



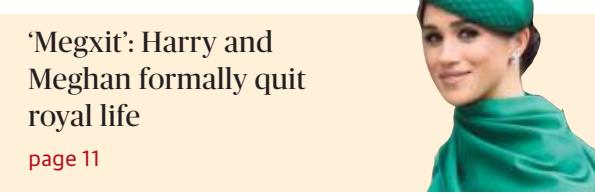
Priority is to stop the pandemic, says T.N. CM Edappadi Palaniswami
page 6



Maharashtra government to pay salaries in installments
page 10



Air India pilots flag poor protective equipment
page 10



'Megxit': Harry and Meghan formally quit royal life
page 11

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NEARBY



Noida administration seals fire safety firm

GAZIABAD
The newly appointed District Magistrate of Gautam Buddha Nagar, Suhas L.Y., on Tuesday sealed a fire safety firm in Noida which is being linked to 29 COVID-19 cases in the district besides Ghaziabad, Bulandshahr and Bareilly. On Tuesday, another employee of the firm tested positive in Duhai village of Ghaziabad.

REGION ▶ PAGE 4

COVID-19: MoUs signed with private hospitals

JAIPUR/GUWAHATI
Scaling up its efforts to tackle the COVID-19 outbreak, the Rajasthan government has reserved 84 private hospitals, with a total bed capacity of 9,377, in Jaipur. The order came following a decision taken last week in Assam, where the Rajasthan government signed MoUs with private hospitals for "transferring the load of other patients".

NEWS ▶ PAGE 10

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OPORTUNITIES ▶ BACK PAGE

Officials of Tablighi Jamaat charged with defying restrictions

Over 400 people with COVID-19 symptoms hospitalised, over 1,000 quarantined

NIKHIL BABU
SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

With at least 24 of its occupants testing positive for the novel coronavirus, an Islamic centre in the national capital has turned out to be the latest hotspot of COVID-19. More than 400 people with symptoms were admitted to different hospitals and over 1,100 shifted to government-run quarantine facilities in Delhi alone over Monday and Tuesday, officials said.

Hundreds of others who returned home after staying at the centre over the last fortnight might have carried the virus to several States, authorities fear.

COVID-19

Thousands of people from across the country, as well as from Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Saudi Arabia, attended a gathering at the centre earlier this month over a number of days, officials said. A large number of them were stuck on the premises as the country went into lockdown on March 24. Markaz Nizamuddin is the international headquarters of Tablighi Jamaat, a puritanical Islamic sect.

The Delhi police on Tues-

day registered a case against Maulana Saad and others from Tablighi Jamaat under Section 3 of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, read with Sections 269, 270, 271 and 120-B of the IPC, for violation of government directions in respect of restriction of gatherings and safety measures, including physical distancing.

'No transport available'
The centre said, in a statement, that many participants could not leave as all means of transport came to an abrupt halt on March 24,

though it tried to make special arrangements with permission from the authorities. "Under such compelling circumstances, there was no option for Markaz Nizamuddin but to accommodate the stranded visitors with prescribed medical precautions till the situation becomes conducive to their movement or arrangements are made by the authorities."

Close community interactions in prayer, dining and travel among Jamaat followers put them at a high risk of the contagion. Participants at the recent congregation

included people from Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Jammu and Kashmir and Kerala – in cases already known.

One of those who attended, a Srinagar-based businessman, died on March 26. He had travelled by air, train and road to Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and back to Jammu and Kashmir. At least 300 people who came in contact with him have been put under quarantine.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

SOUTHERN STATES LAUNCH OPERATION ▶ PAGE 5

MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGE 4, 8, 9, 10, 11



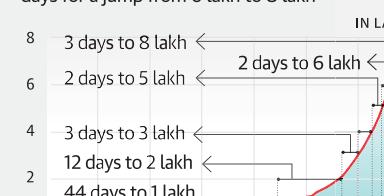
Under watch: People being evacuated from the Tablighi Jamaat centre in the Nizamuddin area of Delhi on Tuesday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

Exponential increase

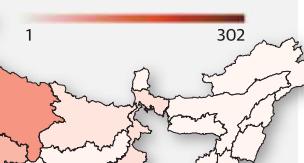
The number of COVID-19 cases crossed 8 lakh globally. The infections in India breached the 1,500-mark on Tuesday.

GLOBAL CASE COUNT

While it took 44 days for the global confirmed cases to reach the 1 lakh mark, it took only 3 days for a jump from 6 lakh to 8 lakh

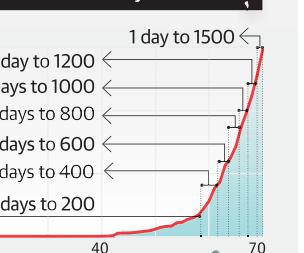


■ STATE NUMBERS
Cases in Maharashtra crossed 300 on Tuesday, while the count in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka crossed 100.



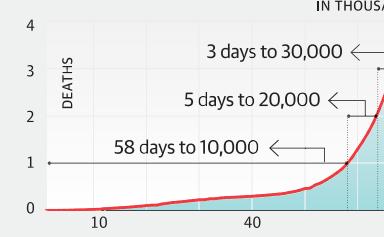
INDIA COUNT

The number of confirmed cases increased by over 400 in the last two days in India



GLOBAL DEATH TOLL

It took 58 days to record 10,000 COVID-19 deaths, but just 8 more days for the global toll to cross 30,000

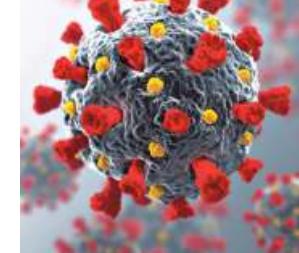


GLOBAL RECOVERED CASES

While it took 62 days for the number of those who recovered to reach 1 lakh, the count jumped to 1.5 lakh in just six days since then



260
Cases recorded in India on Tuesday



Indore cases cause concern

As most COVID-19 patients in Indore, where 17 persons tested positive on Tuesday, have no contact or travel history, health workers are grappling to identify the source, indicating that the city may already be witnessing the community transmission stage. PAGE 9

This, he explained, did not change India's reporting, isolation or testing protocol.

He said the progression in terms of cases could not be compared with any other country as of now and people should be looking at the risk of exposure and adherence to physical distancing.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

seeing any variation from what is being seen on how this strain is behaving around the world. So there is no difference in its severity. However, in a large country like India, it's difficult to predict an accurate trend about the progression of COVID-19 because we still don't have enough time gap between the upswing of cases."

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Treat migrants humanely, SC tells officials

It asks govt. to set up a panel and open a portal to put out authentic information about the virus

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday asked the police and the authorities to treat migrant workers journeying home in fear of COVID-19 in a humane manner.

"We expect those concerned to appreciate the trepidation of the poor men, women and children and treat them with kindness... The anxiety and fear of the migrants should be understood by the police and other authorities. As directed by the Union of India, they should deal with the migrants in a humane manner. Considering the situation, we are of the opinion that the State governments/Union Territories should endeavour to engage volunteers along with the police to supervise the welfare activities for the migrants," a Bench, led by Chief Justice of India

Shard A. Bobde, said. The court ordered the government to ensure that migrant workers stopped from crossing the inter-State borders were given food, shelter and medicines. The government said it was imperative to stop the mass migration as there was a likelihood that three out of every 10 workers might be carrying the coronavirus. The court expressed its satisfaction with the government measures.

The Bench, through videoconferencing, asked the government to urge community and religious leaders to speak to the migrant workers

lodged in shelters. It asked the government to have trained counsellors talk to the workers.

Authentic information

The court directed the government, represented by Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, to set up an expert committee and a dedicated portal within 24 hours to disseminate authentic information about the virus and stop the spread of fake news. A status report filed by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs said the propagation of deliberate or inadvertent false information was the "single most unimaginable hindrance" faced by the government in its battle against the virus.

The Bench, comprising Justice L. Nageswara Rao, asked the government to follow up on persons identified as infected and quarantined.

Mr. Mehta said the lockdown was necessary to stop the spread of infection, and all the people found walking back were shifted to the nearest shelters.

Chief Justice Bobde said that Section 188 (disobedience to order promulgated by public servant) of the IPC makes it a penal offence to disobey orders made by government authorities in public interest.

The court, on March 30, sought a report from the government on the steps taken about the large-scale movement of workers. Tuesday's order came on petitions by advocates Alak Alok Srivastava and Rashmi Bansal for a direction to the government to redress the "heart-wrenching and inhuman plight of thousands of migrant workers" walking back to their villages from the cities without essentials.

Govt. cuts interest rates on NSC, PPF

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The government on Tuesday slashed interest rates on small savings schemes, including National Savings Certificate and Public Provident Fund, by up to 1.4% for the first quarter of 2020-21, in line with the moderation in bank deposit rates.

Interest rates for small savings schemes are notified on a quarterly basis.

With the reduction, term deposits of 1-3 years will now fetch an interest of 5.5% from the existing 6.9%, down 1.4%, according to a notification by the Finance Ministry.

Interest rates are paid quarterly, while the five-year term deposit will earn 6.7%, down from the current rate of 7.7%.

Forced to stay back, these workers now battle hunger

Their ration cards are in Bihar and they have no money left

SOBHANA K. NAIR
PRISCILLA JEBARAJ

'Stay home and stay safe', the global slogan to contain the spread of coronavirus doesn't sound too convincing to Mohammed Hakim and his associates who, unlike many other migrants, were forced to stay back and are battling hunger each day.

Their names are listed on ration cards but the cards, along with their families, are at home in Bihar. Living five to six persons in one windowless room at shanties behind the Jal Vihar bus terminal in the shadow of the posh Lajpat Nagar 1 colony in Delhi, they are now struggling to get one meal a day. "There are about 180 of us from Katihar who live here. Majority of us drive auto-rickshaws or pull cycle-rickshaws for a living. On March 28, many of us, by then having exhausted whatever little money we had, couldn't get anything to eat. Then there were rumours that the lockdown will continue for three months. That jolted the others who still had some money to head home," Mr. Hakim says.

Timings

DELHI

WEDNESDAY, APR. 01
RISE 06:11 SET 18:39
RISE 11:29 SET 00:55
THURSDAY, APR. 02
RISE 06:10 SET 18:40
RISE 12:26 SET 01:50
FRIDAY, APR. 03
RISE 06:09 SET 18:41
RISE 13:29 SET 02:43

Delhi Weather max min
Delhi City 30 13
Safdarjung 30 13
Palam 30 14

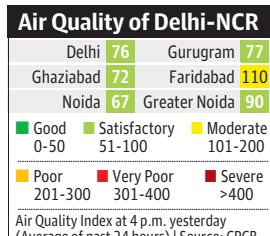
Delhi Palam Today
30°C Pleasant and hazy morning with a warm day is likely. Mainly clear sky is likely.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
32°C Warm day with partly cloudy to cloudy sky is likely. Dry weather with light winds are expected.

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THE HINDU

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IN BRIEF



Relief for LPG staff in case of COVID death

NEW DELHI
Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited on Tuesday announced an ex gratia amount of ₹5 lakh in case of death of any of its staff due to COVID-19. The staff like showroom staff, godown keepers, mechanics and delivery boys are risking their lives to ensure delivery of fuel to customers. The compensation will be given to the spouse of the victim or next of kin. Ujjwala beneficiaries will also get free cylinders for three months.

HC panel eases criteria for release of undertrials

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

A high-powered committee, headed by a Delhi High Court judge, has relaxed the criteria for release of undertrial prisoners on interim bail from city jails in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic.

The Supreme Court recently took up the issue of overcrowding of prisons as a matter of serious concern, pursuant to the spread of COVID-19 across the globe. To decongest prisons, a total of 1,500 convicts have been identified to be released on "Emergency Parole" for a period of eight weeks. At least, 500 undertrial prisoners were identified on the basis of earlier criteria to whom interim bail for a period of 45 days has been granted.

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THE HINDU

India's National Newspaper

Working with inadequate safety gear, say CATS ambulance staff

Vehicles not fumigated and disinfectant not sprayed; company denies claims

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

Drivers and emergency medical technician staff of CATS ambulances alleged that they are not being provided with adequate safety gear and are scared for their lives while transporting patients.

A driver, on condition of anonymity, alleged that the quality of masks, gloves and sanitiser is poor and the amount inadequate. "There is no Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) kit – which is used especially, when dealing with COVID-19 suspects or positive cases – given to us. The sanitisers which are given to us are mixed with water. The ambulances are not fumigated and disinfectant is not sprayed," he alleged.

Lack of measures

Elaborating on the hazards of lack of these measures, he said that if a person who has symptoms of COVID-19 is transported to a hospital and the next call is for a pregnant woman, "in such a case, if the ambulance is not sanitised, it can be dangerous not only for us staffers but also for other patients".

CATS ambulance staff un-



Staff are scared to drive and are worried for their lives but are working due to monetary needs. ■ FILE PHOTO: SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

ion president Narender Lakra said that drivers and EMT staff are scared to drive and are worried for their lives but are working because of monetary needs. He also said that of 264 ambulances, only about 100 are operational and running on the road. "At the time when they should be operational to the maximum, only one-third of them are running. The reason is that most of them need repairs," he said.

Sources said that according to an internal report prepared everyday, at 4 p.m., there were 130 calls received regarding COVID-19 cases but only about 40 CATS ambulances were operational across the Capital.

Adding to the fear, Mr. Lakra, claimed that one EMT staff has been tested positive but the claim has been denied by GVK-EMRI Pvt Ltd State head Manish Tinku. The Delhi government has outsourced operation and maintenance of CATS ambulances to this private

manding safety gear. The authorities got to know and told me that we will not get work anymore and since then, I haven't been called," he alleged.

Denying all claims, Mr. Tinku said that protective gear like masks, gloves and sanitisers were provided to all staffers in all ambulances. "The PPE kits are limited but so far, about 250 cases of COVID-19 have been transported and the kit was provided to the staffers. More sanitisers are being purchased," he said.

Mr. Tinku also said that about 200 CATS ambulances are supposed to operate in the Capital, of which 130 are operational. "The number 264 is old. Also, 50 of 70 which are not operational are due for repairs. We have taken special permission from the government for three workshops which have started helping us since Monday for repairs," he added.

At the time when they should be operational to the maximum, only one-third of them are running. The reason is that most of them need repairs

NARENDER LAKRA
CATS ambulance staff union president

company.

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Capital reports 23 COVID-19 cases

Total number of cases shoots to 120; two deaths so far

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

Twenty-three new COVID-19 cases were reported in Delhi on Tuesday, taking the total number of cases to 120, according to the Delhi government. This is the second biggest single-day jump in the number of cases.

There have been two deaths due to the disease so far in the city, but there was no death reported on Tuesday.

The Delhi government on Tuesday also converted five hospitals as "dedicated hospitals" for treatment of COVID-19 cases.

HELPLINE NUMBERS

COMMON HELPLINE — +91-11-23978046
DELHI — 011-22307145
GHAZIABAD — 0120 4186453
NOIDA — 8076623612/6396776904
GURUGRAM — 108/ 0124-2322412/
991519296/ 7015523417/ 9654231756



G.B. Pant Hospital are in the same compound and hence, the government has considered it as one facility," an official said.

Monday, Sunday and Saturday had recorded the biggest single-day jumps till then with 25, 23, and nine new cases, respectively.

Delhi govt. to feed 10-12 lakh from today

Creating more centres to provide food, says CM Kejriwal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday said the Delhi government is preparing to arrange 3,000 centres between 2,800 and 3,000.

To avoid crowding

"We are feeding 3.5 lakh-4 lakh people daily until now, and we will start feeding 10-12 lakh people from tomorrow. Upon further deliberations on this, we found out that people were crowding

schools and 250 night shelters will start distributing food to 500 people, each bringing the total number of centres between 2,800 and 3,000.

To avoid crowding

"We are feeding 3.5 lakh-4 lakh people daily until now, and we will start feeding 10-12 lakh people from tomorrow. Upon further deliberations on this, we found out that people were crowding

at the food centres. So we decided to create more centres," he said.

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said 10 schools in the Patparganj Assembly constituency had been assigned the task of providing food to 15,000-20,000 people everyday.

Mr. Sisodia said officials and staff were strictly practising physical distancing while handing out meals at the centres.

DMRC running 2 trains daily to keep system 'healthy and functional'

Stations on all lines being manned round the clock by staff

SHININI GHOSH
NEW DELHI

Two metro trains are being run daily from each terminal station, twice a day even as commercial operations remain suspended till April 14 due to the nationwide lockdown announced to curb the COVID-19 outbreak, in a bid to keep the system "healthy", a Delhi Metro official said.

With a complete shutdown of operations since March 22, the Delhi Metro network with 286 stations spanning over 390 km, was being maintained by a reduced number of staff, working in shifts, to ensure the "functionalities of the system" remains intact, the official said.

"Two trains run daily from every terminal station in the morning and evening hours except on the Airport Express Line and the Grey Line.



A DMRC official inspects a metro station on Tuesday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

On these two lines, train movement will be done every sixth day, in the morning hours only," said a senior DMRC official.

The official added, "The train movement exercise is aimed at ensuring good health and functionality of all the systems like track, traction, signalling, telecommunication and so on, which are required for smooth running of the metro services on normal days."

Purpose is to visit the stations and check the health of the system periodically and ensuring all the systems are working fine," the official said.

Dilshad Garden for stricter lockdown steps

Locality in the area has been identified as a hotspot for COVID-19 cases

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

Residents of a locality in Dilshad Garden, which has been identified by the government as a hotspot for COVID-19 cases, have demanded stricter lockdown measures to ensure safety of the area.

A mohalla clinic doctor, his wife, and daughter, who have all tested positive for COVID-19, live in the locality.

A 65-year-old resident who did not wish to be identified said that while there are barricades at the main gate and civil defence officials are on patrol, "there is hardly any checking on who enters and exits the area".

"People are still coming out for evening and morning walks, risking their own lives and that of others," he said, adding that measures should be taken to ensure no one steps out of their homes unnecessarily, "those who do not live here and enter the area should be checked as



Disinfectant being sprayed at a locality in Dilshad Garden on Tuesday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

well... patrolling also needs to be increased".

Residents' Welfare Association (RWA) president Devender Kumar Bhandari said that adequate measures are being taken and the RWA is in regular touch with the Seemapuri Sub-Divisional Magistrate and the local Station House Officer.

The RWA has made an effort at its own level to ascertain the travel history of locals and ensure that families self-quarantine. "The doctor and his family tested positive. There were also four individuals and three families who had travel history during this time. The SDM was asked to inform the families to quarantine themselves," Mr. Bhandari said, adding that the SDM has visited twice to take stock of the situation.

Mr. Bhandari added that upon request, the authorities conducted a door-to-door survey to ask families about their travel history. The authorities also made follow-up calls to residents whether they have developed any COVID-19 symptoms.

While the houses pointed out by the RWA were sanitised, the residents had asked the SDM to sanitise the entire locality last week when he had visited the area. The process began on Tuesday.

"This afternoon, EDMC officials had come and started spraying disinfectant around houses and gates. They said that the team will come every day and we should coordinate with them on which area should be disinfected," Mr. Bhandari said.

As a precautionary measure, all the gates except one main gate has also been closed for entry and exit, the RWA added.

Municipal corporations on Tuesday carried out disinfection drives at areas including Nizamuddin and Dilshad Garden.

During the drive, streets, roads, walls of houses and other places were disinfected, it said. The drive would be continued for coming days it added.

Relief camps' inmates feel trapped, want to return

Set up in the wake of exodus of migrants, occupancy at these centres is very low

ASHOK KUMAR
GURUGRAM

A makeshift relief centre at a "gaushala" in Manesar village here, near Delhi-Jaipur highway, is the new "home" for Dheeraj and his wife and their two-year-old daughter, for at least next two weeks now.

Though the daily needs of his family are being taken care of, the family feels "trapped" like hundreds of other fellow inmates and wants to return to his village in Uttar Pradesh's Hardoi.

"Sahab ji, khana to mil raha hai, lekin biwi bachche ke saath tak yahan reh sakte hain" [Sir, the food is being provided, but for how long can one stay here with wife and the child?], said Dheeraj, a migrant labour at a textile mill in Panipat.

Borders sealed
His family along with 60-odd workers had boarded a truck to Agra from Panipat on March 28 night with the help of local police, but landed at the relief centre after the truck driver dropped them at Bilaspur and the administration sealed the borders.

"We panicked after the exodus began and decided to



A woman at work in a relief camp in Manesar, Haryana, on Tuesday. ■ V. V. KRISHNAN

leave. But the truck driver left us in the lurch. We slept at a petrol pump on Monday and the police picked us up and left us at this centre on Tuesday morning," said Dhruv, also part of the group.



70 Years of Diplomatic Relations between China and India [1950-2020]



A Space Marketing Initiative

Ambassador's Message



H.E. Sun Weidong

On April 1, 2020, China and India usher in the important moment of the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. Looking around the world, China and India, as the only two emerging countries with a population of more than 1 billion, shoulder the historical mission of national rejuvenation, play a key role in the process of the collective rise of developing countries, and inject strong momentum into the profound changes unseen in a century. At this moment, it is particularly important to revisit the original aspiration of establishing diplomatic relations 70 years ago and carry forward the spirit of good neighborliness and friendship, unity and cooperation.

Looking back at the past 70 years, China-India relations have moved ahead despite wind and rain and gone through an extraordinary development path, and gone through an extraordinary development path. In the 1950s, the leaders of the older generation of the two countries made the historical decision to establish diplomatic relations between China and India, and jointly advocated the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. "Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai" (Indians and Chinese are brothers) resounded throughout our two countries. From the 1980s, the two sides agreed to solve the boundary question through peaceful and friendly consultation, established strategic and cooperative partnership for peace and prosperity, and achieved all-round development of bilateral relations. After 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi initiated the "hometown diplomacy", held two informal summits in Wuhan and Chennai respectively, carried out strategic communication on overarching, long-term and strategic issues of global and regional importance, and agreed to strengthen the closer partnership for development between the two countries.

Today's achievements of China-India relations embodied the great efforts of several generations of our two peoples. We can draw some inspirations and experiences from the past. First, adhere to the strategic guidance of the leaders. Second, grasp the general trend of friendly cooperation. Third, expand the momentum of mutually beneficial cooperation. Fourth, enhance the coordination on international and regional affairs. Fifth, properly manage differences.

At present, China-India relations stand at a new starting point and usher in new opportunities. We should draw wisdom from our thousands of years of civilizations and explore a way for neighboring and emerging major countries to get along with each other in accordance with "enhancing mutual trust, focusing on cooperation, managing differences and seeking common development". We also need to master the four keys of "leading, transmitting, shaping and integrating". "Leading" means to reach consensus and guide the direction of the development of bilateral relations under the guidance of our two leaders. "Transmitting" means to transmit the leaders' consensus to all levels and translate it into tangible cooperation and outcomes. "Shaping" means to go beyond the mode of managing differences, shape bilateral relations actively and accumulate positive momentum. "Integrating" means to strengthen exchanges and cooperation, promote convergence of interests and achieve common development.

Indian President Ram Nath Kovind and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have both said that the whole world is a family, which strike a chord with Chinese philosophy concept of "universal peace" and "universal love". The ancient oriental wisdom is still full of vitality today. I believe that China and India have enough foresight and ability to join hands to realize "Dragon-Elephant Tango", create brilliant future in the next 70 years and write together a new chapter in building a community with a shared future for mankind!

On April 1, 1950, China and India established diplomatic relations. India was the first non-socialist country to establish relations with the People's Republic of China.

In 1954, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai visited India. China and India signed the Joint Statement and jointly advocated the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. In the same year, Indian Prime Minister Nehru visited China. He was the first head of government of a non-socialist country who visited China since the founding of the People's Republic of China.

In 1955, Premier Zhou Enlai and Prime Minister Nehru attended the Asian-African Conference in which 29 countries participated in Bandung, Indonesia and jointly advocated the Bandung Spirit of solidarity, friendship and cooperation.

In 1962, the border conflict led to a serious setback in bilateral relations.

In 1976, China and India restored ambassadorial relations and bilateral ties improved gradually.

In 1988, Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited China, initiating



Mao Zedong, Chairman of the Central People's Government of China, met with Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in October 1954.

the process of normalization of bilateral relations. The two sides agreed to "look forward" and develop bilateral relations actively in other fields while seeking a mutually acceptable solution to boundary question.

In 1991, Premier Li Peng visited India. The Prime Minister level mutual visits were restored after decades of suspension.

In 1992, Indian President R. Venkataraman visited China. He was the first President who visited China since the independence of the Republic of India.

In 1993, Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao visited China.



Zhou Enlai, Premier of Government Administration Council of the Central People's Government of China, visited India and jointly advocated the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence in June 1954.

Political and Diplomatic Relations

② Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held 2 informal summits, and exchanged in-depth views on overarching, long-term and strategic issues of global and regional importance.

⑧ Since 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has sent 4 senior delegations to visit China, and sent representatives 4 times to China to attend the international conferences held by the Communist Party of China (CPC).

⑨ The CPC has maintained friendly exchanges with 9 major Indian political parties including the BJP, Congress and left-wing parties for a long time. Exchanges and cooperation have been carried out through high-level visits, study tours, training courses and seminars. These have played an important role in promoting mutual understanding and friendship between the two peoples and promoting healthy and stable development of bilateral relations.

⑯ The two countries have had frequent exchanges of high-level visits. President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have had 16 bilateral meetings since 2014, enhancing political mutual trust, properly managing differences, expanding practical cooperation so as to guide a better and more stable development of bilateral ties.

⑳ Inter-parliamentary friendship groups are set up by China and India. Regular contacts and exchanges are maintained between the leadership and specialized committees of the two Parliaments. More than 20 parliamentarians from both countries have exchanged visits during recent years.

㉒ Since the establishment of the Special Representatives' meeting on the boundary question in 2003, the two sides have held 22 rounds of meetings, which have played an important role in promoting the settlement of the boundary question and maintaining peace and tranquility in the border areas.

㉓ In 2003, the International Department of Central Committee of CPC and the Ministry of External Affairs of India established an exchange mechanism. So far, a total of 10 Chief Ministers from India, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi who used to be Chief Minister of Gujarat, have visited China, and 16 CPC party leaders from the central and local committees of China have visited India. The exchange mechanism has become an important channel to enhance political mutual trust, expand province-state exchanges and practical cooperation in various fields.

㉔ There are 50 dialogue mechanisms between China and India for exchanging views on various topics of bilateral, regional and global concern.

Practical Cooperation

Economy and Trade

④ The Development Research Center of the State Council of China has held 4 rounds of dialogues with the NITI Aayog of India, reaching

Memorabilia of 70th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between China and India



Chinese President Xi Jinping held an informal meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Wuhan in April 2018.

Agreement between the Government of China and the Government of India on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas was signed.

In 1996, President Jiang Zemin visited India. He was the first head of state from China who visited India since the establishment of bilateral relations. Both sides agreed to build a constructive partnership of cooperation oriented towards the 21st century. Agreement between the Government of China and the Government of India on Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas was signed.

In 2000, Indian President K R Narayanan visited China on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and India.

In 2002, Premier Zhu Rongji visited India. Both sides agreed to enhance mutual understanding and trust and promote exchanges and cooperation in various fields.

In 2003, Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee visited China. The two sides signed The Declaration on the Principles and Comprehensive Cooperation in China-India Relations, and agreed to establish the special representatives meeting mechanism on India-China boundary question.

In 2005, Premier Wen Jiabao visited India. China and India signed



Deng Xiaoping, Chairman of the Central Military Commission met with Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in December 1988.

Wen Jiabao visited India and the two sides issued a Joint Communiqué.

In 2013, Premier Li Keqiang visited India in May and the two sides released a Joint Statement. Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh visited China in October.

2014 is the "China-India Friendly Exchange Year". In September, President Xi Jinping paid a state visit to India and visited Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state of Gujarat. The two sides issued Joint Statement on Building a Closer Developmental Partnership.

In 2015, Indian Prime Minister Modi visited China and went to President Xi Jinping's hometown Xian.

In 2016, Indian President Mukherjee visited China.

In 2017, Prime Minister Modi visited China to attend the 9th BRICS Summit in Xiamen and met with President Xi Jinping on the sidelines.

In 2018, President Xi Jinping held an informal meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Wuhan. They had in-depth discussions and reached broad consensus on the overarching, long-term and strategic issues of global and bilateral importance and their respective visions for national development as well as domestic and foreign policies. The informal meeting set up a new model of exchanges between two leaders and became a milestone in the history of bilateral relations.

In 2019, President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Modi held the second informal meeting in Chennai, reaffirmed the Wuhan consensus and agreed to build a closer partnership for development, enhance the in-depth strategic communication, promote mutually beneficial



Chinese President Jiang Zemin visited India and held talks with Indian President Sharma and Prime Minister Gowda in November 1996.

cooperation in various fields, and advance exchanges and mutual learning between the two civilizations.

2020 marks the year of the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and India. It is also China-India Year of Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges. The two sides agreed to hold 70 celebratory activities to demonstrate the historic connection between the two civilizations as well as their growing bilateral relationship over the years, and further deepen people-to-people exchanges between the two countries at all levels.



Chinese President Hu Jintao met with Indian President Abdul Kalam in New Delhi in November 2006.

The two sides have made new progress on exchanges and cooperation in the fields of art, publishing, media, film and television, museum, sports, youth, tourism, locality, traditional medicine, yoga, education and think tanks.

⑤ 2 Confucius Institutes and 3 Chinese language centers have been established in India. Around 20 universities in India offer Chinese courses, among which 8 provide a major in Chinese studies. The contest of the "Chinese Bridge" Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign Secondary School Students (Indian) has been held for 12 sessions. The contest of the "Chinese Bridge" Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign University Students (Indian) has been held for 18 sessions. Chinese language learning is becoming a popular trend in India.

⑥ The two sides have held 4 sessions of China-India High Level Media Forum and 4 sessions of China-India Think Tank Forum to strengthen exchanges and cooperation in the field of media and think tanks.

⑭ The two countries have established 14 pairs of sister cities and provinces, and will establish sister provinces and cities between Fujian Province and Tamil Nadu State, Quanzhou City and Chennai City.

⑯ Since 2006, the hundred-member Chinese and Indian youth delegations have exchanged 14 visits, and more than 4000 Chinese and Indian youth have visited each other's country.

⑰ There are 134 flights linking major cities of the two countries every week, among which China has 94 flights to India and India has 40 flights to China(excluding the flights between the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China and Indian cities).

⑳ China has established 1 Luban Workshop and 1 Luban-Mo-te Culture Institute in India, which have trained more than 200 technical Indian students.

㉐ Over 2,000 young Chinese are studying in India, and more than 20,000 Indian youth are studying in China. Cooperation in the field of education between the two countries has been continuously strengthened.

㉑ The number of Indian pilgrims to Xizang Autonomous Region of China has surged from several hundreds in the 1980s to more than 20,000 in 2019. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China and Ministry of External Affairs of India have made great efforts in coordination and established the Contact Mechanism for Indian Pilgrims. The government of Xizang Autonomous Region of China has undertaken heavy logistics work to help facilitate the pilgrimage, which has become an important bond between the Chinese and Indian people to enhance mutual understanding and friendship.

㉒ Two-way personnel exchanges between China and India have exceeded 1 million, among which more than 800,000 Indians visit China (excluding an average of 700,000 Indians visiting the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China each year) and more than 200,000 Chinese visit India.

Facts and Figures on China-India Cooperation



Chinese President Xi Jinping held the second informal meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Chennai in October 2019.

consensus on promoting sustainable and high-quality economic development of two countries, safeguarding global multilateral trade mechanisms, promoting the reform of the global governance system and guarding against international economic and financial risks.

④ Occupying 4 of the top 5 smartphone shipments in India, Chinese brand smartphones are popular with Indian people.

⑥ China and India have held 6 rounds of strategic economic dialogues to exchange macroeconomic policies on infrastructure, high technology, energy conservation and environmental protection, energy and medicine and promote practical economic and trade cooperation.

⑨ China and India have held 9 rounds of financial dialogues and reached consensus on macroeconomic situation and policies, cooperation under multilateral frameworks as well as bilateral investment and financial cooperation.

⑪ China and India have held 11 sessions of China-India Joint Group of Economy and Trade to engage in extensive exchanges on bilateral trade in goods and services, investment and industrial park cooperation, trade statistics and trade remedies, and constantly deepen bilateral practical cooperation on economy and trade. At the same time, the two countries have closely cooperated with and supported each other on multilateral trading system and regional economic cooperation, making important contributions to establishing new international economic order and safeguarding the interests of developing countries.

㉃ Since the beginning of the 21st century, trade between China and India has grown from less than \$3 billion to nearly \$100 billion, an increase of about 32 times. In 2019, the trade volume between China and India was \$92.68 billion.

㉔ In 2003, the International Department of Central Committee of CPC and the Ministry of External Affairs of India established an exchange mechanism. So far, a total of 10 Chief Ministers from India, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi who used to be Chief Minister of Gujarat, have visited China, and 16 CPC party leaders from the central and local committees of China have visited India. The exchange mechanism has become an important channel to enhance political mutual trust, expand province-state exchanges and practical cooperation in various fields.

㉕ There are 50 dialogue mechanisms between China and India for exchanging views on various topics of bilateral, regional and global concern.

① 200,000 Chinese companies have increased their investment in industrial parks, e-commerce and other areas in India, with 200,000 local jobs created.

People-to-People Exchanges

② China and India have held 2 rounds of meetings of China-India High-Level People-to-People and Cultural Exchanges Mechanism.

IN BRIEF

South body schools earmarked for shelters

Up to 91 schools run by the South Delhi Municipal Corporation have been earmarked as shelter homes, the civic body said on Tuesday. Food distribution and shelter facilities have been arranged for homeless people and migrant labourers in these schools. Arrangements have also been made to ensure that proper social distancing is maintained at all food distribution points, the SDMC said.

Healthcare professionals can volunteer: SDMC

In order to strengthen the medical facilities, the South Delhi Municipal Corporation on Tuesday gave approval for private healthcare professionals to work at its institutions. "Many retired doctors, fresh doctors and medical students are voluntarily coming forward to serve the nation at this crucial time of free of cost in SDMC's healthcare facilities," the civic body said. They will be employed on a voluntary basis, it said. The approval has been given for a period of three months and may be extended depending on the requirement, it added.

'Take action against those associated with outfit'

Delhi Police Special Branch has written to the Delhi government to take immediate action against persons, including foreign nationals, associated with Tablighi Jamaat who are currently staying at various mosques and places in Delhi. A total 157 people, including 94 from Indonesia, 13 from Kyrgyzstan, 9 from Bangladesh, 8 from Malaysia, 7 from Algeria and one each from Tunisia, Belgium and Italy are residing in the city. Remaining are Indian nationals, it said. They are presently staying in south-east Delhi, north-east Delhi and other districts in the city, it added.

Gathering at Nizamuddin a highly irresponsible act, says Kejriwal

Govt. claims to have written to L-G, asking him to refer the matter to the police

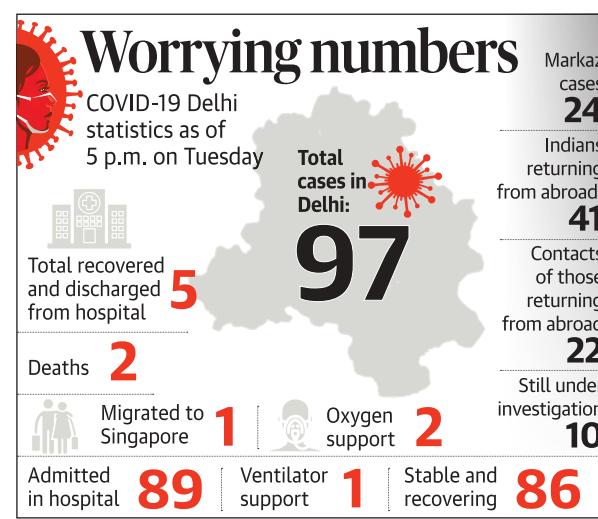
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday said the gathering at the Nizamuddin Markaz (centre) was a "highly irresponsible act" and the government had written to Lieutenant-Governor Anil Baijal asking him to refer the matter to the police.

According to a Raj Niwas spokesperson, these directions came on Tuesday evening with Mr. Baijal directing the police to take "appropriate action as per law" in relation to the case. Of the 97 COVID-19 cases in the city, 24 were from the Nizamuddin centre or the Tablighi Jamaat, Mr. Kejriwal said.

Rise in cases

"There is no denying that there has been a considerable rise in COVID-19 cases in Delhi. Around March 12-13, people from across the nations gathered for a religious congregation. Many of them left for their homes but many stayed back. We are now bringing out the people who



have stayed back and tests are being conducted now, out of which 24 cases have come out to be positive," Mr. Kejriwal said.

He added: "In the last three days, 1,548 people have been brought out of the centre, 441 have been moved to hospitals and 1,447 to quarantine facilities."

The Chief Minister said the world was affected by the disease with even developed

nations under its ambit. Thousands of people had lost their lives in the U.S., Spain, Italy, China and many more, he added.

If religious congregations of different faiths continued, it was going to be "a huge problem", he said, terming the congregation at Nizamuddin a "serious act" and requesting religious leaders across different faiths to ensure that no gatherings are

encouraged.

"Navratri has been going on but we have seen no crowd on the streets and in the temples. Gurudwaras have been shut, people are not going to masjids, Mecca is empty, Vatican City is empty," Mr. Kejriwal said.

"Many people have gone back to other cities after attending this event. I hope not but think about the people that have been already affected by this. With folded hands, I request all the religious leaders and people to cooperate with the government," he added.

The government had written to the L-G for filing an FIR against the mosque administration, he said, adding: "Several reports of how the officials did not act on time are also coming up. If the involvement of any official is found out, strict action will be taken against them. Lives of many people present in the centre have been put at risk; six persons died after attending the event and reaching Telangana," he added.

"You are therefore requested to kindly approach the SDM for early action. We are ready to compliance all your directions," it added.

In the March 25 letter, priest informed the local Station House Officer (SHO)

that they were trying to shut down the centre as directed

Contents of letter written to authorities have been revealed

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The priest of a Nizamuddin mosque in Delhi, from where 24 COVID-19 positive cases have been reported in Delhi so far, had written to the police on March 25 returning to the police stating that they have vacated 1,500 people and 1,000 people were still at their premises.

"Many people have gone back to other cities after attending this event. I hope not but think about the people that have been already affected by this. With folded hands, I request all the religious leaders and people to cooperate with the government," he added.

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that they were trying to shut down the centre as directed



People being evacuated from Nizamuddin centre in the city on Tuesday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

As per your direction we contacted respected SDM for vehicle pass so that we can sent the remaining people to their respective places

LETTER

by the SHO on March 24.

In another letter to the police on March 29, the mosque authorities stated

that further efforts to vacate the premises of the centre were stopped midway due to the lockdown announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Markaz Nizamuddin in a statement on Tuesday said that they had submitted a list of 17 vehicles to ferry people who were "stranded" due to the lockdown at the markaz to the area SDM on March 25, but they were yet to receive permission from the SDM.

AAP leaders attack Delhi Police

Amanatullah questions police for not arranging evacuation

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

AAP MLA Amanatullah Khan on Tuesday attacked Delhi Police over a centre in Nizamuddin from where 24 people have been tested positive for COVID-19.

"Around 12 p.m. on March 23, I had told the DCP [South East] and ACP Nizamuddin that around 1,000 people are trapped in Nizamuddin markaz. After that why did the police not make arrangements to send them," AAP

cials of @DelhiPolice as well [sic]," she said in a tweet.

"It was the job of @DelhiPolice to enforce the order of Delhi Govt. prohibiting gatherings of more than 200 people [sic]!" read another tweet.

She also pointed out that the Tablighi Jamaat had asked for assistance to move people out on March 24, whereas gathering of more than 200 people had been prohibited since March 13 by the Delhi government.

Andaman and Nicobar tribes under heavy security

Measure taken after nine people who visited Delhi tested positive for COVID-19

SAURABH TRIVEDI

NEW DELHI

After nine persons, who visited Delhi from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands earlier this month, tested positive for COVID-19, the authorities have stepped up security near the areas in the islands that are inhabited by indigenous tribes.

An officer said out of the 10 persons who tested positive in the islands, nine of them visited Delhi to attend an event in Nizamuddin and

returned to Port Blair via Kolkata on March 24. The tenth infected person is the wife of one of the patients. The Andaman police and the administration have made arrangements to keep the infected people in quarantine. They were part of a religious gathering in Delhi earlier this month, attended anti-CAA protests and also visited Old Delhi, said officials.

"One of the persons was put under home quarantine but his wife got infected. We

have quarantined the couple. Except for the people who attended the religious congregation in Delhi, no other person has been found infected," the officer added.

Director-General of Police, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Deependra Pathak, said: "All of the suspected persons were screened at the Port Blair airport and shifted to quarantine. We sought help from the health department and later it was found that they went to Delhi for

the religious meeting."

Mr. Pathak added that they are strictly following MHA guidelines and implementing a complete lockdown.

When asked about the safety of isolated tribes, he said tribal habitats are no-go areas and attract severe prosecution. Further, movement of people or vehicles has been stopped even near their habitats. For instance, the ATR passing through the forests has been closed.

Factory of fire safety firm sealed

Held responsible for more than 29 COVID-19 cases in four districts of U.P.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GHAZIABAD

The newly appointed District Magistrate of Noida, Suhas L.Y., sealed the Cease Fire Private Limited on Tuesday. The fire safety firm is directly or indirectly responsible for 29 COVID-19 infected persons in Gautam Buddha Nagar, Ghaziabad, Bulandshahr, and Bareilly. On Tuesday, another employee of the factory tested positive in Duhai village of Ghaziabad. Sanjeevani Hospital of Greater Noida was also sealed after a person was found infected with the virus in the hospital.

Meanwhile, about 3,000 pilgrims stranded in the localities near Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti's dargah in Ajmer have appealed to the authorities to make arrangements for sending them to their native States. The Dargah Committee, which is a statutory body, has written letters to the Prime Minister's Office and Chief Ministers of States such as Telangana, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, seeking their intervention in the matter.

In Ghaziabad, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath inspected the preparations at Santosh Medical College before



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath inspects the isolation ward of a hospital in Greater Noida. ■ FILE PHOTO: PTI

The district administration is also planning to acquire three hotels in the city for developing quarantine facilities.

14 quarantined

Meanwhile, in Deoband, 14 members of Tablighi Jamaat, including 12 Indonesians, have been quarantined in Jamia Tibbia isolation centre in the town. "They were living in a mosque in Rajpur village since March 6," said Kamlesh Kumar, Tehsildar, Deoband.

He said the other two persons who have been isolated are from Assam. Their connection with the centre in Nizamuddin is being ascertained. In a related development, Darul Uloom Deoband has offered one of its buildings for the development of isolation ward for COVID-19 cases.

The hospitals are ESI Hospitals in Sahibabad (30 beds), New Sarovada Hospital (100) in Kavi Nagar, Flores Hospital (75) in Vijay Nagar, Narinder Mohan Hospital (100) in Mohan Nagar and Max Hospital (100) in Vaishali.

Third virus death in West Bengal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA

West Bengal on Tuesday recorded its third COVID-19 death.

A 48-year-old woman from Howrah district who was admitted to the Howrah State General Hospital died late on Monday evening even before her test results were received by the hospital authorities.

"We got the samples by 12 noon (on Monday) and by late evening we confirmed that the patient from Howrah was suffering from COVID-19 infection," a doctor at the Institute of Post-graduate Medical Education and Research, a State run testing facility in Kolkata told *The Hindu*.

The nurses at the State-run hospital in Howrah district, where the patient passed away, alleged that she was admitted to the general ward on Sunday and they were not provided with any personal protective equipment, while treating the patient.

The district administration is also planning to acquire three hotels in the city for developing quarantine facilities.

But the Fancybazar and adjoining Machkhowa areas remain a cause of concern for the local residents. These two areas are the commercial hub of the North-east, and had witnessed a near-stampede when the administration relaxed the lockdown restrictions temporarily on March 28.

"Vegetable vendors, buyers and wholesalers and their vehicles crowd the street where my house is located. The police arrive only after the business is done. We live in such dread that we have double-locked our gate," said Musaddar Hussain, a middle-aged man.

Ahmed Road in Machkhowa.

Mr. Gupta denied the police were allowing vegetable trucks into the city and claimed they were ensuring the shops allowed to operate were following the social distancing norms.

The near-empty roads, however, have not been insurance against accidents. On Monday night, a web portal reporter, Dimpy Kashyap, died when the two-wheeler she was on hit an electric pole. Hours later, a car hit and injured a barking deer that came out of its habitat to explore the Noonmati area of the city.

COVID-19: When 'GOA' dodges lockdown norms in Guwahati

Riders pasting notes on vehicles to get past police; action being taken if no valid reason found

RAHUL KARMAKAR

GUWAHATI

'GOA' is dodging the police in lowdown Guwahati.

The police have been cracking down on people across Assam who ventured out of their homes "unnecessarily" after the lockdown began.

Some have managed to get past the police, some not. "The documents of such people are being checked and action is taken if they do not have a valid reason to drive or ride. Some people have taken passes from the authorities while those in essential services and exempted from restrictions are not disturbed," Guwahati Com-

missioner of Police Munna Prasad Gupta told *The Hindu*.

Those who know the lanes and bylanes of the city often give the police the slip. The lanes are where grocery shops - some selling vegetables too - attract mostly masked people for discussing conspiracy theories and their chances of surviving the "killer flu".

Many adhere to social distancing but some forget in a bid to be the first to take the foodstuff home. "Please stand apart for your own good and mine," Tarunmagar resident Krishna Das requested a middle-aged man.

Pay deferred

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government on Tuesday ordered deferment of part of salaries of the Chief Minister and Ministers in view of the economic impact due to COVID-19.

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Southern States launch operation to identify Markaz delegates

The largest group that visited Delhi to take part in the event from March 15 to 17 was from Tamil Nadu

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI
Authorities in the southern States scrambled on Tuesday to identify the large number of people who had attended a congregation at the Markaz Nizamuddin, international headquarters of Tablighi Jamaat in Delhi, and their contacts throughout their journeys.

Tamil Nadu appeared to have the largest number of delegates to the event, followed by Telangana, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh.

Tamil Nadu's Health Secretary Beela Rajesh said a total of 1,500 persons had attended the conference in Delhi. Of this, 1,131 had returned to Tamil Nadu. Health officials managed to trace and quarantine 515 of them. Tracing all those who travelled to Nizamuddin to prevent and control the spread of COVID-19 was being pur-

sued in high gear. Over half the total COVID-19 positive cases in Tamil Nadu were directly or indirectly linked to the travellers.

Health officials said that the clustering of cases was unexpected and had turned the trajectory of COVID-19 in the State, which otherwise reported positive cases mainly among those who had tra-

COVID-19
velled abroad and their contacts.

500 from A.P.

In Andhra Pradesh, officials launched all-out efforts to trace the Tablighi Jamaat members. More than 500 individuals from almost all districts of Andhra Pradesh travelled to Nizamuddin for the prayers held from March 15 to 17, travelling mostly by AP

Express and GT Express between March 10 and March 20. Police were trying find out whether the members used any other mode of transport.

'No need to panic'

Kerala also braced itself for possible spread of COVID-19 after a large group returned from the Delhi event. At least 300 delegates were from Kerala. Officials said there was cause for concern but no panic, and among the first batch who left on March 5, at least 80 reached Kerala. A random check revealed none of them were positive for the virus, and most had passed the incubation period unaffected. However, the situation could change with extensive testing.

Among the 300 attendees, an estimated 150 from the State had left the centre for other regions for religious



Tracking patients: People who attended the religious congregation at the Markaz Nizamuddin in Delhi being brought to a hospital for COVID-19 test in Hyderabad on Tuesday. ■ PTI

work, and the government was ascertaining their status. Some had stayed on in New Delhi during the curfew.

The State government is also concerned that scores of people from Salem, Madurai and Erode had stayed at the Tablighi seminary along with those from Kerala. An official said the delegates had shel-

tered in mosques in different parts of the country during their journey back, and they were trying to identify the spots.

Isolation centres

About 78 members from Karnataka belonging to the Tablighi Jamaat were quarantined in government

isolation centres and would be tested for COVID-19, said Jawaid Akhtar, Additional Chief Secretary (Health and Family Welfare and Medical Education). Mr. Akhtar said the department did not have specific information if all the 78 members belong to the Jamaat.

"An Order had been issued

to shift all of them to government quarantine centres. They had been home quarantined three days ago. The person from Sirra, who succumbed to the infection, is one of them," he said.

Over 1,000 in Telangana

In Telangana, 1,030 persons from 29 districts were identified as 'returnees' from the Markaz prayers. On Tuesday, officials of erstwhile Adilabad district were on their toes preparing a list of those who had attended. The administrations in Adilabad, Kumram Bheem Asifabad, Mancherial and Nirmal districts intended to put them in mandatory isolation at home or at special centres.

Many devotees had gone to the national capital on their own from rural places and do not figure in the records. Over 50 people were identified as having participated from Adilabad district, but only 12 were in Jamaat records.

Authorities in Nirmal dis-

trict located over 50 Jamaat returnees and they were placed in isolation wards in a polytechnic college. Some 80 people had made the visit.

Nizamabad Collector C. Narayana Reddy said that 39 persons who returned from Delhi along with the retired employee who was found COVID-19 positive were quarantined. Besides, 55 others who came in contact with them were also shifted to isolation wards. None except a retired employee had symptoms, he said.

In Medak, Sangareddy and Siddipet districts, 46 persons travelled to the congregation.

Sangareddy Collector M. Hanumantha Rao and Additional Collector Veera Reddy and other senior officials visited the hospital asked officials to post a police force there.

(With inputs from Vijayawada, Thiruvananthapuram, Karnataka and Hyderabad)

Kerala records its second death

68-year-old man, with several co-morbidities, dies in Thiruvananthapuram

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
Kerala recorded its second COVID-19 death on Tuesday after a 68-year-old man, who had been in a critical condition in the ICU at the Thiruvananthapuram Government Medical College Hospital (MCH) here since the past one week, died.

An official statement issued by the Thiruvananthapuram MCH authorities said he was admitted to the ICU on March 23 and that his condition had worsened progressively as he had several co-morbidities, including high blood pressure and thyroid-related issues. He had been on the ventilator since the past five days after his kidneys failed, requiring him to be on dialysis.



People attending the funeral of the 68-year-old man in Thiruvananthapuram on Tuesday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

While his first test had come out as negative for COVID-19, the second sample showed him to be positive on March 29.

The Minister for Tourism, Kadakampally Surendran, told reporters that the Health Department had not

been able to pinpoint the source of the man's infection as he had not been anywhere abroad nor had he been in contact with anyone with known history of foreign travel.

"He developed mild respiratory symptoms after

March 17 and had been to the local primary health centre (PHC) at Thonakkal twice. He was taken to a private medical college hospital at Venjaramoodu on March 23, from where he was referred to Thiruvananthapuram MCH on the same day," the Minister said.

The district health administration has, with the help of his relatives, brought out a route map of his movements since March 3 and efforts are on to trace all he had been in contact with. "He was well-known in the locality and we have a clear idea of who the primary contacts would be," Mr. Surendran said.

His family members, the staff at the PHC and the staff members of a local bank have been quarantined.

Kerala is working on logistics to make available supplies to alcohol-dependents

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

KOCHI

Alcohol-dependents in Kerala who succeeded in securing prescriptions from doctors to get their daily dose of booze may have to wait for one more day to get their hand on the bottle.

Since the first day of every month is being observed as dry day in the State, they may not be able to buy their quota of alcohol from the Kerala State Beverages Corporation (BEVCO) on April 1. On April 2, BEVCO may make alcohol available on production of the medical pass certified by the Excise Department.

Since the government has ordered the closure of li-



On a high: Kerala has the highest per capita consumption of alcohol in the country. ■ THULASI KAKKAT

quor outlets, including retail outlets of the corporation, bars, clubs, and toddy shops, alcohol may have to be made available through the warehouses or godowns of the corporation, a senior BEVCO official said.

BEVCO is working on the

after the government issued an order permitting medical passes for the alcohol-dependents, the Excise Department received as many as 30 applications.

"Some applications were rejected as the certificates indicating that the patient had alcohol withdrawal symptoms were issued by retired doctors. Only serving government medical doctors are authorised to issue such certificates," said S. Aananthakrishnan, Excise Commissioner.

The role of the department is confined to the issuance of passes and the distribution of alcohol will be the responsibility of BEVCO, he said.

On Tuesday, the first day

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



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

Forecast for Wednesday: Thunderstorm accompanied by lightning, hail and gusty winds very likely at isolated places over Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand; with lightning and gusty winds very likely at isolated places over Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Punjab, Delhi and west Uttar Pradesh; with lightning at isolated places over sub-Himalayan West Bengal and Sikkim.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	...36.0...	17.6	27.2	Kozhikode	...36.0...	52.100	41.39
Ahmedabad	...37.7...	20.6	28.0	Kurnool	...38.6...	24.9	26.24
Aizawl	...31.1...	17.5	19.6	Lucknow	...34.4...	16.0	37.4...
Allahabad	...37.1...	17.5	22.0	Madurai	...37.4...	22.7	35.4...
Bengaluru	...36.1...	19.6	23.5	Mangaluru	...35.4...	26.4	32.0...
Bhopal	...37.1...	22.0	25.5	Mumbai	...38.6...	24.0	20.0
Bhubaneswar	...37.3...	23.5	26.6	Mysuru	...33.2...	16.2	33.2...
Chandigarh	...26.6...	15.6	22.6	New Delhi	...33.2...	16.2	33.2...
Chennai	...33.5...	25.6	28.0	Patna	...33.8...	16.8	33.8...
Coimbatore	...38.0...	22.6	25.5	Port Blair	...31.8...	24.3	31.8...
Dehradun	...30.1...	13.5	17.5	Puducherry	...33.6...	23.6	32.3...
Gangtok	...0.4...	18.0	13.0	Pune	...32.3...	22.7	32.3...
Goa	...34.0...	25.5	25.5	Raipur	...33.2...	21.0	33.2...
Guwahati	...35.6...	-	-	Ranchi	...34.2...	17.4	33.2...
Hubballi	...37.0...	22.0	22.0	Shillong	...23.8...	16.9	23.8...
Hyderabad	...37.3...	23.7	23.7	Shimla	...19.3...	11.5	19.3...
Imphal	...30.5...	12.0	12.0	Srinagar	...14.9...	7.0	14.9...
Jaipur	...34.4...	19.8	25.8	Thiruvananthapuram	...33.6...	25.8	33.6...
Kochi	...15.4...	33.4	25.6	Tiruchi	...37.1...	21.8	37.1...
Kohima	...24.2...	13.0	13.0	Vijayawada	...33.7...	26.0	33.7...
Kolkata	...36.2...	24.5	24.5	Visakhapatnam	...33.7...	26.8	33.7...

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

Yesterday

CITIES SO₂ NO_x CO PM_{2.5} PM₁₀ CODE In observation made at 6.00 p.m., Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 222 indicating a dangerous level of pollution. In contrast, Patiala, Punjab recorded a healthy AQI score of 25.

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

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

PM_{2.5} & PM₁₀: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease.

Not allowed to collect fees, some schools mull salary cuts

Budget schools facing a tough time in making ends meet

STAFF REPORTER

BENGALURU

As big corporations are announcing salary cuts, people employed by private schools are worried about job security, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown. What's cause for concern is that school managements have been told not to collect fee for the next academic year, a fact they cite as reason for not having enough money to meet their recurring expenditure. Some school managements are contemplating paying only half of the next month's salary to their staff.

D. Shashi Kumar, general secretary of the Associated Managements of Primary and Secondary Schools in Karnataka, said the govern-

ment is yet to pay the RTE reimbursement to schools amounting to lakhs of rupees.

"On the other hand, they're empowering parents not to pay fee. All we are saying is let parents at least pay last year's fee. Many had requested for time, which was granted. They would usually pay up the remaining amount before the exams. But now that the academic calendar has been thrown out of gear, we haven't even got the pending amount. How are we supposed to pay staff?" he said.

He also said budget schools, which make up the majority in the private school sector, are suffering. "We will not be able to maintain this in the long run. Of

Kannur-Virajpet route can be considered'

Kerala should send request: Karnataka

K.C. GOPAKUMAR

KOCHI

The Karnataka government on Tuesday submitted before the Kerala High Court that



Step up

Citizens must not hide their travel or contact history as authorities deal with the pandemic

With any big crisis comes great responsibility. In this time of a pandemic, while there is extensive, proven value in adopting recommended personal hygiene standards, maintaining physical distance, and demanding the States and Centre provide adequate facilities for testing and treatment for the ill, it is also essential to leave that word on the top of the pile – Responsibility. Every public health emergency requires community recognition that this is an extraordinary set of circumstances requiring far-from-ordinary responses. A reasonable restriction on citizens' rights may come into play on invoking provisions of the Epidemic Diseases Act. State police are already slapping cases on violators of the lockdown conditions; action is also being taken on those who violate quarantine. However, the strongest weapon that one can unleash against this pandemic is with every individual. The time to say this nicely is over. It is time to insist that every individual respond responsibly during this time: To inform authorities of relevant history of travel, stay in quarantine even if asymptomatic, follow all other protocols. Keeping health authorities in the loop could make the difference between life and death.

Individuals volunteering information will help the Central and State governments narrow down on the cluster cases centred around the Tablighi Jamaat conference in Nizamuddin, Delhi. The spread of cases from this one spot, which reportedly had several foreign nationals who later tested positive, and where six among those who attended died, has emerged as a key milestone in India's management of the epidemic. The conference was held on March 13, more than a week before the Sunday lockdown. Since then, people from the conference moved on, back home, and several, including Indonesian nationals who were present at Nizamuddin, have tested positive. While the State has deployed 'hot-spot' containment strategies in ground zero in Delhi, it is the people who have spread out in the community that are absolutely crucial, over the next few days, to shaping one stretch of the course of the epidemic in India. While it is a massive exercise to track down all the attendees (it is now believed that thousands of people were present) and each of their contacts, it must still be done. Some States have already expressed being thwarted, without co-operation from the participants, and their close contacts. Unfortunately, this may leave the job half done, or undone, leading to disastrous consequences. It is indeed a Herculean task, and may even be considered impossible, unless those who went for the meeting in Delhi step up themselves, engage with health authorities, submit themselves to a test, and remain under quarantine for the prescribed period. Humanitarian crises such as pandemics invoke the worst among men and women, but also their best. The latter is eminently possible, as long as people believe that the enemy is the pandemic, and act responsibly.

Weaker, later

The postponement is better than cancellation, but Olympics is not on anyone's mind now

Sport at its best is a glorious indulgence that blends adrenaline rush, exultant joy and mind-numbing grief both for the athlete and the expectant fan. However, in its worst form, sport is war minus the shooting while the cause of nationhood whips up jingoistic passions. But whatever be its intrinsic nature governed by context and history, sport can never exist in a vacuum and it needs a functional society to serve as its bedrock. In these distraught times of the pandemic and the resultant social distancing, basic survival takes precedence over moving limbs and the frenzied applause from a thrilled audience. And it was no surprise that sports events have been postponed or cancelled and the latest to face a disruption in its schedule is the Olympics. Football continues to be the beautiful game but the Olympics remains the world's greatest congregation adhering to its eternal 'faster, higher, stronger' motto. Originally slated for a July 24 to August 9 slot at Tokyo this year, the high-voltage event got derailed once the coronavirus took flight from Wuhan's wet market and coursed through the veins of an inter-connected globe. Initially, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and host Japan were in denial and Australia and Canada threatened to boycott the event before better sense prevailed and the Olympics was pushed to a July 23 start, next year.

A postponement is a first in the chequered history of the modern Olympics since its inception at Athens in 1896. But worse has happened, especially the cancellations, during 1916, 1940 and 1944, when the World Wars drew vicious lines of hate. There were also the Cold War years when the United States and its allies boycotted the Moscow Games in 1980 and the erstwhile Union of Soviet Socialist Republics retaliated along with the Eastern Bloc by skipping the 1984 Olympics at Los Angeles. The most heart-rending was the 'Munich Massacre' during the 1972 edition in then West Germany when a Palestinian terrorist group, Black September, killed 11 members of Israel's squad. Seen through that prism of a bloodied past, the latest postponement seems a mere quibble. IOC president Thomas Bach and Tokyo 2020 president Yoshiro Mori concurred that fresh logistics had to be worked out and ideally a year's preparation was mandatory. Initially estimated to cost about \$28 billion, a delayed Olympics will have to factor inflation and a shrinking economy coping with a pandemic. Over the next 12 months, it is hoped the virus will wane and a semblance of normalcy will set the stage for the Olympics. Sport then would be a welcome balm. But for now, universal health is the overriding priority.

An eye each on containment and welfare

In Tamil Nadu, the government's priority has been to fully focus on stopping the pandemic in its tracks



EDAPPADI K. PALANISWAMI

The COVID-19 pandemic has spread around the world – 204 countries/regions/territories so far. In India, the first case was reported from Kerala on January 30, 2020. The first case in Tamil Nadu was reported on March 7 – a person in Kancheepuram who had travelled abroad.

Realising the nature of this virus quite early on and even when this dreaded infection was confined to one country alone, in January 2020, I directed the State Health Department to screen all the international passengers who had arrived in the State. To curtail community spread, Amma's [Jayalalithaa's] government wasted no time in closing down educational institutions and all high-risk areas such as big commercial complexes, malls, theatres, places of worship and so on, on March 15. When positive cases began showing up in the neighbouring States, I announced the closure of the State's borders as well, again on March 15.

The Tamil Nadu government made a life-saving decision on March 24, which was announced by me in the Legislative Assembly – of a completed 'lockdown' and the imposition of Section 144 of the Code Of Criminal Procedure throughout the State till March 31. Our call for social distancing was further strengthened when the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India made the announcement of a national-level lockdown till April 14, 2020 on the same evening which was intended to break the infection chain. The participation by 1.3 billion Indians in this national exercise once again proves our unity in diversity.

Augmenting infrastructure

Tamil Nadu shares its boundary with States which reported COVID-19 positive cases in the early days of infection in India. The four international airports and four major ports in the State also compounded the risk of infection in the State. But the Tamil Nadu government was ready and around 2.09 lakh international passengers have been screened besides screening data obtained from the Immigration Department on per-

sons who are natives of Tamil Nadu but who have entered the country through an airport other than Chennai. As a result of this screening, around 43,537 people are under home quarantine and observation as on date for a period of 28 days. The houses of this high-risk category have been identified and stickers were pasted in front of their residences. They are being monitored through audio/video calls made from a dedicated district control room by doctors posted there round the clock. They have also been given medical advice and counselling.

Since Tamil Nadu is right now transiting to Stage II of COVID-19 transmission, the State government has in place a detailed 'Local Containment Plan' of conducting door-to-door surveillance in the zones where positive cases have been identified. People who are identified through active surveillance will be facility quarantined. Passive surveillance to trace the contacts of positive persons outside the zone is also being undertaken in parallel.

The first exclusive block to treat COVID-19 patients has been set up at Chennai's Omandur Government Medical College Hospital, with a capacity of 500 beds; ₹10 crore has also been allocated for the required medical equipment. There are also dedicated COVID-19 hospitals in each district to treat confirmed cases. All medical college hospitals and district headquarters hospitals have been designated as hospitals for the management of suspected patients. Quarantine facilities have also been arranged for passengers arriving from affected countries. These are at Poonamallee, Madurai, Coimbatore and Tiruchi, which are close to all four international airports in the State. The Health Department has earmarked about 17,000 beds in isolation wards; 3,018 of those are equipped with ventilator facilities. I have also ensured the scaling up of the procurement of essential medical equipment, protective gear for health workers, and drugs and medicines. The Health Department has managed to establish 17 COVID-19 testing laboratories to cover all the regions of the State. I am personally reviewing and monitoring these steps.

I have extended full support to all frontline workers (doctors, nurses, para-medical staff and sanitary workers) who are working round the clock. A decision has



B. VELUKANNAN/AI
been made to recruit 530 doctors, 1,000 nurses and 1,508 lab technicians to augment the robust medical team already in place. Ambulance services have also been increased, by 200.

The challenges in providing adequate masks and other personal protective equipment for health-care workers are being met. I have advised the District Collectors to involve self-help group members to manufacture triple-layered masks and hand sanitizers to augment supply. Highly populated and crowded areas, market places, bus stands, other public places and dwelling areas are being disinfected regularly. Thermal screening is being done in public places and government offices. Besides creating awareness of frequent hand washing through advertisements, hand washing and sanitising platforms have been installed in places of public gathering. I have announced an additional one month's salary in recognition of the untiring work by frontline health workers.

Addressing fundamentals

The national lockdown will have a telling impact on the poorest and daily-wage workers in the unorganised sector. An immediate and comprehensive relief package of ₹3,280 crore has been announced. All rice card holders will receive rice, sugar, dhal and edible oil free for April along with ₹1,000 each. Besides, as a mark of addressing their undue hardship, workers in the unorganised sector including auto-rickshaw drivers will get 15 kg rice, 1 kg dhal, 1 kg oil free and ₹1,000 each. Pavement vendors will get an extra ₹1,000 each. Also, migrant workers from other States will receive the commodities in equal measure. For those migrant labourers who are without shelter, community halls/marriage halls are being utilised, where hot, nutritious cooked food is being provided, apart from medical facilities.

The nationally acclaimed State initiative, "Amma Canteens",

which provide meals at subsidised rates, will serve the needy. Keeping in mind the well-being of Anganwadi children, dry ration for 15 days is being provided in advance to families to meet nutritional requirements. Those under isolation are also provided with nutritious and vitamin-rich food. Senior citizens, who are being served by Anganwadi centres, will be provided food at their places of stay.

I have announced an additional two days wages to cover those rural households which are dependent on their employment under MGNREGA for their livelihood. Around 1.5 lakh pregnant women who are due in the next 60 days are under close monitoring. Necessary steps have been taken to provide medicines for the next two months to patients with hypertension, diabetes mellitus, HIV and TB.

Ensuring physical distancing

The failure of many advanced countries in handling the pandemic has given us enough wisdom not to take the lockdown lightly. Since India has a large number of densely populated urban areas, the world is watching us to know how we are going to tackle the deadly virus.

However, to make this happen, the singular message of social distancing should percolate to every individual citizen. Several effective communication materials have been circulated in the media and displayed in all the public places highlighting the necessity of isolation and staying at home. The State government has a dedicated website (<https://stopcorona.tn.gov.in/>) to pass on verified and valuable messages. Severe legal action is being taken against violators and those spreading rumours on the spread of the infection and its treatment.

There are several initiatives to increase the number of field functionaries to create awareness and to monitor the home quarantine individuals; as on date, around 38,809 volunteers have registered themselves and the count is increasing every day.

For active enforcement of the lockdown and to address the important issues, we have constituted 11 co-ordination teams with senior-level IAS officers. I have also constituted a State-level task force headed by Chief Secretary to monitor the preventive measures.

Using video-conferencing, we are frequently reviewing the Dis-

trict Collectors for effective and timely implementation of all the steps. With all the schools, colleges, shopping malls, and cinema theatres closed, adequate supply of daily basic necessities including groceries, agricultural products, milk and medicines are being ensured. Petrol bunks will operate till 2.30 p.m. Only parcel services are being allowed from restaurants. Call centres are operating 24x7 to offer assistance. I have also set up a 'Crisis Management Committee' in all districts under the chairmanship of District Collectors, with representatives from the Chambers of Commerce, private hospitals, NGOs and other stakeholders. I have directed all the Ministers to coordinate prevention and treatment aspects in the districts.

Energising the economy

It is the responsibility of State governments to ensure the welfare of the poor and the vulnerable. Like many State governments, Tamil Nadu too has also announced relief packages. The Centre has supported these measures with its Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana relief package. The timely intervention of the Reserve Bank of India in announcing liquidity and interest rate reduction measures will also help the economy. However, the economic impact of this unprecedented lockdown is likely to be very severe and State governments will suffer substantial reductions in tax and revenue receipts. A lot of measures will have to be taken to revive economic growth and to stimulate consumption and investment demand.

The Centre should help the States continuously in this regard. To overcome this crisis, I have therefore written to the Prime Minister, requesting the Centre to allocate a special grant of ₹1-lakh crore to all the States including ₹9,000 crore to Tamil Nadu; relax, as a one-time measure, the fiscal deficit norm of 3% of GSDP for 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 and permit, during 2020-21, additional borrowing of 33% above the previous year's level.

At this juncture, our priority is to fully focus on the eradication of the pandemic. After achieving this primary goal, I hope the country as a whole will join hands and provide the necessary thrust to the economy.

Edappadi K. Palaniswami is the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu

Beyond social distancing to fight COVID-19

In the global South, a military style lockdown, though inevitable given the circumstances, may reinforce prejudices



KALINGA TUDOR SILVA

I agree with Eric Klinenberg's recent submission to *The New York Times* that social distancing, advocated by health authorities worldwide, as a means of combating the spread of the coronavirus, can only be a part of firefighting. The rapid worldwide spread of COVID-19 has a lot to do with the fallout of globalisation, including the travel industry, tourism and the neoliberal attack on universal health care. Moreover, unfettered promotion of social distancing can reinforce existing social prejudices driven by different forms of social exclusion.

The Korea example

In illustrating how social distancing actually works in the periphery, I will draw from a few examples from corona-affected countries. The COVID-19 epidemic in South Korea started with the controversial Shincheonji Church of Jesus with a personality cult centred around 88-year-old Lee Man-hee, identified as a messianic

saviour. This cult facilitated the transmission of the disease from Wuhan to South Korea because of frequent travel among its followers. Consequently, more than half of all COVID-19 patients at the onset of the epidemic belonged to this religious movement, which accounted for less than 1% of the Korean population.

Social isolation among new immigrants in Korean cities was incidentally a major incentive for people to join this cult. In this context social distancing was not popular among them due to the simple reason that the movement served as an extended family for many of its members. In this instance, social distancing once successfully introduced may have actually served to contain the epidemic, but it also further stigmatized a religious group already in the margins of Korean society, interfering with disease containment.

Iran became a leading COVID-19 hot spot in West Asia due to a unique set of circumstances. It was compelled to develop ties with China due to economic sanctions imposed by U.S.-led western countries. An Iranian trader who made a business trip to Wuhan was reportedly the very first COVID-19 patient in Iran. The initial hub of disease transmission in Iran was Qom, a popular pilgrimage centre

for Shiite Muslims. The next centre was the Iranian Parliament, having strong ties with Qom, the spiritual hub of Iranian society. As many as 23 parliamentarians, comprising 8% of all MPs, were infected with the disease by March 3. Social distancing was contrary to popular forms of social greeting in Iran particularly among the ruling elite. In any case the coronavirus was introduced in Iran through globalisation-triggered international alignment and incubated through political and religious processes.

Spread in Sri Lanka

The onset of the COVID-19 epidemic in India and Sri Lanka has a lot to do with tourism and labour migration, processes intimately connected with globalisation. Both in India and Sri Lanka, the first cases were reported among foreign tourists from Italy and China, respectively. The tour guides who travelled with the respective tourists

and their contacts became the first set of local people exposed to the disease triggering local transmissions. Both Sri Lanka and Kerala in India have large portions of their labour force employed overseas. Returnees from these overseas destinations have contributed to the upsurge in the COVID-19 epidemic in South Asian countries. For instance, among 18 confirmed COVID-19 patients in Sri Lanka by March 15 as many as 11 (61%) were Sri Lankan returnees from Italy, a popular destination for Sri Lankan migrant workers from the 1990s.

Thus, imported cases and those directly exposed to them comprise over 90% of all COVID-19 cases detected in Sri Lanka as of March 22. Roughly about 20.5% of confirmed cases are connected with tourism. Nearly 60% of all cases are among Sri Lankan workers returning from abroad and their contacts indicating that exposure to the disease through overseas employment has triggered the epidemic in Sri Lanka. Considering that nearly 50% of the entire caseload in Sri Lanka is among workers returning from Italy, it is important to note that many Sri Lankan workers in Italy work as live-in care givers for elderly people. The spurt of cases of Indian origin lately has led to identification of Chennai as a high risk

region in Sri Lanka. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic can be seen as a fallout of globalisation, particularly in the global South. The quarantine and social distancing processes may not be totally effective in so far as these workers and their families are often in between two states, experiencing difficulties at both ends. The workers returning from Italy and South Korea were the first to be sent to quarantine centres in Batticaloa and Kandakadu from March 10. Initially, they resented the mandatory two-week quarantine in a remote location. Both migrant workers and tourist guides already experience discrimination of various kinds because of their occupations and the risks involved.

A military style lockdown though inevitable given the circumstances is likely to reinforce the existing prejudices. This clearly shows that we need to think beyond social distancing and address problems of the fallout from globalisation in dealing with the pandemic in the global South. It appears as if the much publicised problems of a run-away world have been finally crystallised in this deadly global epidemic.

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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.

Hosed down

Nothing could be so inhuman, irresponsible and sadistic than banding helpless, stranded and harassed migrant workers together and then spraying disinfectant over them (Page 1, "Migrant workers given mass disinfectant bath in Bareilly", March 31). Even animals are not treated this way. Already the government is found to be at fault for having enforced a lockdown

without providing enough time for people to reach their homes and providing them necessary transportation. It is after almost a week that State governments are moving to provide shelter and food for stranded migrant workers. It is least remembered that it is this unorganised section of the workforce which is the real wealth creator. Those who are responsible for this shabby act, made even more

graphic in the picture with the report, need to be dealt with accordingly to repose confidence in the minds of the vast section of the working class.

A.G. RAJMOHAN,
Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh

An opportunity
The lockdown should be used as an opportunity by civic authorities to clean all public spaces such as roads, pathways, parks and improve the condition of

towns and cities. The effort of keeping cities and towns clean should be continued as an ongoing process in all States. People violating such efforts should be warned and fined. Also, all stray animals such as cattle and dogs (which seem to have taken over the roads and become aggressive) should be taken to suitable shelters away from cities and towns.

N. RAMAN,

Bengaluru

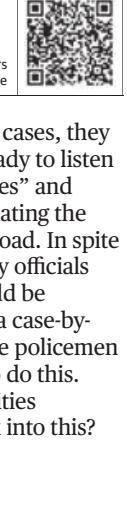
Lockdown woes

Most citizens are aware that the national lockdown has been declared with the purpose of breaking the transmission chain. They are also aware an exception has been made to help people move out to buy essential commodities. However there are quite a few instances of some policemen on duty on the main roads, blocking the public when they are out to stock up on things for the

house. In some cases, they are not even ready to listen to "genuine cases" and resort to humiliating the person on the road. In spite of assurances by officials that there should be verification on a case-by-case basis, some policemen are unwilling to do this. Will the authorities concerned look into this?

K.V. RAMESH NAIR,
Chennai

CM YK



A pandemic in an unequal India

The official strategies place the responsibility on citizens, a majority without privilege, to fight the virus



HARSH MANDER

If the COVID-19 pandemic lashes India with severity, it will not be just the middle class who will be affected. India's impoverished millions are likely to overwhelmingly bear the brunt of the suffering which will ensue. The privileged Indian has been comfortable for too long with some of the most unconscionable inequalities in the planet. But with the pandemic, each of these fractures can decimate the survival probabilities and fragile livelihoods of the poor.

The measures adopted by the government to stymie the progress of the virus were first to introduce a 'work from home' measure, to urge people to wash their hands frequently, physical distancing, and then an unprecedented 21-day lockdown.

Deepening a social divide

Public health experts are divided about whether this lockdown was absolutely necessary and indeed implementable. It should have been clear that a total lockdown was possible only for the rich and the middle class with assured incomes during the period, homes with spaces for distancing, health insurance and running water supply. But how can we justify the choice of a strategy which throws the dispossessed, who lack all of the above, to both hunger and infection?

When ordering the lockdown, did the government not remember the millions of informal workers and destitute people who would have no work if they stayed home, many of them circular migrants, estimated at 100 million? These include casual daily-wage workers; self-employed people such as rag-pickers, rickshaw pullers and street vendors; and people forced to survive by alms.

Many among them are people whose earnings each day barely suffice to enable them to eat and feed their families. Does the government expect them to voluntarily starve and let their children die to prevent the spread of the infection? This crisis of hunger is even more dire for older people without caregivers, and persons with disability. The govern-



Migrants walk to their villages after the announcement of the nation-wide lockdown, near the Delhi-U.P. border. • PTI

ment also seems to be in amnesia about hundreds of thousands of children, women and men in every city whose only home is the pavement or the dirt patches under bridges.

Recorded messages on our phones urge us to wash our hands regularly. We forget, however, that millions live in shanties without water supply, and they buy a pot of water, sometimes for a fifth of their day's earnings (irregular incomes which are further decimated by the lockdown). Regular cleanliness is a remote luxury beyond their means.

We are also advised 'social distancing' (physical distancing) and 'self-isolation'. How is this feasible for large extended families who crowd into narrow single rooms in slums and working-class tenements? Or for the homeless people who have no option except to sleep in over-crowded unsanitary government shelters, veritable breeding centres for infections? Or for destitute people in beggars' homes? Indeed, prisoners in overcrowded jails? And I cannot forget those confined to detention centres in Assam, which are jails within jails.

And then consider the capacity of the health system to deal with the pandemic if (or when) it actually submerges India. India's investments in public health are among the lowest in the world, and most cities lack any kind of public primary health services. A Jan Swasthya Abhiyan estimate is that a district hospital serving a population of two million may have to serve 20,000 patients, but they are bereft of the beds, personnel and

resources to do this. Few have a single ventilator. India's rich and middle-classes have opted out of public health completely, leaving the poor with unconsciously meagre services. The irony is that a pandemic has been brought into India by people who can afford plane tickets, but while they will buy private health services, the virus will devastate the poor who they infect and who have little access to health care.

The Union government has announced a package, including additional 5 kg grain a month for the next three months under the PDS, ₹500 per month for the next three months for women holding Jan-Dhan Yojana accounts; three months' pension in advance to nearly three crore widows, senior citizens and the differently-abled; and ₹2,000 more for MGNREGA workers. If you and I were told that we have to survive on just two days' salary and 5 kg grain a month, with no health insurance, how would the future look?

The visuals of thousands of migrants, suddenly left with no food and work, walking to their homes hundreds of miles away, dodging the police, until the States were ordered to seal their borders, showed clearly that the lockdown is ineffective.

What must be done

Most of the official strategies place the responsibility on the citizen, rather than the state, to fight the pandemic. The state did too little in the months it got before the pandemic reached India for expanding greatly its health infrastructure for testing

and treatment. This includes planning operations for food and work; security for the poor; for safe transportation of the poor to their homes; and for special protection for the aged, the disabled, children without care and the destitute.

For two months, every household in the informal economy, rural and urban, should be given the equivalent of 25 days' minimum wages a month until the lockdown continues, and for two months beyond this. Pensions must be doubled and home-delivered in cash. There should be free water tankers supplying water in slum shanties throughout the working days. Governments must double PDS entitlements, which includes protein-rich pulses, and distribute these free at doorsteps. In addition, for homeless children and adults, and single migrants, it is urgent to supply cooked food to all who seek it, and to deliver packed food to the aged and the disabled in their homes using the services of community youth volunteers.

To ensure jails are safer, all prison undertrial prisoners, except those charged with the gravest crimes, should be released. Likewise, all those convicted for petty crimes. All residents of beggars' homes, women's rescue centres and detention centres should be freed forthwith.

India must immediately commit 3% of its GDP for public spending on health services, with the focus on free and universal primary and secondary health care. But since the need is immediate, authorities should follow the example of Spain and New Zealand and nationalise private health care. An ordinance should be passed immediately that no patient should be turned away or charged in any private hospital for diagnosis or treatment of symptoms which could be of COVID-19.

While one part of the population enjoys work and nutritional security, health insurance and housing of globally acceptable standards, others survive at the edge of unprotected and uncertain work, abysmal housing without clean water and sanitation, and no assured public health care. Can we resolve to correct this in post-COVID India? Can we at least now make the country more kind, just and equal?

Harsh Mander is a human rights worker, writer and teacher

Welcome then, stigmatised now

India must ensure that messaging and reporting on COVID-19 doesn't stigmatise foreigners

K.P.M. BASHEER

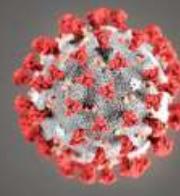
Over a fortnight ago, an Italian tourist at Wagamon, a beautiful hill town in Kerala's Idukki district, reportedly had to spend a night in a cemetery attached to a church. The reason? He had been denied a room in all the hotels and resorts in the area. At the time, government authorities had told hoteliers not to let in foreigners, particularly those from high-risk countries such as Italy, France, China and Iran. If they did, the hotels/resorts were told to keep the tourists in isolation for a fortnight.

In another town, Munnar, in the same district, a British tourist tested positive for COVID-19 on March 15. In a moment of high drama, the individual, along with a group of British tourists, "escaped" from the Munnar resort and boarded a plane at Kochi that was bound for Dubai. The 'positive' result came as the tourist was boarding the plane. The authorities got all the passengers offloaded, the flight's departure was delayed by a few hours, and the British tourist group was kept isolated in a hotel. Briefly, there was even talk of shutting down the airport for fear of a virus outbreak.

Viewed with suspicion

Shocked by the news, Munnar imposed a lockdown the following day. The people in the town, which attracts thousands of foreigners during the tourist season, started to view every foreigner with suspicion. In Kochi, a foreign couple was turned out of a restaurant by fellow diners. In Kannur district, a French-Italian pair had to starve for a couple of days as restaurants refused to serve them. The same story played out in many places in Kerala, a State which otherwise prides itself on being extremely tourist-friendly.

Such incidents were reported from other parts of the country as well. A Venezuelan tourist operator, Ma Dagnino, said: "All over India, foreigners began to be seen as a threat." She said over a WhatsApp message: "If guests are treated like



outcasts, and refused the most basic of courtesies, it is India itself that will be the most profoundly hurt."

COVID-19 is a huge threat to India and it's natural that people will panic. But governments and the media need to be mindful that their decisions and reports, respectively, don't evoke knee-jerk reactions from the people. Creating panic might serve to keep people on their toes in the initial stages, but this only becomes counterproductive later. When there is hype and panic, people view foreigners as enemies of the people and want them out of the country. In tourism-reliant States like Kerala, the economic cost of this kind of behaviour will be massive.

The government's steps against the virus should not lead to the kind of scare and stigma that were the outcomes of the anti-HIV/AIDS campaign during the early stages of the epidemic in India. Back then, some doctors refused to examine HIV/AIDS patients, and paramedics sent the afflicted people out of hospitals. The infection caused extensive social stigma and ostracism.

For a sensitive campaign

While working for this newspaper, I had reported an incident which showed how society viewed HIV/AIDS once. In 1996, in a village in Kerala's Malappuram district, a group of men led by a school headmaster rounded up two young women claiming that they had been "spreading AIDS" in the village. The group thrashed the women and got their heads shaved. It was a campaign focusing on infusing fear and loathing against AIDS patients that resulted in such a response. The incident created immediate reactions and caused a drastic rethink on the way the anti-HIV campaign was being run in Kerala.

"Please stop infusing fear among your citizens," was Ma Dagnino's message to the government. "Don't trash your own country by exchanging kindness for fear."

K.P.M. Basheer, a former journalist with The Hindu, is the CEO of a resort at Munnar

The cost of a cure for COVID-19

If Gilead's drug is successful, the Indian government should issue a compulsory licence under the Patents Act



SHYEL TREHAN

The World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak pandemic. However, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) declared COVID-19 an orphan disease, or a rare disease. Which of these statements is true? As of March 23, it seemed both.

COVID-19 and the Orphan Drug Act

In the U.S., under the Orphan Drug Act, 1983, companies are provided incentives to develop therapies, or orphan drugs, for rare diseases. The idea is that without these incentives, companies would find it difficult to recoup their R&D costs given the small number of people suffering from the rare disease. The Act allows seven years of market exclusivity and financial incentives to innovators of these drugs. As a result, orphan drugs are often exorbitantly priced. Privileges under the Act may be conferred to companies for drugs to treat a disease that affect less than 200,000 people in the U.S., or for a disease that affects more than 200,000 people but for which there is no hope of recouping R&D costs. Interestingly, according to the regulations for revocation, if the number of people suffering from the disease exceeds 200,000 after designation but before approval, this would not be a ground for revocation.

In an egregious misuse of the Act, the FDA granted Gilead Sciences orphan drug status for its antiviral drug, Remdesivir, on March 23. Originally developed to treat Ebola but found ineffective, the drug is now being tested for treating COVID-19. Clinical trials are already in Phase III. But in an interesting turn of events, on March 25 Gilead announced that it had submitted a request to the FDA to rescind its designation for Remdesivir. It alluded to the fact that abbreviated trials were behind the initial designation, though it is well known that there are other avenues for abbreviated trials in such circumstances.

The question that remains is, how did the Act apply to a potential drug for COVID-19, which is anything but a rare disease, with 800,049 confirmed cases across the world? How does the U.S. FDA justify conferring the status of an orphan drug on a therapy designed to treat COVID-19? Sure, as of March 25, the U.S. had 54,941 people suffering from the disease. But this is simply a technicality. Congressional findings for the Act state that the purpose of the legislation is to provide financial incentives for drugs that may reasonably

expect to generate relatively small sales. Is it legal to apply the benefits of a statute to something entirely outside its stated objective and purpose? The simple answer is no.

Gilead is reported to have said that it intends to make the drug accessible and affordable around the globe. However, Gilead's exorbitant pricing of its drug to treat hepatitis C and its drug to treat HIV attracted attention in the past. Yet in 2017, Gilead placed its HIV therapy in the Medicines Patent Pool, a move that would make the medicine more accessible. For Remdesivir, Gilead's suspension of its "compassionate use" programme raised alarm bells. The programme was reinstated for only children and pregnant women; Gilead said it cannot process "the overwhelming number of applications". Gilead also stated that it had transitioned to an "expanded access" programme, for emergency use in severely ill patients. Public apprehension is somewhat justified, not least of all on account of the FDA's conduct in conveniently interpreting a statute to benefit big pharma during a pandemic.

Impact on the U.S. and India

So, what would have been the impact of this orphan drug status for the U.S., given the status of its patents? Patents are open to challenge. Had Gilead not sought that orphan drug status be rescinded, generic manufacturers would not have been able to market a drug to treat COVID-19 with the same active ingredient till the seven-year period of market exclusivity had ended. This would have given Gilead free rein on pricing and licensing which would have had disastrous consequences on the healthcare system.

What does this mean for India? While the orphan drug status of Remdesivir would have no impact on India, Gilead Sciences does hold a patent in India, which it is likely to claim for this use. As far as its patent rights are concerned, Indian law permits the government to issue a compulsory licence in certain circumstances of a public health crisis under Section 92 of the Patents Act. This would allow third parties to manufacture a patented drug without permission of the patent holder. Indian companies have already expressed their capability to manufacture the drug. The firepower under this provision has never been deployed before. If the government does not exercise its powers to issue a compulsory license if required, Indian manufacturers would not be able to manufacture generics (without challenging the patent). This would leave the people vulnerable to Gilead's pricing policies and licensing conditions, should its drug be successful.

Shyel Trehan practises in the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court of India



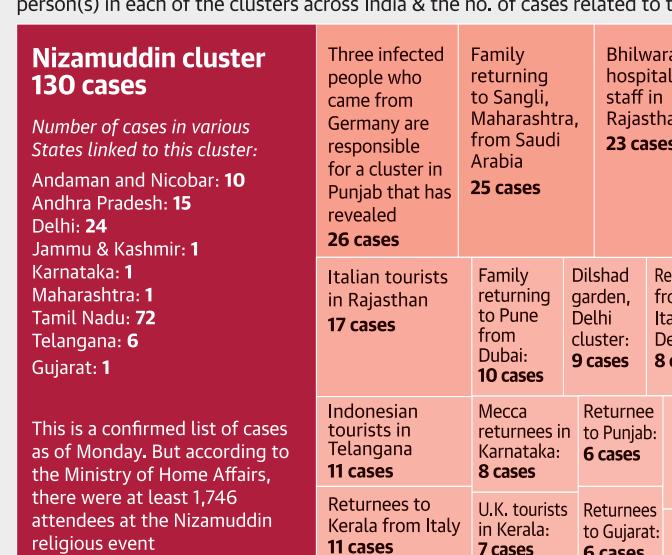
DATA POINT

Spreading through clusters

In many COVID-19-affected nations, the case count started rising exponentially after health workers discovered a group of people who got infected at one place and mostly at the same time. Such groups are termed "clusters". In South Korea, close to 56% of the infections emerged from a church frequented by an infected woman. In Singapore, a dinner party was found responsible for 10% of the cases. Earlier this week, India found one such massive cluster in a religious congregation held in mid-March in Nizamuddin, Delhi. By **The Hindu Data Team**

HOW BIG IS THE NIZAMUDDIN CLUSTER?

The cluster was discovered recently. As of 9:45 p.m. on Tuesday, at least 130 cases have originated from this cluster. Meanwhile, other attendees of the event in Nizamuddin are being tested. The treemap shows the primary infected person(s) in each of the clusters across India & the no. of cases related to them



STATE-WISE CLUSTERS

Kerala (4 clusters) and Maharashtra (3 clusters), the two States with the most number of cases in India, are linked to many clusters. The treemap shows various States and the number of clusters identified in each State

Kerala 4 clusters	Gujarat 2	Telangana 2	
	Karnataka 2		
Maharashtra 3		Chandigarh, J&K, Punjab, T.N., U.P., A.P. and A&N islands 1	
Delhi 2	Rajasthan 2		

Relatives 57 cases	Random contacts 23 cases
	Co-passengers 8 cases

Acquaintance 27 cases	

SOURCE: CASES REPORTED BY THE HINDU, HEALTH MINISTRIES OF STATES, INDIA COVID-19 TRACKER

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 1, 1920

Banks in India.

(From an Editorial)

The Statistical tables relating to Banks in India have just been issued by Mr. Findlay Shirras, the Director of Statistics. The figures now published relate to the calendar year 1918 and are thus a little out-of-date. They, however, serve to bring out and emphasise some features which are peculiar to banking development in this country. One of these, of course, is what may

FROM PAGE ONE

Tablighi officials charged with defying restrictions

Eleven people who returned to Kerala have been put under quarantine; six from Telangana who attended the congregation have died. In Andaman and Nicobar Islands, six people who returned from the event have tested positive. The Assam government has asked people to voluntarily report themselves if they were present at the congregation. Around 300 people from the State attended the event.

All symptomatic people still in Delhi are being tested for COVID-19. "We are still in the process of shifting people from the Markaz [the

centre]. The symptomatic people are being moved to hospitals and the asymptomatic people are being moved to different government-run quarantine facilities," a senior official of the Delhi Health Department told *The Hindu*. "The asymptomatic people are not being tested immediately, but we will be closely monitoring them. This is in keeping with the Central government's guidelines," the official said.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said the Markaz had acted irresponsibly by organising the congregation.

'3 quasi-subspecies of SARS-CoV-2 in circulation'

The ICMR admitted that availability of testing kits was still an issue, and masks should not be used indiscriminately.

Dr. Gangakhedkar added that India would be able to make indigenous diagnostic kits within the next month or two. "So far, 42,788 samples have been tested in India; of these, 4,346 were tested on Monday. This is 36% of our capacity. Forty-seven private laboratories were allowed to test for COVID-19, and they conducted 399 tests on Monday," he said.

Meanwhile, the Health Ministry said that even a single case was a hotspot, especially when the country registered its highest single-day jump in COVID-19 cases since January 30. The number of cases on Tuesday stood at 1,397, with 1,238 active ones and 35 deaths.

Reports from the State Health Departments put the number of positive cases at 1,544, with 1,376 active ones.

At a press conference here on Tuesday, Lav Agarwal, Joint Secretary, Health Ministry, said the jump in cases could be attributed to "lack of community support". Even if one person broke the nation's commitment to physical distancing and lockdown, the results could be very adverse.

Punya Salil Srivastava,

Joint Secretary, Home Ministry, said more than 6 lakh migrants had been accommodated in 61,000 relief camps across India.

Health Minister Harsh Vardhan formed a team of experts for guidance of COVID-19 testing and research and organised a meeting of a Group of Ministers on Tuesday, said Mr. Agarwal.

It asks the media to publish official version to avoid panic; government told to issue a daily bulletin

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday upheld the right to free discussion about COVID-19, even as it directed the media to refer to and publish the official version of the developments in order to avoid inaccuracies and large-scale panic.

It ordered the government to start a daily bulletin on COVID-19 developments through all media avenues in the next 24 hours.

A Bench, led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde, was responding to a request from the Central government that media outlets, in the "larger interest of justice", should only publish or telecast anything on COVID-19 after ascertaining the factual position from the government.

A Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) report in the court, signed by Union Home Se-

We expect the media [print, electronic or social] to maintain a strong sense of responsibility and ensure that unverified news capable of causing panic is not disseminated

SUPREME COURT

cretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla, explained that "any deliberate or inaccurate" reporting by the media, particularly web portals, had a "serious and inevitable potential of causing panic in larger sections of the society".

The Ministry said any panic reaction in the midst of an unprecedented situation based on such reporting would harm the entire nation. Creating panic is also a criminal offence under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, the Ministry said.

But the court took a view balancing free press and the need to avoid panic in society during an unprecedented

crisis. "We expect the media [print, electronic or social] to maintain a strong sense of responsibility and ensure that unverified news capable of causing panic is not disseminated. A daily bulletin by the Government of India through all media avenues, including social media and forums to clear the doubts of people, would be made active within a period of 24 hours as submitted by the Solicitor-General of India. We do not intend to interfere with the free discussion about the pandemic, but direct the media to refer to and publish the official version about the developments,"

Fake news

"Deliberate or inadvertent fake news and material capable of causing a serious panic in the minds of the public is found to be the single most unmanageable hindrance in the management of this challenge... Will set up a separate unit headed by a Joint Secretary-level officer in the Health Ministry and consisting of eminent specialist doctors from recognised institutions like AIIMS to answer

the queries of citizens," the Ministry's 39-page status report said.

The Central government on Tuesday extended the validity of expired driving licences and vehicle registrations until June 30 to help those affected by the nationwide lockdown.

The other documents for which relief has been provided include all other documents required by a person under the Motor Vehicles Act.

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has issued an advisory to all the States and Union Territories communicating its decision.

It requested all the States to implement the advisory "in letter and spirit" so that people and transporters and organisations rendering essential services did not get harassed and faced difficulties, a Ministry statement said.

Ministry extends relief to motorists

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

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Petition in SC seeks free testing

It challenges legality of advisory that caps the price for testing at ₹4,500

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A petition was filed on Tuesday in the Supreme Court seeking a direction to the government to provide free COVID-19 testing in all laboratories, including private ones.

The plea, filed by Delhi resident Shashank Deo Sudhi, challenged the legality of a March 17 advisory that caps the price for COVID-19 testing at ₹4,500.

Mr. Sudhi said 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/



Petition said the advisory was both discriminatory and a violation of the fundamental right to life. ■ REUTERS

labs and being no alternative in the sight, the people are constrained to pay the capped amount to the private hospital/labs for protecting their lives. The respondents are completely insensitive and indifferent to

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

COVID-19

Mr. Sudhi said the COVID-19 tests should be conducted under NABL (National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories) accredited pathological laboratories as the non-accredited labs were not conforming to the standards of best practices prescribed by International Laboratory Accreditation Co-operation and Asia Pacific Accreditation Co-operation.

Congress urges govt. to get more testing kits

'Rule out community transmission'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

As the 21-day lockdown completed its first week, the Congress on Tuesday asked the Union government to procure more COVID-19 testing kits, offer interest subvention on the three-month moratorium on loans and EMIs, and arrange for harvesting and storage of Rabi crops.

In an online interaction, former Union Minister Manish Tewari said that as India moved from second to the next stage of the pandemic, the government should procure and supply testing kits to the State governments on priority.

"We are testing 32 people

for a population of 10 lakh, while in England, it is 1921 and in the United States, it is 2,600....The only antidote to testing is test, test and more tests," he said.

The State governments were keeping the testing kits for a time when the number of cases may shoot up, he said. So far, only four companies have been allowed to make the kits while 17 had applied for permission, he said.

"We would urge the government to find a way out without comprising on quality. Claims about India not seeing community transmission can be made only if there is large-scale testing," he stated.

States told to track foreign Tablighi members

Home Ministry letter directed that they be screened, quarantined and deported, if possible

VIJAYA SINGH
NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry wrote to all States and Union Territories on March 21 to "identify, screen and quarantine" 824 foreign Tablighi Jamaat members who were travelling to different parts of the country.

While the Centre disseminated information to the States about the movement of the religious group's members, the virus had already spread to various parts of the country.

In Jammu and Kashmir, 80% of the COVID-19-positive cases reported so far are linked to an index patient

who attended a gathering at Alami Markaz Banglewali Masjid in south Delhi's Nizamuddin. The patient died on March 26. In Telangana, 50% of the cases are linked to the meetings organised by the Markaz.

On March 28, the Home Ministry shot off another letter to the States that around 2,000 Tablighi Jamaat members from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand who entered India on tourist visa appeared to be "potential carriers" of COVID-19. It asked the States to "screen, quarantine" and deport them if possible. All international flights were suspended

ed on March 23 and the country was placed under a 21-day lockdown on March 24 to prevent the spread of the pandemic.

The March 28 letter said "open domain reports" suggested that several people who attended a religious congregation, held from February 27 to March 1, at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, had tested positive, and hence "thorough screening of those who arrived from Malaysia is urgently needed." By this time, many cases had been reported in Maharashtra, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

According to the Home

Ministry's data, since January 1, 2,100 foreigners had visited India for Tablighi activities and the Bureau of Immigration (BOI) started sharing details of all international arrivals with the States from March 6.

But before the Ministry issued the letters, several States had already informed the Union Health Ministry's control room about the positive cases linked to the Markaz. Health Ministry officials did not respond.

On March 21, a day before the 'Janta Curfew', Jammu and Kashmir officials informed the Health Ministry's control room of the 65-year-

old index patient. His contact-tracing revealed that he had travelled to Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Delhi, Deoband, Jammu and Srinagar from February 16.

Around 15,000 people are said to have come in contact with him directly or indirectly.

His eight family members have tested positive, and 14 medical staff members, who attended on him at a Srinagar hospital, have been quarantined.

Before this, on March 20, the Telangana police detained 11 foreign nationals from a Tablighi Markaz (centre) in Hyderabad.

INS seeks relief for newspapers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Indian Newspaper Society, in a letter to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, has sought a two-year tax holiday and removal of all import duty on newsprint, seeking an urgent relief for the collapsing newspaper sector.

The society said the industry had been hit by a "triple whammy of coronavirus, plummeting advertising and customs duty on newsprint which has led to an unimaginable situation" where the domestic newspaper industry is on the brink of collapse.

The circulation of newspapers has been badly hit due to the lockdown. The advertising, too, has plummeted severely curtailing two key revenue streams for newspapers.

Last year, a 10% import duty was imposed on newsprint, taking the total customs duty on newsprint to 15%. In this year's Budget, 10% of duty was removed but the newspapers still have to pay 5% duty, which the INS demanded be waived off.

"Media's activity is essential, and our newspapers are going above and beyond their call of duty in this pandemic, with editorial and other colleagues... putting themselves at great personal risk to be at the frontlines, to ensure readers get life-saving and other essential information day after day, in the safety of their homes," the letter said.

It said that last year well-known English newspapers such as DNA and the *Financial Chronicle* shut their print editions.

It said there needs to be a "level playing field between foreign digital giants and domestic Indian newspapers".

Forced to stay, workers now battle hunger

Nearly 100 of them left for home. With no trains or buses, they just rode home in auto-rickshaws and cycle rickshaws, that on a normal day was the means of earning a living. Thirty-two of them pedalled cycle-rickshaws to cover a distance of 1,390 km to Kathiawar. Three days later, covering a distance of 554 km, they reached Lucknow on Tuesday morning. "Their mobile phones are switched off, so we don't know if the police caught them or if they are still continuing on their journey," Mohammed Nizammudin, another auto-rickshaw driver, whose distant relative is one of the 32 making the journey, says.

For the 80-odd who stayed back, each day is get-

Exodus could have been avoided'

PM should have consulted States before announcing lockdown, says Baghel

SOBHA K. NAIR
NEW DELHI

The displacement of lakhs of migrants could have been avoided had Prime Minister Narendra Modi first consulted the State governments, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel said in an interview to *The Hindu*.

"Who is to implement the lockdown? Can the Union government on its own do so? The answer is no. Ultimately, it's the State government's job to implement it. Did the Prime Minister talk to any of the State governments before unilaterally announcing it? No," Mr. Baghel said, speaking over phone from Raipur.

Chhattisgarh has reported seven COVID-19 cases, with no deaths so far.

It was one of the first States to announce a lockdown on March 21, four days before Mr. Modi announced a nationwide 21-day lockdown.

"We have the Mumbai-

The wheels of all industries have come to a screeching halt. I am no economist, but surely, we will see the economic impact of this lockdown in years to come

BHUPESH BAGHEL,
Chhattisgarh Chief Minister

Howrah highway cutting across the State and could not have taken a chance," Mr. Baghel said the citing reason for an early lockdown.

The Union government should have reached out to the industry also and the economic package should have precluded the lockdown. It should have anticipated that once the lockdown was implemented scores of persons would not be able to earn a living and would obviously head out to places where they felt more secure, Mr. Baghel said.

"We are staring at a severe economic crisis," he said.

"All skilled and unskilled labourers have left the factories because of the lockdown. The wheels of all industries have come to a screeching halt. I am no economist, but surely, we will see the economic impact of this lockdown in years to come," he said.

The lockdown, he added, would have a similar impact of pulling down the economy as demonetisation had.

The Chief Minister said that there was a crying need for a second economic pack-

age to reach out to those who did not benefit from Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's announcements of March 26 such as the landless labourers and workers in the unorganised sector, among others.

Pay MNREGA workers' In a recent letter to Mr. Modi, Mr. Baghel had suggested that ₹1,000 a month should be transferred to MNREGA and workers in the unorganized sector for the next three months.

Instead of the promised ₹500 to women Jan Dhan account holders, Mr. Baghel suggested that ₹750 must be transferred and the scheme should be extended to men too.

"The only way to avert an economic crisis is to infuse financial liquidity and increase the purchasing power of the end consumer. The Union government will have to move swiftly in this direction," Mr. Baghel added.

"If not, India's health and humanitarian crisis – with the Centre's knee-jerk responses – will only worsen the situation," Mr. Yechury added.

Attempts to create social disharmony, tarnish workers and the vulnerable by communal, casteist and sectarian forces must be resisted, he said.

"Private charity, while welcome, is not a replacement for the government failing to discharge its basic constitutional duty," Mr. Yechury said.



Viral effect: Migrant workers eating meals supplied by social workers under a flyover in Mumbai on Tuesday; persons from different areas of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh who completed their quarantine being discharged from a hotel in Srinagar; people stand in a queue outside a bank to withdraw money in Bikaner; and a medical team examining a person in Jaipur. ■ EMMANUEL YOGINI, NISSAR AHMAD & PTI



RS members to donate from MPLADS fund

NEW DELHI

Many members of the Rajya Sabha have consented to contribute from their Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) funds to the common central pool to fight COVID-19. Rajya Sabha Chairman Venkaiah Naidu had asked the MPs to contribute at least ₹1 crore each from their MPLAD funds. Under the scheme, each MP has the choice to suggest to the District Collector works estimated at ₹5 crore a year to be taken up in their respective constituencies.

20 areas declared 'Red Zones' in Kashmir

SRINAGAR

The Jammu and Kashmir administration has declared over 20 villages and five urban pockets as no-go 'Red Zones' as the number of COVID-19 cases jumped to 55. Six more people tested positive on Tuesday. "The six positive cases were reported from the Kashmir division," said J&K spokesperson Rohit Kansal. An official said 20 villages in Pulwama, Budgam, Shopian and Nandipora and five urban areas in Srinagar have been declared 'Red Zones'.

Inclement weather adds to farmers' worries

CHANDIGARH

As the wheat crop is all set for harvest in Punjab and Haryana, the forecast of rain with gusty winds during the next 48 hours has raised farmers' anxiety as the inclement weather could adversely impact the yield, agri-experts said on Tuesday. According to the India Meteorological Department, thunderstorms and light rainfall accompanied with lightning and gusty winds are expected in parts of Punjab and Haryana between March 31 and April 1.

Ambulance staff in U.P. threaten to halt work

LUCKNOW

Around 16,000 emergency ambulance workers in Uttar Pradesh threatened to stop work if the company hiring them did not give them protective gear for handling COVID-19 cases. They also demanded that their salary, which has been allegedly not paid since January, be released immediately. In a letter to GVK EMRI, the private company that hires them, the Ambulance Karmachari Sangh said that if the requirements were not met, they would halt work.

Ministry, Scientific Adviser differ on mask use

Health Ministry says it is 'studying the recommendations' of the office of the PSA for widespread use of masks

JACOB KOSHY

NEW DELHI

India's highest science advisory body, the office of the Principal (PSA), and the Union Health Ministry appear out of sync on whether masks should be widely used by people.

The Ministry's standing recommendation is that not everybody should be wearing masks. Among those who are not healthcare workers, only those who had a cough or exhibited signs of a flu or a respiratory illness need to be wearing them as did those caring for COVID-19 patients. The reason this isn't recommended for the public at large – though now almost anyone on the street can be seen to be wearing them – is that it will lead to a shortage and unavailability for doctors, nurses and other hospital staff.

On Tuesday, however, the

office of the PSA through the Press Information Bureau recommended the widespread use of masks. It endorsed, above all, home-made masks that could easily be made and were reusable with washing and sanitising.

"The proposed guide is meant to provide a simple outline of best practices to make, use and reuse masks to enable NGOs and individuals to self-create such masks and accelerate widespread adoption of masks across India. The key criteria for proposed designs are ease of access to materials, easy of making at home, and ease of use and reuse. Wearing of masks is especially recommended for people living in densely populated areas across India," notes the advisory.

The office of the PSA is a key coordinating agency among government scientific



To wear or not: Health workers wearing protective masks in Bhubaneswar. ■ BISWARANJAN ROUT

bodies and industry to accelerate decisions on dealing with COVID-19. It does not recommend the use of the health mask or the N95 mask that are expensive, non-reusable and largely used in hospital settings.

K. Vijay Raghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser, did not

immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Health Ministry, which is the nodal agency for monitoring the pandemic, said it was "studying the recommendations" of the office of the PSA.

Health Ministry spokesperson Lav Agrawal said at

the daily press briefing on Tuesday, "The World Health Organization hasn't given a categorical opinion on its [mask] usage. However, a technical committee is looking into this issue and suitable guidelines will be issued soon. Our stress is on social distancing. We request that not everyone wear a mask. We have defined guidelines on who should and shouldn't be wearing one."

Raman Gangakhedkar, who was also at the briefing as a representative of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), said: "There's a wide gap between the number of cases in the United States and India and the risk of exposure isn't as much here. Hence only those sick or at risk of exposure should be wearing one."

Other than the question of shortage, the scientific con-

Panel formed to coordinate virus research

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

A Science and Technology Empowered Committee for COVID-19 response has been constituted and will be chaired by Prof. Vinod Paul, member, NITI Aayog and Prof. K. Vijay Raghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser to the government, the Health Ministry said on Tuesdays.

"The government's policy regarding the use of masks is evolving. Probably they are now taking more notice of the fact there may be a sizeable number of asymptomatic carriers of the infection – some studies suggest nearly 25% of COVID-19 infected may be asymptomatic – and wearing a mask is a good precautionary measure," said Sunit Singh, molecular virologist, Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University.

The March 31 advisory from the office of the PSA recommends the use of homemade cotton masks that are reusable after appropriate washing and disinfection that can be done at home.

'Step up checking in patients'

Jacob John says chasing the virus should be phased down in a strategy shift

SERENA JOSEPHINE M.

CHENNAI

At a time when hotspot containment measures are among the focus areas for prevention and control of the coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19), renowned virologist T. Jacob John has called for a shift in strategy – chasing the virus should be phased down and checking for the virus in infected persons should be stepped up.

"This is not a hotspot transmitting virus but it is a virus that transmits everywhere... Containment measures have to continue. But now, containment measures should have 30% priority, and healthcare testing 70% priority. Healthcare checking is another way of containment measure as we will be finding infected people who had no travel history," said Dr. John, retired professor of virology, Christian Medical College, Vellore.

Silently infected

That community-based transmission is happening in



Dr. T. JACOB JOHN

Virologist

COVID-19

the virus has widely spread," he stated.

COVID-19 is a pandemic, meaning that all countries are affected. It means it is a widely transmitting virus, he said, adding: "In every pandemic, within countries, the virus will spread to every nook and corner where human beings live. Even in tribal areas where the neighbouring house is one mile away, the virus will reach there as people will have contact with someone. If not this month, next month. So that kind of a spread should be anticipated now, a widespread community spread is going to happen."

What should be done now? He said now is the time to prepare the healthcare system to face huge numbers of sick people. "That preparation is what we need now, not chasing the virus. Chasing the virus must be phased down and checking for the virus in sick people must be stepped up. The strategy from now onwards should be lesser and lesser on efforts paid for travel-related

search and more emphasis on illness-related testing," he said.

Fever, cough

Dr. John added that it was high time that the strategy be shifted to testing people with fever and cough. "Anybody with fever and cough must be checked. Additional symptoms like fatigue, headache, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, body ache are common to both influenza and COVID-19. High fever is common in COVID-19 but not in common cold. So, influenza and COVID-19 should be in one category, and all other respiratory infections in another. If there is a loss of smell, if taste disappears for one day, if there is breathing difficulty, it is more like COVID-19. Those people should be tested for influenza and COVID-19," he explained.

"The testing strategy must expand to illness testing as the virus is on the loose in the community. Whether the government accepts it or not, it is already in the community," he said.

Indore bears the burden of 44 patients, most residents of congested localities, of the 66 cases in the State. In addition, three persons from the city died of COVID-19. Besides, eight cases in Jabalpur, six in Ujjain, four in Bhopal, and two each in Shivpuri and Gwalior have been registered.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), community transmission is evidenced by the inability to relate confirmed cases through chains of transmission for a large number of cases, or by increasing positive tests through sentinel samples.

"Coincidentally almost all positive cases, including first ones, have come from congested areas, so probably they have done a lot of community transmission," Dr. Sakalle said. Though pockets have been identified, that doesn't spell a possible wiping out of the virus locally.

"If we are able to contain it in certain pockets and cover

all contacts, then maybe we can make it controlled. We have no way to control their [overall] number," he added.

Aggressive testing in relation to other cities such as Bhopal and Jabalpur has yielded more numbers too. Until March 30, the college had tested 261 samples since March 21. "Most cases in the first lot for Indore were those admitted to government and private hospital ICUs whose samples we took to test for acute severe respiratory illnesses when the testing for COVID-19 was restricted to only those with travel history abroad. When the ICMR revised the guidelines, we ran their samples for COVID-19 too, and many tested positive," explained Dr. Sakalle.

Those who had come into contact with these persons tested positive. "Those who're dying, are either elderly or have some co-morbidities of diabetes or hypertension," he said.

Centre's extra ration promise yet to be kept at PDS shops

Orders issued only on Monday; States yet to lift additional grain for the distribution of extra 5 kg rice or wheat

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ
SOBHANA K. NAIR
NEW DELHI

One week into the COVID-19 lockdown, and five days after the Centre's welfare package was announced, there is no sign of the promised free grains and pulses at ration shops across the country.

Although the Finance Minister promised that the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana would come into effect immediately, the Food Department only issued orders to the States on Monday, and States are yet to lift the additional grain for the distribution of the extra 5 kg rice or wheat per beneficiary. For the promised 1 kg of free pulses, the need to process and transport procured dals, is causing even further delays.

Jaigunnissa, a 38-year old domestic worker and mother of three, is disgruntled by the delay. She has walked for more than half-an-hour from her home in Delhi's Sarai Kale Khan area, in order to stand in the morning sun outside her ration shop in

Bhogal, slowly moving from one chalk circle to the next, keeping the proper coronavirus-era distance from other shoppers.

"I heard that the Modi sarkar announced extra ration last week itself. But when I come here, I find that they are still giving only the 7.5 kg promised by Kejriwal," she says, gesturing to the large poster of the Delhi Chief Minister hung at the entrance to the shop, promising an enhanced ration of 6 kg of wheat and 1.5 kg of rice, now provided free of cost to each beneficiary.

Lost livelihood
She and her husband, who has a cycle-rickshaw, have both lost their livelihood due to the lockdown. "The lady of the house where I work has said that since she is now doing all the cooking, cleaning, washing, she cannot pay me any salary. So I am dependent on ration only. My children will only get rotis and salt during this lockdown," she adds, using her dupatta as a makeshift mask.

We have just issued the notice to States to lift the additional allocation, Food Secretary Ravikant told *The Hindu* on Monday, four days after the initial announcement. "States now have to plan and organise transportation from the godowns [of the Food Corporation of India]."

Advice to States
The March 30 notice to States advises them to lift the additional allocation together with the regular monthly allocation under the National Food Security Act within

the timelines prescribed for that. "However, for States/UTs which have already lifted the allocation under NFSR for April may lift this additional allocation for April till 30 April," says the notice, seeming to indicate that many ration cardholders may not actually receive their extra free grains for some weeks to come.

"The distribution of pulses may be more complicated as few States regularly incorporate them into their public distribution system so far. Senior officials under the Consumer Affairs Depart-

ment say that the ground-work has just begun, with States having sent in their requisitions.

While a sufficient stock of 34.25 metric tonnes of pulses are available with NAFED, these are whole grams directly procured from farmers, and are yet to be milled and processed, for which the Centre will need to rope in private players. Also, unlike FCI, which has procurement and storage facilities for rice and wheat in every district, pulses are procured from eight or nine districts only, creating more transportation and logistical hurdles, said an official.

For 52-year-old Mohammad Akhtar, standing in queue outside the Bhogal PDS shop for the second consecutive day after surging crowds prevented distribution on Monday, that may be too little too late. The garment factory worker does not even have money to pound the ration wheat he gets, let alone buy vegetables, dal or oil.

"I have only ₹40 remain-



On an empty stomach: Beneficiaries waiting in a queue to collect rations at Shahpur Jat in New Delhi on Tuesday. ■ PTI

Hydroxychloroquine combination allowed

Ministry issues revised guidelines

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Union Health Ministry has allowed the use of Hydroxychloroquine in combination with Azithromycin under close monitoring for patients with severe disease and requiring ICU management as per the revised Guidelines on Clinical Management of COVID-19.

Hydroxychloroquine was previously under testing and was allowed to be administered only to doctors and caregivers in direct contact with COVID-19 positive cases.

The Health Ministry has noted that no specific antiviral have been proven to be effective as per currently available data. However, based on the available information (uncontrolled clinical trials), the following drugs may be considered.

"We are also offering support to treating physicians and AIIMS, New Delhi is running a 24x7 helpline to provide support to the treating physicians on clinical management. The helpline number is 9971876591. The identified nodal doctor of the State, appointed for clinical management of COVID-19 should only contact AIIMS Call Centre," said a senior Health Ministry official.

vised guidelines are based on currently available information and would be reviewed from time to time as new evidence emerges," it added.

Health Ministry's Revised National Clinical Management of COVID-19 is intended for clinicians taking care of hospitalised adult and paediatric patients of COVID-19. "This is not meant to replace clinical judgment or specialist consultation but rather to strengthen clinical management of these patients and provide up-to-date guidance," noted the document.

"We are also offering support to treating physicians and AIIMS, New Delhi is running a 24x7 helpline to provide support to the treating physicians on clinical management. The helpline number is 9971876591. The identified nodal doctor of the State, appointed for clinical management of COVID-19 should only contact AIIMS Call Centre," said a senior Health Ministry official.

Centre tells States to help the disabled

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Union Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry on Tuesday asked all States to implement its advisory for the care of persons with disabilities (PwD) during the lockdown as complaints on difficulties in accessing care and essential services continued to pour in.

In a letter to all State Commissioners on Tuesday, Department Secretary Shakuntala Gamlani said that her office was "receiving complaints regarding difficulties being faced by PwDs in getting services of caregivers, maids and access to essential items due to non-issue of travel passes to NGOs/PwD associations/caregivers etc."

INTERVIEW | GITA SEN

'Preventing stigma requires a full-throated campaign'

Health expert says it will have the effect of removing the fear created by the barrage of information on COVID-19

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN

Gita Sen, Director and Distinguished Professor, Ramalingaswami Centre on Equity & Social Determinants of Health (RCESDH), Public Health Foundation of India, speaks about how the stigma attached to COVID-19 is much like what was seen with HIV/AIDS and how it is a result of poor knowledge.

In this time of stress associated with COVID-19, why is a small group of people being stigmatised? How is this different from other health crises we have faced?

■ Stigma and fear are the result of people's poor knowledge about COVID-19 and how it spreads. This is compounded by the large amount of fake news and false information being generated today. Some groups face the additional element

that discrimination against them is already there, and COVID-19 has become one more reason to stigmatise them. In terms of stigma, the closest we have come is with HIV/AIDS patients. But HIV-related stigma did not extend, in general, to health workers.

Which are the groups most vulnerable to stigma related to COVID-19?

■ Three sets of people are being stigmatised now: (i)

those in quarantine, whether they have tested positive or not – many State governments are violating medical ethics codes by publicising address details, marking doors of their homes with stickers and even large posters, stamping them with indelible ink – and stories are coming in of people being thrown out of their homes, shunned, etc (ii) health workers from doctors down to the frontline workers are facing stigma and discrimination including losing their homes because their landlords somehow think they will be contagious, and (iii) those who traditionally face discrimination like migrant workers, people from the northeast, victims of religious or other persecution.



C The health worker that you stigmatise today may be the one you have to turn to tomorrow

What can we as government/community do to prevent this?

■ We have a long way to go because we haven't even fully acknowledged the eco-

nomic and health challenges of 80% of our people in what we have done so far. The main responses put forward thus far, needed as they may be, such as social distancing, hand washing and sanitising, nourishing food are out of reach for the large majority of people.

The most vulnerable groups to the virus are the poor in urban slums, migrant workers with no homes, people living in close proximity with little possibility of social distancing or even hand-washing. Very important among them are women who are the traditional providers of home-based health care, which is where many poor people get their health care. These same citizens of our country are undernourished and have few resources to combat non-communicable diseases even in ordinary times. Think of a woman who has to feed her family, take care of sick people and is herself suffering from poor general health – that is the section that is going to be very vulnerable.

Preventing stigma requires a full-throated campaign of public information. How good it would be if the Union Health Minister were to give a daily briefing to let people know what is happening, together with creative social media campaigns about the virus itself that gets rid of the stigma? How valuable it would be if the Prime Minister were to speak against stigma, on behalf of health workers, on behalf of

migrant workers and those suffering discrimination, in support of women?

We need clear, informative and fun messages of the kind that our social marketers surely know how to produce. Think how creative a series of Amul ads could be! People also need to understand that the same health worker that you stigmatise today may be the one who you may have to turn to tomorrow.

What effect would this have on the groups of people who are discriminated against?

■ It would have the effect of removing the fear that the COVID-19 information barrage is creating. And that is the most important need.

Air India pilots flag poor protective equipment

They have to fly flights chartered by countries such as Germany and the U.K. to repatriate their citizens stranded in India

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Air India pilots have expressed their concern over "flimsy protective gear, inadequate sanitisers, shoddy disinfection procedure" and a lack of quarantine arrangements as they embark on flights chartered by countries such as Germany and the U.K. to repatriate their citizens stranded in India due to the nationwide lockdown over COVID-19.

Two pilots' unions, the Executive Pilots of Air India and Indian Pilots' Guild, have written to Minister of State for Civil Aviation Hardeep Singh Puri raising questions about their safety as they continue to work on the front line during a pandemic.

The unions represent nearly 500 pilots who operate the wide-bodied planes such as Boeing 787, 747 and 777.

The March 30 letter states that the personal protective



Ground realities: Two unions representing nearly 500 pilots have raised the complaints. ■ AFP

equipment is "ill-fitting and flimsy and tears easily on rescue flights, sanitisers are not provided in sufficient quantities and disinfection processes are short of industry best practices."

They also point out that the airline has not made any arrangements for crew members to go into a quarantine,

who are then forced to join their families despite operating flights to some of the global hotspots of COVID-19.

Poor facilities' The pilots have also raised questions about the lack of medical facilities as the Air India Medical Services Department has been allowed

to work from home, which the cockpit crew say implies, "that any illness suffered by the crew or their families because of these high-risk flights is the sole responsibility of the crew."

While the airline has not provided any additional medical insurance to crew members to cover them for

62 cargo flights in 5 days to transport equipment

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Centre is co-ordinating with pharmaceutical companies, States and other agencies to ensure the transportation of medical supplies and other equipment and has organised 62 cargo flights in the past five days.

A total of 15.4 tonnes of medical supplies, including

reagents, enzymes, medical equipment, testing kits, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), masks, gloves, have been transported to different parts of the country, the Civil Aviation Ministry said.

Carriers and agencies include Air India, Alliance Air, Air Force, Pawan Hans and private carriers IndiGo, SpiceJet and BlueDart.

any COVID-19 related risks, it has gone a step further and recently advised its employees, "enquiries on reimbursement of bills, sick leave, fitness certificate, are considered as undesirable."

While some of these pilots have operated special flights to Wuhan and Rome to bring back Indians and have oper-

ated flights for countries like Israel to help their citizens return home, they have not been paid 70% of their salaries for the past three months and "have also recently been informed by our management of a substantial pay cut, while in the midst of the above mentioned COVID rescue operations!"

Captive audience: film festivals come home

DIFF sets up online viewing room

NAMRATA JOSHI
MUMBAI

"Bringing independent cinema to the mountains" has been the catchline of the Dharamshala International Film Festival (DIFF). Now, it's unspooling the indies on a computer, laptop, mobile or tablet near you. In a unique attempt in the Indian film festival circuit, DIFF set up an online Viewing Room on its website on Tuesday, where it will be streaming its alumni's films, free of cost to viewers across the world.

DIFF will be showcasing a set of four to six films every couple of weeks.

The idea of sharing the films that the festival has showcased over the years took root ten days back. "Seeing the situation, the fact that everyone is at home, we thought of doing something positive," says festival director and filmmaker Ritu Sarin. They reached out to the alumni filmmakers and were overwhelmed by the tremendous response they got in return.

"With COVID-19 reshaping the world, we have been thinking about how to reach out [to the DIFF regulars and patrons] and at the moment the filmmakers also don't know what the future holds for them," said Ms. Sarin. The idea then, for all, has been to keep up the spirits and seek inspiration in these uncertain times in cinema itself.

The entire venture is being run on the goodwill between the filmmakers and the festival. "DIFF is run by a no-profit trust. It's [Viewing Room] in keeping with the spirit of the festival," said Ms. Sarin.



Films can offer comfort in these uncertain times, say festival organisers. ■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

Maharashtra govt. to pay salaries in two instalments

No reduction in amount, assures Uddhav Thackeray

ALOK DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

As Maharashtra stares at a major economic crisis as a result of lockdown due to COVID-19, the State government has begun taking steps to cut down on the expenditure. In its first step, the government will be releasing salaries of March in two instalments," he said.

Mr. Pawar added that every employee would get the salary due, but in two instalments.

Deputy Chief Minister and State Finance Minister Ajit Pawar said the decision was taken considering the grim financial condition of the State as well as to give moral

and financial support to the fight against coronavirus. "The State was to receive its due amount of ₹16,654 crore from the Central government by March 31. But it did not receive the amount even on the last day and as a result, the State government was forced to take the decision to disburse the salaries in two instalments," he said.

Mr. Pawar added that every employee would get the salary due, but in two instalments.

This was a change from an earlier statement where he had said that there will be a salary cut of up to 60% due to the financial impact of coronavirus and lockdown. The earlier statement had

C The State was to receive its due of ₹16,654 crore from the Centre by March 31. But it did not receive the amount even on the last day and as a result, the State government was forced to take the decision to disburse the salaries in two instalments

AJIT PAWAR, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister



April 2020. However, a Government Resolution (GR) issued later said that the salaries would be given in two instalments and that there would be no cuts.

According to sources in the Finance Department, the Maharashtra government spends around ₹12,000 crore per month on salaries of its employees. Mr. Pawar on Monday written to Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman demanding a special package worth ₹25,000 crore for Maharashtra. He had also demanded ₹16,654 crore dues from the Centre.

Meanwhile, Housing Minister Jyoti Patel has said that he would donate his salary of the whole year for the relief work related to COVID-19.

It's a crisis: Uddhav

Issuing a clarification on the subject, in a social media address, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray too said there will be no salary cut of government employees.

"After this war against corona is over, we will be facing a financial crisis. We have to take actions and be prepared for it from now itself. For that, we have taken some measures. We will be giving salaries of government employees in instalments. No salary cut has been announced," said Mr. Thackeray, appealing to citizens to not trust rumours.

Pvt. hospitals in Jaipur, Guwahati reserved for COVID-19 treatment

The buildings will be used as isolation, quarantine centres

MOHAMMED IQBAL
RAHUL KARMAKAR
JAIPUR/GUWAHATI

Scaling up its efforts to tackle the coronavirus outbreak, the Rajasthan government has reserved 84 private hospitals, with a total bed capacity of 9,377, in Jaipur district to meet a crisis situation. The hospital buildings will be used as isolation and quarantine centres as and when required.

The orders in Rajasthan came after an important decision was taken last week in Assam, where the State government signed memorandums of understanding with 85 private hospitals for "transferring the load of other patients" to these healthcare facilities so as to enable three of the State's six medi-

cal colleges to focus on the COVID-19 cases. No positive cases have been detected so far in Assam.

Jaipur Collector Joga Ram said the private hospitals would have to, when demanded, hand over their buildings within two hours to the Chief Medical & Health Officer or Sub-Divisional Officer. The hospitals include multi-speciality medical institutions in Jaipur city as well as smaller medical facilities and nursing homes in the nearby towns, such as Dudu, Bagru, Chakru and Sanganer.

Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot said at a review meeting here that several private institutions and undertakings had also offered their buildings as infrastructure for treatment of patients infected

with coronavirus.

In Assam, the initiative for signing the MoUs began on March 27 with the inking of agreements with as many as 34 private hospitals and nursing homes in Guwahati. The agreement is for two months now, beginning March 28. All cases, except for cancer, maternity and emergency that come to the medical colleges are being transferred to the private hospitals according to their specialities," Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

The State government, he added, had also floated tenders for setting up five prefabricated hospitals with 300 beds each with the intensive care unit and ventilation facilities to deal with the COVID-19 cases.

Hima wrote: "I request you [PM] to give back our 4G so that I don't miss online classes".

Ms. Hima wrote: "I request you [PM] to give back our 4G so that I don't miss online classes".

Class 5 student from Kashmir writes to PM

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

A Class 5 student in Kashmir has written a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging restoration of high-speed Internet, after missing the virtual classes started by her school in Srinagar on Monday.

The letter has since gone viral on social media.

Hima wrote: "I feel sad, frustrated, angry and stressed because I could not attend the online classes organised by my school due to 2G connection. Online classes do not work on 2G."

Ms. Hima wrote: "I request you [PM] to give back our 4G so that I don't miss online classes".

Donations pour in for COVID-19 fund

PM's mother, Mamata among donors

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AHMEDABAD/KOLKATA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's nonagenarian mother Hirabai on Tuesday donated ₹25,000 from her personal savings to a special fund set up to fight the coronavirus pandemic in the country.

She deposited the money in the PM-CARES Fund, created by the Centre to help in efforts to contain the spread of the virus and provide relief to those affected by COVID-19, said the Prime Minister's younger brother, Pankaj Modi.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee donated ₹2 crore to the PM-CARES Fund, her family sources said on Tuesday. Former India captain and coach Anil Kumble on Tuesday made a donation to the Central and Karnataka State relief funds.

Taking to Twitter, Ms. Banerjee said the contribution was made from her "limited resources".

In Mumbai, legendary singer Lata Mangeshkar, actors Priyanka Chopra, Kangana Ranaut, Alia Bhatt, Vicky Kaushal, among others on Tuesday pledged money to various relief funds aimed at combating the virus.

Actor Prakash Raj said he was feeding 250 homeless daily wage earners in Kerala's Kovai every day.

Anupama V. Nadella, wife of Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella, has donated ₹2 crore to the PM-CARES Fund, her family sources said on Tuesday. Former India captain and coach Anil Kumble on Tuesday made a donation to the Central and Karnataka State relief funds.

Spain reports record 849 deaths in a day

The spike in COVID-19 toll has dampened hopes that the country crossed the peak of the crisis

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MADRID

Once again, Spain hit a new record with 849 COVID-19 deaths in 24 hours on Tuesday although health chiefs said the rate of new infections was continuing its downward trend.

After Italy, Spain has suffered the world's second most deadly outbreak, which has now claimed 8,189 lives there. The latest figures came a day after the death toll fell slightly, dampening hopes it could have passed the peak of the crisis.

COVID-19

Over the same period, the number of confirmed cases rose to 94,417 after another 9,222 people tested positive: a nearly 11% increase.

That figure was seen as a setback after a week, in which the rate had been steadily failing, with Monday's figures having shown a rise of just over 8%.



Day of mourning: Turin Mayor Chiara Appendino, left, stands at attention as an elderly woman walks past during a minute of silence on Tuesday. ■ AP

Iran reports 141 deaths, raising total to 2,898

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TEHRAN

Iran said on Tuesday 141 more people have died from the novel coronavirus, raising the official toll in one of the world's worst-affected countries to 2,898.

Health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said 3,111 new infections have been confirmed over the past 24 hours, bringing the total to 44,606.

He said 3,703 of those hospitalised are in a critical condition and 14,656 have recovered.

Iran has been scrambling to contain the COVID-19 outbreak since it reported its first cases on February 19.

After weeks of refraining from imposing a lockdown or quarantine measures, Tehran decided last Wednesday to ban all intercity travel until at least April 8. The government has repeatedly urged Iranians to stay at home.

President Hassan Rouhani renewed those warnings on Tuesday as the climax of the two-week Persian New Year holiday nears.

He said authorities would close parks across the country on Wednesday, in a move that effectively blocks the family picnics that traditionally mark the 13th day of holiday. Mr. Rouhani called on people to "leave this tradition for some other time" and said violators would be fined.

The authorities have also stopped the print editions of all Iranian media until at least April 8, state news agency IRNA reported.

Indonesia declares state of emergency

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
JAKARTA

Indonesia on Tuesday declared a state of emergency as COVID-19 deaths in the world's fourth most populous country jumped again.

However, he has resisted calls for a nationwide lockdown.

President Joko Widodo has been heavily criticised for not imposing lockdowns in major cities, including the capital Jakarta, home to about 30 million people. He announced \$1.5 billion in beefed-up social assistance and subsidies re-patriated from Wuhan.

They found that age was a key determining factor in serious infections, with nearly one in five over-80s requiring hospitalisation, compared to around 1% among people under 30.

Taking into account estimates of the number of cases that may not have been clinically confirmed – that

Study shows middle-age COVID-19 mortality risk

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS

Middle-aged people, and not just the elderly, have a dramatically higher risk of dying or developing serious illness from COVID-19, says a study published in *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* journal. Researchers from Britain analysed more than 3,600 confirmed COVID-19 cases as well as data from hundreds of passengers repatriated from Wuhan.

"There might be outlying cases that get a lot of media attention, but our analysis very clearly shows that at aged 50 and over, hospitalisation is much more likely than in those under 50, and a greater proportion of cases are likely to be fatal," said Azra Ghani, a co-author of the study.

Doctor who met Putin tests positive

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MOSCOW

Denis Protsenko, the head of Moscow's main coronavirus hospital who met with President Vladimir Putin a week ago has tested positive, he said on Tuesday, as the Kremlin said the Russian leader's health was fine.

12-year-old dies in Belgium

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BRUSSELS

A 12-year-old girl infected with COVID-19 has died in Belgium, health officials said on Tuesday. Fatality at such a young age "is a very rare occurrence," said government spokesman Dr Emmanuel Andre.

U.S. death toll crosses 3,500

The Navy's 1,000-bed USNS Comfort arrived in New York

ASSOCIATED PRESS
AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

The U.S. death toll from COVID-19 climbed past 3,500 on Tuesday, eclipsing China's official count.

New York was the nation's deadliest hot spot, with about 1,550 deaths statewide, the majority of them in New York City.

President Donald Trump has been criticised for an initially slow response by the federal government to the now-accelerating pandemic spread. USNS Comfort, a Navy hospital ship with 1,000 beds that docked in New York on Monday, was expected to begin accepting non-coronavirus patients on Tuesday.

A 1,000-bed emergency hospital set up at the Javits Convention Center began taking patients Monday night. And the Billie Jean King USTA National Tennis Center was being transformed into a hospital. The crisis became perso-



Comfort by the sea: The Navy's 1,000-bed USNS Comfort on its way to dock in New York. ■ AP

nal for New York Governor Andrew Cuomo with word that his brother was infected. Chris Cuomo tweeted that he suffered fever, chills and shortness of breath but will continue broadcasting from his basement.

Seeking help
On Monday, the Governor pleaded for help from volunteer medical workers, and close to 80,000 former nurses, doctors and other professionals were already said to be stepping forward.

New York City sought to bring in 250 out-of-town ambulances and 500 paramedics and emergency medical technicians to help its swamped EMS system. The city's ambulances are responding to about 6,000 calls a day, or 50% more than average, authorities said. Fire Commissioner Daniel Nigro said a five-day stretch last week was the busiest in the history of the city's EMS operation. Mr. Trump said U.S. death rate was likely to increase for two weeks.

China focuses on patients with no symptoms as infections rise

Asymptomatic people under observation numbered 1,541

REUTERS
SHANGHAI/BEIJING

China will start releasing information from Wednesday on coronavirus patients who show no disease symptoms, ordering them into quarantine for 14 days, a health official said, after the mainland witnessed its first rise in infections in five days.

As local infections peter out and new cases surface among travellers returning home, the existence of virus carriers with no symptoms is fuelling public concern that people could be spreading it without knowing they are ill.

From April 1, the daily report of the National Health Commission will include details of such cases for the first time, Chang Jile, a commission official, told a briefing.

Reported. Many were students returning from overseas. About 35 infected Chinese citizens are still studying abroad, Education Ministry official Liu Jin said.

Fearing a second wave of infections sparked by such inbound travellers, China will delay its college entrance exam by a month, until July 7 and 8, China Central Television said, although Hubei province, where the virus emerged late last year, and Beijing, the capital, will get more leeway in scheduling it.

The annual two-day "gaokao" test drew more than 10 million candidates last year, state media have said.

Harry and Meghan formally bid farewell to royal life

He will remain a Prince but without any military appointments

REUTERS
LONDON

Prince Harry and wife Meghan posted their last message as working members of Britain's royal family on Monday before officially embarking on new careers without their "Royal Highness" styles.

The couple shocked Queen Elizabeth and the other Windsors in January by announcing plans to step back from their royal roles. A later deal brokered by the 93-year-old monarch means they will go their own way from April.

So from Wednesday, the couple, the Duke and Du-



Prince Harry and Meghan at Westminster Abbey in London on March 9. ■ AP

chess of Sussex, will be free to pursue new careers, earn their own money and spend most of their time in North America.

Myanmar scribe hit with terror charges

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MANDALAY

A Myanmar journalist faces up to life in prison for publishing an interview with a rebel group operating in the country's restive Rakhine state a week after the insurgents were classified as a terrorist organisation.

A March 27 interview with a top representative of Arakan Army, a group seeking greater autonomy for Rakhine people, published by Voice of Myanmar led to the detention of editor-in-chief Nay Myo Lin, who was brought to court on terrorism charges on Tuesday. The government had classified the insurgents as a "terrorist group".

U.S. outlines plan for transition in Venezuela, sanctions relief

Power-sharing govt. to include allies of Maduro and Guaidó

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MIAMI

The U.S. is prepared to lift sanctions on Venezuela in support of a new proposal to form a transitional government representing allies of both Nicolas Maduro and opposition leader Juan Guaidó to a five-member Council of State to govern the country until presidential and parliamentary elections can be held in late 2020, according to a written summary of the proposal.

The plan, which will be presented on Tuesday by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, echoes a proposal made over the weekend by Mr. Guaidó that shows how growing concerns about the coronavirus, which threatens to overwhelm the South American country's already collapsed health system and

crippled economy, are reviving U.S. attempts to pull the military apart from Mr. Maduro.

What's being dubbed the "Democratic Framework for Venezuela" would require Mr. Maduro and Mr. Guaidó to step aside and hand power to a five-member Council of State to govern the country until presidential and parliamentary elections can be held in late 2020, according to a written summary of the proposal.

The plan also outlines for the first time U.S. requirements for lifting sanctions against Mr. Maduro, officials and the oil industry.

Those accused of grave human rights abuses and drug trafficking are not eligible for sanctions relief.

But for sanctions to vanish, U.S. Special Representative for Venezuela Elliott Abrams said the council would need to be functioning and all foreign military forces – from Cuba or Russia – would need to leave the country.

Still, any deal is unlikely to win Mr. Maduro's support unless the issue of his future is addressed and he's protected from the U.S. justice system, said David Smilde, a senior fellow at the Washington Office on Latin America.

ELSEWHERE



19 people killed in forest fire in China

BEIJING
Nineteen people have died while fighting a raging forest fire in Sichuan province and hundreds of reinforcements were sent to fight the blaze and evacuate nearby residents, state media reported on Tuesday. AP

Pakistani journalist exiled in Sweden missing

STOCKHOLM
Pakistani journalist Sajid Hussain, who was in exile in Sweden, has been missing for nearly a month, stoking fears that his disappearance is tied to his reporting on Balochistan, a press rights group said on Tuesday. AFP

China chases Indonesia's fishing fleets, staking claim to sea's riches

Fishers in Natuna islands say they feel vulnerable with Beijing's presence in South China Sea becoming more aggressive

HANNAH BEECH
MUKTITA SUHARTONO
NATUNA ISLANDS

Dedi knows where the fish run strongest in Indonesian waters off the Natuna islands. The Chinese know, too. Backed by Chinese coast guard ships, Chinese fishing fleets have been raiding the rich waters of the South China Sea that are internationally recognised as exclusively Indonesia's to fish.

While Mr. Dedi catches the traditional way, with nets and lines, the steel Chinese trawlers scrape the bottom of the sea, destroying other marine life. So not only does the Chinese trawling breach maritime borders, it also leaves a lifeless seascapes in its wake.

"They come into our wa-



Troubled waters: A Vietnamese boat that was sunk after caught fishing in Indonesia's Natuna Islands on Monday. ■ NYT

ters and kill everything," said Mr. Dedi, who like many Indonesians goes by a single name. "I don't understand why our government doesn't protect us."

Wary of offending its lar-

gerable. "There was a vacant period, then China came back," said Ngesti Yuni Suprapti, the Deputy Regent of the Natuna archipelago.

Global ambitions

The latest episode occurred in February, fishers said, when Chinese boats flanked by coast guard vessels dropped their trawl nets yet again. It seemed as if the coronavirus outbreak peaking in China at the time hadn't diminished the country's global ambitions.

The Indonesian Fisheries Ministry, however, denied any intrusion by the Chinese.

China's illegal fishing near the Natunas carries global consequence, reminding regional governments of Beijing's expanding claims to a

waterway through which one-third of the world's maritime trade flows. But local leaders in the Natunas don't control what happens near their shores.

Chinese impunity was on full display in January when President Joko Widodo of Indonesia visited the Natunas.

"There is no bargaining when it comes to our sovereignty," Mr. Joko said. Earlier, Indonesian fighter jets buzzed the sky, while warships patrolled the seas.

But the day after Mr. Joko left the Natunas, the Chinese showed up again. Its fishing fleet, backed by the coast guard, took days to leave the area, local officials and fishers said.

The Fisheries Ministry denied any such incident

had taken place.

"Little by little, I think the Chinese will take the Indone- sian sea, the Philippine Sea, the Vietnamese sea," said Wandarman, a fisherman in the Natunas. "They are hungry: oil, natural gas, and lots and lots of fish."

The Chinese fishers are helping feed the country's growing appetite for seafood by trawling the South China Sea.

But they are also serving a broader purpose.

"Beijing wants Chinese fishers to operate here," said Ryan Martinson, an assistant professor at the China Maritime Studies Institute at the U.S. Naval War College, "because their presence helps to embody China's maritime claims." NY TIMES

Taliban team in Kabul to monitor prisoner release

First such visit since its ouster in 2001

ASSOCIATED PRESS
KABUL

A three-member Taliban technical team arrived on Tuesday in the Afghan capital to monitor the release of their prisoners as part of a peace deal signed by the Taliban and the U.S., a spokesman for the insurgent group said.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid confirmed the team's arrival in a tweet. It marked the first time a Taliban delegation has been in Kabul since the group was driven out by the U.S.-led coalition in November 2001.

On Monday, Jawed Faisal, spokesman for the Afghan National Security Adviser's office, said Afghan officials and the Taliban agreed dur-

ing a video conference that the insurgent group should send a technical team to Kabul for discussions on the release of Taliban prisoners.

The International Committee of the Red Cross agreed to assist the team in getting to Kabul.

The prisoner release is part of a peace deal signed last month by the Taliban and U.S. that calls for the government's release of 5,000 Taliban and the Taliban's release of 1,000 government personnel and Afghan troops. The peace deal calls for the eventual withdrawal of all 13,000 U.S. soldiers from Afghanistan in exchange for guarantees from the Taliban that they will fight other militant groups.

MARKET WATCH

	31-03-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	29,468	3.62
US Dollar	75.60	0.00
Brent oil	22.80	1.60

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	251.30	-0.35
Asian Paints	1666.50	71.55
Axis Bank	379.00	10.85
Bajaj Auto	2022.35	35.65
Bajaj Finserv	4591.20	-69.95
Bajaj Finance	2215.80	-26.30
Bharti Airtel	440.90	9.85
BPCL	316.90	42.15
Britannia Ind	2688.95	215.20
Cipla	422.85	-8.90
Coal India	140.05	6.90
Dr Reddys Lab	3120.75	126.50
Eicher Motors	13095.90	-237.20
GAIL (India)	76.55	5.70
Grasim Ind	476.10	25.60
HCL Tech	436.40	17.40
HDFC	1633.10	74.35
HDFC Bank	861.90	30.25
Hero MotoCorp	1596.45	42.95
Hindalco	95.70	6.90
Hind Unilever	2298.50	114.15
ICICI Bank	323.75	10.35
IndusInd Bank	351.30	-62.10
Bharti Infratech	160.00	4.90
Infosys	641.50	14.80
Indian Oil Corp	81.65	4.85
ITC	171.70	12.50
JSW Steel	146.25	3.85
Kotak Bank	1296.05	2.35
L&T	808.50	9.85
M&M	284.95	10.55
Maruti Suzuki	4288.30	-40.15
Nestle India Ltd.	16300.60	641.95
NTPC	84.20	2.45
ONGC	68.30	4.95
PowerGrid Corp	159.10	3.45
Reliance Ind	1113.75	83.30
State Bank	196.85	9.95
Shree Cement	17546.35	610.90
Sun Pharma	352.30	19.60
Tata Motors	71.05	2.90
Tata Steel	269.60	15.55
TCS	1826.10	47.60
Tech Mahindra	565.50	38.70
Titan	933.70	-9.95
UltraTech Cement	3244.85	158.95
UPL	326.50	18.05
Vedanta	64.70	3.15
Wipro	196.70	12.55
Zee Entertainment	123.95	-1.70

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	75.46	75.78
Euro	82.60	82.95
British Pound	93.15	93.55
Japanese Yen (100)	69.44	69.74
Chinese Yuan	10.63	10.67
Swiss Franc	78.04	78.37
Singapore Dollar	52.89	53.12
Canadian Dollar	52.97	53.21
Malaysian Ringgit	17.45	17.54

Source: Indian Bank

BPCL bid date extended to June 13

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

The government on Tuesday extended the deadline for bidding to buy its entire 52.98% stake in Bharat Petroleum Corp Ltd. (BPCL), to June 13. The government had earlier this month invited bids by May 2. This has now been extended to 5 p.m. on June 13 in "view of the requests received from the interested bidders and the prevailing situation arising out of COVID-19," an official notice said.

IDBI Bank, IDFC First implement moratorium

Borrowers to send e-mails with choice

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Customers of IDBI Bank who wish to continue with equated monthly instalments (EMIs) and do not want to avail the moratorium will need to inform the bank by sending a mail to moratorium@idbi.co.in, the lender said in a communication.

IDBI Bank said there was no separate request needed for availing the moratorium. "The [moratorium] scheme will be uniformly applicable to all standard term loans under housing loans, loans against property, auto loans, education loans and personal loans as of March 1. There is no separate request required from the borrower," it said.

IDBI Bank has said that in case the March 2020 instalment had already paid by the borrower, the relief would be applicable for the EMIs payable in April 2020 and May 2020.

On the other hand, private sector lender IDFC First Bank has said that custom-

REUTERS

NEW YORK

On Friday, the RBI had allowed all banks and financial institutions including non-banking financial companies, to extend a three-month moratorium period on EMIs falling due between March 1, 2020 and May 31, 2020 for all term loans.

This is also applicable to auto, home and personal loans as well as credit card outstanding.

However, the gains were capped as global demand

continues to be slammed by travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

May Brent crude futures

Mallya again offers to repay Kingfisher dues

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Emboldened liquor baron Vijay Mallya on Tuesday asked Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to consider his repeated "offer to repay 100%" of the amount borrowed by now defunct Kingfisher Airlines, in this time of COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Mallya is wanted in India on alleged fraud and money laundering charges amounting to an estimated ₹9,000 crore.

This will also result in a

reduction over the coming year. It is too early to estimate the full financial impact of the COVID-19 crisis," he added.

"Even after the crisis is contained and work resumes, hopefully by end of April 2020, it would take another 7-8 months for things to return to normal," the Shapoorji Pallonji company spokesperson said. "Moreover, the upcoming monsoon will additionally and severely obstruct construction works June 2020 onwards," the spokesperson added.

In the first quarter of 2020, residential sales in the top 7 cities stood at 45,200 units, against 78,510 units a year ago. On a quarter-on-quarter basis, housing sales fell 24%," Anarock chairman Anju Puri said.

"Meanwhile, new launches too fell by 42% annually from 70,480 units in Q1 2019 to approximately 41,200 in Q1 2020. Quarter-on-quarter supply also declined by approximately 21%," he added.

'Unprecedented crisis'

Srini Srinivasan, MD, India, Project Management Institute (PMI) said, "As the COVID-19 spread escalated in China in early January, it became evident that we are facing an unprecedented crisis."

"We do expect a slowdown in the April-June quarter. However, if CO-

VID-19 is controlled by the end of the second quarter, we will see a rebound in the third and fourth quarters for PMI," he said.

Housing slump The pandemic has already had a considerable impact on the Indian housing sector.

Residential sales saw a 42% drop in the first quarter of 2020, compared to a year earlier, latest data from Anarock Property Consultants showed.

"In the first quarter of 2020, residential sales in the top 7 cities stood at 45,200 units, against 78,510 units a year ago. On a quarter-on-quarter basis, housing sales fell 24%," Anarock chairman Anju Puri said.

"Meanwhile, new launches too fell by 42% annually from 70,480 units in Q1 2019 to approximately 41,200 in Q1 2020. Quarter-on-quarter supply also declined by approximately 21%," he added.

Centre to borrow

₹4.88 lakh cr. in first half

Builds armoury to fight COVID-19

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Centre will borrow ₹4.88 lakh crore in the first half of the coming financial year 2020-21, or 62.56% of the gross borrowings of ₹7.8

lakh crore for FY21, Department of Economic Affairs Secretary Atanu Chakrabarty said on Tuesday.

"The government is committed to meet its requirements for fighting COVID-19, whether on account of health issues, or on account of protecting the economy, and also providing necessary stimulus at any point of time. The entire borrowing was designed in that fashion," Mr. Chakrabarty told journalists here.

Cash management

He added the plan would enable the government to have sufficient amounts for cash management to meet such requirements.

The Centre proposes to revise its ways and means advances (WMA) limit to ₹1.2 lakh crore.

This will be reviewed on a need basis, according to Mr. Chakrabarty.

The revised limit is significantly higher than the ₹75,000 crore limit imposed in the first half of 2019-20.

The government will roll out weekly G-Sec tranches of ₹19.21,000 crore, higher than the ₹17,000-crore tranches in 2019-20.

It plans weekly borrowings of ₹25,000 crore in the first quarter, with a net borrowing of ₹1.37,090 crore in the quarter, he said.

The Budget announcement for G-Sec issuances through Debt Exchange Traded Fund route will be operationalised in the second half of 2020-21, and will be rolled out by initiating appointment of required intermediaries, he added.

Core sector growth up 5.5% in Feb.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Eight core sector industries recorded a growth of 5.5% in February, the highest in 11 months, mainly due to healthy expansion in output of coal, refinery products and electricity, according to government data.

The RBI had also urged the State governments not to transfer their deposits out of private sector banks and clarified that apprehensions about the safety of deposits in Indian banks were safe.

The R&B had also urged the State governments not to transfer their deposits out of private sector banks and clarified that apprehensions about the safety of deposits in Indian banks were safe.

Some private banks were seeing an erosion in deposit base after Yes Bank was put

between Saudi Arabia and Russia after OPEC and other producers failed this month to agree on deeper supply cuts to support oil prices.

Mr. Trump and Mr. Putin

agreed in a phone call to

have their top energy officials discuss stabilising oil markets, the Kremlin said.

Although the futures market

is seeing a recovery,

physical cargoes are selling in some regions at single digits, with sellers offering hefty discounts. With a plunge in prices that has knocked about 60% off oil prices this year, a commissioner with the Texas State energy regulator renewed a call for restrictions on crude production because of a national supply glut.

Taipa calls for boosting telecom network capacity

Data usage up due to work-from-home

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

With data traffic in the country surging by at least 30% in the past few days amid most people working from home, the Tower and Infrastructure Providers Association (Taipa) on Tuesday said there is a need to quickly enhance telecom network capacity for which the States need to align their policies with the Centre's Right of Way (RoW) 2016 norms.

To maintain data usage and smooth functioning of telecom services 24/7, the telecom sector needs critical, robust infrastructure. With more than three years

Indian Bank, IOB slash lending rates

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

Indian Bank and Indian Overseas Bank have slashed their benchmark lending rates by 75 basis points. The rates will come into force from April 1.

Indian Bank reduced its MCLR up to 15 bps across tenors. IOB's repo-linked lending rate will come down from 8% to 7.25% per annum, the bank said.

The bank has also reduced the one-year MCLR from the existing 8.45% to 8.25% from April 10.

CMYK

Consumers find buying goods easier from stores than online, says survey

Many unable to get most essential goods ordered via e-com platforms

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

A majority of consumers have been able to buy essential goods from

'Have to educate people and save lives'

Drawing from personal experience, Yuvraj stresses the need to be disciplined in dealing with solitude

EXCLUSIVE

VIJAY LOKAPALLY
NEW DELHI

As the world strives to cope with the COVID-19 virus, Yuvraj Singh, having been through spells of fear and dreadful solitude, speaks to *The Hindu* on how to stay positive and the need to be extremely disciplined. Your views on the current situation in the world following a lockdown... It's heartbreaking to see so many people dying all over the world. People, rather than panicking, should visit the official health sites (WHO and Union Health Ministry) to really understand what the disease is. I was also very scared in the beginning (of cancer) but then I got the right information, went to the right doctor and hospital. There is rampant misinformation about the virus on social media. First of all people need to stop reading (social media) and look for correct information.

How much have you understood from various official campaigns?

Kids and middle-aged people should avoid hugging their parents (over 60 years) and grandparents. It is your responsibility not to spread the virus. My heart bleeds for the migrant workers because they are very susceptible to catch the virus. We have to guide and protect them. We have to educate people in ru-



Right approach: Yuvraj Singh says people need to stop reading social media and look for correct information to help them combat the pandemic. • FILE PHOTO: VIJAY LOKAPALLY

ral areas.

Don't you think each individual matters in this fight?

Yes. People often remark 'How much will my one vote matter?' If everyone begins to have this attitude, then what if five lakh people say how would an individual vote

matter. In effect, it would mean five lakh people will miss sending the right information to others. We have to save lives.

How are you coping with it?

Everybody has to find a routine to follow. Can't keep brooding. If you do that, eventually you will get tied

down. I begin with a gym training (in the house). If you don't have a gym, start doing exercises at home. Do lots of reading. You can do yoga, meditation, rather than mourn at the situation.

Your experience of the lockdown?

I have seen stars for the first

time since I started living in Delhi. No air pollution and no noise pollution. We must take a pledge now that, when things improve, we won't take our car out for a day, spend a day with the family, respect Mother Earth, plant trees, etc. [We need to] Cut down on creating pollution of any kind.

On the cricket front, do you see anything amiss from your time?

Today, the youngsters get such (lucrative) IPL contracts even before playing for India that they don't want to play four-day cricket. The attitude towards four-day cricket and Test cricket is very poor.

How do you view the recent struggles witnessed by Rishabh Pant and Prithvi Shaw?

They play under a lot of pressure. I keep speaking to Rishabh. Prithvi is a great talent. But there are too many expectations from them. Lot of noise when they fail. Too much of scrutiny. I think we need to give them some time because they are the future.

How to deal with Pant and Shaw then?

Coaches and seniors have to be in touch with them constantly and tell them there are certain things they can't do on and off the field. They really need guidance because they are at a fragile stage. They can either become great players or their careers could break.

COVID-19 AID

Rohit Sharma chips in with ₹80 lakh

MUMBAI

Rohit Sharma has donated ₹80 lakh to fight the rapidly-spreading COVID-19 pandemic, saying the onus is on the citizens to help the country get back on its feet. Rohit has given ₹45 lakh and ₹25 lakh to the PM's and CM's Relief Fund (Maharashtra) respectively. He has also given ₹5 lakh to 'Tomato Feeding India', which is helping families affected by



the ongoing national lockdown, and another ₹5 lakh to help aid the welfare of stray dogs. PTI

Karnataka state relief funds to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in the country but refrained from disclosing the amount. "To bowl out #Covid19India, we all need to come together and fight this battle. I have made my humble contributions to #PMCarexFund #PMNRF and #CMReliefFund @PMOIndia @narendramodi @CMofKarnataka @BSVBJP

Please do #StaySafeStayHome," he tweeted. PTI

TTFI contributes ₹5 lakh

NEW DELHI Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI) pledged ₹5 lakh to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund. PTI

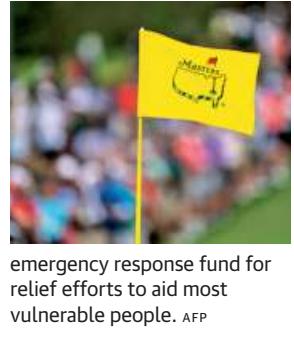
Mithali and Deepthi help with donations

BENGALURU Mithali Raj has decided to give ₹5 lakh to the Prime Minister's fund and a similar amount to the Chief Ministers Assistance Fund of the Telangana government. Deepthi Sharma has contributed ₹50,000 to the West Bengal State Emergency Fund and also separately contributed to PM's fund and UP relief fund. IANS



battling the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, the custodian of cricket laws are also providing food to City Harvest London, which helps redistribute fresh surplus food to organisations that feed the hungry. AFP

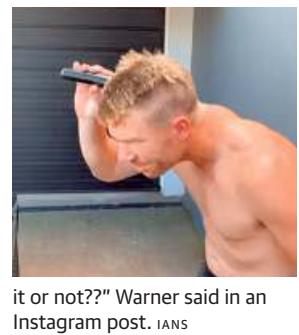


emergency response fund for relief efforts to aid most vulnerable people. AFP

COVID-19 IMPACT

David Warner shaves head in support

MELBOURNE Australia opener David Warner has shaved his head in support of those working on the frontline for tackling COVID-19. "Been nominated to shave my head in support of those working on the frontline #Covid-19 here is a time lapse. I think my debut was the last time I recall I've done this. Like



it or not?" Warner said in an Instagram post. IANS

Duration of WTC should be extended: Misbah

KARACHI Pakistan head coach and chief selector Misbah-ul-Haq has suggested extending the time span of the ICC World Test Championship as COVID-19 has thrown the international schedule haywire. "I just think

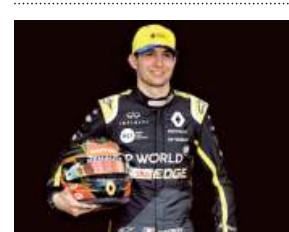


Federer practises 'trick shots' in snow

NEW DELHI Roger Federer is trying whatever he can to remain in touch with the sport and on Monday posted a video on Twitter in which he is playing

Joe Root expecting talks over pay cut

LONDON England Test captain Joe Root expects his country's cricket board and the players' body to discuss a possible pay cut for him and his centrally-contracted teammates "in the coming weeks" as the ECB faces the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. PTI



F1 simulator keeps Esteban Ocon in shape

PARIS Hunkered down in Normandy, Renault driver Esteban Ocon is racking up the hours on a Formula One virtual simulator to be ready when the season finally gets underway. "My days are full and I behave as if I was going to race next week. I do a lot of racing on the simulator." AFP



Bala Devi joins AFC's awareness campaign

NEW DELHI

Indian women's football team captain Bala Devi on Tuesday joined compatriots Bhachung Bhutia and Sunil Chhetri in AFC's #BreakTheChain video campaign and urged people to stay at home and practice social distancing to defeat the dreaded coronavirus. IANS



Federer practises 'trick shots' in snow

PARIS

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I marvelled at the certainty of a bowler who could personally guarantee England would not score 85 runs to win. Today, it isn't the words I remember so much as the emotions: my madeleine, unlocking memory in the Proustian manner.

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How Australia was the start of something special for India – and one Indian



BETWEEN WICKETS

SURESH MENON

How did it all begin, we ask ourselves in these unsettling times. Not the pandemic – we know the answer to that one – but our personal passions. It is not just television that is replaying old matches and connecting us with past experiences; our minds are doing that too.

In the winter of 1967, I fell in love with cricket. Completely, irrevocably, conclusively. First, in the pages of *Sport and Pastime*, and then on radio where I followed my first series as India played in Australia. The magazine was serialising Ralph Barker's two books, *Ten Great Innings and Ten Great Bowlers*. My early heroes, thus, were Spofforth and Grace, Ranji and McLaren, Spooner and Lohmann.

"This thing," Spofforth was quoted as saying, "can be done." I marvelled at the certainty of a bowler who could personally guarantee England would not score 85 runs to win. Today, it isn't the words I remember so much as the emotions: my madeleine, unlocking memory in the Proustian manner.

I remember my mother, ear fixed to the radio, keeping scores as Farokh Engineer and Chandu Borde put on a partnership. Mother kept scores and updated friends. She taught me the joy of listening to cricket. The sport was an audio treat before it became a visual one. When dad came home from work, they would discuss the day's play. Dad and Mom fired a boy's imagination, helped by an uncle who had played the game.

Heroes began to emerge to replace those distant ones in books: Erappalli Prasanna, who claimed 25 wickets in that series and brought India back into the match many times. M.L. Jaisimha, who arrived in Brisbane one afternoon and scored a Test century the next day. Engineer, Ajit Wadekar, Bishan Bedi, and above all the captain, the Nawab of Pataudi, who missed the first Test, and finished with scores of 75 and 85, 74 and 48, 51 and 6 – I haven't had to look these up! That 74 was in Brisbane where he shared the top score with Jaisimha; the 48 was a let-down. A few more, and India might have won the Test they lost by just 39 runs. Jack Fingleton wrote that India could have won two Tests.

Pataudi said later that the Australians were not as good as the 4-0 scoreline suggested, and that if the series had begun with the Brisbane Test, the result might have been different. He was probably right, since

India followed that with a 3-1 victory in New Zealand, their first series victory abroad (the West Indies under Garry Sobers who toured next could only draw 1-1).

That tour was important, and not just for firing the imagination of a little boy far away. It was the first step India took to coming together as a team and demanding a place at the high table, something that would be conceded with series wins in the West Indies and England three years later.

World-class spin combination

A world-class spin combination came together. The spearhead, Bhagwat Chandrasekhar, had to return home after breaking down in the first Test. That brought the focus on off spinner Prasanna, who finished with 49 wickets in the twin series. India's strengths and weaknesses were both on public display – the reliance on spin, and the woeful catching. Bob Cowper and Ian Chappell made big centuries aided by dropped catches.

On one horrendous occasion, two fielders running for a catch – Rusi Surti and V. Subramanyam – clashed, and the latter broke his nose. That was another memory of that period. For, when Subramanyam returned to Bengaluru, he was admitted to the same hospital where an aunt was having surgery too.

"Do you want to meet a cricketer?" my father asked. He had

checked with Subramanyam, who had kindly agreed. I can recall the feel of dad's hand as I slipped mine into it. Subramanyam, nose bandaged, speaking strangely, greeted me warmly. His was the first Test star's hands I shook, a story I lived off for a while. Decades later at a function in Bengaluru, I narrated this story to Subbu (familiarity breeds contraction), and his spontaneous response was, "Of course I remember that handshake." Lovely man.

Over the years, members of the squad became good friends. Tiger Pataudi himself, a conversation-stopper whenever he entered a room. Bedi, whose biography I wrote. The late Jaisimha, in whose company I watched junior matches. Prasanna, who told me when I first began reporting, "I shall be keeping an eye on you." Wadekar, whose room on tours when he was manager, was "liberty hall", open to friend and foe alike. Chandrasekhar, whose self-deprecating humour remains unmatched.

1967 was also the year I determined to play for India. I calculated that some of the players on that Australian tour would be colleagues when I made my debut (in my mind I was a child prodigy). Sadly, I went from being a promising youngster to a has-been without a significant career in between. These things happen.

(A version of this appeared in UK's *Wisden Cricket Monthly*)

SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to puzzle 12897

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Sania joins hands with NGO to help the needy

Involved in bringing aid to hapless daily wage-earners

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM

HYDERABAD
Tennis star Sania Mirza, winner of six Grand Slam titles, is donning a different role – saviour to the needy in these troubled times.

Sania, who has just completed the mandatory 14-day self-quarantine on her return from the US, has joined hands with an NGO – Safa Society – to help daily wage-earners who have been badly hit by the lockdown.

Irrelevant

"The pandemic has made tennis, or for that matter, any sport irrelevant. Right now, I am not concerned about events getting cancelled, even Wimbledon. Tennis is a small part of our lives. We are fighting a larger issue," said Sania in an exclusive chat with *The Hindu* on Tuesday.

"First I donated to the NGO, then I felt it would be great to be involved in a collective effort for better results. I am glad within one week we could raise ₹1.5 crore," Sania said.

"This crisis has reminded us that we take many things for granted. I am saddened by visuals of people walking 800km just to reach their homes," she said.

On her activity during the lockdown, Sania said. "Given the kind of response from across the country, it has been a really challenging task to identify real beneficiaries. But, we are taking utmost care that the needy are well and truly addressed in Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, North Karnataka and Hyderabad to start with."

Sania said she and her family had always honoured their social obligations and as such she was proud to be



Optimistic: On the post-virus scenario, Sania feels humans adapt easily and will move on. ■ FILE PHOTO: V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM

Tennis is a small part of our lives. We are fighting a larger issue

associated with this initiative.

On the post-virus scenario, she said, "Human beings adapt easily and we will move on."

The difference between an injury-break and this lockdown, she said, was "when injured you are focused on getting back into rhythm, for you know the problem and there is a solution and a time-frame. Here

you are fighting a deadly disease," she said.

"I will be back on the circuit, and, hopefully, win a few more titles for I do believe that I have a lot more to give on the tennis court," she said.

Special day

April 12 is a special day for Sania, as it was on this day in 2015 that she became World No. 1 in women's doubles. "That is still the most memorable moment for me. And, also the fact that I finished two year-endings as numero uno," she said.

Crisis deepens in AICF as president removes secretary

CHESS

RAKESH RAO
NEW DELHI

The crisis-ridden All India Chess Federation (AICF) plunged into further turmoil when its president P.R. Venketrama Raja removed Bharat Singh Chauhan from the post of secretary of the federation on Monday.

In a three-page letter, dated March 30, addressed to Chauhan, Raja detailed the reasons for his action, and said he had no option but to exercise his "extraordinary powers as the president of AICF under Article 15 (a) of the AICF Constitution and Bye-Laws."

It may be recalled that the AICF is awaiting a directive from the Madras High Court regarding fresh date of elections of its office-bearers.

In February, Chauhan (secretary), Ajay Patel (president) as well as three others were declared elected unopposed to the principal posts of AICF.

Later, the Madras High Court ordered fresh elections and the Supreme Court dismissed a Special Leave Petition challenging the verdict.

When contacted, Chauhan questioned Raja's authority and dismissed his action of removing him as a "malicious attempt to cover his tracks."

He argued, "Raja ceased to be the AICF president from February 11, the date on which the court-appointed Returning Officer declared Mr. Patel as the newly elected AICF president.

"Despite the Hon'ble Madras High Court ordering fresh elections of AICF, Mr. Patel, being the last person to hold the AICF president's office, remains the interim president till fresh elections are conducted."

Strange development
In another strange development, 12 affiliates have jointly called for AICF's Special/Extraordinary General Body Meeting on April 24 in the Capital.

The Hundred: ticket sales postponed

IANS

In view of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the tickets sale for the inaugural edition of The Hundred competition has been postponed.

"... We feel it is appropriate at this time to postpone opening our second priority ticket window and general sale. We will continue to review this and will let you know any further information in due course," said an official statement on the tournament's website.

BWF freezes rankings

Positions as on March 17 will be basis for entry, seedings in future events

BADMINTON

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

With 15 Olympic quotas secured, most of the shooters who won them were in excellent form throughout the season.

Widen core group

"The core group can be widened a bit. But, don't open it for 30 shooters. One or two reserves in an event should be fine. Form the Olympic group, and back the shooters," reasoned Bindra.

More than anything, the Beijing Olympics gold medallist in air rifle, Bindra emphasised to put the best minds to work on the right path ahead and form the guidelines.

"There is that element of unknown. The nature of the sport is such that it can cut either way," said Bindra.

Conceding that a change in selection policy would be required, Bindra pointed out that it was important "to tune the policy quickly so as to ensure the best team represents the country in the Olympics."

"There may be a rejig in the team, even though the process had been completed and the team was to be an-



Abhinav Bindra.
■ PHOTO: KAMESH SRINIVASAN

both ways. There can be no ideal policy. You can't make everyone happy.

"There is that element of unknown. The nature of the sport is such that it can cut either way," said Bindra.

"Get clarity, and find the right balance. And do it quickly."

"Once you achieve clarity about what is required for the shooters to make the team, they will plan accordingly. There has to be coordination," said Bindra.

The NRAI will swing into action once the sporting world springs back to normal life.

Open 2020," BWF said in a release.

"The ranking lists issued on 17 March 2020 will serve as a basis for entry and seedings into the next international tournaments – although it is difficult to say at this stage when this may be."

Shuttlers in the singles competition have to be inside the top-16 of the world rankings to qualify for the Olympics. The cut-off for doubles is also top-16.

BWF said it will start reviewing the Olympic qualification system but a decision will take several weeks.

"Following Monday's announcement to reschedule the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games from 23 July to 8 August 2021, BWF will also initiate a review process to confirm any impact on the Olympic qualification system," BWF said.

"Please note that the consequences of freezing the World Rankings will not apply to the Olympic qualification system."

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Is it time for a new normal?

As Corporate India continues to work remotely on a massive scale, this question is inevitable

PRINCE FREDERICK

The massive scale in which companies in India are remote-working now is a straw in the wind suggesting that the COVID-19 crisis will go down as a major inflexion point in the history of work.

It is going to nudge the fence-sitters really hard, and they would certainly land on the side of the corporate garden where one will be treading on these pavers: One, greater digitisation of work processes; two, greater reliance on distributed teams; and three, greater resolve to address long-pending questions around data protection.

Digitalisation mindset
"Before COVID-19, globally, even technologically much-advanced companies were willing to allow only 40 p.c. to 50 p.c. of their workforce to operate on the basis of a remote-working arrangement," begins Rituparna Chakraborty, president, Indian Staffing Federation. "Globally, companies consider only one-third of those in the 25 to 65 age group eligible for a remote-working arrangement. Among those in the entry-level jobs, and aged below 25, only 7 p.c. are said to be allowed to remote-work. To remote-work, one has to rise to a particular role, and that usually comes with age. Now, the percentage is bound to change in all categories. Though I would not say there is a dramatic

adoption of remote-working, post COVID-19, but I could safely say there would be a significant increase in the percentage of the workforce that would remote-work from now on, and that includes companies in India. At the least, there will be a greater openness to work in a format where the workforce is distributed. Another thing that is for sure: Undue dependence on physical structures of work will be questioned. The lockdown is unprecedented, and it has underlined the need to be prepared digitally. There would be a digitalisation mindset, with efforts being made to digitalise the work flow as much as possible. So, a scenario where on day one, fresh recruits are by default handed laptops that are fully configured for remote working is not a far-fetched idea."

Dynamic workplaces
Aditya Mishra, director and CEO, CIEL HR, points out that if the lessons from COVID-19 are internalised, there will be a rise in the number of companies that have a hard-desking policy. At present, those that have one constitute a minuscule part of the corporate world.

In a futuristic scenario arising organically from the COVID-19 experience, companies may be inclined to reduce costs incurred on account of real estate. On any given day, only a portion of the employees will report at office for work, and this will be done to effect savings on overheads. So, if an organisation has 1000 employees, say, only 500 desks may be provided for, and this would enable the company to work in a smaller work space. At any given

point, half of the workforce will be remote-working. As this workplace is dynamic, "desks" would be designed to fit roles, and not individuals. So, there won't be a specific desk for anyone to return to, day after day. There will be executive desks, and if you are an executive, you log in to an executive desk with a password, and the password will also ensure that the phone has your number for that day. Similarly, there will be manager desks, and a manager can log in to one of them."

Business agenda
Rituparna says the COVID-19 crisis may signify a point from where one can only expect a broader leadership mandate for remote-working, as the possibility and benefits of remote-working, particularly in the area of transactional work, have stood to reason, even in the case of traditional companies, some of which may be having an in-built resistance to flexible working culture. "So far, remote working was only an HR agenda, and now the odds are high that it will become a business and finance agenda as well," says Aditya.

Data security
One challenge that is as obvious as daylight is data security. Kamal Karanth, co-founder, Xpheno, says: "The corporate world is accustomed to scenarios where even contract-based work is carried out at the office due to the demand for data protection. Now, due to the current exigency, a lot of work is being carried out of the office, because there is no other way to do it. Though two or three weeks make a short sample size, from here, one can expect more openness to having non-IP work done outside office systems, either by remote-working employees or freelancers; and two, greater efforts to improve data security by making checks such as multi-factor authentication more cutting-edge."

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