the issues he is weighing in deciding about the post-lockdown. Just a feel-good moment curated by India's photo-op Prime Minister!" tweeted Mr. Tharoor.

U.P. villages tense as many skip quarantine



Eye in the sky: A policewoman testing a drone used to check gathering of groups during the lockdown in Prayagraj on Friday. ■ AP

The administration has taken action against such persons in across districts including Hathras, Sultanpur, Lakhimpur Kheri, Rae Bareli, Sitapur, and Azamgarh. Returning workers are being kept in primary schools or other buildings outside villages for a designated period before being allowed home.

In Rae Bareli on Thursday, an FIR was lodged against nine persons in Kubna village in Maharajanagar tehsil for escaping the isolation centre built inside the local primary school.

In Rae Bareli, the district magistrate also ordered FIRs against 19 persons in Saloni, Deeh and Nasirabad areas for escaping the quarantine centres and not following "quarantine norms."

Hathras police officials on Thursday evening said they had lodged a case against 29 persons under Sections 269 and 270 of the IPC and Section 4 of the Epidemic Diseases Act for allegedly escaping the quarantine centre in Sarabar village in Sadabah.

Thirty-five persons were kept at the quarantine centre with some of them coming there recently after the huge influx of migrants fleeing home from cities like Delhi.

Police brutality

In Lakhimpur Kheri district, police are probing the death of a 25-year-old Dalit man Roshan who was found hanging in the fields of his village Thariya Pipriya on March 31 three days after he returned home from Gurugram where he worked in a power tower firm. His family alleged that he was threatened and badly thrashed by policemen for allegedly escaping from the local quarantine centre, following which he hung himself.

Roshan had left the quarantine centre after his sister-in-law asked him to go to local flour mill to grind the grains, his brother Sipahilal said in his police complaint.

Superintendent of Police, Lakhimpur Kheri, Poonam

said Roshan was not present at the quarantine centre when the verification was going on. "He was roaming outside the village," she said, adding that policemen of Maigalganj had an altercation with him. Both constables have been sent to the police lines while a circle of officer is probing the matter, Ms. Poonam added.

Conflicting statements

While Roshan's family alleged that he had fractured his arm in the police assault and received other injuries, Kheri police said in a statement that no such injury was found in the autopsy and that the reason of death was hanging.

Kranti Kumar Singh, a political activist associated with the Samajwadi Party, questioned the credibility of the police probe saying they did not file any FIR against the constables. Mr. Singh said locals had a video footage showing injury marks on Roshan's body. "He left hand was fractured and had swelling marks on his hip and right hand. That's why he wasn't cremated but buried so that a fresh autopsy can take place through a court order after the lockdown phase," Mr. Singh said.

Speaking with the Governors and Lieutenant Governor (L-Gs) in a video-conference, the President asked

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Superintendent of Police, Lakhimpur Kheri, Poonam

Modispeak is disappointing, says Opposition

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor calls him a 'photo-op Prime Minister'; Left parties seek concrete steps to tackle pandemic

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Opposition leaders expressed disappointment over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's latest video message of asking citizens to light lamps in their homes on Sunday. Congress MP Shashi Tharoor called him a "showman and a photo-op Prime Minister".

"Listened to the Pradhan Showman. Nothing about how to ease people's pain, their burdens, their financial anxieties. No vision of the future or sharing the issues he is weighing in deciding about the post-lockdown. Just a feel-good moment curated by India's photo-op Prime Minister!" tweeted Mr. Tharoor.

"In a series of tweets, former Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram questioned why the government had not announced a second financial action plan even as the lockdown entered the tenth day. He said every working person – from business persons to daily wage earners – expected Mr. Modi to announce steps to arrest the economic slide and re-start the engines of economic growth

Every working man and woman, from business person to daily wage earner, also expected you [PM] to announce steps to arrest the economic slide and re-start the engines of economic growth

P. CHIDAMBARAM,
FORMER FINANCE MINISTER



measures is equally important", he said.

Prices being hiked

The Congress, in an online media briefing, also claimed that the supply chain for transporting essential commodities had nearly collapsed and prices have sky-

rocketed in the past 10 days.

Congress spokesperson Pawan Khera said, "Of the 12 million kirana [grocery] stores of the country, only 2.5 million are open. The rest are shut because of disruption of supplies of essential commodities. The Centre's intervention is a must. The

tomato, which is available in the mandi at ₹18 a kg, becomes ₹50 to ₹60 a kg for the consumer. Likewise, the potato, which is available in the mandi at ₹16 a kg becomes ₹50," he added.

COVID-19

CPI general secretary D. Rajai said people expected the Prime Minister to come out with substantial measures to guard them against COVID-19 as well safeguard the economic interests of the migrant workers and daily wage earners.

"He could have announced full ration for the migrant workers or wages to

MGNREGA workers," he said.

CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury didn't directly comment on Mr. Modi's call to light lamps but targeted the government over inadequate health infrastructure in rural India.

"When public money is wasted on vanity projects like statues, bullet trains, PR campaigns & personality-promotion, no surprise that health infrastructure has further crumbled under this govt. Its priorities over past 6 years have been laid bare by the #COVID19 crisis. Poor will suffer as more distractions are mounted. Rectify immediately," he said on Twitter.

On the draw SURENDRA



Ensure that basic needs of poor are met: President

Kovind condemns attacks on doctors, health workers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Taking note of the problems faced by the homeless, the unemployed and the weaker sections of society during the COVID-19 crisis, President Ram Nath Kovind said on Friday that the country would have to be extra sensitive towards their needs and ensure nobody is left hungry.

Stating that people had set an example by "showing exemplary courage, discipline and solidarity in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic", the President expressed concern over two incidents – the gathering of migrant workers in Anand Vihar and the congregation of Tablighi Jamaat in Nizamuddin – that caused a setback to the efforts.

The meeting also deliberated upon reports of doctors, health workers and police personnel coming under attack in some parts



Showing the way: President Ram Nath Kovind in a video conference with Governors and Lieutenant Governors on measures to combat COVID-19. ■ ANI

them to deliberate upon the ways and means to help the poor and needy.

Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu also took part. He suggested that voluntary organisations could be roped in to help.

The meeting also deliberated upon reports of doctors, health workers and police personnel coming under attack in some parts

of the country. "In the conference, there was unanimity that there is no scope for laxity or complacency in fighting the invisible enemy. In this context, the President noted with concern the incidents of attacks on doctors, health workers and police personnel in some parts of the country," a statement from the Rashtrapati Bhavan said.

Take criticism in right spirit, says Congress

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Rejecting Home Minister Amit Shah's allegation that the Congress is playing partisan politics over COVID-19, senior Congress leader Anand Sharma said that the party is only constructively engaged.

Mr. Shah in a tweet on Thursday had accused the Congress of playing petty politics. "High time they think of national interest and stop misleading people," he had tweeted.

Mr. Sharma said that such allegations were completely baseless, and that the Congress, as a responsible and mature Opposition, has national interest at its heart. "Giving critical inputs or recommendations should not be misconstrued by the government. They should take it in the right spirit," he said adding that the government should adopt whatever suggestions could be acted upon.

Mr. Kovind in a video conference with Governors and Lieutenant Governors on measures to combat COVID-19. ■ ANI

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Mr. Kovind in a video conference with Governors and Lieutenant Governors on measures to combat COVID-19. ■ ANI

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Supreme Court quashes I-T case against NDTV

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

In a major relief for New Delhi Television Limited (NDTV), the Supreme Court on Friday quashed an income tax assessment notice issued by revenue authorities against the premier news broadcasting company.

Though the Income Tax department had accused NDTV of "round-tripping" finances in connection with a July 2007 issuance of step-up coupon bonds amounting to \$100 million through its U.K. subsidiary, the Supreme Court stood firm to hold that the revenue authorities failed to show that the channel did not make a "full and true" disclosure of its income for the assessment year 2008-09.

"In our view the assessee (NDTV) disclosed all the primary facts necessary for assessment of its case to the assessing officer. What the revenue urges is that the as-

sesee did not make a full and true disclosure of certain other facts... We are of the view that the assessee had disclosed all primary facts before the assessing officer by disclosure of other facts. It was for the assessing officer at this stage to decide what inference should be drawn from the facts of the case," the Supreme Court Bench of Justices L. Nageswara Rao and Deepak Gupta held in its judgment.

The court held that NDTV had disclosed the fact "that step-up coupon bonds for \$100 million were issued by NNPLC (the U.K. subsidiary).

However, the court found that the Revenue had sufficient reasons to believe that undisclosed income of the assessee escaped assessment, and therefore, there were grounds to issue the notice in question.

means that all the higher level jobs are out of the purview of reservation for domes- ciles, also the 15-year threshold for claiming domes- cile means that anyone who comes in to work in J&K and stays on for 15 years, their children, if they stay here, will be considered for domes- cile," said a source.

Jammu BJP raises concern over domicile rule with Shah

Regional parties rebuff J&K police's warning

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

The J&K police's warning to locals against criticising and "instigating" people over the domicile laws drafted by the Centre has been rebuffed by regional parties here. National Conference provincial president Devender Singh Rana on Friday described the

domicile law as "unjust, and betrayal of educated unemployed youth" and spoke of "consequences".

People's Democratic Party spokesman Tahir Sayeed said, "If the people of J&K are not happy with this Tuglaqi farman (diktat), it's their fundamental right to express displeasure in a democratic way."

Speaking to *The Hindu*, BJP general secretary Ram Madhav, who has been handling Jammu and Kashmir for the party for a long time, said there were issues that the Jammu unit of the party had flagged, and that "their fears are valid." He said Mr. Shah had been apprised of the concerns raised.

Delay arrest of Teltumbde, Navlakha'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

More than 5,000 individuals and over 15 organisations around the world have pleaded that the impending arrest of activists academics Anand Teltumbde and Gautam Navlakha be delayed in light of the COVID-19 pandemic as their health could be put at risk.

The activists were recognised for their life-long advocacy for the rights of the marginalised, a statement said.

Signatories include Professors Angela Davis, Cornel West, Jean Dreze, Sulabhadeo Thorat, Zoya Hasan and Noam Chomsky; writers and artists such as Arundhati Roy, Aparna Sen and T. M.



A community effort: Civil Defence personnel distributing meals to daily wage labourers and the homeless at the Rajkiya Pratibha Vikas Vidyalaya Hari Nagar in New Delhi on Friday; medical students who returned from Bangladesh leaving for home after completing their quarantine in Srinagar; police officials during a patrol in Bikaner; and Mumbai police in protective gear checking vehicles on the Western Express Highway in Kandivali. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR, NISSAR AHMAD, PTI & ARUNANGSU ROY CHOWDHURY



Six Navy ships, medical teams on standby

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

As part of India's measures to assist neighbouring countries in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, six Navy ships have been kept ready and five medical teams are on standby for deployment to the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Afghanistan when required, the Defence Ministry said on Friday.

"Twenty eight fixed-wing aircraft and 21 helicopters of the Indian Air Force (IAF) are on standby at various locations across the country for transporting essential supplies," the Ministry said in a statement. Its fleet is being used to assist in transportation of essential supplies, medicines and medical equipment.

The six naval ships with medical teams and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief kit onboard are on standby for assistance at Visakhapatnam, Kochi and Mumbai, a defence official said.

Five viral testing labs at armed forces hospitals, which can carry out the COVID-19 test, have been made part of the national grid, the ministry said.

The armed forces are running six quarantine facilities at Mumbai, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Hindon, Manganese and Chennai — where 1,737 people have been handled.

25,000 Indians stuck abroad, but govt. wants them to wait

MEA says move is important to ensure safety of the 'larger community'

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

Twenty-three-year-old Rahul V., an MBA student in East London, first heard about Air India flights coming to the United Kingdom from a British government website he has been tracking for the past two weeks, ever since India banned travel for passengers from the U.K. due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The student from Hyderabad, one of hundreds stranded in the U.K., among the about 25,000 Indians stranded in different parts of the world, says he felt let down when he was informed that the flights would go back to India empty as the government has refused to lift its strict ban on any passengers, including Indian citizens, to enter India.

"The British government is bringing its people home, despite the pandemic, it's just sad that the Indian government isn't doing the same," he told *The Hindu*, disappointed that despite several flights being operated to the U.K. from April 4 by the national carrier, he cannot return home on them.

No change in rules

Indian missions in several other capitals are facing similar questions from thousands of Indian citizens who are stranded and need to return. Air India announced



No entry: The government said it would not allow passengers to fly till the lockdown ends. ■ REUTERS

on Thursday that it would operate chartered flights to Paris, Frankfurt and London for citizens of the U.K., Germany, France, Canada and Ireland. In Germany, dozens of students recorded a video—

COVID-19

taped appeal to the government, offering to pay full fare if Air India flights would accept passengers on the way back. However, the government says it will not change its decision to not allow any passengers, including Indians, to fly here from about 37 SARS-CoV-2-affected countries, until the lockdown ends, as it is due to, on April 15.

"We are asking stranded Indians to stay put wherever they are in view of local restrictions as well as travelling restrictions to and within India. This is good for their own health and safety as well as that of their family

and larger community," a Ministry of External Affairs official told *The Hindu*.

Among the Indians stranded worldwide are students whose universities are shut down, business travellers who were unable to return in time before the lockdown, and tourists who were stopped from boarding when the Indian travel bans went into place. The MEA did acknowledge that some of them had been stopped wrongfully, as airlines read the travel deadlines overzealously or misinterpreted them, but pleaded helplessness at changing the rules for their return.

Significant backlog

Officials also point out that it will take some days to clear the backlog of passengers given their numbers, depending on how quickly regular commercial flights will be allowed to resume. Many of the passengers will need as-

sistance as they have spent money buying tickets on airlines that cancelled flights and are unable to afford another full fare ticket. Finally, there remain questions about quarantine requirements for all those passengers returning home, given the limited quarantine capacity in India, and the Ministry of Health would have to take a decision on whether they can return right after the lockdown is lifted.

"Most of the students here are desperate now, and have no money. They are willing to do any job, even if it means catching the virus, because they are struggling to survive," said Mr. Rahul, one of the several students *The Hindu* spoke to.

Reaching out daily

On the Indian High Commission's helpline, and social media portals, several students like Mr. Rahul call or write in everyday, describing their problems, including details of ailing parents back home, health problems they have, trouble with the long supermarket queues for food, and difficulties in finding accommodation. Officials say they are coordinating their requests as much as possible, and have had to reach out to local NGOs and food aid groups as well as Indian student associations to help.

Questions over foreign donations for PM-CARES

Income, expenditure details unknown

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ
NEW DELHI

The government has sent conflicting signals over the question of foreign donations to the new Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM-CARES) Fund.

Initially, Indian ambassadors were directed to mobilise donations from abroad, with SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication)

code details made available in order to accept such contributions. However, the Centre has now seemed to take a step back, indicating that foreign funds would be accepted only from individuals and foundations, with details of foreign donations unavailable for now.

The PM-CARES Fund also does not seem to have any website with details of objectives, income and expenditure as yet, raising concerns about its transparency and accountability.

Repeated queries on these issues sent to a senior official at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) remain unanswered.

Public charitable trust
PM-CARES is a public charitable trust launched on March 28 as a "dedicated national fund with the primary objective of dealing with any kind of emergency or distress situation, like the one posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and to provide



Indians were directed to mobilise donations from abroad with SWIFT code.

relief to the affected," according to the original press statement.

That statement, as well as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first tweets on PM-CARES, included both an IFSC code as well as a SWIFT code. However, the donation link on the PM's website now says that "account details for foreign donations will be available in 2-3 days". Only the IFSC code is available on the donation link.

Government sources now say that the "PM CARES Fund will simply accept donations and contributions from individuals and organisations who are based in foreign countries". They pointed to an official statement in August 2018 that contributions from "NRIs, PIOs and international entities such as foundations would be welcome."

While this seems to indicate that the PM-CARES Fund will not accept foreign funds from governmental or corporate sources, it does seem prepared to accept unlimited tax-free donations from Indian corporates.

COVID-19: EU official speaks to Shringla

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla on Friday held a telephonic discussion on the COVID-19 pandemic with the Secretary General of the European External Action Service, Helga M. Schmid. The discussion came in the backdrop of a large scale evacuation of European Union (EU) citizens from major Indian cities over the past week.

"They exchanged notes on the situation and respective efforts to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic in the EU and India as well as coordination in the framework of G20, SAARC, etc," said a source familiar with the exchange between the two top diplomats. EU has been part of India's global dialogue to contain the crisis.

India and EU skipped a summit in March as the COVID-19 crisis exploded across the world leading to the suspension of international travel. While several major EU countries have evacuated nationals from India, Indian citizens continue to remain in major European destinations as India has suspended commercial air service and declared that no citizen will be evacuated without a pre-flight COVID-19 test. Apart from the continental Europe, a large number of Indians remain stranded in East European countries.

Lockdown lifts Delhi's air quality to a 5-year high

CPCB data shows pollution fell with cities recording a 'good' on AQI

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

The ongoing lockdown has pushed pollution levels in Delhi to a 5-year low and, across India, the number of cities that recorded 'good' on the air quality index (AQI) jumped from 6 – on March 16 – to 30 as on March 29, according to data from the Central Pollution Control Board.

PM 2.5, the most dangerous pollutant, measured at the pollution monitoring station in Anand Vihar, New Delhi, ranged from 16 g/m³ – 42 g/m³ (microgram per metre cubed) from March 25 to April 1, the first week of the lockdown.

By comparison, PM 2.5 had ranged from 72-187 g/m³ during the corresponding period last year, and 72-171 g/m³ in 2018.

In 2016, it spanned 49-116 g/m³, station data on the website of the CPCB shows.

It wasn't possible to compare the air quality index,

which is a weighted average of the contribution of several pollutants, in this week from that in previous years, as such data wasn't available on the website.

Janata curfew report

The CPCB in a report on the impact of the 'Janata curfew' on March 22, said that on the day before, AQI was 'Moderate (101-250)' in Delhi.

"Overall, up to 44% reduction in PM10 levels was observed in Delhi during March 22-23, 2020, compared to previous day. The PM2.5 reduction was 8% on the curfew day but declined to 34% next day owing to negligible combustion activities on March 22-23, 2020, in and around the city," the report said.

The key factor that triggered the decline was the number of on-road vehicles, which contributed to a 51% reduction in NOx levels and a 32% reduction in carbon monoxide levels during

Capital breathes easy

Since the lockdown, Delhi's particulate matter pollution (PM 2.5) has dropped to levels not seen in the past few years. The table shows the average PM 2.5 levels* in Anand Vihar, Delhi for the first five days after the lockdown. The pollution levels have more than halved on many days compared to previous years

Day	2017	2018	2019	2020
March 25	89.52	72.41	73.02	42.55
March 26	78.3	91.19	72.42	44.99
March 27	118.87	158.88	80.28	25.54
March 28	121.67	171.25	158.64	22.69
March 29	71.95	116.53	187.6	29.11
March 30	103.17	129.45	153.15	31.88

*Small particulate matter of 2.5 microns or less in diameter

March 22-23 as compared to March 21. Unlike in the winter months, Delhi and other regions of the Indo-Gangetic Plains generally tend to have better air quality in March, aided by consistent wind and sunlight, which help flush out pollutants.

The impact of meteorological factors was partially favourable... however the reduction in air pollution can be largely attributed to transport and commercial-industrial restrictions," the CPCB said in its report.

Research studies have attributed the key sources of PM2.5 in summer to be: dust and construction activities (35%), transport sector (20%) and industry (20%).

Lockdown effect
During the lockdown PM10 and PM2.5 levels were reduced by about 35-40%.

The cessation of industries contributed to this reduction by 10%, vehicles 10-15% and dust another 10-15%, the organisation calculated.

As on March 29, a total 91



Out of the blue: As traffic came to a standstill in Delhi due to the lockdown, pollution eased up giving way to clear blue skies. ■ V. V. KRISHNAN

cities were under 'Good' (0-50) and 'Satisfactory' (51-100) categories, with 30 cities with 'Good' AQI values. However, Lucknow, Muzaffarpur, Kalyan, Guwahati and Singrauli were under 'Poor' category during March 25-28.

High emission levels in Lucknow and Guwahati were noted for PM2.5, attributable to 'local' combustion related activities.

As on March 29, no city was under 'Poor' AQI (251-300) category.

Bhopal-based firm to make testing kits

STAFF REPORTER
BHOPAL

Bhopal-based 3B Blackbio Biotech (I) Ltd. is going to be the second Indian firm to produce real-time polymerase chain reaction (PCR) COVID-19 testing kits, after securing the approval of the Centre on April 2.

A subsidiary of KILPEST India Ltd., the firm's production capacity of 10,000 kits a day will give a leg up to testing efforts across the country, after its kits were cleared by the Indian Council of Medical Research. So far, Pune-based My Labs has been supplying kits, besides imports from the United States.

IIT-Roorkee develops ventilator

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Amid the growing demand for hospital ventilators due to the COVID-19 pandemic, IIT-Roorkee has developed a low-cost portable ventilator in association with AIIMS-Rishikesh, which can be manufactured for just ₹25,000.

On Friday, the machine was presented to more than 450 companies and several have expressed interest in commercial production, IIT-Roorkee said. Named 'Prana-Vayu,' the closed-loop ventilator can deliver the required amount of air to the patient, with an automated process, controlling the pressure and flow rates.

Allow movement of trucks, Centre tells States

Ensure passage for driver, one person

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla on Friday wrote to Chief Secretaries of all the States and Union Territories, clarifying that inter-State and intra-State movement of all trucks and other goods vehicles with one driver and one additional person had been allowed.

The drivers should have a valid driving licence. If the vehicle is empty, the invoice, way-bill and other related documents for delivery or pick up of goods should be carried by them. "The movement of driver and one person from their place of residence to truck should also be facilitated by local authorities," said the letter.

All movement of persons with the passes issued by the authorities concerned will be subject to strict adherence to the norms for hygiene and social distancing as required in the context of COVID-19.

Mr. Bhalla said laboratories had been exempted from lockdown restrictions. The category includes the testing laboratories in the private sector for COVID-19 samples. The samples have to be collected through va-

rious centres and then transported to the laboratories. Therefore, the opening up of temporary collection centres, movement of lab technicians and transportation of samples have also been allowed.

The production, warehousing and transport of essential goods have been included in the exemptions to the lockdown measures and the district authorities are issuing individual passes to the businesses covered in the category. The State and U.T. governments have been advised to issue authorisation letters to companies and organisations having nation-wide supply chains of essential goods. Issuance of regional passes for easy movement of critical staff and workers has also been allowed, said the letter.

GOVERNMENT OF TAMIL NADU - NAMAKKAL MUNICIPALITY		Dated: 31.03.2020

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Tablighi Jamaat link to death in Dharavi

A 56-year-old garment shop owner tested positive from Baliga Nagar and died on Wednesday

STAFF REPORTER
MUMBAI

The Mumbai police have *prima facie* found out that the first person who died of COVID-19 at Dharavi had come in contact with around 10 Tablighi Jamaat members who had attended the gathering of the sect in Delhi. The police, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation and health officers will have to find out every place they visited in the city, including in Dharavi, before they reportedly left for Kerala if they test positive.

On Wednesday, Dharavi reported its first case, a 56-year-old garment shop owner from Baliga Nagar, and the person died on the same day. On Thursday, a doctor from Wockhardt Hospital living in the area also tested positive. He might have contracted the disease from his hospital as Wockhardt has so far reported at least two confirmed cases. A conservancy worker who did not live at Dharavi but had worked there had also tested positive, leading to concerns over whether Dharavi would become a hotbed.

In the case of patient 1, the police believe that he had come in contact with some



A hotspot: A man standing in front of his shanty at Shahu Nagar, Dharavi, on Thursday. ■ PRASHANT NAKWE

Tablighi Jamaat members. Five men and five women who came to Mumbai on March 22 after attending the meeting in Delhi had stayed

COVID-19

at Dharavi. The men stayed at the local masjid, while the women stayed in a flat owned by patient number 1. The police believe they left for Kozhikode on March 24.

Three couples went by air and the other two went "by other means." While the police believe that the deceased spent time with them, it is not yet clear if any of them have been tested positive. The police are in contact with their counterparts in Kerala.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Zone V) Nyati Thaker said, "It appears the deceased had come in contact

with Tablighi members. They left around March 24 and are suspected to have gone to Kerala. It seems the deceased provided them his flat. It is possible that they came in contact with several residents of the area. Now we have to trace each and every person but for that people need to co-operate."

Assistant municipal commissioner of G North ward Kiran Dighavkar said, "We

are trying to establish the link of where the first patient got the virus from. Things will become clearer once the reports of his close contacts are in. If at all the people coming from Delhi were carriers of the virus, we will have to find out where they ventured in the area or even the city, who they came in contact with and screen all of them. It will be challenging."

Six more CISF men at Mumbai airport test positive

The total number of infected personnel has gone up to 11; 147 inmates of Panvel camp isolated

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NAVI MUMBAI

Six more men of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), posted at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport in Mumbai, tested positive for COVID-19 on Friday, taking the total number of infected personnel to 11.

A total of 147 personnel

who shared the Panvel camp with these men have been isolated, and the entire Kalamboli camp has been sanitised. "The first CISF person to test positive has since recovered and his tests have come negative," CISF spokesperson Hemendra Singh said. The 11 personnel were in a stable condition.

Panvel Municipal Corpora-

tion (PMC) Commissioner Ganesh Deshmukh said that after five CISF personnel were found to be positive on Wednesday, 147 of the remaining personnel at the Kalamboli camp were isolated at MGM Hospital.

"Of the 146 tested, six

were found to be positive and the remaining negative, making a total of 11 CISF em-

ployees positive. Of the 11 positive, 10 are staff and one is a helper. It is suspected that they had contracted the virus during an air-lifting operation. Their routine included going to work from the Kalamboli camp to the Mumbai airport and back to the camp. Hence, we do not see any other possibility of contracting the virus. The

CISF camp has been sealed and sanitised by us," Mr. Deshmukh said.

Konkan Divisional Com-

mmissioner Shivaji Daund said the staff at MGM Hospital would continue to be quarantined there. "Two wings in the hospital have been dedicated to the CISF staff who have been quarantined there," he said.

According to a MHA state-

ment, from January 1, about

2,100 foreigners visited In-

dia for Tablighi activities.

Among those blacklisted are

360 foreigners linked to Ta-

blighi who have already left

India.

The 960 blacklisted fo-

reigners who are in present-

ly in India include four

Americans, nine British, six

Chinese, three French, 379

Indonesian, 110 Bangla-

deshi, 63 Myanmarese, 77

Kyrgyz, 75 Malaysian, 65

MHA directs States to book 960 blacklisted individuals

VIJAYITA SINGH
NEW DELHI

A directive from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) asking States to register criminal cases against foreign members of the Tablighi Jamaat could prolong their stay in India by up to five years.

On Friday, Joint Secretary

MHA Punya Salila Srivastava

reiterated that States have

been asked to register cases

against 960 blacklisted fo-

reigners and at "this stage

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does not arise" but whenever

it happens it will be done

as per health protocols.



At risk: People who attended the Delhi event being taken to a quarantine facility in Ahmedabad on Friday. ■ PTI

their visa and they are in quarantine then we cannot register any case against them.

Officers in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh Police, however, insisted that the foreign workers will be arrested and sent to jail. The police in Delhi report directly to the MHA and Uttar Pradesh is ruled by the BJP. Uttar Pradesh Police has registered 35 cases in 15 districts under Section 14 of Foreigners Act against the foreign Tablighi members.

Shifted to hospital

A Tamil Nadu police officer said 125 foreigners traced in the State have been quarantined in mosques and a few who showed symptoms have been shifted to hospitals. "They will be served 'leave India notice' after they come out of the quarantine; maybe cases can be registered against those who provide them logistic help," he added.

Former Uttar Pradesh DGP Prakash Singh said if their visas are cancelled then they should be deported as soon as possible.

"Government should give priority in deporting them and getting rid of them....registering a case means that trial might go on for years. It is essentially for public consumption that government is taking harsh measures," Mr. Singh said.

NSA invoked against four Indore residents

Case relates to attack on health workers

STAFF REPORTER
BHOPAL

The Indore district administration in Madhya Pradesh on Thursday invoked the National Security Act, 1980, against four persons accused of instigating residents of a locality to throw stones at health workers on Wednesday.

"We have arrested 13 of the accused. The Act has been invoked against four of them," Vivek Sharma, Inspector-General of the Police, Indore Zone, told *The Hindu*.

Pelted with stones

A team of health workers, revenue officials, anganwadi workers, municipal officials and policemen were visiting the Tatpatti Bakhali area of the city to trace the contacts of a COVID-19 patient when they were pelted with stones, said a note issued by

the Collectorate.

The administration in-

voked Section 3(2) of the Act

and passed an order to

move the four accused to

the Central Jail, Rewa.

"Such persons are not hu-

mans, they are enemies of

humanity. Attack on para-

medical staff and doctors,

who are risking their lives

to save people's lives, will not

be tolerated," Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said.

On Wednesday, a case was filed against unidentified persons under Sections

353 (Assault or criminal

force to deter public servant

from discharge of his duty),

336 (Act endangering life or

safety of others), 145 (Join-

ing or continuing in unlaw-

ful assembly, knowing it has

been commanded to disper-

se) and 269 (Negligent act

likely to spread infection

of disease dangerous to life)

of the Indian Penal Code.

SC issues notice to govt. on plea for free testing

Petition challenges price cap

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday asked the government to respond to a petition seeking free COVID-19 testing facility at all laborato-

ries, including private ones.

A Bench led by Justice L. Nageswara Rao issued notice on a plea by Delhi resident Shashank Deo Sudhi, who challenged the legality of a March 17 advisory that caps the price for testing for the SARS-CoV-2 virus at ₹4,500 in private labs and hospitals.

Mr. Sudhi has argued that the advisory was both discriminatory and a violation of the fundamental right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution.

"It is extremely difficult for the common citizen to get himself/herself tested in the government hospital/labs and [there] being no al-

ternative in sight, the people are constrained to pay the capped amount to the private hospital/labs for protecting their lives," the petitioner contended.

"The respondents are completely insensitive and indifferent to the plight of the common citizens of the country who are already financially burdened on account of [being] completely locked down with no possibility of" the lockdown being lifted in the near future, he added.

In the alternative, the petitioner asked the court to direct the government to "ramp up the testing facilities at the earliest, given the escalating mortality and morbidity rate across the country".

Mr. Sudhi said ideally the tests should be conducted under NABL-accredited pathological laboratories.

Plea seeks minimum wages for migrant workers

SC expresses concern over their plight, asks Centre to respond by April 7

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has expressed concern over the plight of migrant workers, especially in the unorganised sector, during the lockdown and asked the Union government to respond by April 7 to a petition demanding that Central and State governments pay them minimum wages.

A Bench led by Justice L. Nageswara Rao, through videoconferencing, took a serious note of a petition filed by activists Harsh Mander and Anjali Bhardwaj, who said the declaration of the 21-day national lockdown without prior information "precipitated an unprecedented humanitarian crisis" for migrant workers, resulting in their mass exodus to their



Perilous state: Workers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar staying at a workshop at Mazgaon. ■ EMMANUEL YOGINI

home towns.

The petition said the Centre and the States should, either jointly or severally, take responsibility to pay migrant workers at least a week's wages for their sustenance.

from March 24. It is an attempt to enforce social distancing to prevent the infection from spreading among the general population.

Mass exodus

However, shortly after the lockdown declaration, a mass exodus of panicked migrant workers was witnessed. They were moving from the metros, where they had come for work, to their home towns. The government has maintained that the panic was caused by 'fake' news. The Disaster Management Act, 2005, mandates the Centre and the States to pay compensation to those who have suffered losses during a disaster. The law requires the government to prepare a national plan to combat the disaster.

Cases on foreign Tablighis can delay their exit: experts

MHA directs States to book 960 blacklisted individuals

VIJAYITA SINGH
NEW DELHI

A directive from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) asking States to register criminal cases against foreign members of the Tablighi Jamaat could prolong their stay in India by up to five years.

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At risk: People who attended the Delhi event being taken to a quarantine facility in Ahmedabad on Friday. ■ PTI

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Officers in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh Police, however, insisted that the foreign workers will be arrested and sent to jail. The police in Delhi report directly to the MHA and Uttar Pradesh is ruled by the BJP. Uttar Pradesh Police has registered 35 cases in 15 districts under Section 14 of Foreigners Act against the foreign Tablighi members.

States get ₹11,092 crore for COVID-19

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Friday approved the release of ₹11,092 crore under the State Disaster Risk Management Fund (SDRMF) to all the States to take measures for containment of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The funds were allocated to the States on the recommendation of the 15th Finance Commission.

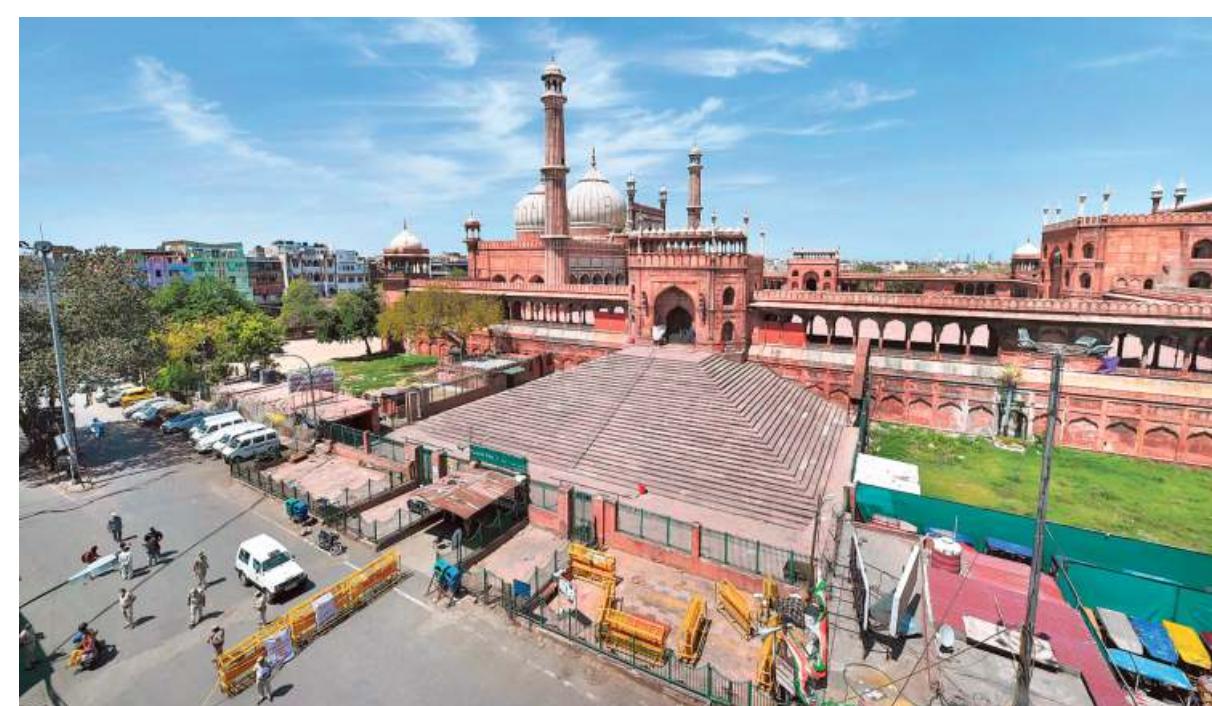
Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot suggested to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday that the Centre release ₹1 lakh crore to tackle the pandemic and the ramifications of the 21-day nationwide lockdown.

Following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's video-conference with Chief Ministers, "the Central Government has released in advance its share of the first instalment of SDRMF for the year 2020-21, amounting to ₹11,092 crore, to augment funds available with the State governments," a statement by the MHA said.

Maharashtra which has reported the highest number of cases has been allocated ₹161 crore. Kerala with a higher number of cases, however, has been allocated ₹157 crore, lower than most States, including Uttar Pradesh which gets ₹966 crore, Odisha ₹802 crore, Rajasthan ₹740 crore, Bihar ₹708 crore, Gujarat ₹662 crore and Madhya Pradesh ₹910 crore.

The SDRF is the primary fund available with the States to meet the expenditure of immediate relief to the victims of disasters.

All quiet



Jama Masjid wears a deserted look during Friday prayers amid a lockdown in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic in Delhi. ■ PTI

Slum dwellers struggle in Delhi

Without ration cards, many cannot avail govt. benefits like increased allocation

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ
NEW DELHI

Laxmi has been a widow for the last 40 years, but this is the closest she has come to despair. Three months ago, a cataract operation forced her to quit her job as a domestic worker. Now, the COVID-19 lockdown prevents her from getting any work. And without a ration card, her meagre pension of ₹2,000 per month leaves her flirting with starvation.

"I applied for a ration card more than a year ago and they gave me this parchi," says the 66-year old, showing a faded and much-folded piece of paper. "But they told me there is a quota for rations

in Delhi, so I cannot get on the ration list until someone else has dropped out."

COVID-19

The 66-year old lives in a tiny windowless room in Jagdamba Camp, a basti in south Delhi's Sheikh Sarai area. Her corrugated metal roof has failed to keep out the unseasonal rain, leaving her bed and the broken concrete floor damp and musty.

"I only have my daughter, who is also a widow with five children of her own to bring up, so I can't expect much from her. Sometimes, she gives me a few rotis," she says.

While the spotlight has been on the plight of migrant workers hit by the COVID-19 lockdown, there are lakhs of long time residents in Delhi's bastis and slum settlements who do not have ration cards either and cannot benefit from the government's promise of a free and increased ration allocation.

Jagdamba Camp has 2,000 registered voters, with a total population about triple that number. Crammed into tiny flats linked by narrow, twisting alleys, and sharing communal toilets, the residents are aware that any COVID-19 infection could sweep unchecked through the basti.

Shanti Devi tries to keep her three grandchildren indoors due to the fear of the virus. However, her son, the family's sole earner who gets about ₹300 per day as a labourer, has lost his livelihood due to the lockdown and the family has no ration card or pension. The family still has to pay ₹3,500 rent each month for their two-room home.

"We want to protect the children from this disease they are talking about, but what is the use if they die of hunger instead?" she asks.

The family cannot even apply for a ration card, as they do not have any residence proof or any identity documents.

Shanti Devi tries to keep

all households in the affected areas for screening. For example, we touched 40 lakh people in the worst-affected Bhilwara district, while the figure for the entire State is 4.16 crore.

What is the purpose of the 11-day-long "all down curfew", which has started in Bhilwara on Friday?

We wish to cover every person who might have been left out. The figure of recovery of COVID-19-positive people in Bhilwara is very encouraging. Of the 26 infected persons, 17 have recovered. The strategy is: Don't let the virus spread and treat the people who are already infected. The government is working on both fronts.

Will the random sampling also help prevent the

showed the COVID-19 symptoms, along with a history of contact or travel, he or she was isolated. We have followed a very structured standard operating procedure.

There were some instances of attacks on doctors because of the emotional and social issues involved

community spread?

Because of the nature of the disease, there might be the people hovering around in the sub-clinical stage. They may not be showing

symptoms, but they are carriers. The community sampling involves rapid test instead of a diagnostic procedure. If there is a probability that someone is carrying the virus, we start isolating them and go for confirmation.

After Bhilwara, the Ramganj area in Jaipur has emerged as a major hotspot. How are you tackling the situation there?

Ramganj is our bigger worry now. The character of the area is different, as it is densely populated and has small and congested houses. People live there in close proximity, and it is not possible for them to maintain social distancing. We have been carrying out an intense contact tracing there since the

first case was detected and have asked the people to keep distance from the suspected cases. Only today, two bus-loads of people were sent to an isolation facility after being asked to live separately for some days until the disease settled down. The good news from Ramganj is that no COVID-19-positive person has come up in the 170 tests we conducted since Thursday.

Are Tablighi Jamaat members who have returned to their native places or travelled to different towns after the attending the Delhi event emerging as a greater risk?

There were some instances because of the emotional and social issues involved in this entire scenario. But the situation has improved with the protection given by the police to the teams of the Medical and Health Department. I have received reports

The fisherman had returned from deep sea fishing expeditions.

The boats as there are no other arrangements to shelter thousands of people," he said.

Around 10-12 workers live in a mid sized trawler, where social distancing is impossible to maintain. They do practically everything, from cooking and eating to bathing and sleeping, on the boat.

They are stuck in their boats that have been anchored at the harbour after they returned from deep sea fishing expeditions.

According to Mr. Fofandi, there are around 4500 fishing boats or trawlers at Veraval harbour on the Saurashtra coast. "Boat owners have made arrangements for their food, but the problem is that all of them have to live on the boat.

Hospital services resume. There is no other means of transportation as their villages are over 2000 km away.

Gujarat, as the country's largest seafood producer, draws thousands of migrants, called "Madrasis" locally, from Vizianagaram, Srikanthapuram and Visakhapatnam to work on mechanised fishing trawlers from August to April every year.

Over 7,000 fishermen from A.P. stranded in Gujarat's Veraval

They are stuck in their boats anchored at the harbour

MAHESH LANGA
AHMEDABAD

The nationwide lockdown forced by the COVID-19 pandemic has left thousands of migrant fishermen from Andhra Pradesh stranded at the Veraval fishing harbour in Gujarat, one of the country's largest.



"More than 7000 fishermen, mostly migrant labourers from Andhra Pradesh and a few hundred from villages in Saurashtra region are stranded at Veraval due to the lockdown," Ritesh Fofandi, a community leader and owner of Samudra Sea Foods company, told *The Hindu* from Veraval.

"No fishing trips because of lockdown, as fish processing has stopped. Transportation has been affected, no ice is being produced to store the fish stock... the entire supply chain has been derailed," a leading marine food exporter from Overall

lunty said. "When the government imposed the lockdown to contain the spread of Coronavirus epidemic, most of these workers would have been in mid seas. When they returned to the harbour, everything was shut.

"Normally, migrant fishermen return to their native places from May onwards and come back in August for the next fishing cycle. Fishing activities are not allowed during the monsoon.

Gujarat, as the country's largest seafood producer, draws thousands of migrants, called "Madrasis" locally, from Vizianagaram, Srikanthapuram and Visakhapatnam to work on mechanised fishing trawlers from August to April every year.

Treat patients with compassion: Mamata

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

COVID-19 patients should be treated with care and compassion, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on Friday. She urged doctors to provide a yeoman service to them.

The total number of coronavirus patients went up from 34 to 38 in the past 24 hours in the State.

Ms. Banerjee appealed to

people to come together and stamp out the virus. Officials were running into resistance while raising exclusive hospitals for COVID-19 patients.

Hospitals were not too keen to treat these patients. "Please do not do this. The job is to provide selfless service.

The total number of coronavirus patients went up from 34 to 38 in the past 24 hours in the State.

Ms. Banerjee appealed to

mate the bodies of the coronavirus victims. I am told by experts that the deceased cannot carry the virus...," she said.

Ms. Banerjee said the government had opened 206 quarantine centres, where 5,165 persons had been admitted. While 3,218 were discharged, 1,892 were under treatment. The Health Department designated 59 hospitals for COVID-19 patients.

that the people gathered in large numbers to get screened at several places when they were convinced about the exercise.

Will the situation be under control in Rajasthan by the time the nationwide lockdown is lifted?

I believe the situation will come under control, unless an unforeseen incident like the Nizamuddin centre's infection takes place. Before the Tablighi Jamaat cases were detected, we were reasonably in control till April 1. But these cases will be controlled, as they are very defined and structured. We are handling the entire set of Tablighi Jamaat members, not just those who attended the Delhi event, to be on the safe side.

INTERVIEW | ROHIT KUMAR SINGH

'Ruthless containment' is key to controlling virus spread

Despite the hardships, people have accepted our strict decisions, and are complying with the guidelines'

Rohit Kumar Singh, Additional Chief Secretary (Medical & Health), steers the huge health workforce in Rajasthan, which is toiling round the clock to tackle COVID-19 and control the spread of the novel coronavirus. He discusses the strategies to deal with the situation in an interview to Mohammed Iqbal in Jaipur on Friday.

What are the special steps the Medical & Health Department is taking in Rajasthan to tackle COVID-19, which are different from other States?

■ 'Ruthless containment', which we have adopted at the hotspots of infection, is the key to controlling the spread of coronavirus. Despite the hardships, people have accepted our strict decisions, and are complying with the guidelines. You have to weigh what you want – people's comfort or spread of the disease. We also went to

all households in the affected areas for screening. For example, we touched 40 lakh people in the worst-affected Bhilwara district, while the figure for the entire State is 4.16 crore.

Did the screenings lead to identification of COVID-19-positive cases?

■ After going to every individual in Bhilwara district and asking them about symptoms, we identified 14,000 people who had influenza-like condition. We kept track of them and if anyone

showed the COVID-19 symptoms, along with a history of contact or travel, he or she was isolated. We have followed a very structured standard operating procedure.

What is the purpose of the 11-day-long "all down curfew", which has started in Bhilwara on Friday?

We wish to cover every person who might have been left out. The figure of recovery of COVID-19-positive people in Bhilwara is very encouraging. Of the 26 infected persons, 17 have recovered. The strategy is: Don't let the virus spread and treat the people who are already infected. The government is working on both fronts.

Will the random sampling also help prevent the

symptoms, but they are carriers. The community sampling involves rapid test instead of a diagnostic procedure. If there is a probability that someone is carrying the virus, we start isolating them and go for confirmation.

After Bhilwara, the Ramganj area in Jaipur has emerged as a major hotspot. How are you tackling the situation there?

Ramganj is our bigger worry now. The character of the area is different, as it is densely populated and has small and congested houses. People live there in close proximity, and it is not possible for them to maintain social distancing. We have been carrying out an intense contact tracing there since the

first case was detected and have asked the people to keep distance from the suspected cases. Only today, two bus-loads of people were sent to an isolation facility after being asked to live separately for some days until the disease settled down. The good news from Ramganj is that no COVID-19-positive person has come up in the 170 tests we conducted since Thursday.

Are Tablighi Jamaat members who have returned to their native places or travelled to different towns after the attending the Delhi event emerging as a greater risk?

There were some instances because of the emotional and social issues involved in this entire scenario. But the situation has improved with the protection given by the police to the teams of the Medical and Health Department. I have received reports

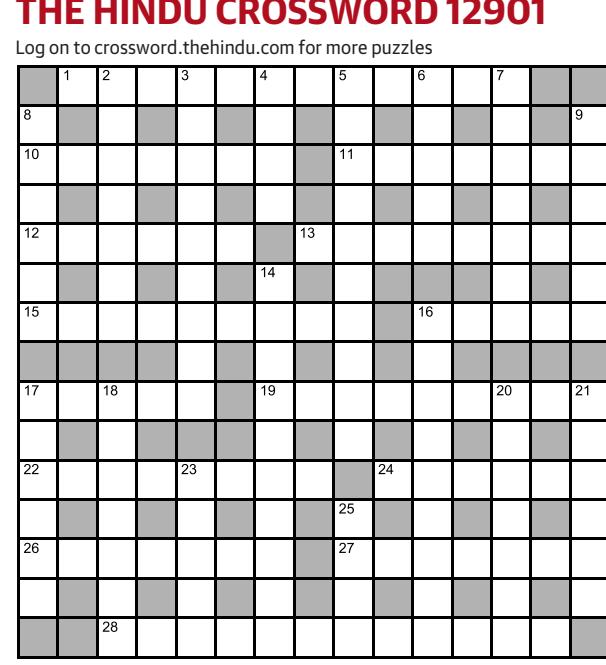
Bharatpur, Churu and Tonk, which were earlier unaffected. Tonk is a big hotbed now, with 17 cases. But the saving grace is that they have been largely identified. We have persuaded them to give details about where they went and whom they met. Our attempt is to isolate them and test them.

Were there some instances of attacks on doctors and health workers who went to the affected areas in the State?

■ Tablighi Jamaat members are, indeed, a big risk. The infection has emerged in the districts such as Dholpur,

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12901

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles



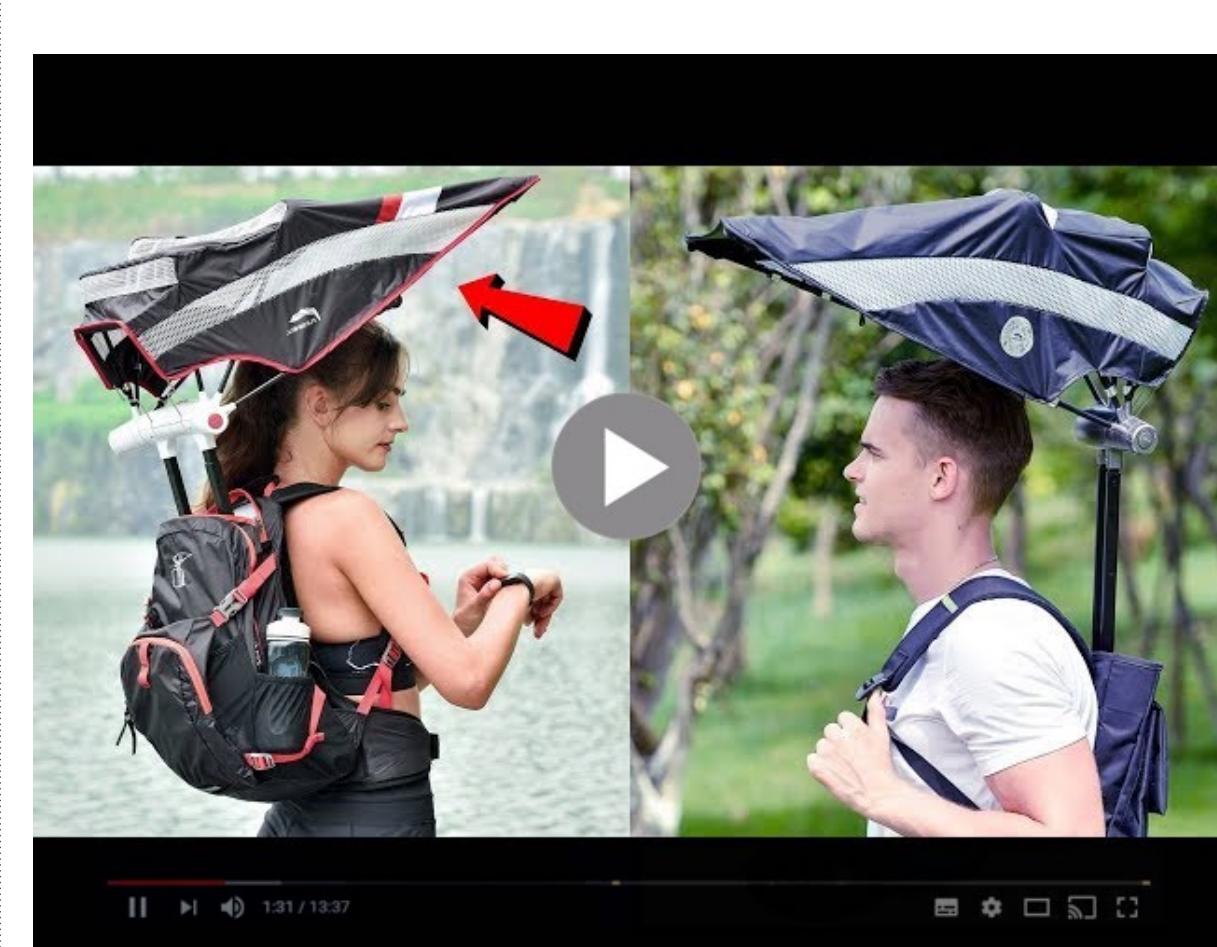
ACROSS

- 1 It is wavering in a frenzy state (4,8)
- 10 English club magazine (7)
- 11 She flies from Scandinavia to Romania (7)
- 12 Quarters in a vessel where dogs are kept (6)
- 13 Corrupt nationalist leader's government ending after 10 years (8)

(set by Vulcan)

- 5 Tree part figure reproduced (10)
- 6 Top advocate in city (5)
- 7 Monroe, say, with a basically cool hairdo (7)
- 8 Without leader, group making noise (6)
- 9 Thrash horse in pen (6)
- 14 Pressure on an emperor to develop a particular empire (6,4)
- 16 Ending anecdote with silence, say (9)
- 17 A line about your old-fashioned dignitary (6)
- 18 Country, not a large one (7)
- 20 Put an end to being jazzy – leaves out perhaps an ornament (7)
- 21 Old country with pricey, lonely housing (6)
- 23 Suit and tie (5)
- 25 Finally completed an over (4)

To play an interactive version of this crossword online, scan the QR code



Getting creative on social media is likely the best way for brands to stay engaged... without taking advantage of the situation



MAGANDEEP SINGH

Recently, while cruising the world on my handback from the comfort of my wingback, I was almost thrown right off it! I had just read that Patek Philippe, the holy grail of the watch world, would be selling online. In the larger scheme, I know the internet hasn't been around too long.

But for an industry (and certain brands) that has long outlived and survived the French revolution, two World Wars and an Great Depression, the fact that the most coveted of manufacturers in the field would be succumbing to the clime of the times and acquiescing to online sales is a sign of just how bad things are.

For many watch collectors and even

nifty businessfolk, if they weren't taking the COVID-19 threat seriously earlier, this has come as the undeniable reckoner.

Buying a Patek is not an off-hand purchase that you do while pottering about on your phone in the middle of the night like, say, some rubbish fitness belt or a home massage kit. It is an occasion, one that is marked by many a praise that the store folk will shower on you for your fine taste (and fat wallet) and oft accompanied by a bottle of sparkler going pop somewhere in the background. To simply make a PayPal transaction to acquire such a celebrated timepiece, you'd have to be stinking rich and absolutely spartan at the same time.

But they aren't the only ones. Rolex,

people are now debating, might joint the fray. Hodinkee, the online portal and marketplace for luxury watches, is hiring people who may have lost jobs in the real space, providing online space for brands to sell their ware, as also putting the works of various writers in the spotlight, all in a bid to 'keep things moving along'. There are discounts but there is also a contribution from all sales towards funds to fight against coronavirus.

Many other brands are already gearing up to reach their consumers in unprecedented ways. Luxury always has it tough because when budgets get tightened, the first thing to go is spending power and the list of wants gets relegated. I may desire to own a flashy watch or a pen, but right now I need to

ensure that I have medical emergency funds ready for the days ahead – and we're unsure of the duration of this beast. Indulgences therefore need to be monitored.

Time to build brands

In the last month, two great international watch events got canned, the Olympics stands postponed, the fashion seasons have been derailed, even Apple and Google are debating when and how to launch their next models. The virus has certainly hit us where it hurts worst and in a manner that no one predicted. Since no business or industry can afford to be blasé about the state of things, this is where brand building comes in. Even if it doesn't have the ring of a Gabriel Garcia Mar-

quez novel, the indomitable human spirit will find ways to conjure up marketing in the time of COVID-19, because inasmuch as this pandemic is bad for sales and profits, in the long run, it is a great time to earn some brand cred through socially woke campaigns.

The time, thus, is ripe for creating equity through contributions to noble causes – from liquor brands manufacturing sanitizers (Diageo, Goa Brewing and Paul John are doing it) to cooking meals for the stranded (ITC hotels and Cafe Lota come to mind), from making online courses free or discounting them heavily (BarSmart, Fondation de Haute Horlogerie), to creating virtual classrooms for everything from guitar lessons to fitness sessions. Even a sector like travel is finding ways to connect. Portuguese tourism is pushing on with their #CantSkipHope campaign (to replace #CantSkipPortugal) and Maldives has #VisitMaldivesLater. Alcohol brands, notwithstanding the non-availability of their product, which does put a damper on everybody's never-ending weekend, are using this time to generate traction – like the #AloneTogether posts on the pages of brews like Beeyoung and Kati Patang. Birajira went a step further and managed to send out 'Stay-home' hampers just before the lockdown was enforced.

The escape route

Meanwhile, most online stores – from sneakers to luxury goods – are offering huge discounts to keep buyers spending. The marketing messages have been one constant emphatic barrage. And there are other more generic trends, which will surely get picked up by brands to cash in on, from Dalgona coffee to

home recipes from famous chefs, or working into a fitness routine (where Myntra will advise you what to buy, from a yoga mat to noise-isolating headphones).

The online space and all its apps have never had a more captive audience. Online engagements are fine-tuning themselves to become the chasm of escape, to give someone a chance to virtually get away momentarily and distract themselves from the ennui of their immediate confines, to be able to live and think freely even when the walls are closing in. Zoom, the video-conferencing app, has seen more downloads in a month than TikTok and WhatsApp will, combined!

Of course, money certainly makes the whole episode easier and it is a position of privilege to be able to even contemplate all such 'getaways'. For example, Ethos watches has announced one of the most tempting online sales ever with discounts as high as 50% on some very exquisite and rare timepieces. They have managed to reach me through personal calls, messages, emails, and even online adverts. They know their target client and they understand the urgency of the moment.

And inasmuch as I know a fabulous deal when I see one, I also know that I shouldn't (and can't) splurge right at this moment, but I am enjoying the warm gratitude that at least I am in a position to be tortured with such ephemeral first world issues rather than anything that's remotely immediate and threatening.

In the meantime, brands have little else to do but sit and wait this pandemic out, a curious case where our helplessness and inaction are the most effective tools in combatting this menace, even as it sends the economy and society into free fall.



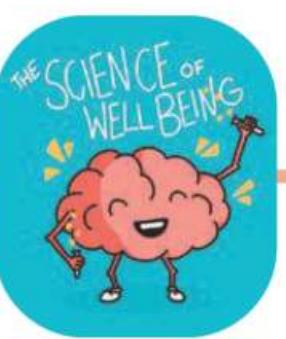
Pick of the week

Concerts, stand-up and other online events you just can't miss. The event preview and calendar will resume in a few weeks.



Kid lit central

The wizarding world is as active as ever during the lockdown, albeit with online activities. **Harry Potter at Home**, a new hub on the official website, is aimed at first-time readers, and features quizzes, puzzles and more. For Potterheads of all ages. On wizardingworld.com. Popular children's author **David Walliams** (*The Boy in the Dress* and *Gangsta Granny*), will be sharing an audio story a day for the next 30 days from his best-selling *The World's Worst Children* short story collections. At [worldofdavidwalliams.com/elevenes](http://worldofdavidwalliams.com/).



Happiness and learning

What do we think will make us happy? Yale University's most popular course, **The Science of Well-Being**, is now available online for free. In these anxious times, it will engage you in a series of challenges designed to increase your own happiness and build more productive habits. On coursera.org. For the IT executives, software giant **Oracle** is now offering free access to its online courses and cloud certification. Topics covered include cloud infrastructure and autonomous databases. Available till May 15 on oracle.com.



The VR life

Discover the most magical place on Earth, from the comfort of your couch. Head to YouTube for a treasure trove of 360-degree and **virtual reality** rides. Get off Splash Mountain without a drop of water on you. Ride the most expensive roller coaster for free. And if the Twilight Zone Tower of Terror gets too scary, simply close your eyes. If you are missing the great outdoors, check out **Everest VR**, which gives you a series of first-person challenges to reach the top of the world. VR headset required. Details: solfar.com/everest-vr



Music from the couch

The iHeart Concert, hosted by Elton John earlier this week, had a star-studded list of celebrity musicians including Billie Eilish, Shawn Mendes and Lizzo. But it was the **Backstreet Boys** who went viral with their performance of the hit song, 'I want it that way'. In other music news, Michael C Hall, who played Dexter Morgan in the TV series, *Dexter*, is now fronting an indie rock band called **The Princess Goes to the Butterfly Museum**. Their first single, 'Come Talk To Me', and their debut EP are now available on all music streaming platforms.



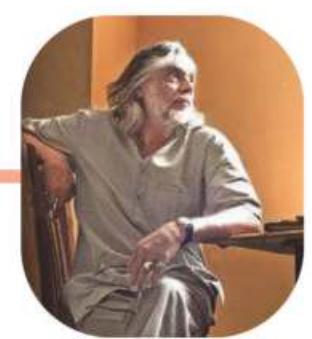
Movie nights

There has never been a better time to watch movies – **Parasite** is now on Amazon Prime Video, while **The Platform** on Netflix is getting rave reviews. The American Film Institute has launched the **AFI Movie Club**, a daily virtual gathering, which kicked off with a video from director Steven Spielberg. Each day, AFI will choose an iconic movie for the world to watch together. So far, the list has featured *The Wizard of Oz* and *Moulin Rouge*, among others. You can also work your way down their **100 Years, 100 Movies** list at your own pace.

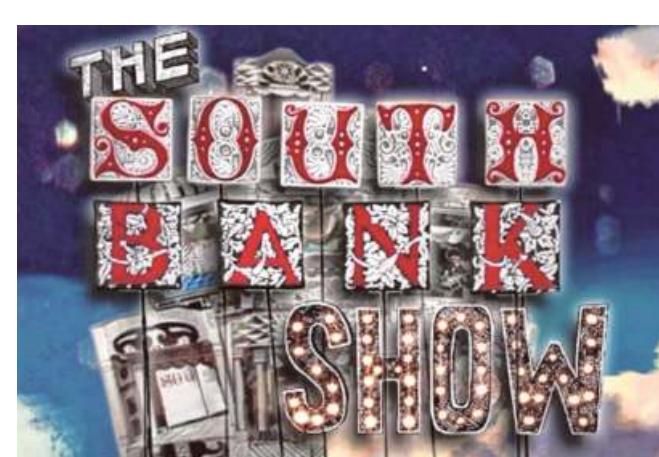


Art rules

Bengaluru-based creative event space, **Bloom and Grow**, has moved their roster of events online. Join them for yoga sessions, DIY crafts and more, via Zoom. Details are updated on their Facebook page. For more information and the schedule, send a WhatsApp message to 7259280949. **RainbowFish Studio** from Chennai is offering new courses starting every Monday for a variety of age groups. At ₹3,000 per child. Details and registration on rainbowfishstudio.com. ☎ 9952018542



The Hindu Weekend is hosting a series of live, interactive sessions on our Instagram handle. Today at 11 am, we will host filmmaker, fashion designer, poet and artist **Muzaffar Ali**. The 75-year-old will talk about finding hope in art, design and creativity during these trying times. At 9 pm, columnist **Vasudha Rai** will conduct a white light meditation and yoga nidra – with schedules going haywire and insomnia a common complaint, she will address ways to get a good night's sleep. [@thehinduweekend](http://thehinduweekend)



The South Bank Show: JG Ballard (YouTube)

JG Ballard (1930-2009) was one of the finest and most prescient writers of speculative fiction. In brilliant fiction like *High-Rise*, *Crash* and *The Drowned World*, Ballard seemed to anticipate the pitfalls of techno-capitalist excesses around the world. In a 40-minute 2006 episode of *The South Bank Show* (a regular art and culture show on ITV), Ballard is extensively interviewed about his themes and influences, as well his prognosis for some of the most complicated problems of the 21st century. This really is a must-watch for all science fiction fans (added bonus being Ballard reading some of his best lines in his sonorous voice).

Gore Vidal: The United States of Amnesia (Netflix India)

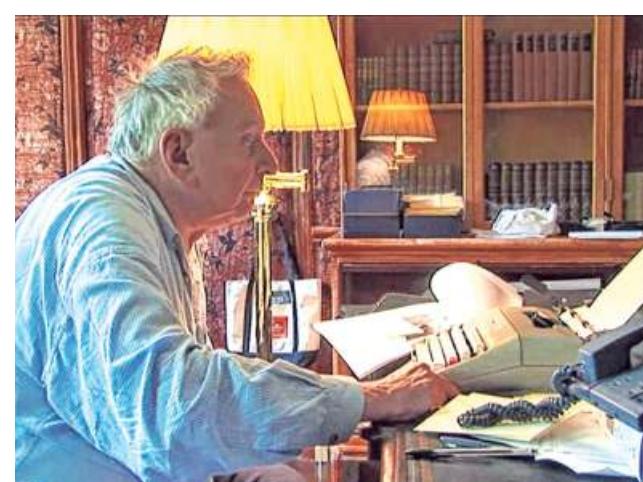
Gore Vidal (1925-2012) was nothing if not controversial – indeed, he was downright offensive, misogynistic and tone-deaf towards the end of his life, like the time he called the 13-year-old girl raped by Roman Polanski "a young [prostitute] who got upset". He was also, as it so happens, an accomplished writer of both fiction and non-fiction. In his seven-part *Narratives of Empire* novel series (1968-2000), for example, Vidal gives us a sweeping, large-scale indictment of America's militaristic ways. In *The United States of Amnesia* (2013), a candid Vidal talks about the highs and lows of his six-decade-long career (including fun sideshows like the time he acted in a Fellini movie, and much later, played a science fiction villain in the Hollywood film *Gattaca*, alongside Uma Thurman).

Love books, biopics and real footage? Here are five documentaries to watch now

Literary icons on FILM

ADITYA MANI JHA

After a friend and I watched *Manto* on the large screen a couple of years ago, we were talking about how literary documentaries were difficult to come by in India. Now, thanks to Netflix and company, this has changed significantly. Given the current lockdown, here are five literary documentaries you can watch online.



Joan Didion: *The Centre Will Not Hold* (Netflix India)

Joan Didion (*Play It As It Lays*, *The Year of Magical Thinking*) was among a bunch of American writers in the 70s who made significant stylistic breakthroughs in journalism and book-length non-fiction, often employing novelistic techniques. The resultant 'New Journalism' remains an influential style with longform specialists. Didion has written some very moving books about her own family life, so it's fitting that *The Centre Will Not Hold* was made by her nephew, the actor Griffin Dunne. It is fascinating to see the now 85-year-old Didion talk about her salad days, covering California micro-cultures in the late 60s and early 70s, the stuff of novels like *Inherent Vice*.



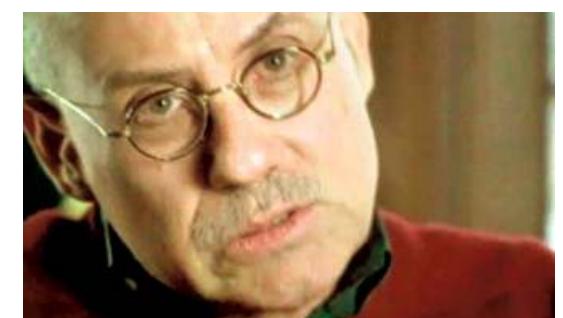
James Ellroy: *Feast of Death* (YouTube)

The celebrated author of *The Black Dahlia*, *LA Confidential* and dozens of other blockbuster crime novels opens up in this (surprisingly) thrill-a-minute 2001 documentary, structured like one of Ellroy's whodunits. At the heart of many of his novels lay the decades-old, unsolved murder of Ellroy's own mother. From this starting point, the film explores several aspects of the creative process, in particular how one fictionalises real-world experiences, especially traumatic ones (without sacrificing one's mental health).



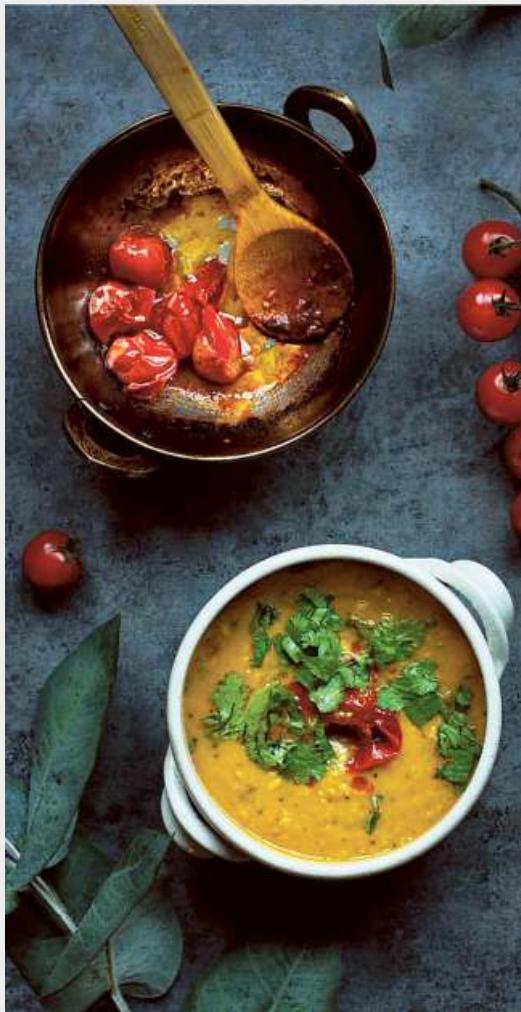
Ted Hughes: Force of Nature (YouTube)

This 1998 BBC documentary was released a few months after Hughes, one of the best-known British poets of all time, died. Its chief strength is the line-up of writers, editors and poets who talk about Hughes throughout the film – Al Alvarez, John Carey, Simon Armitage and so on. Fair warning: in the best British stiff upper lip tradition, it tries to downplay Hughes' cheating, philandering, emotionally abusive ways during his marriage with the American poet Sylvia Plath.



Diets in times of disequilibrium

As food prices rise, and the supply of produce is controlled, we must find a way of eating, mindful of the context and our own privilege



■ RAKHEE YADAV
@BOXOFSPICE ON INSTAGRAM

SUNALINI MATHEW

For the first time in years we have been stirred by images of migrant workers attempting to cross borders within our country, hungry and powerless. Perhaps it is because we have finally had the time to feel. In our comfortable homes, we have experienced empathy, some guilt, a great deal of thankfulness, and a sense of responsibility in the way we procure food and eat. We are finally measuring our lives in coffee spoons – not a bad thing in times like these.

"It is a good time to reflect on what we are eating," says Manjari Chandra, a functional nutritionist in Delhi. She talks of minimalism when it comes to food, looking at fasting (for 14 to 16 hours) instead of feasting, and building responsible food practices like stopping before we are full or cutting down the number of meals we have in a day. Here is how you can buy and eat more mindfully – taking into account our own nutrition, the health of our community, and our environment, because in the end, everything is connected.

Building immunity

Your only innate guard is immunity, and because we have a long way to go, it is best to try and get this strengthened, says Chandra. It is not like popping a pill though – a couple of bone broths and salads may not imme-

Try to include



diate get you a more robust immune system. "Look at it as working on the terrain." She means when every part of the body is strengthened, and all your systems are working like they should, it is likely you will have good immunity.

The immunity function lies in the gut, so those who have constipation, acidity, or any other gut malfunction,

could strengthen it with vitamins (especially vitamin C) and minerals (zinc, magnesium, selenium)," adds Chandra. Again, people who are immunocompromised are those who have hormonal imbalances, endocrine-related disorders like diabetes, and autoimmune conditions. It is important to know that everyone can gradually build immunity.

Onion, ginger, garlic, *tulsi*, pomegranate, and eucalyptus are all anti-viral foods that can reduce the chance of you contracting a viral infection. However, there are no definitive studies on how much of each is good to consume. It is safe to put these in the traditional foods we eat. Star anise can be had in a tea with mint: it has shikimic acid that is used in the medicine Tamiflu to treat the H1N1 virus. Black pepper, asafoetida, and carom (*ajwain/oman*) are also helpful.

Cutting inflammation

Internal inflammation makes you susceptible to disease. Highly processed foods, and a diet rich in refined oils, high carbohydrate, high protein, and simple sugars cause inflammation. Cut down on sucrose-rich fruits that cause insulin spikes.

Dietician Sheela Krishnaswamy says we need to use this time as an opportunity to eat healthy. "Cooking fresh, not ordering in, and not buying processed-packaged food are valuable practices we can take into the days ahead."

In Goa, where she is based, and fruits are a currently a rarity, (while vegetables are not regularly supplied in the market), she says it is possible to work with what is at home – cereals

Keep in check



and *dals*, changing these up if possible, millets-*dal*, brown-rice-*dal*, whole-wheat-*dal*. These give the macronutrients and some micronutrients.

She says it is a good idea to add ghee and/or coconut oil and simple spices and herbs to the food for antioxidant protection. If you can set some curd at home, nothing like it, for beneficial bacteria. The availability of minerals and vitamins in whole sprouted grains, like ragi, green gram, *chana*, goes up and their digestibility increases as starch is partially broken down.

Time to innovate

It is also a time to look around the house and consume all the little bottles of ingredients that we have put on the backshelf. Finish the raw peanuts and the leftover nuts and seeds – do soak them overnight to get rid of the anti-nutrients, which are plant compounds like phytates that reduce the absorption of minerals. And while you are drinking *manjal*, have it with milk – it needs a fat medium to be better absorbed, says Lovneet Batra, a sports nutritionist in Delhi.

FILM REVIEWS

A Tokyo zombie flick done right

The living dead come alive in *One Cut of the Dead*, a Japanese film with rare zest and fun

NAMRATA JOSHI



On set A scene from the Japanese flick ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

One Cut of the Dead

DIRECTOR: Shinichiro Ueda
CAST: Takayuki Hamatsu, Yuzuki Akiyama, Harumi Shuhama, Shinichiro Osawa
STORYLINE: A ragtag but resourceful film crew shooting a zombie film in an abandoned water filtration plant is hit by zombies.

are there. But with a twist.

Of course there's a 37-minute single-take opening shot. But the biggest strength is the eccentric but likeable characters.

The perfectionist director who, despite the limitation of resources, wants the 43rd take to get the "real fear"

and "true shiver" out of his actress. And the emotional side-story of him and his daughter, the one who truly believes in him and is a true inheritor of his filmmaking legacy.

Telling readers, anything more would be giving the film away. Suffice to say that the chills, thrills, laughter, and cries make the film just what the doctor has ordered to fight the mood blues in the COVID-19 times. But this is also a film whose joy has to be shared in the best of company. If only you could have a viewing party.

Based on Simon Stalenhag's narrative book by the same name, the series is an

assortment of stories involving townspeople (Sweden relocated to small town America) living above the "Loop", a machine that is supposed to unlock and explain the mysteries of the universe.

In that sense the three episodes of *Tales from the Loop* that one got to preview can also best be described as poetic puzzles. The beautifully shot series approximates Stalenhag's visuality. The retro-futuristic scenery is omnipresent in each of the episodes even as human, emotional tales play out at the core. The bizarre backdrop itself may have a remote, distancing effect but the people, their relationships, dilemmas, and feelings are relatable and universal.

Based on Simon Stalenhag's narrative book by the same name, the series is an

Meditative mysteries

Tales from the Loop, Amazon's new series, is like a string of poetic puzzles

NAMRATA JOSHI

With my limited knowledge of the world of arts, before embarking on the new Amazon series, I had to educate myself on Swedish artiste Simon Stalenhag's phantasmagoric works. The characteristic juxtaposition of giant robots, massive machines, mammoth structures and humongous flying saucers against an everyday landscape – cars careening on expressways, kids playing in the field or walking in the meadow with their parents. Stalenhag's work is exquisite, intriguing and enigmatic, a combination of the real and the surreal that enchant even as it confounds.

In that sense the three episodes of *Tales from the Loop* that one got to preview can also best be described as poetic puzzles. The beautifully shot series approximates Stalenhag's visuality. The retro-futuristic scenery is omnipresent in each of the episodes even as human, emotional tales play out at the core. The bizarre backdrop itself may have a remote, distancing effect but the people, their relationships, dilemmas, and feelings are relatable and universal.

Based on Simon Stalenhag's narrative book by the same name, the series is an



Retro-futuristic scenery *Tales from the Loop* is a visual delight ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

spiritual and haunting at points and at others annoyingly inane. The element of the unknown have a touch of *The Twilight Zone* but I thought the eeriness lingered there more chillingly, or perhaps I am another generation of viewer altogether.

The cast is led by the ever-dependable Jonathan Pryce, as the force behind the Loop, an actor who cannot put a wrong foot forward, but it's the two children – Fortson and Joiner – and Essandoh who steal the show.

Like all good sci-fi it's the human aspect that makes an impact, but plenty of the elements of technological fantasy feel more facile than profound. The scientific design and human drama feels at a disjunct at points.

The open-endedness makes science feel almost

Tales from the Loop

DIRECTORS: Jodie Foster, So Yong Kim, Charlie McDowell, Tim Mielants, Mark Romanek, Andrew Stanton, Dearbhla Walsh, Ti West

CAST: Jonathan Pryce, Rebecca Hall, Paul Schneider, Duncan Joiner, Ato Essandoh, Abby Ryder Fortson

STORYLINE: Based on Simon Stalenhag's narrative book by the same name, the series is an assortment of stories involving people in a small town living above the "Loop", a machine that is supposed to unlock and explain the mysteries of the universe

Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman's *Summer With Monika* in the local cinema, in the first episode for instance. A nod to flighty women as well as the series' Swedish origins? But how would the film have got released there is still perplexing me.

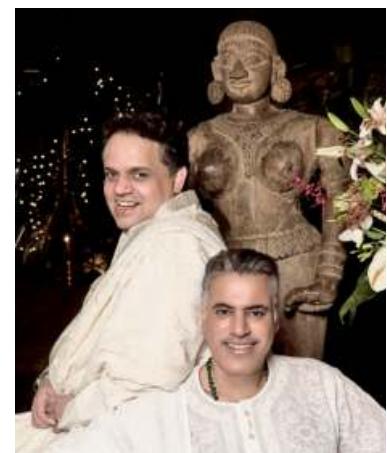
On a more serious note, the contemplative mood will either make you feel more invested in the stories or may just make you want to get off the ride even as *The Tales from the Loop* tries hard to balance between the bleak and the beautiful.

The Tales from the Loop is now streaming on Amazon Prime

India gets its fashion rescue fund

The country's leading fashion bodies come together to help emerging designers during the tough times ahead

SUJATA ASSOMULL



prominent label Abu Jani and Sandeep Khosla (AJSK), known for reviving crafts such as *chikankari*, had agreed with her but also pointed out, "If we go bust as designers, we lose the ability to be employers and safeguard our workforce."

AJSK are paying full salaries to staff despite the lockdown and hope to be able to do this for as long as they can. But what about the ₹1.7 lakh crore Ga-reeb Kalyan Yojana announced by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on March 26, to help the poor tide over the coronavirus lockdown? Fashion designer Tarun Tahiliani says that it is, "...a series of paltry measures that don't address industry and job creation. Collateral-free loans mean there is no security and may

3Qs: FDCI president Sunil Sethi

How large is the fund?

As of now, it is just seed money; it is too early to talk figures. All the money till date has come voluntarily from FDCI board members, including me. Every industry has to help itself now. We have not asked for contributions because we don't believe this is the right time. It is hard to know whether it can be covered as a CSR activity [for corporates] or under the 80G certification [that makes the donor eligible for tax benefits]. Figuring these things out takes time and the lockdown is not making it simple.

How do you plan to disburse the money?

The application process has not started yet. The designers will have a clearer picture of what they need after March 31 [the closing of the year].

How do you feel the fraternity will benefit?

It is going to be tough times ahead. [The thing to remember is] when you help a designer you are also helping the tailors, weavers and embroiders who work for them.

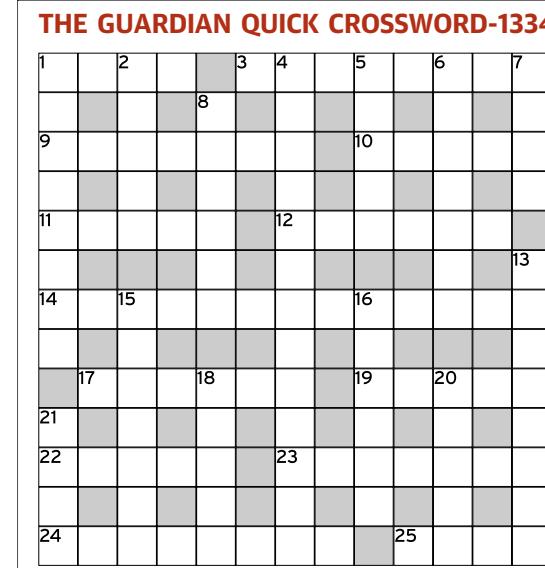
add to bad debts. And EPF is a minimal thing. Frankly, it sounds better than it is." While a few labels are encouraging pre-orders to ostensibly help their artisans earn and stay occupied at their homes, the situation is grim. "With no cash inflow in the markets, buying will be hugely hurt, especially in this niche segment," observes Sunil Sethi, president of the industry's apex body, The Fashion and Design Council of India.

Fund for emerging designers

The FDCI announced the COVID-19 Support Fund (CSF by FDCI) to "provide financial assistance to small businesses and young designers in need". According to Sethi, the fund is "a relief fund for greenhorns who most likely will be struggling with production and loss of revenue as they don't possess a consortium of funds". It is supported by the who's who of the industry, the latest being the L Lakme Fashion Week. "Currently, it means that there is no intent to...have multiple similar actions in the industry," says Jaspreet Chandok, Head of lifestyle business, IMG Reliance that jointly organises LFW with Lakme. The differences between the rival bodies are well documented. "It is a time for unity.... As the structure of the fund and the usage of it is finalised and shared, we will contribute as well," Chandok concludes.

The writer is a former editor, luxury consultant and author

THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13341



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Across

- 1 Batter (4)
- 3 Power-driven cutting tool (8)
- 9 Large square-rigged sailing ship (7)
- 10 Above average in size (5)
- 11 Averages (5)
- 12 Talk endlessly about nothing (6)
- 14 Acid fruit, used for making marmalade (7,6)
- 17 Representative object (6)
- 19 Broom made with twigs (5)
- 22 I'm away (in France?) (5)
- 23 Supporter of socialism (7)
- 24 Children up to the age of 13 (3-5)
- 25 Murder (4)

Down

- 1 One with a partner too many (8)
- 2 Latin American dance (5)
- 4 Large smooth fruit with

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

sweet greenish flesh (8,5)

5 Small area surrounded by water (5)

6 Doctor with cutting tools (7)

7 Troubles (4)

8 Container (6)

13 Maths of lines, curves and shapes (8)

15 Body that rises at night to drink the blood of the living (7)

16 Snub (6)

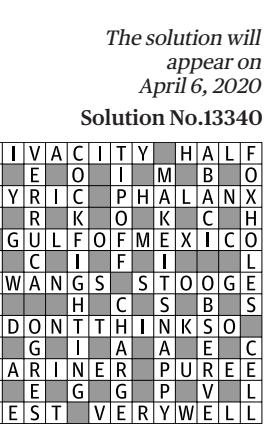
18 Insect – nasty character, undeserving of respect (5)

20 Fire lighter (5)

21 Swindle (4)

The solution will appear on April 6, 2020

Solution No.13340



CM YK

U.S. reports record 1,169 virus fatalities

Worldwide, confirmed new coronavirus infections surged past 1 million and deaths topped 54,000

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

The U.S. recorded 1,169 COVID-19 fatalities in the past 24 hours, the Johns Hopkins University tracker showed on Thursday, the highest one-day death toll recorded in any country since the global pandemic began.

The toll reflected figures reported by the university between 8:30 p.m. local time on Wednesday and the same time on Thursday. The grim record was previously held by Italy, where 969 people died on March 27.

The U.S. has now recorded 6,069 coronavirus deaths since the start of the pandemic.

Globally, Italy has the highest total death toll, with 13,915 dying of the disease there, followed by Spain at 10,003.

The U.S. also recorded more than 30,000 new cases of COVID-19 in the same 24-hour period, bringing the total number of officially reported cases in the country to more than 2,43,000, according to Johns Hopkins.

The outbreak has snapped the U.S.' record-breaking hiring streak of nearly 10 years, while U.S. and European medical workers struggling to save ailing patients on Friday watched supplies of medicine, protective equipment and breathing machines dwindle by the hour.

Swift end

Jobs numbers released in the U.S. showed the virus dealt a swift end to the nation's 50-year-low unemployment rate, with employers reporting hundreds of thousands of job cuts in March.

The true picture, though, is far worse, because the government figures do not include the last two weeks, when nearly 10 million

thrown-out-of-work Americans applied for unemployment benefits.

Worldwide, confirmed infections surged past 1 million and deaths topped 55,500, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University.

Europe's three worst-hit countries – Italy, Spain and France – surpassed 30,000 dead, or over half of the global toll. From those countries, the view remained almost unrelentingly grim, a frightening portent for places like New York, the epicentre of the U.S. outbreak, where bodies are being loaded by forklift into refrigerated trucks outside overwhelmed hospitals.

Shortages of critical equipment led to fierce competition among buyers from Europe, the U.S. and elsewhere. A regional leader in Paris described the scramble to

COVID-19

find masks a "worldwide treasure hunt." Governor Andrew Cuomo warned that New York could run out of ventilators in six days.

With infections spreading, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has asked the Pentagon for 1,00,000 more body bags.

In Florida, hundreds of passengers on a cruise ship where four people died were finally being allowed to disembark after a days-long stand-off. More than a dozen critically ill patients were taken to hospitals, while people healthy enough to travel were taken to the airport for chartered flights home.

One Spanish hospital turned its library into an intensive care unit. In France, space was set aside for bodies in a vast food market. The French prime minister said he is "fighting hour by hour" to ward off shortages of essential drugs used to keep COVID-19 patients alive.

France cancelled its high-school exit exam known as the Baccalaureat, a first in the 212-year history of the test.

Some glimmers of hope emerged that Italy, as well as

Spain and France might be flattening their infection curves and nearing or even passing their peaks in daily deaths.

Elsewhere in Europe, officials began talking tentatively about how to lift lockdowns that have staved off the total collapse of strained health systems but also bat-

tered economies.

Austria said it will set out a timetable next week for what could be a "slow start-up" of closed parts of the economy. The head of Germany's national disease control centre said he expects that any easing of the lockdown, which this week was extended to April 19, will be staggered.

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MARKET WATCH

	03-04-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	27,591	-2.39
US Dollar	76.13	-0.70
Brent oil	33.48	--

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	244.80	0.00
Asian Paints	1520.90	-82.30
Axius Bank	325.45	-33.20
Bajaj Auto	2033.75	-17.35
Bajaj Finserv	4510.75	8.85
Bajaj Finance	2207.50	-11.85
Bharti Airtel	423.95	2.60
BPLC	317.15	14.20
Britannia Ind	2563.25	-1.60
Cipla	449.20	35.45
Coal India	137.75	-1.70
Dr Reddy's Lab	3146.80	51.80
Eicher Motors	12680.05	-321.55
GAIL (India)	80.90	5.15
Grasim Ind	454.70	-21.45
HCL Tech.	405.80	-7.75
HDFC	1499.55	-83.95
HDFC Bank	813.85	-15.80
Hero MotoCorp	1582.05	-57.60
Hindalco	88.80	-2.85
Hind Unilever	2154.10	-25.55
ICICI Bank	286.65	-24.50
IndusInd Bank	313.20	-29.05
Bharti Infralet	156.40	-1.30
Infosys	585.70	-17.10
Indian Oil Corp	79.50	0.55
ITC	177.90	11.50
JSW Steel	140.70	-2.30
Kotak Bank	1140.85	-40.80
L&T	774.65	0.30
M&M	280.70	-7.85
Maruti Suzuki	4011.50	-234.85
Nestle India Ltd.	15104.65	-549.90
NTPC	79.55	-1.45
ONGC	69.85	4.10
PowerGrid Corp	156.20	1.60
Reliance Ind	1077.45	-3.00
State Bank	175.50	-11.05
Shree Cement	15783.80	-765.85
Sun Pharma	375.95	32.40
Tata Motors	65.30	-2.65
Tata Steel	253.75	-12.60
TCS	1654.20	-54.55
Tech Mahindra	520.90	9.70
Titan	862.80	-73.25
UltraTech Cement	3041.60	-99.05
UPL	298.10	-7.65
Vedanta	62.80	0.15
Wipro	180.00	-9.50
Zee Entertainment	124.35	3.45

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	75.97	76.29
Euro	81.96	82.31
British Pound	93.35	93.76
Japanese Yen (100)	70.04	70.34
Chinese Yuan	10.71	10.76
Swiss Franc	77.74	78.07
Singapore Dollar	52.91	53.14
Canadian Dollar	53.60	53.83
Malaysian Ringgit	17.42	17.54

IN BRIEF

RBI needs to monetise deficit, says SBI report

NEW DELHI At a time when market appetite is low due to COVID-19 pandemic, there is a need to monetise deficit with the Reserve Bank subscribing to the primary issues of dated central government securities, a SBI report has suggested. PTI

Life turns turtle for MSMEs as lockdown chokes

Transporting men, machines and materials under strict curbs tests the sinews of enterprises located in smaller cities

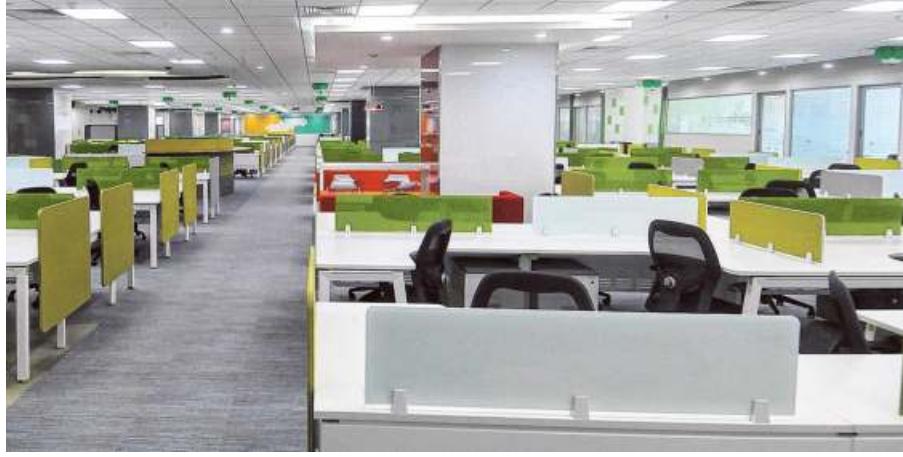
MINI TEJASWI

BENGALURU The lockdown ordered to stem the spread of COVID-19 has swept over millions of small and medium enterprises in tier-2 and -3 cities and across India like a tsunami.

Moving people and machines to facilitate work-from-home (WFH) options became a daunting task for many, as per industry executives of some mid-tier firms who narrate their harrowing experience.

In some cases, attempts to prove something as 'essential' turned into debates between business owners and local administrators. Consequently, many enterprises and their employees, across places such as Mysore, Hassan, Udupi, Kochi, Pune, Ahmedabad, Surat, Nagpur, Goa, Jaipur, Coimbatore and Salem suffered in terms of lack of businesses continuity and clarity, physical hardship and mental stress.

"It was nightmarish for many companies operating in Coimbatore and Salem. We were running [around]



The CII has urged all enterprises, which are still suffering connectivity or business continuity issues, to reach out to the industry association for assistance. ■ FILE PHOTO

for permissions to move people and computers. We could easily move people and systems between Bengaluru and Chennai, but in Salem, the rules were different. And eventually, we lost several days of productivity and our employees suffered a lot," explained Chocke Valliappa, CEO of IT services firm, Vee Technologies that employs 5,000 people across Bengaluru, Chennai and Salem.

The situation was in stark

contrast with the promises of many State governments that vie with each other to attract investments to small cities in their regions.

Not enough time
Certain mid-tier firms are of the opinion that the lockdown came upon them all of a sudden though the government would have been contemplating it at least a few days before it's introduction.

"Over 300 of our em-

ployees in Bengaluru and Chennai were thrown out of their respective hostels soon after the lockdown. We arranged some stay for them in Salem and tried to bring them to Chennai. But authorities made us send them back," said Mr. Valliappa, whose company supports hospitals in the U.S. and in India by providing clinical documentation services.

Udupi-based Robosoft Technologies, a UX and UI

application development and digital advisory firm, too, said small firms had suffered huge disruptions after the lockdown.

COVID-19

Robosoft and its arm, 99Games, together employ 600 people across Mangaluru, Mumbai and Bengaluru.

Rohith Bhat, founder-CEO at the company said, "Fortunately, we anticipated the trouble slightly in advance. Some of our customers in Japan [gently] alerted us; therefore, three days before the first lockdown call, we started moving our men and machines. But we went through a very tough time."

"Had we waited until the complete lockdown announcement, we surely would have faced huge downtime issues like many others."

CII acts

Realising the gravity of the situation, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) sprang into action. It met the

respective State governments and industries departments to chalk out ways to ensure business continuity for the entire MSME (micro, small and medium enterprises) community in the country.

"We discussed a wide array of key topics with the Karnataka government and movement of people, material and machines was one of them," said Ramesh Ramadurai, vice chairman, CII-Karnataka.

The CII has urged all enterprises, which are still suffering connectivity or business continuity issues, to reach out to the industry association for assistance.

Pradeep Bhargava, president of Maharashtra Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Agriculture (MCCIA) said most IT/ITES firms in Pune were able to shift to WFH mode with relative ease; however, other firms, including manufacturing companies, big and small, struggled as the task involved touchpoints with facilities, staff, vendors and customers.

RBI halves trading hours for markets

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has reduced market hours between April 7 and April 17 in view of the lockdown.

The call money market, government securities market, currency market, commercial paper market and others that typically open at 9 a.m. and close at 5 p.m. will now be open between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.

The central bank said the 'unprecedented' situation created by the COVID-19 outbreak has necessitated lockdowns, social distancing and restrictions on movement of people.

"The dislocations have adversely impacted the functioning of financial markets," it said. "To minimise risks and ensure market participants maintain adequate checks and supervisory controls while optimising thin resources and ensuring safety of personnel, it has been decided to revise trading hours for various markets," it added.

Foreign investors sell over ₹1 lakh-cr. securities in a month, for first time in history

But domestic institutions save the blushes, buying stocks worth ₹55,595 crore in March and arresting a further plunge

The Sensex registered its worst monthly fall in more than 11 years, declining 23% in March, the greatest percentage drop since October 2008

HIGHEST MONTHLY OUTFLOWS		HIGHEST MONTHLY INFLOWS	
Month	Net flows (₹ Cr)	Month	Net flows (₹ Cr)
March, 2020	-118,203	March, 2017	56,261
June, 2013	-44,162	March, 2019	48,751
November, 2016	-39,396	July, 2014	36,046
October, 2018	-38,906	February, 2012	35,228
May, 2018	-29,776	May, 2014	33,778
December, 2016	-27,111	January, 2015	33,688
September, 2018	-21,035	September, 2010	32,668
July, 2013	-18,124	March, 2014	31,663
August, 2015	-17,524	June, 2014	30,705
October, 2008	-17,205	March, 2010	29,438

ASHISH RUKHAIYAR

MUMBAI

For the first time in the history of the Indian capital markets, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have sold securities worth over ₹1 lakh crore in a single month.

As per data from the National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL), the cumulative net outflow from the debt and equity segments was pegged at ₹1.18 lakh crore in March – more than double the previous high of ₹44,000 crore witnessed in June 2013.

Further, both the equity and debt segments have individually registered new

highs in terms of monthly outflows of ₹61,973 crore and ₹60,376 crore, respectively.

COVID-19 concerns

According to market participants, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that has affected stocks worldwide is the primary reason for such record outflows as foreign investors shy away from riskier assets and also, emerging markets.

The global death toll of the pandemic had crossed at 27,590 on Friday after falling 674.36 points, or 2.39%, to trading over 53% lower than its intraday record high of 42,274 in January

Currently, the Sensex is trading over 53% lower than its intraday record high of 42,274 in January

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Incidentally, the impact of the record sales by overseas investors has been clearly visible in the stock markets with the benchmark Sensex registering its worst monthly fall in over 11 years. In March, the 30-share barometer lost a little over 23% (23.05%) which was the highest since October 2008 when it plunged 23.89%.

Currently, the Sensex, which closed at 27,590 on Friday after falling 674.36 points, or 2.39%, is trading over 53% lower than its intraday record high of 42,274 in January

Interestingly, buying by domestic institutional investors (DIIs), which include banks, insurance companies, mutual funds and domestic financial institutions, has been acting as a strong counter force to the selling by foreign investors.

As per BSE data, March also saw the highest-ever monthly net purchases by DIIs who bought equities worth ₹55,595.18 crore. This was again double that of the previous high of ₹26,033.9 crore registered in October 2018.

Third TLTRO for ₹25,000 cr. on April 7

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

IN BRIEF



South African players symptom-free

JOHANNESBURG
The South African cricket team's chief medical officer Shuaib Manjra has said that the players have completed a 14-day period of self isolation after returning from India and they were symptom-free. The team returned from India on March 18 after the ODI series was called off due to the pandemic. But the players will remain in lockdown for the next two weeks. IANS

IOA contributes ₹71 lakh to PM-CARES Fund

NEW DELHI
The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) has contributed a sum of ₹71,14,002 towards the PM CARES Fund. IOA also expressed gratitude to all the NSFs, State Olympic Associations and other federations/bodies for extending their support and humble contributions. IANS



UEFA tells clubs to complete the season

PARIS
UEFA and Europe's top clubs have stated their determination that the current football season should be played to a conclusion and threatened that teams may be excluded from the next Champions League if their domestic competitions are ended prematurely. In a joint letter released on Thursday, UEFA, the European Club Association (ECA), and the European Leagues body representing nearly a thousand clubs in 29 countries, said that they were working on the possibility of playing on until July and August if need be. AFP

FIH extends Pro League suspension

NEW DELHI
The International Hockey Federation has been forced to extend the suspension of FIH Pro League's second edition due to the pandemic and now plans to hold the ties in July and August, provided the current situation improves. PTI



ASUNCION
FIFA boss Gianni Infantino admitted that "nobody knows" when football can resume around the world. "We all wish that we could have football tomorrow but unfortunately it's not possible and nobody in the world today knows when we will be able to play like before. Our world and our sport is going to be different when we return to normality. We have to make sure that football survives and that it can prosper once again." AFP

Premier League put off indefinitely

LONDON
Premier League clubs will ask players to take a combination of pay cuts and deferrals amounting to 30 percent of their salary due to the financial crisis caused by coronavirus, the league said in a statement on Friday. The Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) will meet with league and club officials to discuss the proposal on Saturday. A meeting between the 20 English top-flight clubs also agreed to indefinitely extend the suspension of the season until it is "safe and appropriate" for football to return. AFP

IOC revises qualification deadlines

Athletes now have up to June 29, 2021, to book their berths for Tokyo Games

OLYMPICS

UTHRA GANESAN
NEW DELHI

The International Olympic Committee has revised its qualification deadline for the Tokyo Games to June 29, 2021.

Many yet to complete

The 2020 Olympics, postponed by a year due to COVID-19 pandemic, has forced the IOC and International Federations to rework their qualification and tournament calendar. While some of the events, like hockey, have already completed their qualification processes and would not be affected, several, including badminton and track & field were yet to complete the same.

In a communiqué to National Olympic Associations, the IOC has now confirmed the new dates. "The new qualification period deadline is 29 June 2021, and IFs can



Extended wait: A man wearing a face mask takes a selfie next to a Tokyo 2020 Olympics countdown clock that has been adjusted for the new start date of July 23, 2021. ■ GETTY IMAGES

define their own qualification period deadlines, should the deadline be prior to this date. The revised final sport entries deadline has now been set for 5 July 2021," it

said. The IOC also reiterated its efforts to revise an overall final qualification system at the earliest, even as soon as mid-April, but admitted that specifics would only come later.

"We understand that at this time these are unlikely to include the full details on the dates and locations of the specified events, recognising that these will follow later as

the impacts of COVID-19 and its related restrictions become clearer.

"We aim to finalise the adapted qualification systems by mid-April, with the details on specific events to follow when available. The priority remains to reflect, where possible, the allocation method/pathway of the original qualification systems for each sport," it added.

The IOC, while allowing international federations the discretion to tweak their rankings system accordingly, sought to ensure sport-specific balance between protecting those close to qualifying in 2020 and giving the top performers of 2021 a chance to qualify.

It also authorised IFs to decide on the age-eligibility of athletes who may not make the cut in 2020 but do so in 2021. While there is no upper age limit, sports like gymnastics (16 years), football (under-23) and boxing (17) have a minimum age.

Mixed feelings for Ramanathan Krishnan

Playing now not a priority: Ramesh

WIMBLEDON

RAYAN ROZARIO
COIMBATORE

When The Championships was called off a couple of days ago due to COVID-19, many former champions expressed disappointment. Ramanathan Krishnan, who made the world take notice of India with his exploits at the prestigious event in the sixties, shared his views too.

"My immediate feeling about the cancellation was one of joy and sorrow," he told *The Hindu* from Chennai.

"It's sort of joy to me as it's going to save the players, the spectators and the others involved, from this virus threat. At the same time, it's one of sorrow as the players may have to miss the event for a year," he added.

Huge loss

Krishnan, a semifinalist in 1960 & '61 and who reached a world-ranking of No. 6, said that in a tennis player's career, losing one year of Wimbledon is a huge loss.

"It's so precious not only for the international stars but also for the Indian

players. I feel sad for them because we do not know whether they would carry the same form or confidence next year."

He was quick to add that one must not take a chance with corona. "Good luck to the players," he signed off.

His son, Ramesh Krishnan, who had reached the Wimbledon quarterfinals (1986), said these were quite extraordinary times. "Sorry this has to happen and, in the present scenario, we have plenty on our mind. Also, things are so uncertain that playing the sport is not a priority at the moment," said Ramesh.

The Wimbledon and French Open junior title-winner in 1979, Ramesh said it's going to be tough for all players.

"The main thing is to remain fit so that when things return to normalcy you can get going. For the older players such as Federer and Serena Williams, it's a year lost, which is a lot for them."

Ramesh, a regular visitor to Wimbledon, said, "I was looking forward to my travel this year, but that will have to wait for another year."

Ayushi steps it up in tough rifle event

Ayushi steps it up in tough rifle event

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI

It is the toughest event in rifle and pistol. The rifle 3-position event demands 120 shots during qualification, 40 each in kneeling, prone and standing positions. Thereafter, it is a 45-shot final.

Unlike air events, in which youngsters shoot from 10 metres to strike world class scores very early in their career, the 50m event requires considerable experience and expertise.

Remarkable progress

Given this backdrop, the 19-year-old Ayushi Podder has done remarkably well to be among the six shortlisted for the Tokyo Olympics. Ayushi has had impressive scores of 1174 and 1168 in the Olympic trials.

From shooting 1121 in the junior section of the 2018 World championship in Ko-

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